

of God is stronger than human strength.
"Foolishness of God... wiser" – Paul sets out how God's upside down kingdom demands humility and counts man's wisdom as a barrier.

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

"Not many.... influential" – apart from Erastus, the city treasurer, those in the Corinth church were a mixed lot and quite ordinary – living proof that salvation doesn't follow from human attributes.

27-29 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.

REFLECTION We have heard Micah's prophetic appeal "What does the Lord require of you?" in its OT perspective. Then we have considered it again at the very end of the OT era, in Matthew's Gospel, when "the Lord who requires", Jesus, teaches what this means in announcing the kingdom of God beginning to be visible. Now what God requires of us has taken on a different feel, post-resurrection, with the Holy Spirit active in the believers who made up the church in Corinth. They – like us nearly two millennia later – are expecting the return of the Lord Jesus. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is enabling them to live new lives in Christ, even in a hostile culture where everyone is a bit of a philosopher and likes to compete on the strength of their arguments. Except that Paul, the founder of the church, tells them, that is not God's way. God's way is via the shameful, uncomfortable and illogical truth of the Cross. That is where Jesus, having given up all divine privilege, took the burden of our sin to die a cursed, tortured death so that we might walk free, the price of our sin having been paid by Him. It is a scandal that doesn't make sense but it is the powerful truth by which we can be born again into new and eternal life as part of His kingdom. This is what the Lord requires of us – to know Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, and above all to come to a revelation of who we are in Him. Then living for Him comes, not naturally, but supernaturally.

QUESTION *What do we have to let go of, to live by what Christ has done for us?*

PRAYER Lord, to be boastful or self-promoting is completely against the gentle, merciful, peacemaking way of life You taught as the values of Your kingdom. Yet when we consider what You have done for us, for all who truly believe in You, how can we not boast about the Saviour we know and love? Give us courage and clarity to speak about You, Jesus, and what You have done, to others that they too might turn to You and come into Your kingdom. Amen.

"But God chose" – not in the way that we would choose. No amount of intellect or education or merit can influence Christ's work on the Cross, our choice to believe it and God's choice of us.

30 It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

"Because of Him" – we are transformed from unworthy sinners to become viewed as being right with God and accepted by Him in the new identity we have "in Christ Jesus". This is what happens when we believe and take hold of the divine exchange Jesus worked, by His death for our new life.

31 Therefore, as it is written: 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'

"Boasts" – no Christian has anything of themselves to boast about, but can make a "boast in the Lord" about the divine wisdom and heavenly way of being made right, graciously imparted.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, February 2, 2020, with commentary notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **February 2**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: Doing or believing, what does the Lord really require of me?

Micah 6:1-8 – The Lord wants us to be like Him rather than to appease Him

Matthew 5:1-12 – The values of the kingdom headlined

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 – Choosing God's power and wisdom over man's

Also read: Psalm 15

Micah 6:1-8 – The Lord wants us to be like Him, not appease Him

Israel is challenged about false priorities

1 Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead My case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

"My case before the mountains" – which are enduring, solid witnesses to God's covenant.

2 "Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against His people; He is lodging a charge against Israel.

"Hear... listen... a case against" – Micah speaks to the mountains prophetically (as longstanding witness) about the people's unfaithfulness to the covenant.

3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer Me.

"What have I done" – the Lord pleads like a defendant.

4 "I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.

"Out of Egypt" – the miraculous deliverance that defined Israel as God's chosen nation.

5 "My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of

Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.

"Remember your journey" – from Acacia Groves (Hebr. Shittim) west across the Jordan River into Gilgal of the Promised Land, a key moment in the story of God's faithfulness to them.

6 "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?

"Come... and bow down" – sacrifices become extreme.

7 "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

"Will the Lord be pleased" – coming from a wrong heart, even the most costly gifts do not find favour.

8 "He has shown you, O mortal, 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.

"What does the Lord require of you?" – not insincere actions but integrity, unconditional love and forbearance, and worshipful humility.

REFLECTION For the Jews, observing the Law of Moses was to recall the hillside of Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments which were headlines to all the divine rules of life and conduct. All the details of the Law came down to what Jesus would later summarise as the Great Commandment principle: loving God and loving others.

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And that was what Micah's best-known word is all about. Make the main thing, the main thing – loving God in worship, and upholding God's love in all our relationships which in Micah's words is acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly (and closely) with God. Sacrificial offerings are rendered worthless if they do not come from really loving God from the heart. This is what God wants from us, and it's so simple, we easily miss it. We would rather dress it up with elaborate form – like the Corinthians we will meet later, for whom presentation was more important than substance. But all this dodges the essential simplicity of what Father God wants – our hearts.

QUESTION *In our busy lives, what does it mean to learn to walk humbly with God?*

Matthew 4:12-23 – The values of the kingdom headlined

The Sermon on the Mount sets out what godly heart attitudes look like

1-2 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

"Up on a mountainside" – or "climbed a hillside" (The Message), perhaps to find a natural amphitheatre in the hill country above Capernaum. His Jewish followers would have seen Jesus being like Moses in giving foundational teaching on a mountainside.

3 He said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are..." – fortunate, prosperous, experiencing hope and joy

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Those who mourn" – loss or difficulty in life prompts turning to depend on God. But in this context, Jesus is calling people to lament the spiritual state of Israel, and turn to God in repentance for spiritual renewal.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Meek" – or (Phillips) humble-minded and

The Beatitudes – an impossible ideal or the Holy Spirit's work in us?

"Theirs is" – but is Jesus teaching what is attainable, or an impossible ideal? These are the values of the new kingdom order He is setting out, that disciples who commit to Him can embrace. Those still living their lives independently will find it too difficult, but all who choose to belong to Jesus experience a spiritual transformation, and find themselves living by these kingdom values.

(Amplified) kind-hearted and self-controlled, therefore gentle, as gentlefolk are, and like Jesus, who is quoting Psalm 37:11.

"Poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek" – these first three beatitudes echo Isaiah 61 esp. vv.1-3 and 7 which Jesus linked to His divine call, provoking a sharp reaction in His home town of Nazareth, Luke 4:16-30.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Righteousness" – "hunger and thirst for God's approval" (God's Word) with an emphasis on justice.

"Will be filled" – the blessings are a gift of God's doing that come to Jesus' followers, not something achieved by our good works.

• **For further study**, Psalm 11:7, 85:10-12; Isaiah 11:1-4; Jer. 23:5-6, 33:16.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

"Will be shown mercy" – we, having God's mercy in us, give this away in unconditional love to others, and find mercy especially in the final judgment.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Pure in heart" – unlike many of the Pharisees, who disguised judgmental hearts with a rule-bound form of 'doing right'.

"Will see God" – those born again into new life are transformed by the grace of God, and able to perceive God's plans and purposes.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Peacemakers" – adding reconciliation to mercy, righteousness and justice as kingdom values for Jesus' followers.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted

because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Those who are persecuted" – Jesus says the kingdom belongs to those who suffer for it. Doing right by Jesus and His teaching has always brought opposition, Matt. 10:16-23; 2 Timothy 3:12.

11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of

Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"In the same way... prophets... before you" – owning Jesus as Lord is taking an intentional position in the spiritual battle that has always opposed God's people since Cain murdered Abel, Gen. 4:8.

REFLECTION There were practical reasons for Jesus to teach the meaning of the kingdom of God to His growing crowd of enquirers and followers on a hillside. Such a large number needed space to see and hear. However the parallel with Moses' giving of the Law on the slopes of Mount Sinai could hardly have escaped their notice. Micah's words, "And what does the Lord require of you?" would have been familiar, and now they were seeing not just a rabbi but the Lord Himself teaching them that the kingdom of God was a reality for those that chose to follow Him. Choosing to follow is an important distinction. The kingdom of God does not come by a set of principles, much less as a set of rules, although the Church has often reduced it to that. It is a reality we see with spiritual eyes, something we 'get', and it comes from the presence of Jesus and our response to Him. This does not need a hillside or any special place or activity, but a humble openness to the Spirit of Jesus, who then empowers us and releases us to live differently under His lordship. As we draw near to Jesus and begin to 'get' what He is all about, our hearts are changed and His kingdom starts to become real, a blessed and joyful discovery.

QUESTION *How many of these attributes can we do? How many can God do in us?*

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 – Choosing God's power and wisdom over man's

The example of Christ crucified makes no sense except to those being saved

18-19 For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'

"The wisdom of the wise" – everyone in Corinth was trading opinions, to which 'wisdom' Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in this fresh context.

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

"God made foolish" – The wisdom of this world and God's spiritual insight are opposed; the powerful message of the Cross is unintelligible apart from faith.

21 For since in the wisdom of God the

world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

22-24 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

"A stumbling block... and foolishness" – to Jews it was a contradiction in terms to proclaim Christ's victory through being crucified – how could a Messiah be associated with a curse? To the philosophical, logical Greeks it made no sense for God's Son as Saviour to look like the lowest class of offender.

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness