

Walk Humbly With Your God

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a four-week series

June 18, 2017

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Micah 6:8 (NIV, NRSV)

⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To do justice, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 (CEB)

²²Then Samuel replied,
“Does the LORD want entirely burned offerings and sacrifices
as much as obedience to the LORD?
Listen to this:
obeying is better than sacrificing,
paying attention is better than fat from rams,
²³because rebellion is as bad as the sin of divination;
arrogance is like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected what the LORD said,
he has rejected you as king.”

Matthew 7:13–14, 24–28 (CEB)

¹³“Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. ¹⁴But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

²⁴“Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. ²⁶But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

Which will it be? Walking arrogantly on our own path or walking humbly with God?

Two paths. Two ways ahead. Every day we stand at a crossroads and must choose which path we will. One path is our own way, relying on our education, experience, and judgment to make better decisions as we proceed ahead. The other path? That is God’s way, and on that path, we strive to rely on God’s guidance.

Which path will we take? Which path do we take? That question is at the heart of what it means to “walk humbly with God.” The word “humble” can throw us off track. It can sound as if it is all about striving to remain modest and unassuming, self-effacing and unpretentious. But that isn’t really what the phrase is about. The Hebrew translated “humbly” might be better rendered as “wisely” or even “obediently” in this case, for that is the sense of the phrase. The key word is “walk,” which has a long and rich usage in Scripture as a metaphor of our life with God. James Limburg drives this point home:

This expression stresses the theological dimension of the sort of life God wants. The word translated “humbly” has more the sense of “circumspectly, carefully,” than humility (cf. NEB, “wisely”). The important word is “walk,” which is used to describe the whole orientation of one’s life in 4:2 and 4:5; it has the same sense in 6:16. In Judaism the word for ethics is *halacha* which means “walking”; the idea is that the task of ethics is to describe how one ought to walk one’s day-by-day life. This call to “walk” is similar to the call of Jesus, whose most characteristic invitation was not “believe” but rather “walk” or “Follow me.” One who so walks with God will not be exempt from the dark places of life. That person does have the assurance though that this walk is not taken alone: “Even though I walk through

the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me ..." (Ps. 23:4).¹

To "walk humbly with God" is to follow the path of obedience, to not only trust God but to obey him, to learn that true wisdom begins and ends with God. It is to build our lives on a foundation of bedrock, as in Jesus' parable. As Jesus put it, the one who puts into practice God's teachings is building on rock, the one who does not is building on sand. A different metaphor, but the same choice. My way or God's way?

Thus, the use of "humble" in 6:8 makes sense. It is arrogant of us to think that our way could be better than God's way, to think that we know better . . . as the first king of Israel did.

A king who took his own path

When the twelve Israelite tribes conquered and settled in Canaan, they were not ruled by kings. Instead the Lord God was their king and they were led by men and women called judges. Samson, Gideon, and Deborah were a few of these leaders.

Things did not go well in the time of the judges. The people drifted further and further from God. They even began to clamor for a human king, so they could be just like all their neighbors. The last of the judges, a prophet named Samuel, confronted them about their desire for kings. Kings are *takers*, he warned. Kings *take* sons for their armies and daughters for their beds. Kings *take* the best of the fields and the vineyards. Kings *take* property. *Take, take, take* (1 Samuel 8).² But the people didn't listen; they persisted and God relented, granting their wish.

So God found a king for his people. His name was Saul and he certainly looked the part, as if he had come straight from central casting. But despite Samuel's anointing of Saul as the first king of a united Israel, Saul proved to be a disappointment. He might have looked like God's king, but he showed himself to be disobedient to God, figuring that, as king, he knew better. And so, "The Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Sam. 15:35).

Saul's mistake seems understandable. God had said that Saul was to take no plunder when he defeated the Amalekites. But Saul thought he knew better and he chose to follow his own counsel rather than God's. He kept some of the livestock and even claimed that he was doing so to make proper sacrifices to God for the victory.

Look at Samuel's reply to Saul (printed at the top of the study). Not surprisingly, it sounds just like Micah: "Obeying is better than sacrifice, paying attention better than the fattened ram." Saul's problem is that he is "arrogant" (v. 23). He has insisted on walking his own arrogant path, rather than walking humbly with God. He simply thinks he knows better. But this was never supposed to be the way for Israel:

Israel must "walk humbly with God." Adam, Noah, Abraham, and others had "walked with God" (cf. Gen. 3:8; 6:9), and God had walked with all his people in the Exodus. He had shown himself watchful and attentive to the needs of the people, listening to the cries of their heart. The people must listen to the heart of God and his desire for mercy and compassion for those in need. God does not want the people simply to come to him but actually to walk with him, seeing things through his own eyes and behaving towards the poor in the same saving manner as he had done in their history. Humility is a virtue required in walking with God, in being faithful and attentive servants of the Lord (cf. Ps. 123:2). The people must pay attention primarily to the interests of God and to the interests of the poor. This

¹ Limburg, J. (1988). *Hosea-Micah* (pp. 192-193). Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

²This theme of kings as takers is one to keep in mind as we move through the stories of David. Nathan, Samuel's successor as prophet to the king, would accuse David of this very charge. In the end, the people of God could count on one hand the number of good kings they had over a period stretching four centuries! Of course, good didn't mean a capable military leader or a competent administrator, but a king who would lead the people back toward God.

humility is in direct opposition to the pride and presumption that drives persons to be self-centered and closed to everyone else.³

Here, in this story of Saul and Samuel, we can see why walking with God is about humility. It is about knowing that God is God and that we are not. It is about acknowledging that we must always strive to follow God. I'm often asked my opinion about what is happening to our body politic, our culture, our societal norms and expectations. My answer is always the same. Collectively, we are arrogantly relying our judgment rather than humbly striving to hear and heed God.

Jesus and the two ways.

In verses 13 & 14 of today's passage from Matthew, Jesus, like Samuel and Micah, calls upon an old Jewish tradition that contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked; i.e., those who follow God's instructions with those who do not. Jesus knows that the path of discipleship is not always an easy one. Taking up a cross never is. He knows that the world will be calling his disciples away from their master. We shouldn't read these verses as they too often are – as some ratio of the "saved" (the few) to the "unsaved" (the many). Jesus is not talking about doctrinal correctness, he is talking about obedience, an obedience that flows out of our humble trust in God. Remember, the entire Sermon on the Mount is like a "training session" for his disciples. Jesus reminds them that without obedience, his teachings become no more than an impossible ideal rather than a portrait of life in the kingdom of God.

After setting out the "two ways" in verses 13 & 14, Jesus then talks about those who will try to pull his disciples off the path of righteousness – those wolves in sheep's clothing. He goes on to remind them that empty words, even words like "Lord, Lord" don't cut it. It is about the doing. We are to understand God's will and do it . . . *just do it!*

Finally, in closing, Jesus tells a parable about a wise man and a fool. Jesus and his disciples live in an arid region that didn't get a lot of rain. There were many large *wadis* (when I lived in Phoenix we called them washes) that would be dry most of the time, but would become rivers of fast-flowing water when torrential rains came. As compared with some of Jesus' parables, there is nothing unclear or ambiguous about this one. The wise man is the one who hears Jesus' words and "acts on them." He has built his house in the *wadi* on a foundation of rock. His house stands when the storms come. The fool is the man who hears Jesus' words and "does not act on them." He has built a house in a *wadi* and placed it on a foundation of sand. Little wonder that the fool is washed away in the first storm! On which foundation will we build?

Or to go back to the path metaphor, which will we choose. Our way, which we arrogantly assume is the best that can be done. Or God's way, which we freely, joyfully, and humbly walk, hand in hand with the one who made us and loves us.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Micah tells us that we are walk humbly with God. Most directly, this speaks of walking wisely with God, and that inevitably takes us to a word that falls hard on our ears: Obedience. Begin by making a list of your own thoughts about obedience. What words come to mind? Do you find yourself wanting to start making a list of rules? Many people want to make the Bible into just that . . . but it is not a book of rules or a book of right behavior.
2. Knowing which moral choices God would wish us to make is often not straightforward. Even the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of do's and don'ts. Instead, Jesus points us toward what Dallas Willard calls the "habits of goodness." Jesus is training us in the curriculum of Christlikeness. What do you think Willard

³ Alfaro, J. I. (1989). *Justice and loyalty: a commentary on the Book of Micah* (p. 69). Grand Rapids; Edinburgh: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Handsel Press.

means by habits of goodness? What are some examples of such habits? How do we develop such habits?

3. Do you think we really accept that we must choose God's path rather than our own? Can't they just peacefully coexist? If not, why not? What, if anything, threatens every step we take without God?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: Walking the path of wisdom and obedience

Monday, Matthew 4:23 – 7:28 The entire Sermon on the Mount. Please read it in one sitting. We'll do this once a week during this series!

Tuesday, Matthew 7:12-28 The extended passage from Matthew on obedience and those who would lead us down the wrong path.

Wednesday, Mark 8:34 – 9:1 The cost of following Jesus. He has his cross; we have ours.

Thursday, Galatians 6:1-10 Bearing one another's burdens -- and additional advice

Friday, James 1 James, Jesus' half-brother, writes about practical discipleship – love as action and obedience to the word.

Saturday, 1 John 2:1-11 John writes about obedience to Jesus

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Kings of Israel*

Coming in October, 2018: A cruise to Israel with Scott & Patti

For more information, go to www.scottengle.org