

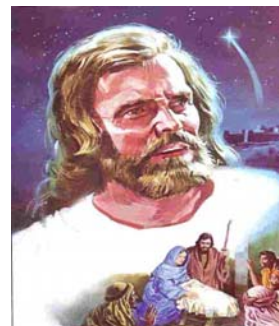
Three Christmas Gifts to God

Micah 6:6-8

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This morning we are going to be looking at a very interesting passage of scripture found in the Old Testament. In it, the prophet Micah is asking a question, "**Just what is it that God really wants from us? What should we be offering to God?**"

There is an old story of a young boy who saw the 3 wise men coming to worship the baby Jesus. He watched in wide-eyed wonder as they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.



Oh, how much he wanted to worship the baby, too. But he had nothing to give, no gift worthy of the little king. His eyes filled with tears as he turned and began to walk away. But just then an angel appeared to him, saying, "**Give what is dearest to your heart.**" The boy thought for a moment, & then following the angel's advice, laid a faded blue bag alongside the gifts of the wise men.

Inside his bag was (1) a butterfly preserved in candle wax, (2) a forked stick used for a slingshot, (3) a ragged rope to help climb high trees, and (4) a seashell that, when held to the ear, echoed the roar of the sea. He gave what was dearest to his heart, and thus was privileged to stand in the presence of the king.

There is an old proverb which says, "**The only gift worth giving is yourself.**" Maybe Paul said it best when he said, "**Present your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . to God.**" (Romans 12:1)

This is the season to give, isn't it? A time of generosity, a time when we often spend more than we can really afford.

But it seems that the custom of giving gifts to Jesus, established by the wise men, has changed. Now we don't bring gifts so much to Jesus as we do to one another. We think about it. We agonize over it. We spend. We sacrifice. We endure almost any inconvenience in order to buy gifts for others.

I wonder this morning what it would be like if, for just one Christmas, we would make a covenant to spend just as much time & energy, be willing to endure any sacrifice, spend just as much money - to make a gift to Jesus?

Micah must have been going through that same kind of dilemma in the scripture that is before us. Listen to his words.

"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 oil**? Shall I offer my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

"He has showed you, O man, 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 (Micah 6:6-8).**

"What shall I bring to the Lord?" Micah asks. **It is sort of like a Christmas list. (1)** "calves a year old," **(2)** "thousands of rams," **(3)** "rivers of oil?"

But then the answer comes back, "No, God doesn't want any of these things. **The gifts God wants are 3 in number.** He wants you **(1) to act justly.** He wants you **(2) to love mercy.** He wants you **(3) to walk humbly with your God.**"

I wonder what Christmas would be like if all of us would wrap up those 3 gifts, place them under the tree, & present them to our Lord? Let's think about that for a moment.

I. JUSTICE. Is the first gift.

Justice. There is so little justice in our world. Almost everything seems to be unfair. The rich get richer & the poor get poorer. The bad seem to succeed, while the good seem to fail. Everything seems to be topsy-turvy. **It is hard to determine what justice really is.**

For years we have heard the **old joke**, "Steal \$10, and go to jail. Steal a million dollars and be elected to congress."

I don't think that I'll ever be able to understand the justice of what happened out in California a number of years ago. A man abducted a young girl, attacked her, then chopped off her arms and dumped her by the roadside to die. But she lived and identified him and he was sent to prison. The only remorse that he has ever shown was remorse over the fact that she didn't die, and thus was able to identify him. He spent only 8 years in prison before they released him. And the public wouldn't even have known that he was loose again, if it hadn't been for some friends of the victim who protested the injustice of it all.

Juries deliberate for hours, even weeks, and sometimes we wonder how in the world they reached the verdict that they did.

A few years ago the gory details of an ax murder in McKinney, TX, were aired on TV and radio and published in the newspapers. A woman who went to her lover's house to confront his wife, admitted that she took an ax with her and struck the wife 50 times with it. She was released scot-free. The jury said that she was "simply defending herself." 50 times? Just defending herself? In my mind that doesn't register as justice at all.

Or how about the automobile accident in which a father and 3 children were killed? A woman was driving way over the speed limit. She ran a red light and crashed broadside into another car, killing the father and his 3 children instantly. But the woman driving above the speed limit, running the red light, wasn't even hurt. Somehow that doesn't seem fair, does it?

There is so much in this world that doesn't seem fair.

I wonder what it would be like if we who are a part of the church would wrap up a little gift called "**justice**" and bring it to the manger of Christ?

"Lord, we don't care what else the world may do, but we, as your people, will be fair with one another. We'll be fair in our play. We promise not to cheat. We promise always to be just with our fellow man."

"We promise to be fair in our businesses. We promise to handle the tools of our trade as reverently as we handle the communion cup upon the Lord's Day. We promise that we will not cheat our customers. We'll always be honest in the things we tell them. We'll always be fair and just in the things we do."

"We promise to be fair with people who have a different color of skin. We'll never talk unjustly about them. We promise that we won't gossip, we won't complain, we'll not argue or fight with one another. We'll always be fair!" **What would it be like if God's people would do that?**

I wonder what it would be like this year if we would wrap up the gift of justice, & bring it to the baby Jesus?

II. KINDNESS. The second gift.

God told Micah "**to love mercy, to love kindness.**" The Bible says **1 Cor. 13:4, "Love is patient and it is kind."** It is hard to find kindness today. So many people are unkind.

Perhaps you have heard the story about the woman who never swore, but caused everyone around her to swear. We have all known people like that.

The result of unkindness is rejection. Have you ever been treated unkindly? Have you ever had that sinking feeling inside, when you feel that people don't really care about you and that you are being rejected by them?

Think about the lepers in N. T. times. Wherever they went, they had to announce their coming by shouting "**Unclean, unclean!**" How they must have felt when people looked at them, and turned and ran away from them, afraid to touch them, not even wanting to be in their presence. They were not even welcome in their own homes, or among their family members.

Yet, when they came to Jesus, He didn't turn and run. He reached out and touched them and healed them! He treated them with kindness, and the result was healing.

What about the woman that Jesus met at Jacob's well? How many husbands had she had? Was it 5? And the man she was living with now was not her husband. She was branded by the whole community as immoral - a prostitute. **(John 4:18)**

When she walked down the street they must have snickered and hurled insulting remarks. They must have been so unkind to her that she was even afraid to come to the well in the morning or in the evening when everyone else came. Instead, she came in the heat of noontime to draw her water. And it was then that she found Jesus.

What if Jesus had been unkind? What if Jesus had said, "I want nothing to do with you, you immoral woman?"

But He didn't. Rather, He spoke to her in such a way that that woman ran back to **Sychar** and told the people to come and meet a man who had told her everything she had ever done - **a man who had treated her with kindness.**

Kindness is a good gift to bring at Christmas time. Would you make a covenant with me this Christmas to give the **gift of kindness**? Can we promise that we will try to be kinder to one another? That we will be more patient as we go around our city? That we will reflect the true spirit of Christ and show the world that He has made a difference and a change in our lives?

I think that the gift of kindness would be a wonderful gift to bring at Christmas time.

III. TO WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD. The third gift.

The Lord told Micah that He wanted one more gift - that we would "**walk humbly with our God.**" Jesus came into a world not greatly impressed with humility. He came into a world influenced by Greek culture and art.

People were arrogant and proud. They thought that if you were in vogue you would have a number of slaves and live among the aristocracy. You would wear lots of jewelry and flash that among the common people.

He came into a world greatly impressed with "**Power.**" Roman soldiers rode on prancing stallions, with plumes in their helmets - spears and shields in place - giving orders. And people quickly responded to their orders.

Into that kind of world Jesus came, riding not on a prancing stallion but seated upon the foal of a donkey. He came with no great possessions, no fancy jewels, no material wealth, and the world was unimpressed! It rejected Him. It mocked Him, and it crucified Him!

Almost 2,000 years have passed since then. Are we any different than the Greeks and the Romans? Now we are impressed with brand names. We still want to wear just the right necktie or jeans or jacket - drive the right automobile - and live in the right neighborhood.

Yet, to Micah, the Lord said, "**Walk humbly with thy God.**"

Three 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 here can give them. We can bring them, neatly wrapped, and place them at the feet of Jesus.

I suggest that when we do, it may very well be the best Christmas that we have ever had.

The Three Christmas Gifts that God wants:

Justice	Gold
Kindness	Frankincense
Humility	Myrrh.