

(Just before Scottish Parliamentary Elections & AV Referendum)**Introduction**

- So, decided how you are going to vote yet?
 - inevitably, cause of much discussion at the moment...
 - *and even more paper!! (leaflets through the door!!)*

Micah

- call for God's people to be faithful in the particular context of Micah's time
- operated at **political** (king, court) and **popular** level (street corner preaching)
- as such, addressed leaders specifically, as well as wider, generally applicable requirements from God
- Not a verse by verse study:
 - but some of the assumptions Micah had and standards he called people to are certainly apposite!

Leaders are responsible (3:1-4)

- *(1) Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, (2) you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; (3) who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?" (4) Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done.*
- **Gruesome passage!!**
- But notice some of the things that are happening here:
 - leaders have tremendous **responsibility**
 - they are expected to know justice, and to implement it
 - when they don't, the consequences are far reaching and profound
 - *the people they rule over will reap the consequences of their actions*
 - *and they themselves will also reap the consequences of their actions*
- These are truths about leadership in the world God has made.
- And so, there are some fairly simple conclusions for our own situation:
 - the selecting of candidates is an action of tremendous importance and seriousness; it is not true that "**they are all the same anyway**"; it matters how we vote, for in our democratic system we share something of the responsibility!
 - knowing the responsibility our leaders face lays on us an obligation to **support** them, **particularly in prayer** - though in encouragement, campaigning, letter writing, etc, too
- So take selecting them seriously, pray for them.

What God desires is:

- If we are to take our role in selecting candidates seriously, is there any guidance on what we should look for?
 - can we read in some obscure minor prophet and have our choice of candidate made for us?!
- No - **need to use our brains!!**
 - but there are **underlying principles** throughout Scripture which should influence our thinking and deciding
- The well known verse in the chunk from chapter 6 that we read is not the only verse we need to apply, but we can't cover the whole of Scripture in one night!!
- (6:8) *"And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*
- Points up three things that God looks for in people

– politicians and voters alike!

What God desires is: justice

- In context: **acting justly** was literally judging in the law courts; leaders were **ipso facto** judges:
 - people would bring disputes, cases, before them and they'd decide what to do;
 - probably akin to Solomon and the two women and the baby...
 - probably done on a case-by-case basis, rather than the application of a set of written laws
- And the question is: **when it comes to the crunch, how do you act?**
 - do you bring justice to those whose land has been stolen by a rich neighbour, boundary stones moved? (**even when that rich neighbour is a friend of yours?**)
- How do we apply this to voting?
 - not simple - matter of making a judgement, but questions we can ask ourselves may help...
- Will this politician do the right thing regardless of what people think?
- Where is this candidate drawing their values from?
 - principles compatible with God's revelation in Scripture, or opposed to it?
- What kind of things do they believe are **right?**
- *Perhaps we'll read their manifestos, their election publicity, perhaps we'll ask them ourselves (if we get the chance!)*
 - *however, we'll seek to make a fair judgement about whether this person will act justly in office*

What God desires is: mercy

- Lawyers sometimes get a bad name for using the letter of the law to get round the spirit of the Law:
- So here, God knows that an un-checked dry legality can be just as abusive to real justice as flagrant ignoring of the law
 - laws used to steal from those who are poor and powerless to defend themselves, perhaps;
 - some of the Highland Clearances might have been legal, but hardly just!
- In whatever a leader does there is to be a **valuing of people**, a concern for the needy and the marginalised, a protecting of the vulnerable, a creating of a true freedom
- So, as we ask our questions of the candidates, will they **love mercy?**
 - to the asylum seeker? **or respond to the popular misgivings of the crowds on the street corner?**
 - to the child, who has no vote?
 - to the poor, the dependent, the old...?
- That should express itself both in **policy** but also in **character**:
 - an MP in our land has a fair amount of clout, and can substantially help people
 - **Tam Dalyell** and my student difficulties getting money out of the Inland Revenue!
 - an MP can bring mercy into a situation, cutting through red-tape; will this person be the kind of person who will do that?

What God desires is: humility

- Christian, dependence on God; pray for that humility to put others and not self first, and for politicians relationship with God.

Conclusion

- **So, sorted then! You all know how you'll be voting on Thursday?!**
- Of course, its not as simple as that!!
 - there are difficulties - **how can we as a church expect to have our voice heard in a secular world?**
 - **isn't it unfair to ask Christian standards of non-Christians**, to seek to impose our ideas of morality on others?

- how do we avoid getting hung up on **our** issues - Christians, and evangelicals in particular, have sometimes seemed to get awfully worked up about sex, and hardly at all about poverty, for instance
- None of the parties is a clearly Christian choice - far from it!
 - in each case there are probably some things we'd want to affirm, some we'll have deep misgivings over
 - hard to say "I'll **vote for them**", never mind hoping that someone might be a politician and retain a clear Christian witness!!
- **Let's be thankful that God is sovereign**
- **Let's pray for the candidates now, and those who will represent us following the elections in their tremendous responsibility**
- **And let's seek to act justly ourselves, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, even as we pray and encourage our politicians to do the same!!**