

## **MICAH 6:1-8**

### **WHAT IS GOOD**

Run away! Run Away, from the Lord! That's what the people have done, people of the Lord. The Lord calls out "O My people, O My people", to His people who have run away. "How have I wearied you?" How has He wearied you? Answer Him! Well, what's your answer as to why you're not here every Sunday. What answers do you get from your family and friends? What answers do the members of our church have for the Lord when they no longer attend? Baptized, confirmed, and gone, no longer to be seen. How has the Lord wearied you, O you His people?

God says this to the Israelites, but He might as well be saying this to every Christian congregation as the congregations are shrinking. These words from the Lord are used in a Good Friday service called the "Reproaches". God reprimands His people asking them why they have not followed Him. God scolds His people for not responding in love to His love. Listen to these reproaches and think of your answer to God's question.

"O My people what have I done to you? Where have I grieved you? Answer Me! Because I brought you forth from the land of Egypt you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. Because I led you through the desert forty years and fed you with manna and brought you into a land exceedingly good, you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. I indeed did plant you, O My vineyard, with goodly clusters, and you have become exceedingly bitter unto Me, for vinegar, mingled with gall, you did give Me when thirsty, you have pierced with a spear the side of your Saviour."

How do you answer God's reproach? God had reminded His people of four specific examples of His saving love. He redeemed them from Egypt. He provided His people with excellent leaders. He guarded His people from harm. He led His people into the Promised Land. The Lord shows His people His saving acts, and yet they acted as though serving the Lord was wearisome.

Are we any better? When we think and speak as though God wants to rob us of the joy of life we treat God as our oppressor. People do act that way. In my last congregation I had a parent lecture me about how I was depriving her children of weekend activities by asking confirmation kids to come to church on Sunday. The Lord forbid that I should deprive you of sports or family gatherings and ask you to worship the Lord your God, your Creator and Redeemer.

Have you forgotten His saving acts, or think so little of them? Today the Lord comes to us in His Word calling us to repentance. May the Holy Spirit move you to confess your sins and to trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Yet, that didn't come so easily for these people whom the Lord was reprimanding.

The reaction of the people to God calling them back to Him was ridiculous. They asked God what He wanted from them. Did God want them to sacrifice a calf? Did God want thousands of rams? Would that be good enough for Him. Is it good enough for you to miss one hockey game to come to church on Sunday, or do you have to give up the whole season? They asked if God wanted ten thousands of rivers of oil? Does God want you to take out a second mortgage on your house so that you can give thousands of dollars to the church every Sunday. Would that satisfy God? How about if we kill the firstborn child of every member in our church. Would God be satisfied then? Would that save our souls?

Do you see not only how horrific but how ridiculous the response of these people was? Hopefully you do. God doesn't want to deprive you of the joy of life. He wants your joy to be full (John 15:11). He wants a good life for you. He doesn't want you to go into debt by giving to the church, or to sacrifice your firstborn, or any other member of your family, or any pet or animal from the barn. He has told you what is good.

He wants you to do justice, to be fair and honest, to live in goodness, His goodness, to know what are good things and to participate in doing good things. What is goodness? Here God says justice, kindness and humility. We could spend the rest of our lives dwelling on God's goodness, and that would be good for you to do. However, for starters I'll just dwell on goodness for the rest of the sermon.

Psalm 133 says, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ... For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore" (v's 1, 3b). Unity in the congregation leading to life forevermore. Wouldn't that be a good thing for each and every one of us?! All the Israelites would come from near and far to Mount Zion to offer their sacrifices and there the people felt unity with one another as they gathered to worship the one God and receive His blessings. The greatest blessing was life forevermore. On the other mountain of Zion, on Mount Calvary Christ was crucified and from there comes the promised blessing of everlasting salvation.

That's the greatest goodness. Unfortunately many Christians have fallen into the same trap as God's people back in Micah's day. They think up different things that they have to do to achieve this great goodness of everlasting salvation from God. What do you need to give to God? Is it right worship, having the right understanding of all the words in the Bible? They ask what is it that God wants of us, and then they make up answers to fulfill their desires to achieve something for God. All God wants from you is honesty. Don't lie to one another, or about one another. That may seem too simple, but it's also very difficult for some people.

We don't sacrifice calves and rams on the alter anymore, and definitely not children, but what about oil. We don't have to go to the excessive extreme they suggested of ten thousands of rivers of oil, but maybe you can sponsor the communion wine for a month, or volunteer somewhere in the church, and that would be enough to appease God.

This is our wrong way of thinking. We don't do good things to appease God, but we do good things because Jesus appeased God for us. We do good things like making our offerings, volunteering and praising God, because Jesus died and rose to win eternal life for us. A Psalm many of you may be familiar with is Psalm 51, which says in part: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. For You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart" (15-17). God wants our hearts to be broken over our sins, just as His heart is broken over our sins, and God wants us to be contrite and repentant over our sins so that He may forgive our sins.

What is laid out in our text is not a path to get on God's good side, but rather to live the good life that God has won for you. Don't just say the right words about God, but let your life catch up with these Words that you hear today. Live past Sunday into your entire week and entire life, living for God with every breath you take in and breathe out.

What does it look like to love kindness? We love kindness when it's shown to us. So when you experience that feeling of gratitude for someone showing kindness to you, then show that kindness to others, not just once but in a steadfast unwavering way. One act of kindness is nice, but if you're then rude to the same person the next time, your act of kindness becomes meaningless.

Yet, maybe they're not kind to you, and so why should you be kind to them? There in comes the third part. Walk humbly with Your God. Showing loving kind humility to unkind people can be hard, but if you try to think of Jesus walking alongside of you being rude to them will also become hard, and being kind can become easier. You need boldness to be a humble person in this world.

Christianity is for the weak in that God saves us while we're still sinners who are blind, dead and enemies of God. Yet, once saved Christianity isn't for the weak of heart. You need courage to be a Christian in today's world and to live lives of justice, kindness and humility. These qualities don't come from you, but rather they come from God the Holy Spirit. You just live out the gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Amen.