

*“Have you forgotten Me? Could you answer me?”*

Not long ago, 60 Minutes aired a segment on the Grammy Award winner of the modern symphony orchestra’s conductor, Yannic Sequin of The Metropolitan Opera in New York City. I began thinking about the importance of a conductor bouncing around with his baton conducting the musicians. But what if there were no conductor, and in some rebellion, overthrow the conductor, leaving the members to play whatever they felt at any particular time, at whatever volume they chose, and so on? The end product would be so chaotic and unappealing that the paying audience would want their money back. All of the harmonies that were potentially there submitting to the music score bowing under the eye of the conductor would have been lost. Harmony. The question of harmony. How are we to account for the absence of harmony in our world?

To answer the question, we look to the Bible. What if we, the world, have overthrown the conductor created by God and for God? In my opinion, we, the world, have been separated from the Creator God, scattered to the tune and imagination of our hearts. That is why we hear people saying, and perhaps telling yourself, “Who needs a conductor?” We can play whatever tune we like. We can make up the music as we go along, regardless of whether the harmony seems out of tune. It looks like the world’s way of doing whatever they want. I think it’s called individualism, and people might say the idea of a conductor, the one who oversees us, the Creator God, is just so far away or non-existent from all that we now hold to affirm.

Some of you might find the comparison between world harmony and a symphony conductor far too corny, but through the lens of my eyes, I see few people I meet who would be prepared to deny that our world is out of tune, out of harmony, too many sour notes. “A world turned upside down.” A world that is fractured, without faith, and filled with fear. There is a foundation for “the virus of fearfulness.” Now, on the other side of a world pandemic where fear has wholly changed lives for as long as we can tell, we might never know how the experience of isolation will affect future illness and the sadness of death. Who would have ever imagined virtual funerals? Now, every morning, we awake to different fears and new levels of viruses threatening the world economically and racially.

We see a new war of economics forcing new levels of unemployment and mountains of debt that will take more than our time on earth to relieve or repay. Then, racially. This nation and the people of the world have been fractured, and its brokenness was highlighted in the aftermath of George Floyd. Now, weeks beyond another brand of racial prejudice, the murder of innocent Israeli people dancing at a festival billed as a “journey of unity and love.” Again, the viruses of fear grip the world, and which of the worst viruses threatens us? Pandemically, economically, or racially? What is the antidote to racial and religious prejudice? Coming to Chapter 6 of Micah, and to answer the question, I have concluded two observations.

First, our language has become so misused. Racial prejudice is now termed as being “racist.” Secondly, objective morality has lost its meaning between right and wrong. Western culture has increasingly regarded ethics as a matter of selfishness, breaking all the rules of morality. After all, with no conductor, people can play any tune at any volume as long as it

doesn't bother anybody else. Racial prejudice is a virus, and racism puts world harmony out of tune for every honest person to know that it is wrong and, from a biblical perspective, there is only one God. We are made in his image, and our morality emerges from God, the conductor. Our one God says, "I'll tell you what is right and wrong." But the world reacts to this the same way they always have. Ha! I don't need a foreign God to tell me what is right, for there is no God! In the Book of Acts, the apostle Paul addressed this identical issue to a gathered group in Athens, telling them to seek and find God, for there will come a day when God will come to judge the world.

It would be easy to say nothing matters beyond selfish desires or there is no God, but Paul affirms what the Bible declares: that we do not live in a random universe on the earth without a conductor, the Creator of heaven and earth. To say nothing matters is crazy, for it does matter to the lawgiver. The issues of this culture matter far more than this world is ready to accept. You will never convince me the murder of an innocent 6-year-old boy is not related to racial prejudice. Brothers and sisters, the sanctity of human life is bound up in the fact that we as humanity were made in the image of God, a genetic code written by the conductor of heaven and earth, and this is why the Bible says that if you take a person's life, you forfeit your own life. So, how does all of this fit into Micah's Chapter 6? I'm glad you asked because God cares about life, and we need to look to the Scriptures and the prophets for a solid dose of theological realism. Micah says, "Listen, people," and know the things of God.

In the book of Micah, the people of both Israel and Judah have been performing terrible acts of prejudice and immorality. As an open reminder of God's righteous acts in Micah 6:5, God reminds them of his redemptive act, fulfilling his covenant promises when he brought them safely out of Egypt to the final place in Shittim. In this last place, Israel stayed following the long journey through the wilderness. Then, to Gilgal, the first place Israel stayed after they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land on dry ground. However, God reminds them of his faithfulness to his people, yet their unfaithfulness only resulted in continuous complaining, rebellion, and disobedience. God says, "Why have you not written these things on your hearts to remember, to know? Answer Me?"

One of my favorite hymns is "Peace Like A River/It is well with my soul." Did you know that early in the 1900s, the New Age church changed some original words to the song? We see the change in our hymnal. In verse 1, the words changed from "You have taught me to **know**, to "You have taught me to **say**." Church, knowing, and saying are two different things. I find that true when we say the Apostles Creed. Do we know in our hearts what it means?

Then God says, "How have I wearied you? Answer me! Why have you forgotten me? Have I become irrelevant? Plead your case. You come with meaningless "burnt offerings, with calves a year old." How about bringing thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil? How about my firstborn, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Church, it is not that the expressions of devotion are irrelevant, but God is looking for faithful obedience. The prophet Amos took on the same issue where the people believed they had done an excellent job of giving sacrifices, but God says, "I cannot stand your religious meetings." I am fed up with your conferences, projects, fundraising schemes, image-making, and ego music. When was the last

time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want the same faithfulness and justice I gave you leading to the land of milk and honey. God wants to see evidence of our commitment, just as God spoke to Israel and Judah, and not to organize more Christian things to do. But then, in verse 8, the people respond by saying, Hey God, we got it covered, and then we see God answer.

The well-known Anglican minister John Newton, best known for the timeless Hymn Amazing Grace, said this about verse 8. “There is hardly any one passage in Scripture more generally misunderstood.” We all have read it. So, what is the true meaning of this verse? Glad you asked. Do justly means following God’s will and purpose, as he has revealed to humanity in reading the Scriptures. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses says God “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, loving the sojourner, giving them food and clothing.” Here, we see a framework of God’s revelation of himself, so God says we should take these things more seriously than we have given attention. The biblical sense is creating a situation and a society where everything is right in the eyes of God, where every last person in it, the most vulnerable and weakest, can flourish and thrive. And so, as a pastor, I put it out there, like me, you can be thinking along these lines. “To do justly, to love mercy.” A heart action and attitude of loving mercy and kindness as a glad and spontaneous action, a faithful love of the Father, walking humbly in submission to God’s will. We sang this morning. Your will be done, my God and Father, as in heaven so on earth. My heart is drawn to self-exalting. Help me seek your kingdom first.

The book of Romans says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, because of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by renewing your mind. Then you can test and approve what God’s will is: his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” Consider what Newton meant about verse eight being misunderstood: without the gospel, the words become just another part of an honorable life, meaning that if God exists, God will reward those who do their best, and part of doing your best involves justice, mercy, and being humble about it. Newton must have had that in mind and how easy it is for us to attempt this without the gospel. It is too easy for pastors to proclaim at the end of worship: go out and have a good week. Do justly love mercy and walk humbly with God without the righteousness of the gospel, for it creates an inherent danger within a society where everything is right in the prejudiced attitudes of peoples’ minds according to their discriminatory beliefs between right and wrong. Sorry folks, that glorious destiny is called the New Heaven and the New Earth, where people will live in perfect harmony with God and his creation, so we must interpret the Old Testament in light of the New and how it fits within the Apostle's prophetic ministry.

In closing, we must remember that God's righteousness is expressed in two ways. He is utterly faithful to his promises. We are blessed and can be sure that God will fulfill his promises. Our enemies cannot overtake us if we remain faithful to our God, knowing the righteousness of God does not tolerate rivals, and Micah’s command to remember applies to us, too. If you are a believer today, remember and know the righteous acts of the Lord, “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” Does an orchestra need a conductor? Do

we need a Savior? We most certainly do, and to him, the one who made the heavens, we cast our eyes upon. Micah writes, "He has shown you, O man, what is good." Brothers and sisters, Jesus is good! If we come before God in the name of Jesus, we will find acceptance and the conductor who leads us into perfect harmony. Thanks be to God. Amen.