

“Because They Can”
Micah 2:1-2
(Preached at Trinity, January 15, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 1** Micah preached a two-fold oracle – “Woe to Samaria, Woe to Jerusalem” It was an announcement of God’s condemnation upon both the Northern and Southern kingdoms. But it had a broad focus. Their wickedness was universal from the greatest to the least, even extending to the ends of the earth.
2. Now as we move into **Chapter 2** Micah gets more specific.
 - In **Verses 1-2** Micah describes the depth of their corruption. They were wicked at the very heart of their being. In these verses Micah had in focus powerful men who were seeking to increase their estates at the expense of the vulnerable. It was a case of the wealthy robbing the poor.
 - **Verses 3-5** describe the consequences – “Therefore”
 - **Verses 6-11** are a condemnation of the preachers of Micah’s day.
 - **Verses 12-13** – a message of hope through God’s grace.
3. Tonight, I want us to meditate for a moment upon the first verses of the chapter. Micah has in view the specific abuses of wealthy landowners.
 - A. We need to remember how important land was in ancient Israel. In an agrarian culture land was not only the means of wealth, it was also the means of providing for the family. Without land an individual would be consigned to the life of a day laborer or slavery. This is also why land stayed in the family, passed down from generation to generation.

This makes the activity of these wealthy land barons most heinous.
 - B. But the problem goes much deeper than these ancient Israelite land barons. It is too easy for us to look at a Biblical text while standing on a balcony looking down from high above where we feel safe. Micah is writing about ancient Samaria and Judah. He’s writing about the greed of these wealthy landowners. But what does that have to do with me? It has much to do with us all because it is an indictment of the nature of our fallen condition.

Micah 2:1 NAU - "Woe to those who scheme iniquity, Who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, For it is in the power of their hands."
4. The truth is we all have hearts full of covetousness and greed. The only reason we don’t take advantage of our neighbors is we lack opportunity. We are all quite capable of all manner of corruption.

Tonight’s sermon is titled, “Because They Can.” When human beings are able, they sin. God has given sinful humanity over to their reprobate hearts but He has also filled the earth with His mercy. He restrains us from our full corruption. Tonight, we’ll look at that restraint.

5. The greatest restraint comes through the Gospel of grace. An amazing transformation has happened upon God's elect. We no longer do those things that we used to do because sin no longer has us bound. And yet, our remaining corruption often rises up and we fall into sin. And so we pray, "Lead us not unto temptation, but deliver us from evil." O God, remove our opportunity to sin.
6. Let's explore this matter of sin and temptation as well as God's restraint.

I. Fallen humanity schemes to do evil

A. This is universal issue

1. All of us have this problem of sin
Romans 3:10-18 NAU - "as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; ¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving," "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood, ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their paths, ¹⁷ And the path of peace have they not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
2. It isn't a Jewish problem or a Gentile problem. It is a people problem.
Ephesians 2:1-3 NAU - "And you (Gentiles) were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too (Jews) all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

B. We sin by nature

- Ephesians 2:3 NAU** - "And were by nature children of wrath."
1. We sin because it is what are. It is what we do. We have wicked thoughts. We are selfish, filled with pride, envy, and hatred. We devalue our fellow man. This is at the heart of robberies, assaults, murders.
Titus 3:3 NAU - "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."
 2. But sin is not merely a passive element in the life of the lost person. He actively pursues sin. He loves his sin.
John 3:19 NAU - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."
 3. This is what we read in this passage. In our fallen condition we dream up new ways to sin.
 - a. The lost man carefully devises his sinful deeds.
CSB - "Woe to those who dream up wickedness"
ESV - "Woe to those who devise wickedness"

- b. Micah says these wicked men were lying awake at night thinking about their schemes. How can I get that man's land? His house? His inheritance? How can I make it mine?
Micah 2:1 NAU - "Who work out evil on their beds!"
- c. He can't wait to wake up to put his scheme into action
Micah 2:1 NAU - "When morning comes, they do it"
- 4. Without regard for his neighbor, he would lay awake thinking of how he could steal from the poor man. How he could do it legally where it would all look proper. He would covet the poor man's fields calculating ways to seize them. He would scheme ways to rob a man of his inheritance.
Micah 2:2 NAU - "They covet fields and then seize *them*, And houses, and take *them* away. They rob a man and his house, A man and his inheritance."

II. The most stirring statement is at the end of **Verse 1**

Micah 2:1 NAU - "they do it, For it is in the power of their hands."

- A In other words, they do it because they can.
 - 1. Micah had in mind the superior power of the wealthy to oppress the poor. But all sinners have the power to carry out their lusts. There is little to restrain our lusts.
 - 2. We sin because we want to. We sin because we can. Micah says it is in the power of their hands.
- B. This is not to deny the mercy of God's restraining grace. By His mercy God uses various means to restrain the sinful disposition of men. Apart from this restraint there would be no limits to human corruption upon the earth. What are some of these restraints?
 - 1. The Law serves to restrain sin.
 - a. God has written upon the hearts of men and it informs the conscience. The Law is one of the means of God's restraining grace upon sinful men.
 - b. The Law helps to prevent sinful society from falling into absolute lawlessness.
 - c. Puritan Samuel Willard wrote in *A Complete Body of Divinity* – "Man's life, chastity, estate, good name, and property must be preserved, and how is this done, but by imprinting on men's hearts an apprehension of these rules of justice and equity, making them approve them and holding a curb on their consciences? And in this way God upholds His government of the world."¹
 - d. As wicked as these wicked landowners were, they still would have had a regard for civil propriety. But even this can fade into absolute corruption. They had become so hardened they no longer saw the evil. Most people prefer to sin under the cover of darkness. These rich men did their deeds in the light of day.

¹ Willard, Samuel, *A Complete Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*. Boston: Green and Kneeland, 1726.

2. Another means of God's restraining grace is the use of delegated authority.
 - a. We are born into families with a strict pattern of authority, wives in subjection to their husbands and children to their parents. Parents must restrain the sinful disposition of their children.
Proverbs 22:15 – "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him."
 - b. There is a pattern of authority in the church so that the Church of Christ might be governed well and that sinful men would not cause great damage to the church.
 - c. God has delegated authority to the state to further restrain the wickedness of men. But the state can also fall into great corruption. The wealthy land barons could do their deeds in the light of day because justice had failed. The legal system had become corrupt and the poor landowners had little recourse.
 3. God also governs and restrains the heart of man by His sovereign intervention restraining much of the evil we are capable of. He prevents us from destroying ourselves. This is comforting knowing how lawless fallen humanity is.
Proverbs 21:1 – "The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."
Proverbs 16:9 – "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."
- C. But it is also true that God has given fallen humanity over to their sin. God allows fallen humanity to pursue the corruption of their wicked hearts, often exposing the most vile, dehumanizing works.
Romans 1:28-30 NAU - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,"
1. Micah is reminding us how wicked the heart of fallen man is. Jeremiah described our heart as being deceitful so that we can't even comprehend it.
Jeremiah 17:9 NAU - "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"
 2. In the wickedness of our heart we scheme and plan our sins. This is sin of the worst sort because it is willful sin. It is premeditated. Micah is not speaking of those sins that come about as the result of some sudden, unexpected temptation. He is speaking of willful scheming. Insatiable coveting. Those who gain at the expense of others.
Matthew Henry described it:
"It is bad to do mischief upon a sudden thought, but much worse to devise it, to do it with design and deliberation; when the craft and subtlety of the old serpent appear with his poison and venom, it is wickedness in perfection."²

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1534.

3. They were not just vain dreamers. No, they were men of action. As soon as they woke up they put their schemes into action. "When morning comes, they do it." Given over to our reprobate minds we sin with unrestrained passion. Micah is saying we sin because we can. We are able. It is in our power.
- D. This also describes the autonomy fallen man demands.
1. Micah writes, "they do it, For it is in the power of their hands." They insist on going their own way and God sets them free. He allows us to express our autonomy.
 2. Few comprehend what this looks like. We see it before our eyes, but few dare to describe it.
 - a. We want sexual autonomy and so God grants it. Men and women practice all manner of unrestrained debauchery. Even men with men and women with women—homosexuality. **Romans 1:26-28 NAU** - "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. ²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,"
 - b. Demanding our autonomy and denying any moral standard, the God-given genders of male and female cease to have any meaning. There is no connection to our Creator. We are what we feel we are, what we want to be. This is the reason we hear cases where people are unable to define what a woman is. It is because a woman is defined by whatever it means to you. You have absolute autonomy.
 3. In a world with hyper self-determination, the individual expression is supreme. The world is my stage. There is little motivation to care for our fellow man. It is all about me. In such a world justice often falls by the wayside. They seize property because they can. The powerful taking advantage of the vulnerable. **Verse 9** implies they prey upon the weak – widows and their dependent children.
 - a. It reminds me of the recent student debt debate. Thousands have incurred student debt. Our politicians have a solution. They'll forcibly steal from some citizens in order to pay off the debts of others. There is no justice in it. They do it because they can. And it buys votes.
 - b. Through reckless spending they have caused runaway inflation. It is another horrible form of robbery as they strip away life savings. Their runaway spending and endless promises buy votes but it is unjust. They do it because they can.
 - c. 1 Kings 21 demonstrates how helpless a man is when the government wants his inheritance – Ahab and Jezebel had little trouble stealing Naboth's vineyard.

- d. This is what wicked men do. They steal what belongs to others.
Micah 2:2 NAU - "They covet fields and then seize *them*,
 And houses, and take *them* away. They rob a man and his
 house, A man and his inheritance."
 The word for "seize" means to take by force.

Conclusion:

1. **Verse 3** begins with the word, "therefore." God would reign down His judgment upon this wickedness. In about a century the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and carry them off into captivity. It is God's justice on display. It is God's faithfulness to His own holiness put on display. But this alone did not change their hearts.
2. The message of God's covenant dealings with Israel in the Old Covenant was their need of a Savior. The only solution for sin is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Jeremiah 31:33-34 NAU - "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.
³⁴ "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
3. Because they can. Sinful men continue to sin because they can. But God is able to change our hearts. He is able to change our wills. God is able to make all things new. God's people can no longer live under the yoke of unbridled sin. The greatest restraint of sin is the restraint of God's redeeming grace whereby God changes our nature and gives us hearts to love and obey Him.