

Worship That Pleases God
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1. Introduction

Have you ever wondered if God cares how we worship him? Is he always pleased with our worship? Is he ever displeased with it? What would make God displeased with the worship of his people?

If you would like to see what the Bible says about this, please turn with me to Micah 6:1-8 (p. 779 in the pew Bible).

Read *Micah 6:1-8*.

Please pray with me.

* Pray

2. God convenes a court

The context for this chapter is that God is seeing the sins of his people. What sins? Other parts of this book say that God's people are worshiping other gods, mistreating the poor and weak, cheating in their business dealings, and seizing property from their poor and weak neighbors. Their leaders who should be upholding justice are looking the other way. Their prophets who should be speaking for God against these practices, are telling the people all is well.

With that said, please look with me at v. 1-2. God is speaking and he has an indictment against his people. An indictment is a charge that someone has done wrong. When a house thief is caught and brought before our courts, the prosecutor brings an indictment against him, stealing. Here in Micah's day, God has an indictment against his people. God makes two commands here. He commands his people to plead their case before the mountains and hills, that is, to defend themselves. And he commands the mountains and hills to hear God's indictment. God is setting up a court. The accused is his people. The prosecuting attorney and judge is God. The jury are the mountains and hills.

Does it surprise you that the Lord God would act as a prosecutor and judge against his people? Does your view of God include these roles for God? God is many things ... all of them right and good. He is loving. He is merciful. And he is just, which means he must punish sins. None of his attributes trump the others. He is all loving, all merciful, and all just. He is holy and pure in whatever he does, showing mercy or executing justice. When we are thinking rightly, we'll prize all of God, not just some parts.

3. God makes his case

Now look at v. 3, “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!” He begins with “O my people.” God’s tone seems tender. But he commands, “Answer me!”, which is demanding. Here we see God making his prosecuting case directly to his guilty people. It appears from God’s words that the people are treating God as though he has wronged them. How do you treat someone who is more powerful than you when you think they have wronged you? You don’t trust them. You don’t listen to them. You treat what they say with suspicion. You don’t trust their judgments, but make your own judgments. You do what you have to because they are powerful, but you don’t do it with a willing heart. And if you can find a way to not do what they are asking, you will. I’m guessing that this is how God’s people were treating God in Micah’s day.

Not only are these people treating God as though he has wronged them, but they are treating him as though he has wearied them. What does this look like? You believe they are unfair or unrealistic. You are bored with them. You’d rather not spend time with them. You are opposed to any of their ideas, even before they say them. You don’t respect them. You look down on them. You might even be bold enough to tell them to get away from you and leave you alone.

Why does God express these charges as a question? Why doesn’t he just say, “You act like I have wronged you and wearied you.”? He turns his charge into a question so that his people would examine themselves. He wants them to see for themselves how wrongly they act. He is giving them an opportunity to repent.

In v. 4-5 God responds to their accusation that God has wronged them and wearied them. “In what way have I wronged and wearied you? I’ll tell you.” Micah 6:4 : “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” God’s people were slaves in Egypt many years. They were oppressed and cruelly treated by their Egyptian masters. And God saved them from this. He defeated the Egyptians and redeemed his people from their slavery. He sent them Moses to lead them out and give them God’s law. He sent them Aaron to be their high priest before God. And he sent them Miriam as prophetess. “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Just look!” Far from wronging them, God has done good to them, redeeming them from Egypt.

Now v. 5, “O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, ...” After God led the Israelites out of Egypt, he led them through the desert for 40 years. They had enemies there too. Balak was the king of Moab and he heard how God all but destroyed the Egyptians. So he feared the Israelites wandering around near him. He devised a plan to harm them. He bribed a seer named Balaam. A seer is someone like a prophet. Balaam was not an Israelite and not a follower of the Lord. But Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. But God controlled Balaam so that instead of cursing the Israelites, he blessed them. And God honored that blessing. God says to the people of Micah’s day, “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Just look!” Far from wronging them, God has done good to them, turning Balak’s curse into a blessing.

Back to v. 5, God asks his people to remember "... what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD." Shittim and Gilgal are places across from each other on the Jordan river. Shittim was the last place the Israelites camped before they crossed the Jordan river to enter the promised land. Gilgal was where they camped just after they crossed. So when God tells his people to remember what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, he means for them to remember how God miraculously dried up the Jordan river just as they stepped into it. God brought them all across on dry ground. And as soon as the last of them stepped out on the other side, the waters of the Jordan overflowed its banks just as it was doing before they stepped in. God says to the people of Micah's day, "What have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Just look!" Far from wronging them, God has done good to them in miraculously getting them across the Jordan and into the promised land.

Notice at the end of v. 5 that God calls these things he has done for them "righteous acts." Surely all that God does is good and right. He never does wrong or acts in an evil way. Redeeming his people from slavery in Egypt, sending them Moses, turning Balak's hoped for curse into a blessing, and getting them across the Jordan at flood stage ... these were all righteous acts. They were not random. They were not morally neutral. They were good and right. God treated his people this way not because they deserved it, but because he was gracious. And God's gracious righteous acts demand a response of obedience in loving God and neighbor. To not do so is to expose a heart that is weary of God and hard hearted toward his kindnesses.

* Summary

God's people wrongly thought that God had wronged them and wearied them. God showed them that the sin was theirs, not God's.

4. The people ask how they can make God pleased with them

Now look at v. 6, "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?" This is the response of God's people to the indictment and evidence God has presented. Their consciences are convicted and so they ask themselves, "With what shall I come before the LORD?" "We have wronged God. With what can we make God pleased?" They seem to see God in a new light, as high in value, as their supreme judge, as their greatest benefactor and provider." They see God as worthy of their worship. This is what is meant by "come before the LORD" and "bow myself before God on high." It is natural that they think of bringing a yearling calf as a burnt offering because Moses had prescribed sacrifices like these.

But look where their thinking goes next. Follow me in v. 7, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The sacrifices they consider get increasingly costly. God did prescribe the sacrifice of rams and oil in some cases. But he never asked for thousands of rams and a river of oil, let alone ten thousand rivers. And God never prescribed human sacrifice. God condemned that practice in the other nations. God's people here

seem to want to make things right with God, but their proposals grow absurd and even wickedly outrageous.

* Summary

God's people are convinced of their sin and so are wondering how to please God. They propose various ways, but none are noted as right. None of these ways are the right ways for a sinning people to "bow [themselves] before God on high."

5. The prophet gives the right answer

So what is the answer? With what are guilty sinning people to come before God? Look with me for the answer in v. 8. "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" The prophet says that God has told his people the answer to what is good and what the LORD requires. These questions are not different. The Bible means for us to see all the questions in v. 6-8 as the same: with what shall I come before the LORD and bow myself before God on high, with what will the LORD be pleased, what is good, and what does the LORD require of his people? The answer starts with the word "but." It looks a little out place here, but I think it is here to tell us that God's answer is in contrast to the proposed answers that the people made. God is not pleased with burnt offerings of yearling calves, not with thousands of rams, not with ten thousands of rivers of oil, and certainly not with the sacrifice of the firstborn. God tells the people of Micah's day that he is pleased with them doing justice and loving kindness and walking humbly with God. These are not new. God's law, given to his people through Moses, taught these same things. God requires heart obedience to his commands, not sacrifice.

He requires that his people treat others fairly, justly. Don't cheat them. Work for justice among those who are being unjustly treated. Don't stand idly by saying it isn't your business. This is what it means to do justice.

God requires that his people love kindness. If you have ever heard a Bible teacher talk about the Hebrew word "hesed," that word is translated here as kindness. Love "hesed." Love loyalty, faithfulness, mercy, kindness. Don't be a person who is hard with their customers, their employees, their neighbors, their children. Don't harden your heart to the poor, the weak, your husband or wife, but show them understanding and care, give them favor. Don't just be minimally kind, but love kindness and mercy.

God requires that his people walk humbly with him. He opposes the proud, but gives grace only to the humble. When God opposes you, you will not fare well. God's people need God's grace. You will know you are walking humbly before God if you are submitting to him, not shaking your fist at him; if you are following his way, not trying to rationalize yours; if your heart and mind is open and teachable, not confident that you know best; if you are seeking his will, not trying to convince him to choose yours.

6. Big idea of the passage: worship that doesn't please God and worship that does

The big idea of this passage is that God is not pleased with sacrifices, with acts of worship, when sin is embraced in the heart and life. Sacrifices from people do not buy God's favor. Never. Were OT sacrifices wrong then? No, they were not wrong when they came from a heart that loved God and his law. But when the sacrifices were not offered from a right heart, they were worthless before God and even raised a stink in God's nostrils.

An example of this is when Saul was king of Israel. God told Saul to wipe out all the people of Amalek because of their sin, including their animals. Saul does this, but doesn't completely obey. He kept alive some of the animals for sacrifice to God. Sounds like a God honoring idea? Samuel the prophet gives God's response, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." In God's eyes, obedience is better than sacrifice. Saul got this wrong and so did the people of Micah's time. A sacrifice to God does not make up for a lack of obedience to God.

Worship that pleases God is a heart and life that pursues justice for others, delights in kindness to others, and walks humbly with God. God's law in the OT is a gift to God's people because it tells how to live in a way that pleases him.

7. Like the people of Micah's day, we are sinners

So does this OT passage even apply to us today? After all, we don't live in OT times. The people in Micah's day lived before the Messiah came. We live in the days after that. Jesus has come, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for the sins of men, and rose from the dead as proof that he was God's Messiah. Do we have anything in common with God's people in Micah's day such that this passage applies to us? We have much in common.

Like the people in Micah's day, we too are all sinners. If God convened his court and asked the trees and fields around us to be the jury, we would all be convicted of great sins against him.

Likewise, we too sometimes treat God like he has wronged us and wearied us. Have you ever said or thought, "God, what did I do to deserve this?" When we think this way, we are judging God as unfair. We are saying that God is not treating us as we deserve. We are saying that God has wronged us.

Have you ever thought of living God's way as a burden? "God, I'm really too busy to read your word and pray." "God, why should I pray, it doesn't do any good anyway." "God, I know I shouldn't do this thing that all the other kids are doing, but it sure looks fun. I wish I could be in on it. Sometimes I wonder if following you is worth it." These thoughts come from a heart weary with God. These thoughts come from a heart that has stopped seeing God as breath for our life and started seeing him as the unwanted parent who is ruining all our fun. Have you too at times treated God like he has wronged you and wearied you?

If we are honest, we might be able to admit this and even worse admit that we are not that bothered by it. We know we have acted wrongly toward God and yet see it as hardly that bad. Oh, it's bad! Is there help for us in this state? Yes, it's the same help that God gave his people in Micah chapter 6. When God convicted them of their sin by bringing to their memory all the good that he had done for them, he was being kind to them. It would be very unkind to leave people in their sinful state and not help move their heart toward repentance. To rationalize our sin or to see it as only a little bit bad, that is a dream world. Someday all the earth will see that the promises of sin are lies and sinners are guilty of great wrong. God wants us to see our sin as real and awful, because that is the reality. Seeing your sin as real and awful is one foundational pillar for escaping God's judgment for your sins.

8. We too have received from God better than we deserve

So like God's people in Micah's time, God has treated us far better than we deserve and it does our soul good to recall those ways. Every wondrous act of favor from God for his people in the OT becomes an act of favor for our ancestry once we are in Christ. Galatians 3:7 says that all those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. So if you are a person with faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then rejoice that God redeemed your people out of Egypt, that he gave your people a leader like Moses to shepherd them in the wilderness and give them God's law, that he protected your people from the curse of Balak and turned that curse into a blessing, and that he brought your people across the Jordan river at flood stage so that your people could inherit the promised land. All the promises to Abraham are now yours if you have the faith of Abraham, that is, if you have faith in Christ.

And to add to all this, as someone who was born after Christ's coming, you have received even more benefits from God. You have the full Scriptures, old and new testaments by which you can know God and yourself rightly. You can look back and see Christ on the cross and risen from the dead as an historical reality. You have the Spirit of God to comfort and guide your soul in the ways of God. You have the church gathered to encourage your heart to worship God in song, prayer, preaching, and sacraments.

Like God's people in the time of Micah, see those benefits from God as righteous acts given to you not because you deserve them, but because God has chosen to be gracious to you. Then be like Micah's people and be convinced that it is you who have treated God as he doesn't deserve, it is you who have sinned, it is you who must find a way to come before God.

So the first way we are like the people of Micah's day is that we are sinners like them and we need to heed God's call to repentance like they did.

The next way we are like the people of Micah's day is that we are tempted to bring sacrifices to God in order to appease him. I doubt that you are tempted to sacrifice animals or oil. But ask yourself if you are ever tempted to bring sacrifices in other ways. What might be some ways? Church attendance, giving financially, singing worship songs, praying, Bible reading, helping at church, fasting. Remember that we said the sacrifices in Micah's time were not necessarily

wrong; God commanded them. But when the worshiper wants to use their sacrifices to buy off God, then they are wrong. Let me give you a story as an analogy.

Imagine that Joe and Sally have been married for 6 years. Things started out great, Joe and Sally were kind and giving toward each other. But over time, Joe began to grumble about his wife. He began to treat her disrespectfully. This became a pattern where Joe would regularly make demeaning comments to Sally. He doesn't see it, but he stopped being giving toward her and instead is utterly selfish in his marriage. This has been going on for 4 or 5 years now. Day to day, their relationship is cutting, cold, and quiet. Sally has lost faith that Joe really loves her. Their 7th anniversary is coming up and Joe plans something big. He doesn't quite say it aloud to himself, but he wants to smooth things over a bit. So he buys a very expensive piece of jewelry for Sally and takes her on an extravagant getaway. Here's the key question. What does Sally think of Joe's anniversary gift and trip? Do you think she'll say to herself, "Oh I'm so happy. Joe really does love me!"? In Sally's eyes, do Joe's gifts undo the long pattern of bad treatment? Surely not. If Joe really loved Sally, he would act like it ... day to day. And Joe's gifts might actually make matters worse, because it appears he is trying to buy her off.

Friends, when our consciences are convicted of our sins, we too might think we can make sacrifices to God to buy him off. These sacrifices did not appease God in Micah's day and they won't today either. Without a humble and repentant heart, our sacrifices are only pretense, fake love, like Joe's. God wants true love from us. True love shows itself in obedience, not sacrifice.

9. We too fail to obey God from the heart, but God provides.

If you are tracking with me, you might be thinking, "Okay, I get it that I'm wrong when I try to appease God by working at Awana or giving money to the church or reading my Bible. I believe that God wants true love from me, the kind that shows itself in obedience, not sacrifice. But I have a big problem still. I don't obey God all that well. Am I lost with no way to please God?"

The words of the apostle John are just right for us at this point. First John 2:1 says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Doesn't this sound like our situation? Don't sin. Obey God. But when you do sin, remember that you have an advocate with the Father. Who? Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus provides 3 gifts for us in our situation. First, Jesus as a man perfectly fulfilled God's law. This means he perfectly loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength; and he perfectly loved his neighbor as himself. Jesus always did justice, always loved kindness, and always walked humbly with God. And for those people who are born again, Jesus' righteousness has been credited to them. So you don't obey God all the time? Jesus obeyed God on your behalf. Great gift of mercy.

The second gift that Jesus provides is that he atones for the sins of all who repent and trust him. This means that he makes amends with God for your sins. No sacrifice you can offer will do that. Don't try. With what are you to come as a sinner before God? With Jesus death on the cross.

Colossians 2:13–14 says that you and I who were dead because of our sins, God made alive, forgiving us all our sins. How? By canceling the record of debt that stood against us. How did he do that? By nailing it to the cross of Christ. So you have a long record of sins behind you? Jesus paid the penalty owed you for those sins so that you can be forgiven by God.

The third gift that Jesus provides ties back to God's command for us to obey him. For those who are in Christ, he changes us, not just in God's eyes, but on the inside and working out. He removes our heart of stone that is disobedient and weary with God and replaces it with a soft heart that wants to obey and delight in God. Jesus doesn't eliminate good works from the picture. That would be abolishing the law. But he provides a way for those who are his to do good works. Good works are not the root of your pleasing God. Jesus' righteousness is the root of your pleasing God. But good works are the fruit that is produced by a life saved by Jesus. Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." You can never obey God on our own. But that doesn't mean you cannot obey God. You can, if Jesus is in you. A few verses later Jesus says in John 15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Bearing godly fruit does not make you a disciple of Jesus, it proves you are one. So you know that your heart's desires are more for sin than for God? Jesus works in your heart, progressively making your heart and life holy so that you actually will love God and neighbor.

10. Conclusion

From Micah chapter 6 we saw that God is not pleased with acts of worship when sin is embraced in the heart. Worship that pleases God is a heart and life that walks humbly with God and pursues justice for others and delights in showing kindness to others. And so how does this apply to you? When you come to God, banish all pretending. Stop thinking you can buy God out like a bad husband. Instead, come genuinely sensing your need for a Savior to purchase your way to God. And then come repentant of your sins and trusting Jesus, with happy whole-hearted acts of worship. He will work in you so that you can do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.