

# “Finding Satisfaction and Fulfillment”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – January 29, 2023

Micah 6:1-8

According to legend, Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones fame, woke up one night, turned on his tape player, picked up his guitar and began to play a 2- or 3-minute riff. Then you can hear his pick and guitar hit the floor and for the next 45 minutes you can hear Richards snore.

A few days later, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards put some meat to the riff and Jagger wrote some words to match the song. And that was the birth of the song, “*I Can’t Get No Satisfaction*” by the Rolling Stones.

Despite the sexual connotations of the song, the singer largely points his gun at the pitfalls of commercialization rather than anything too specific. Lambasting the modern world, Jagger shares his confusion with a society where the radio is all “useless information” and he is constantly told by the TV “how white my shirts can be—but he can’t be a man ‘cause he doesn’t smoke the same cigarettes as me,” a reference to the Marlboro cowboy. It is a song pumped with the steroids of a struggling society.

After all these years, Jagger still can’t get no ... satisfaction.

As we move through life, satisfaction — the joy from fulfillment of our wishes or expectations — is fleeting. No matter what we achieve, see, acquire, or do, it seems to slip from our grasp ... Satisfaction, is the greatest paradox of human life. We crave it, we believe we can get it, we glimpse it and maybe even experience it for a brief moment, and then it vanishes. But we never give up on our quest to get and hold on to it.

Or, as Mick Jagger puts it, “I try, and I try, and I try, and I try.”

We are always on a search for satisfaction.

“*LISTEN TO WHAT THE LORD SAYS,*” said the prophet Micah (6:1). He was from land of Judah, and his book begins with prophecies of doom directed toward Israel and Judah. Because the leaders of the people “*DESPISE JUSTICE AND DISTORT ALL THAT IS RIGHT,*” Micah said that “*JERUSALEM WILL BECOME A HEAP OF RUBBLE.*” (3:9, 12)

What was going on in Jerusalem? The leaders were looking for satisfaction. Jerusalem's "*LEADERS JUDGE FOR A BRIBE,*" says the prophet, "*HER PRIESTS TEACH FOR A PRICE, AND HER PROPHETS TELL FORTUNES FOR MONEY.*" (3:11) Micah saw that people in power were trying to get ahead — in business, government, and religion — and they were using corrupt and unjust practices.

Rich landowners were exploiting vulnerable people in the community. "*THEY COVET FIELDS AND SEIZE THEM,*" said Micah. "*THEY DEFRAUD A MAN OF HIS HOME, A FELLOWMAN OF HIS INHERITANCE.*" (2:2) In Jerusalem, the rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer. And this was happening on a playing field that was anything but level.

But Micah was not interested only in exposing injustice. He predicted that a shepherd-king would arise to rule Judah. This new ruler would come from the little town of Bethlehem; he would be a rural savior who was not part of the wealthy Jerusalem establishment.

Then, the prophet accused the people of not being satisfied with God's goodness to them. "*LISTEN TO WHAT THE LORD SAYS,*" said Micah. "*I BROUGHT YOU UP OUT OF EGYPT AND REDEEMED YOU FROM THE LAND OF SLAVERY.*" (6:1, 4)

Are you not satisfied?

*"I SENT MOSES TO LEAD YOU, ALSO AARON AND MIRIAM."* (v. 4)

Are you not satisfied?

*"REMEMBER YOUR JOURNEY FROM SHITTIM TO GILGAL,"* crossing the Jordan River into the promised land. (v. 5)

Are you not satisfied?

God brought the people out of slavery, gave them wise and powerful leaders, and brought them into the promised land. And yet, the people of Israel and Judah can get no ... satisfaction! No matter what they achieve or attain, they want more. Instead of enjoying the good life that God has given them, they resort to corruption and injustice to satisfy their wishes and expectations.

*"THE LORD HAS A CASE AGAINST HIS PEOPLE,"* said Micah; *"HE IS LODGING A CHARGE AGAINST ISRAEL."* (v. 2)

These were hard words for the people to hear, and some of them immediately felt guilty. They asked the prophet what they could do to make things better. *“WITH WHAT SHALL I COME BEFORE THE LORD,”* they asked, *“AND BOW DOWN BEFORE THE EXALTED GOD? SHALL I COME BEFORE HIM WITH BURNT OFFERINGS, WITH CALVES A YEAR OLD?”* (v. 6)

No, said the prophet, forget about your burnt offerings.

*“WILL THE LORD BE PLEASED WITH THOUSANDS OF RAMS, WITH TEN THOUSAND RIVERS OF OIL?”* (v. 7)

No, said the prophet, God will not be pleased with rams and oil.

*“SHALL I OFFER MY FIRSTBORN FOR MY TRANSGRESSION,”* said the people, *“THE FRUIT OF MY BODY FOR THE SIN OF MY SOUL?”* (v. 7)

Are you kidding? Human sacrifice? “No way,” said the prophet.

Like so many of us today, the people of Jerusalem wanted to cut a deal with God. They were lifting up a “foxhole prayer,” the kind we might offer in times of grave danger. “Heal me, Lord,” we might say after receiving a cancer diagnosis. “Answer my prayer, and I’ll make a huge donation to the church.”

These foxhole prayers are understandable, but they do not bring us any closer to God. They end up being transactional, not relational. They send the message that we want to show our appreciation to the LORD, but we do not really want to change our lives to get closer to God.

This seemed to be true for the people of Jerusalem. They would be happy to make a burnt offering, but they were not going to stop taking bribes. They would be willing to give the LORD some rams and oil, but they were not going to reform their unjust real estate practices. They would gladly give up their firstborn child, but they were not going to stop committing fraud!

The hunger for satisfaction is powerful, isn’t it? We are pleasure-seeking creatures, and we will do almost anything to preserve what makes us feel good. When Mick Jagger sings, “I try, and I try, and I try, and I try,” he is talking about the effort we put into the search for satisfaction, even at the cost of our ethics, morals, integrity, marriages, and families.

Micah reveals the true secret to happiness: It has nothing to do with money or power or real estate holdings. The prophet says that God “*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.*” (v. 8)

That is shockingly simple, isn't it? Acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God are the keys to our true satisfaction. Micah clearly states that God is more interested in the way people live their ordinary lives than in their religious practices.

**Act justly.** This is not wishful thinking about the doing of justice in the world, but a set of concrete actions that advances fairness and equality for all of God's people. To act justly means to work on behalf of people who are weak or powerless or exploited by others.

**Love mercy.** The Hebrew of this commandment is a little bit tricky because the word “mercy” translated is “hesed,” which is a common word in the Bible, but it cannot be translated neatly into any one English word. Yes, it means mercy, but it also means kindness, grace, loyalty, and faithfulness. To love hesed is to love all these qualities, which are so important in a relationship with God and with the people around us. This is like what Jesus said to the Pharisees when they questioned why he was eating with tax collectors and sinners: “*I DESIRE MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE.*” (Matthew 9:13)

**Walk humbly with God.** Once again, the challenge is concrete action: “*WALK HUMBLY.*” This means to travel forward with God, walking in God's way and staying close to God. It means to remain humble as we make this journey, because God is all-powerful and cannot be manipulated by burnt offerings or rivers of oil. When we travel in this way, we are mindful of our behavior, because we know that God is challenging us to act justly and to love mercy.

The promise of this verse is the gift of satisfaction. When we act justly, we tend to have good relationships with the people around us. When we love mercy, we can feel as though we are in step with Almighty God. True satisfaction does not come from property or power or money.

Instead, it comes from being right with God, and right with the people around us. Amen.