

Micah 2,3 "A Divine Wake-Up Call"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We began last week, as Derek mentioned, looking at Micah's prophecy, a call to repentance that God sends to His people that is living in a season of great prosperity and equally great promiscuity, the economic factories of Judah churning out success, and the idle factories of their hearts churning out alternate ways to find life, and God won't stand for that.

He'll do whatever it takes to restore relationship with His people, to remind them that life is found only in Him, not anywhere else. So, He sends a warning, a warning of coming judgment, and then this week, He gets pointed about specific sin.

So, buckle up. Basically, Micah says, the self-serving idolatry of God's people and their leaders is bringing His judgment upon them.

Repent now is their only hope. Micah doesn't pull any punches here with God's people or with their leaders. It's painful.

[1 : 31] It is convicting. But it's God's Word. It's the passionate plea of your Heavenly Father. So, listen to where He would give you a much-needed wake-up call, perhaps, where He would call us to repent because He loves us.

I'm going to read just the beginning and the end of Micah 2 and 3 for now. So, this is Micah chapter 2, beginning at verse 1.

And God's holy Word to His people. 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. Therefore, thus says the Lord, behold, against this family I am devising disaster from which you cannot remove your necks.

And you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster. And turn to chapter 3, verse 9. 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.

[2 : 58] 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 of wooded height.

This is God's word. Let's pray. God, your word is hard. Hard for us to hear.

Easy for us to keep at arm's length because we would like to live our own way. Oh, Holy Spirit, would you soften our hearts that harden quickly?

Would you give us ears to hear? Would you speak to us? Even things that are hard for us to hear because we need to hear them.

[4 : 03] That's why you've sent them to us. We thank you for them and ask for your help. In Jesus' name, amen. Micah jumps right in here to the idolatry of God's mostly prosperous people.

But that idolatry is not merely in the sanctuary with little wooden statues, is it? He sees it everywhere, all the time. You're obsessing over yourselves.

Dreaming of what you want. Plotting how to advance your own glory rather than God's. He says you scheme in the night to do evil and then you wake up to do it because you can.

Why? Because it is in the power of their hand, he says. They want to use their power for self rather than for others.

And this is a reminder to all of us, isn't it? Just because you can doesn't mean you should. If we have a self-focused orientation for all of life, then why not?

[5 : 16] If I can do it and I want to, then go for it. But God calls us to have a Godward orientation to all of life. It's all lived before him.

And that asks not merely can I, but should I? Will it honor God? Kids, that's an important thing for you to learn early on.

Not merely what can I get away with? Can I do something and maybe not get caught? But should I? What reflects a love for God and for my neighbor?

What should I do? Adults. Not what can my business or my medical research team get away with? But what are God's moral and ethical standards, right? Our relationship with Yahweh must matter beyond Sunday. How would he have us live?

[6 : 20] But often we've stopped thinking of him by Monday morning, haven't we? Because we're busy thinking of what we can use our power and our resources for.

Be honest. Isn't that what we think about a lot? How can we advance ourselves? Because we've got big hopes and dreams and we've begun to get greedy and covetous.

Verse 2. They covet fields and seize them. Houses. Take them away. Oppress a man in his house. A man in his inheritance.

Coveting. Coveting. Hey, that's one of the big ten. Pay attention. And it's already important, but the significance of what Micah describes here just grows if you remember the context.

God gave his people this land, right? It's God's land. And he gives it to each of them as a reminder of his care and provision for them. Every single one of them gets a piece of it, right?

[7 : 27] God makes sure. And God puts laws in place to keep it that way. To make sure that the land is redistributed regularly because some of them won't manage it as well.

And God wants them to have it back. He wants them to have that reminder of his provision and protection for them. So that he will look out for the poor, widow, immigrant, orphan.

So they can eat off of your land. But that's not what's happening in Micah's day. God's people are not reflecting his generous heart. Rather, they are displaying their own greedy hearts.

They've found a way to get ahead, haven't they? I know how to get ahead. I love being first, even if it makes you last. Oppressing a man and his inheritance in the land.

Taking it from him. Man, I know that heart. I do whatever I have to do to get ahead. I use whatever resources I have to get a better seat, especially if it has more legroom, even if I know it puts you back.

[8 : 36] I'm always looking to slip ahead in the line of traffic while someone else is stuck. Have you ever used your influence to get your kid the best teacher?

Not stopping to consider the kid who didn't? You're called to love your kids. And your neighbor's kids.

Many of us have lots of different resources, don't we? And we can use them however we can to get ahead while neglecting to consider others.

I mean, maybe you're not literally sitting on your bed dreaming and envisioning how to plot violence against someone, but are you thinking about dreaming about how to help them?

Sometimes our dreams or our daydreams show us our hearts, don't they? What are our anxieties or our fears? What are we dwelling on? And what's really important to us?

[9 : 41] And we say things like, I've just been so worried today about the contractor showing up late to my remodel. What if it gets delayed? I really hope my son makes the team.

How come all the good restaurants are closed on Sunday? We're so frustrated. We've never said that, but... But we chuckle and we say, First world problems, right?

Listen, that's true. And that's good to admit. But often first world problems is actually peacetime problems.

That's what it really is. And that's dangerous. It means I'm living in a world that denies the reality of the spiritual warfare that God tells me I'm actually in.

That turns a blind eye and a calloused heart to devastation around me. Because I've got other priorities. There's other things I'm more concerned with.

[10 : 45] Do you wake up worried about our first world problems? What impacts me? What impacts me? And never wake up with tears filling our eyes.

Prayers on our lips for people being trafficked in our city. For homeless dealing with this oppressive heat these days. Maybe the predatory payday lenders in our city are a close analogy to Micah's day.

Plotting to get rich off others' poverty. But they're not alone. It's not just out there. This is to God's people. I'd say there's many things on that spectrum.

All the way down to being a cheap tipper. When those who make 10% of your salary get 10% on your bill. I talked to a friend just this week who said the bus routes got changed.

And he was faced with the decision to drop one of his jobs. Or to lose three hours of sleep every night because of where he was going to have to walk. And you know what?

[11:54] I actually have the resources given to me that I don't have to lose much sleep over bus routes. If all I care about is myself, that's not a problem for me.

You know we have Huntsville neighbors we've partnered with who are having to relocate this fall. Section 8 housing getting torn down. Some may relocate within walking distance of your home.

Will you welcome them into your neighborhood? It's not easy to relocate, is it? New friends, new places. Will you welcome them into your schools?

Into your lives? Do you daydream about how to welcome the poor and the marginalized into our church family? We need them here, don't we?

Or is it honestly not that important to you how they feel? If your money gets you what you need legally, socially, relationally, no need to worry about what it does to them.

[12:56] Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily.

For it will be a time of disaster. In that day they shall take up a taunt song against you and moan bitterly, and say, we are utterly ruined. He changes the portion of my people.

How he removes it from me. To an apostate he allots our fields. Therefore, you will have none to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

The first of several times here, God's punishment will fit the crime. You're planning greedily and proudly, God says. God says, I'm planning for you quite the opposite.

Something humbling and empty. No inheritance in the land like those you stole it from. Serious warnings, right?

[14:00] It's meant to hit them right where they are. And God's people hearing these serious warnings, you know what they say? Oh, come on. Come on, man. Don't worry.

Be happy. Verse 6. Do not preach. Thus they preach. One should not preach of such things.

Disgrace will not overtake us. Micah, this won't happen. God loves us. Preacher, stop it.

This is a grace church. Quit talking like that. Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Has the Lord grown impatient?

Are these his deeds? Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly? But lately, my people have risen up as an enemy.

[15:01] You strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war. Listen, God is a God of grace. You're right. So we are a church of grace.

Amen? But his grace comes in relationship with him. Don't presume you can spurn him, ignore his heart, and claim his grace at the same time.

We are on the Lord's side. No, you're not. Look at your life that ignores the least and the lost. Micah says, God's people have risen up, not as his friends, but as his enemies.

How? By their bad teaching? Theologically lost it? No. By oppressing women and children.

Verse 9. By using their power to get ahead on the backs of others who have less. God says, I see this.

[16:10] You must be enemies of mine. In fact, you know the perfect preacher for you? Verse 11. If a man should go about and utter wind and lies full of hot air saying, I will preach to you of wine and strong drink, he would be the preacher for this people.

They'd love that. The one who tells you what you want to hear about your pleasures and your comforts and forget everything else. Eat, drink, and be merry.

That's your preacher? That's all they want to hear, isn't it? No one wants to hear a downer like Micah. So discouraging. Sin. Disrupting our lives.

Pointing out we're not living after God's heart. Micah, it's working. We're prospering. Leave us alone. We're getting ahead. This is great.

But God doesn't think so. And he promises not to let his people flaunt his holy and gracious character. They will get what they deserve.

[17 : 23] And this is where the leaders come in. Chapter 3 makes many similar statements to chapter 2. But Micah is now specifically addressing the leaders of God's people.

Spiritual leaders, priests and prophets. Social leaders, judges, magistrates. These are the ones who should be leading the people after the heart of God, right?

That's why God's put them there in his people. They should be addressing these idolatrous practices and passions. Micah chapter 3.

I said, hear you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? The leaders are particularly supposed to know justice.

It's a word used repeatedly in this chapter. Mishpat. They're to know the heart of God that has sympathy for outcasts.

[18 : 26] In the Old Testament, mishpat is more than correct legal verdicts. Okay? It's much bigger than that. It's justice meaning an honest relationship with someone else.

A generosity to the needy. Actually, activism against injustice. It's all tied up in that. Often, when it's used, it includes the widow or the orphan or the immigrant or the poor that's in mind of the justice that needs to happen.

When you hear justice, think of all of that. God's heart. Again, Psalm 146. The Lord executes justice for the oppressed.

See who's in mind when God's thinking justice? He gives food to the hungry. He sets prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.

The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners. He upholds the widow and the fatherless. That's what justice looks like.

[19 : 34] And the leaders of God's people are to know that. And to love that. And to lead them after it. Instead, verse 9 says they detest justice and make crooked all the straight things.

Verse 2. Verse 11.

Its heads give judgment for a bribe. Its priests teach for a price. Its prophets practice divination for money.

Alas! All the leaders, they've fallen into the same trap of prosperity, haven't they? They're using their power and their position for themselves.

They're getting ahead at the expense of others because they can. And their idolatry compounds because they want to say exactly what the people want to hear, don't they?

[20 : 59] 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.

Peace! Peace! You're good! It's okay! As long as you feed them. And God says, no! That's not peace! That's self-serving lies!

The land is full of injustice! People are running away from me! And the prophets who should call them back urge them on and keep going! Look at verse 11.

Its heads, the judges and magistrates, give judgment for a bribe. Its priests teach for a price. Its prophets practice divination for money. Yet all these guys, they lean on the Lord and say, Is not the Lord in the midst of us?

No disaster shall come upon us. We're God's people. Hey y'all, God's happy with us. They love to remind everyone.

[22 : 12] And God says, no I'm not. You're just lining your own pockets with the bribe you were paid to give a good report, to predict a positive future, encourage my people in their idolatry.

The preachers say, we are on the Lord's side. Sing it with me. And God says, really? You don't stand for justice in a time of need?

You don't hear the poor man and his children plead? In fact, you don't help the rich man see his poverty at all. You join him in taking advantage of those who have less for your own gain.

That's not my side. My side loves justice and cares for the oppressed. Y'all, I gotta tell you how gut-wrenching this has been for a pastor who loves pleasing people.

If you don't know me well enough, you might as well know that about me. Um, I love it when people are happy. I especially like it when they're glad it was worth their time to talk to me.

[23 : 29] Makes them feel good. Makes me feel good. It makes me feel really good to say, peace. I don't relish offending people.

I don't like the idea of challenging the rich on their sin while hoping to balance the church budget. It can seem self-serving. You know? I'm in that budget.

I hate the relational tension at the end of a lunch meeting when someone storms off frustrated with me. It eats me up. Please pray for me.

The speaking of God's word has a big impact on his people, Micah says, for good or for ill. Pray that I would love God and his people more than myself and my comfort.

Pray that I would say what God wants me to say, not what my often fearful and self-protective heart wants me to say. Please pray that God would continue to pour his spirit into me.

[24 : 42] That's how Micah is the faithful prophet in his day, isn't it? It won't be by my own strength that I'm faithful. Look what Micah says, verse 8. As for me, how's he different from all the other prophets?

Because he's so awesome? I'm filled with power with the spirit of the Lord. With justice and might. To declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

The spirit enables declaration of sin to God's people. So that they might repent and return to him. That's the beauty of how it's supposed to work. Preaching that only encourages and never challenges your heart and your life is not faithful, spirit-led preaching of God's word.

Christ-centered preaching exposes your great need and your greater Savior, right? If your pastor never calls you to repentance, he's not shepherding you faithfully.

[25 : 49] While I'm at it, if your Bible never calls you to repentance, you're not reading it. If your friend, your brothers and sisters who do life with you, if they never call you to repentance, they're not leading you and pointing you to Jesus.

Because that's what shows us how much we need him and how glorious he is. See, this is for all of us. Not just me, right?

All of us are called in some way to lead others to God. Many of you in this room have considerable authority or influence in the church, in the community.

You serve on boards. You lead businesses. You start non-profits. You're connected throughout Huntsville. I'm amazed at the gifts God has given here.

But let's stop and ask, in what ways do we wield our power, authority, or influence to support ourselves? Do we take advantage of the weak to position ourselves stronger?

[26 : 57] Do we perhaps ignore the poor altogether while we build a business or lead a church? Southwood leaders, let me ask it this way for you.

When we make decisions and plans for our church, do we cater to or encourage consumerism and self-focus?

Or do we shape our church around Christ-focused, sacrificial living, even when it makes others less than thrilled with our leadership?

One commentator calls this passage an expose of iniquitous structures. Evil systems.

In the church and in the society. Self-focused leaders encourage self-focus in God's people who are all too happy many times to follow their lead.

[28 : 00] While the poor are pushed further down and further away from God's people. Are we thinking intentionally of the kingdom when we structure Southwood and Huntsville?

I love how the relationships that have developed in the faith and finances class, which is just ending. The jobs for life class, which is just starting. They do two things at the same time.

They both dignify the individual poor, welcoming them into the lives of God's people, which is so important. And they attack generational systems of poverty, seeking to break oppressive patterns.

Because the structures are a problem too. What are other ways that we can display God's heart and open our doors to the poor? Will you spend time thinking about that? Talk about that together in your Connect community, in your small group?

How can we use our resources for others rather than ourselves? Y'all, that's what God has made all of us priests in his kingdom for.

[29 : 06] That's our purpose, right? That his grace might not stop with us, but that it would flow through us to many others. That's how he designed it. That's why he's made you a priest in his kingdom.

What's it going to look like for you? And if it does not flow through us, if we don't steward what he gives us for the sake of others, we will get exactly what we deserve.

Verse 4. Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. Poetic justice, like Proverbs 21 already tells us.

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. In fact, God's prophets will be appropriately shut up.

You won't hear it from the preachers either. It shall be night to you without vision, darkness to you without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets. The day shall be black over them. The seers shall be disgraced.

[30 : 18] The diviners put to shame. They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. With no answer from him, they say, but God is with us.

Nothing bad will happen. But verse 12. Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field. Jerusalem, God's holy city, shall become a heap of ruins.

Wow. God's holy city, a heap of ruins. That's how serious God is.

When God's leaders and God's people use his blessings to promote themselves, he will not be mocked. They will eventually be brought to their knees.

Great King Nebuchadnezzar learned that and said, he who walks in pride, God is able to humble. Hear God's word.

[31 : 21] If you persist in self-serving idolatry, no matter who you are or how you feel God is blessing you, his judgment is coming.

That's the focus of this passage. It's a warning of God's judgment that we might repent.

See how we've broken relationship with him. Turn back to him. That's the call of the prophet Micah. But I will tell you, for idolaters like us, there's a glimmer of hope in the middle of this that's a preview of a lot more hope next week.

Listen to the end of chapter 2. I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob. I'll gather the remnant of Israel. I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.

He who opens the breach goes up before them. They break through and pass the gate going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head.

[32 : 31] Out of nowhere in this chapter. Completely undeserved. Into the darkness of idolatry. The shepherd king.

Yahweh himself will gather his people back together. Break through the siege of their enemies. And lead them out victorious.

God, again, cares for the outcast. The remnant. Those left turning to God. The poor themselves. And the repentant rich. God cares for the oppressed.

As his design in the land shows us already. He is the true king. Right? He gathers us. He gathers us. Feeds us. And leads us together to safety and sufficiency.

This is a promise here in these two verses of a leader. Not out for himself. But rather who gives up himself. Who lays down his life to provide so richly, so lavishly for his people.

[33 : 36] There's our Jesus. Right? We know that. We know that leader. Our hearts are to be satisfied in his leadership. And nothing short of it.

And how will we then live when we are that well cared for? How will that change us to have a king who cares for us like this? Will we any longer need to promote or protect ourselves?

Will we ever have to worry about sharing so much with the poor that we won't have enough left for ourselves when we have such a generous king?

Won't we begin to have our hearts love as he loves? And then have our lives changed to serve the least? Won't we? Oh God. May you be the king that we can't stop following.

Let's ask him for that. God, you are that king. We're the ones who like to follow others. It costs to follow you.

[34 : 42] Sacrificial living is not what many of us wake up dreaming about.

So spirit come and change our hearts that we would truly be your people. Not in name only.

Not those who play church. Not those who call themselves Christians. But those who have been changed deeply. By your great love and mercy.

Your love. Your mercy. Your love. Your mercy. And your grace. Are great. We thank you for them.

We rejoice in them. And we ask that by your spirit you would use them in our lives to make us a people after your heart.

[35 : 39] Who shows your love and kindness to the least of these. In our midst. In our city. In our world. Work in us by your spirit we pray for Jesus' glory.

Change us. Make us like him. Amen. Amen. This is a song I've been ripping on in the sermon. Because of Jesus.

Because he forgives and calls your heart back to him again. If that is your heart you can sing this with joy. Because of your great savior our king who leads us.

Let's stand and sing together. For more information visit us online at southwood.org For more information visit us online at southwood.org