

All Will Be Held Accountable (Micah 3)**Matthew Williams****March 27, 2022**

Why does the thought of Vladimir Putin experiencing little to no consequences for invading Ukraine trouble us? Or Bashar al Assad getting away with murder in Syria. Or Kim Jong-un starving his people in North Korea. How do you feel when an officer of the law or a criminal judge is corrupted by bribery? Or pastors who preach a false gospel rake in millions? Something deep within many of us cries out, "That's not right."

Injustice of any sort is wrong. But there is something especially unsettling when a civil or spiritual leader practices injustice. They have a heightened responsibility. They have a greater impact on the people around them. If they are hating what is good and loving what is evil, we don't want them to get away with it.

The Bible has a lot to say to corrupt leaders, but it doesn't start where the world starts, with questioning authority. It starts by affirming authority because authority is a good thing in God's eyes. He gives rulers authority to lead nations. He gives pastors authority to lead churches. Our fundamental or starting attitude toward those who occupy positions of power and influence should not be one of skepticism or mistrust.

But Scripture is also clear that leaders are not superior to followers no matter how many college applications imply as much. They are sinners who need a Savior. Honor your leaders, yes, but do not put them on a pedestal. And when godless authorities spurn justice and delight in wickedness, God will not fail to hold them accountable. Lk 12:48, "To whom much was given, of him much will be required." That's both a call for repentance if you have used your leadership role to promote injustice and a tremendous source of hope for all who languish under the weight of their oppression.

In Micah 1, the Lord pointedly calls out Israel for her collective spiritual idolatry. In Micah 2, he details the specific kinds of social injustice that plagued the nation as a result. And in Micah 3, Yahweh turns his attention to the corrupt civil and religious leaders who made it possible. Through their own practice of injustice, the very people who should have been a safety net, protecting Israel from greedy land

barons, joined them in the same sort of oppression. Micah's words to them are both a warning and a comfort.

When it seems like the people who should be most concerned about practicing justice do the exact opposite. When it feels like you could get away with using the position or authority God has given you to line your own pockets. Remember this. **God will call every corrupt leader to account, upholding the justice they fail to provide.** How does he do it? Micah gives us three examples.

1) THOSE WHO ABUSE GOD'S PEOPLE WILL BE DEPRIVED OF HIS HELP (vv. 1-4)

In v. 1, the prophet opens the second section of the book by summoning the "heads of Jacob" and "rulers of the house of Israel," the civil and judicial authorities. "Is it not for you to know justice?" he asks.

Remember how Scripture defines justice. It always begins, as Micah does in Ch. 1, with the justice of God. Because he's holy, he is the moral standard. And because he's just, he requires his creatures to conform to the moral standard, to treat one another in accordance with his law. Doing justice means hating what God says is evil and loving what God says is good. It means relating to all people, especially the weak and vulnerable, in a way that's consistent with their identity as an image-bearer of God.

In Israel, a combination of elders, judges, and kings of Israel were responsible for upholding justice in the public square. It was their job, as Ralph Davis observes, to make and enforce "equitable legal decisions in line with God's covenant law." In Micah 3, they're doing the exact opposite. They're creating a culture through their own example where wickedness thrives. V. 2, "You...hate the good and love the evil." The people who should have been protecting Israel from injustice are using their office to perpetuate injustice.

In vv. 2-3, Micah rebukes them with a gruesome image designed to get their attention. He accuses them of cannibalism. Through government-sanctioned injustice, they are functionally devouring their countrymen, the people of God. Tearing their skin. Eating their flesh. Breaking their bones. Chopping them up like meat in a soup pot. It's a picture of rampant selfishness and greed.

In contemporary parlance, think turning a blind eye to predatory lending, supporting sex-trafficking, jailing political dissidents on false charges, or stealing from customers and clients. They have no use for God or any interest in what he says is right until they get in a bind. Until suffering comes their way, and they need God to fix their problems.

“Then they will cry to the LORD,” Micah says in v. 4. But what happens when they do? “He will not answer them, he will hide his face from them at that time...” Why? Because the King of Heaven will not be treated as magic charm. They want to do life their way and have God bail them out whenever they get in trouble. Micah says, “You can’t have it both ways.” The salvation of the Lord and all the spiritual and physical blessings that come with it are reserved for those who call upon him in truth, with humility and sincerity of heart.

The only kind of prayer God answers is a prayer fueled by genuine faith, a prayer that issues from a life submitted to God’s authority. That’s not the kind of life the heads and rulers of Israel want to live. V. 4, “they have made their deeds evil.” They are knowingly and deliberately practicing injustice. They’re not crying out in godly sorrow. They’re not interested in repentance. They just want God to make their life easy again.

So when they pray, God doesn’t respond. It’s not a case of Christians struggling with unanswered prayer like the psalmist. It’s the just fulfillment of Prov 21:13, “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.” As John Calvin observes, “Thus, Micah confronts us with the greatest evil that could ever befall us, that is, that God rejects those who reject him, and that God refuses to answer them, so that all their prayers are in vain and are no longer received by God.”

It’s a terrifying consequence, friends. And the most frightening part is that it’s real. Those who abuse God’s people will be deprived of his help, not only in this life, but in the life to come. They will cry to God and receive no answer, no relief, no deliverance. By spurning their fellow man, they have spurned their Maker. The Lord will hold them accountable.

2) THOSE WHO MISUSE GOD'S WORD WILL BE DEPRIVED OF HIS REVELATION (vv. 5-8)

In v. 5, Micah turns from warning civil authorities to warning religious authorities, namely, the prophets. It was their responsibility under the Old Covenant to deliver God's Word on God's behalf to God's people. So how did a prophet practice justice? By speaking the exact words, the Lord gave him to speak regardless of whether he liked the original recipients or not. Faithfulness in saying what God told him to say enabled the Word to serve as "a lamp" to the nation's feet and "a light" to their path (Ps 119:105).

In Micah's day, most prophets are doing the exact opposite and leading the people "astray" as a result. They cry "'peace' (v. 5) when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths." They are prosperity preachers who promise divine blessing to those who gave to their ministry. They're not speaking to represent God. They say whatever they need to say in order to make people treat them the way they wanted to be treated.

Sadly, we can follow their example, even in the church. We too can use spiritual language to manipulate people into satisfying our desires. Have you ever verbally condemned or withheld words of encouragement from your spouse to pressure them into fulfilling your sexual desires? 1 Cor 7:3 at them. "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband," is not a license for selfishness, brothers and sisters. It's a call to walk in Christlike love.

How about parents who give their children no room to respectfully ask mom or dad to reconsider a decision? They quote Eph 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," but it's not because they're jealous for God's honor. It's because they're lazy and don't want to be bothered with questions.

The prophets weaponized God's Word for personal gain. They took a God-given gift, the ability to receive spiritual revelation for the rest of the nation, and used it to line their pockets. The Lord responds with a judgment fitting to their crime. V. 6, "Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision...The sun shall go down on the prophets and the day shall be black over them." V. 7, "They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God."

He will hold them accountable by taking away their prophetic gift because they used it to serve themselves instead of the Lord. Listen carefully, my friends. The appearance a “spiritual” gift like prophecy or teaching in someone’s life is no guarantee of godliness or that what they are saying is actually true. The leaders in vv. 5-7 are false prophets. And Micah says they will not only be deprived of God’s revelation. They will also be deprived of God’s salvation. The “darkness” and “shame” awaiting them is complete and total.

On the day Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, all lying lips will be silenced. Until then, we must take care to avoid misusing God’s Word and lending our ears to those who do. I’ll give you a very practical suggestion. If a self-proclaimed prophet or teacher is always talking about how financial giving is the key to getting God’s blessing you can rest assured, they are preaching a false gospel.

But the Lord does more than hold false prophets accountable for misusing his word. He empowers true prophets to speak his Word with boldness and authority! V. 8, “But as for me,” Micah says, “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.”

In contrast to the false prophets who lose their ability to hear from God, Micah is “filled” with the Spirit of the Lord. It’s the Spirit who imparts God’s Word. It’s the Spirit that enables us to obey God’s Word. The Spirit did both of those things for Micah and justice characterized his ministry as a result. He acted as a man of character. He spoke and related to his countrymen in keeping with God’s law. He didn’t use his spiritual gift for selfish gain. He told Israel where she had wandered away from God.

Mind you, v. 8 isn’t talking about a “call out” culture where we correct people left and right. Micah’s not giving hot takes, going off on things, ranting online, or “saying it like it is.” He’s speaking God’s Word with boldness, courage, and tears in his eyes to bring the gift of conviction to God’s people. It’s the hallmark of the Spirit’s ministry. Jn 16:8, “When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...”

Conviction of sin is one of the defining qualities of biblical preaching. And that's a good thing! Why? Because it reveals our need for a Savior! Do you think of conviction or correction that way? As a Spirit-born, Word-centered, heart-rescuing gift? Or is it as a curse, a bad thing you try to avoid at all costs? Micah's ministry of correction was a precious gift to Israel. Let me give you an example.

Nearly 100 years later, a group of wicked priests and false prophets are about to kill a man named Jeremiah for prophesying the downfall of Jerusalem. "We don't like the message so we're going to take out the messenger." But some of elders stood up in his defense and spoke to the assembled community.

Jeremiah 26:18-19, "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.'" (It's the last verse of Micah 3!) Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring disaster upon ourselves."

The judgment Micah pronounces in this chapter isn't just information revealing what God is about to do. It has a moral aim. It's designed to warn Israel, false prophets included, so they will repent and turn to the Lord! His words are designed to accomplish the same thing in our hearts today, my friends. Yes, they're serious. But warnings are ultimately an expression of God's grace. They get our attention, compel us to stop going our own way, and remind us that all will be held accountable.

3) THOSE WHO ASSUME GOD'S FAVOR WILL BE DEPRIVED OF HIS PRESENCE (vv. 9-12)

Micah returns to indicting the "heads" and "rulers" of Israel in v. 9, rebuking both their heart attitude – you "detest justice" – and the outward actions that ensued as a result – you "make crooked all that is straight." instead of building Zion or strengthening the people of God with justice, they're building the city (v. 10) with "blood" and "iniquity."

And all three of groups of Israelite leaders are in on it in v. 11 – prophets, priests, and kings. The heads, men responsible for governing according to God's Word, “give judgment for a bribe.” The priests, men responsible for educating the people with God's Word, “teach for a price.” The prophets, those responsible for discerning God's word, “practice divination for money...” Everyone has become corrupted by greed. They've stopped serving the Lord. They're hirelings who serve Mammon.

1 Tim 6:9-10, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith...” You don't have to be guilty of taking bribes to succumb to the same sort of temptation.

There are a multitude of ways in the business world to treat people unjustly in order to amass more wealth for yourself. You can buy or sell faulty products that don't serve people. You can cheat on your timesheet. You can overcharge your clients or underpay your workers. And here's the real danger. We can do those things all the while assuming we're good with God.

V. 11, “...yet they lean on the LORD and say, ‘Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.’” Look at the temple over there! We've got God in our backyard. I mean, he's practically in our back pocket! I know I'm a Christian. I go to church. I got baptized as a kid. I can show you the certificate!

What are these leaders doing? They're presuming on the mercy of God, on the gift of his presence and favor. They can give a fine, spiritual talk. Their prayers sound so good. They know all the Bible verses. But the pattern of their life completely undermines the integrity of their character. Their professed dependence on the Lord is a sham. They have a false assurance of salvation.

Friend, if you are not walking in obedience to King Jesus, if you are not fighting to love, honor, and serve him, condemnation, not salvation, is waiting for you on the day you die, for that is what you deserve. Your conduct reveals you are not God's son. You are not God's daughter. You're a rebel and you need to repent!

You need to come home to your Heavenly Father – not tomorrow, today! – that you might be forgiven, cleansed, restored, and adopted as his precious child through



the life-imparting, heart-transforming work of the Spirit who unites us to Christ that we might exchange our rags for his riches.

Don't be like the leaders of Israel who by and large refused. The Lord promised in v. 12 their sin would be Jerusalem's undoing, and in 586 BC, it was. The Babylonians sacked the city. That little phrase, "because of you," in v. 12 points to the tremendous influence leaders have, whether for good or evil. In this case, because of the impact they had on the rest of the nation, the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel became her undoing. Both the city and the temple were completely destroyed.

Those who assume God's favor will be deprived of his presence – then and now. Do not follow their example, friend. Do not assume it's well with your soul if you're not living in submission to God's Word. Fear the Lord, heed the warning, and ask Jesus to give you a new heart and a new spirit that delights to walk in his ways.

CONCLUSION

To linger in Micah 3 is to meditate on the wickedness of men. It opens our eyes to how bad human leaders can be. But Scripture never leaves us there. It directs our attention, by way of contrast, to how good and glorious Jesus is! There are hints in this chapter of what the rest of the canon shouts. Jesus is and will be the faithful prophet, the righteous priest, and the just king the leaders of Israel failed to be.

Therein lies our hope, brothers and sisters. Where men fail, God does not. He loves what is good. He hates what is evil. He doesn't devour us for selfish gain. He nurtures the faint and protects the weak with the arm of his might. He never manipulates us with his Word. He speaks the truth to turn our wayward hearts back to him.

Praise God he never says, "If you're willing to pay up, I'll be with you. I'll help you." No. He freely grants the gift of his presence to all who cry out to him for deliverance from sin, death, and Satan. And he takes up residence within us so that we can say for all eternity, "The LORD IS in the midst of us. Therefore, no disaster will come upon us!" He died and rose again to make that relational blessing possible.



And on the days you look at leaders in the world or the church and think, "Father, it seems like they're getting away with murder!" Remember Rev 20:11-12: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."

King Jesus **will call every corrupt leader to account, upholding the justice sinful men fail to provide.** Therein lies the warning. Therein lies our hope. May we humbly respond to both, brothers and sisters. Let's pray.