

Leaders Held Accountable

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[0 : 00] Well, now let's turn to God's Word. You know, I found these concepts stripped straight from the headlines from the last couple of years.

Pastor found embezzling money from large church. Church leaders exposed for cover-up of sexual abuse charges against pastors. Pastors who are having affairs claiming, look at this church, God is blessing this church with new buildings, growth in numbers, and we are reaching more than ever. God is on my side. The common thread in all of these headlines is that these leaders used their position for selfish gain at the expense of those that they lead.

They've gained power. They've gained money. They've gained fame. They've gained illicit pleasure because of the roles that they have. How do we think about this?

How do we think? How are we to think when we find church leadership abusing its position and power to serve itself, not the Lord, nor the congregation, nor the community that it is in?

[1 : 13] Friends, this is what our passage this morning in the book of Micah will look like. If you want to turn there, we're going to look at Micah 3. We're starting in...that's page 729 in your pew Bible.

And as you're turning there, just remember, Micah was a prophet at the end of the northern kingdom of Israel and the ongoing existence of the southern kingdom of Israel.

He prophesied most likely over the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom and the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem itself. Micah prophesied to a nation and to God's people as they were struggling to come to grips with what was going on in their nation and in their church.

And the book is likely a compilation of prophecies. And we don't always know the specific historical context of each chapter or each oracle that we see. But it's not difficult to see his overall theme.

The overall theme of Micah is that God's judgment is coming because of the sin of Israel, its leaders, and its people. Yet he will not forsake his covenant people, but promises to be to them a God like no other.

[2 : 36] This is the big picture of what the book of Micah is telling us. And in our passage today, he sets his sights specifically on the leadership. And he pronounces oracles of judgment on them while offering a whisper of hope.

So let's read Micah 3 together. Again, that's page 729 in your pew Bible. Let's read it and then look at it for a few minutes this morning.

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 off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off them and break their bones into 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.

[3 : 55] 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.

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, 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 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 a...

[5 : 12] and the mountain of the house of wood of... let me try that one more time. Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Let's pray and ask God for his help as we read his word. Lord Jesus, we come to you this morning, and Lord, we hear the tone of this passage. Lord, I pray this morning that you would have, Lord, for us a word.

Lord, we pray that you would humble us before your word. We pray, Lord, that you would, Lord, open our hearts to receive your word, and our minds to understand your word.

And I pray for your help, that I may proclaim it faithfully. Lord, that we would together sit under your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So sometimes when we preach, we preach through the passage sequentially, and then the first point is about the first couple of verses, and then we go on. The prophets aren't always like that. Prophets often have cycles.

[6 : 23] And so that's how we're going to preach through this today. We're actually going to preach through the cycles of judgment, because there are three of them in this passage. Then we'll figure out, think through how to apply them.

And then finally, we're going to look to Micah's and our ultimate hope in light of this passage. So if you're taking notes, that's our outline this morning. First, we see what are the cycles of judgment? What are the charges that Micah brings against the spiritual leaders, the covenant leaders of God's people? We see them, there are three of them. Verses 1 through 4 is the first one.

Verses 5 through 7 is the second one. And verses 9 through 12 is the third. We're going to ask a few questions about that. First of all, who are they? Who are the leaders that he is targeting?

Well, you see the phrases, heads and rulers in verse 1, and then again in 9-11. This likely referred to the kings, or those in more political power.

[7 : 21] We see the prophets mentioned in verse 5 and 11, and we see the priests in verse 11. What we need to recognize and remember is that in the Old Testament covenant community of people, the religious leadership and the political leadership and the social leadership were all overlapping.

They didn't have distinct branches of government. These roles were often intersecting with one another, right? And so we need to recognize that as God is bringing this word to the Old Testament covenant community, it has this overlap.

And we'll think a little bit further on about how we apply that today. But for now, we need to see he's talking to this range of people, prophet, priest, and king, if we want to put it that way, who were meant to be leading God's people, and yet were failing in doing it rightly.

What were the charges? What were the particular ways? Well, in verses 2 through 4, we see that they are perverting justice by calling good evil and evil good.

It doesn't explain exactly what this is. If you were here last week, Tyler explained in a lot more specifics of what chapter 2 explained about the way that there was economic injustice and taking of lands and things like that.

[8 : 44] But here, what Micah does is simply say, you are calling something that is right wrong and something that is wrong right in the way that you are leading. And then he says, what you are doing, it's like you're a bunch of cannibals.

You are stripping the people of everything they have down to their very lives. You are devouring them by your selfish and self-serving ways.

We see a hint in verse 10-11 that even the civic building projects of the city were done so at the expense of the very life of the citizenry that that was meant to serve.

So that's the charge we see in verses 2 through 4. In 5 through 7, we see a charge against the prophets. What is it that they're doing? It seems what they're doing is they are changing or adjusting their prophecies based on what they're getting back for it.

Look with me at verse 5. It says, who cry peace when they have something to eat but declare war against him who puts nothing in their mouths. Wrestling with that, what does it seem to be saying?

[9 : 59] He seems to be saying the prophets, if you come to the prophets and give an offering, give them food, give them money, give them whatever it is that they're looking for, if you're filling their mouths with the things that they want, then they will bring you blessing.

Oh, the Lord is with you and the Lord will do well. But if you don't have anything to bring to them, it is war against you. Woe be to you. Their spiritual leadership is dependent on what they're getting from those that they're called to serve.

And they've lost their ability to speak for God because they're speaking to fill their own bellies. Their words are no longer trustworthy, are true.

And they bring silence and darkness upon the people because they can no longer speak for God. Then we go on and we look at the oracle in 9 through 12.

We see those who are making judgments are taking bribes. In fact, in verse 11, it seems everybody is taking bribes. Prophets, priests, and kings, they're all saying, hey, if you give me something, I'll give you something back.

[11 : 11] They're making straight things crooked by the way that they're warping all of their leadership to serve themselves. And what should be centered about God's glory, about God's justice, about leading people and even the world to worship God, instead becomes about the leaders, their glory, their comfort.

And it's destroying the people. And finally, in the second half of verse 11, you see their hypocrisy. Because while they're leading in all of these evil ways, those who have been entrusted by God to lead well, instead, they are saying, God is blessing my evil leadership.

God is blessing what I am doing. They violated the covenant requirements for leaders. They lean on the presence of the temple and the fact that Jerusalem has not fallen.

Look with me at verse 11, the end of it again. They lean on the Lord and say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us. The presumption, the spiritual arrogance, and the pride of these leaders is shocking.

They serve themselves and claim that God is blessing them. This is a word of judgment that God brings.

[12 : 49] He is exposing their sin and He is warning them. And while this passage may have secondary application to political leaders, to institutional leaders, to leaders of households, certainly there are resonances of character and quality and focus, like what are you doing as you're providing leadership in lots of different areas?

I want to argue this morning that the primary application of this passage is to the church. Because the Old Testament community was this overlapping civic religious community, but in the transition into the New Covenant community, post-Jesus resurrection, the New Covenant community was a transnational, not civil or state body, body, but the church and the leadership of the church is called to account in this passage.

And it brings me no joy to say that we see some of these leadership failings in the church today. With humility and with tears, we recognize that these things happened.

As your pastor, I know some of you have been wounded scarred by the leadership failures of the church.

And look, it's easy. We could sit back and look at those outside our circles. We could look at the Catholic Church and sexual abuse by priests. We could look at the prosperity gospel and their stealing money from widows, promising financial blessing in its false promises.

[14 : 36] We could go after the false healers that have worked out a system in order to make it look like. They're providing these miracles when they're not. We could look at cults that take over bank accounts that separate those disciples from their families that abuse women.

We could look at all of them and feel pretty comfortable, couldn't we, if we wanted to do that? And look, we need to recognize all of these things are terrible.

They are perversions. And for those who suffer under these leadership, it produces destruction in their lives. But friends, that's not how we apply the Bible, by thinking, well, who are the people out there, not about me, that we need to look at?

We need to look at ourselves. We need to look at our own tribes, our own circles, our own church. those in our circle of Christianity. We have held up celebrity pastors like Mark Driscoll.

And yes, I'm going to call him out because he failed in his leadership because he made it about himself. Ravi Zacharias, he failed in his leadership because his personal life had nothing to do with

his public ministry and he claimed to speak the truth of God while hiding his sin.

[16:11] Friends, we're on Southern Baptist Church. And last year, the Southern Baptist Church released a report that said the leaders of our denomination failed over and over again to respond to allegations of sexual abuse by pastors in the church.

The leadership failures on multiple levels in that. So let us not throw stones at others, but let us look at our own house and see that we too may fall into this, have fallen into it in some places.

Leaders who lead for their own benefit, gaining money, fame, and pleasure. Leaders who make false assurances about spiritual health while hiding sin. Leaders who are not ultimately serving God and people, but who use God and people for themselves.

God and people in the church in the church and people in the church and the church says God will hide his face from his people.

In verse 7 it said God will be silent to his teachers, his prophets. And in verse 12 there is this picture that I couldn't read this morning, but you understand a picture of total devastation.

[17:47] Jerusalem, Zion, which is the Old Testament word specifically about the spiritual value of Jerusalem being the center of God's kingdom on the earth and a picture of the heavenly kingdom that's going to come.

He says Zion will be plowed like a field and Jerusalem will be like a pile of rubble, a wilderness where the trees are growing in the middle of the plazas.

God warned them. And you know what's remarkable? We read in Jeremiah 26, 18 that Hezekiah, the king, actually heard this. Verse 12 is quoted in Jeremiah that Hezekiah heard this warning, responded to it, repented, turned to the Lord and for a time God relented on this judgment that He had prophesied because of that faith.

And yet we also know that a hundred years later because they persisted in their sin, the leaders, the kings of Israel persisted in it. So in 586 when Babylon finally came they raised Jerusalem, they sowed salt in the fields, they tore down the temple, the walls of the city were broken, and the people were taken into exile.

God did not let these ungodly leaders stand forever. He brought judgment upon them.

[19:31] And it might have been if you were in Israel in say 690 B.C. and you're watching all this terrible leadership happening, you think, where is God?

What is He doing? Well, He finally did show up. And we do know that though the wrong seems off so strong, God is the ruler yet.

Reading through the book of 2 Peter, He reminds us that there will be leaders like this in the church. They will come and they will preach false things and they will use people and they will take advantage of people.

But in the end, God will judge them. In the end, God will bring them. He will have His day of justice and He will build His church and the gates of hell will not stand against it.

He will not let these selfish and destructive leaders escape His justice forever. So how do we apply these things?

[20:37] I've suggested that we too are in a similar situation. What do we do with a passage like this? How do we make it come home for us? First of all, as a leader of this church, I am reminded, there but for the grace of God go I.

And I ask you to pray. Pray that the leaders of this church will not fall into these sins. I can stand before you today and say, as far as I know, we do not live in these patterns of selfish leadership. but I also want to say that I need to keep asking myself as a leader, am I in any way like this? Has my heart become hardened so that I'm justifying sin?

Has my motivation become warped so that I'm ministering for selfish reasons? Am I doing this because it's about me and what I get? Or it's about God and His glory and the good of His people. Not only do I ask you to pray for us as leaders, but I ask you to talk with us that we might examine ourselves. If you have concerns, bring them to us. Don't be afraid of raising them with us because we want this word to never be true about the leadership at Trinity Baptist Church.

[22:03] We may need your help. It also causes us to think through how do we engage with a broader church?

How do we engage with our circles and our tribes, our denominational failures? How do we bring clarifying truth and justice and righteousness? How do we bring the truth of God's word to bear on these things?

And here's where I'm going to say something. I don't know if you guys are going to agree with me or not, but here we go. I think we have a temptation to say we must be like Micah.

We love to step into the role of the true prophet. We want to be the ones speaking truth to power and be the savior of the church. And I'm wary of that approach because I think Micah points us elsewhere.

First, we see that in Micah 6, 8 at the heart of this book. He has told you, oh man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

[23 : 18] And our engagement with our spiritual leaders should be shaped by these words. Let me speak plainly. Cancel culture is an unhealthy spirit of judgment and condemnation.

It has a lust for winning and a pleasure for toppling leaders. We love to sit in the seat of judgment on others and it fills our hearts with an ugly self-righteousness and we lose sight of Micah's call.

We are called to do justice, not always to enforce justice. We are called to love mercy, not judgment. We are to walk humbly because there but for the grace of God go I.

And it does not mean we are silent but it means that the way that we speak must be different. It must be rooted in God's word and it must be spoken humbly and ultimately it must be spoken in faith.

Faith in something that is bigger than us because what we'll see in Micah, what we'll see in the next couple of chapters in Micah is that though he brings these oracles of judgment and warning, he says, I will come.

[24 : 35] I am not blind. I am not helpless to this state of my people. I will come and be the ultimate judge and the redeemer and the ruler and the king. I will come to do these things for you.

And I think that's the appropriate application of verse 8 as well. So as we close, let's look at verse 8 for a second because this is where in the middle of these oracles of judgment the prophet interjects himself and he says this, as for me I am filled with power with the spirit of the Lord with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Micah says there's a true prophet sent by the Lord who will bring these things. This prophet will come knowing what the leaders the sinful selfish leaders don't know because they don't know God's word but this one does know God's word and he will come to lay bare the transgressions and the sin of the people so that he might redeem them.

this word verse 8 reminds us that though God's leaders have failed their people God has not failed his people and though they have abandoned the people God has not abandoned them and in the fullness of time God sent this one the fulfillment of verse 8 Hebrews 1 says in the last days God spoke to us spoke to the fathers through the prophets but now in these last days he has spoken to us by his son Jesus comes as the prophet and the priest and the king he comes as the righteous judge who will judge all things fairly and equitably he will come as the true prophet the word of God the very word of God given to us he comes as our high priest the one who intercedes for us by offering himself up and then interceding for us with all of his authority as the great leader of God's people he comes as a son of

God for our redemption and how does he do it he heads to the cross just as Jerusalem was raised and ravaged so Jesus was stripped just as Jerusalem was made a desert so Jesus was sent out on a hill to die just as Jerusalem was abandoned my God because of its sin so Jesus bearing our sin on the cross cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me this is the leader that God has sent for his church this is the only hope that this church has that Christ would be our head and he exerts his greatest authority not by putting us under his thumb but by laying down his life for us to redeem us out of our selfishness out of our pride out of our rejection of God to redeem leaders out of arrogant self-centered self-serving leaders and to redeem a church of people who will truly be to his glory that one day a new

[28 : 05] Jerusalem will come down from heaven and it will not be a plowed field and it will not be a wilderness but it will be a glory of life with God and this is what Jesus brings to us and this is our hope in the midst of this oracle of judgment so friends let us recognize how prone we are to be the ones who need our sin to be exposed and let us look to the one who has not only exposed our sin but who has taken it away by bearing it on the cross for us let's pray together oh lord have mercy on your church lord we pray that by your spirit you would refine your church that you would lay bare the sin of leaders lord we ask that you would rescue us lord rescue us from our own sinful hearts and rescue our church from the destruction that comes from sinful leaders oh lord jesus we pray lord

that we would instead turn to you and see you to be our true head our true great shepherd one who has come and loved us and laid down his life for us that we might be his forever oh lord we ask that you would turn our hearts to worship you in spirit and truth lord that through your mercy we might be saved from this judgment and that we might be your people for your glory pray this in jesus name amen turn see you ■ go