

Micah 3

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[0 : 00] For those of you I've not met, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors. That's one thing that I love, even though I sometimes dread about consecutive expository preaching, the way we do it here.

There's no escaping the hard things, and that is, in the long run, very good for God's people. So, Micah chapter 3.

And I said, hear you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice, you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off of them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron?

Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. 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.

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.

[2 : 07] The seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame. They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. 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.

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. Who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.

Its heads give judgment for a bribe. Its priests teach for a price. Its prophets practiced 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. Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field.

Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins.

The mountain of the house, a wooded height. This is God's word. Lord, this is a challenging bit of scripture.

[3 : 25] Father, I pray that you would challenge us, as you have so decided. Lord, may our hearts be soft.

May we look to you for all our truth and for all our needs. We ask that you would do the work you intend to do in us by your spirit and for your glory.

Amen. When we began our study in the book of Micah a few weeks back, we recognized, we mentioned that most interpreters understand this book to be written in three sections.

Chapters one and two, which we covered in the first two weeks. The middle section being the longest. Chapters three through five, which we begin today. And then chapters six and seven. Each of those sections begins with a word of impending judgment for the sins of Israel.

And ends with a note of hope. Last week we saw a pretty incredible transition into that hope at the very end of that first section. The Lord abruptly shifted into that message of hope at the conclusion there.

[4 : 46] And today begins this longer middle section of the book. And chapter three is, as we just heard, that initial note of warning, of judgment against Israel.

And so today, there wasn't a lot of light in that. Right? Today is all a word of judgment and of darkness.

Or is it? We'll see. You may have caught there that Micah wrote this chapter in three sort of sections itself.

Three cycles of four verses each. Each cycle names one of the leadership groups and then convicts them of their crimes, mostly of oppressing the weak, and then announces a sentence upon them. And we'll look at each of these in turn. The first being verses one through four. I said, Hear you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel.

[5 : 50] Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off of them and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron.

And they, that is the heads and the rulers of the house of Israel, will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because they have made their deeds evil. Who were the heads, the rulers in Israel? If two neighbors were in a dispute over land or a herd or accusations of wrongdoing, something along those lines, they would go to the gates of their city or of their town, their village for a judgment.

Early in Israel's, in the life of Israel, they would have received that judgment basically from the heads of the local families. That's who would have been rendering that judgment.

Later, as in Micah's day, this was often coming from a professional judge appointed by the king and you can read about how that transition happened in 2 Chronicles chapter 19.

[7 : 15] Now, last week, chapter 2 began with these words. Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds.

When the morning dawns, they perform it because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away. They oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

And so, the owner of that stolen field would probably go to the gates for justice. It would have gone to these, the heads of the rulers, for a judgment for justice to be done.

And Micah, transitioning away from the evildoers, now this week to those who would condone evil, he looks to the leaders who ought to have been rendering justice, bringing peace and restoration to God's people.

These who are essentially the civil, the judicial authorities in the land and then, with incredulity in his voice, says, is it not for you to know justice?

[8 : 34] You who hate the good and love the evil. And so, friends, right away, we, looking at this passage and then looking at ourselves, if you stand in a position of authority, it is for you to know and to do justice, to discern right from wrong, to apply it equally to all in your span of care, to keep a balanced scale, as it were.

Michael will return to that idea in a future chapter. If you stand in a position of authority, Micah shows us clearly, the Lord sees and cares how you wield that authority and he will hold you to account.

Parents, supervisors, husbands, teachers, managers, elders within the church, the Lord cares about how you wield your authority because he cares for those in your charge.

The shed blood of Jesus for their sake is the evidence of that. And so when those who devised wickedness coveted a field and seized it, and that probably wasn't by force mostly, it was probably shady business, probably charging exorbitant interest rates and things like that and then foreclosing on people most likely.

When they did that and unjustly seized the inheritance of Israel, the heads, the rulers, the judges of the people ought to have restored the land, the inheritance from the Lord.

[10 : 25] But they didn't. Either to curry favor with these powerful people, or, as we'll see in a moment, to receive bribes, or maybe out of sinful cowardice, whatever it is, they let injustice stand.

And in so doing, they are despising good and loving evil. And the Lord wants them to see that their actions have consequences.

Look at verses 2 and 3. To these people who hate the good and love the evil, here's how he describes them.

you who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off of them and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron.

that is a very vivid image. Designed to shock them at how terrible their sins truly are because we don't think of our sins as all that terrible, especially kind of like a white collar crime like this.

[11 : 52] Seems very tidy, very clean, very neat. Some think that this is an image of cannibalism perhaps.

I think it's more likely what many of the other prophets talk about like the wicked shepherds. Ezekiel chapter 34, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God, ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves. Should not shepherds feed the sheep?

You eat the fat sheep. You clothe yourselves with their wool. You slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

Whether it's an image of cannibalism or an image of shepherds devouring the flock, it's a picture of savagery. God and God points the finger at them and says, you are.

[13 : 11] This is designed to shock them out of their calloused stupor and awaken them to the reality of the severity of their own sin, which seemed so small in their own eyes.

We don't read that here, but I guarantee you it seemed small in their own eyes. And the Lord takes away every pretense and shows them this is the real severity of your sin.

You judges in the land, you think that your sin is small because you want to overlook it, don't we all? But your greed is devouring your brother and your sister, shredding them like meat, all to feed your selfishness your own belly.

And isn't that how we operate, all of us? How often do you, do I, minimize, gloss over our own sins, and excuse ourselves, or simply look away from it like it's not a big deal, going on as if it never happened?

How would the Lord direct Micah to condemn our sins? With what shocking image would he paint our lives, I wonder?

[14 : 45] you who use pornography, who consume and devour another person in the midst of their exploitation for your own pleasure, you who gossip, who pour gasoline on your neighbor and light a match just to see a good blaze, just to warm yourself, you managers who take advantage of your employees, who grind their bones into mortar to build up your own tower, you who give vent to your rage, who burn to the ground the very building you're standing in with others inside.

With what image would the Lord have directed Micah to confront your sins or mine? How do your sins look when God strips away all the varnish that you've applied to cover them over?

I guarantee you the rulers in Israel never thought of themselves in terms like that.

But this was who they truly were. Their white-collar crime, seemingly so clean, was vicious savagery.

And verse 4, the Lord declared their sentence. Then they will cry to the Lord when Assyria comes to conquer them.

[16 : 43] They will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face. He will hide his face from them at that time because they have made their deeds evil.

When Assyria comes, the judges who ignored the cries of the oppressed, the judge of heaven, will ignore their cries. And they are not alone.

They have partners in this. Their judgment is tied up with others. When the field was seized, the judges should have known and applied justice.

But when judges made a practice corrupting justice, the prophets should have rebuked them to bring them to repentance. But, verse 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.

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 days shall be black over them.

[18 : 11] The seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame. They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. 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.

When we think prophet, we often think about someone giving predictive prophecy, oracles about the future. But just reading through Micah, that's not chiefly his purpose.

He is definitely saying, like, Assyria is coming, and God will not. Most of this is in future tense, right? He's telling people what's about to happen, but it is chiefly an ethical document.

It has to do with the morality of the people. He's confronting them. He's saying judgment is coming for this reason. The prophetic office is chiefly an ethical office.

There wouldn't be anything to predict if they hadn't been faithful here. So the prophetic office, chiefly being ethical, concerning their morality, calls the people back to righteousness, which is what the prophets were intended to do.

[19 : 31] These prophets who he's condemning, right? they should have been holding up God's light and shining it on the conduct of the people, specifically those who are corrupting justice.

They should have condemned the land grabbers of chapter 2 and called to account the crooked judges here in chapter 3 who are permitting the strong to prey on the weak, and yet they don't. In fact, they do quite the opposite, because the strong could feed them. Verse 5. They could bribe them.

And then, these prophets who should have been calling out judgment for their sins would cry, peace be upon you. How wicked is it to pronounce evil good?

how outrageous is it to give wickedness God's own blessing? And so, this amounts to a war, right?

[20 : 42] He says, they're declaring war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. It's the people who either can't afford to bribe them, or those who are faithful and won't. And this amounts to a declaration of war, because it's open season for those who are strong and wicked.

And what is their sentence? Now the Lord will plunge the prophets into darkness, because from this we see. Just as we saw with that first cycle, this second cycle.

The first cycle showing us how God cares about how we would steward the authority we have. God also cares about how we declare what is right and wrong in our midst.

And these, whose job it was, whose role it was to declare what was right and what was wrong in the land, and call people to repentance, who refused to do it faithfully, their sentence?

The Lord would plunge them, the prophets, into darkness. He would blind the seers. He would shut up the diviners, which is really interesting here, because divination was already a capital crime in Israel, if you read the Pentateuch, right?

[22 : 05] But here they are, anyway, in the midst of the land, and they will cover their faces in shame, because, verse 8, the Lord will empower Micah.

As for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might. Those who wouldn't call the nation to justice will be superseded by a prophet who will.

Those who would serve the might of the wicked are going to see the Lord's might brought to bear upon them. they will be stopped up, and he will be shown to be true, and he has, right?

We know his name. We don't know theirs. We hear his message. We don't hear theirs. And their message, well, his message, has one last cycle, in verses 9 through 12.

In this, he begins to draw all of the leadership structures, not just singling them out. He says, 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, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.

[23 : 33] 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. 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. chapter 3 is these three cycles, so to speak, of judgment.

This is the summary, the cumulative one. The heads and the rulers, God will not hear, that's the first one. The prophets, God will plunge into darkness, that's the second one.

And here, this third one, the heads and rulers, the priests, the prophets, working all together, because wickedness is an interrelated system, often.

[24 : 43] Working together, they have built a city and a palace of blood and wickedness, and the Lord will tear it down. If you build a castle whose foundations are greed and walls are blood, what else will a holy God do, but tear it down?

Actually, there's one thing he could do that's even more scary. He could leave you in it. In Romans chapter 1, the apostle Paul says, God gave them, he's talking about wicked doers all over, gave them up to the lusts of their hearts.

He gave them up to their own sin. Gave them up to the lusts of their hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a

lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. It is a worse fate. It's a very hard thing to have your idols smashed by God, but a worse fate to be left to them.

When he leaves people in their sin, it's when he intends to judge them. We talked about the covenant he made with Abraham a few weeks ago, right? Genesis chapter 15, he's talking about how he's going to bring his people back and displace the people of the land of Canaan because, he says, they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

[26 : 45] He was allowing people to progress in their sin, to keep going further into it and heap up more judgment for themselves.

That is the most terrifying thing, is when God leaves us to our sin, not when he shatters our idols. So, tearing away your idols, shattering your own sinful aspirations, plundering the resources that you would have used to ungodly ends, it is a severe mercy to be sure, but for your ultimate good if the Lord chooses to do that.

What is, perhaps, the most striking part of their sin, though, comes in verse 11.

Micah says, they lean on the Lord in the midst of all of this. The evil, and then the bribery, and the covering up, and the false judgments.

He says, they lean on the Lord and say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.

[28 : 02] They looked around, and the temple was operating great efficiency. All the sacrifices, all of the ceremonies, all of the feast days, everything was going according to plan.

So God must be pleased with us. And actually, during Micah's time, Israel was experiencing a very strong economy. And so it looked like he was blessing them. The skies were sunny, so to speak. Those who gorged themselves on the weak pointed to this prosperity and said, look at how the Lord is blessing us, giving sanction, as it were, to all their actions.

So, woe to those who do evil. Woe to those who would cover over them and call it justice.

And thrice cursed are those who would put God's blessing on it, as they do in verse 11. A few years ago, a famous ministry leader was found to have been praying on the weak.

[29 : 12] It came out that he was rationalizing it, pointing to the stress of his ministry, saying that it was permitted for him for all his hard work for the Lord.

And so on an ongoing basis, he justified his sin with God's name. And friends, we see in Micah chapter 3 that the Lord will not be mocked.

He will not be made party to our wickedness. Beware, friends, every temptation to justify your sin, especially using God or his word or his ministry as an excuse.

never cloak your sin. Never cloak your sin in piety. Never justify someone else's sin with a Bible verse. That is blasphemous.

And it's just what these people were doing. You can see that even the priests were involved. And so all the leadership in Israel had been corrupted by this greed, and they couldn't imagine that God would allow his temple to be destroyed.

[30 : 27] This is the holiest place on planet Earth. It is one of the great structures of the world. It seemed immovable. Too big to fail. God surely would not undo this.

This is his beacon, his pinnacle in the world. Certainly he wouldn't tear it all down for the sake of righteousness, would he?

And he says, you obviously don't know me very well. Because of you, Zion, that is the Mount of Jerusalem, shall be plowed as a field.

Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins in the mountain of the house of wooded height. God, the living God, the God of Israel, the true and only God, is holy.

And there is no extent that he will not go, tearing down even what is precious in his own sight, to chase after that righteousness. There is no sacrifice too large.

[31 : 46] There is nothing too precious in this world that will keep him from doing justice, even the death of his own son.

Because that's where this is eventually going. When we get to chapter 5, we're going to meet someone, someone very strange.

Someone from Bethlehem. Someone who is to be ruler in Israel, and this is so strange, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

A ruler from Bethlehem has nothing to do with the Assyrian invasion or the Babylonian invasion. Not one thing.

Because Micah is here concerned more with the souls of the people, the everlasting souls of the people, than with their temporal condition, than with these short few years in this world.

[33 : 16] So chapter 3 is a message of judgment. I'm sorry. I'm going, I went off script here because as I was reading again this passage, I was realizing, wow, he would just sacrifice the temple.

He would just destroy the temple and all that is holy. And I realized as I was reading it, like, look what else he sacrificed for righteousness' sake, his son for us. And so I've dislodged myself in my own outline.

I apologize. But I couldn't not share that. Chapter 3 is, from beginning to end, a message of judgment, of wrath and of condemnation, right?

Well, that depends on where you're standing. If you stand underneath its judgment, absolutely, this is unmediated a message of God's justice and judgment coming.

But, if you are one of those whom the rulers had shredded and thrown in their meat pot, you stand under the boot of the evildoers.

[34 : 41] This is a message, perhaps not exactly of liberation, the Syria is coming after all, but at least a message of justice and vindication. The corrupt will be unseated for their corruption.

The oppressors will be undone for their oppression. The Lord sees our plight, hears our cries, knows us, and cares to do something.

And we'll deliver the justice that we have been denied. And if you stand among the heavenly host, this is a message of vindication.

The Lord finally is acting to clear his name, so to speak, and wipe away the stain of wickedness from his own people. And if you stand among the nations, right?

In chapter 1, he calls the whole world to hear what's going on here. This is not just a message to these specific leaders, but it's a message to the world.

[35 : 48] Micah chapter 1, hear you peoples, all of you pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it. The Lord wants the whole world to know.

This is how he treats the sins of his own people. And so, to the nations' standing witness, if this is how severe God is with Israel, with his own people, regarding sin, if we fall into the hands of the living God, he will certainly not overlook ours.

Friends, where you stand makes all the difference. The same words testify judgment to the wicked, justice for the oppressed, vindication to the faithful, and a warning to the world.

Where you stand makes all the difference in what message this is to you. And so, I ask you, where do you stand?

Clearly, the most dangerous place is to be standing with these rulers, these prophets and priests, doing evil, covering it over, congratulating ourselves in God's name.

[37 : 18] And if you are holding on to your wicked ways, giving yourself cover for them, and excusing and glossing over it, especially with a spiritual veneer, then you, friend, are in a very dangerous place.

And you need to repent immediately. The problem, of course, is that because we'd like to cover it over, and that's part of the sinfulness, we don't see it because we don't want to.

So let us return to what Micah did at the beginning of the chapter. Tearing away all the varnish.

They had covered over their sin, and with a shocking image, revealing the truth of our own sins.

How does it look? What does our sin look like when the varnish we've applied is stripped away? No more euphemisms or justifications, nothing but the truth.

And repent. Repent. Where we stand makes the difference. For those who are under the boot of the wicked, whether that's because of a societal injustice in your case, or the sins of an individual in your life.

[38 : 49] If that's where you stand, be encouraged. This is a testimony of who God is. He will not ultimately stand in justice, especially among his own people.

And when the structures designed to protect you, hurt and harm you instead, God takes notice. And he will not let it stand forever.

They will be held to account in this life or the next. And so run to the one who sees you and detests injustice.

Do you stand among the outsiders looking in? Are you not yet a part of God's people? I'd encourage you to see how the Lord takes human wickedness seriously. So much so that he would send conquerors to level his own temple to rid his people of their sins. [40 : 01] Rather than be party to their sin. That's how serious the Lord takes human wickedness. Yours and mine included. And so see with fresh eyes. Where you have sin. The selfishness we see in this passage. The callousness towards others. The presumption of these wicked ones. And not only the sins we see in these 12 verses, but in your whole life. And recognize that if this is how severe he is with his own people. The God of all the earth will surely hold you to account as well. Where you stand matters. And all this is a part of a story. Where we find that there is indeed one safe place to stand. [41 : 05] And only one. The place where all of these people need to run. The great sinner can find great forgiveness. The oppressed can find a strong tower. And the world can find a savior. And that's where Mike is taking us. I said before, chapter 5 is about someone who's superseding all of these judgments. Even all of what's about to happen in the next 150 so years in Israel. As Assyria and then Babylon come. He's talking about a leader born in Bethlehem. Whose coming forth was from ancient days. And that one safe place to stand is under the cross of Christ. Where we find forgiveness for our sins. Where we find refuge in his loving arms. Where we find the builder of an eternal city. [42 : 26] That cannot be conquered by any enemy. And who welcomes us in. By his love. Friend, where do you stand? Let's pray. Lord, there is none like you. Who is so utterly and truly and finally and fully committed to justice and righteousness. Before you, none can stand. Except that you have made a place for us to stand. Lord, convict us of our sins. Let us see with the eyes of the prophet. With all of our vanities. All of the varnish we would apply. [43 : 36] Every pretense would strip it away. Show us our need for a savior. And thank you, Lord. That you've sent him. Lord, will you cause us all. Will you draw us all. To stand in the one safe place. Amen. Amen. Thank you.