

6 Now listen to what the LORD is saying:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your complaint.^[a]

² Listen to the LORD's lawsuit,
you mountains and enduring foundations of the earth,
because the LORD has a case against his people,
and he will argue it against Israel.

³ My people, what have I done to you,
or how have I wearied you?

Testify against me!

⁴ Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from that place of slavery.
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ahead of you.

⁵ My people,
remember what King Balak of Moab proposed,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from the Acacia Grove^[b] to Gilgal
so that you may acknowledge
the LORD's righteous acts.

⁶ What should I bring before the LORD
when I come to bow before God on high?
Should I come before him with burnt offerings,
with year-old calves?

⁷ Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams
or with ten thousand streams of oil?
Should I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the offspring of my body for my own sin?

⁸ Mankind, he has told each of you what is good
and what it is the LORD requires of you:
to act justly,
to love faithfulness,
and to walk humbly with your God.

Where to Stand

As children progress from roly polly to mobile they learn to stand. And it's something to be celebrated. Standing is the first step towards mobility. It's important but knowing where to stand is more important.

There is the old silly song sung to the tune of auld lang syne. *"Don't stand behind the two behind the two behind the four, for if you stand behind the two behind you'll find what they be for."* In other words don't stand behind a four legged creature like a mule. It's not a good idea. They tend to kick. It's also important to know where to stand in the workshop. I'm constantly telling the kids "Don't stand directly behind the table saw." I know they want to watch the wood be cut but dust and sometimes large chunks of wood can kick back. It's not safe. It's great knowing how to stand but it's even more important knowing where to stand.

Micah enters the picture and he's talking about where we stand with God? After all, God has called us to stand trial for our actions, given an account. Will we be able to stand on our own justified, having loved mercy, and walked

humbly with our God? Do we stand on our own efforts or do we stand in Christ? Where to stand that's the question and I hope that you'll see there is no safer place than standing on the words and work of Jesus.

Micah is a minor prophet. That doesn't mean he isn't important. It simply means his book isn't as big as Isaiah or Jeremiah, Major Prophets. Micah's name means, "Who is like the Lord." He's from the countryside. He doesn't seem to have the same access to the kings of Israel as Isaiah. In chapter 1 he condemns the Northern Kingdom and Jerusalem for going along with them. He singles out the false prophets, the leaders, the rich. In chapter 4 and 5 there is a lot of comfort, speaking about a child, the Christ born in Bethlehem Ephratha. His prophecy is about the Messiah, the New Testament Church, and heaven.

But then in chapter 6 God calls the mountains and the hills as his witnesses. Micah builds suspense, those with whom God has a dispute aren't yet made known. God calls on the mountains to take their stand. The mountains are those silent observers who have long looked over mankind. They have seen the misdeeds of men and God calls them to account for all that's been done. Then the shocking news comes. The accused are God's people, his chosen, his treasured, his kingdom of priests, and a light to the nations. They are called to stand before God and give an answer. But before the trial begins God seems to search his own heart, maybe there was something he has done to lead them away from him into rebellion and the worship of other gods. He questions and cries out, "*My people what have I done to you? How have I wearied you?*"

As he ponders, he pours out evidence of his unwavering love. Instead of letting them down, he's raised them up. He's set them on their own two feet. He's given them a place to stand. He delivered them from Egypt, guided them along the way, and carefully set them in the Promised Land. He guided them through leaders like Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. He protected them on their journey even when Balak tried to curse his people, when they enlisted the help of Balaam to curse Israel but instead of curses, Israel is blessed again and again. God was with them from the Acacia Grove to Gilgal (the last stopping point and the first camp) and beyond. These three broad segments from the exodus history are *the righteousness, the righteous acts of the Lord*.

History is a record of his willingness to give us all that we need. It proves his point. He delivered his people. He was alike a father to them showing them how to stand, where to stand, while holding their hands as they walked with him. In spite of his love and faithfulness they have not reciprocated. They are unwilling to stand with God and give God his due. The disappointment is God's and his alone.

It's easy for us to throw stones at those in the past, after all, how could they? We're so much better than Israel. We're not even close to contemplating child sacrifice. (but then there is abortion – the sacrament that is supposed to save single mothers and allow men off from the consequences of sex). But the problem with throwing stones is that there is always a person in the past lobbing them back at us, "You do the same things!" And we could say of them, they didn't know much about the Christ, the one who would come from Bethlehem, whose origins are of old. Their knowledge was limited, so what's our excuse?

We know who Jesus is. We know what he has done. We have his Word given to us in the NT – 13 books of Paul, 4 Gospels, Pastors and teachers (peacemakers) who guide us in his Word. We know who Jesus is, his person and work. We've received the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us generously through baptism. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Our history is full of the righteous acts of God. So what's our excuse for taking a stand against God and his Word? What excuse can we offer?

God has called us to account for our actions, where will we stand. We'll make excuses, "I know better, but I don't care. I'm going to continue to stand on my own outside of grace, God will understand." or "I know and I can discern the errors of this or that church," but you know others can't and if you don't support the truth it won't be with you much longer either. There are other excuses but maybe we'd better call them accusations, "God isn't good. God is restrictive. He doesn't care for us." That's not the truth, the truth is God is faithful to us. He has been there

for us. The truth is that our heart isn't always in it. We don't act justly, love faithfulness, or walk humbly with our God and that is the one thing he requires. What God requires is what we haven't done.

There isn't any way we can stand on our own. So don't think for a second that if I suddenly start doing these things, I'll be safe. It's dangerous. It's not safe. Micah tells us. Stand with the Lord, look at the lengths he has gone for his people, look where he has taken his stand.

God knew the outcome of the case long before Israel to their stand. He knew that they were more than ready to throw money at problems and pretend they would go away. But there was one thing they were unwilling to do and that is what Micah called for you. Repent and believe the promises. They could offer anything and everything but God didn't want their money, their sacrifices, he only wanted their heart, their loyalty, and love: demonstrated through obedience.

Micah isn't replacing religion with social justice. He isn't saying, "This is an either or." This isn't a foolish argument of, "It's not a religion, it's a relationship." It's a both and statement. God required the Israelites to sacrifice but even that was an act of mercy. God held them responsible for their failure to offer sacrifice or circumcise their sons. It wasn't burdensome. It wasn't about quality of sacrifices either. The prophet Micah contemplates, "*What shall I bring the Lord?*" Where should I stand? How should I stand before God? *Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves?* That is a quality offering but calves were acceptable sacrifices at seven days. Why feed them for a full year before offering them? Quality and costly sacrifices. But then that won't work. What about quality and quantity? 1,000's of gallons of oil, would that make God happy? Then Micah rises to a crescendo with the ultimate sacrifice, "*Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring of my body for my own sin?*" That's what the gods of Ahaz and Manasseh demanded. But God has forbidden such a practice.

Instead he wants their loyalty, their hearts. Sacrifices were intended to be a concession – not a consequence to sin. The sacrifices serve as a way to bring peace with God, not because you planned to commit a sin. It was God's way of bringing forgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, "*The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin*" (Hebrews 10:4). They only pushed the debt down the road to the cross where God gave his one and only son to stand in your place, to take your sin. It was quality for the quantity of sin.

This Jesus took his stand on the mountains of Galilee, (still stand as silent witnesses) and he began to teach, "*Blessed...poor in spirit, the meek, the humble.*" He announces his blessing on you. These are not physical descriptions these are spiritual realities. That means you may be rich and yet poor in spirit. You may be a peacemaker without carrying a peacemaker. Because the peace that is being made is not between people but between God and man. The poor in spirit can also be the rich who realize that they have nothing to offer God. They stand in humility before God, pleading, "*Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.*" They cry out with David, "*Create in me a pure heart. Don't cast me away from your presence.*" These are the ones who without even being told, "Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly," already carry them out or strive to.

It's not as if God is calling us to build bigger churches, strive and struggle with all our might for gilded crosses, and serious sacrifice, "Give till it hurts... I'm asking you to give sacrificially...because we can't budget or plan ahead." These words "*act justly, love mercy, walk humbly,*" bring to mind the familiar, the ordinary work as parents and children, workers and managers, citizens and leaders. This is what you do using your time and gifts for your good and God's glory. You serve doing what is right, in mercy and love. You don't need a law telling you to do these things. You already know them by the example of your Father in heaven. He has acted justly – sin is met with consequences and Jesus took them up. He has loved mercy – faithful love. He has shown us what it looks like to walk humbly as he took up a cross he didn't deserve. He suffered, died, and rose from the dead for you. God has given you his Spirit in

Micah 6:1-8

4th Sunday after the Epiphany

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baptism. He has made you a child and an heir of eternal life. He has created in you the desire to do good and to serve him.

Not because you have too, but because that is where your treasure is. That is where God is and that is where we want to be. That's why we come to worship our God and our King. That's why we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Don't feel guilty at this part in the sermon. Now is not the time to feel bad for failing but now is the time for you to realize, God still loves and forgives as he always has. Having seen the evidence of his love and knowing you stand at peace with God how will you live your life of faith?

Where will you stand? Behind a mule? I hope not, they can kick. Behind the table saw? That too can kick. In God's grace and forgiveness? That is where you'll want to stand. In Christ and the forgiveness he has freely given, on the God of grace and mercy whose history is fully of his righteous acts. That is the only safe place Amen.