

A God of Justice + Mercy: A Call the Lord (Micah 2)

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Our culture increasingly views people in one of two categories. You're either among the oppressed or you're an oppressor. Either you're a good guy divesting yourself of power and lifting the marginalized or you're a bad guy holding onto your power and perpetuating the status quo. From a Christian perspective, there are a host of problems with that view of the world.

First, there's a critical sense in which every human being belongs in both categories, not one or the other. Take the words we speak for example. Who among us has not hurt other people with our words and been hurt by them? Second, human authority is not an intrinsic moral liability. It all depends on what you do with it. Do you use the power God has entrusted to you for good or evil?

Third, while Scripture categorically condemns human oppression, being oppressed does not render anyone righteous in God's sight. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, oppressed people included. We all deserve to be condemned before the Judge of all the earth on account of our failure to conform to God's moral standard in act, attitude, and nature. People who have oppressed others need a Savior. And people who have been oppressed by others need a Savior.

In Micah 2, the Lord speaks directly to Israelites who were using their power to oppress their neighbors, committing grievous acts of social injustice. They thought they could get away with it. They didn't believe God would do anything about it. The Lord engages their unbelief head on in this chapter, but he does so in a way that urges all of us to fear, to stand in reverent awe, of his justice and hope in his mercy.

There are significant dangers to avoid in passages like this one. One is a false guilt that wrongly assumes we must be culpable of the same injustices they committed. It's not arrogant to evaluate your life in light of God's Word and conclude, "Lord, by your grace, I don't believe I'm doing what the original recipients of this letter were doing." If that's the case, praise God, friend! May the warning God issues here compel you to keep running down the path of righteousness.

But there's another danger. We can assume if we're not guilty of the particular injustice the Lord condemns here that we have nothing to learn and tune out. Don't do that. What Micah says about the character and ways of God applies to all of us. None of us are immune to the unbelief that loses sight of God's justice or mercy. **We all need the Lord to engage our unbelief by teaching us to fear his justice and hope in his mercy.**

1) THE LORD WILL JUSTLY PUNISH THOSE WHO PRACTICE OPPRESSION (vv. 1-5)

Earlier in Micah 1, the prophet called out Israel and Judah on account of their spiritual adultery, their collective failure to know God as the only true God. As Ch. 2 begins, he pivots to detail the social injustice powerful people in Israel were committing as a result. The very structure of the book shows us the first and second greatest commandments are two sides of the same coin. When we're not loving God first and best, we will inevitably fail to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So what's Israel doing wrong? What's the sin for which Micah says she is about to be judged? V. 1 reveals it's not accidental, unconscious, or lingering despite her best attempts to do otherwise. Nor is it some sort of guilt by association on account of someone's ethnicity or economic status. It's personal, deliberate, and intentional. They are plotting in the evening and performing in the morning. They are using their power, the resources in "their hand," to practice wickedness.

V. 2, "They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away..." Like all sin, the problem starts in the heart. To "covet" is to believe there's something that someone else has that I need in order to be happy. It's an expression of greed. And it's the opposite of being content, of trusting our Generous King that even when we don't comprehend his ways, the boundary lines have fallen for us in pleasant places.

An Israelite king named Ahab thought otherwise in 1 Ki 21. A neighbor named Naboth had a beautiful vineyard. Ahab wanted it to grow vegetables. But when he offered to buy it, Naboth refused. 1 Ki 21:3, "But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.'" Ahab promptly throws a pity party, leading his wife, Jezebel, to murder Naboth so Ahab can take the

vineyard. In the eyes of the law, murdering an innocent man was a big deal. But so was taking his land.

Bruce Waltke describes the situation well. "In that agrarian economy a person's life depended on his fields, and for that reason his inheritance was carefully safeguarded by the Law. It was a sacred trust, not just another piece of real estate. If a person lost his fields, at best he might become a day laborer; at worst, he might become a slave. In either case he lost his independence, his freedom before God, and became a dependent of the land barons."

That is exactly what Micah's countrymen were doing. They were taking houses and fields for themselves through oppression and injustice, robbing their neighbor of the "good land" (Deut 4:21) God had given him. V. 2 reminds us the whole concept of private property isn't rooted in selfishness or western capitalism. It's rooted in the wisdom of God. The land barons were taking what God had said belonged to someone else. Employers do the same thing today if they fail to pay or grossly underpay those who work for them. Employees do the same thing if they cheat on their timesheet or do personal projects on the company dime. Coveting and social injustice go hand in hand.

How does the Lord respond? V. 3, "Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster..." The parallelism with v. 1 is striking. What are the Israelites doing? Devising wickedness. So what is God doing? Devising disaster. It's the same two words in Hebrew.

Micah's point is not that God is repaying their moral evil with moral evil of his own. Rather, God is going to give them exactly what they deserve. They will reap what they have sown, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. He will bring a just retribution upon the wicked, a punishment that fits the crime. His judgment is unavoidable. Every oppressor will be humbled. V. 3, "And you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster."

Friend, the Lord is ultimately the one who humbles the proud. I'm not saying it's wrong to contend for justice, whether in private or in the public square. I am saying that if you try to do God's job for him and use our own power to humble someone, you will invariably oppress those who oppressed you. Rom 12:19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is

mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Do not retaliate as a vigilante. Fear the Lord. Wait for the King.

So what kind of disaster will God bring to pass against Israel? Look at v. 4. He will take their land away and give it to foreigners, presumably a reference to the Assyrians and Babylonians. Those who seized property from others will have their own property seized. But that’s not the worst consequence. More frightening by far is the promise in v. 5. “Therefore you will have none to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.”

They’re not just going to lose their land, including the portion the Lord originally gave them. When a remnant returns from exile and the Lord graciously restores his people, those who practiced oppression will not be counted among them. They will be excluded from the assembly. They will have no part in the inheritance of the redeemed.

So it will be on the final day, brothers and sisters. Jn 5:28–29, “For an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” Does that mean we earn our way into the heavenly assembly by being a good person? No. It means a tree is known by its fruit.

The people of God do not consist of those who merely believe in God, go to church, or pay it forward. The assembly of the Lord consists of those who have surrendered their life to King Jesus and are obeying him accordingly! Ethical righteousness is mandatory. Jas 2:17, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

That’s why maintaining our corporate holiness as a church through discipline is so important. If we tell someone they can live a life characterized by injustice, given over to unrepentant sin, and still consider themselves part of the “assembly of the Lord” we’re giving them a false assurance of salvation. The Lord will justly punish those who practice oppression. And if they refuse to repent in this life, that punishment will be eternal.

You might look successful in the eyes of the world, friend, no less than the land barons in Micah 2 who had it all. But if greed and injustice get you there, I warn you. You will suffer a total loss in the kingdom of God. Do not gain the world and forfeit

your soul. Fear the Lord. Sadly, that is not how Micah's original audience responded.

2) A LACK OF REPENTANCE REVEALS THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHING (vv. 6-11)

Look at v. 6. How do they respond? "Stop it, Micah. We don't want to hear it. You're blowing smoke. "Do not preach' – thus they preach – one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us." Like Satan in the Garden of Eden, we functionally say the exact same thing whenever we refuse to walk in the fear of the Lord. We act as if there are no serious consequences for rejecting the Lord.

"Besides, Micah, God isn't full of wrath! He's patient and loving. I mean, that's his job, right? He's not going to get impatient with us like you're saying or bring all this judgment you're talking about. Read Ex 34:6! "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

Is that true? Is God merciful, gracious, and slow to anger? Absolutely and gloriously so. But what else is equally true? Ex 34:7, "But who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Ex 22:22-24 is even more specific. "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword..."

God isn't more merciful than he is just - just on the outside, but merciful at the core. No. He is infinitely merciful. And he is infinitely just. The moment we emphasize one of those attributes to the neglect of the other is the moment we worship a god of our own making. That's where false teaching starts. Usually, it doesn't start by saying something that is categorically untrue. It just presents a selective portrait. It picks some things the Bible says and ignores others.

For example, does Genesis 2 teach that God created our physical bodies, sexual desires included? Yes. But does that mean whatever I feel like doing must be good? No. Because Scripture Romans 1 teaches that all our physical desires have been corrupted by sin. Does the Lk 6:38 say, "With the measure you use it will be measured back to you?" Yes. But does that mean the more money I give to God the

more money he will give to me? No. Because Matt 6:24 says, “You cannot serve God and money.”

Dig into most kinds of false doctrine and you can typically find a half-truth masquerading as whole truth. Why? Because the pride in our hearts that persistently exchanges who God says he is for who we want him to be, a god who doesn’t get in our business. He plays nicely on the sidelines, fixing our problems whenever we run over with our hurts and anxieties, affirming our felt needs, and generally staying out of the way.

The problem, of course, is that such a God does not actually exist. He’s not real. The real God, the true God, the God who reveals himself to us in the pages of his Word, says what? V. 7, “Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?” Micah isn’t talking about salvation through works. He’s talking about the obedience of faith!

Only those who obey God’s Word, starting with his command to turn away from sin and turn toward trusting and following Jesus, will experience God’s eternal favor and blessing. He’s not saying we earn God’s blessing through ethical righteousness. He’s saying the path of ethical righteousness, including a lifestyle of treating other people with integrity and justice, is the only path of spiritual blessing.

Israel’s problem was that she wanted the covenant blessings without the covenant responsibilities. We sing the same tune whenever we quiet our conscience at the doorstep of deliberate sin by saying, “I know I shouldn’t do this, but if I do, God will still forgive me.” We presume upon the mercy of the Lord just like they did. We forget the warning in Luke 1:50: “His mercy is for those who fear him.”

Israel didn’t fear the Lord. Instead, they continued stealing from the unsuspecting, taking advantage of people who trusted them, all to line their own pockets. The victims in v. 8 are not just “women.” They’re God’s “people.” They’re not just “young children.” They’re children to whom the Lord gave dignity and “splendor.” By oppressing their neighbors, they were assaulting the One whose image they bore. The Lord so identifies with the weak and vulnerable that an attack against them is an attack against him. Remember that when you suffer injustice, Christian. You’re not alone.

In v. 10, Micah resolutely points unrepentant Israel toward her inevitable end, namely, exile. “Arise and go, for this is no place to rest, because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction.” Unrepentant sin isn’t just “unfortunate” or “unwise.” It’s spiritually and physically destructive. It destroys our relationship with God. It destroys our relationships with one another. And it will eventually destroy your soul in hell.

We don’t want to be a sin-focused church. We want to be a Christ-focused church. But a Christ-focused, Christ-centered church follows our victorious, sin-conquering King in waging war against the great enemy of our souls. So we don’t tolerate sin or toy with sin. We put it to death through the power of the Spirit lest it succeed in destroying us and those around us.

Micah concludes his response to Israel’s lack of repentance with a stinging indictment in v. 11. The reason you’ve rejected my words isn’t because you don’t like preaching. It’s because you only like preaching that tells you what you want to hear. The kind of preachers you like utter “wind and lies.” They discuss the finer points of wine-making and cocktail recipes.

They don’t implore you to abandon living for physical pleasure because Jesus is better. They provide suggestions for enjoying your best life now. They help you feel more positive, more upbeat, more confident that no matter what, God will always love you. They don’t speak of sin and righteousness and judgment or leave you more of your need for God’s mercy and his provision in Jesus.

May we never gather in this room to hear easy words, KingsWay. May we always gather to be exhorted, encouraged, and warned on the authority of God’s Word to prepare our souls for eternity by holding fast to Christ and living accordingly. False teaching says don’t worry about repentance. Micah urges us to recognize how much we need God to rescue us from ourselves and cry out for mercy.

3) THE MERCY OF GOD TRIUMPHS OVER THE STUBBORNNESS OF MAN (vv. 12-13)

From vv. 1-11 the Lord engages the unbelief that ignores or downplays our accountability to him by teaching us to fear his justice. If you’re familiar with Israel’s story, however, you know that no matter how many times God warned her, even

after the suffering of the exile, she continued to go her own way. Injustice remained. Her story is our story. Can you relate?

Her utter inability to make herself repent, to make herself turn toward the Lord instead of away from him, is what makes the promises in v. 12 all the more amazing. "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture..."

In the midst of justice, what will the Lord also do? He will continue to show mercy. Not a little mercy, or tastes of mercy, but a triumphant, overcoming mercy that does for Israel what she could not do for herself. What does language like "I will assemble," "I will gather," or "I will set" describe? The work of a Good Shepherd. His justice scatters them to the nations. His mercy reunites a remnant as a people for his own possession.

What does the "fold" represent for a sheep? A place of protection. How about the "pasture"? A place of provision. In Jesus, we discover both. Jn 10:14-15, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

When Jesus came to earth to live our life and die our death, he fulfilled the Lord's promise to protect and provide for his people. He protects us from the condemnation and death we deserve. He dies so we wouldn't have to die. And provides for us through the power of the Spirit, uniting us to himself such that every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is ours.

Left to ourselves, we refuse to assemble and gather as a people holy to the Lord. So what does the Lord do? He brings it to pass himself. He pursues, assembles, gathers, and makes us part of his chosen, covenant people. Were he not a Faithful Shepherd, there would be no people of God. But because he is sovereign in salvation, because his power to gather is greater than our power to scatter, his glorious purpose prevails.

Where we were trapped in sin and death like Israelites in a besieged city, King Jesus breaks us out! V. 13, "He who opens the breach goes up before them: they break through and pass the gate, going out by it." He's not a passive shepherd. He's a Warrior Shepherd, a Shepherd-King. King David uses the same language in 2

Samuel 5:20 to describe the victory the Lord gave him over the Philistines. "And he said, 'The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.'"

That's exactly what Jesus does, my friends. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he makes a way where there was no way. He rescues us from the clutches of the world, the flesh, and the devil, from enemies that were too strong for us. We follow him into a land of salvation, freedom, and deliverance. And he doesn't do his redemption thing and then point and say, "Hey, walk that way!" No. What does v. 13 say? He "goes up before them...Their king passes on before them." He remains with us, leading us, guiding us, bringing us safely home.

We must choose to follow him, exchanging death in the city of man for life in the city of God. But our Shepherd-King is the one who brings it to pass. The mercy of God triumphs over the stubbornness of man. Praise God for that, brothers and sisters! Apart from him, we have no hope.

CONCLUSION

Micah begins Ch. 2 by warning God's people to fear his justice. He ends Ch. 2 by urging the same people to hope in his mercy. Whether we have oppressed others or been oppressed by them, we need to hold fast to both.

His justice warns us to not take advantage of vulnerable members of our society and to look to him for vindication when other people hurt us. And his mercy compels us to turn to the Lord even after years of embracing lies about who he is. It doesn't matter how long you have failed to repent. It is never too late to trust his power to save.

Jesus stands ready. Jesus stands willing. He remains faithful even where we have been unfaithful. Even where we have doubted him. Even where we have refused to believe him. He patiently, graciously, persistently, engages our unbelief by teaching us to fear his justice and hope in his mercy. Let's ask for his help.