

## ***Rulers Denounced – Micah 3:9-12***

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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](mailto:Derek@chapelpasadena.com).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Micah 3:9-12...

Please stand for the reading of God's word:

*<sup>9</sup> Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight,<sup>10</sup> who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.<sup>11</sup> Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." <sup>12</sup> Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. -Micah 3:9-12*

February 11, 1990, is a date to be remembered. This was about 10 months before my birth, so I confess up front that I'm not speaking from experience here, but rather vicariously through the many boxing fans during this era. This was the night that Mike Tyson, the reigning heavy weight champ, fought Buster Douglas. There was no question in anyone's mind who would win the fight. The only question was, in what round would Tyson knock out Buster Douglas. The fight lasted 10 rounds and is labeled as one of the most stunning upsets in sports history. It's the night that many discovered the fact that Mike Tyson was human after all. Douglas was a 42-1 underdog going into this battle. So how did this happen? Well, Douglas trained as if this was the fight of his life, ready to go and leave everything in the boxing ring. Tyson was busying partying in Tokyo, among other things, and didn't perceive Douglas as a threat. In other words, his assurance and trust were in his talent, as opposed to his training, which led to his downfall.

In our passage this morning, Micah's audience assume their relationship with God is just fine, because their assurance is out of whack. Much like those in Jesus' day, they assume that Yahweh is in their midst due to their covenantal relationship with God. Ignoring the details of this covenant that demands their obedience. Just as Tyson's false assurance led to his downfall, Micah predicts the same for the people of Judah in this oracle. We have three points this morning:

- I. The Address: Leaders of Judah (v. 9a)
- II. The Accusation: Lack of Justice (vv.9b-11)
- III. The Sentencing: Leveling of Jerusalem (v. 12)

By the way, let me briefly lay out what the next few weeks will look like. We're going to use our passage this morning as a springboard unto another passage in James that we'll consider next week. I think it'll be helpful as we consider false assurance more closely from the OT unto the NT. And then for easter Sunday, we'll consider Micah 4:1-5, which is an excellent passage to consider the implications of the Resurrection. But for now, let's consider our first point this morning.

This is the typical structure of the prophetic oracles that we find in this book, particularly in this chapter. He begins with a summons to hear the prophetic word and designates the sector of society that must pay heed.

*<sup>9</sup>Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel...*

So far, Micah has addressed the gluttonous magistrates in verses 1-4, and the faulty prophets in 5-9, and now he's addressing the heads and rulers of Israel as a whole. This would have had the courts and prophets in mind, but only as a part of a broader indictment. Isaiah provides us with an informative list of those who would have fallen under the category of heads or leaders in Judah.

*"...the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder..."*  
-Isaiah 3:2a

Now this is not meant to be an exhaustive list, as it excludes priests as mentioned by Micah in verse 11, but it does nevertheless provide a valuable contemporary commentary on leaders. So pretty much anyone with influence in Judah had been corrupted. Imagine the devastation and wickedness that must have been rampant in the land. The lust for money and power had impacted all these groups, and that's the effect of the fall. Death spread to all men because all sinned, and now we live in a world in which not one area of society hasn't been impacted. Therefore, we have to deal with both the internal and external implications of sin's far-reaching influence. So, Micah addresses them, all the rulers, leaders, and influencers in Judah. I think that's by far the shortest point I've ever preached. Don't get used to it. Let's move on to our second point this morning,

## II. The Accusation: Lack of Justice (vv.9b-11)

*...who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight,<sup>10</sup> who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.<sup>11</sup> Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us."*

My wife and I have been watching a show on Hulu called *The Dropout*. It's based on the incredibly fascinating true story of Elizabeth Holmes. She was one of the youngest CEO's and billionaires of her day. It's entitled dropout, because she dropped out of Stanford, in hopes of developing life-changing healthcare technology. Well, her technology was indeed life-changing, just not the way it should have been. Her technology was faulty, and she was well aware of this fact, yet this didn't stop her from proceeding forward. She put millions of patients at risk, and even convinced Walgreens and others to go into business with her. As I watch the show, I'm irked at the fact that these rich and powerful entities and individuals are able to step on whoever they want to get whatever they want. And then I remember passages like this, and it adds tangibility to this text. I'm reminded A, wow this had to be what it looked like in ancient Israel, and B. that they won't get away with it forever. Elizabeth Holmes is now facing charges of fraud and may spend up to 20 years in jail. The very one who was meant to save and help patients, was the one causing them harm, all so she could become a billionaire.

Well, this is what we see in the text. The very individuals who are charged with ruling justly, are now driven by their love of money.

*Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money;*

They also *who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.*

It's actually quite disheartening when you stop and think of all the national monuments that were built by slaves, or at least had the help of slaves building them. According to what I looked up this past week, this includes The US Capital Building, The 4 major railroad networks, several buildings in UNC-Chapel Hill, Wall Street, and the White House. Now I'm sure that at the time, there were many who marveled and wondered at the beautiful architecture of these monuments.

And yet, if the prophet Micah were to stroll into DC or any of these other structures back in the day, he wouldn't have been impressed. As a matter of fact, he would have rebuked those who built such plush and lavish buildings on the backs of unjust free labor based on ethnicity.

Well in like manner, Micah looks with distaste at the new buildings throughout Jerusalem. Vast sums spent I'm sure to secure these architectural splendors, and yet, the prophet wastes no time admiring them. Instead, he criticizes the immoral means by which they were built! Jeremiah's rebuke on King Jehoiakim a century later fills in details that may have been relevant in Micah's day:

*<sup>13</sup> "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages,<sup>14</sup> who says, 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,' who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion. -Jeremiah 22:13-14*

He went on in that chapter accusing the king of,

*...shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence." -Jeremiah 22:17*

*"Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! -Habakkuk 2:12*

So, nothing new under the sun, right? It was evil in Micah's day, evil during slavery in America, and it's evil today in its various forms. And yet, the Israelites have this irrational assurance as they gaze upon the dominating presence of God's house on the holy hill of Mount Zion. They imagined that God's commitment to his house, his hill and city was irrevocable. Perhaps we too would fall victim to such a temptation. Due to our plush buildings and the great number of seats we're able to fill, it's easy to assume something is being done right, and that God is blessing our efforts! But this is a horrible gauge! I watched a documentary entitled "Hillsong Exposed." I knew that corporation was faulty before watching the documentary, but I gained a great deal of knowledge from the show. The leaders and members had a false confidence, similar to that of the Israelites. The correct gauge is the Scriptures! "Are we being obedient to what God calls us to?" If the answer is no, the results are completely irrelevant.

The people here don't understand that. From the outset, these were the clear conditions after Solomon built the house of Yahweh,

*<sup>12</sup> "Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. <sup>13</sup> And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel." -1 Kings 6:12-13*

And then Yahweh appears and says this,

*<sup>6</sup> But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. <sup>8</sup> And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' -1 Kings 9:6-8*

So, the warning is clear in the text! This is what Micah's been preaching to these stiff-necked people. And this is why it is irrational for the people of Judah to openly forsake the law of God and yet believe that they're in the clear. Now I believe this is such an issue in our churches today, and our country in general, I'd like to devote an entire message out of James to this very topic. I had two choices in front of me, 1. Prepare an hour and a half message due to a long point, or 2. Allow this message to be shorter and give an entire session to this idea of false assurance, and I

chose the latter. But I'm really excited about our text next week. Make sure you bring a friend for that one. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We have one final point this morning,

### III. The Sentencing: Leveling of Jerusalem (v. 12)

*12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.*

Micah prophesies that Yahweh will take away the very object of their assurance. If you know your Word, this should remind you of Jesus' words, as he warns that not one stone will be left unturned concerning the temple. The people of Jesus' day were valuing the wrong temple. And in 70 AD, that object was completely removed, destroyed by Titus. Don't think the Lord won't remove objects of worship in your life so that he can fully get your attention and affection. The beautiful fact is, if you're his child, it's an act of discipline and love as opposed to wrath. So, Micah proclaims, your fine buildings in Jerusalem/Zion will be rubble, and the temple, which once represented holiness and justice, but now, "on account of you," have been profaned and represent injustice, providing you with a false sense of security. So, the mountain of the house will become a wooded height, or literally a forest.

Space in the OT was divided into degrees of holiness. At the lowest level of holiness was the Holy Land itself in contrast to the pagan lands. Within the Holy Land the forest was most unholy because there deadly and/or unclean wildlife rule

*39 "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon,<sup>[a]</sup> and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. -Jeremiah 50:39*

The tilled land was much more holy, and the city of Jerusalem, was more holy still. At the summit of the city was Mount Zion, which was still more holy, and on top of it stood the holy temple consisting of a series of courts representing even further gradations of holiness. The building itself was more holy, and finally the Most Holy place, where priest could only enter in but once a year. Micah is saying that Yahweh will reduce the temple to a shrine in an unholy forest. This would be a shock to the hearers! As Calvin says about this,

*It was as though God had thrown heaven and earth into confusion, inasmuch as he himself was the founder of the temple. -John Calvin*

So much so that, praise God, it had an effect on the heart of King Hezekiah.

*16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." 17 And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, 18 "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.'*

*19 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 great disaster upon ourselves." -Jeremiah 26:16-19*

Therefore, we can conclude that this oral rebuke from Micah was a contributory factor in Hezekiah's religious and social reform! This demonstrates the true persuasive power of Micah's message and how God's Spirit is able to use these words to pierce the hearts of unjust and deceptive people. This came through Micah's willingness to preach against Judah's sin, admonishing them to repent. God's Word was effectual in Micah's day, and it's effectual in ours as well. Let's consider a couple of implications concerning this last point. We must make the resolve like Micah, to be willing to preach repentance to a sinful people.

We must trust the gospel! Many of us find this as a difficult task, we believe we have to remove, add, or build a 5-year relationship with someone before the gospel is able to work! Are we really trusting the gospel? Or are we trusting our tactics. Beloved, hear the Word of God and believe it! *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. -Romans 1:16*

*14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?<sup>[c]</sup> And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. -Romans 10:14-17*

*And I, when I came to you, brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> did not come proclaiming to you the testimony<sup>[b]</sup> of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men<sup>[c]</sup> but in the power of God. -1 Corinthians 2:1-5*

The Spirit of God uses the gospel to bring dry bones to life. So, preach the Word! Preach the gospel, don't share it. You may ask what I mean by that. Well Elliot Clark in his work, *Evangelism as Exiles*, makes the persuasive argument that we shouldn't be referring to our evangelistic efforts as "sharing the gospel," but rather "preaching the gospel." He talks about the fact that he was awakened to this reality while in Central Asia. As he took a course in spiritual terminology, and a missionary teacher bemoaned the fact that many Westerners had imported the idea of sharing the gospel into the vocabulary of the church. He asserted that such a concept was completely foreign to their context and the Bible. Scripture, instead, spoke primarily of preaching the gospel. The author anticipates the pushback of his readers who would say that the greater problem is those not sharing at all. But he believes these dual realities to be related. Through the book of Acts, we find Christians as authoritative witnesses, even in the face of persecution. They proclaim boldly, they persuade others, and they reason from the text. We don't find them "sharing" the gospel. So why is this the dominant way American Christians describe the act of evangelism.

He provides an analogy of baseball. What if a coach consistently described the role of pitchers in terms of tossing the ball? Not to throw strikes, not to work corners, change speeds, pound it inside, but rather to just toss the ball. Would the pitchers have an accurate understanding of their responsibility? To quote Elliot Clark,

*...To simply share the gospel, we fail to convey the attitude, approach, and authority necessary for the act itself. That's because sharing typically involves the act of giving something to someone who desires it. Children share Legos with other kids who want them. Friends share a great cookie recipe with another friend who asks for it. Or we might share money with those holding a cardboard sign at the street corner. In each case, we share with others because they're asking for what we possess. But the reality is, few people are ever begging us to share the gospel with them.*

*We must ask ourselves then, whether casual Christianese has influenced the way we view the gospel mandate. We must consider why we're only willing to speak the gospel when we perceive openness on the part of another. We must ponder whether we even have a category for proclaiming a message that people oppose, one that's innately offensive. Or do we tiptoe through polite spiritual conversations and timidly share our opinions, then call it evangelism?*

*But to evangelize is to preach good news. According to D.A. Carson, this is the basic definition of the Greek word. As he observes in his comprehensive study of the "gospel" word-group in the Bible, "the gospel is primarily displayed in heraldic proclamation: the gospel is announced,*

*proclaimed, preached, precisely because it is God's spectacular news." In fact, Carson expresses concern that some of our confusion (what he labels as "nonsense") about what the gospel is (and how it must be communicated) results from our lack of understanding regarding how the Bible describes the gospel and evangelism in the first place.*

Sorry for the long quote, but that was just too good not to share. Micah proclaimed a message of repentance; God did the work in the hearts of the people. We proclaim a message of repentance, the gospel itself, and allow the Spirit of God to do the work in his people's hearts!

Second implication, the Lord will relent of his wrath and not inflict disaster that he warns about if his people will repent. Now this doesn't mean that his proclamation wasn't legit. It absolutely was! As a matter of fact, it's somewhat of a postponement, as Jeremiah had to reissue Micah's message, but the king of his day was more stubborn. Therefore, God did indeed lead his people into exile.

But God did relent of this particular disaster. It's similar to the prophecy concerning the death of King Hezekiah. That was 100% legitimate.

*In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover."<sup>[a]</sup><sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord,<sup>3</sup> and said, "Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah:<sup>5</sup> "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>6</sup> I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city. -Isaiah 38:1-6*

This text shows the power of prayer, because don't get it twisted, God was not playing around. Hezekiah would have indeed died if he had not prayed. And yet, our God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, mercy, and grace, and is quick to forgive. Maybe you're here and you haven't repented of your sin and placed your trust in what Jesus accomplished through his life, death and resurrection. Your future is a fate worse than that of the Israelites who would be exiled. You too will be exiled, but not to Babylon, but rather to Hell. Do not harden your heart to the gospel this morning. Trust in Jesus and be reconciled to God the Father today.

Believers, if there is sin in your life that you've turned a blind eye to. Thankfully it's earthly consequences of sin that we must face, as opposed to eternal ones. But you too, do not harden your heart. But rather come to him with a clear conscious, as we partake of the Lord's Supper.

Let's pray.