

Micah 6:6-8

*What Does God Want For Christmas?*

Well, Christmas 2009 is past. Yesterday the stores were flooded with people returning all those gifts they got that really didn't want. I have a solution to that problem. I thought you might be interested in some ideas I came up with. These are gifts for that really had to please person. These are actual gifts that I found online.

The first one's actually kind of neat. It's a fridge magnet that has a usb port. You can load over 60 jpegs into the thing and they rotate through while hanging on your refrigerator.

If high tech isn't their fancy, then who couldn't resist one of these head massagers. This is an actual product I found on FindMeAGift.com. Creepy hand with no arm not included.

Then there's always the old stand by (snuggly). And if they have a pet. (pet snuggly).

They already have a dog snuggly? How about this? I bet they don't have one of these. These are Christmas lights for the bathtub. You won't have to worry about them saying, "Thanks but I already have a set of these.."

Of course there's always warm up cow socks, glow in the dark shoelaces, or a coveted deed to an acre of land on the surface of the moon. That moon deed will set you back \$16.00 but what a practical way to say, "I love you" to your honey. Much better than a Zhu Zhu pet. No batteries.

The gifts are out there. You just have to look. But have you ever thought about this one? What does God want for Christmas?

Talk about the guy who has everything! God created everything and ultimately He owns it all. The Bible says...

*Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it. (Deuteronomy 10:14)*

*Every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (Psalm 50:10-12).*

*The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:8)*

*All that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all. (1 Chronicles 29:11)*

What do you give someone who not only has everything, but who actually made everything? That's a tough question. But it's one of the most important questions God's people could ever ask.

Is there anything on God's Christmas list that He'd like from us this year? What could we give Him that would bring a smile to His face?

### **Open your Bibles to Micah chapter 6 Page 822**

Micah is one of the Old Testament Jewish prophets. His writings are in a section we call the Minor Prophets, not because their message isn't important but because their books are kind of short.

Micah has 7 brief chapters while a Major Prophet like Isaiah has 66 lengthy chapters.

Now, if your just starting to look into the Bible, maybe you didn't even know there was a book of Micah. Micah chapter 5 contains the prophecy of the location of the Messiah's birth. Verse 2 says that the eternal one would be born in Bethlehem. God would take on flesh in Bethlehem.

All the Jewish teachers knew about that prophecy. When the wise men from the East came to Herod looking for the new king Herod called a meeting.

*Matthew 2:4-6 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel."*

When I was in collage in Florida I worked on a loading dock for Alterman Freight Co. My supervisor was a young Jewish man named Hillel and we had a lot of discussions about who Jesus and what the Jewish prophets wrote about Him. But I can remember one time I said, “Micah 5:2 says Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.” And Hilly looked at me and in all seriousness and said, What’s a Micah?”

He totally didn’t know. Maybe you’re wondering, what’s a Micah?”

Micah is the name of a book of the Bible. It’s also the name of the person who wrote the book. God gave Micah a message for his generation. He wrote that message down so the people wouldn’t forget it.

Micah lived about 700 years before the birth of Christ. He was a country boy from the little town of Moresheth a few miles outside of Jerusalem. Scholars tell us that he lived about the same time as his fellow prophets Isaiah and Hosea. In fact, many think he and Isaiah were friends because parts of the books they wrote sound very similar.

Ray Pritchard writes, *A character sketch of Micah would yield the following words and phrases: blunt, direct, terse, plain-spoken, no-nonsense, a straight arrow kind of guy. He loved the common man and hated corrupt politicians. In fact, his book is basically a condemnation of religious and political leaders who use their position to take advantage of other people. Micah was a prophet of social reform.*

The days Micah lived in were a lot like ours.

There was international uncertainty. Israel was caught between three warring nations—Assyria, Egypt, and the Philistines. The greater threat came from the Assyrians who had demanded tribute money from Israel in exchange for peace. It led to a kind of voluntary national slavery.

Then there was rampant religious corruption. Again and again Micah spoke out against against Jewish priests who took bribes and then said whatever people wanted to hear. It seems like all the leaders were on the take.

Finally there was moral chaos. This follows from the first two. It was every man for himself, the rich ripping off the poor, the leaders taking bribes, and everyone cheating everyone else. The merchants couldn’t be trusted, the leaders couldn’t be trusted, and you couldn’t be sure about the members of your own family.

Micah could have been writing in 2009. In some ways the message sounds as if the prophet has been watching CNN or FOX News.

So Micah wrote to a world facing massive problems. And he especially focused on the sin and hypocrisy of God's people. He warned them that judgment was coming. He didn't pull any punches. He just laid it out plainly for anybody who'd listen.

But then, kind of dropped into this foreboding message of judgment is a beautiful passage of Scripture. It's only 3 verses long, but it's 3 of the most important verses in the Bible. It tells us exactly what God wants from us for Christmas this year.

*I. What God Does Not Want From Us*

### **Read verse 6**

Remember, God had set up a system of sacrifices and offerings for the Jewish people. There were five offering or sacrifices in the Bible. They were burnt, grain, peace, sin, and trespass.

There were different types of sacrifices used. There were oxen, sheep, and goats. There also were two birds of sacrifice - turtle-doves and young pigeons. All sacrifices were either such as were offered on the ground of communion with God (Burnt and Peace), or else as were intended to restore that communion when it had been broken by sin (Sin and trespass).

Of course anything that God commanded as an action can become just a routine event. It wasn't just the sacrifice. It was the heart of the person offering the sacrifice that mattered.

A one-year-old calf was considered the prime age for sacrifice. Maybe God will be pleased if we give him the very best that we have.

But the answer is no. **Read verse 7 through "oil"**

Well then if it's not quality he wants, then maybe it's quantity. The idea is to impress God by offering a thousand rams at a time and then creating a river of oil (which was also used in offerings) flowing through the streets. Surely that would make God happy. The idea is that an extravagant sacrifice would convince God of their sincerity.

But again, the answer is no.

Then things really get intense. *Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

From the earliest days of Israel they were surrounded by Canaanite people who practiced child sacrifice.

One of the chief deities was the god Molech. Molech had the head of a bull and the body of a man. His image was made of bronze and heated by fire. A worshipper who wanted to get a blessing from Molech placed their first born child into Moloch's hands where they were burned alive.

At times, even God's people got sucked into the perverted practices of the surrounding nations. God would later say, *And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jeremiah 32:35)*

This is an immoral suggestion. Now the people are suggesting that if they offer their firstborn sons, the Lord would be pleased and would forgive their sins.

But again the answer is no.

Hopefully this is becoming clear. Someone said this is "Let's Make a Deal" religion. "Whatever you want, Lord, we'll do it. You name the price and we'll pay it." They actually thought God would trade forgiveness for sacrifice. In essence they thought God could be bought just like their leaders!

And isn't that so typical of us. Don't we try the same thing? We say, "Lord, I'll do anything you want. You name your price. You want me to give a little more in the offering? I can do that. You want me to read my Bible more often? I can do that. How about showing up for church more often? We can arrange that. Whatever you want from me, that's what I'll do. I really mean it, Lord."

Now there's nothing wrong with giving, reading the Bible, and worshiping together with others at church. In fact, God has commanded those things of His children. Just like he commanded sacrifices and offering from the Jews.

So what's wrong? What's wrong is those responses only deal with the outside.

God wants our heart. You can be a generous giver and have a hard heart. You can rote read your Bible every day and have a rebellious heart. You can be very religious, and yet far away from God.

God rejected every offer made by the Israelites because they had completely missed the point. They wanted to make a deal and God wanted their hearts.

*I. What God Does Not Want From Us* Just external obedience.

*II. What God Does Want From Us*

### **Read verse 8**

This verse has been called the heart of Old Testament religion and the greatest verse in all the Old Testament. It sums up what God really wants from you and me. This is the kind of verse you ought to commit to memory, write out on a card, and put it in your mirror so you can look at it every day. It tells us exactly what God looks for in our life.

#### **A. Justice**

The Hebrew word is *mishpat*. It's used over 400 times in the Hebrew scriptures. Many times this word is applied to God's own character. God is just—He is absolutely righteous in all His dealings. His laws are called *mishpat*.

Biblical justice is "treating people right because you know God." In the Bible this concept is applied in some very concrete ways: caring for the poor, remembering the widows and orphans, not plowing the corners of your field so the hungry could get food, speaking the truth, paying a fair wage, having honest scales, no cheating, no extortion, and refusing to take advantage of the less fortunate.

For us at Christmas time justice certainly means doing right by those around us because we know God.

#### **B. Mercy**

This speaks of the way we treat others. The Hebrew word is *chesed*, which means "devotion" or "kindness." It's the word sometimes translated "His *mercy* endures forever." But the most common translation is "His lovingkindness." It means loving the unlovely even when they don't love you back. It speaks to our obligation to care for people who don't care for us.

Here's a simple definition of mercy: Doing unto others as God has done unto us. In just a few days 2009 will be history. Think back across the last 12 months. How has God treated you this year? Has God blessed you with His mercy and lovingkindness? Then bless others. Has God forgiven you? Then forgive others. Has God lifted you up when you were down? Then lift others up when they are down. Has God overlooked your faults? Then overlook the faults of others.

This word "mercy" is used 240 times in the Bible and 26 of those times is in one Psalm, Psalm 136. Twenty-six times we're reminded *His mercy endures forever*.

How many times have we seen some one on the side of the road with a sign that says something like "Homeless, Need Money, Please Help." They're usually standing at an intersection.

Obviously it's hard to tell which ones are for real but you know someone who is really down and out doesn't care how much money you have. What matters to them is only that you share some of it.

The people around us don't care how much love we have, only that we share it with them. How many people do we know that hold a spiritual sign that says, "Godless. Need His love and forgiveness. Please help?"

It's easy to pretend that we don't see the need or the sign. We don't have the time or the money or the solution or some other excuse.

How can we expect to point others to God when we refuse to share His love with that hurting person in our school, our Muslim coworker, our widowed neighbor? This holiday season, may God help us to show His mercy and lovingkindness to somebody who has a spiritual need.

If God has been merciful to you this year, be merciful to those around you.

### C. Humility

There's 6 or 7 Hebrew words translated by the English word "humble." This one means "modestly" or "carefully." It describes an attitude that's the opposite of pride. What is humility? It's having a right view of yourself because you have a right view of God. Humility doesn't say, "I'm useless. I'm not good for anything." That's not humility, that's self-pity, which is really another form of pride. It's being self-focused.

Pride is having too large a view of yourself because you have too small a view of God. When your God is big, you will be small, and pride will be impossible.

This is biblical humility. “God made me and I belong to him. Every thing I have in life is a gift from the Almighty. Some have more, some have less. It doesn’t matter to me. I thank God for what I have and I’m going to do the best I can with what God has given me, and I’m going to leave the outcome with him.”

If we live that way, it will save us so much trouble. We won’t have to get into some power trip at work or live in the rat-race or sell out our convictions to get ahead. We won’t get angry at the foolish comments people make. Humility allows us to enjoy who we are in Christ. And we don’t have to worry about what others think.

What does God want from you this year at Christmas? Justice ... Mercy ... Humility. If you think about it, those three words form the sum total of our Christian duty. If you have those things, God will be pleased. If you don’t, nothing else makes much difference.

That brings us back to Micah. Why didn’t God accept all their sacrifices? Why did he turn them down? Because they offered him everything except the one thing he really wanted—their hearts.

The religion that God approves is the religion of the heart! Outward religion is useless unless our heart belongs to God. He wants the real you—the person on the inside. You can fake all kinds of religious activity. You can fool everybody But the heart doesn’t lie.

What does God want from me at Christmas (and every other day of year)? Justice ... Mercy ... Humility. These are what’s inside.

This is why Jesus came. Matthew 12:18 says, *Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles. When Mary sang of Jesus birth she said, His mercy is on those who fear Him and He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.* (Luke 1:50, 52).

This is the heart of the gospel. What God requires, He first gives to us. He came to establish justice! He came to show mercy! He came to lift up the humble!

His justice requires that all sin be dealt with. God gave His law to show the whole world their guilt before Him.

**Turn to Romans chapter 3 Page 1001 Read verses 19-20**

The commandments of God are holy, just, and good but they can't get us to heaven because we can't keep them perfectly. That's why the whole world is guilty before God.

**Read verses 21-26**

How could God be just and righteous and yet forgive guilty sinners like us? He set forth His Son, Jesus, to be a propitiation by His blood. Propitiation means "atoning sacrifice."

The perfect Son of God, who entered the world that first Christmas, died for our sins. Jesus paid the price that God's justice required. The cross established God's justice.

That's why God is now free to show us His mercy.

The Bible says, *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.* (Titus 3:5)

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* (I Peter 1:3)

A just God didn't ignore our sins. He punished them in Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God floods us with His undeserved mercy. That's why we were called to be merciful. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* (Matthew 5:7).

The truth that it's not what we do for God, but what God has done for us that produces real humility in us.

*All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.* (I Peter 5:5-6)

What does God want for Christmas and every day?

*And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*

Here's three special Christmas gifts yet, amazingly, we don't have to have money to give them. We don't have to have talent to give them. Everyone of us can give them. We can bring them, neatly wrapped, & place them at the feet of Jesus Christ.

How are you fulfilling what God requires of you as a believer in Jesus Christ this Christmas season?