

Act. Love. Walk

MICAH 6:8

ACT.LOVE.WALK: Know Jesus

Large Group Talk 4

Objective: This is the fourth lesson in this series, and it directly connects the words and life of Jesus to the prophetic command in Micah 6:8 to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Jesus is the perfect model of Micah 6:8, but more than that, he's the one who enables us to follow through on those commands by transforming us from the inside out.

Introduction

Say Something Like: *There are three commands found in Micah 6:8: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. We've looked at each aspect of this challenging verse and what it means for us. Micah said this to the Israelites, and they wrote it down as part of the Old Testament. Fast-forward over 500 years. It turns out, these simple commands were still important when Jesus was talking to a group of religious folks about 2,000 years ago. Check this out, and see if you can hear Micah 6:8 in these words from Jesus:*

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (Matt. 23:23-24).

Now, you're probably not raiding your kitchen spice rack in order to toss mint and dill into an offering plate at church. So why is Jesus talking about spices? And blind people? And bugs? And camels?! We can't simply ignore this teaching because it's difficult to understand—we have to take the words of Jesus seriously, and dive deeper into what it means to follow God's direction in our own time and communities. So let's listen to Jesus and learn what he really means when he talks about justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Say Something Like: *This seems totally obvious, but which would you be more likely to notice in your soup, a tiny gnat or a giant camel? Yet Jesus used this metaphor to describe the Pharisees' upside-down priorities. They cared more about the tiny, unimportant specifics of their cultural laws than they did about the basics of what God wanted for them. They thought they knew the way to God, but they were blinded by their own pride and need to look good to see that God was right in front of them in Jesus.*

Teaching: Know Jesus

1. Enter Jesus

Ask: What motivates you to do the things you love? How do you motivate yourself to do things you don't enjoy?

Say Something Like: *If you need to look for an example of how to practice Micah 6:8, the best possible person to imitate is Jesus. He acted with justice and righteousness toward others. He showed mercy and grace to the broken and outcast. He constantly sought out God and talked with him. He was a humble servant who washed his own disciples' dirty feet.*

When Jesus showed up in the world, he didn't just wait around for 30-something years in order to get on a cross, die, and come back to life. He also lived a full and sinless human life. Sometimes we focus so much on the importance of Jesus' death that we miss out on the importance of his life. He was God, sure. But he was also a human being, just like you and me. He ate food, he took naps, he hung out with his friends, and he attended worship services and weddings and parties. Even though he taught amazing truths about God and did incredible miracles, in many ways, he was an ordinary man who did a lot of the same things that we do. That's probably why the Pharisees missed God right in their midst—they were looking for a powerful warrior king to save them from Roman rule, someone majestic and attractive who would recognize their religious greatness. But Jesus didn't do that. Instead, he called them hypocrites.

Let's be honest—we are all hypocrites in some way. No matter how hard we try, we can never be fully honest or authentic or consistent. We all wear masks. But when you look at Jesus, what you see is what you get. And what you get is God. Jesus is no hypocrite. He doesn't wear a mask. He is the perfect image of God.

2. Matters of the Heart

Say Something Like: *So what did this hypocrisy look like for the Pharisees? Well, Jesus acknowledged that they did some things well, particularly one thing: they tithed. They gave of their own resources to help support others. Jesus pointed out a list of expensive spices they gave as a tithe. They were doing all the right things on the outside, but their hearts—their motives, desires, and affections—were not set on God. Tithing was supposed to be a way to help people that God loved, but they tithed to look religious. God wanted their tithe to be a about worshiping him, not themselves. They were doing good religious acts more for their own purposes than for God's purposes.*

Jesus does care about our outer actions and decisions. He spoke often about serving the people who needed it most and obeying God's laws from the Old Testament. Yet he was more interested in a person's heart, like their internal motives and thoughts and desires. It turns out that when God transforms people's hearts on the inside, they will also be transformed on the outside. Following Jesus is not about checking good religious things off a list—going to

church, reading the Bible, praying before meals, and other things. Those are all great things, but they should begin with our hearts being changed and tilted in the direction of God. It's all too easy to do those things because we want to look good, not because our hearts are in it.

3. The Gospel

Say Something Like: *No matter how hard we try on our own, even if we do all the right religious stuff, we cannot change or transform our own hearts. We need someone from the outside to save our internal lives.*

Our own hearts are also dying because of the disease of sin. We cannot act justly, love mercy, or walk humbly with God by our own efforts and strength. We aren't capable of being good for any great length of time just by trying really, really hard. Even the good things we do from our own efforts tend to be for selfish reasons (for example, to impress someone or to feel good about ourselves).

We need someone else to save us, to transform us from the inside out. We need a spiritual heart transplant. This is exactly what Jesus did on the Cross. He acted justly when he took the sin of humanity on himself and paid the penalty for us all. He showed incredible mercy when he forgave the very people who killed him, and forgives you and me when we repent and turn to him for grace. He walked humbly and obediently with God—to the point of death on a cross. Then he was raised from the dead in order to bring life to those who believe and follow him. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we can see Micah 6:8 lived out perfectly.

Putting it all together:

Say Something Like: *It turns out that when we put our faith in Jesus and invite him to transform our hearts, we'll be prompted and empowered by the Spirit to start acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly. But we cannot do it on our own. We need to take off our masks of hypocrisy. We need a heart transplant. We need a savior—Jesus—who frees us to love and serve others in this world.*

[**Speaker note:** The following questions will be discussed deeper in the small group lesson]

Question 1: What are the masks of hypocrisy that you're living behind?

Question 2: Which of these three commands in Micah 6:8—act justly, love mercy, walk humbly—needs to grow the most in your own life? Why?

Looking Forward: As this event comes to a close, please take the time to pray a special prayer for people who are far from God. Challenge your students to look for opportunities to present the gospel. Remind them that the next small group

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session will be the last. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.