

## **MICAH 6:1-8 God's requirements**

Jay's Dad is coming up to his 99th birthday. He has had the great privilege of enjoying nearly 40 years of retirement in a most glorious coastal setting. Jim worked in the insurance industry from the time he left university until he retired - something that rarely happens these days. Occasionally Jim speaks with some regret about the fact that he was never one to "blow his own trumpet" in the workplace. He just went quietly about his work, doing the best he could. I think he felt a little cheated because some of the young sales people who were brought into the company – young people who weren't afraid to tell the world how wonderful they were – started on a salary more than Jim was on when he retired.

It seems that to get ahead today – particularly in the business world, you have to not only constantly extol your own virtues, but be prepared to tread all over other people to get to the top. Unless you grab every opportunity that presents itself, other people get there first, and you miss out!

That is the way of the world, isn't it? Me first, others second. How different it is to the spiritual values that we find in today's readings!

Paul tells us, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." and that "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."

Very definitely, the ways of God are not the ways of the world!

In each of this morning's readings. The Scriptures set out for us the way that God calls his people to live. It's a tough call! Most of us will know the truth of that statement.

One of the places our team visited on our mission trip to Syria was Ma'aloula. It's an ancient Christian village about an hour out of Damascus, where they still speak the language of Jesus - Aramaic. It's a beautiful village with ancient stone dwellings, as well as intact catacombs in the hills that the Christians used to hide in during the Roman occupation. Though the village has stood since the early days of the church, it didn't fare so well under the more recent occupation by ISIS. Bombs and automatic weapons do a lot more damage than swords and spears. We were told some sad stories about the occupation. When ISIS took the village in 2011, they captured three Christian men who were leaders in the community. The men were forced to

their knees and told to deny their Christian faith and convert to Islam. When they refused, they were beheaded.

To live the life God has called us to live is indeed a tough call – and sometimes may involve great sacrifice.

Just what is it that God wants us to do? How does he want us to live? And are those questions we really want to ask?

The passage we read from Micah this morning gives us God's requirements in a nutshell. Verse 8 tells us this; **“He has showed you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

The setting for this verse was a time of great social injustice in Israel - not unlike today. Corrupt leaders, false prophets and even the priests - exploited the poor for their their own ends. Judges were easily bought by bribes, and merchants used deceptive weights. The poor were many, the rich were few, and there was a great deal of suffering in society. Familiar, isn't it?

God raised up the prophet Micah as the champion of the poor and the oppressed. The entire book of Micah shows God dealing with this whole question of sin and injustice in the world, and what his people's response to it should be.

In this chapter of Micah, we see the close relationship between godliness and social conscience. It actually describes a courtroom scene where God charges his people with their misconduct, and invites them to prepare a defense against the charges. Israel, sobered by the threat of judgement, and confronted with God's goodness, recognises her guilt and in effect says, "What do you want us to do? How can we please you?" A question we ourselves posed just a few moments ago.

In the midst of a corrupt and unjust world, much of which we are responsible for, what does God want us to do? The Israelites asked if they were supposed to offer him more sacrifices - to even go so far as sacrificing their children as the pagans did.

"No, people," says Micah "The Lord has already told you what is good, and what He requires. To do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

It's once we start to seriously reflect on the true meaning of those three little phrases, we realise how very difficult it is to live up to God's requirements.

We're to "do justice." - meaning we are to be champions of fairness and equity and right living. Always. In every possible situation. It incorporates taking a stand against the injustice in our society, locally and abroad. I wonder if we have much involvement in issues of social justice? Sadly, too many in the church leave those things to agencies such as Anglicare, Vinnies & the Salvos. We see it as "not our job."

Then, we're "to love kindness (or to love mercy)". Always. In every situation. With those people in our lives we're angry with. With the grouch behind the counter. With the person who has hurt us so much, that we shut them out of our lives.

Now that we're all suitably deflated, let's look at the third requirement.....

What does it mean to "walk humbly with your God?" In the light of God's infinite love for us and all that he has done for us, our only reasonable response can be to fall on our knees before Him in all humility. To walk humbly with God means to recognise that he is indeed our Lord and king, - our boss if you like - and that we are his servants. Our lives are not our own - they have been bought with a price, and we are completely indebted to him.

Perhaps in the same way we might feel indebted to someone who has pulled us from a burning building, or from raging floodwaters. We owe Jesus our very lives!

Now, If we truly recognise this, and live in loving obedience to God, - you know something? We *will* do what is just and right. We *will* love kindness & mercy. We will do these things, not out of a sense of obligation or guilt, but because they will become things we *want* to do. It will be a response of gratitude.

How many of us would have difficulty sitting down to a delicious meal? Or taking an exotic holiday? Would I have to force myself to spend a glorious

sunny day out on the water in my kayak? Hardly! There are things each one of us really enjoys doing – it's never a hardship to do what we want to do.

As we walk humbly with our God, our hearts tune in with his. He shares his heart with us. And our love for him grows.

Do you remember being in love? That heady feeling of wanting to spend all your time with the person you love. Wanting to be with them. Wanting to please them. As we walk humbly with our God, it's as if we fall in love with him. Does that sound strange to you? It needn't. It comes from intimacy and from spending time with him. And when we love someone, it's natural that we want to please them.

As we live in humble obedience to God, and he begins to change us, we become powerful forces in his kingdom. He can begin to use us - in whatever way he desires - to begin to set to rights the injustices in the world. It may be that he will call us to do something really challenging. I often think of the challenges the Tingle family has faced serving God in Ecuador and now Thailand. But if we are walking humbly with Him, our wills will be in tune with his. However, be aware that God doesn't always call us to the mission field. He may simply wish to start with our own family and church relationships!

Sometimes, though, even the things we want to do can be difficult, can't they? God knows this. We are never asked to live the life he calls us to in our own strength.

Listen to Paul again – “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The message of the cross – that is, to turn around, change our direction and surrender our lives to Jesus; that attitude which the world finds so foolish – is a message that breathes the very power of the God into our lives.

But it's a message that we need to respond to on an ongoing basis. This attitude of surrender is something we're called to do as we begin each new day with Jesus. And it's that surrender that keeps the power of God flowing in our lives.

During a time of spiritual struggle, when I was feeling anything but close to the Lord, my spiritual director suggested that as I began to surface each morning, I should direct my first interaction with the world to God, and simply say, “Good morning Lord” and take it from there. It really helped.

This morning, let's and ask ourselves again if we are living God's way? Have we fully surrendered our lives to him, walking humbly with him? If not, then let's renew our commitment to the message of the cross that the world finds so foolish, and experience afresh the grace and power of God to enable us to live the life he has called us to.

Shall we pray?