

# What the Lord Requires

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning again. Glad you're here this morning. As we turn to God's Word this morning, I want to make a bold statement, and it is this. You are here because God wants you to know Him in a life-giving, life-changing relationship. Now, you may be here because you're visiting for the weekend, because family has dragged you, because this is what you do on Sunday morning.

There may be all sorts of reasons why you think you've come here this morning, but God has a purpose for you, by His Word, that you would be restored and renewed in your relationship with Him.

Why is a restored relationship with God His purpose? Well, because we need Him. Our relationship with Him is not all that He would desire it to be.

Now, some of you know this. Some of you are here because you're seeking and exploring Christianity. You're reading the Bible and figuring out who is Jesus, and who is this God of the Bible, and why would He want a relationship with me, and what does that mean? You are so welcome to be here. We are so glad that you're here, and we hope that this message and your ongoing interaction with our church will be of help in your search for God. Now, some of us are regulars. You've come here this morning at Trinity, and you are rejoicing in His grace today, and my hope is that this message will encourage you to know God more. But some of us are here, and are regulars maybe, but we don't need this, and we need to wake up. Maybe we attend, give, serve, but God is far from our hearts.

Maybe our relationship with God has turned to duty, to formalism, to superficiality. Maybe you are weary of the game of keeping it together. You've wearied of trusting God through hard times. You've run from God to seek your own desires and goals. Maybe you've just grown cold, and you're not even sure why. Friends, I'll tell you, this week as I've studied this passage, God has used this in my heart. I don't come this morning as one who has it all together, and has figured all this out, or has no need of God. I need this message as much as you do this morning.

[ 2 : 43 ] Our message is from Micah, chapter 6, verses 1 through 8. We've been in a series in the book of Micah. Micah. If you want to turn there, I forgot to get the page number, 731. Thank you, Lori.

731 is in the Pew Bible, if you want to look. Micah 6. And remember, Micah's a prophet preaching in the 700s BC to the people of God, the southern kingdom primarily, after the fall of the northern kingdom. And God is speaking a word of warning, and of judgment, and of hope. And this is what this is the overview of what Micah is doing, and we will see all of those things in our passage this morning. So Micah, chapter 6, verses 1 through 8. Let's go ahead and read it together, and then I'll pray.

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 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, 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? 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 love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? Let's pray together. Lord, as we come to your word this morning,

I ask, Lord, that you would help us. Lord, if we come and simply seek to understand your word, Lord, in our own strength, Lord, we will surely miss the richness, the fullness, and maybe even the plain meaning of it. For our hearts endlessly would turn away from the truth of your word. So, Lord, we ask this morning for your Holy Spirit to help us. We ask, Lord, that by your Holy Spirit, we would understand your word and that in understanding it, we would sit under it and receive it. God, I pray this morning that you would help me to speak your words as I ought.

[ 6 : 05 ] And together, Lord, we would sit under your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. What is the path to a restored relationship with God? In this passage, there are two sections.

Verses 1 through 5, we'll talk about the problem. Verses 6 through 8 will show us the solution. So, let's look at these things in turn. Starting in verse 1 through 5, the problem.

In verses 1 through 5, God reveals the depth of our alienation from God. That is, the depth of our broken relationship with Him. This is a classic Old Testament word of accusation where God comes to His people and He says, I have something against you. He begins in verse 1 by calling on the creation itself, the mountains, the heavens and the earth to bear witness to what He's about to say. And He brings this word of indictment, which is a judicial word. It is what we do when we charge someone formally with a crime against the state. And it is what God is saying, my people have committed a crime against me. They've committed an offense, a transgression that needs to be addressed. And this is what verses 1 and 2 of our section do is God is setting up.

One of the things that's really important as you're reading the prophets is to recognize that the voice changes and it's always important to hear who's speaking, right? So, in verses 1 and 2, it seems that God is actually, this is Micah saying, God is saying to Micah, hey, stand up and plead this case, right? And then in verse 3, Micah is speaking for God. And so, this is God speaking directly to His people, having called the witnesses into the count. But He doesn't lambaste them the way He has. If you've been here for a while, you know that chapters 1, 2, and 3, God goes after them and tells them exactly what they've done wrong and everything. But here God goes not at the proving His case route, but the pleading His cause route. He turns from, I have an indictment with you, against you, to why have you done this? Why have you broken the relationship with me? Do you see this in verses 3, 4, and 5? Oh, my people, what have I done to you?

[ 8 : 42 ] Now, the reason He does this and why these things coincide is because in the Old Testament, the people of God, the people to whom Micah were speaking, were in a covenant relationship with God. A covenant was a binding agreement between two parties where each had roles to play. This is what you see in Exodus 19, God, having brought His people out of Egypt, out of slavery, delivered them from the hands of Pharaoh and through the Red Sea, comes and says, I will be your God and you will be my people and I will protect you and I will provide for you. And you are called to be my people by obeying me and following me and making me the object of your worship, exclusive of all others.

And God comes to this people that He has loved and invited into this covenant relationship and He says, how have I failed you? What have I done wrong? And this tone of pleading is not a tone of weakness, but it's of strength. He's saying, like an abandoned lover, have I done anything to cause this to you?

And then in verses 4 and 5, He says, this is what in fact I have done. This is my part in the relationship. Look with me again. He says, for I brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery. I have done the greatest work of salvation in the entire history by redeeming a million people from slavery to Egypt with my strong hand.

I did a miracle in order to make you my people. And then He goes on, He says, not only that, but I gave you leaders. I gave you Moses and Aaron and Miriam. And these leaders were called by me to speak for me and to represent me so that you would know me well.

I've provided for you the things that you need, the leaders that you need, so that you might continue in this covenant relationship. And then He shifts gears from Exodus and He shifts gears into the book of Numbers. And He says, do you remember as you, the chosen people were heading towards the promised land. You had to cross the territory of Moab.

[ 11 : 16 ] And the king of Moab, whose name was Balak, opposed you. And he called his prophet to come out. And as he came out, he said to his prophet, go out and curse these people so that they will not succeed.

And yet God foiled him. And the king of Moab, who sought to oppose the purposes of God and the people of God, was foiled. And in the end, Balaam went out and he blessed God's people.

Because it was the only words that God would allow him to speak. And they entered into the promised land, moving from Shittim, which is across the, on the eastern side of Jordan River to Gilgal, where you see in Joshua 5, they renewed their covenant.

They renewed as they entered into the promised land that God was providing. So God's telling this story of their relationship to remind them that He has been faithful.

No matter what obstacles they face, no matter what enemies that have stood up against them, no matter even their own failures, God has been faithful to them through all of this.

[ 12 : 32 ] And He says, how have I failed you? I haven't. I have been faithful. And I want you to know my redemptive works, to know my redemptive love for you in the saving acts that I have done for you.

And so God comes to His people with this charge. And look, this charge has in its background all of the rest of the prophecy of Micah. So God has already said, you have oppressed the poor.

Remember, you have taken advantage of people. You have misused spiritual authority. You have been selfish in the way you have led. You have been unrighteous in many, many ways in your horizontal relationships with one another.

And you have turned away from me to worship idols and to turn to treaties to protect yourself. This is what I have done. Or this is what you have done.

You have done all these things. So there has been content, but it's not in this passage. Here God is pleading for a renewal. He's saying, what do you have to say for yourself?

[ 13 : 44 ] How have I failed you? And the answer is, of course, none. And friends, as we think about how this applies to our life, God puts us on trial as well.

He reminds us of His faithful love to His world and to His church. And He asks similar questions of us. He asks us, how have I failed you?

And yet we find ourselves claiming to be God's people and yet failing to be the covenant people that He wants us to be.

We cannot say that we love God and hate others and treat them with prejudice. We cannot say that we love God and not love the people in the pews next to you who you find annoying or quirky or weird or difficult.

We cannot say that we love God if our hearts are hardened towards those who are poor and needy.

We cannot say that we love God if our church participation is superficial or rote.

[ 14 : 56 ] If we think that by just showing up on Sunday mornings, God will be pleased. Or that our formal affiliation or our baptism in the past will cover for our present faithlessness.

If we think it's simply okay to go through the motions of church life, God would say it is not.

And that's for God's people, for those of you who would claim Christian. But all of humanity stands under this charge of rejecting the God who has loved the world.

We have refused God's claim on all of humanity and rejected that He has the right to call us to live in a certain way and to tell us what that ought to be.

And instead of submitting ourselves as a created being to our Creator, we arrogantly position ourselves as the masters of our domain. We live as we please in our world, do we not?

[ 15 : 57 ] We live as we please and expect God to bless us and to make our lives easy and to make our hearts happy. But the self-centeredness of our sinful living is an offense to God.

Our selfishness rejects His common grace. Provision is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. When God comes and brings this indictment to us, we recognize we cannot be in a right relationship with God while we reject Him at the same time.

And we must heed this warning. We must not skip over this. In fact, this is God's plan for us this morning.

It's that God would search our hearts to see if there is any wayward or wicked way in us.

If there are ways that we are harboring sin against the Creator of the universe. If there are ways where God is revealing in our hearts right now that we are cold, that we are indifferent, that we are dismissive, or that we are rebellious against our Creator and our God.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts. And show us if there be any wicked way in us. This is where we must start for our renewal in our relationship with God.

[ 17 : 25 ] Because we don't know that there's a problem. We're not going to look for a solution.

We're just going to keep doing the same thing. But when we actually admit the depth of it, when we see that we have sinned against the Creator of the world, and the God who has loved us in all the ways that He has, then we're positioned for renewal in our relationship with Him.

God shows us our need so that He can show us the way for restoration. And this is what we see in verses 6 through 8. God has spoken to His people, and now in verses 6 and 7, it seems that the people respond.

There's an acknowledgement that something must be done. And the question is, what shall I come? What shall I come before? With what shall I come before the Lord? There's a recognition. I've got to do something to try to make this right.

And I will tell you, I've wrestled with these verses this week, because the question I've had is, what is the tone? Right? It's possible that this is an honest, humble seeker who's convicted of their sin and saying, God, what can I do to make this right?

And verse 6 talks about, I'll follow the law. I'll bring the sacrifices that the law tells me to bring that might atone for my sin, or somehow make this right.

[ 18 : 49 ] And verse 7 seems to go beyond it and say, maybe that's not enough. Maybe I'll give more and more. The greatest treasures that I have, even my firstborn child, if I could give that to you, there's a sense of a humble, desperate desire to be restored to God.

Or, this is more like a frustrated teenager saying, I can never please you.

There's nothing I can ever do. What do you want? I'll go get the moon. I'll give you a million dollars if I can just do this thing. And the hyperbole seems to point to me more towards the second, where it goes beyond just the requirements of what God has shown them to say, what can I give you?

My own child? I'll give you my own child? Come on, God. What do you think? What do you really want from me? It seems more of a slightly defiant and frustrated than a humble and desperate tone. Either way, however, it raises a question of, is there something that I can do? Some religious activity, some rite, some ritual, some sacrifice, some something, where I could actually do something to make right what is wrong in my relationship with God?

[ 20 : 22 ] And God replies in verse 8. This is where God shows a path of restoration. He says, he's shown you, oh man.

Again, the prophet is speaking for God. God has already told you, oh humanity, all of you who have known God's word, who have heard him speak, you know what he wants.

He wants you to do justice. And to love kindness. And to walk humbly with God.

This is what I called you to in my covenant long ago. This is what I've restated to you through my prophets. This is what it means for you to be in a right relationship with me.

To do justice. What does that mean? It means to practice our life with the just values that characterize God and his kingdom. It has a primarily relational aspect.

[ 21 : 22 ] How do we live in such a way that we don't oppress the poor, but treat them fairly and mercifully? How do we use the power that we have not to accumulate more power or to use others, but to serve others and to bless them and to do good to them?

How do we take the wealth and positions that we have so that others might flourish, so that others might be built up rather than seeking our own kingdoms and glory?

To do justice would be, you can go back and read Exodus 21 through 23. It's three chapters of commands on how to live in God's kingdom as a part of his covenant.

And it has all these particularly mentioning care for those on the margins, for those in need, for those who are vulnerable, saying, this is what it looks like for you to be just in my kingdom.

And this is what he's calling us to do. And friends, I wonder, if we think about our own lives, how well do we do in doing justice?

[ 22 : 30 ] What does justice look like in our home life with our family, our roommates? Do we take them from granted? Do we expect too much? Are we easily offended?

Or are we gracious and patient? Do we seek to serve them and to build them up? Do we take the time to invest in their well-being?

Or are we fundamentally self-centered in how we do it? How do we treat those we work with? Are we demanding? Are we harsh?

Are we gossipy? Are we complaining? Or do we celebrate their successes? Do we seek to help them thrive and survive, even at the cost of ourselves?

How do we treat our neighbors? Literally, the people who live next door to us. Do we ignore them? It's so New England to just ignore your neighbors, to not even know who they are, to not have a conversation with them.

[ 23 : 38 ] But do we see them as divinely appointed relationships that God has brought into our life, even when they're loud, even when they're cranky, even when they have cats that poo in your garden, like ours do.

Do we judge them or do we embrace them? Do we ignore them or do we welcome them? How do we show justice in treating the people of God?

Do we love those in church who love us? Or do we find ourselves gravitating towards and seeking to reach out to those who are on the edge, who needs a little extra care, a little extra attention?

Friends, we don't need to fix all the injustices of the world to do justice. But we are called to do justice where we are, in the relationships that we have, with the opportunities that we have.

God says not only are we to do justice, but we're to love mercy. Now this is a funny term, because it sounds like, and often many of the commentators said, what this means is actually the same thing as the first one, in a different way, right?

[ 24 : 57 ] To love mercy, to love being merciful to those who are in need. I don't actually think that's the right understanding of this. I'm going to take a slightly different take at it, because the words here are, we are to love, that is to treasure, to value, to adore, to be devoted to something, and that something here in, okay, so in the ESV it's translated kindness, in some of your other Bibles it may be translated mercy, it might be translated steadfast love.

This is the glorious Hebrew word hesed, which is God's word for his covenant love for his people. And it's what he said he was, when Moses said, show me who you are, in Exodus 34. And when God passed by, he said, the Lord, the Lord, slow to anger, and abounding in hesed, steadfast love. It is the love that David, King David, showed to Mephibosheth, the son of the rival house, that had sought to destroy him for years, when he welcomed him into his home, invited him to sit at his table, and to enjoy the bounty of his household.

It is the father's love, pacing on the front porch, waiting for the prodigal. It is an effective thing that has, moves our emotions.

[ 26 : 34 ] It is a commitment. It is loyalty and faithfulness. And it is bonding ourselves to another, to give to them freely without restraint.

And what I think God is saying here, is that his people are called to love hesed, to love covenant faithfulness, to be these kinds of people.

And it does work its way out horizontally, in a lot of ways that doing justice does. But it means, I think primarily, to treasure being God's covenant people, and to treasure the covenant God, who has called us into relationship, with him.

This is what it means, to love hesed. It's to recommit to faithful devotion, and loyalty to God, and to love him wholeheartedly, and without reservation, because he has loved us, wholeheartedly, and without reservation.

And so we ask ourselves, how do we treasure a relationship, that we have in our human world? We give them time.

[ 27 : 46 ] We give them our energy, our forethought. We plan. We consider their needs, when they're not around. Not just responsively, but proactively.

We give our effort. We give our full attention, to the people, that we treasure, in our lives. It's where we invest, the best part of ourselves.

It's the thing, that we think of, the one that we think of, when our minds, aren't occupied, with other things. Friends, God wants us, to be consumed with him, and with loving him.

First, above all others. Do we seek to engage him? Do we make him a priority? Is he the biggest rock, that we put into our, Stephen Covey, time management planning program, for those of you, who are old enough, to remember Stephen Covey?

Is he our first priority, that we make him, the first thing, that we do? Loving him. Is he the one, that we bring along, into everything else we do?

[ 28 : 58 ] In our workplace, in our home, in our relationships, in our leisure time, in our hobbies. Is it serving God, and pleasing him, that drives us, in all of these things?

Or have we allowed God, to be someone, that we take for granted? For him to become, the backdrop of our life, rather than the focal point, of our life. How easily, we allow the weeds, of this world, to choke out, our love for him.

How easily, we allow the hurts, and disappointments, of life, to harden our hearts. How easily, we allow the allure, of the shiny things, of this world, to grab our attention, and to distract us, from our

devotion, to the Lord.

God, it means, it means not only, devoting ourselves to him, but it also means, recognizing that he is our God, and therefore, he has the right, to transform every sphere, of our life.

So he is able, to instruct us, on ethics, in our workplace, on what we do, with our sex life, on how we file, our tax returns, on what we do, with our charitable giving, on how we spend, our leisure time, on how we take, our influence to others, and use it for good, or for evil.

[ 30 : 19 ] God says, all of these are mine, in this covenant relationship. Friends, do we treasure Christ, or do we fall back, on formality, and religious activity?

Are our hearts, far from loving, and treasuring him? So doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly, with God. This humility, is a fundamental part, of the covenant, recognizing that, we are not, in a relationship, with God, because we have anything, to commend ourselves.

In Deuteronomy 7, Moses reminds, the people of this, in at the beginning, as they were entering, into the promised land. He said, for you are a people, holy to the Lord your God, the Lord your God, has chosen you, to be a people, for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples, who are on the face, of the earth.

It was not, because you, were more in number, than any other peoples, that the Lord, set his love on you, and chose you. For you were, the fewest of all people. But it's because, the Lord loves you. The humility, of relating to God, who has shown grace, like this, is absolutely fundamental. I have never done anything, to earn this.

[ 31 : 39 ] I can never do anything, to deserve it. There is nothing, that I have, in me, that obligates God, to love me.

But rather, out of the fullness, of his love, and his grace, and his mercy, he reaches out, and grabs hold of us, and pulls us in, to this embracing relationship, and he says, I have made you mine.

This is his chesed love, commitment to us. And we receive it, with all humility, and grace.

Nothing in our hands, we bring. Only to the cross, we cling. And this humility, extends not only, to receiving this grace, of relationship, but again, to submitting to him, and following him.

To saying, my life, is no longer my own. I have been bought, with the price, of the love of God, for me in Christ. And therefore, all of what I do, is now, reoriented, around the, gravitational center, of loving, and pleasing him.

[ 32 : 56 ] It is no longer, about me. It is about God. And that's true, of my whole life. Friends, how often, how often, do we act more like, a two-year-old?

I can do it myself. How often, do we want to be, independent of God, in so many different ways? But God calls us, to walk humbly, means, being open, to his instruction, being dependent, on his strength, and being aware, of our inability, apart, from his work, in our lives.

How often, do we become proud, of our obedience, and of our righteousness? How often, do we see, our successes, as the fruit, of what we have done, and not a gift, from God?

How often, do we proudly, refuse God's help, and try to live, on our own? How often, do we bristle, when God gently, reveals, our sin, and our failure?

When he instructs us, we question, quibble, and doubt, and when he convicts us, of sin, we justify, excuse, and shift blame. So friends, this is what the prophet, Micah has for us today.

[ 34 : 20 ] Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly, with your God. This is how we can be restored, to a right relationship, with God. Now friends, it would be very easy, to end this sermon here, and you would hear, a great sermon, exhorting you, to live a life, that you will never, be able to live.

We cannot do this, on our own. We cannot be, Micah 6, 8 people, by trying harder, to do better, and being the best self, that we can be. In fact, it's a calling, that defeats us.

If we've ever had, the courage, to actually try, to do this, we would see, how far short, we fall. And verses 6, and 7 point out, this futility, a little bit.

It says, what can we give, our obedience, our devotion, our humility? If we're honest, none of it will ever be enough. Our commitment to justice, is marred by self-interest. Our commitment, to covenantal living, is foiled, by our wayward hearts, and our walk of humility, is scarred, by our insistent, ego, and pride.

And we cannot do this. But there's one who can't. There's one who did. Because Jesus came, to do what we couldn't do.

[ 35 : 55 ] Jesus came, to be, the perfect son, to be, the true vine, of Israel. He lived, a perfect life, of obedience.

I have come, to do your will, O Lord, he said. And he did it, with justice, loving the needy, the marginalized, the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the poor.

He did it, loving and walking, perfectly in line, with his heavenly father. As he walked this earth, he lived a life, of perfect obedience, doing justly.

He, also, showed perfect devotion, to his father. In John 17, he says, I have glorified you, on earth. That is, I have made my life, not about me, but about you.

And I have served you, and your purposes. Not my will, but yours be done. It's what he prayed, in the garden of Gethsemane. He loved his father, and was willing to go to the cross, for his father's purposes.

[ 37 : 04 ] And friends, these were not at cross purposes, with Jesus' desire. But together, they chose this path. Jesus walked humbly, with God.

Not counting equality, with God, something to be grasped, as Philipians 2 says. But he humbled himself, took on the form of servants, and suffered, and died on the cross.

Why? For us. Because though we have, no firstborn that we could offer, that would make ourselves, right with God.

God has his firstborn. He says here, I will give it up for you. I will give the perfect sacrifice.

I will atone for your sin. He will die for you, for all of your injustice, and all of your pride, and all of your fickle devotion.

[ 38 : 06 ] And he will call you, and redeem you, from these things. And yet we know, that he did not stay in the grave, having died for us, but he rose to new life.

And he comes to us now, his people, and he says, what you cannot do in yourself, I am able to help you, to start to do. Because in my new resurrected life, I can give you, a new life, a new spiritual life, in relationship with God.

I can bring you, into a new covenant, that is better than the old covenant. I can turn your heart of stone, into a heart of flesh, so that you can do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly, with your God.

And we don't do it again, by going back to an Old Testament, I am going to try to do this on my own. But we do this, in a New Testament way, of humbly, in dependence on the spirit, walking by faith, and treasuring Christ.

When we do those things, when we see him, then God works in us, and we are able, to begin to be, the people that God calls us to be, in relationship to him.

[ 39 : 26 ] And this is how we have, a restored relationship with God. This is how we live out Micah 6, 8, not in order to restore, our relationship with God, but out of the relationship, that God has restored, to us in Jesus, the one who has fulfilled, this passage for us.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we come to you this morning, and we confess our need. Holy Spirit, work. Do your work now, as we sing, as we disperse, and scatter from here. Do your work in our hearts. Lord, show us where we are cold.

Show us where we are rebellious. Show us where we are proud. Show us where we have become weary of you. And renew and restore us.

Lord, by your spirit, draw us to Jesus, that we may be renewed in him. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[ 40 : 40 ] Amen.