

*Majoring on the Minors: The Prophet Micah*  
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The prophet Micah lived towards the end of the eighth century BC. His job was to tell the people of both the northern and southern kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, that God demands righteousness from them. His job was to declare that God wants right living from them, every single one of them. His job was to tell Israel and Judah what God requires of them. His job was to go around and tell everyone what they were doing wrong, to tell them to straighten up, and to keep telling them until God told him to stop. I doubt he was a very popular guy. When a party was being planned, I doubt his name was the first name on the list. Do you think when he was sick anyone took him a meal, a card, or some flowers? The life of a prophet was a hard life, folks. Their job was to deliver whatever message they heard from God to a disobedient people. Over 100 times in the Historical and Prophetic Books of the Old Testament we read that "the word of the LORD came" to a prophet. Their calling was not to share their own ideas or agendas. They were called by God to be spokesmen for God, which would be fine (and even fun!) if the people were living as God told them to live. But they were not living as God told them to live because they couldn't. They couldn't. On their own, just like us, they could not do it. Let us pray: *Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for loving us, for teaching us, for helping us, for saving us. Help us to hear now your words of life and truth, that in being instructed by them, our lives may be transformed in ways we never imagined to the glory of your holy name, Amen.*

The northern kingdom, Israel, fell to Assyria in 722 BC due to their disobedience to God's instructions. The southern kingdom, Judah, was not far behind. The people of God were oppressing the poor, perverting justice through corrupt courts, and cheating in their business dealings. This was especially intense in the leadership. At this time there were three offices: prophet, priest, and king. They were all infested with corruption. There were false prophets, greedy priests, and rulers who sneered at justice. In Micah 3:9-12 he wrote, *"Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD's support and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us. Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'" Yeah, Micah was not the most popular guy. In fact, if you saw him coming, you probably ducked into the nearest alley and ran for your life!*

In the book of the minor prophet Micah, we read God's complaints against Israel and Judah as if we are in a courtroom. We see this very clearly in Micah 6:1-2 where God is calling his court to order, *"Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. 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."* You can envision the courtroom scene, right? And then it gets more personal from the LORD to his people. *"My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. '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. '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."*

God is charging the people with amnesia. *"You've forgotten all I've done for you! You've forgotten my mercy and grace!"* He even pulls out the words from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:2) when he gave the Ten Commandments, *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."* God is accusing Israel and Judah, the northern and the southern kingdoms, of forgetting his covenant, of forgetting his grace. What's the evidence of their amnesia? Their national and their personal unrighteousness. God delivered them out of Egypt, out of bondage, so they would be a holy nation, a people belonging to Him, but they had become the exact

opposite. This hits a bit close to home when you think about all that is going on in our nation, doesn't it?

So here is the response of the people to this accusation from the LORD. *"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? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* Do you hear the sarcasm? Never a good decision to come before God with sarcasm, folks. But the underlying understanding they obviously had is what is so troubling. They didn't know what would please God, but their best guess was that it somehow involved paying him off through empty rituals. John Calvin wrote this about their response, *"Hence they wish to discharge their duty towards God as a matter of necessity; but at the same time seek some fictitious modes of reconciliation, as though it were enough to flatter God, as though he could be pacified like a child with some frivolous trifles."* (Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 14, p. 338). They were treating God like one of their idols which could be somehow motivated or pacified by sacrifices of their own creation! And here comes one of the most well-known passages of Scripture not just in Micah but in the whole Bible in Micah 6:8, *"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."*

God says, "I don't want your sacrifices! I want your obedience! I want right living! I want righteousness from you! I want you to act justly. I want you to love mercy. I want you to walk humbly with Me. 24/7."

The problem for Israel and Judah was that they weren't doing these things. From the false prophets, the greedy priests, and the corrupt kings all the way down, everyone was found guilty. Everyone was found morally bankrupt. They hated justice and mercy. They were not walking humbly with their God. They lacked righteous leadership and they lacked personal righteousness, just like us today. How can we ever do perfectly what God requires? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God? Let's read now some words of hope from Micah that point to the coming of the great Deliverer, Jesus Christ. (Remember, Micah lived and prophesied 700 years before the birth of Christ.)

Micah 2:12-13, *"I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass through before them, the Lord at their head."*

He is speaking about a shepherd. In John 10:11 Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. He came to deliver us out of bondage to Satan, sin, and death! He came to free the Jew and the Gentile and make us into one flock. In John 10:14-16 we read Jesus' words, *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."* Micah told the people that one day they would have a righteous shepherd who would save them once and for all. But he also told them that this same shepherd would be a king. He says more about this in Micah 5:1-5:

*"Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses."*

Do you see all the prophecies about Jesus in there? Israel's ruler being struck with a rod? Coming from Bethlehem? One whose origins are from old, from ancient times? She who is in labor bears a son who will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty

of the name of the Lord his God? His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth? And no matter what comes against us, He will be our peace...

In Micah's day, Israel & Judah were suffering because they had corrupt leaders. Micah told them that one day a righteous leader would come. He promised them a great shepherd and a great king. He attempted to cure their amnesia about the promise God had made to send One who would crush the head of the serpent once and for all! And we know that the promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Lord!

We also need to be reminded of this. We know, don't we, that we are unable to be perfect, to be perfectly good by our own resolve, by our own strength? I know this about myself. I want to act justly. I want to love mercy. I want to walk humbly with my God 24/7. I want to. But I fail. We want the leaders of our country to act justly. We want them to love mercy. We want them to walk humbly with our God. But it's not happening, is it? Has it ever happened? Perfectly? No! There might be a glimmer here or a glimmer there of justice, of mercy, and of humility before God – but that's all it ever is. A glimmer.

So many people, good people, God-fearing, Christ-following people, are talking about what to do about the thousands and thousands of people walking towards the southern border of this nation. Thousands of people, families, children alone, people who have a glimmer of hope inside of them that maybe they could come to America, get a job, and be able to provide for themselves the basic necessities of life. Some of us have been to Honduras where many of these folks are from. We've heard the stories from their own mouths, including the mouths of former Honduran missionaries Dr. Scott & Diane Karper of corrupt leaders whose main objective is to keep the people needy and oppressed while they themselves pad their own pockets. This is the case for many of the people walking towards our southern border. They have been so oppressed, so enslaved by the corruption in their countries that they couldn't even fathom freedom. They knew if they tried to leave, false accusations against them may rise and might very well land them in prison with no hope of release. But then they hear of a great army of people heading north. Perhaps if they slip into the middle of the group their departure might be undetected by the thugs in charge. Perhaps this is their chance to finally be freed.

What does it look like to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God as we think about what to do with all these people? Some are truly looking for a refuge - a safe place to live and thrive. But some others are not. Some are wicked people looking for new places and new people to harm with their evil schemes of addiction, human trafficking, stealing from responsible American citizens, and worse. William VanGemeren wrote, *"Justice, as it pertains to human beings, is that quality of integrity by which one deals with people in accordance with God's standard."* (*Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, p. 154)

On our own we do not know what to do. I don't know what is right to do. On our own we are unable to perfectly enact justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. We have to cry out individually and collectively for the One through whom we can become the righteousness of God – Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and our King. Romans 5:19 tells us, *"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."* 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* Jesus perfectly lived out Micah 6:8 for us. He kept the law, enacting perfect justice. He loved mercy. He is the wonderful, merciful Savior. He humbled himself and walked faithfully with the Father. And so, when we have put our faith in Him, we are hidden in Christ who alone, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, can help us know and do what is right.

I want us to listen to, read, and ponder the words of Romans 8:1-14 from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Scripture called *The Message*. Dr. Peterson died this past Monday at the age of 85.

*Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has*

*magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.*

*<sup>3-4</sup>God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that.*

*The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.*

*<sup>5-8</sup>Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.*

*<sup>9-11</sup>But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's!*

*<sup>12-14</sup>So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons."*

God's call to Israel & Judah through the prophet Micah was what Paul wrote to us in Romans. Quit with the wicked ways of serving self by putting our full faith, our full weight, and our full hope into the ways we can control and manipulate everything and everyone around us to get what we want. Let's put our full faith, our full weight, and our full hope in the fulfilled and still being fulfilled promises of God through Jesus Christ the Lord. The good shepherd of the sheep, the majestic king, the Promised Savior will show us the way, will lead the way, has already made the way for true justice, true mercy, and true humility before God.

Let us pray: *Father we come before you, so aware of our own shortcomings. We are so quick to point to everyone else as the source of our problems. We are so quick to blame. So quick to defend our own actions pridefully. Humility seems a foreign concept. Forgive us. We have not acted justly. We just haven't. We have not loved mercy. We haven't loved it as Jesus loves it. We have merely chosen it when it was convenient. We have not walked humbly with you. We think we're walking with you just because we come to church or read our Bible from time to time or sing songs of deliverance. But walking humbly? Submitting to you? Living as you call us to live? We have not. Forgive us. Please forgive us. Help us, Father. For those who have not welcomed you, may today, may this moment be the moment they yield to you, say yes to you, say no to doing this on their own strength. In this moment, Father, receive them. You promised to strengthen us, to help us, and to uphold us with your righteous right hand. Oh, how we need the fulfillment of your promise today. Oh, how our nation's leaders need the fulfillment of your promise! Your Word tells us that if your people, who are called by your name, will humble themselves and pray and seek your face and turn from their wicked ways, then you will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and will heal their land. Oh Father, today we choose to humble ourselves before you, seek your face, and turn from our wicked ways. Thank you that you hear us, that you forgive us, and we pray for you to heal our land, starting right here with us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*