Adult Prep Class  
For Sunday January 4, 2015

I. Brief Review Of Where We’ve Been In Micah  
A. The current state of affairs during the days of Micah is that corruption and injustice rule the day (Micah 2:1-5).  
B. The future vision is of a world where peace, justice, and a hunger for God’s word reigns (Micah 4:1-5).  
C. How do God’s people get from the current state of corruption to the future vision of peace? Micah reveals the answer in Micah 6:1-8.  

II. Structure of Micah 6:1-8  
A. This oracle is in the form of a covenant lawsuit (cf. Mic. 1:2-7; Isa. 1:2-20). That is, God is taking Israel to court (it is a courtroom scene). The legal term that reveals that this is a formal lawsuit in verse 2 is translated “accusation” in the NIV, “controversy” in the NRSV, and “indictment” in the ESV.  
B. The movement of the oracle:  
1. Summons to court (vv. 1-2)  
2. Statement of the plaintiff, i.e., God (vv. 3-5)  
   a. Israel has grown tired (“how have I wearied you,” v.3, NRSV, ESV). Being tired is a serious theological issue. You’re a different person when you’re tired.  
   b. God rehearses the mighty acts of God to remind Israel of how he has displayed steadfast love and faithfulness to them. Note the use of "righteous acts" in v. 5 to refer to this work of God.  
3. Statement of the defendant, i.e. the worshipper (vv. 6-7)  
4. The response of the court, i.e., possibly the prophet Micah (v. 8)

III. The Significance of Verse 8 in Scripture  
A. This is one of the most quotable quotes in the OT.  
B. Often regarded as the epitome of the message of the Eighth Century Prophets.  
C. Note the similarity of Micah 6:6-8 with Amos 5:21-24. In both the sacrificial system is rejected as a means of establishing relationship with God.  

IV. The Text  
A. It is important to emphasize that the text is addressing people who felt they were deeply religious.  
B. Note the progressive response to the question, "With what shall I come before the Lord?" (v. 6). Here’s a contemporary recreation of the scenario described in the text (vv. 6-7):  
The worshipper answers his/her own question in a way that he presumes is right. He begins with offering the most common sacrifice, “Lord, I am willing to offer you a burnt offering, a yearling calf. I know that this will be acceptable to you and I want to do what pleases you. But I want to do more than just the minimum. I really want to show you how devoted I am. I’ll offer you several thousand rams.” [So the worshiper offers to increase the sacrifices exponentially! Now offering thousands of rams was not at all a common offering. But 1 Chron. 29:21 records king David offering a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs. Solomon offered 22 thousand oxen and 120 thousand sheep; I Kings. 8:63]. But the
worshipper goes even further and begins to get ridiculous. What he's doing is showing the length to which he is willing to go to please the Lord. So the worshipper says, "To show you how lavish I can get, I will offer you ten thousands of rivers of oil." [Obviously this was impossible but it is a statement of dedication. Still the worshipper's not finished!!] "Lord, if that doesn't please you, then I shudder to think about this but I'll go to the ultimate extreme. In fact, it's against your law. But if it will make things right, I'll break the law and offer the dearest thing in the world to me – my own son." [Child sacrifice was strictly forbidden in Israelite law (Lev. 18:21)! The prophets spoke against it: Jer. 19:5; Ezek. 16:20; cf. Dt. 12:31; 18:10. But this worshipper is willing to consider it. The idea the worshipper raises (child sacrifice) would have been repugnant to the readers of this text but the worshipper raises the possibility in order to show just how far he's willing to go to please the Lord.]

C. The suggestions this worshipper offers move from the most common sacrifice (burnt offering) to the most uncommon (child sacrifice). The movement is also from quantitative to qualitative items, each item being more valuable than the previous: calves, rams, rivers of oil to a child sacrifice. Surely in all of this there is something that will please the Lord!

D. Ask class members to discuss what is wrong with the worshipper’s thinking and understanding of his relationship with God. Here’s some possibilities that identify the faulty perspective then and now:

1. The worshipper is offering God things instead of self.
2. He is substituting material goods for a relationship with God. This has always been the temptation of God’s people: things as a substitute for relationship. It's true of many of our relationships.
3. How do we fall into the same scenario today with our relationships? Here’s some possible scenarios:

   a. Parents consumed by their work because they are working hard to pay the bills. Their reasoning: It is for the sake of the children. We want our children to have the best: best education, best opportunities possible. We want them to have what we didn't have. So we spend long hours every day, sacrificing for the children. Very little time is actually spent with the children. But "look at the things we are giving to them. Look what we are doing for them!" Then when children express no gratitude: "Look at all that I have done for you. And this is the thanks I get!" It happens all the time.

   b. It happens in a husband/wife relationship. Here’s a story I heard about one couple: the husband traveled a lot. Wife ironed his shirts and packed his suitcase, washed his clothes when he returned. But the evidence accumulated that he was being unfaithful. Finally one day she faced him with it. He'd come home for lunch. When she confronted him with the evidence, he just stirred his food. He came home early later that day. He walked in, tossed some keys in her lap, and said, "Look out the window." There was a new car. The next day, she stopped by the minister's office at the church on the way to the lawyer. She said to the minister, "the infidelity I think I could forgive. But I could not forgive the gift. Who does he think I am?"

   c. What other ways do we substitute things for relationships?
4. Discuss how we often relate to God in the same way. Here’s some possible scenarios of how we might bargain with God:
   a. “Lord I know I haven’t been living right. I’m going to go to church more.”
   b. “I’m going to increase my contribution.”
   c. “I’m going to pray more.”
   d. “I’m going to read my Bible more.”
   e. “Lord, I take the L. S. every Sunday.”
   f. These are all good and important acts of worship, aren’t they?
   g. What are other ways we negotiate with God?

E. As you lead the discussion it would be good to remind members of the historical context and why the worshipper may be offering all these ways of trying to please the Lord: The 8th century was a time of crisis in Israel’s history. The Assyrians were about to destroy Jerusalem. What do worshippers do in time of crisis? They beef up their worship activity. More religious output. When the going gets tough, the tough go to church. Worship was an attempt to put God in a half-nelson and get him on their side during the crisis. It was a way to negotiate with God. You negotiate from a position of strength. That’s what this worshipper is doing. Actually we Americans can easily identify with that. That’s good American strategy. It’s the democratic way. God, however, wants a different and more humble response to him.

F. What does God want? The answer is given in verse 8.
   1. The answer is neither new nor unique: “he has already showed you O mortal what is good”
      a. The answer is as old as the Decalogue.
      b. God demonstrated the answer in vv. 3-5: the righteous acts of God toward Israel. God’s actions toward Israel set the standard for his expectations of her behavior toward others and toward God.
   2. What God really wants is for them to “Do justice, love steadfast love, walk humbly with you God.”

G. Consider unpacking each of those three terms:
   1. Justice:
      a. In America the image justice brings to mind is a woman blindfolded, holding a set of balances before her. It’s static. Concerned with making decisions that are fair, equal. It’s a detached impartial judgment.
      b. In the prophets, it’s different: justice is dynamic!!
         i. Recall Amos’ description: Justice is like a flowing stream (Amos 5:21). The image is more like a rushing river than a balanced scale.
         ii. Justice is something one does. It is responding to what God has done.
         iii. To do justice means to take the side of the powerless: poor, homeless, divorced, unborn child, outsider, refugee, handicapped, etc. How do we practice this justice at WS? How do we practice it in our Colonial Acres Neighborhood?
         iv. Isaiah 1:17—“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to
do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

2. Steadfast Love (chesed):
   a. This is a difficult word to translate. Different English versions use different words to translate it. These include the following: mercy, loyalty, loving kindness, steadfast love, commitment, etc.
   b. The word contains a strong element of loyalty: e.g. between husband/wife; covenant loyalty.
   c. The NT counterpart to chesed is agape. Read 1 Cor. 13:3-5.

3. Walk humbly with God:
   a. This phrase is often misunderstood. It is not a romantic notion that is sometimes envisioned in hymns (e.g. “I Come to the Garden Alone.”) The line about walking and talking with God in casual and comfortable conversation in a beautiful garden).
   b. Rather what Micah has in mind is different. To walk with God means to go where God has gone. Eg. Micah 6:3-5. God walks into some very rough neighborhoods and goes into very difficult places and environments, and takes on difficult tasks! It is a part of the cost of discipleship.
   c. Important: Walking with God is not the third in a checklist here in verse 8. But it is inclusive of the previous two. In other words, one who walks humbly with God is one who practices justice and exemplifies steadfast love.
   d. Israel has a concrete model of how these qualities, justice and steadfast love, look in life. Read verses 3-5: When Israel was the least desirable, an unwanted child, God took her in. God practiced justice. God cared for her and nurtured her and loved her. God was loyal and faithful. Now that is what God expects from Israel. To walk with God means first and foremost to recapture a vision of who God is.
   e. The best imagery is found in Psalm. 123:2: watchfully attend to the will of God. Walking humbly means not going one’s own way presumptuously, but carefully attending to the will and way of God. To walk humbly is to refuse to become arrogant and callous critics of other’s sins.
   f. The New Testament counterpart is Philippians 2:5-8; also John 7:53-8:11.

H. After all is said and done, in reality this passage is about sacrifice. However, God desires not a sacrifice of things (an easy out) but a sacrifice of the self!

I. God wants the whole self. Does that mean martyrdom? No, actually something more difficult: denying self and taking up cross daily. What God wants first is not what we have but who we are. It’s the sacrifice of time and energy and spiritual gifts for the sake of others. Paul sums up the message of Micah 6:8 succinctly: "I beseech you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1-2).