

PARK ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH, PETERBOROUGH

Sunday 26th July 2020

Theme: LOVE MERCY (Micah 6 v 8)

Bible Readings: Micah 6 v 1-8 and Luke 6 v 27-36

Background

Today we are continuing our series of three studies based on Micah chapter 6 verse 8 which reads “He has shown you O mortal 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”

Last week, in the first of the series, we thought about what it means to act justly and today we are thinking about what it means to love mercy. We will conclude next week by thinking about what it means to walk humbly with our God.

Before we begin to think about what it means to love mercy, let's first of all look at some of the background to the book of Micah.

The prophecy of Micah was written in about 700 BC – a similar time to that of the prophets Isaiah and Hosea.

Unlike Isaiah who prophesied to kings and rulers, Micah spoke to the ordinary people of his day.

Micah originated from Moresheth – a country town in Judah (the southern kingdom) and about 20 miles south west of Jerusalem.

Micah had seen the northern kingdom (and its capital Samaria) completely destroyed by the invading Assyrian armies and he was convinced that the same thing was about to happen to Jerusalem and the southern kingdom.

The main theme of the prophecy is to warn the people that God's judgment is coming and to offer the hope of salvation to all those who repent.

Micah spoke strongly against immorality, social injustices and oppression of the poor and he reminds us that God is the almighty Lord who hates sin but loves the sinner. Much of the book is a warning about God's impending judgement on both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

In the middle of this prediction of destruction Micah also gives a message of hope because he recognises that our God is a God who loves his people and longs for them to return to him.

In chapter 4 v 1-3 Micah looks forward to the time when God will bring-in a universal reign of peace:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways so that we may walk in His paths”. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

In chapter 5 v 2-5 Micah predicts the coming of a Messiah from Bethlehem the town of David – this is a familiar passage that we often use at Christmas time:

But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth, and he will be their peace,

Which then brings us to the key verse of Micah's prophecy in chapter 6 v 8 which we are thinking about today:

He has shown you O mortal 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.

Last week we thought about the first thing that God requires of us – which was to act justly, and today we come to the second thing that God requires of us - which is **to love mercy**.

This is an unusual way of expressing mercy – we normally talk about showing mercy towards someone, or having mercy on someone, but here God is saying (through Micah) that we should actually **love** mercy – and so, because we are being asked to love mercy, we need to define what mercy is.

What is mercy

Showing mercy is not something that comes naturally to us human beings. Our natural, sinful desire is to seek revenge or punishment for those who have done wrong. Many Hollywood films have been successful because they have featured a good revenge story. We live in a society that seems obsessed with retaliation and making sure that wrong-doers get what they deserve.

Showing mercy is completely different – because, when we are merciful, we show compassion and forgiveness to other people even though it might be within our power to punish or harm them. Mercy looks beyond what someone deserves and involves us giving up our desires for revenge.

Illustration from “Les Miserables”

In the Victor Hugo novel “Les Miserables” we read the story of Jean Valjean - a man who has just been released from prison after spending 19 years doing hard labour for stealing a loaf of bread.

Because of his criminal background, Valjean is not welcome anywhere and so he ends up being taken-in by the bishop of a local church.

In the middle of the night, Valjean makes off with most of the church silverware but he is caught by the police the next morning.

When questioned about the silverware, Valjean hides the truth and tells the police that the bishop had given it to him.

The police take Valjean back to the bishop to get his side of the story.

Instead of turning him in the bishop grabs two silver candlesticks from his mantle-piece and gives them to Valjean. He tells the police that he had given the silverware to Valjean but he had forgotten to take the candlesticks.

The bishop acted mercifully when it seemed obvious that Valjean should be punished.

The bishop had to sacrifice his pride and righteous indignation.

The bishop was badly treated by Valjean who had ignored the bishop's acts of kindness and stolen from him instead.

The bishop knew that Valjean had done wrong but, instead of punishing him, he gave him the only silverware he had left, in order to save Valjean from certain death – this sounds much like John 3 v 16 to us as Christians.

The bishop had been badly treated but he was now letting Valjean escape punishment – the bishop was showing that he loved mercy.

Mercy means more than just being nice to someone – instead it means showing a kindness which involves a personal cost to us (even if we have the power to do otherwise).

How do we learn to love mercy?

Micah reminds us that God wants us to be people who love mercy and to do this we need to remember:

How much we require mercy from God

The whole of the bible is filled with the stories of people who have wandered away from God and deserve his anger and punishment but, time and again, God withholds His judgement and responds with patience and mercy giving his people another chance to repent.

In Psalm 23 v 6 we are reminded that trusting in God as our Good Shepherd will mean that goodness and **mercy** will follow us all the days of our life.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that “Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy” Matthew 5 v 7

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes “Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved” Ephesians 2 v 4-5

It is never too later to receive God’s merciful forgiveness – one of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus pleaded for mercy with his dying breath – and Jesus assured him “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” Luke 23 v 43

How much we often require mercy from other people

We read earlier in Luke chapter 6 that Jesus tells us that we should “Love our enemies, do good to those who hate you” and that we should “Do to others as you would have them do to you”.

This is hard teaching for us to accept and put into practice,

At some time or other in our lives, we may do or say something which causes hurt to someone else. When this happens, we hope to receive forgiveness and mercy from those we have offended. This forgiveness and mercy are more likely to be freely given if we have treated other people as we wish to be treated ourselves.

When we are shown undeserving mercy from those around us, we might not always deserve it and it may not be an easy thing for them to do – but, as the people of God, we need to remember that:

“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved” we should “clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone - forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” Colossians 3 v 12-14

Mercy can do what judgment can’t

In “Les Miserables” Jean Valjean experiences the bishop’s mercy and this changes the whole course of his life. He turns from a life of crime and becomes someone filled with selflessness and

compassion. If the bishop had insisted on justice and sent Valjean back to prison, he would never have escaped from his old way of life.

This is the same message for us as Christians – we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and deserve to face punishment. Instead we have been shown mercy because, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

By believing and trusting in Jesus, we can obtain mercy and forgiveness and escape from our old life of sin and death and instead look forward to an eternal future.

Application to our lives

We are called to follow God's example. In Luke 6 verse 36 Jesus reminds us that we are to "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful".

This way of thinking is not something that comes naturally to us – it is an attitude that we need to develop but thankfully help is available from God's Holy Spirit.

Paul reminds us in Galatians 5 v 22-26 that those who belong to Christ have left their sinful, human nature behind and that we have been given the gift of God's Holy Spirit to help us become more like Jesus (which Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit).

When we show deep kindness to others and want the best for them (even though they might not deserve it) we are becoming lovers of mercy. We are becoming more like Jesus.

A Prayer

Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for your incredible mercy which never ends. You have saved us and rescued us. We pray that we can continue to grow in the understanding of how deeply rich your mercy is. Thank you for your forgiveness and your amazing grace.

We also pray that you will help us to extend mercy and forgiveness to those around us, and that you will wipe away any negative feelings we might have towards them. Help us to love each other in just the same way that you love us.

We ask all these things in Jesus name, Amen