

## Micah 6:1-8

Dear Repentant Christians:

Do you remember a TV show called *The People's Court* with Judge Wapner? Well, Judge Wapner passed away 3 years ago at the age of 97. During his heyday, the judge had quite the TV following and a very unusual courtroom style. I suppose we could say the same about Judge Judy. Either hilariously or sadly, a recent news report said 10% of college graduates thought Judge Judy was a member of the US Supreme Court!

Micah's account today is a courtroom setting -- a very *unusual* courtroom setting. God is seeking to convict the Israelites of their sins so they see their need for a Savior from those sins. Today we are in ***The People's Court*** (1) ***God's Charge: You despised me for no good reason*** (2) ***The Expected Outcome: True repentance and its fruit.***

### 1

Prophet Micah lived about 700BC -- a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea -- a time when Israel was entrenched in many foul sins: the wealthy preyed on the poor; judges accepted bribes; priests taught lies; and people practiced widespread idolatry worshiping Canaanite gods like Baal and Asherah.

So God makes his case vs. Israel: ***"Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel."*** Metaphorically, the mountains and hills served as the jury. They had been around a long time and, personified, were eyewitnesses of God's goodness to Israel and to Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord. He's saying, ***"If these mountains could talk, what tales they could tell of God's grace and the people's sin!"***

How many Israelite hilltops blushed with shame as they watched God's chosen people practicing idolatry on their very summits? As we read in 1 Kings 14:23, 24: ***"They set up for themselves high places, sacred stones, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites."*** The evidence was clear. They had abandoned the Lord.

But why? Was it God's fault? Hardly! He asks them, ***"My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me."*** Can you find any reason to justify your despising me and my Word and living so sinfully? No, on the contrary: ***"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam."*** The Israelites had been slaves making mud bricks for Pharaoh and his cronies, but the Lord freed them by his grace and awesome power as he led them out and through the Red Sea.

He continues, ***"Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."*** Shittim was Israel's last camping place before crossing the Jordan River to enter Canaan. God stopped the flow of the Jordan, the people crossed, and beginning with the battle of Jericho, the Promised Land was conquered.

God did all these things **by grace**. They had deserved none of it, yet God gave them all of it. And what did they do? They lied, cheated, bribed, and worst of all, they ignored God's Word and worshiped false gods that had done nothing for them!

Often we see a piece of Israel in ourselves. From our hymnals we sing: (302 v. 1): ***"Lord, to you I make confession: I have sinned and gone astray; I have multiplied transgression, chosen for myself my way."*** How often don't we need to confess that we take for granted God's countless gifts and blessings and instead grumble and complain about what we don't have or wish we had? How often don't we thumb our noses at what God clearly says in the Bible and do our own thing -- and then get

angry and yell at God when we get burned in the process? How often don't we look at the cross and see the overwhelming love of Jesus for sinners like us, and then treat others like dirt or stubbornly deny someone our forgiveness even though Jesus didn't deny us his?

Yes, there is a piece of Micah's Israel in all of our hearts. We stand convicted: God has been good, very good. We have not.

## 2

Now, Micah echoes Israel's reply. They had been unfaithful to the Lord time and time again, yet did they get down on their knees and repent? Did they change their ways? No, they tried to **bribe** God just like they did their corrupt judges. Maybe they could grease his palm and get him off their backs. You can hear the syrupy, melodramatic tone of their fake plea: ***"With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression?"*** Summarizing: *"Lord, how about some barbequed, choice calves? Or, if you're not into quality, how about quantity -- like 1000s of rams and 10,000 rivers of expensive oil? Will that buy you off and appease your anger?"*

That's not humble repentance. That's arrogant baloney. God doesn't need our animals or any of our offerings. Our gifts can't buy God off. What he wants is us! He wants our hearts, our appreciative lives and attitudes that lead to loving generosity on our parts, not bribes to God. Micah says, ***"He has showed you, O man, 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."*** By the way, these last words appear in the alcove of religion in the reading room of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Oh, how we all, including our governmental leaders, could use a reminder of this simple truth!

Notice, Micah says, ***"God has showed you...what is good."*** He sure has! His goodness floods our lives: In Christ we are forgiven. In Christ we are at peace. In Christ we have eternally bright futures!

That wonderful goodness of God moves us to express our thanks in this way: ***"to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."***

- ***"Act justly"*** -- treat people fairly. Don't judge based on assumptions, opinions, or by jumping to conclusions. As Luther says, rather than think the worst, ***"put the best construction on everything."***
- ***"Love mercy"*** -- Mercy sees the needs of others and reaches out to meet those needs, without worrying about "what's in it for me." That's what God did for us!
- ***"Walk humbly with your God"*** -- We stand spiritually naked before God -- all our sins exposed. Yet, Christ lovingly clothes us with his perfection. That is truly humbling.

So, in *The People's Court* we stand condemned. There is no doubt God's charges against us would hold up in any court: Judge Wapner, Judge Judy, or the US Supreme Court. But our gracious God has provided a remedy for our guilt: the blood of Jesus. May that wonderful news move us to produce the fruits of repentance, as Micah says: "justice, mercy, and a daily, humble walk with God."

Amen.