

"WHAT IS REQUIRED OF YOU"

TEXT: "He has showed 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)

INTRODUCTION

George Adam Smith, who devoted the major part of his life to the study of the Bible, called that particular verse of scripture the greatest saying in the Old Testament. In his judgment, it was the finest expression of true religion to be found between the books of Genesis and Malachi. It's a simple and comprehensive statement of what God expects of you and men and of all men everywhere. And it reminds us, too, that religion and morality are linked to each other. Religion - that is, the inner life of the soul, and morality - that is, the outer expression, the outer life of conduct.....these two are not separate, distinct entities, but are one and indivisible.

"He has showed 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".

The greatest saying in the Old Testament! We are entering into Brotherhood Week. What better words could we take from this place on this day. Whenever I am invited to suggest a bible verse to be printed on the editorial page of the Journal American this is the one I always suggest.

TO DO JUSTICE

"What does the Lord require of you - but to do justice". There's nothing ambiguous or uncertain about this command. It's as explicit as it is emphatic. The stress is on action, on conduct rather than creed, on fair dealing not pious profession.

From time to time we encounter people who admire justice in the abstract, as an ideal, but who fall short in specific life situations - like the woman about whom Gogol, the Russian playwright tells, who wept her eyes out at a play depicting the miseries of the poverty stricken peasants but left her coachman all through the performance sitting in the winter cold on the open box seat of her carriage, and stormed at him on the way home over some minor if not fancied misdeamnor. Everybody recognizes justice as one of the cardinal virtues, but actuality has to be put into what would otherwise be an abstrzction. No good comes of merely admiring justice; justice has to be done.

Long ago Socrates defined justice as "giving to everyoner what is his own, what is his due". Harry Emerson Fosdick, in one of his earliest books, "The Meaning of Service" worked out in practical detail what this ought to involve for us as persons. Let me read it to you:

"Justice says: you are a white man. Then put yourself in the place of the Negro whose father was freed when he was a youth, and whose great, great, great grandfather was brought over against his will on a slave ship from Africa, and see from the inside; how the problem of this man's life must appear to him. You are an American. Put yourself in the place of Great Britain, and France, and Italy, and Japan, and China, and those who but lately were our enemies, to see how this tangled world's problems must appear to them. You are a laboring man. Put yourself in the place of the employer, and see from his angle the perplexing problems of our economic life. You are an employer. Then put

yourself in the place of the laboring man, to see how life must appear to him".

This is practical and down to earth. This is religion in action, religion getting things accomplished. This is religion bent on making the ideal actual. There is no ritual substitute, no creedal substitute, no emotional substitute for justice. Orthodox doctrine, church attendance, prayer, Bible reading - these are of little value in the sight of the God of righteousness if they are not accompanied by a hatred for any form of oppression, and by just and fair dealing in all the relationships of everyday life.

TO LOVE KINDNESS

"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness". Sometimes you find that people fulfill the first requirement, but fall woefully short in completing the second. They are just persons, but they're hard, censorious, condemnatory. Certainly no one would suspect them of cheating or lying; their word is as good as their bond, but there is something forbidding, something lacking in their very rectitude. The very soul of integrity - unpurchasable, incorruptible - they lack fellow feeling, loving kindness, compassion, sympathy.

One of Dostoevski's characters says to another, "You have no tenderness, you have only justice and therefore you are unjust". A lack of sympathy for the troubles and weaknesses of others is the besetting temptation of just men and women. The religiously upright person can at times be extremely cruel. In God, let us remember that justice and mercy always go together. This is the way it should be with us. And yet so often it takes a strange and terrible experience to school our souls in mercy. Life comes tumbling in on us. A sword is thrust into our hearts. The wounds of life become our teachers. Suffering, on the one hand, may harden men and women, leaving them sullen, cynical, bitter, rebellious. But so often it is the other way around. It begets in them understanding, sympathy, tenderness of heart. Yes, it takes adversity to understand adversity. There's an old proverb which says: "The darkness passes, but the lessons we learned in the darkness remain with us forever". I've thought of those words these past few days and certainly feel that the sadness that has touched our lives will help us to understand better the heart-ache and sadness and darkness that touches the lives of others.

Dr. A. J. Cronin tells how he was brought up in the strict tradition that if one did wrong one should be punished accordingly. This was called justice. As a young doctor he was appointed medical officer in a fever hospital in an isolated district in northern England. One winter night soon after his arrival a little boy of six was admitted suffering from diphtheria. He was so seriously ill that only an immediate tracheotomy could give him even a slender hope of life. Painfully, inexperience, Dr. Cronin had never attempted this simple but crucial operation. As he stood in the poorly lit room and watched the old Sister and the only nurse, a young student, place the gasping boy on the table, he felt himself trembling - cold and sick. He was determined to do his utmost, and the operation being successfully completed, he went back to his room with glowing satisfaction. Four hours later, however, at two o'clock in the morning, the young nurse came frantically knocking at the door. She had dozed off by the child's bed and awakened to find the tube blocked. She lost her head, panicked, and when Cronin got to the child, he was dead. A sense of loss, the failure of the student nurse overwhelmed him, and his anger blazed out, "This will be filed in a report that shall make out". Later he sent for the nurse and read to her the report he had prepared. She listened to it in pitiful silence. "Have you anything to say?" Cronin asked. Half-fainting from shame and misery, she shook her

head and then stammered, "Doctor, give me another chance".

Apparently the idea had never even occurred to Cronin. She must pay for what she had done. He dismissed her curtly and signed the report. But he never slept, for all through the night - echoing, drumming in his head, were the words: "Give me another chance". In the morning he tore up the report. That was a long time ago. We are told that this same student nurse who had erred so fatally later became the matron of the largest children's hospital in Wales. Her career was a model of service and devotion. She was worshipped and loved by the children who came under her care.

TO WALK HUMBLY

"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice. To love kindness. And to walk humbly with your God".

Humility has often been misunderstood and on occasion mis-represented. It does not mean self-disparagement or the refusal to accept responsibilities for which we are fitted. It does not mean doubting our own capacities or hesitating to voice our own convictions. It has been said that the distinguishing mark of the genuinely humble person is his complete freedom from self-consciousness.

The proud are encased in egoism. They monopolize the conversation, chatter endlessly about themselves, their doings, they hear little of what is said to them, and are so pathetically athirst for compliments that they go out of their way to invite them. But on the other hand, the truly humble - and this is the title to their greatness - never court observation; they shun any kind of personal advertisement; their central thought is not of themselves but of their work - the causes to which they are committed, the service they can render to their friends and fellow human beings.

Nobody can put on Christian humility. It's something you feel - feel only because of the greatness and the holiness of God. Some time ago someone loaned me a copy of Harry Golden's "Only In America". Remember the first chapter in it; it is called, "Why I Never Bawl Out a Waitress". It begins:

"I have a rule against registering complaints in a restaurant; because I know that there are at least four billion suns in the Milky Way - which is only one galaxy".

He goes on to speak of there being billions of galaxies, and winds up,

"When you think of all this, it's pretty silly to worry whether the waitress brought you string beans instead of lima beans"...

And we could go on and say, and yes it's pretty silly to worry about some of those other things that we tend to worry about. Pride is inevitable, I should think, for people who believe in no power greater than themselves. But humility is a natural outlook for those who believe in Him, and know of his greatness, and who are thankful to Him for sending Christ into the world.

I once heard it said that "The true way to be humble is not to stoop till you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your full height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatest goodness is". As one of the saints put it, the secret of humility is "always to be looking up", not to be looking in at what we are pleased to think of our merits and virtues; not looking out on our neighbors with critical and censorious eyes; but always looking up to one in whose sight we are all sinners, to One who for us and for our salvation long

ago made Himself of no reputation, took upon himself the form of a servant, and humbled himself even unto death upon the cross.

The prophets of the Old Testament reached a high point in their religious insights when they declared:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you -

But to do justice.
To love kindness.
To walk humbly with your God.

LET US PRAY Let these words, O God, become a conscious part of our lives.

O God, who art the hope of all the ends of the earth; we beseech thee to hear our prayers for all races and kindreds of men, that thou wilt turn all hearts unto thyself. Remove from our minds hatred, prejudice, and contempt for those who are not of our own race or color, class or creed, that departing from everything that divides, we may be brought into the unity of the spirit of Christ, in the bond of peace. In His name we pray. Amen

The prophets of the OT have much to say to us, to our time, but I feel Micah reached a high point in all of this when long ago he uttered: