

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE?

MICAH 6:1-8

Acquiring carnal power requires that one is baptized into the polluted waters of worldly wisdom. People hungry for worldly power eagerly acquire the skills of manipulative aggression to satisfy their appetite for control and domination. They desire so much to be the greatest and the most powerful that they consent to being mentored by seducing spirits.

Seducing spirits are radically committed to organizing and running the world according to the demonic vision of cold-hearted injustice. Seducing spirits are experts at exploiting mankind's prideful ambition to become the gods of the earth. Seducing spirits know that men not only want to be gods, but they are actively driven by an unconscious urge to replace God. It is their insatiable desire to own and lord over the world that they initiate global power struggles that recklessly endanger human civilization.

Some men desirous of vain glory readily bow down in worship to the Prince of Darkness in exchange for the possession of the temporal kingdoms of this world. The temptation to power is so magnetic that it draws millions of people into the reading of contemporary literature that is laced with the invisible poison of demonic wisdom.

Today, millions read books that teach the importance of embracing the practice of dishonesty, deception, falsehood, and manipulation. These unspiritual qualities are portrayed as being necessary skills in the gaining and maintaining of temporal power. Demonic wisdom is contained in such books as the Prince, the Art of Seduction, the Art of De-Motivation, the 48 Laws of Power, and the Lucifer Principle.

The Prince is a very popular little book that was written by Nicollo Machiavelli. The book was published in Italy in 1532 five years after Machiavelli's death. It is described as being "witty, informative, and devilishly shrewd." The book is "devilishly shrewd" in that it teaches the reader to be dishonest, deceptive and manipulative when in the pursuit of power.

The Machiavellian doctrine teaches power seekers how to appear to be good as a means of cleverly disguising their evil intentions. He says that one should not deviate from what is good, if possible, but must be able to do evil if it becomes necessary. Machiavelli believes it is good to appear to be merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, and religious, but one must have the mind that is willing to act otherwise and change to the opposite qualities.

He somewhat admiringly describes a particular leader during his life time as being a man who does nothing but preach peace and good faith, but he is really a great enemy to both. The demonic influence of Machiavellian doctrine can be seen in the lives of infamous world leaders who studied Machiavelli with an obsession. Some of the most well-known dictators of the 20th century immersed themselves in Machiavellian thought.

Adolph Hitler kept Machiavelli's book the Prince by his bed for bedside reading. Mussolini selected Machiavelli's book as the subject of his doctoral thesis. Lenin and Stalin both were ardent students of Machiavellian doctrine. It is interesting to note that over the past 100 years some have credited Machiavelli as being the founder of modern political science. It is unsettling to think that some of our most popular leaders in the free world have gone to school in Machiavellian thought.

For a while after the period known as the "age of the dictators" in Italy, Machiavelli's book suffered a decline in popularity. However, today Machiavelli's book is once again experiencing resurgence in popularity. It is also interesting and disturbing to note that a good number of the readers of this book live in nations that supposedly embrace democracy.

Machiavellian doctrine and other sinister teachings have helped arrange the global stage for the acting out of grave injustice. The present climate of misinformation and deception requires that God's people are wise, alert and discerning. Machiavelli's teaching is a primary reason why the people of God cannot afford to naively assume that political leaders who master the use of religious language are sincere and honest in their profession of faith.

There have always been those who honor Jesus with their lips while they contradict his sacred teachings with their actions. Jesus says, "You shall know a tree by its fruit." Paul echoes the need for the people of God to be awake and discerning while living in the world.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 Paul says that in the last days people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness, but denying its power.

The Church of God must remain alert and discerning because cunning and crafty men who are in love with money and power seek to kidnap the church in order to use it for unspiritual purposes. Kidnappers seek to cover the church's mouth with the masking tape of fear and to cover the church's eyes with a political blindfold called blind loyalty. Christians cannot afford to permit this clever abduction to happen lest the church becomes like the temple of Israel during Micah's prophetic ministry. The temple of Israel had lost its moral bearing because it was being misused by immoral men for unspiritual purposes.

Though Israel was a very religious nation the temple had failed to stave off the serious problem of social injustice. In fact Israel is so religious during Micah's life time that she could easily include in her pledge of allegiance the phrase, "One nation, under Yahweh, with Liberty and Justice for All." But Israel's social context demonstrates anything but liberty and justice for all. It is more accurate to describe it as liberty and justice for those who are rich and powerful enough to afford it.

According to Micah it is in the midst of this highly religious nation that social injustice is rushing in upon the poor and powerless like the rising flood waters of Hurricane Katrina. Poor Jews with no resources to defend themselves are being driven out of their homes and off their lands like fallen timber cut down and uprooted in the

name of progress. Micah exposes the fact that the Jewish merchants are engaging in price gouging. Corrupt trading practices and addiction to financial profit in Israel are being driven by dishonest men who cheat their customers by using false weights and rigged measurements. Shrewd merchants cheat their consumers by using fabricated reasons to hike up prices so the consumer pays more at the pump and gets less in the tank. The deceptive economic practice used by the merchants in Micah is nothing more than a sophisticated scheme of highway robbery.

The economic injustice in Israel did not develop over night. Micah says it had its treacherous beginning in Lachish, one of the largest and most influential cities in Judah. Lachish was the first city wherein political and economic corruption gained a foothold among the southern tribes of Israel. Once injustice gained a foothold in Lachish, moral contamination spread to the capital city of Jerusalem like a deadly infection. Once the sin of injustice took root among the leaders and heads of the country in the capital city, the infestation of immorality and corruption came to lodge with all its deadly force throughout the entire nation.

Micah could clearly see the devastating effect of social and economic injustice upon the nation because of his own social location in rural Israel. Micah's hometown is Moresheth, a small village in the hills about twenty five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Micah being a country prophet speaks for the poor farmers who are suffering at the hands of powerful landlords. Micah sees greedy men unmercifully dispossessing the poor. He sees corrupt leaders fearlessly standing in the way of justice like an iron gate. In chapter 2 he says the powerful lay awake at night devising wickedness. The prophet's stomach is made sick because he sees the strong exploiting the infirmities of the weak.

It is probable that the powerful men in the capital city are of the same conviction as that of Callicles an ancient Greek politician. Callicles believes that the strong has the natural right to dominate the weak. Listen carefully to Callicles' reasoning. He says, "Everyone is naturally driven by self-interest. The weaker band together and make laws and enforce conventions like "justice" in order to "terrify" the stronger sort of men, and those who are able to get the better of the weak."

Callicles states further, "Thus the many say dishonesty is shameful and unjust to keep the stronger from acquiring more power. The endeavor to have more than the many is conventionally said to be shameful and unjust and called "injustice." But nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful to have more than the weaker. Nature also shows in many ways that among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races that justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior."

It is this arrogant attitude that struts through the streets of Israel marching to the loud music of foolish pride. Arrogant pride is at the very root of social injustice. Arrogant pride says, "I don't have to respect the rights of others." Arrogant pride says, "I simply take from others whatever I want." Arrogant pride is narcissistic. It thinks the whole world revolves around its agenda. Arrogant pride is impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered, keeps record of wrongs, delights in evil and hates truth, protects itself, kills hope and always persecutes those who do not go along with it.

Micah points out another disturbing problem in Israel. While injustice has a talk show on every A.M. station in Israel the prophets and priests are noticeably quiet. The prophets and priests are afraid to speak truth because they don't want to jeopardize their ratings nor lose their sponsors. Because of the silence of the prophets and the priests the people of Israel have become like the people described in Ezekiel 16:49. Ezekiel says that the entire nation is arrogant, well fed and have no concern for the poor.

In Micah 6:1-8 Micah explains the cause of Israel's social injustice. He says that Israel is suffering from memory loss. Micah takes Israel back to the Exodus event where God shows mercy on Israel and delivers her from the despotic system of Egyptian oppression. Micah helps Israel to remember the non-oppressive leadership God appointed to the ancient Hebrews in the persons of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Micah wants Israel to see how the Mosaic legacy of humility, love and justice is being disgraced by domestic oppression of God's people by their own leaders.

Israel is advised to "remember the journey." Remember how God delivered your ancestors from oppression and injustice on the other side of the Red Sea. Remember how Balak king of Moab counseled Balaam to curse Israel but I would not let him. Remember how I protected you in the wilderness from starvation and dehydration. Remember how I gave you liberty instead of death when the British were coming. Remember how I cut the disease of slavery out of your body politic and made you one nation wholly free. Remember how I tore down the walls of segregation that contained the ugly graffiti written by the calloused hand of historical hatred. Remember how I kept you through two world wars, a great depression, the Cuban missile crisis, and 9/11. "Remember the Journey."

Like a prosecuting attorney pressing a guilty defendant God questions Israel. God questions Israel in the presence of the cosmic jury consisting of the mountains, the hills, and the foundations of the earth. God says, “What have I done to you that make you act unjustly?” Did I offend you when I delivered you from Egyptian oppression? Did I offend you by placing you in a land that flows with milk and honey? Have I spoiled you because you have been my only child for so long? Have I poured too many blessings upon you?

Israel responds by raising several important questions. 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 first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

Israel must learn that God is not pleased with our what. God wants the “who in us” and not the “what about us.” The solution to social injustice is not an upgraded worship service. Isaiah 58 dispels the notion that the practice of more worship in the assembly is the remedy for the practice of injustice in the streets. God says, “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists, you cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.”

God says further, “The fast I have chosen is to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke. It is to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked to clothe him and not turn away from your own flesh and blood.”

Let us say it again. Social injustice does not require more worship. Social injustice requires repentance, mercy and love. If we speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have no love it is only a resounding gong and a clanging cymbal. If we come before God with all our burnt offerings, with calves a year old, with a thousand rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil, offering our firstborn for our transgression, but have no love, mercy and justice it means nothing. If we come before God with our praise teams, our meticulously planned worship, our relevant sermons, our fabulous church buildings, if we have no love, mercy and justice it means nothing!

Hosea 6:6 reminds us that the Lord desires love (Hesed) and not sacrifice. Again adding contemporary things to our worship services to generate greater intensity will not substitute for the justice we are called to practice in the lives of human beings beyond our assemblies! What does the Lord require? This is a very important question..

God does not want more dead animals on the altar. He wants hearts on the altar. He wants humble and submissive hearts. He wants a humble heart that is willing to humbly walk in agreement with Him. Amos 3:3 says that two cannot walk together unless they have agreed to do so. When we walk with God we will walk like Jesus of whom God says, "I am well pleased."

When we walk humbly with God it means that we see ourselves connected to something greater and more important than our own puny egos. When we walk humbly with God it means that we are clothed with his feelings and we identify with his affections. It means that we find solidarity with his emotions. When we walk humbly with God our inner attachment with God's feelings cause us to care about the people that God cares about.

When we walk humbly with God our emotional alliance with God's emotions prevents us from acting unjustly towards other human beings. When we walk humbly with God it frees us from the rat race of self promotion, heartless competition and the desire to be number one in everything. When we walk humbly with God we desist from meeting arrogant pride with arrogant pride. As humble servants of God we are no longer enslaved to the idea of doing evil for evil, dropping bomb for bomb, firing missile for missile, and rendering attack for attack.

When we walk humbly with God we perfectly understand that evil is never conquered by the use of evil. The only power that is greater than evil is good. Walking humbly with God teaches us how to build community not around our problems. Walking humbly with God gives us the determination to never again build community around the sins of racism, sexism, terrorism. We are determined to build community around justice, mercy and love. This divine agenda frees us from having to be devilishly shrewd.

Walking humbly with God leads us to that city that sets on a hill and cannot be hidden. Our walk with God builds the church into a holy nation wherein we become the house of prayer for all nations. Walking humbly with God teaches us that he is at work in us and that he will bring his sacred work to completion by Spirit and not by carnal power.

Let us follow Him all of our days. Step by step he will lead us to that place of love, mercy and justice. Our feet might get tired, but we will keep stepping. Our courage may become dizzy, but we will keep running. Our vision of the bright lit city may grow dim, but we will keep marching until we sit in that place wherein every knee is bowed to the Christ and every tongue confesses his name. So let us walk together children and don't you get weary because there is a great camp meeting in the **Promised Land**.