

THE GOOD LIFE – DO JUSTICE

FEBRUARY 28/MARCH 1, 2009

Pastor Bill Fitzhugh

Micah 6:8 (NKJV) has been the theme verse for the past several weeks of this sermon series – “The Good Life.” The three words “to do justly” speak a great deal as to what a big part of the Church’s mission is on this earth. Let’s read this verse again:

**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
- Micah 6:8 NKJV**

The sixth chapter of Micah begins as a lawsuit conducted by the prophet against the people. The mountains and hills are witnesses to God's prior actions on behalf of the people. The words "case" in v 1 and "controversy" in v 2 might better be translated "lawsuit." Verses 3-5 demonstrate the blessings and benefits of God as well as the ungratefulness of the people. "Answer me" in v3 is an invitation for the people to offer their defense in this lawsuit.

Verse 4 recounts the Exodus. Verse 5 tells of the scheme of Balak to hire Balaam to curse Israel although Balaam's "answer" was one of blessing on Israel.

The trip from Shittim to Gilgal (v 5b) is the first part of the conquest of Palestine--hence it refers to the gift of the land.

In view of the indictment in vv 1-5, vv 6-7 are a series of rhetorical questions that ask how the person/nation can make up for its sins. “With lavish sacrifices? With abundant offerings of olive oil? With the sacrifice of one's own child?”

God doesn’t want superficial, pagan rituals. He wants true repentance! Doing justice is the fruit of loving God! It really comes out of walking humbly with our God – a relationship with Christ. Through that, we love mercy and do social justice on the earth to show God’s redemptive love towards people.

Social justice is the overflow of a life spent with God! In fact, **Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)** says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Because of Salvation’s work, we should be working for Christ. **We are not saved BY good works, we are saved FOR good works!** We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

James 2:14-18 (NIV) also talks about doing social justice. It really says that serving others SHOULD be part of the Christian life, not just optional. Serving is faith expressed!

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Faith that lacks social justice and good works is dead. Now, that doesn't mean that if you aren't serving anywhere or anyone right now that you are not saved. But in light of this scripture, it should bring you to action to desire to express the love of God through service.

Listen to Psalm 89:14 (NIV):

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

Justice accompanies righteousness...they go hand in hand. Now, defiantly righteousness is the key to the relationship with God, but justice is righteousness expressed in the earth.

James 1:27 says, ***"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."***

RIGHTEOUSNESS has to do with our relationship to God --- it's vertical.

Righteousness is an attribute of moral purity belonging to God alone (John 17:25). God alone is truly righteous. We are only counted righteous in the eyes of God when we receive Jesus by faith (Phil. 3:9). Our righteousness is based on what Jesus did on the cross. The righteousness that was Christ's is counted to us. We, then, are seen as righteous in the eyes of God. Though we are actually worthy of damnation, we are made righteous (Is. 61:10) by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. As a result, we will spend eternity in the presence of the holy, pure, loving, kind, gentle, and righteous God.

Righteousness is also a positional term. We have a vertical relationship with God. It is often used to describe the justification that took place in our relationship to God. We have been justified or aligned in our relationship with God. This alignment was made in reference to our relationship and calling (or occupation) within the Kingdom. Occupying the right position in terms of our occupation causes us to be effective and experience fulfillment within the Kingdom.

JUSTICE is how we relate to other people --- it's horizontal.

Our relationship with others – how we serve and show Christ's love toward them – is serving. You should out-serve your mate. You should out-serve your employer – going beyond expectations. You should out-serve your neighbors. Jesus said in **Mark 10:45**:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Listen to what Richard Foster, author of Celebration of Discipline says about serving others:

Self-righteous service comes through human effort.
True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside.

Self-righteous service is impressed with the "big deal."
True service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service.

Self-righteous service requires external rewards.
True service rests contented in hiddenness.

Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results.
True service is free of the need to calculate results.

Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve.
True service is indiscriminate in its ministry.

Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims.
True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.

Self-righteous service is temporary.
True service is a life-style.

Self-righteous service is without sensitivity. It insists on meeting the need even when to do so would be destructive.
True service can withhold the service as freely as perform it.

Self-righteous service fractures community.
True service, on the other hand, builds community.

Genesis 18:19 NKJV

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

Here again, we see that righteousness and justice (serving) are connected. Genesis says this is the "way of the Lord." Doing these together was the condition to bring to Abraham what God spoke to him.

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 NKJV

He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Here is an example of social justice. We are to reach out to the fatherless and the widow – even the stranger. That is shocking to some Christians. Sure, they want to take care of the fatherless and the widow – who

wouldn't. But the stranger? Come on, really God? Yes – especially to the stranger! God tells them that they were once strangers. We should never forget that someone once reached out to us when we were strangers to the Kingdom of God.

How do we do that? Food and clothing are some ways, but it really comes down to need. The physical need is an inlet to a person's spiritual need. The physical need is not the most important issue, although it may be the most immediate to the person in need.

Helping meet someone's physical need is the first step to helping meet their spiritual need.

Jeremiah 22:15-16 NKJV

**Shall you reign because you enclose *yourself* in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink,
And do justice and righteousness?
Then *it was* well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
Then *it was* well.
Was not this knowing Me?" says the LORD.**

Do you see a theme? Justice goes hand in hand with righteousness. You will be fulfilled in your Christian living (then it will go well with you) when you begin to serve the poor and needy.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV

**This is what the LORD says:
"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,
but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,"
declares the LORD.**

I think we sing a song about this scripture... What are you boasting in? That you know the Word better than anyone else? Are you boasting in how long you have been a Christian? Are you boasting about how God has blessed you? These verses tell us to boast in knowing AND UNDERSTANDING God. What do you mean understand? Understand that He is the Lord and shows kindness, justice and righteousness on earth. When you do this, the Lord is happy and delights in you!

Isaiah 5:16 NIV

**But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice,
and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.**

QUOTE:

“The universe is done. The greater masterpiece still undone---still in the process of being created is HISTORY.”

"Servant" in our English New Testament usually represents the Greek *doulos* (bondslave). Sometimes it means *diakonos* (deacon or minister); this is strictly accurate, for *doulos* and *diakonos* are synonyms. Both words denote a man who is not at his own disposal, but is his master's purchased property. Bought to serve his master's needs, to be at his beck and call every moment, the slave's sole business is to do as he is told. Christian service therefore means, first and foremost, living out a slave relationship to one's Savior (1 Corinthians. 6:19-20).

What work does Christ set his servants to do? The way that they serve him, he tells them, is by becoming the slaves of their fellow-servants and being willing to do literally anything, however costly or undignified, in order to help them. This is what love means, as he himself showed at the Last supper when he played the slave's part and washed the disciples' feet.

When the New Testament speaks of ministering to the saints, it means not primarily preaching to them but devoting time, trouble, and substance to giving them all the practical help possible. The essence of Christian service is loyalty to the king expressing itself in care for his servants (Matthew 25: 31-46).

Only the Holy Spirit can create in us the kind of love toward our Savior that will overflow in imaginative sympathy and practical helpfulness towards his people. Unless the spirit is training us in love, we are not fit persons to go to college or a training class to learn the know-how or particular branches of Christian work. Gifted leaders who are self-centered and loveless are a blight to the church rather than a blessing.

Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes. It tells us that those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who weep, those whose hearts are pure, those who work to establish peace, those who suffer for the cause of justice -- they are all blessed in the kingdom of God. Then the Sermon on the Mount speaks of the response of those who are blessed. What is our responsibility? It tells us: ‘You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world’. All who are blessed are called to a responsibility. Christian discipleship, membership in the kingdom of God, is a great responsibility. In the Old Testament, the prophets reminded Israel again and again that it is not a light thing to be God’s chosen people.

Writing to the scattered Christian congregations in Asia Minor, Peter in his first Epistle tells them:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received God’s mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

In the Old Testament, it is the entire people of Israel who are addressed as a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Peter echoes this. The whole Christian congregation is the royal priesthood with a ministry and mission to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God.

After the Beatitudes, Jesus tells the disciples of their responsibility in society, in the world. The focus of God's action is the world -- not simply the Church or Christians. 'Let your light shine before people that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.' It is about our deeds in the world. We are not to spend our time thinking of how to escape from the world. Nor are we to be preoccupied with just the matters of the ministries inside the church building. We should be filling the earth with light and salt. In the schools, work, politics, businesses, T-Ball, and on vacation. Jesus said: You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.

In the first place, Christians are to be the **salt of the earth**. When we want to stress a person's worth we often say that he or she is the salt of the earth. In the ancient world, salt was highly valued. The Greeks called salt divine. Salt performs two important functions. It is the commonest of all preservatives. It keeps things from going bad. For millions of people in the world, salt still has this purpose. In the second place, salt gives taste and flavor to food.

The Christian's task is to be the salt of society, preserving, reconciling, adding taste, giving meaning where there is no meaning, giving hope where there is no hope. It is about the quality of life. It is interesting that when the early Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire, the Christian Apologists pleaded for tolerance saying that society continued to exist because of Christians. What they were saying was that Christians upheld the good values in life, they worked for reconciliation and peace, and they prayed for the empire and its well being.

To be the salt of society means that we are deeply concerned with its well being. We preserve cultural values and moral principles and make a contribution to the development of cultural and social life. We add taste and flavor to the common life. Because there are Christians in a city, its people should be able to praise God for the harmony and fellowship, joy and happiness which Christians bring to the common life.

We are also called to be the **light of the world**. The New English Bible translates: 'You are the light for all the world'. It means we are to be light in all aspects of the world's life. It also means we are to be light for all the people of the world. It takes us out of our preoccupation with the welfare of the Christian community alone.

QUOTE:

"The fact is that sin and evil constitute bad news in every area of life on this planet. The redemptive work of God through the cross of Christ is good news for every area of life on earth—that has been touched by sin—which means every area of life. Bluntly, we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess.

By God's incredible grace we have a Gospel big enough to redeem all that sin and evil have touched. Every dimension of that Good News is good news ultimately and only because of the Blood of Christ on the cross.

Ultimately, all that will be in the new redeemed creation will be there because of the cross. Conversely, all that will not be there (suffering, tears, sin, Satan, sickness, oppression, decay and death) will not be there

because they will have been defeated and destroyed by the cross. That is the length, width, breadth and height of God's idea of redemption. It is exceedingly Good News!

Holistic mission cannot be the responsibility of any one individual—but it is certainly the responsibility of the whole church."

I mentioned James 1:27 NIV earlier. Take a look at it in the Message paraphrase:

James 1:26-27 MESSAGE

Anyone who sets himself up as "religious" by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. How can you do justice in Jefferson County and every county that touches it?**
- 2. Are you being "salt and light" to those around you?**
- 3. What are you boasting in?**
- 4. Are you serving like Christ? (Mark 10:45)**
- 5. Are you more interested in righteousness or service? Which is more important? How do they go hand-in-hand?**
- 6. Out of your relationship and growth in Christ, what has God been showing you to do about your part of "do justice"?**