

False Prophets! (Part 3) – Micah 3:5-8

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Pastor Derek at Derek@chapelpasadena.com.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Micah 3:5-8...

Please stand for the reading of God's word:

⁵ Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. ⁶ Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; ⁷ the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. ⁸ But as for me, 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.

It's been a while since I've provided a marvel/superhero illustration, so we're passed due. Everyone loves a good superhero story. Or at least those who have had the veil removed from their eyes. Just kidding... sort of. We love the idea of a selfless individual who is ready to give all that he has for the greater good. Whether it's Captain America willing to fly the plane into the ice and sacrifice his life to save others from the blast radius of the bombs, or Superman willing to drive the kryptonite spear into doomsday knowing that it would cost him his life, or Iron Man making the snap with the infinity gauntlet giving up the family he had so that he could save all of humanity, or Spiderman willing to give up his dream of being with the woman of his dreams so that he can continue to save others. This is the appeal for many, including myself, and the reason why superheroes have become iconic. If you're a geek like myself than you're familiar with a superhero team called *Heroes for Hire*. I've always found this oxymoronic. This team, founded by Luke Cage and Iron fist, consists of superheroes who are basically mercenaries and bodyguards who hire out their aid in exchange for money. Now I realize that this scenario is completely realistic. If we had superpowered beings who lived among us, they'd definitely hire themselves out to the highest bidder. But despite the realism, this group and their motivation has never sat right with me. The fact that their aid is motivated by the pocketbook to the one in need irks me. What does that mean? Those who don't have as much won't be protected, and the ones who have much will never have any worries. They're betraying their non-verbal oath that they took when they were endowed with their powers. Interestingly enough, Iron Fist eventually loses his powers to the leader of an organization called the hand. I wonder if taking the superhero call more seriously would have led to him retaining his powers.

In our text this morning, we don't have superheroes for hire, but something far worse. We have prophets for hire. Those who were divinely tasked by God to preach his Word, essentially as his mouthpiece on earth, were nothing more than mercenaries. But like Iron Fist losing his power, God's judgement on these prophets will be the loss of their divine gift. Here are our three points this morning:

- I. The Accusation: Prophets for Hire (v. 5)
- II. The Sentencing: Prophets in Darkness (v. 6-7)
- III. The Description of a True Prophet (v. 8)

Let's reread verse 5 and dive right in.

⁵ Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.

This is Micah's third address to the faulty prophets in his day. I considered bundling this stanza with the next, but I would be doing injustice to this passage. There's so much here that's worth considering and that's applicable to our day. Let's quickly consider structure. Micah first addresses this particular audience in 2:6-11, which followed 1-5, where the prophet describes the sins of the land barons and sentences them to exile. So also, in chapter 3 a judgement against these gluttonous prophets follows one against greedy court officials. Both of these reproach oracles against the prophets imply a collusion between themselves and the tyrants based on their common greed. So instead of the spiritual leaders of the land rebuking the land barons for their injustice, and rebuking the judicial officers for theirs, they followed suit so they too could line their pockets. They too were cannibals who feasted on the flesh of God's people. The phrase in verse 5 that's translated as "have something to eat," is literally "to bite with their teeth." This should call to mind what we considered last week concerning the court officials.

³ who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them...

Micah accuses these prophets of the same cannibalistic behavior of the judicial officials. So how are these prophets leading the people astray?

...who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.

The common denominator within this indictment and last week's is both group's love for money. The O'Jays had it right, people will do everything under the sun for the love of money. The song goes, "People will steal from their mother, for the love of money people will rob their own brother, for the love of money. People can't even walk the street, because they never know who in the world they're gonna beat for the lean, mean green, Almighty dollar, money. For the love of money, People will lie, Lord, they will cheat, For the love of money, People don't care who they hurt or beat, For the love of money, A woman will sell her precious body, For a small piece of paper it carries a lot of weight, Call it lean, mean, mean green, Almighty dollar."

If I could add to that verse, prophets will betray their own God, for the love of money. Prophets will act very odd, for the love of money. Prophets will change their own tune, for the love of money. Prophets will preach about your doom, for the love of money. As one scholar put it, "money talked louder than God." What these wicked prophets had to say depended upon the way they were treated by the listeners, IE, how much they were getting paid. If the fees and perks were in place, there was nothing but smoothness and approval. Almost like a pre-papacy indulgence. You pay your fair share, and I'll remove any guilt you may feel for oppressing your brother by preaching a message of approval. And yet if there wasn't a payment or anything tangible passed down to these prophets, they would declare war! This is so backwards! Those who were hearing peace should have been hearing message of judgement. And those who weren't able to pay, the poor, should have heard the message of peace as opposed to one of war and judgement. These prophets were so blinded by money, they weren't able to discern the error in their ways. To be clear, there's nothing wrong with paying a prophet for their services. We see that this was an ancient practice based on several OT passages, (1 Samuel 9:8, 1 Kings 14:3, 2 Kings 4:42; 8:8) but these prophets were being driven by greed. I just want you to imagine the horrors of such a system.

Imagine walking into a church that's segregated by financial income, similar to a caste system. And there's a different preacher for each financial bracket. And the hope of the sermons increase based on the higher the bracket. That means folks who are on the poverty line, or below, would never have any good news proclaimed to them! This is the basic idea of what's taking place here. This is night and day from what we see with the Lord Jesus who says,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." -Luke 4:18-19

Aren't you glad that this isn't the mentality of our savior!? And yet, with these prophets, instead of speaking the truth because they're filled with the Spirit, they preach lies because their concern is to fill their bellies. This isn't keeping in line with the long and noble history of courageous confrontational preachers in Israel!

You have Samuel who boldly proclaims to Saul his sin and the fact that he will be removed from his office. Saul was the most powerful man in Israel at the time! Nathan who tells David, "You're the man!" Elijah who feels as if he's alone, and yet doesn't shrink back from calling Ahab and Jezebel to repent, lest they be destroyed!

One of the most egregious points in this text is the way the prophets flippantly use the term "peace" to their own advantage. This can never be a lightweight or casual theme on the lips of a prophet or preacher. Its biblical significance is far too profound. The purpose behind dialing 9-1-1 is explicitly for emergencies. If you found out I was dialing 9-1-1 so that I could have a pizza delivered to my home, you'd rightfully take issue. Well, these prophets are misusing a far loftier concept than just dialing for an emergency. Peace, or shalom, with God was lost in the garden. Humanity is now born with sinful hearts that desire to usurp God's authority, which results in hostility between God and mankind.

"There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked." -Isaiah 48:22

They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace, 'when there is no peace. -Jeremiah 6:14

These false prophets were providing this people with a false hope. And so do too many false preachers today. They provide you with a false hope that if you remain in your sin, that God is pleased with you. Let me tell you, no! This is not true. The apostle Paul echoes the sentiment in the New Testament,

For if, while we were God's enemies... -Romans 5:10a

That's the state that every human is in from birth. There is no peace between you and God. And yet that peace was accomplished through the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Which would lead Paul to say,

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. -Romans 5:1

So, peace with God doesn't come through giving of finances, but rather the giving of God's very own son. And yet, these prophets' pervert the gospel for gain. These prophets predate Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, and Benny Hinn, and yet, they're just as destructive. This is why there are so many warnings in the Bible to keep our lives free from the love of money. It can consume and destroy us. It'll have us doing things we never even imagined doing. A Christian rapper admits to selling crack cocaine to his own family members. Why? For the love of money.

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." -Hebrews 13:5

9 But 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. 10 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 and pierced themselves with many pangs. -1 Timothy 6:9-10

So, this is the accusation of Micah. Let's now turn our attention to the sentencing.

6 Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; 7 the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God.

II. The Sentencing: Prophets in Darkness (v. 6-7)

This should remind you of last week. The court officials refused to hear the cries of the oppressed, therefore God would mute himself to their cries. These prophets refused to reveal truth to the people, therefore God refuses to reveal himself to them. We continue with the Lex Talionis idea. But we find something quite interesting in this text. There appears to be at several categories when referring to false prophets. Sometimes they're just charlatans.

14 And the Lord said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. -Jeremiah 14:14

We see other examples in the life and ministry of Ezekiel. But that's not the only category of false prophets in the OT. A few weeks ago, we looked at the example found in 1 Kings where the prophets encouraged the kings of Israel and Judah to go into battle. They were sent a lying spirit by Yahweh himself. So, they did indeed receive a revelation from God, albeit a lying spirit. And then we have cases such as Balaam, who I would argue is much like the faulty prophets that we find in our text this morning. Balaam was a pagan seer, and yet he received legitimate revelations from the God of Israel in Numbers 22. Those Micah faced were probably misrepresenting what they received in a vision from Yahweh. So, the prophet doesn't deny that his opponents are endowed by God with these gifts, he's interested more in their motivation. This is why gifts should never be elevated above character. And yet we see churches and organizations do this all of the time.

It came out recently that a very well-known apologist, who has since passed away, was deeply involved in sexual misconduct for years on in. And the individuals close to him, may not have known what was going on, but for some reason I find that hard to believe. Perhaps they perceived that his gifts were too great and that the Lord and others needed him. Beloved, the Lord doesn't need anyone. If you're familiar with the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill, you'll know that this was another instance where genuine gifting, provided by God, was prioritized over motivation and character. Not so with Micah. He's not impressed with the fact that they receive genuine visions from God. He's irked over the fact that their motivations, lifestyles, and effect on God's people were all negative.

We must also beware of falling for the "supernatural" as a tell-sign of what we should approve of. There are many who will perform false miracles, many in the name of the Lord Jesus, who will indeed spend eternity away from him.

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' -Matthew 7:21-23

9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. -2 Thessalonians 2:9-10

So how do we know when something is a genuine move of the Spirit of God? Micah is going to give us some hints, but let's look at the word of the Lord Jesus as well.

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. -John 16:13-14

So, we must have the discernment of Micah, even in our day and age, regarding gifts and the supernatural, because these two don't tell the whole story. And now, like Samson, who lost his gift for abusing it and was plunged into darkness, so these prophets who should have been the moral eyes for the nation, would lose their gift of insight. And they shall all cover their lips. Which is a designation for those who are unclean and are therefore shamed.

Micah ends this stanza by contrasting himself with these prophets.

8 But as for me, 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.

III. The Description of a True Prophet

Micah's passion and ministry couldn't be any more different than the false prophets! These three virtues in the original language really refer to one total concept: a spirit-energized power that victoriously establishes justice. In the words of Blaise Pascal:

Justice without power is powerless. Power without justice is tyrannical...Justice and power must therefore be connected so that what is just is also powerful and what is powerful is also just.

This is the ministry of Micah. Not only does he preach justice, but his preaching has power. Similar to Paul when he said he comes not with word only, but with the Word and power, because the Word is powerful. The presence of the Spirit of God makes for effective ministry. Notice what he's filled with the Spirit of the Lord to do, "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." I was talking to a Korean pastor this past week and he shared his testimony with me. A man asked him if he believed he was evil, good, or a mix of good and evil. He responded by saying that he was a mix of good and evil. And then the man took a bible and explained to him that he was only evil. This was offensive and led to this man responding with anger. But it didn't take long for the Lord to soften his heart to the truth and for him to repent of his sin and place his faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Obviously, that's not always how these stories end. Most of the prophets were persecuted and killed by their own people, along with many early Christians. And yet, our message has never been one that is palatable. I know I sound like a broken record by now, but I believe it's worth the repeating. The gospel is an offensive message because you're proclaiming to people their sin! Just as it was offensive and shunned in Micah's day. But the difference he says, is that He's filled with the Spirit! So, he really has no other option. That's one of the aspects of the Spirit's ministry.

8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me... -John 16:8-9

This wasn't an easy task for Micah, and it isn't an easy task for us today. This is why the Spirit provides us with the boldness that's needed for prophetic ministry. Luke makes this clear in the book of Acts.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders... -Acts 4:8

31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. -Acts 4:31

*And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.
-Acts 6:8*

⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? -Acts 13:9-10

So, the Spirit of God is the key. The third Person of the Godhead. The one who seals and indwells the believer at the point of faith. We must continually seek to be filled by him, that we may possess the boldness necessary to proclaim truth that will offend the masses. Charles Spurgeon understood this. That's why every time he ascended to the pulpit, he reminded himself, "I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the Holy Ghost."

For many of us, we don't have a problem preaching against the sin of the "other" camp. I've noticed that more and more, particularly on twitter. We can't be those type of believers because that definitely isn't the Spirit. Whenever the "other side" is caught in sin, boy we jump on it with the quickness. But when it's our camp, there's silence, and even excusing. Micah says, there's no excusing and there's no discrimination. "I'm filled with the Spirit to preach against the sin of Judah."

But there's another prophet who was also filled with the Spirit, and who was also God Himself! He was not only prophet, but also priest and king. He too was hated for his bold preaching against the sins of humanity. So much so that the people desired to have him crucified, because the sons of these false prophets rejected him. Little did they know that this was all a part of God's preordained plan in order to save all of humanity. But not only to save and reconcile us, but also that we may be empowered to follow after the ministry of Micah and the Lord Jesus. So let us do just that.

Let's pray.