

What Does God Want from Me?

✧ **A memory of mercy (vv.1-5)**

✧ **A sacrifice of self (vv.6-8)**

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of our life, the Savior of our souls, dearly redeemed believers:

“It’s a tough job, but somebody’s gotta do it,” quipped the captain of a cruise ship as passengers boarded for the first time. But when the food went bad somewhere out in the middle of the deep, he would have traded jobs with anyone rather than have to tell their relatives how they died of food poisoning. Some jobs look great in the sunshine, but they stink like bilge water in a storm.

Years ago a member told me that he would never want to be a pastor. That was just before he left the church in anger. Many times in my ministry I’ve wondered how so many people can be sure what a pastor should be doing, except the pastor. Day by day I have to get down on my knees and beg our merciful Lord for guidance and wisdom. But about the time I’m tempted to feel sorry for myself, Moses pops up in my devotions, or Jeremiah in a sermon. Or I a text like this tells me, “I’d rather be Mark from Shoreview than Micah of Moresheth.” You’ve had those experiences too, if not at work or school, then at the doctor’s when the tests come back the wrong way. Suddenly your weaknesses are pounding your head and your guilty heart has you asking the question of the ages: **What Does God Want from Me?**

✧ **A memory of mercy (vv.1-5)**

There’s nothing wrong with Micah, at least nothing worse than the other sinners God sent him to serve. Micah, a minor prophet with a major message, proclaimed destruction for the Northern Kingdom of Israel, while calling the Southern Kingdom of Judah to repentance. It’s not fun to have the job of telling the kings, priests and false prophets that the LORD God almighty is about to lower the boom on your idolatry, graft and corruption. The LORD’s faithful prophets often felt like radio man Tommy Mischke who described going to a Wisconsin bar across the river to see a Vikings – Packer game. When Packer fans turned ugly to “beat and kill the Vikings,” Vikings fan Tommy Mischke left very quietly.

But Micah and the LORD’s prophets could not leave. And this wasn’t just a football game. Micah said, ***“But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.”*** (Micah 3:8 NIV) You and I are like stubborn Israel. We don’t care about a cure for cancer until a loved one gets it, or something shows up on our test. Likewise, God’s people can never have **A memory of mercy** until they see the results of their tests with God. And without **A memory of mercy** you don’t have a clue to the question of the ages: **What Does God Want from Me?** God must first expose the cancer of our sin, then He can do His lifesaving surgery.

People did not want to hear it from Micah either. They all wanted to argue, oblivious to the fact that arguing with the LORD’s prophet is just like arguing with God Himself. Jesus said as much to His disciples: ***“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”*** (Luke 10:16 NIV) But since rejecting God comes so naturally for our sinful hearts, God calls us into His courtroom and basically says, “Shout to the hills. Go ahead, you contentious souls. You want to argue against my holy will for your life, but understand this: I have a case against my own people. You Gentiles can’t begin to imagine my case against you. But let me jog your memory.”

You’re like a slave released from an Iraqi prison who complains that no one picked him up in a limo. ***“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.”*** But you did not like the priests I provided, the kings I sent or any of the leaders I’ve used to save you from disaster again and again. King Balak wanted Balaam to curse you, but I rebuked Balaam

with his donkey. And even though that evil prophet got your men to sin with Moabite women at Shittim, I purged your sexual deviants by a plague, then led you across the flooded Jordan River on dry ground to Gilgal. Remember Gilgal where I brought the whole nation of Israelite men into my covenant with Abraham by circumcision? Remember how many times you earned my wrath and displeasure by complaining about your pastors, being harsh with your wives, disrespectful to your husbands, disobedient to your parents and totally ungrateful to me for all the blessings I've been pouring out on you since day one? Quit acting as if you all have spiritual Alzheimer's disease. If you want to know what I want from you, then you need **A memory of mercy**, my **mercy** that I've given you again and again instead of the death and destruction you deserve. I want this to click in your head and in your heart. I've taken you guilty sinners into my courtroom where I have you dead to rights. And here I have fully paid your penalty with my own holy life and innocent suffering and death in your place. Have **A memory of mercy** "*that you may know the righteous acquittal of the LORD*" your God – gracious and merciful.

☆ **A sacrifice of self** (vv.6-8)

So now at least you know. Now the lights are turning on. But Micah's coming questions remind me of someone who just came in out of a cold, dark night and is blinded by the light with his glasses all steamed up. God has to focus this for us. Our guilt just won't go away by itself. You may think you can hide it under a smile, a tan, or a warm relationship with a man or woman. You might try to drown out that accusing voice inside by pounding rhythms in your ears. Busy, busy lives might do it for a while. But the day always comes when you find yourself flat on your back, unable to get up, and way too much time to think. And you're one of the lucky ones – blessed we would say. God is giving you time to repent. He could just snuff out the lights with a heart attack or emphysema lungs starved for oxygen.

All the world is asking these same questions as Micah. And a world of religions keeps giving the wrong answers. "*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?*" You might not see a need for old Israelite *burnt offerings* or *calves a year old*. But if you have time to think about where you'll spend eternity, you may conclude you need the big bucks pictured in *thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil*. So many, many Americans don't even think about God because they have bought into the lie that people evolved from slime. So you try to live like the mighty Incas in the mountaintop castles of Peru, or the awesome Aztecs eating chocolate in Mexico, or the sophisticated Mayans steaming away in their jungle cities of Central America. But your power, position and great wealth can't stop the grim reaper from swinging his sickle on your loved ones and finally on you. So you try harder and harder to get rid of your guilt with God. But instead of evolving into something better, you devolve into human sacrifice. According to sinful human logic, nothing else is good enough. Guilt brought human sacrifice to major civilizations, the Israelites, even kings like Solomon. And that is why Micah asks the gut wrenching question: "*Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*" **What Does God Want from Me?** The sacrifice of my own children?

Americans have been saying, "Yes!" to human sacrifice, legally since 1973, in the abortion clinics. Change the names of the idols, and Americans sacrifice their offspring on the altar of convenience. In China it's the law for one child per couple. When I demand to enjoy life my way, it's just a more godless, a more selfish way of answering the question my way: **What Does God Want from Me?**

God's answer through Micah: "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly...*" literally, to *produce justice* especially for those who cannot speak for themselves. "*...to love mercy...*" that's unconditional appreciation for God's faithful love which gave us His Son to save our souls from destruction. Kneel at the foot of His cross and see how God's own Son hung there for your sins; then pour contempt on all your pride. "*Walk humbly with your God,*" and He will skillfully direct your life according to His good and gracious will. That's what God wants in the light of the cross. He wants to bless you with a true **memory of mercy**, and a sincere **sacrifice of self**. Amen.