

Micah's Book

Micah 6

The title of the message this morning is “Micah’s Book.” This is a reference to little Micah, who was baptized this morning; it is a prayer that the book of Micah and the Bible in which it is found would be special to this covenant child all his life long, that the book of Micah and the Bible from which it comes would indeed be “Micah’s book” all the days of his earthly life!

So what is Micah’s book? Micah is the sixth in order of the minor prophets. “Minor” does not mean *unimportant*, just *shorter*. The minor prophets, including Micah, are every bit as authoritative as any other of the books of the Old Testament. Micah 5:2 prophesies concerning the coming of Christ: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Here is an explicit prophecy, made *seven centuries* before the coming of the Messiah, that was fulfilled exactly as written. It took a decree from Caesar Augustus to move Joseph and Mary, great with child, from Nazareth in Galilee down to the little town of Bethlehem, where the Lord Jesus was to be born. Only the all-knowing, omniscient God of heaven could declare with certainty the exact location where his Son was to be born, over 700 years before it happened! This prophecy was inscripturated—written down—by the prophet Micah. Which Micah? There are several Micahs in the Bible. The opening words of the book explain that “The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” The phrase “Micah of Moresheth” identifies the prophet and distinguishes him from Micaiah, the son of Imlah, the prophet who boldly prophesied the imminent death of King Ahab when he went out to battle (1 Kgs. 22:8). The name *Micah* is a shortened form of *Micaiah*, and means *Who is like Jehovah?* It is similar to *Michael*, which means *Who is like God?* The names Micah, Micaiah and Michael remind us that none can compare to Yahweh, the God of heaven. After leading God’s people through the parted waters of the Red Sea on dry ground and witnessing the destruction of the pursuing Egyptian army as the waters returned over them, Moses taught the Israelites a song in Exodus 15 that includes the words “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” It is a rhetorical question, but the biblical answer is easy: “No one!” There is no one like Yahweh, the God of heaven. The Greek and Roman pantheons with their hierarchies of petty deities, each vying for mastery, are nothing in comparison with the God of Holy Scripture. Yahweh knows no equals. He is “glorious in holiness.” He is the One who performed the wonders recorded in Holy Scripture: creation; the flood; the plagues upon Egypt; the voice of God speaking the Ten Commandments out of the thunder, fire and smoke over Mount

Sinai; the ground opening up and swallowing the household of Korah and the other rebels; fire from heaven consuming Elijah's sacrifice at the contest with the prophets of Baal; the provision of a great fish to swallow Jonah—and on and on we could go. Yes, there is none like unto Yahweh—"glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders"!

So Micah means *Who is like Yahweh?* There is an allusion to this in Micah's book at 7:18, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Who is God like thee?¹ the prophet asks? Why, there is *none* like thee, a God who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders"! But that is not all. Jehovah is also a God who pardons iniquity and forgives transgressions, who delights in mercy, who forgives sins. How thankful we ought to be for God's self-revelation to Micah!

Our text for exposition and application this morning is another great text, Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Little Micah, baptized this morning, was born on 8-6; our text is the reverse of this: 6:8! As we look at this text this morning we will consider two things; first,

1. God reveals right and wrong.

Note these powerful words: "He has shown you, O man"—*not* "He has shown you, O Jew." The word for man is אָדָם, the word used in the first chapter of Genesis to refer to the first man, Adam—Adam means *man*—created out of the dust of the earth in the very image of God. Here, then, is mankind in its broadest sense—man male and female, of every race and culture. Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God Micah is not limiting his statement to Israel or Judah, he is addressing the human race: "He has shown you, O *man*."

Furthermore, consider the verb: "shown." The word translated "shown" is very strong; it is defined as *to put something up conspicuously* in front of someone, *to put forward* an opinion, *report, announce, tell*.² But the prophet does not say, "God has *told* you, O man"; rather, he says, "God has *shown* you, O man." How appropriate in a visual culture, with our heavy use of pictures, photos and videos! "God has *shown* you, O man." Here is an announcement that transcends language, here is a declaration that can be understood by every people group on the face of the earth, literate or not. Micah is contending that the Creator-God has shown to *man*—to mankind, men and women, boys and girls of every people group and culture—what is good. Micah's book reveals clearly that God has shown man—that is, all mankind upon the face of all the earth, wherever they might live,

¹ מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹתָיִךְ (Heb.)

² William L. Halliday, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, נגד

whatever language they may speak, whatever their culture—what is good. Let’s consider that word for a moment.

Good is a simple word. It is one of the basic words of our language. We learn it as young children from the lips of our father or mother, who might reward our behavior by saying, “Good boy!” or “Good girl!” When God created the world and everything in it, he saw that everything was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The created order is a reflection of God himself, who created it. The Psalms tell us over and over to “give thanks unto the LORD, for he is *good*.” God is a good God, and the creation—even after the fall—reflects his goodness. How has God shown man what is good? Through creation. The God who gave man his conscience informs that conscience through his signature and imprint on the created order.

The music of Bach, the art of Picasso, are recognizable; each has his unique style. So it is with the creation. The creation reflects the Creator. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps. 19). God reveals his glory through creation. God is a God of order, and the created order reveals God—not only his power, but his character and virtue. So Micah testifies, “He has shown you, O man, what is good.” Good and evil are not constructs invented by man but moral absolutes inherent in the divine character, revealed in creation, and the basis by which every man, woman and child on the face of the earth will one day be judged. At the final day no man or woman will be able to protest, “You didn’t show *me* what is good.”

Micah’s book anticipates what the apostle Paul would later write in Romans 1:20, “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Men and women who refuse to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ are without excuse, for God has shown man what is good.

Though the Bible has been translated into many languages and is accessible to the great majority of the world’s population, there are still people groups with no Bible. Organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators are trying to remedy this. But every human throughout the earth stands face to face with God’s creation. It is inescapable. We are brought into this world by the miracle of birth. We are sustained at our mother’s breast. We experience day and night. We draw lungfuls of life-giving oxygen. We drink water and ingest food. We experience sight, taste and smell. We are surrounded by all the creatures—flora and fauna, plants and animals. Above us rise the majestic mountains. Above them are the stars and galaxies. We experience the passage of time and the rhythm of the seasons—spring, summer, fall and winter. There is the miracle of human birth and the tragedy of human

death. The creation testifies to the existence of the Creator. This is God's world, and we intuitively know it.

Article 2 of the Belgic Confession, which we will confess a little later, teaches that humans know God by two means: "First, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse. Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word" Not everyone has the holy Bible, but *everyone* has access to the creation.

And so Micah's book says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good." Good and evil are fixed categories. *Good* is that which is preferable, that which accords with God's perfect character. *Evil* is that which is detestable, that which is contrary to God's perfect character.

We live in a world where moral standards seem to be constantly in flux. Sin and vice have always been with us, but in earlier times sinners were more likely to hide their sin out of a sense of shame. But now sinners are more likely to come out of the closet, embrace their sin and declare that they are proud of it. When I was a boy, sexual promiscuity was considered wrong. People still engaged in it, but there was a sense of shame. A high percentage of young people would put off starting a family until they were married. Now, cohabitation is considered normal, and Christian young people might even be laughed at for waiting until marriage. Homosexuality was once considered shameful, now it has gone mainstream; there are homosexual characters even in children's movies. It was once accepted that a child's sex was established at birth; now, people are fired for saying that homosexuality is wrong or for using the "wrong" pronouns.

But in the Bible *good* and *evil* are fixed categories which must not be mixed up. "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20). Man intuitively knows this; that is why Micah can say, "He has shown you, O man, what is good." God reveals right and wrong. Secondly,

2. God summarizes man's duty.

The prophet goes on to say, "What does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Since God has shown us what is good, here is how man is to respond. Let us look at each of these elements in turn.

First, "What does the LORD require?" To require is the prerogative of a superior; to obey is the duty of an inferior. "Require" implies the Creator-creature distinction: he is God, the absolute owner and master of the universe; I am a creature. I am his by reason of creation, by right of ownership. He made me; I did *not* make him. One of the basic lessons that every human being has to learn is:

Who is *in* authority, who is *under* authority? Who's the boss? Whom must I obey? The fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," requires "that I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother, and to all in authority over me."³ A child who cheerfully obeys his parents and those in authority over him is a happy, well-adjusted child. On the other hand, a child who disobeys his parents and those in authority over him—ultimately including God himself—will not be happy and well adjusted and will ultimately come under condemnation. When Saul of Tarsus was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus he was asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" At that moment, born again by the Spirit of Christ, he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" The Lord responded, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." This last phrase, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," is found in the Vulgate and the *Textus Receptus*, the King James Version and the New King James Version.⁴ It contains a lesson that every human being needs to learn: it is hard for a person to kick against the pricks—that is, goads, spiked sticks used for driving cattle. Earlier this summer as I walked in a park under a tree I accidentally kicked the point of a stick that was sticking out from the grass. I was wearing sandals, and the pointed stick jammed into the tender flesh between my big toe and second toe. Stunned, I pulled it out and hurried on to keep up with the group. You can bet I did not keep kicking that stick over and over! It hurt, and I did not want to experience that pain again. It was hard for me to kick against the prick—once! Here is a lesson that every human needs to learn: there is a God who is the ultimate authority; in his wisdom and compassion he has set over us other authorities whose job it is to teach us the right way and to point us to the ultimate Authority with whom we have to do, the Judge of all the earth before whom we will all one day stand. We need to learn the lesson of the centurion who came to Jesus, begging for the life of his son. When Jesus offered to come to his home and heal him, the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For *I am a man under authority*, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." The centurion—a Roman army officer—knew the principle of authority and submission, and Jesus commended his faith: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."⁵ If we, like the centurion, can learn the lesson that it is appropriate for our Creator-God to make requirements of us, and for us to fulfill them, then we will be happier and better adjusted in this life—and better prepared for the life to come. If we parents

³ Heidelberg Catechism 104, <https://all-of-grace.org/heidelberg.html>

⁴ The statement is also found in Acts 26:14.

⁵ Matt. 8:5–10

can teach our children the blessings of recognizing and submitting to authority, we can have a happier home and happier, better-adjusted children. How do we do this? Through consistent discipline. Failing to follow-through is one of the worst mistakes of parenthood: to make repeated threats and fail to follow through on them, getting angrier and angrier until we suddenly lash out in retaliation. Being a good parent does not mean responding in violence and beating our children within an inch of their lives when we get “fed up.” It means making reasonable expectations and following through when the child becomes defiant. We want to communicate to our children that as they obey us, their parents, whom God has put in authority over them, they are obeying God himself. When Jesus, at age 12, returned to Nazareth with his parents, after they had gone up to the feast in Jerusalem, we read that “he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was *subject* unto them” (Luke 2:51). The word translated “subject” can also be translated *submissive* or *obedient*. Here is Jesus, the Lord of all the earth, at age 12 demonstrating submission and obedience to lawful human authorities. It is a lesson for us all.

Micah asks, “What does the LORD require?” And as I stated a moment ago, to require is the prerogative of a superior, to obey is the duty of an inferior. To acknowledge God’s authority to make requirements of man is a lesson that every human sorely needs to learn. What does the Lord require of you? And are you willing to obey? More than that, are you *eager* to obey? We are to love and obey God with *all* our heart, soul, mind and strength. That is the only kind of obedience God is pleased with. What does the Lord require? Three things: (1) to do justly, (2) to love mercy, and (3) to walk humbly with your God.

First, “to do justly.” In the original “justly” is actually a noun: *justice* (מִשְׁפָּט). It derives from the verb meaning *judge* or *govern*. In the plural it refers to God’s holy commandments (“judgments”). Judging—discerning right from wrong—is the prerogative of God himself. Perhaps we’ve tried to photograph a sunset. Back in the old days when we had to wait to get the photos back from the developer we were very disappointed with our sunset pictures. They were usually washed out and pale. We remembered being there and wishing to record the moment for posterity, but we thought, “That photo doesn’t do the moment *justice*”—that pale, washed out image doesn’t evoke the sense of wonder and amazement that prompted us to take the photo in the first place. It didn’t do it justice.

God wants us to “do justly”; that is, to treat every person with justice, as God himself would treat him. It is a tall order, and if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we have often failed.

Second, “to love mercy.” In the original “mercy” is רַחֲמֵי, faithfulness, kindness, grace. We learn from Psalm 136 that “his mercy endureth for ever.” God is a God of kindness and love. His people are to recognize him for what he is and “give

thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his *mercy* endureth for ever.” Humans are to *love* mercy—to fully appreciate this quality that sets apart the living God from the demons of hell. To *love* mercy requires that we practice it. God is dead serious about this. Jesus taught that if the steward that a master appoints over his household begins “to beat the menservants and maidens . . . the lord of that servant will come . . . and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:45–46). If we, who have received mercy, do not treat others with mercy, we will come under judgment. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7). Do you recognize that you have received mercy—that if you got what you deserved, you would be in hell right now; instead, God has given you life. He has allowed you to hear the gospel, that God has mercy on lost sinners and has sent his Son to die for them and save them. Do you then treat people mercifully, recognizing that you yourself have received mercy from God? Here is a great way to discern whether you are born again. The born-again person loves and practices mercy.

Thirdly, “to walk humbly with your God.” God wants us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, recognizing that he is sovereign, and we are his subjects. To walk humbly with God means that “he must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Micah says, “Walk humbly with *your* God.” The gospel requires that the God who created and redeemed us be *our* God—that we be in covenant with him, that he has taken us as his own, and we have taken him as our own. “The LORD is *my* shepherd”—I am led by him, and I follow him; he is *not* the shepherd of the person who refuses to follow him. God requires that we walk humbly with him. Humility is the essence of biblical religion; pride is the antithesis of biblical religion. “Be proud, be the church” is not the slogan of biblical Christianity. As King Nebuchadnezzar learned, after God took away his sanity for seven years, “those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37). Christian, do you walk humbly with your God? Is Jesus Christ your Lord?

Here in Micah 6:8 is a useful and memorable summary of man’s duty. But experience tells us that man fails to keep even this abridged moral summary. How much we need the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! *He* is our Lord and Savior. *He* has done what we ourselves failed to do. By his perfect life he, the perfect man, has shown us what is good. He has perfectly satisfied all the Lord’s requirements. He has done justly, in his earthly life treating all people—superiors, inferiors and equals with perfect justice. He loved—and demonstrated—רַחֲמִים, biblical mercy. In him mercy and truth are met together. He it is who humbled himself, taking upon him the form of a servant; he it is who walked humbly with God his Father. It is through him alone that we are saved.

Here, then, is Micah’s book—a book that points us to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory, honor and power for ever and ever. Amen.