

## Micah 6:6-8 - 23<sup>rd</sup> after Pentecost [4.11.2007]

... that's just too much, God!

**<sup>6</sup> What can we bring to the LORD to make up for what we've done? Should we bow before God with offerings of yearling calves? <sup>7</sup> Should we offer him thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of olive oil? Would that please the LORD? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for the sins of our souls? Would that make him glad?**

**<sup>8</sup> No, O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. [NLT]**

Do you know the feeling: Somebody did not really understand what you were trying to tell them. They only seem to have heard one part of what you were saying - and so they got it quite wrong. Now you end up looking like the one in the wrong.

When we read the verses preceding this passage, it seems that Israel were dissatisfied with God. We don't get to know quite what the reason for their unhappiness was, but it seems that they felt that God was expecting too much from them, that they had grown tired of his expectations and had turned away from him. God had become the one in the wrong - so it seemed!

The amazing thing is that God does not simply do away with their complaint - that he does not simply put them in their place. Instead he invites them to tell him what it is that has so exhausted them.

Have you ever felt like that:

... that's just too much, God!

For some it is a big sacrifice that they attend worship services every Sunday, while for others its too much already to do so. There seems to be a general feeling that the Sunday morning is a time where people can decide how they want to spend it. After all the rest of the week they have to fall in with the expectations of work and other obligations. ... that's just too much, God! - if you expect us to give up this time every Sunday.

Wherever you fit into this picture, the question is: What is it that you expect of God? Do you expect him to be on call when you need him, but that you can apportion time to him as you choose - or not to give him time at all, as long as things go well?

Could it be that you did not hear correctly what God expects of you - or possibly

what it is that he has given you. In Israel it seems they had forgotten that who they were, what they had - all this came from God. He had chosen them to be his very own.

A novelist, Frederick Buechner, writes: "And of course, there is the comedy, the unforeseeableness, of the election itself. Of all the peoples he could have chosen to be his holy people, he chose the Jews, who as somebody has said are just like everybody else only more so - more religious than anybody when they were religious and when they were secular, being secular as if they'd invented it. And the comedy of the covenant - God saying 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Exodus 6:7) to a people who before the words had stopped ringing in their ears were dancing around the golden calf like aborigines and carrying on with every agricultural deity and fertility god that came down the pike." [Quoted in 'Fearfully and wonderfully made' by P. Yancey and Dr. P. Brand]

Have we forgotten what God has done for us? Or is it that we just hear what we thought he said - that we are so busy with what we are doing, that we just don't really listen, and so don't really hear what he says?

We confess the Creed every Sunday - but do we also hear what we say: I believe in God, who created not only the entire universe, but who also made me and provides me with all I need from day to day.

I believe in Jesus Christ, who became human - not because he was bored in heaven, but because he could not bear to see me enslaved to all kinds of things, because he could not bear to see God's anger over me, and so he came into this world to give me new life.

I believe in the Holy Spirit - in him who has called me to faith in this God, who has helped me understand that I can only be saved from myself and eternal death by accepting that Jesus Christ died in my place.

Confessing faith in God - and realising: it was not all about the sacrifices, it is not all about what we do to get to church. It is not about the time we give for God or the money we give to the church. Of course, those things are important as well. But God wants us to have a time of worship - he wants us to spend time reading his Word throughout the week also, so that we will get to hear all the wonderful things he has done for us; so that we will get to be near him - turn to him.

God is not interested in all the things we do for him - his interest is in us. After all he chose us - not our money, nor anything else. He chose us, because he wants us to

really have life. A life free from the false belief that time spent for ourselves will make us happy.

Together with everything God has done for us, is the important realisation that he designed us to live in close fellowship with him. Where this is not part of our lives, we miss out on that which sets apart from the animals. Where we only live to satisfy our desires - and wanting to spend Sundays as we choose fits in there - we have degenerated to the level of animals.

What those who speak of evolution don't realise is that they have not stepped up from the animal kingdom, but that wherever we move away from God, we step down from the wonderful gift he gave us - and really become little more than animals. Then there is no hope of any future - everything must be enjoyed now.

God's expectation of those who are his people is quite different. Instead of living just for themselves, he has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

To do what is right - not simply what you feel like doing at this moment. That applies as much to how you drive, as to how you live together with your family, and how you treat people around you. The original temptation was that we could choose for ourselves what is right - but who knows what is right? Is it right to do what I feel may benefit me the most - possibly because I believe that nobody will find out if I did something wrong?

To love mercy - to act compassionately. That means that you have to consider more than what is good for you - you have to see the other person. You have to consider what impact your actions will have on them.

And then 'to walk humbly with your God'. So often people believe humility means that we don't have any real sense of self-worth. Nothing could be further from the truth. Walking with God means that we realise who we are - and who he made us to be. We are not just anybody - not because of what we have done, but because God chose us to be his.

As you look at what it is you ought to do, it becomes clear that 'doing what is right' and acting with compassion go together with 'walking humbly with God.' As you live your life in his presence, as you look to him to give your life meaning and direction, as you receive from him the gift of personhood, you will change from being somebody who thinks only of themselves, and instead become people who 'do what is right' - no matter the cost to yourself. As you live in God's presence the way

you deal with those around you will be tempered by mercy - because you yourself have received God's mercy into your life.

Being God's people - that is why it is so important to really hear what he says. To listen for him with all we are, because God does not expect too much from us. Rather he gives us so much more than we could ever dream or hope for.