

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
11/6/11

Title: Walking with God: Humbly
Text: Micah 6:1-8

Introduction

One of the first verses of Scripture that I ever memorized was Micah 6:8: What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

In NYC where I grew up, when you drove off the Grand Central Parkway, at the end of the exit ramp was a stop sign and across the intersection was a 2 story Jewish synagogue with this verse engraved on the side in large letters. So, as we waited at the stop sign, I memorized this verse. I'm not sure I knew it was from Scripture, but I thought it was meaningful.

This verse is also in the religion alcove in the reading room of the Congressional library in Washington.

One theologian calls it "the finest summary of the content of practical religion to be found in the OT."

Another theologian says "The rabbis who commented on this verse in the early centuries of the Christian era called it a one line summary of the whole law." (New American Commentary p.112)

It is a summary of the Law—a summary of what it means to live in relationship with God through Christ.

Background

Micah prophesied to both the northern and southern kingdoms from about 750-729 BC. —that was just before the northern kingdom fell in 722 BC. The southern kingdom was taken into exile by the Babylonians about 587 BC.

The situation in both the northern and southern kingdom was bleak—the people were corrupt morally, religiously, politically, socially.

Micah alternates between warnings of coming judgment and hope of future salvation. Micah gives the word of the Lord, "In that day," declares the LORD, I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells. I will destroy your carved images and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles and demolish your cities." (5:10ff)

Micah goes on to describe the sinful state of the people and nation, "This is what the Lord says, 'hear this you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortune for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us.'" Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple will be a mound overgrown with thickets."

God will put an end to the injustice and corruption.

But Micah also prophecies in 5:2 the coming of Jesus, saying, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

And in 4:3 Micah speaks of a time in the future when there will be restoration for the people of God when "they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." We long for that day.

Then chapter 6 begins with God taking Israel to court. God is the prosecutor and the mountains, which have seen everything, are the jury. God asks what he has done in verses 1-5 to warrant Israel's disobedience. And of course the answer is nothing.

God ransomed the people from slavery in Egypt. God sent them leaders in Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Notice that Miriam is included in the leaders that God says he sent to the people. And when Balak sent for Balaam son of Beor

and wanted him to curse the people, God protected his people and instead caused Balaam to bless the Israelites.

God has been there, freeing them from slavery, watching over them, providing for them, caring for them. Israel cannot blame God for her disobedience.

A man, representing Israel then answers God's charge. And the answer is in the vein of, "Ok, Ok, we're guilty, so what do you want God? What will satisfy you and get you off our backs? How about if we sacrifice some year old calves? Will that get you off our backs?"

No? OK, we'll up the ante. How about thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? Will that satisfy you and get you off our backs?"

No? OK, we'll up the ante even more. How about if we present our first born child—will that appease you? "The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

God, answers this man, saying, "I don't want STUFF, I want YOU." "I don't want your children, I don't want animals sacrificed, I want your heart, your love, your loyalty, your obedience."

One writer said, "False worshipers think God's favor, like theirs, can be bought or earned. They 'offer the Lord everything but what he asks for: their loving and obedient hearts.' Offerings...are no substitute for obedience to God's will."

That doesn't mean that God didn't direct the people to offer sacrifices—he did. That doesn't mean we aren't directed to worship, tithe and offer other gifts to God.

What it does mean is that those things are not a substitute obedience. It's only when we obey God that we are giving our heart, mind and soul to him. What God wants before everything else is that we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to be used by him to his glory. That only happens when we obey him.

As long as we are trying to be like god, as Adam and Eve were...knowing—or defining-- good and evil, we are not obeying God; we're obeying ourselves. We have offered ourselves to God—our mind, our body, our will, our emotions, everything only when we obey him.

Remember Jesus rebuked the religious leaders in Matthew 23:23 saying, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former....”

It’s the same three words as in Micah: The weightier provisions of the law are justice, mercy and faithfulness. But, don’t neglect the others—the tithing and sacrifices.

Jesus has shown us a life totally committed to the Father.

It is Jesus, “Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2)

Christ did the opposite of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, so they disobeyed God and ate the fruit. Jesus who is God, did not consider that equality with God something to be grasped, he humbled himself and obeyed God.

Do you see that? Adam and Eve did the opposite in Genesis 3 and sinned. Eve was human but desired to be like God knowing good and evil. Knowing does not mean “discerning” good and evil. “Knowing” means you decide what is good and what is evil. That was Satan’s temptation.

So, Scripture says, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” She decided the fruit was “good.” She decided what was good and what was evil.

That is always at the root of sin. We want to be like God. We want to define good and evil. We want to decide. That was Eve’s problem, so she disobeyed God.

Christ who is God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. He humbled himself and became obedient.

Humility comes first. As long as we're trying to be like God, we will disobey God because we know better.

It's only when we humble ourselves and become obedient ...as living sacrifices, that we can even know what justice and mercy are.

Christ did justice and loved mercy...that is the cross. In the cross, Justice has been served. The text says, "do justice".... Jesus did justice on the cross. Love mercy. God so loved mercy that Christ died in our place. God's mercy in Christ gives us what we could never earn. Our response is what Christ has done is to walk humbly with our God.

It is Christ's sacrifice that restores us to right relationship with God and puts our hand back in his. It's not our good deeds—even deeds of justice.

God says in this text that we are to "do justice." DO justice. What does that mean? I like what one author said, "Justice is truth in action." That's the best definition of justice I've seen. It is truth in action. Jesus is the way and truth and the life.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross is truth in action. It is doing—not just talking about but actually doing—what is right according to God's will as revealed in Jesus Christ. Truth in action. Justice is truth in action.

Now we have to step back a moment. In today's world, the self-rules. I define what "my rights" are and then claim justice is when you give me what I claim are my rights.

Everyone today is a victim of something because they can't have their own way. It's almost like we've grown a nation of two year olds clamoring for our own way. And the argument people use is that it's only "fair or just" that they be given their own way. It's their "right."

As Christians we need to reject the popular notion that everyone can define their own personal rights and then that justice demands we give them those rights. What the Bible says is that justice and truth are related. Humility which is obedience...not trying to be God...comes first.

And truth comes from God—not from me looking in the mirror. The standard for justice is the truth of God. Unjust is untrue according to God’s word. “Just” is “true” according to God’s word. We can’t know God’s justice until we humble ourselves.

It was the church, the chosen people, who rejected Christ. They didn’t want his truth. They wanted their own truth. They wanted what was right in their eyes. Jesus didn’t come and die in order to give us what we thought we needed. He came in obedience to give us real justice, and real mercy.

Justice is truth in action.

My neighbor has the rights God has given him in the 10 Commandments. My neighbor has a right to possess property without my stealing it. My neighbor has the right to a spouse without my stealing him. My neighbor has a right to his name without my bearing false witness against him. My neighbor has a right to life without my taking it. My parents have the right to honor regardless of whether they have “earned” it.

If my neighbor says they want someone else’s wife or husband, I have to say, “No” because to take what belongs to another is not justice no matter how much my neighbor says things like, “I deserve to be happy. It’s my right to be happy with someone else’s spouse.”

It is out of covenantal love that we must say, “no” to our neighbor. Real justice says no. Real love says “no.” We are to DO justice, and when we do-- we do not do it grudgingly, but with faithful covenantal love. The love that Jesus has for us, we are to have for one another.

Now again, as Christians we have to stop and look at this in contrast to society’s view of love. Society says that if you love me—you give me what I want. Biblical mercy or love flows out of God’s will and heart.

Real covenantal love carries truth into action with commitment, tenderness, joy and wisdom. God’s love is hesed love—covenantal. He gives us what is best for us, out of loving commitment to us. He gave us Christ, even though he was mocked, rejected and crucified. Christ was justice for us in action. Christ was mercy for us in love.

Hesed is our attitude of love when we do truth in action.

To walk humbly with our God means to take care to live in close and intimate fellowship with God and we can't do that if you are not being obedient. If we're doing the Adam and Eve thing and wanting to be like God deciding for ourselves what is good and what is evil, then we will never know justice and mercy.

Only when we first humble ourselves and obey God and acknowledge that God alone knows good and evil. Because only God alone is holy and righteous. Only then can we live in close intimate fellowship with God and know God's truth that lives itself out in justice and mercy toward our neighbor.

One author translated it as, "Be careful to live the way your God wants you to." Or "Walk carefully with your God—with your hand in his."

Well, if we are walking carefully with our God with our hand in his—then we are living the truth of Jesus Christ in action—we're doing justice. And we are loving others with the same covenantal love that God loves us with, that's mercy.

If we say we are walking with God and don't put truth into action and aren't committed in love to our neighbor then we aren't walking with God, because that's where he's going. We're going in another direction.

Is worship important.

Yes, God directs us to do it.

Is tithing important.

Yes, God directs us to do it.

Is serving in the church important.

Yes, God calls us to serve him.

Is daily Bible reading and prayer important.

Yes, God want us to know his Word.

But if we do these things and do not obey God so that we can practice truth in action—justice; If we do not love others with a covenantal commitment; If we are not walking with our hand in God's, then the rest are like the sacrifice of thousands of rams. They are empty ceremonies.

We are receiving Communion this morning. It is in Christ that we understand what it means to, "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God."

The cross was God doing justice. Christ paid the price of our sins. Justice says there has to be a penalty for our sin. But, in mercy God himself paid the price through the cross.

Christ went to the cross because he did not think equality with God was to be grasped. He, who is God, did not seek equality, but became obedient. It starts there. Then justice and mercy flows out of that relationship into all of our other relationships.

In communion, we remember God's justice for us. We remember God's mercy for us. As we accept the nourishment of Christ's body and through his life that ebbs through us—we seek to live in his truth—practice his justice—putting the truth of God into action; and we do it with an attitude of God's covenantal love—loyal, faithful, sacrificial love for our neighbors.

In other words, we leave here today, being careful to live the way God wants us to. We walk carefully with our God—with our hand in his and through him do justice and love mercy.

Let us pray.