

Little Isaiah (Week 4) - Six Eight (Micah 5-6)
Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. One of the trickier parts of reading and applying the Old Testament for Christians is answering the question, "To whom is this text speaking?" It goes without saying that the Old Testament was in its time for Israel. But we're not "Israel" per se, so who is the text speaking to now? First, just as Israel was full of men and women trying to obey and trust God, O.T. texts speak to us because as individuals we're trying to do the same thing. Israel was also the community of God's people, so in another sense, O.T. passages are speaking to the church today (who are also the community of those trying to live God's way together). Last, Israel was meant to be an example of a nation trying to live according to God's wisdom and commands, so what we read in the Old Testament can also be speaking to any nation anywhere, a kind of measuring stick for the choices they're making, their priorities, etc.

2. Yesterday we talked at length about what is easily the most famous verse in Micah - Micah 6.8. One biblical scholar describes it as the bumper sticker summary of Judeo-Christian morality. Micah 6.8 reads, "He (God) has told you, O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you: do justice, love kind faithfulness, and walk humbly with your God."

3. Micah 6.8 describes what's best, delightful, and right ("good," or in Hebrew, "tov") for every single human being (note the use of "mortal," a word that casts far wider a net than just those within Israel).

4. In 2024, Relevant Magazine asked several biblical scholars to explain biblical justice to its 20 and 30-something readership. The result featured three key facets. First, "biblical justice is **EQUITABLE**: it believes and practices that everyone should be treated without bias, favoritism, or prejudice, regardless of social status. Second, "biblical justice **RECTIFIES**: it sets right that which is wrong; it makes whole; it makes amends. This can be as specific as mending a relationship broken by personal wrongdoing, it can also be as wide as challenging and working to change social biases and injustice. Third, "biblical justice pays special attention to what's been called the 'quartet of the vulnerable' in scripture - widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. That is, biblical justice prioritizes those with little to no social, economic, and legal standing who are most commonly exploited or taken advantage of."

5. "Justice" and "kindness/mercy" (which is really a Hebrew word, "hesed," that ties together loyalty and compassion) often appear together in the Old Testament. They are said to be part of God's own character that then should shape our own. The ancient church father Tertullian (North Africa; 160-240 CE) put it this way, "God expects people to act with the same divine justice and mercy that has been bestowed upon them."

November 9,
2025

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Six Eight
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6. So how can you and I "do justice" in our own lives? Here are a set of seven questions drawn from several sources that are a good place to begin answering that:

- Am I living so fast, consumed by my own day-to-day agenda, that I don't notice the people and situations God puts in my path? Am I unwilling or unable to take the first step toward a life of justice – which is paying attention and really looking?
- Am I so rushed, tired, and stretched thin that I have no time, space, or energy to give to justice, even if given the chance? Do I arrange my priorities, hours, and days in such a way that there is room for justice work and relationships?
- Am I willing to move beyond mere feelings of compassion, sympathy, and kindness toward practical action, however small it may be?
- Am I willing to face and move through the inevitable anxiety, disruption, and disorientation I will feel if I try to live, practice, and defend justice? Do I have the courage to speak up for justice when others are silent?
- As one who may not have much personal experience of injustice, am I willing to become a student and not be the expert, taking the time to learn about inequality and indifference from those who are most directly affected by both? Will I ask what it might look like for them to receive love on their terms, not on mine?
- What one or two justice issues in our culture is God prompting me to understand deeply enough that I can become an advocate for it and invest my time and passion into it, rather than spreading myself thin across many issues and having a diminished effect?
- What privilege do I possess that I can give to or leverage on behalf of those who don't have it?

7. But we can also wonder what it looks like for a nation - any nation, our nation - to grow in justice. In that same Relevant article mentioned above, the scholars suggested at least one specific criteria for national justice: "The justice of any society according to scripture is evaluated by how it treats 'the quartet of the vulnerable' – widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor, as well as any other similarly disadvantaged or marginalized group. Any neglect shown to the needs of these groups is not called merely a lack of mercy or charity but a violation of justice itself. God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power, and so should we. That's what it means to 'do justice.'"

8. Martin Luther King Jr. would offer several more litmus tests for the presence or absence of biblical justice in any country. First, King would say we need to ask for whom and/or for what cause do the powerful use their influence authority: in King's words, "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." Second, we need to realize that we are all negatively affected by injustice, even if we don't experience it directly: again in his words from 1963, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

9. Do justice, love faithful, long-term compassion, and walk humbly with God - this is what matters to God. Micah [6.6-7](#) which immediately precedes 6.8 tells you what God doesn't care about, especially when justice isn't being done or "hesed" isn't being loved: sacrifices, religious festivals, or in our lingo, worship, prayer, or other outward expressions of religious devotion. (There are many passages in the O.T. that contain a similar, stark message: [Hosea 6.6](#), [Amos 5.21-24](#), [Isaiah 1.10-17](#), [Psalm 40.6-8](#), [Psalm 51.15-17](#), to name a few.)

10. James Nogalski, who teaches the Old Testament at Truett Seminary in Texas, summarizes Micah 6.6-8 as follows: "God has told us what is good and what is required: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. It is not enough to long for justice. We must practice it and we must demand it from those we put in office. It is not enough to feel bad for those in need. We need to give to those in need economically, emotionally, and spiritually because God has done the same for us...Our actual lives and the choices we make, not our mere worship or words, become our testimony of God to others....We cannot save the world alone, but justice, kindness, and humility before God are the cornerstones of a life well-lived."