

HALL OF JUSTICE

Micah 6 & 7, with Matthew 23:23-26

Andrew Irvin

08-29-21, First United Methodist Church

Well this is it! The fourth and final message in Micah. I hope that all of you have read through Micah at least once during the last three weeks. After all, it's only seven chapters!

By the way, did you know that it's the shortness of this book that makes Micah one of the minor prophets? He wasn't a coal miner, he wasn't less significant, in fact he ministered as a prophet for 40-60 years! His book is just shorter. When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, he and the other minor prophets all fit on one scroll, as opposed to his counterpart Isaiah, for example, who occupies one scroll all on his own.

Along the way in Micah I hope you heard some things that encouraged you. It's all discouragement and condemnation today. :) Hardly! The prophets read harsh, but there is always, at least, a glimmer of hope.

If you brought a Bible with you today, I want to invite you to open it to Micah chapter 6. We are going to cover verses 1-13 in chapter 6 and then just a few verses in chapter 7 that will help us finish off this short book packed with eternal truth. Chapter 6 opens with a familiar word: HEAR!

A. HEAR GOD (6:1-2)

If you've been with us this whole series, and why would you be anywhere else :), you may remember that Micah's writings are organized around three shema's. Shema is a very authoritative way of saying LISTEN UP!

>> In chapter 1, God tells all the people of the world to hear Him. The invitation to come to God is for ALL people of all nationalities, ethnicities, language

and cultural groups, skin colors, regardless of socioeconomic background, physical disability, or anything else.

Just as worship that centered in the Temple was not just for Jewish people, we need to throw off the notion that Christianity is the religion of the West, and especially, caucasians. Christianity began in the Middle East, and first grew in Israel and places like Syria and Egypt and throughout North Africa, Turkey, and India, before it made its way to Rome.

Did you know that some of our most influential theologians and pastors were North African? Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril spoke and wrote in Greek while Cyprian, Tertullian, and Augustine wrote in Latin. Hence, both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches refer to them as the Greek and Latin Fathers. While these are preserved accurately in the rich iconography of the Eastern Church, many of the early church leaders including some of these North African fathers, as well as Jesus and the Apostles, were painted with white skin during the Renaissance. Regardless of paintings, church schisms, and everything else, Jesus Christ is Savior of the world, not just select groups.

So the first shema brings us to the global invitation of God: all people on earth, here His voice!

>> In chapter 3, God says SHEMA! to the leaders of Judah who should know and embrace justice, but instead cannibalize their own people. We will come back to them in a little bit.

1. This is the third and final “shema” (HEAR!) in the book of Micah.

Hear what the Lord says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ² Hear, O 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.

2. God is Judge and Plaintiff, the Mountains are invited to be God's witnesses.

We see a grand Courtroom scene here. The eternal Hall of Justice. God invites His people, the people of Judah, to plead their case before the mountains. God is Judge - as always, but God is also just, so God invites the mountains, as impartial witnesses, because human hearts have become too hard. The mountains, in existence since the second day of creation, are representative of the majesty and power of their Creator.

God revealed His glory to His people on Mt Sinai. From that mountain He gave His people the Ten Commandments, which contained the details of the covenant life into which He was calling His people. Other mountains were associated with demonstrations of God's power and the ministry of the prophets.

Additionally, the mountains were witness to the idolatry of the people, who constructed high places and shrines with idols of false gods. In the mountains they built secret, defiled altars from which the gruesome rituals of child sacrifice were practiced.

B. God's Complaint (6:3-5)

God announces that He will lodge a complaint against His people. To dig down to the heart of the matter, He starts off with questions.

"My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer Me."

If we lived in Judah with Micah, we would have understood God's frustration as well as His divine sarcasm. It may have caused us to squirm a little. Surely, God must have done something to us to cause us to turn from His ways. Surely, He mistreated us, that we would think of mistreating others. Surely, His Law became too burdensome for us that we would live as if it never existed.

1. God "burdened" Israel by rescuing them from slavery and bringing them into covenant life.

God reminds His people that if it were not for His intervention on their behalf, they would still be slaves in Egypt. As He made covenant with them, He gave them the Law, so that they would no longer live as slaves, but instead be self-governing citizens. They were their own judges under God, ruling their own lives without interference and joining together to enforce the Law in their families, neighborhoods, tribes, and nation. They went from powerless to, under God's provision, having their destiny in their own hands.

2. Does your salvation feel like a burden or a deliverance?

Not only were the people of Judah delivered from slavery long ago, but God declares that He has redeemed them... and that moves us more into the present tense. Even these stubborn and rebellious people He has redeemed. You may say, "Yes, but they were redeemed year by year because of the sacrifices that they brought."

What did the sacrifices harken back to? That first sacrifice observed by the entire Jewish Community in Egypt - the Passover. The blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts of the house so the angel of death passed over. It was an act of faith. "The righteous shall live by faith," says our God.

C. People's Response: Judah and Micah (6:6-7)

In this Hall of Justice, the people are the defendants. They actually have no defense, because the prophet Micah is among the people, and we will hear from him in a moment. But, here go the rest of the people of Judah.

1. The people of Judah defaulted to outward observance.

In their response to God, they ask Him how they should approach Him. In my opinion, this is a tragic question.

The people of Judah had the Law as a guide, and besides the written law, they had living guides. The priests and the Levites - as well as the prophets and even their kings - were called to equip the people in their journey of faith with God. The people should have felt so well-connected to God that they shouldn't have felt distant and shouldn't have to ask how to approach God. But they did.

Their answers, though we often put them in songs and hold them up as ideal, are actually deadly. Their solutions range from expensive to absurd.

2. The people of Judah made no distinction between what was holy and unholy.

They begin with a calf a year old. This calf would have been born at the time of the last yearly sacrifice. It would have been blemishless. The owners of the calf would have to feed it and take good care of it until the time of the sacrifice. As the calf grew, it became more valuable. A year old calf in the peak of its health would command top dollar if sold at auction. Instead, it was taken to the Temple as a sacrifice.

“But if that’s not enough God,” the people continued, “How about thousands of rams and a river of olive oil for a marinade?” And if that absurdity wasn’t enough irreverence, they continued with the unthinkable, “How about my firstborn?” Now I know what some of you are thinking... some of you are thinking that sacrificing your firstborn sometimes seems like a good idea. :) But that’s because you wouldn’t seriously put that on the table.

Yet it was on the list of sacrifices for the people of Judah - and here is something that should make everyone of us pay attention: they had wandered so far away from God that the only distinction they made between the year-old calf and a firstborn child was only one of value, not a distinction based on what was

actually pleasing to God. Human sacrifice, and in particular child sacrifice, is the most egregious act a human can commit. Jesus Himself said that it is better that an abuser of a child be tied by the neck to a huge cement block and thrown into the deepest part of Lake Ming than that they abuse a child. The fact that this was done in violation of the first commandment, you will have no other gods before Me, stirred up the righteous indignation of the Almighty all the more.

This reveals the heart of God: the more innocent and vulnerable the individual, the more they must be protected by the people of God, not allowed to be sacrificed at the hands of the powerful, the elite, or those who are deceiving others into thinking that they need the convenience of planning. The psalmist reminds us that “Children are an heritage from the Lord!” and, “You saw me when I was yet unformed; You knit me together in my mother’s womb.” This issue, like human trafficking, and any other act that exploits the powerless is a great moral evil and one of the most heinous injustices of our time.

In their defiance of God, the people of Judah began with what they knew the Law required, then went off the rails to absurdity, and finally proposed the unthinkable. All of these were unacceptable, because the people wanted to give the sacrifice, without a faith-filled lifestyle of surrender to God. As the people went through these ideas of possible sacrifices, you can sense an escalating cacophony of noise and then finally Micah’s voice thunders out, silencing the others. What he says in Micah 6:8 are familiar words for us. Let’s read them together.

On screen, Micah 6:8 - **“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

D. The Prophet’s Presentation (6:8)

Come before the Lord with your whole heart, soul, and mind. It’s not just a one-and-done. It’s a lifestyle complete with verbs. :)

1. Do Justice

- a. Justice is impartial, righteous action that reflects the heart of God.

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees in Jesus' day, like the people of Judah in Micah's day, got caught up in the fulfillment of the Law and not a life of love.

- b. **Jesus confronted the teachers of the Law about injustice.**
(Matthew 23:23-26)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Following the Law had become a very intricate game to the religious leaders of Jesus' Day. These spices were tithed to the seed or leaf. Yet when it came to practices of spirituality that would cost them deep down in their souls, and perhaps inconvenience them: justice, mercy, and faithfulness, they were lacking.

Quit playing games! Start acting impartially towards everyone, giving preference to those with less power and wealth.

Do justice.

2. Love Mercy

- a. Mercy is God's faithful, covenant love to His people.
“Chesed”
- b. This mercy is available to all, regardless of label or condition.
- c. What does it mean to *love* mercy?

Sometimes we tolerate others and show mercy to them, yet with a chip on our own shoulder.

And if we look at people on a transactional basis, or as a label, it's easier for us to turn off mercy. When we see each other as God does, we realize that our brother or sister is more than their most recent mistake, their political party, their vaccination status, their race, their socioeconomic background, or their apparent limitations. Burn the labels, and see people, including yourself, as having the intrinsic, eternal value that God gave them.

We are to love mercy in chapter 6 the same way that the leaders of Judah were called upon to embrace justice in chapter three. Both arms! Wholehearted! Faithfully loving, even as God is faithfully loving us.

3. Walk Humbly with Your God

This is interesting because it has more than just the verb and subject of the sentence... we have a few more words here... descriptive words for walking and for God. When my wife or a friend asks to walk *with me*, they have to move faster or slower to match my pace. When *I'm* walking *with someone*, I have to go faster or slower to match their pace. I'm walking with God. And He's not just God... He is my God. I am called to walk with my God. Is God your God today?

And I am not just called to walk with my God. I am called to walk humbly with my God. This is where we tend to fall down... humility. We are proud of our churches, proud of our pastors or our doctrinal pedigrees. We are proud of our own righteousness, and we are proud of ourselves. We need some humility... a recognition of how awesome and all-powerful and perfect God is, and a recognition that God is God and I am not. So I need to walk circumspectly, deferentially, submissively, humbly with my God.

As Micah wraps up His brief presentation, God renders His verdict.

E. God's Verdict (6:9-13)

- 1. God's pronouncement of punishment still comes with an invitation to grace (6:9).**

God still wants His people to repent, so even at the beginning of issuing His verdict and sentence, His invitation is for them to turn right now from what they are doing and receive grace and mercy to help in time of need. Just listen, and acknowledge that God is about to judge you for your sin.

2. Lack of repentance leads to destruction. This is global as well as personal. (6:13)

3. Often, we are destroyed by our own stubbornness. We don't need any external punishment.

The truth is that even though He may have, God didn't need to take an active role in the destruction of the people of Judah. They were headed down that path anyway, because of their own stubbornness and self-driven choices. But praise God, He doesn't stop with our sentencing and neither does the book of Micah. We end with a look at God's mercy which brings restoration to His people.

Do you remember Jonah? Jonah saw God's mercy and complained to God about it. Micah sees God's mercy and worships Him.

F. People's Restoration (7:7-9; 18-19)

On week two we studied characteristics of justice. One of those was that Justice brings correction and restoration. As the recipient of God's justice, based on this passage, I am confident that:

1. God's justice always includes our good. (7:7)

2. We may be disciplined by Him for a season. (7:8-9)

^{7:7} But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. ⁸ Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.

3. Our attitude often affects the outcome. (7:9a)

⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until He pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see His righteousness...

This statement probably needs a finer point - My attitude often affects the outcome in my spirit. I realize that because of my sin I am bearing the consequences. I realize that God is not against me and there will come a time when He says, "You've suffered under these consequences long enough." This will preserve me from bitterness and allow true repentance to take hold of my heart.

4. Repentance and Restoration = Worship (7:18)

With his worshipful question, Micah brings us almost full circle. The name Micah means, "Who is like the Lord?"

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.

When we really realize who God is, we will worship. We won't be caught up in the details of whether or not we like the song or what time it is. When we really realize who God is, we will be caught up in Who He is... the Lord, God, Giver of life, Fount of every blessing, Forgiver of sins.

Do you know the forgiveness of God for your sins? It's as easy as ABC: admit you are a sinner who needs a Savior; Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for Your sins, doing what no other sacrifice could do; satisfying God's wrath for anyone who believes; Confess He is Leader of Your life and commit to follow Him in faith and love.

All who come to Jesus find that at the highest place of the Hall of Justice there is a throne of mercy. All who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved.

5. God will keep His promises. (7:19-20)

Justice reflects the heart of God. And here is something that is near and dear to His heart as well: God will keep His promises. Even if we fail to the point of forfeiting blessings that could otherwise be ours, the Scriptures remind us that even when we are faithless, God is faithful for He cannot deny Himself.

The ultimate Fulfillment of God's promises is His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. About 500 years after Micah, the Apostle Paul wrote, "All the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." 2 Corinthians 1:19-20

Who is like the Lord? No one! But we, by the mercies and blood of Jesus, may grow in His likeness as we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. Amen.