

“What Does the LORD Require of You?”

**Micah 6:1-8** Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. <sup>2</sup> Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. <sup>3</sup> "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. <sup>4</sup> I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. <sup>5</sup> My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember *your journey* from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD." <sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love loving-kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

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Back when I was nineteen and newly become a disciple of Jesus and not just a believer and when I was wrestling with the call to ministry, I did some pretty weird stuff to get God to tell me what he wanted from me. I remember watching one of those TV preacher shows on which they were talking about fasting. They said all Christians should fast regularly because it keeps us reminded that we should hunger for God. Then they overstepped the scriptural bounds of the discipline. They had it all figured out. If you fasted a meal a day God would deliver such and such a blessing. If you fasted a whole day God would deliver thus and such of a blessing. They went on to forty days like Jesus in the wild.

What got my attention was the three day fast. They said if you want to know what God is doing in your life, he would reveal it to you if you fasted for at least three days. So, that's what I set out to do. I made it two and a half days, until it occurred to me that this was stupid. I can't manipulate God with starving myself. God's called me to the ministry and God loves me and therefore all will be well. I jumped in my car and drove to Hardee's and got me a big burger, a large fry, and a vanilla shake.

Just to analyze what I did, I was basically sacrificing my food to get God to give me a little head's up on what lay down the road ahead. I was trying to gain control in a situation where the lesson to be learned was faith. That TV preacher had wrongfully taken the prayerful discipline of fasting and turned it into magic, a simple means of manipulating the rules to get God to do what we want. When one fasts, one just fasts. You don't do it for some sort of reward. That aside, I was only doing what so many of us do and that is to make a sacrifice of some sort to get God to do something in our lives that's real so that we know God is real and hears us whether it is a monetary donation to something, or fasting, or going to church. I think you know the drill where we say, "God if you just do this, I will go to church every Sunday and stop smoking." Or "The reason God isn't here for me now is that I'm not living right. So I'll clean up my act and God will

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get back in my game.” This is real stuff. You know how it is. Something goes wrong in your life and you start asking God why and instead of looking for God to be gracious you start saying, “there must be something I’m doing wrong that I need to rectify and then God will get things going right again.”

Well, long story short God is not a contractual God where if we do this, then God will do that. God is a covenantal God where by God’s own self-initiated act of grace God has made it so that he is God and we are his people. That being reality and God being a righteous God, he will therefore be faithful and steadfastly loving to us regardless of whether we are the same in return. Indeed, sometimes God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to us will look like all hell breaking loose in our lives. In the end he will work it for our good, what’s best for us in his eyes not necessarily our own. Our problem is that we get in his way. We wear glasses through which we see only the world according to me and can’t conceive of what God is really up to with us. To take those glasses off we have to look at Jesus and get a new set of lenses. More on that in a minute. But, let me say that the point of this sermon is that God does not require sacrifices from us to get him on our good side. In, through, and as Jesus of Nazareth the Christ God the Son has made it so that we already are eternally on God’s good side and are recipients of his favour.

Let’s now look into Micah and talk about why people were sacrificing in Micah’s day. Only like I and my fasting, the people in Micah’s day weren’t necessarily trying to get God on their side. What Micah accounts is that the people of God were trying to figure out how to respond to the fact that God has done such an enormous act of grace in their lives by choosing them as his people. God brought his people up from Egypt from out of slavery and made them to be a prosperous nation. In return, they are asking how shall we come before this powerful God who has done such powerful things for us. Especially, now that it appears we might lose it all to the Assyrians. Their answers clearly demonstrate that they don’t understand who their God is and who they were as human beings.

The first answer has to do with the age old idea that all humans are good for is feeding the gods and being their slaves. It goes: “I know. I’ll feed God some veal. Since the LORD has been so gracious to me, I’ll feed him the best veal I can come up with.” The second answer is similar having to do with giving back to God a little of what he has given you. It goes: “God’s blessed me so that I have much wealth and I’ve become a powerful person. So, since rams symbolize power, it would only seem appropriate that I feed this powerful God thousands of rams. And, since he’s made me so wealthy, I’ll feed God ten thousands of rivers of oil from all the olive trees that are mine.”

The third answer really misses the mark on understanding who God is. It says simply that God is all powerful and I am a very sinful, so I’d better get on his good side. It goes: “Uh-oh, this God killed all the firstborn of Egypt, parted the sea, and trounced the most powerful army in the world. I’ve not ever really given this God the credit due. In fact, I’ve been very rebellious and have done little more than simply do my own thing my own way. I’ve been a little pharaoh unto

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myself. I'd better feed him my firstborn child just as he took pharaoh's. That's the only thing that would be appropriate to appease such a powerful God.”

God is not some sort of capricious power mongering god that only needs us to feed him and we are more than simply slaves of God whose lives have no purpose beyond feeding gods. The God that Jesus Christ revealed to us and that the prophets spoke for and who is attested to in the Bible is not a God who responds to sacrifices. It's beyond the scope of this sermon to go into detail on this, but...all the sacrifices in the Old Testament had nothing to do with feeding God or with trying to get a favor from God or to stay on God's good side. Rather, they all foreshadowed what God the Son did as Jesus Christ in taking our sin upon himself and bearing it away along with death unto death and then by the power of the Holy Spirit the Father resurrected this same Jesus so that his life passed through death and made us one with God as he has given to us his new life by God's gift of his very self, the Holy Spirit. In Christ we now share in the relationship God the Son has with God the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is all the doing of the Trinity and not our own doing's. There is nothing we could ever say or do to get on God's good side or to gain his favor. Jesus has made it so that by grace we already are on God's good side and receive his favor. We just have to live with it. As far as what it is to be human, we are not the slaves of God who have no other purpose than to feed him and endure his capricious whims. Rather, God has dignified humanity by making us in his own image. God has dignified us to be the ones who reflect God's loving self within and to his creation.

This leaves us now asking how we come before this wonderful God of grace. How do we live our lives since God has shown us such wonderful grace in, through, and as Jesus Christ by delivering us from sin and death and granting us eternal life regardless of our own faithfulness? How do we live out our days as the people of God who bear his very self? The answer is as Micah says: What does the LORD seek from us each? – He's told us seek justice, love loving-kindness, and walk humbly with God. Since God has been so graciously and lovingly kind and faithful towards us, our only response can be that we treat all peoples accordingly. If you remember a sermon a couple of weeks ago about justice, then you remember that justice is loving-kindness acted out. It is to have the humility of regarding all people, even those that would be our enemies, according to the dignity with which God has created them and treat them with loving-kindness even if they are unable or unwilling to do the same. Since God first loved us, we must love. Go forth and be the people who live justly. Amen.