

Micah 6:1-8 Hear now what the LORD says: "Arise, plead your case before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice. ² Hear, O you mountains, the LORD's complaint, And you strong foundations of the earth; For the LORD has a complaint against His people, And He will contend with Israel. ³ "O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. ⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵ O My people, remember now What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the LORD." ⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"

In our text, a courtroom scene is placed before our eyes. God's children take their place in the defendant's chair awaiting the case that is to be brought against them. The ancient mountains which have witnessed all of the interaction between God and His children Israel sit on the judge's bench ready to hear the case. And finally, God himself enters the room, and take his seat as the wronged party in the lawsuit. He informs the judge that He will not use any legal counsel, but will make His case personally before the judge in the presence of His children.

The case begins as the judge calls upon God and He begins to make his case saying, "I have done everything possible for my children. What have I done to deserve the way in which they disregard to my commands? I brought them up out of the land of Egypt where they were enslaved for many years. I gave to them great leaders like Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. I led them into the Promised Land just as I had said. When other kings tried to bring curses upon them as they prepared to enter this land, I made sure that instead blessings were brought upon them. Every time they have gotten themselves in trouble, I have saved them. They have seen my salvation with their own eyes. And yet, they continue to walk before me in disobedience."

The children of God are reddened with embarrassment. Everything God has said is true. There is no way to argue against the case He has made before the judge. And so instead, they offer a plea agreement. They will admit their guilt and appease God by a ritualistic offering of rams, oil, or even humans if God so desires. After all, they knew this was how other nations around them appeased their gods and they are willing to make whatever sacrifices would gladden their God.

But God rejects the plea offer outright. He proclaims that His people should know better. He reminds them that he has never been pleased with ritualistic sacrifice done for sacrifice's sake. The sacrifices He required were a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Even the sacrifices He prescribed to be offered in the temple were only pleasing to Him if accompanied by repentance, faith, and obedience. A ritualistic sacrifice of rams, oil, or humans with no real repentance, faith, or obedience was useless to him. God solidifies this point in his closing argument against his children, turning to them and saying, "You know what I desire: for you to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with me, your God."

What if this same courtroom scene was set in our day? Could we not also find ourselves very easily in the defendant's chair? In fact, God's case against us might even be stronger than His case against Israel. Perhaps He would state His case this way, "I have done everything possible for my children. What have I done to deserve the way in which they disregard my commands? Not only did I bring their fathers up out of the land of Egypt where they were enslaved for many years. Not only did I give to them great leaders, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Not only did I lead their fathers into the Promised Land. But now I have manifested my saving work fully by sending to them my only Son to live for them, die for them, and rise for them. I have done everything possible for them. They have seen my salvation with their own eyes. And yet, they respond to my grace by continuing to walk in sin and approaching me without true repentance in their hearts."

Yes, our faces ought also to be reddened with embarrassment. For when we truly consider all that God has done for us, and truly ponder our own disobedience towards and arrogance before God, we too should be moved to repentance. But all too often, true repentance is not our first response to God's accusations. We often respond much like those first Israelites. We decide that we will try to appease our God by ritualistic means, by doing something to make Him happy with us. We decide that our church attendance will be regular, and that we will not miss even one communion Sunday. We raise our offerings a little, and hope that God will be pleased with us. But if we do these things without truly repenting and striving to walk in holiness, God wants none of them. He is not pleased with church attendance or increased offering for their sake alone. Yes, even these things must be accompanied with the proper attitudes that faith works in us. God closes His case against

us today by reminding us also, “You know what I desire, for you to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with me, your God.”

God case against us is strong. The verdict is certain. No great deliberations will be necessary. The ancient mountains will indeed find us guilty of living in disobedience before God in spite of all of His saving goodness towards us. And there is no plea agreement that will be acceptable to our God.

So what are we to do? Well, put simply we are to listen closely to God’s closing argument and walk humbly with our God. We are to humbly walk with God admitting our sins of disobedience and our lack of true repentance. We are not called to make up for these things by trying to please God through ritualistic works. Rather, we must simply fall at his feet and beg for His mercy.

But God has promised that if we do this, the courtroom scene will change dramatically. Just as the mountains prepare to issue the sentence against us, God will order that the sentence be suspended. He will remind the mountains that instead of us receiving what we have coming to us that this sentence has already been served by His sinless Son. He reminds them that these sins were added to the weight of sin Jesus suffered in our place on the cross. And so, we are set free by the judge on account of God’s Son. Instead of being sentenced to death or being locked up in a cell where only bread and water are allowed, we are welcomed again at God’s table to feast on His word, His forgiveness, and His body and blood.

Yes, we are blessed this day to know that while the case of God versus his children, us, was very solid and should have resulted in our temporal and eternal punishment, we walk out of the courtroom as free men and women feasting with our God. Freed from sin. Freed to act justly according to God commands, free to love mercy and be merciful to others whenever they are in need. Free to walk humbly with our God, recognizing that everything we have depends on Him and His forgiveness and grace. For this is what our God truly desires. Our humble faith in Him and our obedience to His commands are much more valuable to Him than any ritualistic deed we could offer.

Rarely do the wronged party and the defendant leave a courtroom with a perfect relationship. But because of Jesus, we do walk out of the courtroom today having our relationship with the Father completely restored. We walk out not as opposing litigants but reconciled family members. We walk out hand in hand.

We leave with His Holy Spirit guiding us in his ways. We leave acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. Amen.