

I suggested last time that there are three sections to Micah’s prophesy:

each opening with Micah’s call to “hear”

The first is addressed to the nations:

“Hear, you peoples” (1:2).

The second is addressed to the leaders of Israel:

“Hear, you heads of Jacob” (3:1, repeated in 3:9)

The third is addressed much more broadly:

“Hear what the LORD says... (6:1),

“Hear, you mountains” (6:2).

So last time we focused on how the sins of Israel
are a warning to the nations about the coming judgment –
that God will judge all nations by the principles that he taught Israel.

For the next couple weeks we will focus on the church –
because Micah is calling the leaders of the *church* to listen and pay attention.

Tonight we look particularly at the warning to the church in Micah 3.

There are three sections to Micah’s warning –

first, addressing the rulers of Jacob as cannibals;

second, addressing the prophets as leading the people astray;

and third, declaring that this cabal of civil and religious leaders
will result in the destruction of Jerusalem.

One commentator urges us:

“Micah’s words...deserve to be taken to heart by each generation of God’s people.

They challenge every attempt to misuse the service of God for one’s own glory and profit

They are a dire warning against the complacency that can take God’s love
and reject his lordship.

They are a passionate plea for constancy between creed and conduct.

The Lord is content with nothing else.” (Allen quoted in Waltke, 190).

1. The Warning to the Church: the Fall of Old Jerusalem (3:1-12)

a. The Rulers of Jacob Are Cannibals (v1-4)

And I said:

Hear, you heads of Jacob

and rulers of the house of Israel!

Is it not for you to know justice?—

² *you who hate the good and love the evil,*

Micah opens his second address by addressing the “heads of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel,”

and accusing them of not knowing justice.

It is worth noting that Micah addresses the heads and rulers –

not the king.

As we saw last time, Jeremiah 26 attributes Micah 3 to the days of Hezekiah, and says that Hezekiah repented when Micah preached Micah 3 to him, so it may well be that Micah is preaching this before King Hezekiah.

Micah may not refer to the king, or mention Hezekiah by name, but the king is complicit in this – since he is the one with the authority to overrule the heads and rulers.

And Micah insists that these rulers “hate the good and love the evil.”

Micah is talking to the judges of Israel.

These are the people who render judgment in the city gates.

In the ancient world, there was no such thing as “rule of law.”

There was no “legal code” in the ancient world.

The Law of Moses, for instance, takes the form of *examples* of justice, rather than a code of justice.

The Code of Hammurabi, another ancient law book, also has the feel of “Hammurabi’s greatest hits” – a collection of wise and just decisions that Hammurabi wanted other judges to think about.

So how did a judge know what to do?

Well, a judge in Israel should study the Law of Moses – because God’s law is perfect.

But notice this,

when we say that God’s law is perfect, we do not mean that *his code addresses every situation*.

Rather, we mean that God *judges justly in every situation*.

And so therefore a judge that would judge justly should render justice by loving the good and hating the evil.

No law code has ever been written that addresses every situation.

The US code regulating broccoli tries!

(it’s longer than the five books of Moses put together!)

But our statute-happy culture has turned justice on its head.

If something bad happens, our first thought is,

“there should be a law against that!”

We fear the arbitrary power of judges, so we pass mandatory sentencing laws – thereby preventing judges (in some cases) from doing what is *right!*

Yes, we need wise laws –

but we also need wise judges –

we need judges who love the good and hate the evil –

and Micah says that this is *precisely* what Israel lacks!

Think back to Genesis 2-3.

God planted two trees:
the tree of life,
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The knowledge of good and evil is essential to being a good judge.
Solomon prayed that God would give him
the ability to discern between good and evil
so that he could govern Israel.

But Micah points out that knowing good and evil is not enough.
You must *love* the good, and *hate* the evil.

But the judges – the heads and rulers of Jacob –
hate the good and love the evil,
and therefore tear the skin from off my people:

Who are “my people”?

Look back at 2:2 –

the man and his house,

or 2:9 –

the women of my people you drive out

The heads of Jacob and the rulers of Israel are oppressing “my people.”

In one sense Israel is “God’s chosen people” –
but God’s people love the good and hate the evil –
so when Israel’s rulers oppress and betray God’s people,
when they hate the good and love the evil,
then they become the worst thing imaginable:

cannibals.

Micah describes this in horrific detail:

*who tear the skin from off my people^[a]
and their flesh from off their bones,
³ who eat the flesh of my people,
and flay their skin from off them,
and break their bones in pieces
and chop them up like meat in a pot,
like flesh in a cauldron.*

Micah says that when judges rule unjustly –
when judges love evil and hate good –
then they might as well be cannibals.

They are devouring my people.

Why does Micah use this analogy?

Well, think about what the judges are doing.

By judging unjustly (and thereby handing over the property of the innocent)
they are taking the livelihood of the innocent.

The innocent are now stripped of their property –
they have been “flayed” –
and their substance, their inheritance, their life –
now is devoured by their oppressors.

But Micah is not content to use prosaic statements.

He wants to ratchet up the rhetoric.

He wants to show the wickedness of these judges for what it is.

It is *cannibalism* to devour the livelihood of the helpless.

And even as their sin is most heinous,

so also the LORD’s response will be the most extreme response:

⁴ *Then they will cry to the LORD,
but he will not answer them;
he will hide his face from them at that time,
because they have made their deeds evil.*

When the rulers of Israel cry out in distress,

God will ignore them.

There really is nothing worse than being ignored.

Haven’t you ever had that experience?

When someone you love is ignoring you,

you often wish that they would just get mad and get it over with!

Why?

Because you love that person – and therefore you want to be *with* that person –
and so when he (or she) is ignoring you,
you are not *present* with each other.

And there is no presence more wonderful than the presence of God.

There is no blessing more blessed than the face of God shining upon us!

And so when God *hides* his face and refuses to answer,
that is the worst!

There are times when God hides his face from people

because they have made their deeds evil.

Sometimes the reason why God does not answer you
is because you are acting wickedly.

How do you know?

How do you know the difference between
when it's your fault?
and when God is simply testing you?

Well, consider your actions!
Are you treating others fairly?

Verses 5-8 then address the prophets who lead “my people” astray.

b. The Prophets Lead My People Astray (v5-8)

⁵ Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets
who lead my people astray,
who cry “Peace”
when they have something to eat,
but declare war against him
who puts nothing into their mouths.

Micah says that the prophets say ‘Shalom’ to those who feed them,
but declare war on those who give them nothing.

This is one of the worst temptations a pastor faces:

how many churches have been destroyed
because a pastor looked the other way when a rich man sinned!
I think it's safe to say that virtually every major decline in church history
has been accompanied (I won't say ‘caused’ – but at least facilitated)
by pastors saying “peace” to the wealthy,
and “war” to the poor.

“Declare war” is probably too mild a phrase:

the phrase is “consecrate a war.”

The prophets of Israel have consecrated a war against those who don't pay them.

Charles Hodge, back in the middle of the 19th century,

worried that the Presbyterian church was becoming a wealthy church –
and a church only for the wealthy.

He disagreed with the practice of allowing each congregation to pay its own pastor,
on the grounds that that would encourage pastors to minister only to the wealthy.

Poor communities couldn't pay as well,

and so Presbyterian ministers would always be looking to go to richer churches.

If you will not preach the gospel to people because they can't afford it,

that is not “benign neglect” – that is war!

The Free Church of Scotland adopted a different system.
All their ministers are paid exactly the same amount.
The pastor of the largest, wealthiest church
is paid the same as the pastor of the smallest, poorest church.
And so the Free Church of Scotland is able to send ministers
wherever the gospel will flourish and bear fruit.
(Sure, they still have limitations: *someone* needs to pay –
but they are better able to minister in poorer communities!)

But if we lavish our attention on the wealthy,
and ignore the poor,
Micah makes it really clear what will happen next:

⁶ *Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision,
and darkness to you, without divination.
The sun shall go down on the prophets,
and the day shall be black over them;
⁷ the seers shall be disgraced,
and the diviners put to shame;
they shall all cover their lips,
for there is no answer from God.*

When the prophets fear man more than God,
then God will give the seers no vision –
and the prophets no message.

This is what happened to the mainline Presbyterian church:
they became fixated on maintaining their influence among the wealthy and powerful,
and so they lost their prophetic voice;
they lost their divine vision.

And I have to say that the PCA and the OPC did not escape unscathed!
We became so focused on the doctrinal battles of the 20th century
that we sometimes assumed that anyone who shared our doctrine
was on God’s side.
Just because a man is theologically conservative
does not mean that he loves the good and hates the evil.
Theological conservatives can sometimes be very nasty people.

The point is not: are you theologically conservative!
The point is: do you love the good and hate the evil.

James says the same thing.
Just saying that you believe in Jesus is not enough!

Faith must be demonstrated by what you do!

And so Micah says:

⁸ *But as for me, I am filled with power,
with the Spirit of the LORD,
and with justice and might,
to declare to Jacob his transgression
and to Israel his sin.*

Micah rarely speaks in the first person singular.

Usually when Micah uses the first person singular,
it is *God* who is speaking,
or Micah is speaking on behalf of Israel (in chapters 6-7).

Micah only speaks in the first person singular
in the lament in chapter 1, verses 8-9,
in the brief comment, “and I said” in 3:1,
and again here, in verse 8 of chapter 3.

Many have pointed out that 3:8 serves as Micah’s prophetic “call.”
It doesn’t explain the circumstances of his call.
But it does explain the purpose for which God called him.

“I am filled with power” –
in other words, “with the Spirit of the LORD,”
which could be said another way:
“with justice and might.”

The language of “justice” is primarily the language of the judge and the courtroom –
but “geburā” – “might” – this is the language of warfare.
The false prophets have consecrated a war against the poor:
Micah now says that God has consecrated him with his Spirit
to bring victory – to bring justice – against the prophets.

After all, justice and power require each other.
Power without justice is mere tyranny.
It’s hard to imagine anything worse than a powerful man who is unjust.
But if anything is worse,
it would be a just man who lacks power.
Because justice without power is pathetic!
A just verdict that is ignored accomplishes nothing.

But Micah is filled with power –
because he is filled with the Spirit of the LORD –
and when the Spirit speaks, he brings justice –

along with the *might* needed to enforce justice!

The judges of Israel were probably all theological conservatives!
The prophets of Israel all spoke in the name of Yahweh
(after all, Hezekiah was king – and he wasn't going to tolerate any prophets of Baal!).

But it's not enough to be theologically conservative!
The Spirit of the LORD must fill us –
we must be filled with power and with justice and with might –
for what reason?

To declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

The false prophets proclaimed peace – “shalom” – God's good pleasure –
to those who oppressed the needy;
thereby *consecrating* a war against the poor.

Micah *declares* to Jacob his transgression.
Too often *we* focus on the problems of “our culture” –
telling ourselves “peace” – God is happy with us! –
when *we* are blind to our selfishness and pride!

Micah's prophetic mission is to convict Israel of sin.
This is part of what Jesus came to do as well.
Christ executes the office of a prophet in declaring to us by his word and Spirit
the will of God for our salvation.

As one commentator put it,
“In Jesus justice has come to maturity, not only in the authority of his words
but in the fact that he suffered injustice and overcame it.
By suffering injustice in place of the unjust, he put justice in force with final authority.”
(H. Wolff quoted in Waltke, 175)

And part of that prophetic mission is declaring the judgment of God
that is about to come on those who will not repent.

And so Micah repeats his denunciation of the rulers and heads of Israel,
including his condemnation of the priests and prophets as well:

**c. Because of the Rulers, Priests and Prophets, Jerusalem Will Become a Heap
of Ruins (v9-12)**

⁹ *Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel,
who detest justice*

*and make crooked all that is straight,
¹⁰ who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with iniquity.*

¹¹ *Its heads give judgment for a bribe;
its priests teach for a price;
its prophets practice divination for money;
yet they lean on the LORD and say,
“Is not the LORD in the midst of us?
No disaster shall come upon us.”*

In verse 9, Micah says that the rulers of Israel
“detest justice.”

The word for detest is the word used elsewhere to speak of abominations.
In other words, they view justice as an “abomination.”

And, what is more, they make crooked everything that is straight.

You can see how verses 9-11 simply summarize and expand on
everything that Micah has said in verses 1-8.

Micah says that the religious establishment
has joined forces with the political and legal establishment
in plundering the people of God.

And all the while, they *claim* divine sanction for their deeds:
“Is not the LORD in our midst?”

But if you try to build Zion with blood – if you try to build the church with iniquity –
you will only succeed at destroying her.

¹² *Therefore because of you
Zion shall be plowed as a field;
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.*

Because the prophets said that God would protect them from disaster –
even as they betrayed the LORD’s people –
therefore, Jerusalem would be destroyed.

But not just “destroyed” –
Jerusalem would become a “heap of ruins” (the Hebrew for “heap” is “Ai” –
the name of the 2nd city that Israel destroyed in Joshua’s day),
and the “mountain of the house” –
in other words the most exalted place (the holy of Holies)
would become a ‘high place of the forest.’

Of course, this is preeminently true of Jerusalem in the days of Jesus.
The religious leaders (the priests and Sanhedrin)
joined with the civil rulers (the Romans and Herod)

against the LORD and his anointed.
And so Jesus himself said that the temple would be destroyed –
as it was in AD 70.

But Micah's warning remains true today.
Churches that once faithfully proclaimed the gospel
may become synagogues of Satan –
where the gospel is denounced.

When Hezekiah heard Micah's sermon here in chapter 3,
he repented (as Jeremiah tells us – Jer 26).

May we also repent of our cockiness and fickleness –
may we humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus Christ
and renew our commitment to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

Because Micah sees a hope beyond the destruction of Jerusalem.
He sees a new Jerusalem – the exaltation of the mountain of the house of the LORD.

We'll look more in depth at chapter 4 next time,
but I'd to close by reading the first five verses –
because it helps us to apply what Micah has said in chapter 3.

*It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,
² and many nations shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,^[b]
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
³ He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall decide for strong nations far away;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;
⁴ but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.
⁵ For all the peoples walk
each in the name of its god,*

*but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God
forever and ever.*

Micah calls all nations to repent – to go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to go up to the house of the God of Jacob.

In other words, the message of Micah is that repentance starts with worship.
Not just getting the outward form “right.”
But seeking the LORD himself.

And this means listening to God – “for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.”
You need to be diligent students of God’s word.
You can’t be slackers.
You need to pay attention to what God has said and done in history!

And finally, this means *walking* in the name of the LORD our God.
You cannot say “Lord, Lord,” unless you also *do* what Jesus commands.
Jesus did not say that discipleship consists in learning what he commands.
Jesus said that discipleship consists in learning to *observe* what he commands.

If you are not growing in your *practice* of what Jesus said to do,
then you are not being a disciple –
and indeed, you are in danger of becoming what Micah warned about.

The Spirit of the LORD came upon Jesus –
and filled him with justice and might to accomplish what we could never do.

It’s that great statement in Romans 8:
“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.
By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering,
he condemned sin in the flesh.” (8:3)

But now the Spirit of the LORD has come upon *us* so that we might do what God calls us to do.
As Paul goes on to say in the next verse:
“in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us,
who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (8:4)

Paul, together with Micah, insists that the people of God must *walk* according to the Spirit.
You cannot say “I believe in Jesus” – but then walk away.