



## DO JUSTICE

Micah 6:1-8

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When it comes to living the life of faith, we often want God to respect us less. We want God to treat us like we would teach a monkey how to change a tire or our child how to tie a shoe. Don't think, just do it. But God created us with minds and hearts. And if we were to follow the mechanical steps, but leave our heart and mind behind, we wouldn't be getting it right. Imagine a parent who does all the right steps, such as changing the baby's diaper and feeding it, but whose heart is not invested in the child's welfare. It doesn't work. Step-by-step instructions from God would not help us get it right. Instead, God gives us the principles by which we should live our lives.

This verse gives us freedom. Anything which does not fall under the categories of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God, we are free to do without guilt. To know what God wants us to do means that when we have done those things, we are free to enjoy life as we see fit but, unfortunately, the people of Micah's time were not doing it.

Micah prophesied at a time roughly contemporary with Isaiah. Micah was active during the time when the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria, was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Micah blames the city's destruction on the Israelite's wickedness. He says, "Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights, your wealthy are full of violence." Back in those times, people got paid for their goods based on weight. Apparently the merchants with the scales were cheating the people by rigging the scales in their own favor.

The people of Micah's day sensed God's coming wrath, so they went to temple wanting to know what they should do. "Should I bow myself before God? Shall I give him burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with a thousand

rams? With ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Their inclination in essence was to go to God and say "I'm sorry", instead of asking God how they could treat the poor better.

In fact, they were willing to give up their own child before changing when they said, "Shall I give up my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" They were so utterly clueless that they thought about murdering their child as some sick form of payment for their sin before they considered changing how they behaved towards others.

They hoped God would forgive them so they could go back to cheating the poor. Micah's fury over their lack of justice led him to condemn their worship. Harper's commentary wrote "Micah like Amos before him proclaimed, that religious worship without...justice was meaningless." It is. The Lord does not want apologies, nor burnt offerings. The Lord simply wanted them to "Do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God."

However, doing justice must not spring from some abstract notion of fairness. That becomes totalitarian. Rather, the three things God asks of us are mutually connected. Our justice should spring from a deep love for others, shaped by our devotion to God.

For to love kindness is to think first of other's needs. We might ignore those in need of charity if we simply think in terms of what's fair. We all need to learn responsibility.

But if we also love kindness, if we think of them as real people with real children, as your brother or sister living in a hovel, as my daughter Elizabeth or son Matthew without food or water, then we cannot let it lie.

For the most part we are not out oppressing the poor; we're not the dishonest merchants, but for God this is not enough. God does not simply want us to avoid doing injustice but wants us to actively pursue justice for others. Do justice! Do something to stand up for others.

Doing justice is God's command to all of us. And, unfortunately, there is more than enough injustice in this world, meaning that there is more than enough for us all to do.

Knowing when and how to do this is difficult. This world is a complicated place. But there are some easy places to start.

Most of you know that for those who spend time in prison, sometimes, life on the outside is harder. Even if you want to become a respected, contributing member of society, finding gainful employment is EXTREMELY HARD. But there is a simple way each of us can help

Go out to lunch! Eat one of the most delicious meals in town at the Monarch Café and you will be supporting an organization that hires and trains prisoners to become productive members of society, so they can hold their heads with pride.

But just what is justice? There has to be more to it than going to lunch. Something occurred to me while seeing how incredibly hard the Haitian people work. They are off to work before sunup, on a bicycle for 45 minutes, to build houses in 95-degree weather for 9 hours straight, for less than \$10. And that is in the cool of winter. In the summertime its 110°!

I remembered as a child complaining to my father that my big brothers always won a game we called "squeak squeak". The game went something like this. My brother matt was seven and I was five. We had to race across our front yard, past Nato, who was ten years old, and Steve, who was eleven, while they were on their knees. Once they caught us, they could pound us with impunity until we escaped or gave up by saying "squeak squeak", like a mouse trapped in a cage.

We lost every time.

It was not fair, it was unjust because the rules of the game were rigged for their height and strength – rather than Matt's and my vastly superior intelligence!

Doing justice means being willing for the rules to change so they can benefit people besides myself or yourself.

While I was in Haiti, I heard about a young girl who understood this in a profound and amazing way. There is an orphanage not too far from the Haiti Outreach Ministries that is run by Nadege, the daughter of the founder of Haiti Outreach Ministries. Nadege told us a story about one girl in that orphanage.

Every year each orphan gets only one present at Christmas. And so that one present has to last all the way until the next year. They want a particular toy that is theirs, that they can play with and call their own. Now these orphans literally don't have anything in the world – they don't even have parents, of course. But there was a girl in the neighborhood who had parents, but they didn't have any money. And that little girl didn't get a single present for Christmas. When one of Nadege's girls found out about it, this one orphan girl, who gets one present a year, gave her doll to her. She didn't give out of her abundance; she gave out of her scarcity. She allowed the rules to be changed so that she wouldn't get a present that year, but that other girl would.

In many ways the scales are rigged for people like me. As a white male born in America I am in the most privileged class in the history of the world.

I may not have put my finger on the scale like Micah was accusing the merchants of, but I receive the benefits nonetheless.

For those of us with intact families, a good education, and the right connections we start life ahead of billions of others.

Billions.

I did not earn this privilege. But I am so thankful. I am so thankful for my parents, for my country, and my community. For this church.

I am even profoundly privileged to serve in a church like First Presbyterian. I know of hundreds of other pastors and congregations who work so hard and so faithfully who don't experience anywhere near the blessings we pastors do here.

God has given me so much, so many blessings. So what does the Lord require of me?! To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk in deep humility, awe, and thanksgiving for this amazing gift of life and his amazing grace. Amen.