

The 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Micah 6:1-8 (NIV)

¹Listen to what the LORD says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ²Hear, 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. ³“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. ⁵My 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.” ⁶With 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? ⁷Will 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? ⁸He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Theme: What Does God Expect of Us?

These verses depict a courtroom scene. However the witnesses and jury are not people. They are the mountains and hills, which are throughout Palestine. These are called on to testify to how good God has been to His people and to find any way that God has burdened them. He compares His grace and mercy with Israel’s unfaithfulness and constant complaining. The question that Israel asked when their guilt was proven beyond a doubt was, “What does God expect of us?”

I. God has been good and gracious to us.

The mountains and hills had witnessed God’s goodness throughout the centuries. They were there when God brought the people out of Egypt and redeemed them from their bondage. He gave them prophets. He didn’t let the seers of other religions curse them. He brought them to the promise land. We could add the blessings that God gave them in the promised land. He delivered them from their enemies. He gave them judges and kings. There were many times of blessing and God’s deliverance from so many enemies.

God has also been very good to us. Think of all of the ways that God has blessed His Church, our nation, and our lives personally. The church has been under constant attack from false teaching and persecution. The Lord has protected His Church throughout the centuries from enemies as great as the Roman Empire and as slick as the best false teacher who have said what everyone’s ears were itching to hear instead of God’s Word. When you look at the history of the Christian Church over the last 2,000 years, it is a miracle that it is still here today.

God has blessed our nation with prosperity, which has probably been unprecedented since the beginning of the world. People from throughout this world long to come to our country. We have conveniences and wealth that many people can only dream of.

What about your life personally? Think of the blessings that God has given to you. One of the

greatest blessings is that we can come together freely to worship Him this day. He has given us family and friends, including our brothers and sisters in Christ in this place. Think of the evils and the dangers that He has delivered you from. There were times when we were lost or when our lives seemed to be falling apart, and His help came in a way that we never expected.

II. But then we think of how often we have complained about God and how unfaithful we have been to Him.

Those same mountains and hills that witnessed God's goodness, also witnessed Israel's failings. They complained against God over and over again. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, things didn't go so well at first. God tested His people. Even Moses complained to God saying, "*You have not rescued your people at all.*" (Ex 5:23) After they left Egypt, Pharaoh's army had them pinned against the Red Sea. The people complained to Moses, "*What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians.' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.*" (Ex 14:13) When God delivered them from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, they complained in the desert, "*If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.*" (Ex 16:3) God brought them to Mount Sinai and gave them the 10 Commandments, but they made a golden calf and said, "*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.*" (Ex 32:8) When they reached the promised land, the spies agreed that the land was good, but they were afraid. They grumbled against Moses and said, "*If only we had died in Egypt or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword?...Would it be better for us to go back to Egypt? We should choose a new leader and go back to Egypt?*" (Nu 14:4) Those stories are a good summary of the whole history of Israel. They were constantly grumbling and complaining about God and His ways even when God was giving them some of the greatest blessings that they would ever receive.

It's very tempting for us to do the same thing. We believe that God has failed us, rather than that we have failed Him. We grumble about His commandments. We say that He isn't fair. We give the glory to ourselves or the things of this world, rather than to God. Just like Israel, we must confess that we have been both ungrateful and unfaithful.

III. So what does God want from us?

He doesn't want great sacrifice. The text asks whether He might be appeased with thousands of sheep or rivers of oil. The ultimate sacrifice would be one of our children. Child sacrifice is what several of the nations around Israel practice to appease their gods. It is the reason why the land was taken from the Canaanites and given to Israel because they sacrificed their children.

God doesn't want us to try to make amends for our sins. There is nothing that we can give or do that would be able to make up for them. Such thoughts show our ungratefulness even more. God gave Israel the rites that would point to the One who would give His life in our place. God gave the ultimate sacrifice to save us. He gave His own Son. His Son bore all of our sins on the cross. It angers God when we wonder what we must do to make up for our sins, because in His grace and mercy for us, His own Son has atoned for them all. They are paid for in full. In Jesus Christ, they are completely forgiven.

What God wants are three simple things. First, that we **act justly**. The Bible often tells us that God is just and right. There is no sin in Him. He wants us to act justly, which is to do good to each other, as He has been good to us. This part is basically the golden rule, “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.” Second, the prophet says to **love mercy**. Mercy is one of the greatest concepts of the Bible. It is love for those who cannot help themselves. As God has helped us in many times of need, He calls on us to give our help and aid to those who are in need of it. Finally, God calls us to **walk humbly with Him**. Last week we heard Jesus’ call, “Follow Me.” He wants to take hold of our right hand. He wants to guide us with the wisdom of His Word. He wants to be there to pick us up when we fall. He wants us to trust in His forgiveness when we fail.

That last verse of our text is inscribed about the religion section in the library of congress. We stand convicted of our guilt, but the good news is that God has taken our guilt away. We should all hear the verdict, “Guilty,” but in Christ all is forgiven. All that God wants is that we follow Him and His ways as we act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

Amen.

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