

The Micah 6:8 resolution \* Micah 6:8

December 29, 2019 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

With New Year's Eve right around the corner, I know that there are probably a lot of people thinking about 'New Year's resolutions.' So I thought I'd start off with a little game here this morning to see how much you know about New Year's resolutions generally. I looked around online to find the most common resolutions that people make and I want to see if you can guess what they are.

(<https://discover.rbcroyalbank.com/the-science-of-succeeding-at-your-new-years-resolutions-infographic/>).

1. Getting fit/losing weight
2. Focus on financial goals
3. Travel more
4. Give up bad habits like drinking/smoking
5. Spend more time with family and friends

Those are all good things to do, and if you're going to take one on this year, good for you! Taking care of your health, your finances, your family; those are all great things to do.

Now whether or not you're going to make one of *those* resolutions, I do want to give you a resolution this morning that all of us as followers of Jesus should try to make this year. And this resolution comes straight from the Bible. The Old Testament specifically. So if you join me in Micah, Micah 6 specifically, I'll give you a new year's resolution that all of us should try to keep.

Since we're in Micah that means that we're in the time of the kings. The Golden Age of life under David and Solomon was long gone, the nation had split in two, and the kings that ruled those parts weren't always great at helping their people stay true to God. In fact, some of them were downright idolatrous. And so God sent prophets like Micah to call them to turn from sin and to come back to the Lord who loved them.

The book of Micah gives us a sense of what life was like in those days – the people worshiped other gods, they stole each other's property and had a quid pro quo kind of society. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. And if you couldn't afford to scratch anybody's back, well, then you weren't worth much. Micah 3:11 describes the situation like this - "Her (Jerusalem's) leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money (Mic 3:11 NIV)."

There's a particularly colourful anecdote at Micah 2:11 where he says - If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be [just] the preacher for this people! (Mic 2:11 ESV).

You get the sense that this is a society of people looking out for their own benefit: Profit is more important than justice, pleasure is more important than truth and their own purposes are more important than God's.

This is a society that is very much off the rails.

But it can't stay that way. And when you read the whole of Micah, you hear God pleading with His people – 'turn from your wicked ways and come back to Me, or you will reap the disaster that you have sown.'

And nobody wants that and so Micah starts to think about what it will take to come back to God. How do you make things right with God and get back to living the good, righteous life that He intended for His people, when they've gone so far away from Him?

Well, Micah 6, verse 6 Micah offers one suggestion:

6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? (Mic 6:6 NIV).

Will God be pleased to receive us if we make costly sacrifices? Burnt offerings are meant to express total devotion and they're not cheap – is that enough? Are burnt offerings sufficient? If not, how about more offerings? Verse 7 –

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Micah's upped the ante, hasn't he? Not just a burnt offering, but thousands of offerings. Not just year old calves but rivers of oil? And if God's not pleased with that, how about this?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Mic 6:6-7 NIV).

Now that should strike us as utterly abhorrent and wrong - and it is - but sadly, in Micah's time, it was not unusual. Many in Israel had turned to worship a god called 'Molech' and they worshiped him by sacrificing their children. Even some of Israel's kings got in on the action and one of them is in Jesus' family tree! *6 He [Manasseh] sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. (2Ch 33:6 NIV).*<sup>i</sup> Some people in Israel started to think that maybe YHWH would be pleased with that too.

Now that's just entirely wrong, and we can leave it to the side, but you see what Micah is doing, right? Rhetorically speaking, he is little by little increasing the value of the gift and saying 'will God be pleased with us if we offer these ever more costly sacrifices? If we give these exorbitant gifts, will God receive us and get us back on track?

Well, what do you think? Does our relationship with God and our culture's well-being depend on increasingly valuable offerings? Does God desire extravagant sacrifices?

Verse 8 - 8 He has showed you, O man, 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 (Mic 6:8 NIV).

That's it. That's what's good. That's what the LORD requires. To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him.

They already knew that! Micah says ‘He has showed you o man what is good’ – he’s probably thinking back to Deuteronomy 10:12 which says - 12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

Micah takes all of that and boils it down to its purest essence and says look – what is it that God desires? – that we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

Jewish rabbis in the first century AD called that a one line summary of the whole of the Law (Kenneth Barker, NAC, 6:8) – It’s carved into the ceiling in the Congressional Library in Washington (<https://www.loc.gov/visit/online-tours/thomas-jefferson-building/main-reading-room/>) and that’s the resolution that I want us all to make this year.

To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Because admittedly, our culture is not all that different from Micah’s.

Let’s unpack that just a little bit, starting with the first one – Act justly.

The culture that Micah lived in was rife with corruption. Rulers and judges took bribes (3:11, 7:3), merchants defrauded their customers (6:11) and the religious leaders of the day simply told people what they wanted to hear. Micah 6:12 says “Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully” (6:11-12). You get the sense that personal gain was more important than justice to these people , just so long as THEY themselves were treated justly.

*(The ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire-- they all conspire together. (Mic 7:3 NIV).*

*11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."*

*11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?*

*12 Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully (6:11-12)).*

And while we are hardly a society that runs on bribes (thankfully), it’s all too easy for us to put ‘getting what we want’ ahead of ‘doing what’s right.’

Let me tell you a story to give you an example. When we were down in Florida, we decided to catch a Lyft from our hotel over to the airport. (That’s like an Uber – they come and pick you up and take you where you want to go). The price is already worked out in advance and you know who’s picking you up, where you’re going and it’s all handled within the app.

Well, when we got into our Lyft and starting driving, I thought, ‘this is taking a little longer than I expected.’ But, we had lots of time to get to the airport so it wasn’t a big deal. And of course we didn’t know how you get there so it was all just scenery out the window.

When we arrived at the airport, I looked at the app to confirm payment and it told me that I was to pay \$30 more than I had originally been promised. \$30 more! I couldn't believe it. But we had to get into the airport, so I paid the fee and off we went.

When I looked into it, here's what I discovered. The fee that I had been promised was for a straight line over – from the hotel to the airport. That makes sense right? And to be clear, there are roads there. So that IS the road he should have taken. Here's where our driver took us. Instead of going straight across, he went up one side of an A shape and down the other. That's why it cost more – he drove us further so that he would get more money.

The company ultimately gave us a refund, admitting that yes, this was an inefficient route, and so it was all good.

But it proved to me that the spirit of Micah's age is alive and well in ours. And if we as Christians are going to make an impact in this world, we need to stand against it. WE need to act justly in all that we do.

And actually, that Lyft drive is a pretty good picture of justice. The word for justice and righteousness in Hebrew comes from the word that means 'straight' as opposed to 'crooked.' When we do 'the right thing' we truly are on the straight and narrow, the honest path that God would have us go. When we deviate from that though and go our own way for our own benefit, we are straying from the good way that God has set before us and we hurt other people by treating them unjustly.

So I want to encourage you this year. Make acting justly a priority in your life. Now I think that nine times out of ten, all of us here WOULD instinctively do the right thing; but for that one occasion, stop and remind yourself that this is what God asks of us. To act with justice. Just because our political leaders stretch the truth and justify themselves after the fact, doesn't make it right. We answer to a higher power and because He Himself is just, then we too should act justly.

Second, love mercy. In a way, this is related to the last one. When you put your own interests before the interests of others and the interest of what is fair, then you're never going to be merciful, will you? You're treating justice AND the other person with contempt, rather than with love. Right? The Lyft driver didn't care about us; he just wanted our money, and more of it.

Micah 6:8 calls us to reverse that and to love people, not for what we can get from them, but because they are inherently valuable. Micah calls us to default to mercy, rather than to judgment or indifference.

It's all too easy for us to jump to conclusions and decide – 'this person is being a jerk' or 'this person just needs to get their act together' or 'this person isn't worth my time' – but God calls us to extend mercy to every one of those people. Why? Because He extended that mercy to every one of us.

We were separated from God – enemies of God – dead in sin with no interest in Him (in biblical terms) – and yet, Ephesians 2 says "God – who is rich in mercy – because of His great love for us – made us alive with Christ so that we are saved by grace" (4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.) (Ephesians 2:4-5). He had every reason to just write us off, but instead of doing that, He took a risk on us and showed us mercy. He asks us to do the same for other people.

So when somebody does something questionable, give them the benefit of the doubt before you jump to conclusions. Be slow to anger and quick to forgive. Give people a chance before you get on their back. And when you see a need, don't ask 'what bad decisions led this need?' Instead, act with mercy and meet that need. Extend mercy to others – near and far.

So act justly, love mercy and finally, walk humbly with your God.

And like the other two, this is pretty straightforward. Walk – humbly - with your God. Sometimes, we act as though we know better than God and that our ways will lead to better outcomes than His. When we do that, I can picture Him just sitting back and saying 'ok, let's see how that turns out.' And then of course we need His help to get out of the pickle we've caused.

Instead of doing that, Micah says 'look, just rely on God in the first place, admitting HIS sovereignty and humbly following His good and life-giving ways.'

Leslie Allen puts it like this – “Over against a natural tendency to self-centredness and turning every one to his own way, Micah counsels a life of fellowship with God” (NICOT, 374) and T. D. Alexander sums it up like this - 'this means simply bringing one's life into conformity with God's will" (TOTC, 6:8). Walking humbly with God means letting Him take the lead, following in His footsteps, prioritizing His will, knowing that His way leads to life.

And of course, since He IS in His very essence, justice and mercy, walking in His way will lead us to indeed act justly and love mercy.

So there's your resolution for the year – act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. That's just as relevant to us as it was to Micah and I really want to encourage you to memorize that and think about it and live it out all through the year. Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

To close, I want to give the final word to James Mays. I've always appreciated his work in the psalms and I discovered this week that he brought the same great insight to Micah. He fixes his attention here on the question at the heart of Micah 6:8 – what does God require of us? – and he writes -

At a profound level, the answer *does* call for sacrifice but a kind quite different from that proposed by the question. It is not sacrifice of something outside a person which can be objectified as a means to deal with God. It is rather the radical yielding of life itself to God and His way (142).

We become living sacrifices, offered with gratitude for what God has already done, and live sacrificially by acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God.

2 Cor. 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

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<sup>i</sup> 30 " The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it.

31 They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire--something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.

(Jer 7:30-31 NIV).

32 The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done--they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem.

33 They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.

34 They set up their abominable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it.

35 They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.

(Jer 32:32-35 NIV).

6 He [Manasseh] sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. (2Ch 33:6 NIV).