

3rd January 2021

Bible Reading: Micah 1

What God requires

In Australia and globally political scandals relating to abuse of power are a daily occurrence. While many are prospering, there seems to be great inequality and heartache among the poor and disenfranchised. The darkness of sin seems rampant in our society, and for many, hope seems like a distant memory.

Does this sound like what you may be reading, living, or watching? Well, it actually forms the backdrop to the Old Testament book of Micah.

Micah begins: “*The Word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth ...*” (1:1). Two questions strike me instantly, “Who is Micah?” and “Where is Moresheth?” While Micah was a common name (there are fourteen Micahs in Scripture), this man is virtually unknown, and Moresheth was essentially a fork in the road. The prophet is mentioned only twice in the Bible, and even then, only nominally. Later in Jeremiah, we learn about the outcome of his ministry (Jeremiah 26:18–19). Essentially, this could mean you’re reading the prophecy from a nobody, who was from nowhere. How is that for encouraging? It helps us to see that God uses all kinds of people for his glory.

Unlike the book of Jonah, we will not read in Micah’s book about masses of people repenting. It’s tempting to think that this nobody had no impact. Such is not the case. We learn from Jeremiah, 100 years after Micah, that his preaching was greatly used by God. Jeremiah mentions the preaching ministry of Micah in Jeremiah 26, where the people want to kill the weeping prophet. But Jeremiah’s life is saved because one elder remembers hearing of Micah’s preaching ministry (Jeremiah 26:18). Not only was the prophet’s life saved, but we learn that during Micah’s day, his preaching led King Hezekiah to revival. It states, “*Did he (King Hezekiah) not fear the Lord and entreat the favour of the Lord, and did not the Lord relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them*” (Jeremiah 26:19)? In two verses, we learn that Micah’s preaching was used by God to bring both revival during Micah’s day, and pardon during Jeremiah’s day.

Themes: Some of Micah’s themes seem to be taken from our headlines.

For example;

- Justice is a huge issue for Micah. He denounces those who oppress the poor (2:1–2),
- Those who abuse their positions (3:1–3), and
- Rob from the needy (6:9–11).
- Women and children are cherished, and
- The exploitation of the innocent is denounced (1:8–9).

Repentance is also a major theme of Micah (3:8). He pronounces “woes” upon the people so that they might turn from their sin and return to God. In that kind of preaching, we find that God cares about how we live, and he cares about the damaging effects sin has on people. We’re told what God requires of us: “*to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God*” (6:8). But such repentance also carries the promise of forgiveness. Micah promises that God will pardon our iniquity and pass over transgression and have compassion on us (7:18–19). We end this book with hope that we serve a God who is like none other (7:18). While life on earth will always have injustice and sin, Micah gives us hope that a day is coming when:

“The mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: ‘Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths’” (4:1–2). That great day will not be accomplished politically or militarily, but rather through Christ: *“He will stand and Shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD his God, and they shall dwell secure . . . and shall be their peace”* (5:4–5).

What’s the big idea?

Much of Micah’s book revolves around two significant predictions:

1. Judgment on Israel and Judah (Micah 1:1–3:12),
2. The restoration of God’s people in the coming kingdom (4:1–5:15).

Judgment and restoration inspire fear and hope, two ideas wrapped up in the final sequence of Micah’s prophecy, a courtroom scene in which God’s people stand trial before their Creator for turning away from Him and from others (6:1–7:20).

In this sequence, God reminds the people of His good works on their behalf, how He cared for them while they cared only for themselves. But rather than leave God’s people with the fear and sting of judgment, the book of Micah concludes with the prophet’s call on the Lord as his only source of salvation and mercy (7:7), pointing the people toward an everlasting hope in their everlasting God.

The Important Question: *“God, what do you want me to do?”* As followers of Jesus in our journey we have had to consider this question when confronted with major decisions. There are various choices, we don’t want to make a bad decision, because we know wrong turns consume time, energy, and money. Most of us don’t have a lot of that to spare.

To an extent He has already revealed the answer. v8 *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

a) To do justly....”

This simply means we do what is right; we treat people right; we do unto others what we would have them do to us. Even non-believers will often do that if it cost them nothing to do it. The real test is when we have to pay a personal price to do the right thing. Have you ever made a promise to someone and later wish you hadn’t made that promise?

But a promise is a promise. My word is my bond. I can’t just ignore the commitment. I have to follow through even when circumstances make it hard to do.

To do justly means I don’t take advantage of other people, especially the weak and defenceless. The Bible has a lot to say about how we treat the fatherless and the widow. They are representative of vulnerable people. A lot of scams (that go on today) target elderly people because they are more easily misled. So, mailings go out that look like they’re from the government telling them this is their final notice. Telemarketers call them with various offers.

To do justly means I will be fair in all my dealings. I will give my employer a good day’s work whether he is watching me or not. I will show up on time and work for the benefit of that company. I would not steal from my boss. On the other side of the issue, I will give my employees a fair wage. Some employers think it’s simply smart business to give their employees as little as possible; keep the profit line high at any cost. In some corporate settings you are highly esteemed if you can negotiate an unjust agreement that give the fat cats more money. These people have only forgotten one thing: The God of justice.

Let's read a little further from our text and see what God has to say about justice.

Mic 6:9-12 *"Listen! The LORD is calling to the city and to fear your name is wisdom "Heed the rod and the One who appointed it. Am I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures, you wicked house, and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully".* So here is a picture of injustice: lies and deceit; inaccurate scales that tip in my favour; violent, aggressive tactics that intimidate and dominate.

Justice is a prominent characteristic of God that is seldom celebrated in our culture. We celebrate mercy because we want mercy. And God is merciful. But God is also just—He always has been just and He always will be just. And He expects that same characteristic in us. Develop a sense of mercy. Develop a sense of justice. Do people right even when it costs you.

Do them right, even if they don't do you right! Wrong behaviour done to me never justifies me doing wrong in response. Take the high road. Be the kind of person God has called you to be. "...to do justly...."

b) To love mercy...."

The better I know God and the better I know myself, the more I appreciate mercy. Mercy develops in our own hearts when we realize just how dependent we are on it for ourselves. So we pray, *"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"* (Matt. 6:12). That's a daily prayer for the Christian. We don't just need mercy to be born again; we need mercy continually. Yes, we strive to live godly lives; we treat others justly as best we can. But even with our best efforts we come short of the glory of God. If we don't think we need mercy, we have probably become self-righteous and are in serious spiritual peril.

John tells about the time the scribes and Pharisees caught a woman in the act of adultery. They brought her to Jesus and reminded him that the Law required that she be stoned. They, no doubt, had planned this out to put Jesus in a quandary. What they left out of the calculation was their own guilt before God. So, Jesus quietly wrote on the ground as if he did not hear them. When they insisted on an answer as to what should be done to her, Jesus rose up and simply said, *"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"*. John 8:7. Everybody there, but Jesus, needed mercy. The Bible says they were convicted in their conscience and went away one by one. Then Jesus extended mercy to the woman.

Matt 5:7 *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."* Jesus taught a direct correlation between the mercy we extend to others and the mercy we are able to receive. Later in that sermon He said, *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way, you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matt 7:1-5).*

Anytime we are passing judgement on other people, we are on thin ice. We do have to evaluate and discern things; but we must be very careful that we are not operating in pride or self-righteousness. We must be careful that we are genuinely seeking the wellbeing of everyone involved. We must be very careful that we are extending the same kind of mercy we would want to have if we were in that situation. When the heart is filled with love, mercy comes easy. "...To do justly, To love mercy, And...."

c) ...To walk humbly with your God..."

No sin separates us from God like the sin of pride. C. S. Lewis calls pride "*the essential vice, the utmost evil.*" In Mere Christianity he wrote, "*Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.*"

Walking with God always calls us to a walk of humility. The closer you walk with Him the more sensitive you are to opportunities for humbling yourself. Humility does not automatically come with pain and suffering. Hard times simply make some people hard. Our response is essential. That's why Peter tells us to:

"...be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time'" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Life will bring you and me plenty of opportunities to do that. See them as opportunities to draw closer to God. Every conflict is an opportunity to humble yourself. Every failure; every mistake are opportunities to acknowledge dependence on God and put down pride. We can resist those opportunities; dig in and refuse to humble ourselves. Or we trust God with our reputation and walk humbly with Him.

You have probably heard of the great missionary to the American Indians, David Brainerd. He was seen lying in his hut, teaching a child his ABC's. Somebody asked what is going on with the great David Brainerd teaching the ABC's. Brainerd replied, "*I have prayed that as long as I live, I might be useful to God. Now I am too weak to preach, I am too feeble to do anything else but just teach this little child the alphabet; and I shall keep on doing something for my Master till I die.*" Humility lays aside appearances; and serves. That's walking humbly with God.

You cannot walk humbly with God unless you're willing to walk humbly with people. Walking humbly with God means I esteem others better than myself; it means I acknowledge failures and shortcomings; it means I apologize when an apology is due. The reward of all that is a closer walk with Jesus!

So, the question becomes: Can I do justly, love mercy and not get prideful about doing it? Doing one of these is not enough. We must be just in all our dealings with others. That means we do every body right even when it costs us to do it. We must be merciful to others because we will most certainly need some mercy along the way. And we must walk humbly with other people as we walk humbly with God.

The tendency to substitute religious stuff for a lack of sincere obedience runs all through man's history. The Pharisees of Jesus day were doing exactly that. They were Bible quoters, and church attenders; but when it came down to it, they did what they wanted to do and whitewashed it with a little religion. I honestly wonder what the Lord would say to the Australian Church today? Would He say the same thing He says here to Israel? Would He commend us on some points and correct us on others as Jesus did in Revelations 2 and 3? I don't know; but the Bible gives a very clear warning. Guard your heart. Do the right thing. Live humbly with God and others, because religious stuff will not make up for not doing those things.

We are studying Micah so that we might know God better, recognize and repent of our idols and injustices, and experience renewed hope

Prayer: