AM Micah 6 & Matthew 25:31-46

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Preacher: Rev Ronnie Christie

[0:00] Page 942 of the Church Bibles. Page 942, Micah chapter 6. And we're reading from the beginning of the chapter.

Hear what the Lord says. Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth. For the Lord is an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me, 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.
O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Baor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.
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 thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
[1:24] 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.

The voice of the Lord cries to the city, and it is sound wisdom to fear your name. Hear of the rod, and of him who appointed it. Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed?
Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales, and with a bag of deceitful weights? Your rich men are full of violence. Your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.
Therefore I will strike you with a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins. You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger within you.
You shall put away, but not preserve, and what you preserve I will give to the sword. You shall sow, but not reap. You shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil.
[2:37] You shall tread grapes, but not drink wine. For you have kept the statues of Omri, and all the works of the house of Ahab. And you have walked in their councils, that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing, so that you should bear the scorn of my people.

May God bless to us this reading. Matthew 25, reading from verse 31. Matthew 25, reading from verse 31.
A passage entitled, The Final Judgment. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.
Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
[3:51] Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food.

I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me.
I was in prison, and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you drink?
And when did we see you a stranger, and welcome you, or naked, and clothe you? And when did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you? And the king will answer him, Truly I say to you, As you

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did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.
Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me no food.
[4:57] I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me. Naked, and you did not clothe me. Sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.

Then he also will answer, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then he will answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.
And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. May God bless to us this reading also.
Look at Micah chapter 6. Micah chapter 6, on page 942. And especially, we're going to look at verse 8.
Well, we're not going to look especially at verse 8. We're going to start with verse 8, and look at the whole passage up to that point. He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?
[6:15] Now, this really is quite a big question.

What does the Lord require of you? We could ask it in a personal way. What does God require of me?
Is he going to accept me? If I'm going to be in good standing with him? If I'm going to have something positive to say at the end of the day? What does he require of me?
It's a big question. It's like other big questions in the Bible. There was Peter on the day of Pentecost. He had preached powerfully.
And people were cut to their hearts. And they say, Brothers, what shall we do? Or there's the Philippian jailer who feels his life is endangered and probably more than that.
[7:19] And he comes saying to Paul and his companion, What must I do to be saved? This question ranks along with them as one way of picking the biggest questions that there are in life.

How can I find God? What do I do to meet his requirements? How can I find peace with him, a good standing with him? This passage is right up there along with other passages of a similar nature asking the biggest question that you could ask.
What does God require of me? But if we see it in that light, of course, I think the thing that will immediately make us think is this.
Well, it isn't like what the others say. It sounds awfully legalistic. It sounds like works righteousness. And it isn't the sort of answer that we would naturally think would be given.
You have to do justly, you have to act mercifully, and you have to walk humbly with your God. It's got a ring about it that may make us ask, well, how are we to understand this?
[8:39] After all, Peter said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now that's a full good answer to the question, what must we do? Or the Philippian jailer was told, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
And that takes us to the heart of the gospel. But in comparison with that, this doesn't sound to be working along the same lines at all. And one could easily understand that what they're saying is, you have to be nice to poor people, and you have not to think too much of yourselves.
And that's all God requires of you. And that doesn't go down well with what we've been brought up to believe, evangelical believers, or what's found in the gospel teaching.
So I just want to begin with that problem. We'll mention it later on. As well, you know, how does this fit in with what we're taught elsewhere?
[9:45] Now, there's really a very simple explanation that we can give of this. It's the context that matters. Who is he speaking to? In what circumstances is he speaking?

That's what will give this meaning. We can't just take these words out and use them as to describe what God requires of them. We've got to see why God said this, why the prophet said this.
We've got to see the background to this. And when we understand it against its background, then we'll see that it does fit in with the gospel message that we've been talking about.
And the thing, you see, to notice about the context especially is this. that he's speaking here not to the outsider that knows nothing about God, not to the Gentile who is estranged from God.

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He's speaking to his own people. He's speaking to his covenant people who are in a special relationship with God. And it's that situation that he's speaking to.
[10:49] So we can't say this is what he would say to an unconverted person because he's speaking to his own people. We've got this in verse 2.

Or is it verse 3? No, verse 2. The Lord has an indictment against his people. He's speaking to folks that have known him and have gone astray from him. Oh my people, he says in verse 3.
He's speaking to folks that are in this covenant relationship with him. But the problem is that they've gone astray from what has been required of them.
And now he's bringing them back to understand fully what God wants from them. And it's not just the teaching of verse 8 that comes in here but the teaching of the whole passage up to that point.
So this isn't something we would immediately say to an unconverted person. What must I do to please God? Or how can I be right with God? Or how can I be assured that I'm at peace with God?
[11:51] We don't see. He wants you to act justly and to show mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Because that's not the whole of the message here.

That's the message that is directed to a people that have gone astray from God although they were in a covenant relationship with him. So it's first of all designed we might say for Christian people who aren't walking the way they should be walking who have strayed from God's path whose love has grown cold as we'll say in a minute.
That sort of situation is what is in mind. It's a person that has enjoyed the relationship with God that claims amongst his people that this is directed to.
It's Christian people who have gone astray that this can be applied to directly today. So with that idea in our minds that this is to be seen against his background let's look at the teaching of this passage.
And we've got three pictures of God here. God complains God corrects God counsels. First of all he complains and we've got this at the beginning of the chapter.
[13:08] Arise plead your case before the mountains and let the hills hear your voice hear your mountains the indictment of the Lord for he is an indictment against his people and he will contend with Israel.

Here there's a legal setting not a criminal court but a civil court where two parties come before the judge and they give their cases statement of their case and the judge makes some decision as to the rights and wrongs of the situation.
And in this case it's God that's coming before the court and he's saying he's giving an indictment against his people. He's coming to a court and saying this is what I have against my people there's something wrong with them and that's the complaint that he's making here.
Now it's a bit funny that he says a bit strange that he says plead your case before the mountains let the hills hear your voice. It's if the hills were a jury that is listening in to this indictment and they're to make up their minds as to what is right and what is wrong.
I can only suggest that this is poetry this is poetry there's no doubt at all about that and that explains this way of thinking. The hills we speak of the eternal hills they're there from generation to generation we might indeed personify them and say what seems these hills have witnessed and of course we don't really mean that it's a way of speaking and we might say the hills of Galilee what they can say about the conventicles that were heard there their witnesses to the dragoons that chased the covenanters and killed them in cold blood these hills of a story to tell they're witnesses to what happened we might say something like that and it's something like that that God is saying here he's appealing to something that is stable and sure and saying we'll put our case against these that know and we'll lay our case before them because they're eternal they're solid they've witnessed things that have gone before that's the way that he speaks here as if the hills were going to be the jury that decided the case or something like that now what is his indictment here and it's contained in just a few words in fact oh my people he says in verse 3 what have I done to you how have I wearied you there's something wrong with the relationship to God and they're speaking of God's dealing with them in terms of something that is burdensome they're tired out with it they're wearied in what they're doing and I think we can see because of what follows in a minute that this especially has got to do with their worship they've been doing the same things time and time again and it's become a burden to them they've followed out the rituals and the ceremonies just exactly as the scriptures laid down but they're not getting any delight in this and they're saying oh what a burden

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[16:29] God has placed in this all these things that he asks us to do it's tedious repetitive monotonous boring and God says why are you feeling like that this is what I've got against you that you're going through your worship and yet this is the spirit in which you're doing it this is your attitude to me it's just a tedious business to know God and to worship God and do the things that his people require and that's what he's got against his people and I think you see although I'm reading it in this version it's perhaps not quite so plain but that's what is mentioned also I think in verse 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 and then it's not just that which is quite sound teaching but he goes on to say will the

Lord be pleased with thousands of rams in other words if I do this time after time after time so that in my lifetime I've offered up a thousand rams to God is that enough to please him with ten thousands of rivers of oil I bring some oil with my sacrifices I do it again and again and again and again and again and again throughout the years so that there's rivers of oil will that please him now this could be read as a spiritual insight into the temporary nature of Old Testament worship because if this was said from a New Testament perspective then this is a good thing because it leads us to believe no it isn't through repetitive offerings that we get right with God it's through the one sacrifice that was made at Calvary but that's not their attitude here their background as we've said is that they find this boring and tedious and burdensome and what they're saying is it's so repetitive
I did this last week I did this week before I've been doing it week by week month by month throughout the years of my life what good is it doing it's just a burden to us that's their attitude I think so this is God's complaint the people are worshipping me people are following me acknowledging me and to a large extent they're doing it in accordance with what was laid down but they've no understanding of it no appreciation of it their heart isn't in it it's just a routine a monotous routine it's a boring routine and that's what he's got against them and you can see how this is something that can well be applied to the Christian life as well it's the easiest thing in the world for believers genuine believers to feel at times that worship and service get a bit monotonous we do things repetitively we're meant to do them repetitively every meal we give thanks every day we worship every week we come together for worship the same pattern day after day week after week year after year and it's very easy that we should lose our genuine sense of meaning in it so that it becomes a repetitive burden just like it was for them we lose our spiritual edge and we don't appreciate it as much as we used to and therefore we never give it up we never think of giving it up but we haven't got that genuine spirit of worship that there used to be and that there shouldn't be and it becomes a bit of a matter of routine so that we find it to be quite honest a bit tedious repetitive burdensome now I'm not saying that that happens to the degree in which it happens here all I'm saying is that there is that sort of danger that because of the nature of the worship that God has prescribed for us weekly worship and because of the nature of the spiritual life as something that we must do every day that can become repetitive and there's a danger to be recognised in it and we just need to think about what was said to the church of the
Ephesians in Revelation chapter 2 I think it was the Ephesians or maybe it wasn't no matter one of the churches that are written to in Revelation 2 and 3 you've left your first love now it seems to me that they had all the outward signs of the mechanisms that make up a good functioning congregation a good functioning gospel work they had all these in place but there was something missing something vital missing it wasn't being done with the same love and spiritual meaning and involvement as it was at the beginning and I think most of us would have to be honest and say from time to time that happens I don't have the enthusiasm that I used to have my life has grown cold even just a wee bit I don't take the same delight that I used to in things and although we keep doing them it's just a wee bit monotonous and that's the sort of situation that God is dealing with here so he complains against his people that they find the religion to be boring and tedious burdensome so what does he do he corrects them he corrects them that's the second main point how does he correct them well he mentions the great things that he has done for them and what he's really saying here is you keep in mind all that
I've done for you and when you come to worship that will change your attitude to it and it won't be boring and tedious any longer because it will be motivated by this genuine response to the great things that I've done on your behalf that's the basic line that he's following here I think we've got it in verse four for I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery so he's saying to them think about my saving art once you were slaves in Egypt you had no hope of

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getting out of there you were oppressed the burdens were put on you more harsh and harsher as the days went by and there was a real danger that you were going to be wiped out as a people a real attempt at ethnic cleansing as it would be called nowadays that was your position and what did I do for you

[23:53] I redeemed you from the house of slavery and we know how he did that there was the miracles done through Moses the plagues and then there was a great final occasion when they took the Passover lamb and they killed it and shed its blood and sprinkled the blood on the doorposts of their houses and so on and the destroying angel came to the Egyptian houses but didn't come to the houses that were sheltered by the blood of this lamb that was the redemption and what he's saying is you remember this you're a redeemed people think what I did for you then wasn't it great wasn't it wonderful didn't it stir your hearts well keep that in mind when you worship and your hearts will be stirred again and it's not just that he says to them there's this first of all there's this experience of redemption I brought you up from the land of Egypt there's the provision of leadership

I sent before you Moses Aaron and Miriam so there were these three siblings that were together in the leadership of the people Moses we know about he was the chief actor in this drama of redemption he confronted Pharaoh and so on and he was the leader as the people of Israel saw it but God raised him up for that purpose Aaron helped him he spoke on behalf of Moses on certain occasions and he was very much part of the leadership team as we might say what surprises us is Miriam who doesn't in our estimation usually come up to a status where she would be put alongside Aaron Moses as people that God had sent before the people of Israel but we're told that she was a prophetess she had special insight into the will of God and she led the people or rather she led the women in the festivities that were the climax of the redemption she took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing

Miriam sang to them sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea an inspired song came from Miriam's lips that has been recorded for us and is part of scripture so the prophet is saying God is saying through the prophet look what God has done for you he brought you out of Egypt yes and he sent leaders ahead of you who guided you and helped you and encouraged you a leadership team were supplied for you so that you weren't on your own wandering around aimlessly you were governed and directed by people that God had chosen and he doesn't just say that to them also they were preserved from destruction oh my people he says remember that's the keynote of this think back in the past and recall what God did remember what Balak king of

Moab devised and what Balaam the son of Baor answered him so there's a specific event when they were coming through the desert on the edge of the promised land there was this event that hopefully you know about from the Old Testament and this was Balak the king of Moab who felt that he and his people were going to be endangered by the encroachment of Israel on their territory and he summons this man Balaam to curse them and this is what was said then come now curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land for I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed so they're faced with this possibility of being put under a curse that will lead them to destruction but what happens then the message comes to Balaam you shall not curse this people for they are blessed so the prophet is saying remember that event there you were up against it and folks were coming against you in such a way that they wanted to destroy you and they took these measures that hope would result in that and what happened

I didn't allow it to happen I didn't allow them to curse you I rather pronounced a blessing on you that's the way I was working in the past isn't it wonderful doesn't it stir the heart doesn't it fill you with emotion you remember that when you come to worship and you'll not be tedious in your worship any longer and the final thing that he says here at the end of verse 5 remember what happened from Shittim to Gilgal that you may know the saving acts of the Lord now I don't know in any detail what happened from Shittim to Gilgal I should have checked that up a wee bit more Shittim is on the east side of the Jordan River and Gilgal is on the other side of the Jordan River so this speaks about the fulfillment of God's purpose for them in bringing them to the promised land they were confronted with the barrier of the Jordan River in full flood how would they get across God saw to it that they got across and they took stones from there and they set them up from the stones from the riverbed they set up as a monument in the first place that they encamped and that was

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[29:41] Gilgal so from Shittim to Gilgal is the last stage of their journey the great stage where they entered the land that God had promised to them and he says remember all that and it's summed up in this that you may know the saving acts of the Lord keep these things in mind cherish them in your hearts bring them before you when you bring your sacrifice and your heart will be filled with gladness and you won't say what a bore!

this is you'll say how good it is that I can express my gratitude to God by offering these thank offerings for a great God we've got and that will deal with their problem of this repetitive monotonous worship that they've been confronting so he he complains against them and then he corrects them he says I don't like your attitude to worship thinking it all boring and tedious this is what you have to do think about the saving acts of God and that of course is precisely what we need to do have we lost our first love then look again at Calvary look at the saving acts of God you find it a bit boring going to church and having to sing the same things every time or more less the same pattern of worship well think about the saving acts of God bring them to mind and how can you be sad in worship when you've got these things in mind remember what was done at Calvary remember how he gave the Holy Spirit remember how he raised up the apostles and prophets and others as well that they might lead God's people remember the great things that he's done throughout history delivering his people the covenanters bled and died but there was fruit from it and a church that flourished thereafter that's the that God was with his people men wanted to curse but God blessed remember these things and let them stir your hearts to a genuine spirit of gratitude and devotion so you see there's two things here already that God requires in this situation it's not limited to the last thing that we'll see in a moment there's two things already here that God requires of them he says what I require of you is that you keep before me the saving acts that I've performed on your behalf and what I require also is this that you take these things into mind when you worship me and therefore what I require is that you worship me in spirit and in truth that's what he's saying to them so these are two requirements that he's already laid down at least by implication before we come to the final one which we've got in the final verse here and this is therefore God counselling his people he's complained against them he's corrected them and now he's counselling them and that's in verse 8 he has told you a man what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly!
with your God now when we hear about justice we tend to think about the criminal code and respecting the law and punishing the wrongdoer and that sort of thing it's very much justice is the implementation of a legal code of right and wrong and to do justly means to keep the law and respect the law but that's our way of looking at it and I don't really think there was much of that in the scripture there is that in the scripture of course there is but the main thing when it speaks in the prophets especially and the Psalms as well about doing justly executing judgment it's social justice is got in mind and this of course is what we were singing about who righteous judgments executes for those oppressed that be he executes righteous judgments not by condemning and punishing those that have broken the law but by upholding the cause of those that have been oppressed illegally he executes judgment for those that are oppressed he to the hungry gives food
God sets the prisoner free the Lord doth give the blinder sight the bow down doth raise that's what it means for God to act justly it's to look after in those days those that were in the bottom of the heap as it might well be described those that were marginalized in society and in those days that meant the widow the orphan and the stranger and these people were often oppressed and frequently defrauded and people despised them and marginalized them and to do justly means to take up the cause of the oppressed to deal generously with those that are deprived of their rights and in general to look after those that are in the bottom of the heap as we might see and that's what's been told to do here you must show kindness to the widow the orphan and the stranger and you must show mercy towards them not despising them and treating them badly because of who they are but treating them mercifully because of
[35:38] God's merciful dealing with you when it comes to that's what it means so it's social justice that they're talking about and that's not just here that the Bible talks in those terms Zephaniah says seek the Lord all you humble of the land seek righteousness that is social justice the same idea we've got here seek humility seek righteousness the same things as we've got here and Isaiah is more specific wash yourselves make yourselves clean remove the evil deeds of you from before my eyes seek justice correct oppression bring justice to the fatherless plead the widow's cause and there you see social justice is what he's asking them to do this is the proof of their repentance that

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they care for people that others don't care for the marginalized in society now in society nowadays

I don't see that the widows and orphans are marginalized but I do see that the strangers are and that might well be the main implication of this for ourselves or looking abroad to other countries yes there's a wider definition of who are marginalized and that would be of relevance too and we might think what's this got to do with the gospel but that's what Jesus himself said on the day of judgment how are we going to be judged not by how often we went to the prayer meeting or things of that nature although I'm sure that is part of the picture but the particular aspect that he brought out in his teaching was this you visited me when I was in prison you clothed me when I was naked you fed me when I was hungry you visited me when I was sick and on that basis the righteous with that as a distinguishing feature the righteous are accepted into the kingdom and the others are rejected because they didn't do these acts of justice they didn't show mercy to the marginalized of society so that's what God requires of people that have looked at his saving works and have been so moved by them that they have learned to worship in a proper spirit without any sense of tediousness or monotony about it this is what he now requires of them that they should also show their genuine godly spirit in showing social justice to the oppressed and in walking humbly!

before God and these two I think are connected we could no doubt talk a lot about walking humbly before God a sense of dependence on him a willingness to submit to him a willingness to put our own will in second place in order to do God's will we walk humbly before God these ways and many others we think soberly of ourselves and not in an exaggerated manner we don't try and push ourselves forward but walk humbly as God would direct us but the two are connected it seems to me how can we show mercy unless mercy has been shown to us and walking humbly before God means in part a recipient of his mercy I have no claim upon but that he should be gracious to me anybody that walks humbly before God in that sense will surely surely be merciful and gracious to others so these two things go together well there's the picture that we've got what does

God require of us well he requires of us that we look at the saving acts of God and if we haven't come to terms with Jesus the saviour and with the demands of God this is where we must start look at his saving acts not the ones done in Egypt just but the ones done at Calvary look to the cross where the one that knew no sin became sin for us recognize that that's the only basis of your hope put your trust in them rest upon them put these things in the forefront of your mind so that they teach you to love God and to honour him and to follow him the saving acts of God become the first thing that you think about when you think about religious matters and use these feelings about the wonder of God's saving acts to inspire you to genuine worship so that we don't go through an outward form only but that we do it from a heart that has been touched by this knowledge

God's saving acts are wonderful and then go on also to show this in a way that will demonstrate that you have been that you have received mercy by being merciful to others that's what God requires of us what of legalism is there there nothing is there anything there that makes us say oh it's all a matter of works not at all not at all the central thing is God's saving acts that impinges upon our worship and upon our conduct with others Jesus himself said love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself and that it seems to me is entirely in accordance with the teaching that is given here and that makes this totally conformable to the gospel nothing of legalism or anything of that nature in it but totally in conformity with the gospel of God's grace look at his saving acts worshiping properly and be careful for those that are marginalised in society may God bless to us his word now

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