

Micah 6 "Are We Playing Church?"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2019

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

They're singing straight out of Micah. Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God. And maybe the only ones from the book of Micah that you knew before we got to Micah.

We put them on our walls. We tattoo them on our bodies. We memorize them. We post them on social media. Because they're beautiful, right?

But as beautiful as they are, they come in a much bleaker context. We're going to read them in Micah 6 this morning. But the context is God bringing charges against His people.

Charges of abandonment of Him. Telling them how they've failed to live this way. Listen for this legal proceeding as God builds a case in the first half of Micah 6.

[1 : 07] The Word of God to the people of God. Hear what the Lord says. Hear what the Lord says. Arise. 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 has 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 son of Beor 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.

[2 : 04] 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? 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? What does the Lord require of you but to do justice?

And to love kindness? And to walk humbly with your God? This is the word of God. Let's pray. Oh, Father, we need your help.

Would you search us this morning and know our hearts? You know them. What we're asking you, Father, is to show them to us. And by your Spirit to change them.

To enliven them. To revive them. That we might know you more. And love you more. And serve you more. For your glory.

[3 : 09] Do that, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We've just seen in Micah 4 and 5 some glorious promises of hope and of restoration for God's people who will turn back to Him and trust Him.

But then, as God here begins to build His case for how so many of them are not doing that but are turning away from that relationship.

We notice how valuable the relationship is to Yahweh Himself. We see His wholehearted commitment to His relationship with His people.

What does He say in verses 4 and 5? I delivered you from slavery in Egypt. Gave you great leaders to guide you toward me and to provide for your needs.

I led you into the promised land and I turned even the curses of others into blessings for you because you were so precious to me. All of that. So that you would know me.

[4 : 16] So we could have this special relationship. God initiated this relationship and He has demonstrated His commitment to it, hasn't He?

He's all in with His people. But they're not, are they? That's where His deep concern is when He comes to His people then and to us now.

You've abandoned the relationship. You've lost your commitment to me. When He's building this case, it's not a long list of offenses that He starts with.

We'll get to those in the second half of the chapter. He starts by saying, it's the relationship. You seem to be wearied by relationship with me.

Right? Verse 3. How have I wearied you, my people? That's the essence of God's indictment.

[5 : 18] You've lost your passion for our relationship. You're tired of me and more interested in other things. You don't love me with all your heart and soul and mind.

You've lost your first love. If God is all in, wholeheartedly committed, His people are exposed as half-hearted in this relationship with Him, aren't they?

And that begins to get exposed here as He paints the glorious standard. What's it supposed to look like?

How the relationship should be. The good life, if you will. It's walking with God. Don't you love simple, direct statements like this?

Isn't that one of the reasons we love this verse 8? What does God want me to do? I don't know God's will for me. Well, here's a good place to start.

[6 : 25] He has told you, oh 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?

It's beautiful. A holistic picture of relationship with God that is to shape and direct all of our lives. It's really one description rather than three disconnected parts.

But just briefly, let's look at them. What do they highlight in that relationship? The first one is do justice. The focus on our actions, our deeds.

It's that great word mishpat that we saw earlier in Micah. Beyond mere fairness or accurate legal verdicts, it's talking about honesty in relationships.

Generosity to the needy. Activism against injustice. Actively defending the widow, the poor, the immigrant, the orphan.

[7 : 33] Welcoming the outsider in. Speaking for the voiceless. Taking on the bully. Tending to the hurting. Do justice.

But you may know the glorious standard is actually a lot higher and harder than that. It's not met by merely doing good deeds. Yahweh also addresses the purity of our hearts.

Love. Kindness. You're probably used to reading love. Mercy. The word is hesed. Yes, if you're counting, pastor knows two Hebrew words.

New record for one sermon. Hesed is the word used repeatedly in the Old Testament often for God's faithful, unflinching love.

His compassionate mercy. His steadfast love. Loving kindness. We sometimes hear that faithfully keeps His promises and cares for His people.

[8 : 39] We're supposed to love God's hesed. That it would delight our hearts. That we're most inspired in our lives by gracious faithfulness to the undeserving.

So much so that we ourselves begin to love sharing it the way we have loved receiving it from God. Never stopping when someone hurts you.

Never giving up when someone disappoints you. Unbreaking. Unbreaking. Always. And forever. Love. No matter what it costs. That others can always count on.

Love. Kindness. And then walk humbly with your God. The summary statement of the summary commands here.

This is what it's about. It's be like this consistently all the time. Make these attitudes of heart and actions of life not momentary but constant.

[9 : 44] Abide in this dependent relationship with God where He's the glorious one and your heart is convinced that you can't live without Him and that there's no life apart from Him.

Micah 6.8 is at the core of the call of God's word to His people. Make close relationship with Him your life's work.

Your heart's passion. Your spirit's bent. I don't want to make this complicated. Sometimes I have a tendency to do that.

If you're not sure what I'm saying, let me try it more simply. Your job is to know and love and glorify God. Kids, do you know what God wants you to be when you grow up?

We talk about that a lot. What does God want me to be? God wants you to be a young man or an old man or a young woman or then an old woman who loves Him.

[10:52] That's what God wants. God says this is what is good. There's nothing more important. Everything else in life flows from this.

It's good, God says. A life shaped around seeing and sharing His heart. Isn't that glorious when we get a glimpse of it in someone?

You can think of people where you've seen it. It's usually not grand or glamorous. Often you glimpse it in someone in their quiet faithfulness. And there's probably only a few of you in the world who even see it or know it.

They're usually below the radar of the media. Sometimes in places others wouldn't dare to stoop. But you've seen they're consistently delighted in having not much but God.

That's the only thing you tend to ever see delighting them is Him. And they love sharing whatever they do have with the lowly. It's beautiful, isn't it?

[11:59] Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God. God says the good life is in relationship with Him. And that relationship being the most important thing.

It's a glorious standard that the law of God calls us to here. It's like love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

Might God work in all of us to live more like that? But in this passage, God's law does another thing. And in addition to the way it's used in our lives to shine a light on the good path, God's law also does something else. And it's what's primarily pictured here. That glorious standard exposes our half-hearted commitment to it.

And maybe you've felt that already. It sounds simple but it doesn't describe my life or my heart. Our half-hearted commitment is this grievous substitute that we make for a life designed and created to walk with God.

[13:14] And so we have to go there this morning. I'm going to call what Micah describes here in this chapter, playing church. Playing church, if you've never heard of it, is similar to playing house.

Maybe you've played house before. Sometimes in my home I'll hear from the other room a nine-year-old crying like a baby. Or a six-year-old talking like she's a mother.

Right? And at first it's a bit disconcerting. But what's actually going on, kids? What's it? Yes, it's on your sermon. You can mark playing church off on your sermon words. That's playing house or playing family, right?

Whatever you call it. It's where you're pretending to have a relationship with your sister or your doll or whatever else it is that's not actually a real relationship.

And that can be fun. Playing house is a good thing. It's a good use of your imagination. It's a fun thing to do. But playing church is not.

[14:23] It's not fun. It's not funny. What I mean by playing church is pretending to have a real relationship with God, but it's not real.

Pretending God is your beloved father, but feeling inside that you don't love him. Living like you don't care about him at all.

And that kind of pretending is exactly what God is condemning here in this passage. It's not fun. It's not funny.

In fact, there's a hauntingly good picture of it in a movie that many of you have seen. I have seen at least 10 movies in my life and am well qualified to say that the baptism scene in the Godfather movie is one of the greatest movie scenes of all time.

I have lots of experience. But what happens, if you haven't seen it, that's okay. It's this haunting. It's an excellently done, but it's haunting if you watch it and you think about what's going on.

[15:28] Michael Corleone in the movie played by Al Pacino, he's a head, he's functioning right now as the head of a mafia family in New York City.

And he orders hits on five of the other crime families' leaders there in town. He's coordinating multiple murders.

That's what's going on. And at the very same time, what does he do? He doesn't get his hands dirty. He dresses up and goes to a really beautiful church building.

And he stands as Godfather for the baptism of his nephew. And so he stands there before the priest and professes his faith in God while a murder he orders is carried out.

And then it cuts back to the church and he renounces the works of Satan and it flashes to another murder being carried out. And all of the time he's standing there professing his great spirituality and orchestrating terrible violence at the same moment.

[16:36] Michael is playing church. That hypocrisy is pretty easy to see there, isn't it? If you're in the younger generation, you don't need examples like that.

You sniff out playing church just like that. It's second nature to you. But how do we play church? Sometimes we know already, don't we?

We know when we're going through the motions, pretending. We feel that. I grew up in church, so I've had experience with this for a long time. Saying the right things, looking good, appeasing God and others.

It's how you get through life. I'm very familiar with this dangerous struggle in my heart. And this passage may help us see it more fully in our hearts.

What's the difference between walking with God, you could say living for Jesus, and playing church? Look at verse 6.

[17:41] What do God's people say about his passion for relationship with them? They say, oh man, we better do something. With what shall we come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings? With calves a year old? Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? Or 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? We'll do lots of outward ceremonies. I mean, sacrifices are good things, right? God commands some of them in our relationship with him.

But here it's only outward rituals. Because the God that they would sacrifice to says what in the next verse? Do justice.

Love kindness. Walk humbly with me. And this is what they do when they leave the temple. Verse 9. And the voice of the Lord cries to the city.

[18:42] It's sound wisdom to fear your name. Hear of the rod and him who appointed it. Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked? 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 strike you with a grievous blow. Making you desolate because of your sins. You shall eat but not be satisfied.

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.

You shall tread grapes but not drink wine. For you have kept the statutes of Omri. And all the works of the house of Ahab. And you have walked in their councils.

[19:41] That I may make you a desolation. And your inhabitants a hissing. So you shall bear the scorn of my people. Micah has brought these things up before, right?

Using your power and resources to get ahead yourself at the expense of others. Lying and cheating to exploit others. Even using the poor to get rich yourself.

This is Judah. They're sitting there in Jerusalem with the right temple and the right king. Doing the things God has told them to do. And he says in that last verse, you're just like the worst idolatrous kings of Israel.

That's Omri and Ahab. God's people are exposed as playing church. Putting on a show. Thousands of rams.

Ten thousands of rivers of oil. My firstborn son that the other gods supposedly require. I'll give you whatever. I'll give you whatever. But there are people being killed while I'm taking my vows in church.

[20:52] Where are our outward formalities not matched by our inward passions? Do we come to church regularly but have no connection to God beyond this building?

No relationship with Him in daily life? Have you ever sung or said words during this service and found yourself doing the opposite by Monday?

Could it be said of us that we call Him Master and Lord but don't obey Him? That we call Him strong and good but don't trust Him?

That we call Him rich and gracious but don't depend on Him? That we call Him the way and the truth and the life but don't follow Him?

Now here's something I'd never do. Buying God off. What does God need to leave me alone?

[21 : 56] Burn offerings, rams, rivers of oil, my firstborn. Do you see how there's no relationship at all here in that? It's just a transaction, right? I'd never buy God off like that.

At least I'd never do it in those terms. But see what God's people are really doing here is treating Him as a means to an end.

Give Him what He needs so life can be good. I'll join a connect community and a small group.

Watch me. I volunteer every Sunday. I'll double my tithe.

Surely that's enough to satisfy Him and life will go all right. But again, it misses what? Relationship. It assumes that God, this is so grievous about it, it changes who God is altogether. It assumes He's an ogre to be appeased. Rather than a father to be loved.

[23 : 01] Do I really savor relationship with God? Or am I playing a game? This has been hitting me hard this week when I think about my prayer life.

I talk a lot about prayer and it's really important to me. So I set aside time to pray. In the last couple of weeks as I've been doing that, what I've seen is that I've heard the clock ticking sometimes while I've been praying.

What I mean is you know this feeling where you said, I'm going to pray for this long and then you pray and you look up and you're like, oh man, it's only been two minutes? I thought it had been 20. Two minutes? When's the time going to be up? And I realize I may have set the time aside because I can check boxes like that.

But I'm not savoring the relationship with God. I'm longing to talk to Him. Delighting to slow down in His presence and listen to Him.

[24 : 08] And it's made me wonder this week if my heart was making God a box to check, an ogre to appease, and forgetting that my Father delights to be with me.

To shape my heart after His when it's not. Do you see how that's playing church for me? I don't know if it is for you. It's revealing a half-hearted commitment to my relationship with God.

A couple more ways if you're not seeing it in your life yet. Playing church will mean sacrifice is a necessary evil. I mean, sometimes you've got to give some money or some time or some service. After all, what will people start to say about you if you don't ever do some Christian things occasionally, right? And it'll be good for your social resume if you do.

But are needy people honestly an inconvenience that bothers you most of the time? A distraction from your life?

[25 : 19] I hate it when I say that. A hindrance to your bottom line and successful business or successful family life? That's what the least and the lost and the littlest and the lonely and the left out had become to the people of God, wasn't it?

Don't slow me down for them. God says, watch out. They're on my heart.

I love to rescue lost causes. Don't you remember that's how we met? If your heart beats like mine, you'll not just sacrifice for others, but you'll genuinely delight in doing it.

Friends, we get so distracted, don't we? By so many other things. Busy with so many good things. Are we half-heartedly playing church?

Or really wanting God to shape our hearts like His? Do we really long for that? Or are we afraid what it would cost us from our real lives? Listen, God didn't redeem us at the cost of His own Son so we could be happy and comfortable for 70 or 80 years.

[26 : 36] So we could claim His name and live for ours and our comfort. May it not be said of us in this generation that we played church while lost souls went to hell.

While orphans died of hunger. While the poor were systematically oppressed. While unborn millions were killed. While lonely neighbors despaired of life.

While nations abandoned the heart of God. May it not be that we, His people, lose His heart too.

We desperately need revival right here, don't we?

It's got to be something new and fresh. Don't you see how far our hearts and lives are from God's glorious standards where He is the center.

Where my life's work, my heart's passion is my relationship with God. Walking with Him.

[27 : 43] Living for Him. Maybe what's even worse is when we're exposed there. When God's Word and Spirit shows up and maybe right now in your heart, like He's been doing in mine this week, saying, there's something wrong.

There's new life that's needed. We just start hatching plans to feel better and get back to our lives. You know what? I have been skipping my quiet time for six months. Really not thinking about God much.

You got me, pastor. Prophet. 10,000 rivers of oil take care of it. That be enough? I mean, that way I won't have to repent again until the next big mess up, right?

God says, no. No, repentance is about relationship. Remember the definition we've been using? Repentance is a heart-grieving, broken relationship with God. Turning to God and rejoicing in restored relationship.

[28 : 52] Martin Luther says, all of life is to be about repentance. Repentance. Another commentator calls repentance the basic maneuver of life.

It's how we live day to day. When I say repent, it's not just once a year in the really big mess up. It's the reason we confess every week in this service and need time with God day in and day out.

It's calling our hearts back from playing church to walking with God every day. Some days I wake up and say, God, I'm anxious about today.

I'm not trusting you with what's on my calendar. Bring me back to live for you today. That's repentance. Other days I wake up and say, God, I'm doing great.

I'm joyful because life's good. And I'm not grateful to you or finding my joy in you. Bring me back to live for you today.

[29 : 57] That's repentance. We shouldn't have to get caught to repent if we're walking with God. Repentance is what Peter said early. It's desperately and joyfully running home to our Father over and over.

It's a recentering of my heart on the relationship God says is the center and source of my life. I don't know about you, but I've seen a lot of half-hearted realities in my life this week.

Take some time to think about some of these questions. What's God showing you? Have we wearied of the one relationship we were made never to live without?

Has our passion waned? Have we lost our first love and just been playing at relationship with God? This table reminds us of the good news. Our only hope, and it's this. God doesn't play in his relationship with us, does he?

[31 : 18] God doesn't even demand that we give our firstborn son for our sins. He gives his for us. That's our only hope.

He is all in in this relationship. Always has been, by the way. Sending his son to secure our eternal relationship with him and seat at his table forever.

However, Jesus, the only one who perfectly does justice and loves kindness and walks humbly with his God, gives his life for us.

He bears the scorn that we, his people, deserve. That mocking hissing that should have come to us fell on him.

That's why he sat with his disciples the night he was betrayed. He took bread. He broke it and gave it to his disciples. As I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you.

[32 : 30] And he said, take, eat, this is my body, broken where yours should have been. Do this and remember me.

And he took the cup and said, this cup is a new covenant in my blood, which will be shed so yours doesn't have to be. Because there's forgiveness of sins here in his blood.

Drink from it in remembrance of him. For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember not our death, but his.

And we proclaim his death as our only hope until he comes again and we eat it with him forever. If you're willing today to stop playing church, to stop pretending, then the good news is you don't also have to go and fix your life before you can come to God.

Did you know that? You can come to him honestly and say I'm desperate and I need you. And come and feast, repent of your abandonment, abandonment of the only one who will never leave you.

[33 : 49] And come back to him. Run back to your father through Jesus. Rejoice in the relationship that you have that you could never have earned, but he did for you.

Let's pray. Jesus, thank you. That the only one who lived the way we were created to has also died in our place.

Use this table to lift up broken hearts. To give us hope again.

Not in ourselves, but in a God who loves us and comes to meet even with us this morning and forever. Because he's so committed to this relationship.

Father, where would we be without your commitment to us? Call us back again this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

[35 : 03] For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.