“Going Forward: My Plan or God’s Plan?”

Micah 6:6-8

May 18, 2014

Honoring Our Graduates

Micah 6:6-8 (Dillon)

This morning we are honoring our 2014 P-E-M High School graduates – Emma, Stacie, Hannah Burnett, Dillon, Hannah Finne, Sid, Rachel, Lida, Donovon, Marlena, Corrie, and Haley.

This is always a hard time of the year for me, but at the same time, it’s an exciting time. Hard, in that I won’t see these young people weekly at ONEighty, “22 Minutes to Impact” & “Digging Deeper into God’s Word” Bible study and just around because they will be going off to college, out into the work force, or back to Germany and the Czech Republic.

But at the same time, it’s an exciting time, because these young people are going off to college or out into the work place or back to Germany and the Czech Republic and they are going to influence and impact their campuses, workplaces, friends and family for God’s kingdom all for His glory.

This is a very special group of young people – I know many of you know this, but for those of you that haven’t gotten to know them, they are an outstanding group of young men and women. Each one of them have provided great leadership in their own unique way as God has gifted them. For myself, and I know I speak for the entire adult ONEighty leadership team, they have been a joy to serve with and to shepherd and to mentor – and this group will be greatly missed by all of us.

This morning as we dig into our Scripture passage, I titled my message; “Going Forward: My Plan or God’s Plan?”

Seniors, in one week you will have completed your high school career, and in less than two weeks you will be walking across the stage at P-E-M High School to collect your diploma. As you complete high school, you are moving from one significant stage of life on to another. This is an exciting and wonderful time in life, especially as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Did you know that you are the first and only class that Delaine and I will have the privilege of saying we were here with you throughout your entire time at ONEighty as you were all coming into 7th grade when God called us here to Trinity six years ago? We have so been blessed to “Grow Together in Christ” with each of you throughout these past years.

Now as you go forward, you will find that life will be filled with joy, sadness, wonder, challenges, miracles, highs and lows, and many blessings beyond description as you continue seeking and discovering the incredible plan God has for each of you in your life.

There is no greater joy or blessing than walking in obedience to God’s plan for your life.

But how do you know what God’s plan is for your life? Who better to ask for help in discovering that plan than God Himself? We can search the scriptures and find many passages that speak to doing the will of God. In Matthew 26:39; Jesus provides us with the ultimate example in the Garden of Gethsemane as He agonized while praying; “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.”

Jeremiah 29:11; “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give a hope and a future.” As you graduate, how can you be sure of God’s plan for each of you going forward?

A great place to begin is with our passage today – Micah 6:6-8. Look again at Micah 6:6-7; “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 olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? What we see in this passage is Israel’s focus is on their external religious rituals, and their questions to God show a progression from lesser to greater. First, they ask if God would be satisfied with burnt offerings of year-old calves (Micah 6:6b), offerings required in the Law of Moses. Second, they ask if they should bring “thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil” (Micah 6:7a). This is an overstatement – an exaggeration; such an offering could only be made by someone extremely wealthy or by the larger community of God’s people pooling there resources. Third, they ask whether they should offer their firstborn sons as a sacrifice to God for their sin.

Would that be enough to cover their sin? Would God be pleased with them then?

But the answer to Israel’s sin problem was not more numerous or more painful sacrifices. The answer was something much deeper than any religious observance: they needed a change of heart. Without the change of heart, Israel’s conformity to the Law was nothing more than hypocrisy.
Isaiah communicated a similar message in Isaiah 1:11-14: “The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.”

Amos 5:21: “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.”

In other words, Israel should already have known the answer to their questions. God isn’t impressed with the external appearances of religiosity–God desires a heart that is after His heart.

Look again at Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Just as Israel’s rhetorical questions had a three-part progression, the answer God provides in verse 8 contains a similar three-part progression in the response of a godly heart.

First, there is outward response – “To act justly” or to do justice.

Second, there is an inward response – “To love mercy”.

Third, we see an upward response – “To walk humbly with your God”.

What does it mean “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” to each of you as you graduate next week?

1) “To Act Justly”

What does it mean “To Act justly”?

“To Act justly” would have been understood by Micah’s audience as living with a sense of right and wrong. In particular, the judicial courts had a responsibility to provide equity and protect the innocent.

Micah 2:1-2: “Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning’s light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance.”

Micah 6:11: “Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?”

Injustice was a problem in Israel during this time.

“To act justly” means that you are to do the right thing.

You and I have been created for one purpose – to bring God honor and glory in all that we do.

“To act justly” means you desire to live your life in a way that glorifies our Father in heaven.

“To act justly” means treating others with respect, being fair and not taking advantage of others.

“To act justly” implies that a decision has been made – That you are being intentional to bring honor and glory to God through your actions and decisions in your life. This includes your thoughts and attitudes.

1 John 1:5-7: “This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But is we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Light represents what is pure, true, holy, and good. God is Light!

Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. Satan, the ruler of this world is darkness.

2 Corinthians 6:14b: “what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

The more you get to know God, His character, and His Word; the more you know His truth and you see that God is light. As we learn the truths of God’s Word, we see they are 180 opposite from the teaching of this world.

What is missing in our world today is honesty, fairness, faithfulness, and humility.

The world tells us success and happiness are only found in the things of this world, such as high paying jobs, big bank accounts, big houses, expensive cars, and lot of wealth. Now there is nothing wrong with having high paying jobs, big houses, and a lot wealth, but that isn’t what brings joy and happiness. The truth of God’s Word tells us there is a difference between happiness and joy. True joy is only found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. No matter what your personal situation or circumstance is, no matter what your financial status is, you can have peace and joy because you are not trusting in the state of the economy or how well the stock market is doing, or how big your bank account is; your total sufficiency is found in Jesus Christ.

That seniors; is where you will find true success and unending joy. So seniors, I ask you this morning – what’s it going to be “Going Forward: My plan or God’s plan? Are you committed to pursuing God’s plan for your life and doing the things God has taught you through His Word? Not compromising, but standing firm on the steadfast foundation of Jesus Christ that has been initiated and begun to be established in your life.
“To act justly” – means treating others with respect – Loving others as Christ loves!
I can guarantee you if that is indeed the case, you will stand out. You will not be blending into the world. There will be definitely something distinctly different about you. – That is a good trait to be known by. What is missing in our society today is honesty, fairness, faithfulness, and humility.

“To act justly” – means that your walk matches your talk – that your “yes” is “yes” and your “no” is “no.”
“To act justly” - means that you live the same in the dark as you do in the light. 
“To act justly” requires an ongoing commitment to doing the right thing no matter what the consequence.
You may be ridiculed, you may be persecuted. In fact, I know of a young man who lost his job because he refused to give in to an unethical business practice the owner commanded of him as an employee. Prior to losing his job, the boss made life very miserable for him. Still, he had committed to do what was right and “act justly” and God was honored and glorified through his actions. I am totally convinced that this young man, even though he was unemployed was receiving God’s blessings for his obedience in doing what was right. I don’t know what the extent of the blessing will ultimately look like, but I do know he has peace that goes beyond all understanding and he could sleep at night knowing his action brought honor and glory to God. That he was a man of integrity.
And what does the Lord require of you?
According to Micah 6:8; Not only are you “to act justly”; you are “to love mercy”.

2) “To love mercy”
What does “to love mercy” look like?
“To love mercy” contains the Hebrew word hessed, which means “loyal love” or “loving-kindness.”
Hessed is one of the richest, most powerful words in the Old Testament. It reflects the “loyal love” that people who are committed to God should have for one another. Love is an action; something we do, not just something we feel.

Along with “to act justly”, Israel was “to love mercy”. When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisee in Matthew 22:36-40: Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied; “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
“To love mercy” is loving our neighbor as our self.
God calls you and I to demonstrate toward others the same kind of love we want for ourselves. It’s responding to the needs of others when God bring them into your path.
James 2:15-16: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?
“To love mercy” requires action. Being the hands and feet of Jesus. Showing a world full of darkness the light of Christ. God calls you and I to give the same measure of care for the welfare of others as we do for ourselves. Both justice and mercy are foundational to God’s character.
Psalm 89:14; “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.”
God expected His people to show love to their fellow man and to be loyal in their love toward Him, just as He had been loyal to them.
To “love mercy” means extending forgiveness to others as God has forgiven us through Jesus’ death on the cross.
To “love mercy” is not holding grudges and growing bitter.
Hebrew 12:15: “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
Who suffers when bitterness takes over? The one who is bitter is the one who suffers. Many times the one who you are holding a grudge against isn’t even aware, much less affected. That is why God commands for you to “love mercy.” It is for your own good.

We live in a society that teaches us to look out for number one. The message you will hear from this world is your self-worth is measured by your individualized accomplishments. Have you gone down to Barnes & Noble lately? Look at all the shelves of self-help books available for building one’s self-worth and self-esteem. And if you can’t find enough of them there, just go to the internet. The list goes on & on & on. Looking out for the needs of others first is a foreign concept.
But listen to God’s Word in Romans 12:9-10: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

So seniors, what’s it going to be? “Going forward, my plan or God’s plan?”
And what does the Lord required of you? According to Micah 6:8, Not only are you “to act justly & to love mercy”; you are “to walk humbly with Your God.”
3) “To walk humbly with your God”

“To walk humbly with your God” requires movement, action and initiative on your part. “To walk humbly with your God” requires submission to God’s plan and His leading for your life. “To walk humbly” is a description of the heart’s attitude toward God. God’s people depend on Him rather than their own abilities. “To walk humbly” means we don’t fight for our way, but instead we are following God’s way.

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6b

Instead of taking pride in what we bring to God, we humbly recognize that no amount of personal sacrifice can replace a heart committed to justice and love. “To walk humbly” means dying to self and your independent desires and seeking God and His plan for you.

Listen to God’s Word in Psalm 32:8-9: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.”

God longs to guide you with His great love and wisdom. Proverbs 16:9; “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.”

God’s plan for you is always best and He promises to teach you and show you the best way to go. You need only to follow Him and His plan for your life by seeking Him through His Word and in prayer.

“To walk humbly with your God” means serving others. In the modern church today, 20% of the people do 80% of the service. Why? Because many have little or no desire to serve others. The sad fact is they are only looking to be served. We live in a “me first” society with a growing sense of entitlement and a diminishing desire to serve. That is why as followers of Jesus Christ, if we are to be more Christ-like, we will serve others as He served.

John 13:12-15: “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Jesus provided you and me the ultimate example of serving – look at Philippians 2:3-8;

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of the others. Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus teaches us to serve with humility and love. That seniors; is a picture of what it looks like “To walk humbly with your God”.

So again I will this same question one last time: “Going forward, my plan or God’s plan?”

God has a magnificent plan for each of you as you go out from here. May your charge be the same as that of God’s command found in Micah 6:8 “To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Class of 2014 – You have touched Delaine and my lives in greater ways than you will ever realize. We love you all and we praise Jesus for the blessing you have been to us! My charge to each of you is to continue pursuing Jesus with an unrelentless pursuit! Don’t ever stop seeking Him!

God is faithful and He promises in Jeremiah 29:13-14a; “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD.”

There is no greater joy or blessing than walking in obedience to God’s plan for your life.

Amen. Amen!

Congratulations to all of you in the Class of 2014!

Let us pray.