

## **Did I say that?** Micah 1:8-16 Grieving

I remember the awful day our first dog died – suddenly. We lived in the country and our dog Boots loved to roam – on both sides of the road. He loved to hunt and explore the smells. One day, a car hit him. Our children were playing with the neighbor’s children, who lived right next door. I heard the tires screech and very soon our children were home – bawling their hearts out and telling us what had occurred.

Immediately, I was frozen. I was bewildered. This was not something I was prepared for. I had studied grief and had conducted funerals. I was worried about the children’s reactions. And what to do with Boots – was he alive or dead? When I ran over to the neighbors, their oldest son had carried Boots off the road into their yard. He was clearly dead. The driver of the car chose that moment to take off in a rush, so I never had a chance to talk with her. I wanted to tell her that it was not her fault.

It took some effort to gather my thoughts. We sat the children in the living room where they wailed their hearts out, as Rose and I tried to think, what should we do. It was a sad tragic time. We offered comfort and let them cry. A short while later I got a blanket to bury Boots in; got the little red wagon; and decided where to dig the grave. I was in shock and worried about my children’s reactions. The neighbor’s teenage son was a big help to me in burying our dog. Rose took a clip of Boots hair and asked our children to put together a memory box of Boots. We kept the box for decades, occasionally looking at it and in it, and talking about him.

We all have experienced loss in one form or another. One of the most difficult things about experiencing loss is that we can’t do anything about it. We usually have no control or at the most very little control of the situation. We must simply submit our will to our Father in heaven and trust him. Easier said than done. And while we do so in faith, we still grieve.

What that grief looks like depends on the person who is grieving, and the relationships involved.

We dare not put expectations on our-selves or others for what grieving should look like or when we should be over it, as if we can turn the grief switch off and on.

We know there are different causes for grief and various types of loss. Even though its grief – the dynamics are different. Some titles we can give to grief include: Traumatic Grief – like with Boots surprise death; Chronic Grief – mourning for a long time; Anticipatory Grief is knowing a loved one will die soon; Guilty Grief – why did I not I when I could...you fill in the blank. We also experience Delayed Grief, Complicated Grief, Exaggerated Grief, Disenfranchised Grief, Distorted Grief, Masked Grief, Absent Grief, Prolonged Grief, Collective Grief, and Normal Grief – what ever that is.

There are as many types of grief as there are situations, people, and relationships. And it is common to live with several types or categories of grief about the same loss. Some one came up with a way to measure our level of sorrow and unhappiness by applying points to various situations. This demonstrates Cumulative Grief. If a person has over a certain number of points – they need to really work at taking care of themselves or they will end up very sick, or worse.

I am talking about grief because our scripture is a picture of Micah grieving. What label would you give to his grieving? Imagine – Micah has just told Israel about their Creators judgment against them. He told them why the Almighty is angry with them. Even if these are Micah’s own words, or they are God’s words through him, how do you think Micah felt?

I can imagine as soon as Micah utters **verses 1 to 7**, he stops and is astonished with himself. Did I really say that! He laments the imminent destruction of Samaria and also the coming invasion of Judah, fulfilled by Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 B.C. In my Bible this section is titled, Weeping and Mourning. I suspect this does not even get close to what Micah was feeling. Micah truthfully shared his message from God. But that did not help him feel good. Instead, it caused him to feel even worse. How

would we label this kind of grief? (pause)

Would we call it – loving grief? Maybe disappointed grief? Sad because of people’s failure grief? Isn’t that what the father in the prodigal son parable experienced until his son returned?

It was how King David felt about Absalom his son who murdered one of his brothers and led a rebellion against David. We know David tried to not get into a war with him. We know that when Absalom was killed, David was heartbroken over the death of his son, the man who tried to kill him and steal his throne. David's grief showed the depth of a father’s love, as well as regret for his own personal failures which led to many family and national tragedies. (2 Sam 15-19)

I suspect Micah loved the people so much, it tore his guts out to give them the warning that God directed him to. The closest I can describe this feeling is like having the wind knocked out of you – and this wounded sad sensation goes on for days, even months and years. It goes deep.

When Moses discovered the people of Israel worshipping the golden calf, he was more than shocked. He was in grief about the people’s betrayal of God. They turned their backs on the God who led them out of slavery. Moses had the Ten Commandments to share and yet there were the people, breaking them! Moses chose to plead with God to not kill them. Betrayal leads to grief. We become angry and sad when we feel we are betrayed. How can I be treated this way? How can people be so wrong? Its clear God felt that way as did Moses and Micah.

I’m spending this time talking about **betrayal grief**, because I think its many dimensions affect us much more than we understand. We label it a lot of things and try to rationalize our feelings, but Micah’s kind of grief goes deep. It reacts like a low-grade long-term fever. It helps us get a sense of God’s feelings and reactions. Way too often we take our relationship with God, way too casually. We tend to presume on our Creator’s forgiveness and love way too often, forgetting that we are created in his image – so he feels like we do when grief in all its forms strikes us.

Another story. A long-time close friend of my father, and a co-worker, was caught stealing. He had set up his own personal bank account where money from the international charity they worked for, was deposited in. When the charity needed funds, he had it transferred from his account to the charity. He was caught when a clerk at the bank called the charity and someone else took the phone call. She was asked, which account should the new deposit be put in to?

This question of course revealed the crime. I know this man. I’d been in his home as a child. He was often in our house. I visited with him each time I returned to Taiwan, years after he was caught. It’s a story I wish I had talked more to my dad about. Dad fired him of course and helped him find another job. How did Dad stay friendly with him? Because he did. I wish I had pushed my dad more about his feelings. The theft was minor considering the depth and width of relationships including its effect on everyone in the whole charity. This betrayal caused a muddle of feelings. My dad was embarrassed. How could a trusted friend and long-term co-worker do this?

These stories help us come close to understanding our Creator’s gut feelings. And Micah’s anguish. So, our scripture today begins with, “Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal & moan like an owl.” That’s quite a self description, of pain, sadness, & despair. (vs 8)

As he carried on like this – it becomes a picture of how he felt and how Israel would soon feel. This judgment was like an incurable wound. Like a tropical ulcer that just does not heal. Just like Samaria had been acted on and been treated, the same would happen with Jerusalem – and all the people of Israel. The malignant course of the nation was irreversible. (verse 9)

We see how personal Micah owns this. He refers to “my people.” I suspect one reason there is so much anger and grief in various parts of the world, go deeper than the actual issues. It’s the startling realization that my country & the world isn’t working as it should. Most of the population

is not experiencing their dreams of a good life.

Recently, in one of Rose's monthly cousin's calls, we reflected on why the law allows a teenager in Wisconsin to get away with killing 2 people. We also expressed concern about the increasing weaponization of vehicles like when 5 people were killed and over 40 were injured recently in Waukesha. We were expressing in various ways, bewilderment, grief, shock, and for me at least, it is a sense of betrayal. "My people," just are not acting and thinking in ways they should. We just wallowed in this feeling that doesn't easily dissipate. As we see in Micah – it goes deep with despair and disappointment.

In a similar vein, Rose's dad a few years before he died expressed pain, sadness, and grief, that the world then didn't seem much better than when he was young. Did all his church work make a difference? was the question he asked.

One of the many proofs of the inspiration of the Bible, is here Micah speaks, & he's responding with grief to what he said. Micah responds to his prophecy. He is properly struck with grief at what he sees and what he hears and what he says. He is undone, both by the knowledge that it is the sin of God's people that is the cause of the judgment plus by the judgment & destruction itself. Micah's grief is both real and severe. He gives us both the audio & the video version of it. He will wail, & he will go out stripped & naked. The image is of somebody who is completely beside himself. We can't miss it. But Micah does not avoid sharing God's message.

Micah gives us the reason his grief is so severe. He says in verse 9 that the wound is incurable. The wound of Israel - Samaria is incurable, and it has come to Judah. There is no solution or escape. God has pronounced his judgment. Now all that remains is for the execution to be carried out. Perhaps even worse, Micah sees that the sins of Israel – Samaria – the northern 10 tribes, have taken root in the southern two tribes. Judah has idolatry. Judah has injustice. She has oppression. Her judgment is coming.

Then Micah goes through a list of what judg-

ment will look like in Judah, in **verses 10 to 15**. He does it with wordplays and with choppy grammar that is hard for us to see in translation. We don't catch all the allusions and references, nor all the ironic statements. Because his grief is so great, he wants to make it evident before our eyes. This will come true in the days of King Hezekiah. Jerusalem will be spared by God when Hezekiah repents, but the Assyrians will capture and destroy all the surrounding area, and later will take Jerusalem.

He goes through this litany of names of places and describes what will happen to them. He does it in a way that would be very memorable. **Verse 10** – is a reference to *Gath*, where the Philistines overran Israel's territory. The words remind the listeners of David's lament over the deaths of King Saul and his friend Jonathan. Referring to *Beth Ophrah* literally means house of dust – becoming dust in death.

In **verse 11**, the people of *Shaphir* which means beautiful, will experience something quite the opposite of what the name of their town means. They are reduced to dishonor, mourning, and shame. They will be in hiding. *Zaananan* sounds like the Hebrew for come out of hiding. The town of *Beth Ezel* will mourn and not be safe.

**Verse 12** prophecies that the coming judgment will be painful for the people who live in *Maroth*. The meaning is disaster and bitterness, and perfect grief will come.

**Verse 13** describes how the corruption, which had started in the northern tribes of Israel, gained their first foothold in the south at *Lachish*. She spread this deadly contamination to Jerusalem. Lachish, sounds like the Hebrew word for horse, which gives the idea the people will hitch horses not to go out on chariots fighting but, rather, to flee away.

In **verse 14** the people are told you will give parting, goodbye gifts to *Moreseth Gath*, which seems like a play on words about people fleeing. And we hear about *Achzib*, which means Deceitville. The kings of Israel will think it's a

strong and reliable place, but it is not.

Then in **verse 15** we have the word play that the town of *Mareshad*, which means conquest, will be conquered. No one can stand against God's judgement and wrath because of his grief. The glory of Israel – its leaders, will be forced to flee like King David did when he fled to the *cave at Adullam*, when he fled from King Saul who was trying to kill him. (1 Sam. 21)

With this string of examples of place names and word plays, of what was to come, it is God telling the people, the reign of King David, and the physical kingdom, is over. With the coming fall of each town and the two Israelite kingdoms, all their glory and fame, ends up in a cave. If you are into the meaning of numbers, numerology, eleven seems to be a bad number according to the Hebrews. It is why there was not any name having 11 letters in Hebrew. Here 11 towns are listed by name. It is another symbolic message.

**Verse 16** seems to cap off this litany of woe. This is in the past tense, indicating this eventuality seemed so certain that Micah regarded it as already real. Micah seems so caught up in his anxiety of the corruption going on that the nation would be destroyed – which it was.

We've seen a warning that terrifies. We have looked at the judgement against Israel and Judah – which probably surprised the people. And then we see an overwhelming grief that motivates Micah and should motivate us.

How should we respond? Listening to this mourning might sound like listening to the news we receive every day. **So, what do we do?** **First** – we need to realize that if God did not spare his special picked people, why would we be spared when we rebel? Even though we say the best place to live right now is in Drake, what makes us special if we ignore God's Word and think we can get away with rebelling against the Creator with no consequence?

**Second**, we must agree with the Almighty that sin is rebellion and self destructive. And then act against it accordingly – now!

**Third**, we have to **hear, listen, & act** when God speaks. That's the command at the beginning of this chapter. Micah's message is designed to get the attention of God's people, you and me, today. It is designed to show us a holy God, a God who hates sin, yet calls out to his people, because that's what he's doing here through Micah. It's important to notice, the name Micah means - "Who is like the Lord?"

And **fourth**, we do not stop at grief. We must do more than be sorry. Paul in the opening reading from 2 Corinthians 7, (1,8-13) points out the difference between worldly and godly sorrow.

Worldly grief in the contest of acts by God, only produces death. It focuses on the consequences of judgment. But godly grief sees the root of the judgment. It leads to repentance. It wants more than simply to avoid unpleasantness. Godly grief produces a change of heart that moves us away from acts and attitudes and habits of sin.

That's why Micah paints this picture in such stark colors. It's why he doesn't hold back at all on his own grief. "The word of the Lord that came to Micah," leads him to show us that God is not silent. Remember that it is the grace of God that causes him to speak to his people and calls out their sin. This grief we experience in hearing of the judgment of God should lead us to repentance and lead us back to God.

And the **fifth** learning and application of what we are to do is, notice how often our Creator has and is reaching out to us throughout history. God did not stop at Micah. After speaking through his many prophets, the Almighty has spoken through his Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God has shown us the punishment of sin, and he has shown us his mercy and grace.

Let's hear the voice of Jesus today. Let's turn from sin and turn to the Lord. Let's trust Jesus to deliver us from our sin and to make us a child of God. Micah's message is one of warning, but it's also one of hope...hope we can find today. We find it in Jesus.