

June 23, 2013
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Micah
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Micah 7:1-13.

1. Describe the picture of Micah looking for grapes or food that has been gleaned (vv.1-2).
2. Why was Micah's description of his culture so negative? Was it at all accurate?
3. What is Micah's hope?
4. In what ways could your society be compared to Micah's society?
5. In what do you hope?

I WILL WAIT FOR THE GOD OF SALVATION **Micah 7:1-13**

Just the other day I was talking to a pastor friend who said something that resonated with me and will resonate with many of you. He confessed that the first twelve years he ministered at the church things went well, or at least as expected. However, he also confessed that the past two years have been very discouraging because people were responding in a way he never expected. Some of you have shared with me similar concerns about your associations in the past months. There are times when we read or hear the local news that we think the entire society is unraveling. I don't know how many times in the last year my wife and I have responded to a news

report with, "What in the world?" You know things are bad when hermit-hood begins to look attractive.

That is how Micah felt while living in Judah, probably around the turn of the eighth century B.C. God has promised to make His nation desolate because of the piling up of the people's unconfessed, unforsaken sin. There can be no doubt based on the various prophets' messages that God was on the verge of opening the door of His judgment and letting the beasts into Judah's house. Things were not good in the nation.

Life is difficult in a society that teeters on the cusp of God's judgment. Other prophets like Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah described in some detail the character of their peers. It must of been stressful to live in such a town or society. Those prophets and their few righteous friends must have felt like Lot whose soul was tormented day after day as he lived in Sodom. Micah expressed the frustration a godly person experiences in such circumstances—and it is not a pretty picture. But, in the fashion of Elijah, Jeremiah, and David, Micah remembered the promises of God in favor of His people. Those promises cause us to resort to confidence in God's Word. Because God will keep every promise He ever made, we can face a very uncertain world with confidence.

How Utterly Disappointing Life Is (vv.1-6).

No doubt some folks among us have sympathized with Micah who wondered, where he could turn for encouragement (vv.1-4). A man is pretty discouraged when he moans, "Woe is me." But that is what Micah was saying. *Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires (v.1).* The word "woe" identifies an expression of deep grief or disappointment. It is as if to complain of being in great misery all the time. Is Micah whining for no good reason? Is he a spiritual wimp?

If we read carefully in the text before we discover that his picture of disappointment is accurate and powerful. In order to understand the picture Micah drew, we must be familiar with the law that God gave to His people and expected them to practice. God

required farmers to leave the corners of their fields of grain for gleaning, as well as portions of grapes and olives. The reason for this was to provide care for the poor and the foreigners who owned no fields or vineyards. So God's law required, *And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 23:22)*. The Bible recorded the story of Ruth and Naomi who planned to survive after they returned to Bethlehem from Moab by using this provision of the law.

That is the background for Micah's comparison. The prophet went out into society like a poor man looking for left over grain, grapes, or figs only to discover that there was nothing left to assuage his hunger. The grapes of kindness and goodness or the figs of faithfulness were missing. The vineyard was bare. The vineyard is the one God planted for Himself according to Isaiah's picture in chapter five. The nation of Israel (in this case, Judah that was left) was what remained of God's vineyard. The fruit Micah would have looked for would have been fruit of righteousness, which God expected His "vineyard" to produce.

Simply put, Micah discovered that the people were not righteous. He looked and looked but could not find examples of people living out demonstrations of God's character. He found plenty of religious people who were busy doing religious things. But where were the people who knew God and desired to live like Him?

Godly people seem absent and the best of the people left were more like thorns than fruit (vv.2-4). There seemed to be few people with good character, if any (v.2a). Micah assessed the situation like this: *The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind; Wait a minute! All the godly are gone? No one lives uprightly? That would have made for a lonely time for anyone who was righteous. It did. But, Micah was not the only man of God who felt quite alone. Abraham negotiated with God down to ten righteous people in a thriving metropolis, only to learn there were not even ten in the cities combined. Elijah felt like he alone was left as a person in Israel who loved God. But God revealed to him that He would set aside 7,000 people, in a nation numbering maybe millions, who would serve Him. Jeremiah identified with this loneliness as*

revealed in his statement, *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her (Jeremiah 5:1)*.

So Micah went out into the Lord's vineyard to find some righteous fruit only to discover that nothing worthwhile was left in the field and no one worthwhile was left in Judah. When we assess the condition of our nation, we are tempted to come to the same kind of conclusion. Oh, we are not so discouraged that we think there is no one in this nation of 314 million seeks God's righteousness. But we might sometimes ask, "Where are the people who produce the fruit of the Spirit?" Where is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and lifestyles like that? Instead we see plenty of sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

Was Micah being extreme? Did he exaggerate the problem? A description of Micah's culture proves his conclusion (vv.2b-4). He described the people by saying, *they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net (v.2). Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well; the prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul; thus they weave it together (v.3). The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand (v.4)*.

That is a very discouraging description of any city much less of a city where God's people lived. Would we want to live in a place with low morals like that? No one is safe in a morally bankrupt culture. In such a society it seems like everyone looks for the opportunity to trap or ensnare another (v.2). What they do best is evil (v.3a). The wicked attitudes and actions begin with the leadership (v.3b), then trickle down to the common people. Leaders, like the prince and judge, ask for bribes. In modern America we call this lobbying. The rich and famous (*great man*) say whatever they please with no concern about respect for those they should respect. And the leaders negotiate in an attempt to "*weave together*" corrupt laws. Micah said that even the best of the evil leaders are like briers that rip and tear the victims who get caught up in their plans (v.4a).

I can't think of a more apt description of the deception, subterfuge, and outright wickedness that has been proliferated in Washington for too many years now. Where do those foolish and wicked leaders think their evil will lead? God will not be surprised at the results. He makes the rules. God is not deterred in rendering judgment to whom it belongs. The day of punishment was coming. In the case of the people in Judah, King Sennacherib, the king of mighty Assyria would soon be knocking on the city gates (701 BC). In time it would be Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon (586 BC). And that would be the end of Israel's nationhood for a long time. Micah's day was certainly a day of confusion and defeat.

No wonder Micah said, "Woe is me!" What hope is there when no one is trustworthy (vv.5-6)? Read his further description of his town: *Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms (v.5); for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house (v.6).*

This is the description of a culture in complete meltdown. Imagine instruction not to trust anyone. Then again, we don't have to imagine because that is and has been precisely the case in some cultures. In 1989, I met with a young man from Russia who was visiting America. When he entered my office he checked all around the office and then went over to the window, pulled back the drapes and scanned the parking lot. Then he turned to me and apologized saying, "In my nation a man has to learn to trust no one and assume that someone has him bugged at all times." Is that not pretty much the case in America now? George Orwell's "1984" is true and worse than even he imagined. Many cities have cameras at intersections, in stores, in many public places that gather information about us. Government officials record our cell phone contacts and information, our internet activity and who knows what all. Almost anyone can buy a drone at Radio Shack or Best Buy and take pictures of their neighbors. It is simple to record other people's conversations. What do people plan to do with all this stolen information?

Imagine having to guard the doors of your mouth from your wife and best friends. We don't have to imagine. When I mentor and counsel young men who are planning to make ministry their vocation,

at some point I warn them to choose their words carefully, even in casual conversation, because one day everything they say can and will be used against them. Often those innocent, casual words will be taken out of context in order to be used as accusations.

Imagine a family so dysfunctional that family members rise up against each other, lie about and to each other, and virtually become enemies. This sound a lot like what Jesus taught in His day. He warned His disciples of a day when, *Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death (Matthew 10:21)*. He taught, *Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household (Matthew 10:34-36)*.

How do people and whole societies end up in such a terrible condition? Is this the nature of humanity? It is true that lying and deception are part of the fallen condition. Jesus pointed out that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). He certainly proved that to be the case in his conversation with Eve, which introduced sin into God's creation. Therefore, everyone who is a sinner by nature will live according to the nature of sin. Therefore, also, lying or deceiving is listed as a sin or one of the evidences of control by the flesh. That idea is found in Paul's description of an evil age: *Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2Timothy 3:13)*. Deception is one of the traits of the natural man Paul he listed in Romans. *Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips (Romans 3:13)*. And even Christians need to be reminded to be honest. *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another (Ephesians 4:25)*.

Because of the fallen nature God has to command us to honor our parents, love our wives, submit to our husbands, nurture our children. These good traits do not come naturally, and the more we neglect God's instruction and standard of righteousness, the more our families, work places, and society will evidence chaos. Micah's peers refused to do what God told them to do in 6:8. *He has told you, O*

man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)? Therefore, Micah's society looked the way he described it in 7:5-6. Many times the evidence of our own society and circles looks like the horrible picture that Micah painted which depicted his day. What can we do? Have you never felt rather hopeless when you listen to the news or when you the latest family gossip is dumped on you? God's Word has an answer for discouraging relationships.

How Encouraging Hope in the LORD Is (vv.7-13).

Instead of running away from the Lord and rejecting His words, it is far more profitable to look to Him. Maybe folks don't do that because looking to the LORD causes reflection on sin (vv.7-9). Yes, but that is all part of the process of becoming right with God and a right relationship with God gives confidence in the face of conflict (vv.7-8). Micah confessed, *But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me (v.7). Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me (v.8).*

Surely there was a faithful remnant who connected with Micah. They too were discouraged with the "norm" in their society. They too would be encouraged by words of comfort and confidence. Micah, the righteous spokesman was determined to wait for God (v.7). He waited on the God of His salvation. His was not the kind of waiting and hoping someone has for something as unsure as winning the lottery, or maybe waiting for a miracle that would suddenly change all. Micah was looking with expectation to his loving God and heavenly Father, like a man scanning the horizon fully expecting to see a long awaited friend arriving. He waited for the God of his salvation. That would make such a God Micah's Savior. The prophet was confident that God listened to his prayers.

Therefore, Micah had confidence according to verse eight. It appears from a cursory reading of the text that verse eight is an expression of confidence from Micah that everything was going to turn out fine. That really is not the case in this verse. Sure, Micah had confidence, but there is reason for more than Micah to have confidence (v.8). Micah was indeed a picture of the righteous people

who waited on God and hoped in Him for salvation. But here the speaker actually changes because it is the remnant, the righteous people of Jerusalem who speaks (or a personification of the city). Jerusalem's enemies sought to destroy her. They overran her (both in 586 BC and AD 70). Does anyone have any hope for Jerusalem and the tiny nation of Israel? Everyone who trusts God's promises does.

Those who trust God have a right relationship with God. A right relationship with God reveals the need to confess sin. In a picture, the people of a future Judah will confess, *I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication (v.9).* The city personified illustrates the right response to those who God chastens because of their sin. The best response is to admit that we have sinned against God and then bear the indignation that comes with the sin.

That might seem hard to do, but consider the confidence expressed here. Remember that God Himself will plead your case. Ultimately, God will vindicate His nation. Ultimately, He will make them the leading nation in the world. And, in keeping with this picture, we Christians do well to remember that God will vindicate us who confess our sin against Him. The vindication is already certain because He has already clothed us in Christ's righteousness. He has already paid the debt for our sins and made us His children. We will rejoice when we are able to look upon the vindication that God levels in our behalf.

Forgiveness from sin results in a day of blessing. God will recompense the enemy (vv.10,13). The people of God should know, *Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets (v.10).* With the nation of Israel, it is not so much personal vengeance as a vindication of God's name. The nation of Israel is God's people. They have sinned and God scattered them. They are coming home to Israel in our day. One day, the people who make up the remnant (small remnant) will believe God fully and just Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Those people will trust in God and the world will scoff at them and mock them. God will vindicate His name — and His people will rejoice to see it.

That is a wonderful promise for a beleaguered people. We look forward to God's vindication in their behalf. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the same scenario plays out for the Christian. It is true that we by nature are sinners and deserve God's wrath. But when we confess our sins against God He forgives us and makes us His children and the recipients of His blessings. A sinful world will often recoil against God's favor on us and treat us unkindly. Worse is the fact that we will battle against our sinful nature and spiritual wickedness in our world. We grow weary and long to see complete and final victory.

There is good news. One day the enemy (whether it be Satan or his demons or individuals he uses, including sin itself) will be thrown into the lake that burns with fire for eternity. Read the promise Jesus gave to John. *And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10). Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).*

No wonder Micah would write, *But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds (v.13).* God keeps a record of sins committed. There will be pay day some day. But, there will also be a special time when God will bless His forgiven people (vv.11-12). Micah called it, *A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended (v.11). In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain (v.12).* At the same time God judges the unrepentant enemy, He will greatly bless His people. He will increase the size of the nation (v.11). Nations who were notorious enemies of Israel will come and show respect (v.12).

Older folks can remember that back in the "good old days" the villain was recompensed for his dastardly deeds and the righteous person was the hero. A world of entertainment sunk in sin doesn't write many books or movies like that. But that is God's plan. He has

written it all through the Bible. God promised to recompense the enemies of the nation of Israel and to pour out immeasurable blessing on the citizens of His favored nation. Some folks do not believe that God will carry out these promises. They believe that God is finished with the nation and that any picture of blessings are figurative and apply to Christians. However, we should have cause to wonder if God does not keep these clear and specific promises He made to Israel, why He would keep the literal promises He has made to Christians?

In fact, God's dealings with the nation Israel are often fitting pictures of His plans for the Church. God will complete His promised salvation unto eternal life for each person who has received Jesus Christ as Savior from sin through faith. God will bless us with life everlasting that exceeds human explanation. At the same time, God will vindicate His people as He pours out vengeance on the enemy of sin, Satan, and real personal enemies of the cross. That might seem fanciful and make believe to people who do not trust God, but it is our hope. God's promises motivate us to keep trusting Him and serving Him.