

What Does God Want by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E4050130
Micah 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:1-12
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There is a trial about to take place. The jury is made up of the mountains and hills. The defendants are we. The complainant is God. Our faith is on trial.

In the opening argument, God lays a guilt trip on us, reminding us of all that God has done for us. I don't mean that God gave me the flu this week, or that God took my mother away from me. God has done far more for us. God has given us life, and family. God has given us a place in history. God has brought us out of slavery in Egypt and sent us leaders of faith through the centuries.

You say you never were in slavery in Egypt? Yes you were. You are not isolated. You are a person with a history, a family. You have DNA within you, DNA that extends back to Adam and Eve, and probably farther back than that. Our history is the history of the Hebrews and the early Christians. The words of the Prophet Micah are as vital today as they were twenty-six hundred years ago.

In the trial God asks, "Have I wearied you?" God takes personally the fact that we do not worship God in the ways God wishes. God is tired of the way we worship when we do it for show. We don't need to worship God with burnt offerings, or animal sacrifice, or the sacrifice of firstborn children. We don't need elaborate ceremonies. God isn't interested in the way we sing hymns, in which pew we sit or how much money we put into the offering plate. God has something else in mind. Is there some reason why we cannot do what God asks of us?

The title of this sermon is rather presumptuous, "What Does God Want? How can we possibly know what God wants? The very belief that we can know what God wants is often what starts wars and strife. Fundamental Christian preachers say they know what God wants. I say I know what God wants. Muslim clerics say they know what God wants. Except that the Sunni clerics can't seem to agree with the Shia clerics about what it is. God has given us a blueprint, a set of clues, in the scriptures. We have read the Ten Commandments. We have read Jesus' commandment to love one another in John 15:12. We have heard Jesus' parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25. These all point to the fact that our faith in God is closely related to the way we treat other human beings.

Today's Hebrew scripture reading, Micah 6:8 is one of the verses we all ought to memorize. It is as important as the One Hundredth Psalm or the Twenty-third Psalm or John 3:16: "He has told you, O mortal, 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?" That is what God wants! There has been a controversy about faith and works ever since the time of the Apostle Paul. Although we know we cannot earn salvation— that was provided for us through God's grace long ago—works are important. Although we can not earn salvation, that is no excuse for not acting with justice. As James said, "faith without works is dead."¹

Micah says, "Do justice!" What is acting with justice? Is it taking an eye for an eye, as outlined in the Hebrew law?² No. Jesus taught something else. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if

¹James 2:25

²Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21

anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;³

God's justice says something about the issue of moral values we hear so much about. Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine was interviewed by Jon Stewart on the Daily Show two weeks ago.⁴ Wallis said,

“It is hard to believe that Jesus' first priorities were capital gains cuts and the war in Iraq. How did Jesus become pro rich, pro war, and pro American?... I like moral values... but are there only two? There are three thousand verses in the Bible referring to poverty. I would say fighting poverty is a moral value.... What about protecting the environment? Is torture a moral value?”

Justice has to do with all people being treated as people—as God's children. Jesus taught us that the way we treat others is the way we treat him.⁵

Love mercy. What is loving mercy? The word is *chesed* in Hebrew. It can be translated “steadfast love,” “mercy” or “loving kindness.” It is treating others as you would like to be treated. It might be sharing with tsunami victims. It might be sharing with the Good Samaritan fund of this church, or assisting Allied Churches or Loaves and Fishes.

I share two notes of caution here, though. Showing kindness does not mean giving a beggar five dollars to get him or her to leave you alone. It must be a genuine action from the heart. We must also take care that we are not supporting an individual's dependency. Loving mercy means helping each individual achieve their God-given potential.

What is walking humbly with God? It is not groveling. There is a difference between humility and humiliation. Humility is not allowing yourself to be humiliated. It is not shame. Humility is meekness, modesty, non arrogance and non-pridefulness. It is showing deferential respect. I appreciated learning that humility comes from the Latin root *humus*, meaning ground. Humility means groundedness!

What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? To love God might mean to have a lover's quarrel with the world as in the prayer of William Sloan Coffin.

Because we love the world, we pray now, O [God], for grace to quarrel with it, O Thou whose lover's quarrel with the world is the history of the world... Lord, grant us grace to quarrel with the worship of success and power... to quarrel with all that profanes and trivializes [people] and separates them... number us, we beseech Thee, in the ranks of those who went forth from this place longing only for those things for which Thou dost make us long, [those] for whom the complexity of the issues only served to renew their zeal to deal with them, [those] who alleviated pain by sharing it; and [those] who are always willing to risk something big for something good... O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them. Take our hearts and set them on fire.”⁶

³Matthew 5:38-39

⁴Comedy Central, “The Daily Show” January 18, 2005

⁵Matthew 25:31-46

⁶As quoted by Patricia Farris in “Living by the Word,” *Christian Century*, January 25, 2005, page 18