

QUESTIONS AND RIGHTEOUS ANSWERS MICAH 6:1-8
FOURTH SUN. AFTER EPIPHANY JAN 29, 2017

- ¹ Hear what the Lord says: Arise,
 plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.
- ² Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord,
 and you enduring foundations of the earth,
 for the Lord has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel.
- ³ "O my people, what have I done to you?
 How have I wearied you? Answer me!
- ⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
 and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
 and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
- ⁵ O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
 and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
 and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
 that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."
- ⁶ "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?
- ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with 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?"
- ⁸ 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?

Sometimes children feel what parents expect is too much.
 The rules are too strict and the chores are too many.
 So some families will have a family meeting
 in which everyone gets to present their side
 and talk about what is just and fair.

In text, Micah pictures something like this,
 God is holding court with his children, Israel.
 He offers them to go first in v. 1: Go ahead, make your case.
 but replies in v. 2: I have an indictment against you.
 and asks in v. 3: How have I wearied you?
 What do you think is so unreasonably hard about this?
We too may find some things hard about being God's children.
 It may be hard not doing things that may come naturally
 and seem enjoyable but God has said no to
 like sexual immorality, drunkenness, greed, laziness

May be hard to believe things that don't make rational sense
like creation or communion or eternal life,
But one of hardest things may simply be understanding
what is really right and why.

Micah pictures a conversation that raises the questions...

HOW DOES GOD ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

WHAT MAKES US RIGHTEOUS AND WHY?

HOW DO WE ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

HOW DOES GOD ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

First God makes a case for why he has a right
to expect something of Israel by reviewing history.

Foundation of their relationship was setting them free
from slavery in Egypt using the ten plagues.

Sunday adult class just finished studying how amazing
and well planned it was so they even ended up rich.

And God didn't just leave them on their own but led them
by Moses & Aaron through whom he gave them
a beneficial system of laws and worship.

and kept on helping them all the way
from Shittim at beginning of trip through wilderness
to Gilgal in the promised land.

For example, when Balak tried to get Balaam to curse them
but God got him to answer with blessings instead.

That is what God keeps doing as bad things happen,
turning curses into blessings.

So why did he do this. Today's Epistle points out
what goes without saying in this reading.

It is not because anything makes them great & worth saving,
but entirely because God himself is so great.

v. 5 calls what God has done his saving acts.

More literal translation is righteous acts.

God has done what is right, which is what saves them.

Today's Gospel reading refers to how Jesus begins to gather disciples, including us, as his kingdom people. We too are saved by God's miraculous actions, from helpless slavery to sin which ends in death, and he continues to turn curses into blessings for us not because of anything good about us but because of his own wisdom and power, and his righteous acts. So, how should we respond to this?

WHAT MAKES US RIGHTEOUS AND WHY?

⁶ "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?
⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with 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?"

The question seems to be, am I expected to pay God back for everything he has done for me?
Because everything we have comes from God,
God taught Israel to recognize this and show gratitude by bringing animals & other gifts as sacrifices.
These constant sacrifices may be what Micah is referring to as heavy burdens that make the people weary.
But how much would really be enough for all God has given?
This would be like thinking children need to pay their parents back for all they ever did for them.
They should to love & help them, but that can't be done.
God has given us our whole life.
When we sin & fail to live our whole life the way he wants,
Does he deserve a precious life sacrificed in return?
There was a religion at that time that had this practice.
Those really desperate for God's attention and help would sacrifice their own children.
Today too, it seems when people mess up with big mistakes it is their children who end up paying the price.
But the unspoken answer to these questions is "no."
There is no way we can repay God for all he does for us.
It is an insult, diminishing his gifts, to imagine we could.
When we do wrong, we & others may suffer as a result but God is not somehow pleased with our suffering,

and whatever mistakes we make, getting what we deserve
can never fix them or make up for them.

The only sacrifice great enough to truly pay for our sins
is not our imperfect life but the perfect life we fail to live,
not our firstborn son but God's only begotten son,
who lived and died in our place.

and so has already finished all the suffering
that needs to be done to pay for our mistakes,
As a result God now gives us more: forgiveness and love.
Jesus death in our place turns curses into blessings.

This is what is absolutely necessary
and all that is necessary to make us righteous.
Imagining that any of our own sacrifice or suffering
somehow pays for things is actually rejecting
the very thing God is trying to give us: grace.

So, what do we do in response to all this?

HOW DO WE ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

⁸ 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?

Ideas in this verse may be what connect this O.T. reading
with today's Gospel, which is the beatitudes.

Beatitudes are commonly misunderstood as if
our mourning, meekness, being merciful or persecuted
were what made us blessed.

They are actually saying the opposite.

We are blessed because of what God gives
to those who are poor, mourning, hungering, etc.

Same is true in this verse. Is doing what is required,
doing justice & loving kindness, what makes us good
so that we deserve to be helped as God's people?

Does it mean if we do this, going to worship is unnecessary?

No, it is the other way around. This is how we respond
to what God already does for us in and through worship.

The more we truly believe & trust in what God does for us
the more we end up reflecting it in our lives.

God has told us and shown us what is good
by being a just God who always does what is right.
He always punishes evil and rewards good.

but at same time, he is even more a loving and kind God
and so Jesus is the one who is punished for all evil
and we are the ones rewarded for his good.

God's law and gospel show us how to reflect his own nature.

In the law he tells us how to protect the relationship with him
and the relationships with others, the lives & the goods
which he has given us and he himself protects.

This use of the law turns it from a curse to a blessing.

Justice is treating others the way God treats us.

In the gospel he tells us how much he loves mercy
so he keeps forgiving us & helping us when we fail,
so that we can afford to love, forgive & help others.

Loving mercy is treating others the way God treats us.

This is what it means to walk humbly with God,
to recognize that all the good things we have and do
come from him, step by step and day by day.

HOW DOES GOD ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

He rescues the foolish & weak because of his greatness.

WHAT MAKES US RIGHTEOUS AND WHY?

Our failures are all paid for by the sacrifice of his own son.

HOW DO WE ACT RIGHTEOUSLY AND WHY?

We reflect God's justice and mercy in our own lives
when we continue to humbly receive what he gives us
each day and forever in heaven.