

Micah 6:6-8
“Simples”

I find languages fascinating. And I find accents fascinating, too - though it's difficult to notice those differences and variations within foreign languages.

A couple of years ago, when our French friends Erick and Delphine had their first experience of that strange expression of Britishness, the **pantomime** - courtesy of Greg and his Illogan troupe of players - they were really thrown not just by the strange humour, but also the strange accents. The one that threw them most was by one of our locals trying to do a **French accent** - I think the character was supposed to be some French king, perhaps Louis Quatorze?

And it's strange how people can pick up accents without realising it. I can remember a potentially embarrassing moment many years ago when a friend of Jenny's rang up. Annette had a very strong Dudley accent, so what I heard was along the lines of *Hello Pete, It's Annette, Is Jen there?* And without thinking - and honestly without any intention to mock - I picked up on (at least my interpretation of) her accent when I started to answer: *Hold on just a minute, I'll ...* (and then I noticed what I was doing, and reverted back carefully) ... go and ask her to come to the phone.

Annette has never mentioned it, to this day. I feel as if I had **mentioned the war once** ... and got away with it.

In more recent years, it has been easy to develop a rather generic Russian or eastern European accent, since the start of a particular price-comparison website advertising campaign. Boosting **CompareTheMarket** from the 16th to the 4th most visited such website, the **meerkats** arrived.

It's actually quite difficult for me to not slip into mock-Russian as I talk about this. But you can finally see where I'm going with this introduction - the meerkats' catchphrase: **Simples!** To me that is a superb example of effective advertising. It is slightly quirky. Which helps it to stick in the memory. The way the advertising campaign started was to “complain” that an obviously spoof website - comparethemeerkat.com - was being confused with the site they really want you to visit: comparethemarket.com. Getting that website URL into your memories, for next time you want to access a price comparison site.

And of course, it appeals to an almost universal desire these days, when we have had decades of complex **high-tech gadgets** and **self-assembly furniture** and **forms to fill in** ... oh, at last, something **Simples!** ... even in mock-Russian, oh, the obvious relief.

Don't we have an instinctive desire for simplicity? Thinking particularly this **Mothers' Day**, when we consider the role of the modern Mum ... quite possibly holding down her own **job**, likely major contributor to the **housework**, main **shopper**, provider of unpaid **taxi** services, and, this last year, **home-schooler** ... oh for something to make this all *simpler!* Oh for just a moment of **calm** and rest!

And Jenny and I both remember those days when our own kids were young, and were **crying** ... only we couldn't work out what for. Were they hot or cold or hungry or scared, or ill, or impaled with a nappy pin? We just couldn't tell. It would have been so much simpler, we used to say to each other, if they had little flags that just stuck out from their heads - like those old **car indicators** - telling us what the problem was. But nope, we looked, and we never found them.

Mind you, we've also looked for the **on-off switch** ... or even a just a **mute button** would do ... but never found them, either.

That cry for something to be **Simple(s!)**, though, is something we can all identify with, isn't it? It can certainly apply in religion, too. That short passage we read together not long ago is one that I've heard people use to push that point. At first sight it does seem to support a much simpler approach.

Let's not worry about all that religious ceremonial stuff, for starters!

"Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?"

(Micah 6:6-7)

Is God going to be pleased with the multiplication of meetings and services and rituals? It really is quite a relief to think that more *isn't* necessarily better ... or else, where would we stop? If you can do two meetings on a Sunday, why not three? If you have 30-minute sermons, why not 45? If you get up at 6.30 every morning to pray, why not start at 6.00 and get an extra half hour in? Or even earlier ...!

No, that is quite an honest relief. Following Jesus *isn't* first and foremost about putting in the necessary hours ... which is, anyway, a number that our unsatisfied consciences will always insist could be ... *should* be ... ramped up, over the years ... just to be on the safe side.

We are quite right. There must be something a whole lot **Simpler** than that.

Though the argument takes it further, and onto dodgier territory. For there is all that insistence about *sin* in church, it seems. Is that really so necessary, too? You could twist the next line to agree with that sentiment.

"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

(Micah 6:7)

Is this sin thing really so serious, that we should do what some of those neighbouring tribes used to do, sacrifice their firstborn sons to try to appease their so-called gods? That can't be right, can it? Implication ... we perhaps hope ... what

those religious people have been calling “sin” can’t really be *that* bad, can it? Isn’t it all just hyped up, to keep people scared and compliant? It can’t be all convoluted and manipulative as that, can it? Things have to be **Simpler** than that, surely, to be true and good and right?

And then, it seems to say, Yes, there’s really not all *that* much to do. It *does* all appear to be far simpler than it sometimes appears.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:8)

You know, the way I’ve heard it told, this all really comes down to just being generally nice.

You keep within the law - “do justice”.

You smile when you hear of good deeds being done - “love kindness”. You might even occasionally stretch to that as well, if it’s convenient.

Oh, and you and God sort of politely mind one another’s business. You don’t get in his way, and you therefore expect that he would get too much in yours. That’s what “walking humbly with your God” means, doesn’t it? He’s happy enough up in heaven, and we can just get on with our own stuff here. That should work, shouldn’t it? We don’t need all this overtly religious stuff, really, do we? If people want to, I guess that’s down to them, but me, I’m just happy to potter along and not trouble God, so long as he doesn’t trouble me, either. **Simples.**

And I nearly said then, *If only*. But that would be such a wrong attitude. “If only” to something that is not just so terribly wrong, but so terribly weak and tame and totally insipid, too.

Folks, can we spend a few minutes just thinking through - and hopefully debunking - this polite, tragic, limp, total misunderstanding of what being a disciple of Jesus Christ is about.

And the very first thing that struck me when turning up this passage is that the kind of thing I’ve been suggesting it might be saying is just totally at odds with what comes before it and what comes after it. Look at the preceding verses and the following verses in Micah 6, and there’s no way you can get the impression that just being nice is what the centre section is all about. Instead, we are driven to the conclusion that there is something very seriously wrong, that God is very seriously concerned about.

Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel.

(Micah 6:2)

Has the LORD laid huge religious burdens on the shoulders of his people? Totally the opposite: he has been their *liberator*. He sets them free, not ties them down!

“O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, ...”

(Micah 6:3-4)

And that *sin* stuff that we’re talking about here, that’s not something trivial at all. It’s not a technicality. It’s not like on those **diets** where you’re allowed a couple of “sins” (I think they have tried to spell it “syns”) each day, so long as they’re only single pieces of chocolate or something like that. It’s something that God takes very seriously, and from the way it’s described, we would too:

“Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed?”

(Micah 6:10)

There is serious exploitation going on here. Systematic deceit.

“Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?”

(Micah 6:11)

And neither is this just polite white-collar crime. There’s old fashioned thuggery about it too.

“Your rich men are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.”

(Micah 6:12)

And so often that is how it is with people who try to shut God out of their lives. If they can bring themselves to ignore the evidence for God, then that’s just great, they think. Because if they feel they are no longer accountable to *him*, they’re just accountable to *themselves* ... and if they see nothing wrong with doing this or that at the expense of, to the detriment of, someone else ... well, if nobody else knows or nobody else sees or nobody else cares - or if they just can’t fight back - what’s the problem? Might is right. Survival of the fittest. That’s just how nature works, right?

So, that first point, then. Trying to take that central passage in that very tame and inoffensive way just doesn’t do justice to what comes before and afterwards.

But I think that actually our instincts about just religious stuff were right. There is no point about doing loads of that stuff.

“Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?”

(Micah 6:6-7)

Because if God doesn't exist, there's no point. And if he really *does* exist, he's surely going to see through that kind of sham, isn't he? I mean, if we can see it is so provocatively hypocritical, don't you think any kind of God worth his salt is going to be at least as aware as us, and probably even more thoroughly provoked by it, too?

So that sin stuff that we mentioned earlier, that's *not* a trivial little technicality. And I think we see that if we look more closely at that key verse that looks so attractively simple ... but I think that simplicity is only apparent. I think there is far more to it, if we're prepared to probe a bit.

He has told you, O man, what is good;

(Micah 6:8)

First of all, God sets the scene, and calls the shots. He defines what is right and appropriate in this world of his. The world that started out gloriously right.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

(Genesis 1:31)

And yet, he is saying, there are some things that are very far from good in his world as it is today. Not technicalities. Not trivia. But something that is lodged in the heart of every one of us, starting with that insistence upon self-determination. Instead of “he has told you”, it's *I will decide for myself*. I will be my own judge and jury ... and, that way, I need never be my own executioner. I will always find some extenuating circumstance or excuse to let myself off that unfavourable judgement.

But here God reminds us of what is appointed for us in this world of his. And at first glance it looks all very unobjectionable, all very laudable and honourable, actually:

... and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:8)

And we should up the stakes on that “**do justice**” phrase a bit. See it as rather more active than just keeping within the law, but positively seeking to do what is good and right and fair - and not just to your own advantage. That word doesn't mean just “do”, but *make*. Promote, advance, true justice. Be concerned about the society we live in, instead of just focusing on me and mine.

“Love kindness” - that could probably do with beefing up a bit, too. That “kindness” word is the one that is so difficult to translate, but so full of God’s gracious nature. It’s “loving-kindness” or “covenant-love”, in some translations. It’s something that the Bible says God shows towards his people:

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

(Psalms 86:15)

And, God says, that same thing should characterise our own relationships with our fellow human beings. Our concern shouldn’t be merely superficial and short-lived but deep and dependable. We shouldn’t just live that way, but *love* living that way. It should feel to us like the relief of walking on **soft grass** instead of the jarring of the hard road.

But this final little phrase, I am convinced, is amazingly profound, if we just stop to think about it.

... and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:8)

Why humility? Why is that so important? I think it’s because it involved us accepting that we need to be told what is true, we need to accept God’s verdict concerning us, and we need to accept God’s offer of rescue

Accepting God’s truth

We’ve already started on that. And hopefully you didn’t baulk at the principle:

He has told you, O man, what is good;

(Micah 6:8)

But not just what is good. What is true, more generally. About the world that he has made, and how it will run best. About what consequences we can expect if we choose to live otherwise. About what is right, and what is wrong. About how we have obligations to him. And about how we have every one of us failed to keep those obligations to him.

Accepting God’s verdict

And that’s where it starts getting personal. Because there is quite a step - a step of humility - between accepting God’s comments on the human race in general, and me in person. It’s one thing to say that ...

... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ...

(Romans 3:23)

But it's something else to say to that God

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

(Luke 18:13)

If you haven't got there yet, then I think I really have to say that you are not “walking humbly with your God”. And until you are ready to say that, you're not ready for that final step, either.

Accepting God's Saviour

See, God hasn't just provided a rescue, but a rescuer. Not a plan, but a *person*. And until you accept God's verdict that you are lost, and accept God's truth that you cannot save yourself, then you are never going to accept God's Saviour.

Every time you think or act as if you can save yourself, you're actually insulting Jesus. You're saying that he didn't need to die on that cross in your place. You're saying that that was unnecessary. Or maybe just unnecessary for you. Maybe needful for the lower sort of human beings, but no, *I*, I can manage by myself, thanks.

To me, that is the pretty much the ultimate possible insult, saying that what Jesus endured on that cross is just irrelevant ... in your case. The ultimate insult. And the very opposite of

... and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:8)

Folks, I don't want to protract this talk for the sake of it. I don't want to make this seem long and protracted and complicated. I want to show you that it is actually very **Simple**.

There is no huge range of candidates to choose between, just the one:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, ...

(1 Timothy 2:5-6)

And there is the simple choice. It is either

“We do not want this man to reign over us.”

(Luke 19:14)

Or you can humbly say, *Jesus Christ, my Lord, and my God ...*

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

(Luke 18:13)