

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

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The world's requirements are often complex and difficult. God's requirements are simple and easy. Kinda.

INTRODUCTION:

When you become a big celebrity with the ability to pull in millions of dollars in ticket sales you can make some pretty wild demands on concert promoters and sponsors. Those demands are called "riders" because they are usually tacked onto the contract after the important things (read: money) have been hammered out. Some riders are extravagant and absurd; others are fairly simple.

Christina Aguilera requires a police escort, to and from the concert venue so that "under no circumstances are her vehicles to be allowed to encounter any delays due to traffic."

Taylor Swift requires Starbucks. Specifically, 1 Grande ICED Caramel Latte with 2 Sweet-N-Lows, 1 Grande ICED Americano with 2 Sweet-N-Lows and soy milk, and 1 slice of Pumpkin loaf. All delivered by 11AM.

Rihanna requires one large fur rug (preferably animal-printed) for her to walk on barefoot.

Jay-Z requires seven dressing rooms and some "good quality peanut butter and good quality jelly" for making his favorite PBJ sandwiches.

Cher requires a separate hotel room for her wigs.

According to the prophet, Micah in the Bible, God's covenant with his people has only three, simple riders. Justice. Kindness. And humility.

WHAT THE WORLD REQUIRES

Bon Jovi requires bowls of M&Ms with all the green ones removed.

Beyoncé requires that her dressing room be kept at a constant temperature of 78 degrees.

Adele requires a pack of Marlboro Lights and a lighter plus two bottles of "the best quality Californian red wine and one bottle of the best quality Californian Sauvignon Blanc white wine (chilled). AND NO CHARDONNAY!"

Justin Bieber requires 10 luxury Sedans, a massage table, and a private jet on standby for any of his travel desires.

Guy Fieri requires a restaurant to close for two to four days to film a 10-minute segment on Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives. Restaurant owners who have hosted him, however, say it's worth it for the business that an appearance on his show brings in.

It's not just celebrities whose requirements are often absurd.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller claims local and state police in Minneapolis have been required to "stand down and surrender" to the feds despite the fact that under the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the federal government doesn't have the authority to order local law enforcement officers to "stand down."

Federal prosecutors under the direction of Attorney General Pam Bondi are requiring Minnesota officials, including Governor Tim Walz and Mayor Jacob Frey of Minneapolis, to provide evidence that they did not obstruct federal law enforcement during immigration operations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, knowing full well that it's impossible to prove a negative.

President Donald Trump requires nothing less than absolute fealty and unquestioning loyalty from his fellow Republicans. When his former supporter Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene announced that she was not going to run for re-election because she could no longer support MAGA's role in the government shutdown, the refusal of the Republican party to come up with a plan to help people who were losing health care because of the "Big Beautiful Bill," and the lack of Republican support for releasing the Epstein files, he responded in social media with barrages of insults and half-truths.

Even I, your humble pastor, have certain requirements for my home study and writing space: a 3X4 foot bulletin board, my HP laptop computer, yellow Post-its, No. 2 pencils, manilla file folders. I love to cook but to work my culinary magic I require a good quality nonstick 10-inch skillet. Sorry, it's non-negotiable.

That's the world we live in, where human requirements are sometimes reasonable but more often complex and difficult, and sometimes vague and just plain absurd.

In today's scripture lesson, Micah says that God's requirements on the other hand, are simple and easy: Do what is just. Love what is kind. Walk humbly with God.

Okay, simple, maybe. Easy-peasy? Sometimes not.

MICAH'S WITNESS

The prophet, Micah, is one of the twelve "Minor" prophets in the Bible, "minor" because the books they provide are all relatively short. That does not mean that their witness is unimportant, however.

Micah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah from roughly 730-701 BCE, making him a younger contemporary of First Isaiah (of Jerusalem). His home was in Moresheth, a village just southwest of the capital city. Other than that, little is known about him except what we can

infer from his preaching. He identified with the plight of the poor; he was called by YHWH to prophesy; he was angry with the Judean leaders whose selfishness and lack of compassion was leading to what he predicted would be the destruction of Jerusalem.

He, or perhaps he and Isaiah together, must have been effective preachers because the record shows that in 715 BCE, King Hezekiah heeded their preaching and turned to the Lord, thus averting the disaster(s) they predicted.

While the little book of Micah contains much meat for the theologically hungry mind, selections from it appear only three times (once each year) in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary:

- Year B, Advent 4 (Alternate OT Reading) Micah 5:2–5a – Micah predicts that a great king will emerge from Bethlehem, the city of David.
- Year C, Advent 1 (Alternate OT Reading) Micah 4:1–5 – Micah predicts a time of peace under a great king when the people will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
- Year A, Epiphany 4, Micah 6:1-8 -- our present reading.

Today's Reading

Everyone loves a good courtroom drama and, in today's reading, Micah delivers a doozy.

6:1-2

The setting is a courtroom. The mountains and hills who have been around for thousands of years and seen it all are the jury. YHWH has brought suit against his people. They have accused God of being unjust, but they have broken the covenant and have suffered the consequences that were expressly stated in the contract, so God, therefore, cannot be judged to be unjust. (Q.E.D.)

The people argue, however, that, to paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan, the punishment does not fit the crime. Other, neighboring nations are even more reprehensible than Judah, they say, but God does nothing to them. They flourish. They live comfortably and well while God's people suffer. Therefore, God is unjust.

6:3-5

Now God makes his case. Listen to the emotional pleading in his voice: What have I done to you that is so unjust? How have I burdened you? Answer if you can, if you dare.

I delivered you out of the hands of the Egyptians, out of slavery and gave you Moses and Aaron and Miriam as your leaders and examples. Is that it? Is the freedom I gave you too burdensome? Are Moses and Aaron and Miriam too long ago for you to remember? Do I overtax your memory?

When King Balak hired the magician Balaam to speak a curse against you, I turned it into a blessing. Would you have preferred the curse instead?

When you crossed the River Jordan between Shittim and Gilgal was the crossing too difficult for you? The water too cold, the current too strong? Would you rather go back in the other direction?

Have you forgotten all my acts of saving grace? Has this all just slipped your mind?

6:6-7

The people respond that God is unjust because God asks too much of the people in return for these admittedly nice things God has done. It's just that there's no pleasing God. The demands are too great. What's it going to take, they ask, to satisfy YHWY? What is required so God will get off our backs and stop punishing us for every little infraction?

They resort to hyperbole: Will burnt offerings and calves a year old? (A common sacrifice.) Apparently not because we already do that and God isn't satisfied. So how about a few thousand rams or ten thousand rivers of precious oil?

And now they ratchet it up. They throw down and insult by comparing God to the false gods of neighboring nations, gods who require human sacrifice. Are you just like all those other Gods, they ask, selfish and cruel and false?

6:8

Now, Micah, the judge steps forth and renders his judgement: He. Has. Told. You. What. Is. Required. Not rituals and ceremonies and expensive sacrifices and loud prayers. No! This is what God requires: Three simple things, three things that have been spoken by the prophets for centuries and ignored by you, God's people. So, let us reiterate them, here.

1. Justice

Not justice as a concept written about in books and hidden away in scrolls but as an act, something you do. Work for fairness and equality for all, but especially for the poor, the weak, the powerless, and the marginalized who are exploited by others. That is the real justice that God requires.

2. Kindness

The Hebrew word is *hesed* and it cannot be translated into a single English word. It means being kind, being loving, being faithful, being gentle. Like an old married couple. It means doing all of these things not out of duty but out of affection and care. It means loving God with all your heart and soul and might and loving your neighbor as yourself.

3. Humility

We are just and kind not so we can claim to be superior to those who aren't, not because we expect to get something in return, not to enhance our reputation or our public image, not to make ourselves feel all warm and fuzzy inside. We do these things because of who and what we are. We are the People of God. We are Christian brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ who taught us the one way to eternally authentic life.

WHAT GOD REQUIRES

Every once in a while, we come across a text that cries out for an exegetical sermon, one that leads the listener on a walk through the verses, unfolding and unpacking each one as they come. Micah 6:1-8 is such a passage.

Then, when the journey nears its completion, to a conclusion that brings the point soundly home:

So, which comes first, God's salvific acts or the righteousness of the people who are saved? The passage makes it clear that God is the first actor in salvation history.

It was YHWH who brought the people up out of Egypt and delivered them from slavery. It was YHWH who saved them from the curse of Balaam. It was YHWH who brought them through the Red Sea and across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

And only then did God say what He expected in return. Daniel J. Simundson, in his commentary on the Book of Micah (*The New Interpreter's Bible*) concludes his comments beautifully: "These key verses from Micah are about lifestyle, one's total outlook on life, and one's ethical values. They reject the simplistic notion that there is one thing Israel [or we] can do (ritually or otherwise) to make things right between God and the people."

The eternally authentic life is constructed of three simple, though not always easy things: Justice. Kindness. Humility.

General concepts to be sure. God leaves the details to be figured out, worked out by us in whatever context we find ourselves. And it is in that working out that we find ourselves on the road to God's kingdom.

Amen