

SERMON

# Sermon: What Does the Lord Require?

*Full sermon manuscript on Micah 6:8 -- justice, mercy, and humility as the three defining imperatives of covenant faithfulness*

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*Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.*



# Sermon Overview and Context

Primary Texts: Micah 6:1-8 | Matthew 23:23 | Luke 10:25-37

## Preaching Hook

What does God actually want from me? This is the most basic religious question -- and the one most susceptible to wrong answers. The religious imagination tends to generate increasingly elaborate performance requirements: more sacrifice, more religious activity, more spiritual demonstration. Micah's congregation had gone through this progression: they were asking whether thousands of rams would be enough, whether ten thousand rivers of oil would satisfy, whether the offering of a firstborn child would finally appease the divine requirement. It is a picture of escalating religious anxiety -- of people desperately trying to figure out what God needs from them. And Micah's answer cuts through all of it with three words that are simultaneously the simplest and the most demanding in the whole prophetic tradition.

## The Covenant Lawsuit -- Understanding the Context

Micah 6 begins with a legal proceeding. God brings a lawsuit (a "riv") against Israel, and the mountains and hills are summoned as the jury. God's complaint: after everything I have done -- bringing you out of Egypt, giving you leaders like Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, guiding you through the wilderness -- you have forgotten what I require. The question "what does the LORD require of you?" is not a genuine inquiry. God has already told them. Multiple times. In the law and the prophets. The question is rhetorical: he is exposing the absurdity of their escalating religious performance when the basic requirements have been available all along.

*"Micah 6:1-8"*

-- Primary Text

## Three Words That Define a Life -- Mishpat, Hesed, Halak

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Do justice (mishpat): The Hebrew word mishpat appears over 400 times in the Old Testament. It is the word for legal right, for the verdict that restores the wrongly accused, for the socioeconomic arrangements that protect the vulnerable from exploitation. Mishpat is not primarily about personal virtue -- it is about structural righteousness. It asks: Are the systems of this community producing fair outcomes? Are the vulnerable protected? Are the powerful held accountable? To "do mishpat" is to be someone who actively works to make the structures of community life function as they ought -- who does not merely comply with justice but produces it. Love kindness (hesed): Hesed is one of the most important and most untranslatable words in the Hebrew Bible. It is the word for covenant love -- the steadfast, loyal, unconditional love that God shows Israel even when Israel is faithless. To "love hesed" means not just to perform it but to be someone who delights in it, who is characterized by it, whose instinctive relational posture is this covenant loyalty that goes beyond what is required. Walk humbly with your God (halak): The third imperative is the posture from which the first two flow. Justice and kindness without a walk with God become ideology and sentimentality. The walk with God -- the sustained, daily, humble, dependent relationship with the One who defines what justice and kindness actually mean -- is the source of the other two.

*"Matthew 23:23"*

-- Secondary Text

## Jesus's Application -- The Weightier Matters

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for tithing their garden herbs while neglecting "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness." The precise correspondence with Micah 6:8 is intentional: Jesus is identifying the prophetic tradition as the standard against which the Pharisees' religious performance is found wanting. And his condemnation is not of their tithing -- "These you ought to have done" -- but of their theological error in treating precision in small things as a substitute for faithfulness in large ones. The application for every congregation: What are we doing with extraordinary precision while neglecting justice, mercy, and humble faithfulness? What are our tithing-mint-and-cumin practices that feel religious but substitute for the weightier things?

*"Luke 10:25-37"*

-- Third Text

## Application and Invitation

Invite concrete, specific response. Not "let's all try to be more just" but "What is one specific act of mishpat you can take this week? One specific extension of hesed to someone who does not deserve it? One specific practice that would deepen your walk with God?" Give the congregation the three words as a weekly examination: Did I do justice? Did I love kindness? Did I walk humbly?

## Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What did this sermon say to you personally -- not in general, but specifically? Where did it land?
2. Was there anything in the message that challenged or confused you? How did you engage with it?

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3. What specific application is this text calling you to? Name it as concretely as possible.
4. Who in your life needs to hear what you heard today? How might you share it?

### Preacher's Preparation Checklist

- Have I allowed this text to preach to me personally before I prepared to preach it to others?
- Do I have a specific illustration that makes the central theological claim concrete and immediately recognizable?
- Is my introduction creating genuine need for what the text provides -- curiosity, tension, a felt question?
- Is my conclusion specific, clear, and calling for a concrete response rather than general inspiration?
- Have I prayed specifically for the individuals who will be in the room when I preach this?

*The sermon is not yours. You are the herald -- the one who delivers the message on behalf of the One who sent you. Prepare with everything you have, and then step behind the text and let it do what only it can do.*

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