

Micah's Final Plea to Israel Micah 6:9-7:7

It is right to bemoan Christianity's decrease of influence on society around the world. But, addressing a national seminar of church leaders over 10 years ago, George Gallup, the pollster, said, "We find there is very little difference in ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously....The levels of lying, cheating, and stealing are remarkably similar in both groups. Eight of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount. Fewer still could recall five of the 10 Commandments. Only 2 in 10 said they would be willing to suffer for their faith. *Erwin Lutzer, Pastor to Pastor, p. 76.*

It is easy and right to blame individuals and society for the decreased influence of the church on people. But we also must look at ourselves. Our witness or lack of it has consequences. That is what the Old Testament prophets are about. To get us to look inward as much as outward. Because we must influence ourselves, as much as we try to influence others.

What are your thoughts of the story of the university student and his mother?

Another introduction to our sermon today is, I read about a college student who, having been raised on the edge of poverty, was the first person in his family to ever go to college. Someone there offered him some dope which he turned down. "Go ahead, try it. It will make you feel good." But this student again refused.

"No one is going to know; are you scared?"

To which the student replied, "My mother cleaned houses and washed floors to send me to this college. I am here because of her. I am here for her. I wouldn't do anything that might demean her sacrifice for me."

His story had meaning and mattered. His decision was not rooted in an ethical awareness that

doing dope is wrong; it was rooted in what had been done for him. His decision was not rooted in his rights or freedom to do as he chose, but in his obligation to his mother who had sacrificed for him, the story he was living. A failure of Christianity and western society is the focus on my rights, my fun, my desires. My choices over how they will affect society. Individualism at the cost of responsibility to others. Me, myself & I.

The cart before the horse God

God's commands are never detached from moral principles and from how we live together. God always calls us to live in light of what He has done for us. When Moses met the Lord at the burning bush, the Lord did not give him the 10 Commandments, tell him to go back to Egypt, to instruct the Israelites to keep these commandments, and that as soon as they did so, He would deliver them from slavery.

Instead, our Creator, went ahead & delivered His people from Egypt by grace and brought them to Sinai. Then he gave them His law about loving God & neighbor. The Almighty operates on the cart before the horse principle – teaching us and we become God followers. God had the same operating principle when he sent Jesus to teach His values and die on the cross for our sins. But we must not presume on God's love.

Israel's Guilt and Punishment

As we have been seeing as we study Micah, the people of God failed to remember the story of what God did for them. That story was not informing, influencing, guiding, and leading how they lived. The purpose of the Bible is to help us to remember God's story and respond rightly to how much our Creator wants to bless each one of us in the whole wide world.

So, let's take another look at Micah. We have covered the book, up through Micah chapter 6, **verse 8**. We discover again, what God cannot stand. What cannot be overlooked. Micah

helps us understand how a remnant maintains faith while living in times of great wickedness. How can we uphold, sustain, keep alive, and preserve faithfulness in a broken world? Micah tells us, in his book what God wants from us.

Our Savior is not asking the impossible from his people. God is not demanding from us a bunch of religious activity. The Good Shepherd is asking for the people's hearts to love justice, show mercy, & walk humbly before the Lord – with a huge dose of honesty and trustworthiness. We are called to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks as we head up the Mountain of the Lord. We are to give up the gods of military might and false religions. But now Yahweh tells the people what he is going to do. What God says and does, tells us a lot about His character. This also tells us how we are to live during dark days and difficult times.

Verse 9 Once again we are called to listen. Pay attention. The phrase, “calling to the city,” signals the cry of alarm like when disaster threatens a city like Jerusalem. It is like a tornado siren. We are told it is wise to fear God's name. The word “fear” is spelled with the same consonants as the word, “see,” in Hebrew, but has different vowels for speaking. This is one of the challenges of translating Hebrew. It's writing just gives us the consonants. So we have to look at the context as well as the overall theme. The “rod” is the punishment Israel will endure. Let's see & hear, what our God detests.

Verse 10 begins a list with a rhetorical sarcastic question from the Almighty. “Do you expect me to forget your ill-gotten accursed treasures you have stored up in your houses?” The word ephah is a dry measurement, of just over a bushel. The accusation is that the seller is not receiving their full market price payment for the weight of their product. For example, when we take grain to the buyer – do we have confidence they are paying the actual market price?

We need to remember that in Micah's time, agriculture was the main economic driver. So,

God condemns cheating on the weight of produce in buying & selling agriculture goods. If this basic level of commerce is dishonest, we can assume the whole economics of society is corrupt. And the charges continue.

Verse 11, God asks another sarcastic question. “How can I forgive those who use false scales and weights?” It drives right at the heart of any commercial activity. Is the transaction fair to both buyer and seller? It's a refutation of every person for themselves – at the cost of others.

The list of reasons why Israel was condemning itself goes on in **verse 12**. We can consider the word, “violence” here refers to physical violence. But in this context it means as much or more the verbal violence of lying and deceit. This is not a new accusation by Micah. Chapter 3 offers this complaint. We are being told again; this is the character of the average resident of Jerusalem. When a society has an unreliability in speech and in measurements, good relationships and trust is gone. And it clearly seems the Bible is telling us, people who engage in these practices are obliged to accept the natural and moral consequences and can not hope to be accepted by God.

Verse 13 begins laying out the consequences of the treasures of wickedness. Such sins are an affront, an insult, & disrespect to God Himself, especially since he puts the cart before the horse in offering us his love, grace, and pardon.

One of the sins of the church today is that when confronted by the social claims of the gospel, we try to draw a sharp line between the spiritual and material realms. Some argue in various ways that religion and ethics must stay out of business. Any serious attempt to point out that spirituality and daily living is inseparable, is fiercely argued against. Any attempt to pull the two parts of life into one, in a creative practical partnership, is rejected and labeled false religion by some.

If that is the case, why does so much of the Bible's teaching tie the material world and our faith together? The two go hand in hand for

real true religion. Our daily walk is part of our faith.

Micah here gives a serious condemnation of ancient Israel for its corrupt business practices. Is God only concerned with personal morality and not business morality? Not so. God's law is intimately concerned with business practices. Those who engage in shady fraudulent business dealings & try to avoid responsibility by saying, "let the buyer beware" are sinning against their fellow citizens and are sinning against God and violating God's laws. They pollute society, not as we generally think of pollution, but it is the pollution of introducing practices that are harmful to people's lives, morals and wellbeing.

Verse 14. God brings a divine indictment against these sins that create corrupt societies. So, the sinners involved in these sins, find a perpetual frustration for what they seek – power, security, happiness, and so on. Why? Because the means by which we try to get these, are not congruent with the end. And the judgement is precise, not vague. "You will be hungry and have nothing. Someone will take it away by the sword. You will not be satisfied."

Verse 15 offers a real threat we can understand. Crops will fail. We will work hard but not enjoy the fruits of our labors. Since we have not cared about what God has done for us, why should God care about our welfare? Since we have focused on ourselves, and not the good of society, including around the world, why should God care about us? If we take this for real, it is a grim message. If we try to wish it away by spiritualizing it, separating these demands from daily living, we face a grim result.

Then **verse 16a** is another clear accusation. It moves us from commercial sins to idolatry. We must do some research into the statues of Omri and the practices of Ahab's house and their traditions. But we can be sure the people who first heard Micah, knew what he was referring to. They knew they were being accused of idolatry – the worship of false gods.

The people knew Omri and Ahab were evil kings. The Bible says both kings did evil in the sight of the Lord, but Omri is noted for being the worst of Israel's six kings up to the time of his reign. And Ahab followed. (1 Kings 16:25).

16b. They had allowed their neighboring cultures and their worship practices to lead them away from the true Yahweh God. The house of Ahab and his queen Jezebel had become the symbol of sin in the nations religious and political leadership. They are regarded as the fountainhead of apostasy. And Omri was the notorious king who headed the dynasty that produced Ahab. They allowed and encouraged Baal worship & child sacrifice. They persecuted the prophet Elijah and murdered Naboth to take his land. Micah is saying that even in his day, 150 years or so after Omri, their influence had not ended, but lived on. Omri's evilness was still continuing!

Israel's Misery Micah 7:1-7

This is a reminder that repentance must be continuing – ongoing if we are to defeat Satan and evil. The implication of these accusations is that unless there is instant rapid constant repentance, there is only the prospect of ruin, catastrophe, desolation, people appalled by God's judgement, with contempt from other nations. That is what occurred with the exile.

Verse 1. Micah 7 offers a lament of despair over a degenerate society. It is a confession. Micah casts a final survey over the society of his day, looking for an upright person, but is disappointed. There was no spiritually faithful fruitful person around. Here we see a metaphor of a person, looking in a vineyard for grapes and figs, and cannot find any. The search is in vain.

It was a society where it is everyone for them selves. There are no godly fruitful people. False leaders collude together for their own benefit and not the benefit of the people. Exploiting people seems to be the order of the day. The descriptions of society in these first 4 verses of chapter 7, give good reason for

despair, hopelessness, confession, and lament. It is a sad bad situation.

Verse 2. That is not a good place or situation to be in – a place so ungodly that it’s hard to find a godly, upright, honest, follower of the Almighty God. It reminds us of Abraham bargaining with God to not destroy Sodom in Genesis 18.

It echoes God challenging the prophet Jeremiah “Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around & consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city. Although they say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ still they are swearing falsely.” (5:1-2)

Verse 3. The emphasis here on “Both hands,” offers two similar condemnations. The phrase reflects the dual denunciations on both the religious and the political establishments we find in Micah. And “Both hands” is a loaded attack on the country’s leadership. As Micah describes the condition of the state of the nation Israel, it is amazing that he did not give up in despair. It is surprising that he still had positive things to say about God’s plan for the people. The situation was desperate. Most of the population lived under the despair & oppression that is described.

Verse 4 gives us a new negative description. “The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge.” That is quite a negative description of people. When the best of society is given these two labels – life must have been really miserable. Can we imagine having to live with everyone around us, so obstinate, prickly, selfish, and corrupt, that we feel unsafe?

The Good News Bible describes these kinds of people by writing, “Even the best and most honest of them are as worthless as weeds.” The Message translates this, “The best and brightest are thistles. The top of the line is crabgrass.” And The Voice version goes, “The best of them is as painful to deal with as a briar, the most honest of them like a hedge heavy with thorns.”

It is hard to image a whole society like this.

Another way to describe what was happening concerns the watchmen of the city. Their job is to be lookouts for enemies. But they will not see or hear. Remember verse 9 about fear and see, God’s punishment coming? They cannot do their job because they and all the people are confused, with so much unfaithfulness, evil, immorality, and corruption by everyone. Not one righteous person can be easily found in the society. That is not a good place to live.

Verse 5. We find in Micah’s observations that when faith goes off the rails, so does all of society. When religious and political leaders look out for themselves above any other consideration, the people and nation suffer. And family units break down. This is complete societal disintegration. No one can be trusted, including your neighbors, friends, and spouse.

Verse 6. This loneliness because of the danger of trusting anyone, including family members is strongly emphasized in verse 6. A person’s enemies are in their own household. This is spiritual, military, political, business, collapse. It is complete social breakdown. This may be as bad as life can get. Micah must have been really depressed as he looked around. These verses describe a very pessimistic mindset. When an individual starts thinking they are the only decent trustworthy person around – that is a bad place to be, commercially, emotionally, spiritually, and relationship wise. This is what occurs when we have evil leaders – religious and secular. Can you many any nations like this today?

Micah’s message is that we have less control over our prosperity than we think. Our welfare is tied directly to how much we choose to value and follow all of Jesus values and commands. God is sovereign and at some point, our Creator responds to how we live with each other and with Him. The Almighty cannot overlook the sins of individuals, of nations and of people groups. Micah’s message is the time will come when we reap what we sow. This list of accu-

sations holds up a mirror to us today that we better pay attention to.

But then in **verse 7**, we have this beautiful personal affirmation of Micah's. "I will hope, I will wait, my God will hear me." Micah was one of the minority in Israel who retained faith in the Lord, even in the bitterness of his own sins and the sins of his nation. He models for us that we need to keep a posture of watching & waiting with faith for the Almighty will hear us. Micah calls us to live our Savior's story and depend on our Creator and Savior, despite what we see.

How can each of us best follow the example of the young man, who responded well and rightly to the sacrifices his mother made? What is your "story" within Jesus' "STORY"?

This mimic's what we often find in the Psalms after a list of woes or a desire for vengeance on enemies, the fallback position of confidence, trust, loyalty, and reliance in God. May this also be our testimony, as we believe and fully follow Jesus, despite what we see or experience. This sets up the wonderful vision Micah has of the future. Yahweh will show unfailing love and pardon because he chooses to put the salvation cart before the horse for us. May we respond positively to the story of Jesus' sacrifice for us. And add our own story to be within the Kingdom of God's story. May we worship the God who puts the cart before the horse – for our salvation.

How do we respond to the "cart before the horse God"?