Introduction - Good morning Colonial, Pastor Mark here kicking off our three week mini-sermon mini-series called, “Minor Prophets.” Today we are starting with one of my favorite prophets… In fact, I like him so much I named my youngest son after him: Micah.

Next week you’ll hear from Pastor Todd who will be preaching from the book of Amos, and then on Aug 9 Pastor Bob will preach from the book of Joel.

At this time would you stand as I read the scripture passage from Micah 6:6-8.

Scripture

ESV

“With what shall I come before the Lord, 
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, 
with calves a year old?

‘Will the Lord be pleased with

[227\text{a}] \text{thousands of rams,}

with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, 
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

‘He has told you, O man, what is good; 
and what does the Lord require of you 
but to do justice, and to love kindness, 
and to walk humbly with your God?

Sermon

In 2008 there was a movie that came out called, “Seven Pounds.” I don’t know if you had a chance to see this particular movie, but if you haven’t, before you decide to rent it, I want to warn you that it’s extremely depressing. If you like that sort of thing, hey, go for it! But don’t say I didn’t warn you.

In this movie, the main character’s name is Ben Thomas, played by Will Smith. Throughout the movie, Ben befriends seven different people who need saving for one reason or another. And Ben decides that he is going to do what he can to help save them. In fact, Ben ends up sacrificing a great deal, even donating organs from his own body, in order to save the lives of others.

It sounds like a noble cause but it begs the question, “Why?” Why would Ben do this? Why would Ben befriend strangers in order to try and save their lives? What would compel him to do such a thing?

And what we find out is that Ben is doing these sacrificial things to his own body because he is oppressed by the crushing weight of his own guilt. He has skeletons in his closet that he cannot shake free from. Ben has a massive secret that he cannot forgive himself for. So he tries to make amends by doing good deeds until he reaches his breaking point.
Ben is not denying his guilt… he knows he’s guilty… so he tries to buy his way, or bribe his way, back into God’s good graces.

This is a similar predicament to that which the Nation of Israel finds itself in in our passage today. Israel has skeletons in her closet. She doesn’t need anyone to convince her that she is full of sin. She knows she is guilty. She knows she has broken her end of the covenant, and so she makes various attempts at reparation.

But unlike Ben in the movie, the Nation of Israel was not just dealing with individual guilt or individual oppression. Israel was dealing first and foremost with corporate, or collective guilt. She was operating under oppression caused by two things: first, by the penalty for her own sin, and second, by the geopolitical power of Assyria. And the prophet Micah warns Israel that if she fails to corporately repent and turn back to the one true God, Babylon will be next.

So here in Micah 6 we find ourselves within the setting of a metaphoric courtroom. In this court case, God is portrayed as the plaintiff and the prosecutor, while Israel is pictured as the defendant. God has brought a covenant lawsuit against the Nation of Israel. And He calls upon His creation to be His jury. God tells Israel to, “plead your case before the mountains, let the hills hear your voice.”

God begins his indictment by reminding Israel that He alone delivered her out of slavery in Egypt. He alone raised up Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as godly leaders to guide them. And He alone made a way for her to cross the Jordan River into the promised land.

God is reminding the Nation of Israel of His authority and desire to deliver them from their oppressors. His track record of faithfulness and mercy is unblemished and unquestioned.

Time and again, God has proven His covenant faithfulness toward Israel, but time and again, Israel has proven her unfaithfulness toward God.

So God indicts Israel. He brings two primary charges against her: infidelity and social injustice. That is, He accuses Israel of being unfaithful, and neglecting to care for the marginalized among them.

God puts Israel on the witness stand, but her response is NOT that of repentance. Instead, her hope is to strike a plea bargain. She hopes to buy, or bribe, her way out of trouble in exchange for the charges to be reduced or dismissed.

Ever tried to buy or bribe your way out of trouble? Ever tried to bargain with God? It doesn’t work for us, and it didn’t work for Israel either.

6 While on the witness stand, Israel says:
“With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with a thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

See, Israel's response was a combination of desperation, defensiveness, and hyperbolic sarcasm. Is this similar to how we might have responded as well?

When we’re called out by God on our own sins of idolatry - no matter what type - our initial response is often a mixture of desperation, defensiveness, and hyperbolic sarcasm. When we get called out, we desperately try to cut a deal with God. Or we get defensive about our own sin. Or we deflect from our actual sin with hyperbole and sarcasm.

It really doesn’t matter what the idol is - whether it’s worshipping carved statues, or our favorite football team, or the flag… Or which sin for that matter - whether it’s racial profiling or self-righteousness or materialism or something else… We’re all prone to respond the same way as the Israelites responded here in Micah 6:6-7.

“What do you want from me, God? I’ll give you whatever you want as long as you’ll allow me to go back to living my normal life."

“Do you want 10 percent of my money? Fine. Here’s my routing number... have it at. Not much in there anyway.”
“Do you want me to start going back to church? Fine. I’ll go every single Sunday from now on.”
“Do you want me to quit my job? Fine. I’ll quit my job and go live in a hut in Africa and do missions work. Is that what you want God?”
“Do you want my wife and my kids too?”

“Just tell me what you require and I’ll do it. I’ll get it to you as soon as possible. Just don’t keep guilt tripping me like I owe you something.”

The truth is, there is no plea bargain sufficient enough or payment substantial enough to buy our way back into God’s good graces.

Striking a plea bargain might be the easy thing to do, but God isn’t interested in easy money or manipulative sacrifices. God is not interested in your bargains or bribes. God cannot be bought.

So how does God respond to this desperate, defensive, and sarcastic series of questions from the defendant? He responds by speaking through his prophet with the most famous verse in all of Micah, and one of the most famous verses in the entire Bible. This verse has been oft quoted by pastors, presidents, and patriots. It is written in three historic buildings in our nation’s capital. And it is quoted by Jesus in Matthew’s gospel in Matt 23:23.

A wise person once said that the whole teaching of the New Testament is foreshadowed in this one verse: the Micah Mandate.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
Now we could surely spend several weeks worth of sermons unpacking this one verse, and many have. But I’m only preaching today, so I guess you’re stuck with me until dinner!

God speaks through Micah to communicate that He is NOT interested in the Israelites’ gifts or religious rituals. He wasn’t after their animals or their oil or their firstborn children. **God simply desired for their hearts to be devoted to Him, and Him alone!**

God summarized the requirements of the covenant by once again inviting the Nation of Israel to return to Him. But what does this mean? What does it look like? It looks like repentant hearts that result in **doing justice**, **loving mercy**, and **walking humbly** with their God.

**Justice, mercy, and humility are NOT the means by which we can earn God’s covenant blessing. Instead, they are the manifestation of a heart relationship with the one true God.**

Let’s unpack under three headings what it means to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly... starting with doing justice.

I. **Doing Justice**

The first phrase in the Micah Mandate triad is **doing justice**. The word for “justice” is the Hebrew word, *mishpat*. It literally translates to mean, “rightful action” or “fair judgment.” Biblical justice is inextricably linked with **righteousness**, which is our moral obligation to do what is right.

One thing that’s important to emphasize here is that righteousness leads to justice. And unrighteousness leads to injustice. Biblical justice includes right relationships AND righting wrongs. If everyone lived in right relationship with God and others, then there would be no need for righting wrongs. But we know that sin is a reality.

In other words, **there would be no need for works of justice IF NOT for the unrighteousness of human sin and the brokenness of creation that accompanies it.** Simply put, **unrighteousness leads to the need for justice throughout our world.**

In the scripture, there is NO dichotomy between **personal piety** and **social responsibility**. And yet, for centuries, the Church has tried its best to create a division between the two. However, biblically speaking, no such division exists.

The **conservative Fundamentalist movement** and the **liberal social gospel movement** have tried to divorce the two because “doing justice” in general and “social justice” in particular was hijacked by liberal churches who watered down the gospel and refused to teach sound doctrine. On the other hand, fundamentalist churches had placed a heavy emphasis on personal salvation while neglecting to acknowledge **systemic injustices** or care for the hurting among them.

When Jesus walked the earth, he scolded the fundamentalist Pharisees by calling them “hypocrites” and letting them know that in no uncertain terms they have, “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others,” Jesus rebukes (Matt 23:23).
Here at Colonial, our Bootstraps racial healing ministry actually has a Micah 6:8 justice committee, and I wanted to offer their working definition of justice and injustice to you because it ties in with what Jesus says here in Matthew 23:23.

“In the Bible, God provides the standard for knowing what ought to be, and there is justice when what ought to be happens. Therefore, **doing justice is using your power or influence to advocate for what ought to be and against what ought not be.**”

Speaking of what ought not to be, many of you have heard about my recent diagnosis of stage 3 sigmoid colon cancer. I was diagnosed a little over a week ago, and I will be undergoing surgery to remove a malignant tumor. In addition, I will be having chemotherapy and radiation over the next 6-9 months to try and kill all the cancer from my body.

I would be remiss if I didn’t take this opportunity to say THAN YOU from the bottom of my heart for all the prayers and encouragement and support that you have offered to me and my family over the past 10 days. I already knew this church was a church that dedicates itself to prayer. And I already knew that you all are incredibly generous and supportive and encouraging… But we are experiencing it now on a whole new level. I can’t even describe it.

Last week I was talking to one of my close friends about my diagnosis and he was in a state of disbelief. He said, “I know that cancer does not discriminate, but it feels like an injustice that a 36-year-old pastor and father of four would get cancer.”

The primary risk factors for colon cancer are being a smoker, being overweight, being over the age of 50, and having a family history of it. I checked none of those boxes. I agree with my friend. Cancer is a form of injustice… not just my cancer. All cancer. It ought not to be, but it is, because of the broken world in which we live. Things are not as there were, presin, before the Fall, and things are not as they will be one day, when God will restore all things fully and completely.

In the meantime, **injustice is a reality of life.** Having said that, **God is not surprised by injustice.** He is sovereign and He has the power to overturn it.

However, that doesn’t mean we should sit back and do nothing. On the contrary! It means we should participate with God as the Body of Christ to usher in God’s mishpat, God’s justice. **Our cry for justice is universal because we bear the image of a just God whose plan of overcoming injustice is Christ and His Church!**

Timothy Keller is a fellow Presbyterian pastor who has also been recently diagnosed with cancer. And Keller, for years, has called the church -- specifically the Presbyterian Church -- to engage in what he refers to as “**generous justice.**” He argues that the justification of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross compels the Church to do justice. In other words, **the doctrine of justification leads to justice.**

Our justification in Christ is the only motivation we need to stand against the injustices in our world.

**II. Loving Kindness**
The second phrase in the Micah Mandate triad involves a call for Israel to love kindness. Love is a verb here, as is the case throughout the majority of the Bible. It is not primarily a feeling, but an action, something you do. Here, it’s an action of affection, or affinity.

The word for “kindness” or “mercy” is the Hebrew word, hesed/chesed. Hesed could also be translated, “loyalty,” or “faithfulness.”

The word appears nearly 250 times in the OT, primarily in the Psalms. It can actually be translated 15 or 20 different ways. Hesed implies a sort of unconditional, covenantal devotion between two parties that is relational in nature.

When it boils down to it, hesed love is what all our hearts yearn for. Without exception, we long for loyalty, mercy, and unconditional love. We want to surround ourselves with family and friends who will stick by our side no matter what, through thick and thin - through unemployment, illness, loss, social unrest, family turmoil, loneliness, and yes, even when we have wandered into sin.

We need to know with full assurance that there is nothing we can do or say - and nothing that can be done to us or said about us - that would push them away.

This is the essence of hesed. It is the loving-kindness that God offers His people.

III. Walking Humbly

The third phrase that is present here in the Micah Mandate triad involves a call for Israel to walk humbly with their God. Walking with God is not something to be taken for granted. Enoch, and Noah, and Levi are all examples from the Old Testament of individuals who “walked with God.” But God was also inviting the collective Nation of Israel to walk with Him, just as He invites us, His Church, to walk with him as well.

Right now my family and I find great comfort and strength in knowing that God chooses to walk with us on my cancer journey because He loves us. We don’t have to go it alone. He walks with us on the mountains and in the valleys. Can I get an amen?

We believe in a God who promises to walk with us in pain and suffering. We believe in a God who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. We believe in a God who promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us. We believe in a God who promises to walk with us now, and always, to the very end of the age.

Church - do you believe this? It’s true!

But in what manner should we walk with God? How should we walk with God? Humbly. The Hebrew word is, tsana.

“Humbly” is an adverb that describes how we should walk. It could also be translated, carefully, prudently, or modestly.

With regard to humility, Reformed pastor and author Kevin DeYoung says, “Humility isn’t about pretending to be lower than we are. It’s about realizing we are not as mighty as we think. When we understand who we are—gifted, loved, and made in the image of God, but also flawed,
weak, and wholly dependent upon God—we will naturally show respect, listen to others, and be eager to see those around us flourish. God is the ultimate sovereign, so we don’t have to be."

All three of these phrases within the Micah Mandate -- doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly -- assume a certain level of power, or authority, that God has granted to His people. And they all involve a shift, or transfer, of power that results in generous love and compassion for the marginalized and oppressed in their midst.

- **Mishpat** is the power of impartial judgment that leads to acts of restoration.
- **Hesed** is the power of loving-kindness that leads to acts of generosity.
- **Tsana** is the power of prudent submission that leads to acts of obedience.

These three phrases ultimately point us to Christ! After all, Christ is the ultimate example of impartial justice, merciful love, and humble obedience.

**Jesus Christ fulfilled the requirement of the Micah Mandate through His life, death, and resurrection.**

The application for us, then, is to return to the way of Christ.

Here’s the truth: You won’t have a strong desire to stand against injustice if YOUR heart hasn’t been eternally impacted by the injustice of Christ’s crucifixion.

Likewise, you won’t have a strong desire to show God’s loving-kindness toward others if YOU haven’t received God’s kindness and mercy for yourself.

Finally, you won’t have a strong desire to walk humbly with God if YOU haven’t grasped the beauty and power of Christ’s humble, sacrificial love.

To live out the Micah Mandate, you must first give your heart to Christ! **More than anything, God longs for a heart connection with you.**

**God isn’t interested in you buying your way back into His good graces. The buying has already happened through the blood of a Savior.**

If you want to live out the Micah Mandate, repent and believe in Jesus Christ!

**Pray to close.**