



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Prophets and the Fruits of Faithfulness

Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 23:23-26; Psalm 40:6-8

Sermon by: Robert Austell

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Today we have reached sentence five of “The Old Testament in Seven Sentences.” Let me remind you of what we’ve covered so far:

1. **CREATION:** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)
2. **ABRAHAM:** All people on earth will be blessed through you. (Gen. 12:3)
3. **EXODUS:** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Exodus 20:2)
4. **DAVID:** The Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him ruler of His people. (1 Samuel 13:14)

And today we get to the prophets. The Hebrew scriptures for Jesus consisted of the Law and the Prophets, and the writings. The prophets are a significant portion of those scriptures and they play a key role in God’s story and in the story of God’s people.

In short, God raised up the prophets to remind His people of two things: that God desired faithfulness *from* them and God remained faithful *to* them. The people and the kings had not been faithful and the consequences of that disobedience, unfaithfulness, and sometimes wickedness was profound. But God would not abandon the covenant with Abraham or with David; God was (and is) faithful!

So the prophets spanned several centuries and regions in the divided kingdom of Israel/Judah and even into exile in Babylon. The messages varied, but had the consistent theme: turn back to God, who is ever faithful to His promises.

Our fifth key theme from the Old Testament comes from the prophet, Micah:

5. **PROPHETS:** *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*

Micah is describing faithfulness in some specific ways and in a specific context. I want to talk through those ways and then speak to the context, which remained applicable in Jesus' day some 700 years later and remains so today.

What does Faithfulness Look Like?

Christians sometimes like to pit faith against works, though the New Testament holds the two together as part of the same whole. Instead of the word 'works' I like to use the word faithfulness, because it makes that connection more clear. Faithfulness literally describes someone full of faith, but in English it also carries the sense of action that we sometimes leave out of faith alone. Someone who is faithful acts and behaves in a certain way. Their faith informs their actions. And that obedient action produces good fruit and blessing because it is what God desires from us.

Micah puts it this way: the Lord requires you to do justice, love kindness, and walk with God in humility. Mira did a wonderful job talking about loving kindness. It's not kindness for what we can get in return, but kindness for the sake of kindness, of blessing another person.

Justice is doing what is right for others. It is what is fair and right in the sight of God. It's easy for justice to get co-opted by politics. Too often we pick a team and let them dictate our behavior. But the believer looks first to God. Sometimes one party may get it right; sometimes the other (and sometimes neither!). It can be hard work to not just toe the party line, but ask "what does God say is right in this circumstance?" But that's the justice God desires. That's also why I believe having a class at church to discuss racial justice in light of scripture is *exactly* where we need to have that discussion, as difficult as it can be.

And that leads into Micah's third challenge: to walk humbly with God. Yielding our own opinions or political views to God requires humility. I may be wrong about something I've believed most of my life. But if God is first, I have to be willing to submit my will, my opinions, my understanding to God's Word. But what fruit and blessing can come from that act of faithfulness.

Yes, I know that doesn't answer whatever specific question you may be wrestling with. But here's what Micah says, and he is speaking on behalf of God (that's what prophets do!): do what's right, do what is compassionate, and get there by seeking God's Word in community and humility. I believe if we are diligent about THOSE things, we will discover what God would have us do.

What Does Faithfulness NOT Look Like?

Micah's context was interesting and familiar. If you read the verses right before the well-known Micah 6:8 you hear the question, "What does God want? Is it extravagant offerings, sacrifices, or worship?" And Micah says, "No, it's faithfulness." We sing a simple song sometimes that follows that theme: "Faithfulness, faithfulness, that's what I long for... that's what I need... that's what you want from me."

He would have been familiar with Psalm 40, probably a few hundred years old at the time of his writing. It also says offerings are not what the Lord desires, but doing God's will. And then in our second scripture reading from Matthew, Jesus is pretty confrontational with the scribes and Pharisees of his day... they are scrupulously following details of God's Law, even tithing on small bits of spices; but they are neglecting what Jesus calls the "weightier provisions of the Law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness." (Mt. 23:23) Sounds like Micah!

What a familiar problem! It's easy for us to make our faith about things like going to church, saying our prayers, giving to the church, or even having quiet times. And all those things can be good, but they are not the "weightier matters of faith" – faith exists to be lived out, specifically says Psalms, Micah, and Jesus, as justice, mercy, faithfulness, and humility.

It's not an either/or – it's a both/and. We need to worship and study God's Word and pray and give. Those are healthy things! But the purpose of those faith-building exercises is to then get to exercise our faith in action in the world. It's that familiar covenant theme of blessed to be a blessing. And Psalms, Micah, and Jesus (and a whole lot more) tell us that we participate in being a blessing when we show justice, mercy, compassion, and kindness.

How do we know what that looks like? We do because God has shown and done those things to us.

May God give us ears to hear!

May God give us eyes to see!

May God give us hearts to follow, in humility and faithfulness!

Amen.