

24th January 2021
Covenant Loyalty & Hope
Micah 6:1 – 7:7

As Micah's prophecy comes to a close, a superstructure becomes more evident based around the imperative "to hear/listen."

This literary marker is used at the beginning of the book to address all the nations 1:2,
"Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign LORD may bear witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

In the middle of the book to single out the leadership of God's people 3:1,
*"Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel.
Should you not embrace justice,*

Now at the end of the book to clarify for God's people how they should live 6:1.
*Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say".*

Micah calls us to listen as he presents his case like a lawyer speaking at a trial. He says the mountains are God's witnesses, and God himself is the judge. The covenant relationship between God and the people has deteriorated, and God asks why v3:

*My people, what have I done to you? (to make you tired of me?)
How have I burdened you? Answer me.*

Then Micah reminds us of what God has done:

1. God **brought Israel out** of Egypt and freed them from slavery.
2. God **provided Moses, Aaron, and Miriam** to be their leader, priest and prophetess.
3. God prevented **King Balak** from having **Balaam** pronounce a curse over Israel, and instead Balaam pronounced a blessing. (Numbers 23)
4. God brought Israel **from Shittim to Gilgal**, which refers to the place where they crossed the Jordan River to come out of their wilderness wandering and into the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Joshua 5)

God had faithfully brought salvation to the people, just as God has brought salvation to us. And what shall be our response? Are we tired of God?

Thinking about accomplishing the next part of what Micah describes makes me tired. He asks, "With what shall I come before the Lord?"

- Should I bring him burnt offerings?
- Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?
- Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?" (v6-7) That's a lot of work! Days and weeks of butchering and roasting. Hours and hours of picking and pressing and filtering. If this is what God requires, we will certainly be tired. Hopefully, though, we'd be too tired for the other offering on Micah's list;
- Should the offering of first-born children?

This was something people did back then to appease the god Molek and atone for their sin, but God had expressly forbidden this in Leviticus 18:21

Is all this stuff what God requires of his people? Micah says, "No! God has told you already what is good, but let me make it plain and simple: **Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God.**"

It turns out God's requirements are not a what but a who. God wants each one of us. Imagine God singing, "All I want for Christmas is you...and you....and you..." and so on.

On a personal note, Micah interjects his own misery at living in a corrupt land (7:1-6). But, despite its brokenness, Micah says:

*But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD,
I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me. V7*

How can Micah have that kind of hope? Is it because he has offered so many sacrifices for his sins (6:6-7)? No. Micah explains, quite clearly, that God has already shown his people what is necessary for them, even in days full of darkness and fear and death. He says they are to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (6:8).

For as trite as that might sound, it seems to still be relevant to our society today. As God's people, even though we lament about corruption, deceit, and wickedness all around us, we know the only solution comes from God through Christ.

Therefore, the more humbly we walk with him, the more mercy we show and justice we pursue, the more we are able to say, as Micah did, "I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Saviour"

When we think about doing justice and loving mercy, have any of you seen the 2019 movie ***Just Mercy***? This movie is based on the true story of a young graduate from Harvard Law School named Bryan Stevenson, played by Michael B. Jordan. Stevenson moves to Alabama to work on filing appeals for death row inmates who were unfairly tried and convicted. One of his first cases was Walter McMillan, played by Jamie Foxx.

This movie is quite uncomfortable because it's quite clear how entrenched racism had put McMillan in jail for a murder he didn't commit, and was making it almost impossible for Stevenson to bring an appeal to trial. It's hard to watch people being hateful. It's hard to watch people giving up on themselves because the walls of hatred and discrimination seem so impenetrable.

One of the most powerful scenes in the movie is a conversation in which Stevenson is telling McMillan that even though they finally got the witness who'd been coerced into lying to tell the truth, they've been blocked again. **McMillan** says,

"The day I got arrested, I thought I was going to be okay, because I got the truth. Soon as they talk to everybody that was with me, they're going to have to let me go. Then the police keep calling you a killer. Some white dude say he saw you do it. News people saying you did it. Judge and jury saying you did it. Now you on the row. Two, three, four years. Your friends, and your kids, they ain't calling you like they used to. After a while, you start wondering what they think about you. You start wondering what you think about you. Truth ain't so clear no more. But the last few days, I can't stop thinking about Myers up there, telling everybody how it went down. That's the first time I feel like myself since I've been locked up. First time I remembered who I is. These fools are going to do what they're going to do. But if they take me to that chair tonight, I'm going out smiling, because I got my truth back. You gave that to me. To me and my family. And ain't nobody going to take that from us."

Instead of making assumptions, Stevenson listened and got others to listen, and got McMillan his truth back. Equal justice is based on truth.

One of the ways we can do justice is by listening to each other without judgment. It's too easy to make assumptions about each other that affect our ability to hear each other's truth. We make assumptions based on skin color, hairstyle, clothing, education, age, body size or ability, job, where we live, our gender, and the list goes on.

How are we letting our assumptions get in the way of hearing each other?

Studies are finding that we are really good at only hearing what we want to hear, and that our ideology greatly affects how we hear. It might seem like we're stuck in a downward spiral of divisiveness and polarization. Sometimes truth is hard to find, but the prophet Micah reminds us who to trust:

*But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD,
I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me. V7*

My God will hear me. With God all things are possible. If we will turn to God and pray, God does surprising things.

One of Micah's accusations against the people of Israel and its Kings is that they exploit people's vulnerabilities, using their power and money to take advantage of people. I'm sure you'll agree that this still happens today, but it's easy to miss the subtle ways this happens. Whenever someone has a need that we're able to fill, they are vulnerable and we are in a position of power. It's easy to be blind to the ways this is happening to the people around us, especially if prejudice clouds our vision.

At the 62nd Grammy awards. **Demi Lovato** gave a heart-wrenching performance of a song she wrote four days before she almost died of a drug overdose. She sings a cry for help. Listen to her lyrics:

I tried to talk to my piano, I tried to talk to my guitar, Talk to my imagination, Confided into alcohol, I tried and tried and tried some more, Told secrets 'til my voice was sore, Tired of empty conversation, 'Cause no one hears me anymore . . . Anyone, please send me anyone. Lord, is there anyone?

Demi was telling us her truth. Though people may have thought she was ok because she already had success and money, she was very much not ok. She desperately needed someone to hear and believe that she was not ok.

In many ways v7 is the key verse in the whole chapter. Why? Because Micah's response is to wait upon the LORD and to pray. Though Micah feels discouraged, let down and even betrayed, he makes a choice to trust God. He moves his focus from the challenges around him and places it on God, his Saviour.

While our situation will never exactly resemble the situation, Micah faced (God is not about to take us into exile) we do live in times when by and large the people around us do not honour God. The principle contained in v7 can be applied even more generally: there will often be times when we also feel discouraged, let down and/or betrayed. In those times the question we face is whether we are going to give up or make the choice to trust God? There is much all around me to discourage and knock me off track. Concerns about our family, health, finances, the state of the nation can all weigh me down and I am sure they do you also. Perhaps you are working through one of those periods right now. If so, will you trust God. If not, what will you do next time? Despite of how we feel this is what we must do. Rather than focus on the problem we have to focus on God. We are encouraged to *watch in hope* and *wait on Him*. We need to rise up and pray for God to move in our time.

At the start of our Studies in Micah I said: “We are studying Micah so that we might know God better, recognize and repent of our idols and injustices, and experience renewed hope”

In the Old Testament, there is a word for **Loyal-Love**. *Hesed* is a central theological term. It is a key attribute in the Lord’s self-description in Exodus 34:6–7,

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin”.

Yet because there is no exact English equivalent, it has proved hard for Bible translators to render it accurately. In various versions, it appears as “kindness,” “faithfulness,” “mercy,” “goodness,” “loyalty,” and “steadfast love.

Normally, *hesed* describes something that happens within an existing relationship, whether between two human beings, or between God and man.

In human relationships, *hesed* implies loving our neighbour, not merely in terms of warm emotional feelings but in acts of love and service that we owe to the other person simply because he is part of the covenant community. God’s people are to do justly, to love *hesed*, and to walk humbly with their God (Mic 6:8).

An example of this that radically redefines the boundary of the community of obligation is the parable that our Lord Jesus told about the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37).

Similarly, *hesed* can describe loyalty to one’s obligations to God. This includes faithful actions toward other members of the covenant community, for how can we say that we love our covenant Lord if we ignore His commands to love our fellow residents.

Even when His people sin against Him and face the consequences of their sin, they may still appeal to the Lord’s *hesed*, as the writer of Lamentations does in the midst of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Surrounded by the evidence of the Lord’s faithfulness to judge wickedness, rebellion, and sin, he casts himself on the unchanging character of God, affirming, “The *hesed* of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22–23).

Yet the most precious use of the word *hesed* in the Old Testament is as a description of what God does. Having entered a covenant relationship with His people, God bound Himself to act toward them in certain ways, and He is utterly faithful to His self-commitment. Psalm 136 explores what the Lord’s *hesed* means in its broadest possible terms, for each line concludes with the words: “his *hesed* endures forever.”

Both His deliverance of His people and His destruction of their enemies are aspects of the Lord’s faithfulness to His promise to make Abraham a mighty nation, blessing those who bless him and cursing those who curse him (Gen. 12:1–3).

The fullness of the Lord’s *hesed* is seen in the cross: there the true *hasid*, Jesus Christ Himself—the only human ever truly to be loyal to the Lord and to His neighbour in every aspect of life—was treated as the covenant breaker and cursed for sin so that we who are unfaithful might be clothed in His faithfulness and thus redeemed. In this way, God’s original covenant purpose to have a people for His praise was faithfully accomplished.

The Lord’s *hesed* will never let us go. In the midst of life’s trials and tragedies, we may cry out to our loving Lord in confidence that nothing in all creation can ever separate us from the loyal love that chose us before time began, is sanctifying us in the present, and will faithfully bring us to our eternal home (Rom. 8:28–30).

Prayer: