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A Message from Micah: Her Wound Is Incurable (Micah 1.1–9)

FRED ASARE

Any preacher who is tasked with the responsibility of presenting the word of God to an audience other than his local congregation will at one time or another be confronted with the issue of the relevance of his message. What audacity does an outsider to a community have to tell the word of God to a people who consider themselves to be children of God, especially when it is a not-so-pleasant message?

MICAH—THE OUTSIDER

The prophet Micah was faced with such a challenge, for he was an outsider to Jerusalem where he proclaimed the word of the Lord. If he had been from Jerusalem, he would have been identified as, “Micah, the son of such and such a person.” Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem at about the same time that Micah did; being from Jerusalem, he was identified as “Isaiah son of Amoz.” Micah, on the other hand, came from Moresheth, a small village in the hill country of Judah, about twenty to twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. His identifying mark was, therefore, not his parentage but his hometown.

Micah went to Jerusalem to speak words to its people and leaders that were not his own. Micah did not speak words he made up himself. Micah spoke not merely out of the depths of his own understanding. He did not speak out of spite for the rich and powerful. He did not speak out of envy and jealousy for the affluent of society. He preached out of concern for the nation and its people to urge them to change their ways so as to avert God’s wrath. When Micah spoke of judgment, disaster and destruction, it was not his own wishful thinking but it was the word of the LORD that came to him concerning Samaria and Jerusalem during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Samaria and Jerusalem were the capital cities of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, respectively. The two cities were the two nations’ centers of authority and power in the days of Micah. These two cities represented their nations and, therefore, the words directed at these cities were also addressed to the nations of Israel and Judah. As the centers of influence, these cities were responsible for what happened in the rest of their nations. As it were, when Samaria and Jerusalem sneezed, Israel and Judah caught cold.

Reference to the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah speaks volumes of what was going on at the time of the prophecy. The reigns of these three kings of Judah lasted for a period of fifty-five years. Only a generation before this time, there had been political peace and stability in both Israel and Judah, accompanied by a vibrant and buoyant economy that had resulted in great wealth and prosperity. During the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, the people were still enjoying the prosperity, wealth, affluence and luxury of times gone by. Unfortunately, though, there was great inequity in the distribution of wealth. It was a time of great abundance, and yet a time of great need. It was a time of great affluence and yet a time of great deprivation. It was a time of great gains and yet a time of great loss. It was a time of great wealth and yet a time of great poverty. It was a time of great joy and yet a time of great sorrow. It was a time of great contrasts.

INEQUITY THEN

This was the time when the word of the LORD came to Micah—the vision he saw. Micah saw both physically and spiritually. He saw what went on around him (which everyone else could see) as well as what God was about to do as a result of that (which no one else could see).

Micah saw the effects of an economic revolution—the influx of material prosperity upon a people. He saw the wealth of the majority, vested in their lands and homes, taken away from them as they were dispossessed of their properties through unjust means by the powerful minority. Callous greed and cruelty marked the conduct of men who should have behaved humanely. The rich were so greedy for wealth that they stooped to the lowest level to grab and scrape off even the little leftovers from the lowest of the land. They stopped at nothing to feed their covetousness. He saw the powerful minority enjoying the pleasures of material prosperity while the powerless majority was crushed physically and emotionally by poverty.

Micah saw a distressed people oppressed by the agony of hopelessness. Unfortunately, the oppressors were their own brothers and sisters. The rich shamelessly engrossed in selfish materialism—so much so that the impoverishment of their neighbors and social concerns were at the bottom of their list of priorities. The poor, the weak, widows, orphans and the destitute were left to their own fate as no one cared for them. The disintegration of personal and social values was at its highest peak while morality was at its lowest ebb. The poor had no one to plead their case. The dispossessed had no one to speak on their behalf. Dishonesty was the order of the day and injustice was everywhere. The judges who were to administer justice had been bought with money and so they always ruled in favor of the rich and powerful. The abuse of judicial and political authority led to much suffering of the masses. Those who were to protect the people were not only neglecting their duty to protect them; rather, they were actively ill-treating the underprivileged. Those who were to feed the flock were fleecing the flock.

Micah saw the gross abuse of office by public officials and the gross neglect of religious officials to correct what was going wrong. Priests and prophets were endorsing what they should have been condemning, and so while all these evils were going on, the rich and affluent people were still “worshipping” God as if nothing was wrong. True religion had been perverted for self-satisfying religion. They saw God as a kind-hearted, generous benefactor who would always bless and never curse; who would always affirm and never condemn. The rich saw their ill-gotten wealth as a sign of divine approval—for that was what they were told by the prophets whom they had bought with their money to speak to them only words they wanted to hear. Ironically, therefore, in the midst of so much evil, religion was thriving and had become very popular because it made no demands on their evil ways. Outwardly, they looked very religious as they assembled in the temple and lavished gifts and offerings to God, but inwardly they were evil and their morals were rotten.

INEQUITY NOW

That was what Micah saw then, but what would any outsider looking into America see now? Compared to the rest of the world, the United States of America is a nation that is strong, powerful and filled with people who are rich and overflowing with material wealth; people living in comfort and affluence in beautiful neighborhoods and elegant homes with exquisite furniture. Fine cars, the finest clothing and the choicest of food is what Americans flamboyantly display to the rest of the world. The average Christian home in America has closets full of clothing and footwear that have not been worn in years and perhaps will never be worn again. Yet most people continue to buy more new clothing. People who have so much keep on grabbing more. American people never seem to be satisfied until they have the latest vehicle, designer wear, entertainment gadget or fad.

On the other hand, in the rest of the world, particularly third world countries, people have very little and even that is being taken away from them. People are being kicked off lands they have lived on for hundreds of years so that multinational mining companies can mine for gold and diamonds to meet the demands of

their rich clients. Children dying of hunger and starvation are daily occurrences. In many African villages, four out of every five children die before their fifth birthday because the water they drink is infested with filth—germs, parasites and diseases of every kind. It is common to see teenagers scavenging through garbage for food—otherwise they have to survive for days without food. As pathetic as it is, some mothers sell their children into slavery or prostitution because they cannot stand to watch them die under their very eyes; they believe that selling them is the only way to ensure the survival of their children. In Africa, entire communities are wiped out by AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria because the people cannot afford lifesaving medicines.

There is a huge and widening gap between the rich and the poor in this world as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Sadly, the rich have turned a blind eye to the misery and sufferings all around them. They have turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and underprivileged. There is so much inequality, inequity and injustice in this world.

THE JUDGE

God revealed to Micah that because of the gross inequality and injustice that prevailed in the land, he was going to bring judgment on the people. Micah paints a picture of a courthouse where God assembles all the people on earth to a hearing. The matter at hand is so serious that the whole earth is called to appear before the sovereign Lord. This is not a picture of an American court where one person cannot be both prosecutor and judge at the same time, and where the judgment of the judge can be challenged in another court of law.

What Micah describes is a traditional court where the king is sovereign and his verdict is final. For example, in the traditional set-up of the Ashanti tribe in Ghana, West Africa, each small village has a “small” chief or regent. However, there is also a “big” chief who has authority over many small villages. Above this “big” chief is another more powerful chief called the “paramount” chief. Paramount chiefs have authority over large clans and control vast areas of land. However, all the paramount chiefs are subject to one overall king. The king of the Ashantis is the sovereign overlord of the entire Ashanti kingdom. If the king brings a case against anyone, he can level charges against the person and pass judgment at the same time. His authority is unchallenged; his words and judgment are final. This may be difficult for a people who are so much used to democracy to comprehend and accept. However, a sovereign king has both authority and power to be prosecutor, witness and judge and to pass judgment that cannot be challenged. God is the sovereign Lord of all the earth. He can summon anyone and everyone at anytime, anywhere; his judgment is final.

In Micah 1.3, Micah invites us to witness the appearance of God to bring judgment. When the sovereign Lord appears, it is an awesome sight to behold. God’s coming out of his habitation into the habitation of man is an indescribable scene.

Sometimes when the Lord comes out of his dwelling place, it is a joyous and pleasant occasion. When the coming of the LORD symbolizes victory and triumph for his people, there is rejoicing and jubilation. But this time, Micah says that the coming of the Lord is a fearful and terrible thing. When God comes out in a pleasant mood, it is so awesome that even his righteous servants and messengers are scared to death. When God revealed himself to Isaiah in the temple, Isaiah cried out: “Woe to me! I am ruined!” (Isa 6.5). Can you then imagine what it is like when God comes out in anger to bring judgment? Micah says,

The mountains melt beneath Him,
And the valleys split apart,
Like wax before the fire,
Like water rushing down a slope. (Micah 1.4)

There is total destruction like has never been seen before! God’s theophany results in total destruction!

THE JUDGMENT

Why is God so angry? What is causing such anger and judgment from the LORD? What is it that could make a merciful God so merciless in his judgment and punishment?

It is because of the transgression and sin of God's own children. It is because of the idolatry, corruption and evil: the terrible conditions of the poor, the powerless, the downtrodden and the neglected. There is terrible human suffering going on, but those who call themselves the children of God are living in luxury and affluence and have done very little or nothing about the plight of their fellow human beings.

Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble,
a place for planting vineyards.
I will pour her stones into the valley
and lay bare her foundations.
All her idols will be broken to pieces,
all her temple gifts will be burned with fire;
I will destroy all her images.
Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes,
as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.
Because of this I will weep and wail;
I will go about barefoot and naked.
I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.
For her wound is incurable;
it has come to Judah.
It has reached the very gate of my people,
even to Jerusalem itself. (Micah 1.6–9)

God was going to bring terrible judgment, intentional destruction, misery and reproach to Israel. God used Assyria as a tool to remove the nation of Israel from existence in the world. They were deported into exile and scattered upon the surface of the earth, never to regroup as a nation again. God's judgment did not end with Israel. The tragedy of Israel was to serve as a warning to Judah. Since Jerusalem was equally guilty of the transgressions Samaria was guilty of, the same fate was to befall Jerusalem. Because she was equally guilty, Judah would not escape the tragedy that had befallen Israel. The judgment that was to come upon God's children was not just political in nature or origin. It was of divine origin—God himself was bringing the calamity.

The coming doom causes the prophet to mourn. He is in great pain and anguish because of the certainty of the calamity. Israel's prospects are hopeless. She has reached a point of no return. Her wound is incurable.

In the West African country of Ghana, there is an ulcer that doctors refer to as "buruli ulcer" but the natives call "the incurable wound." It starts as a small sore but it gradually erodes a person's flesh as it spreads over a wider skin area, causing excruciating suffering to the afflicted. It is a terrible thing to have an incurable wound. The picture that God paints of his own children is that of a nasty eyesore. An incurable wound is no Band-Aid matter. It is a serious, deadly disease that only leaves destruction and misery in its memory.

CONCLUSION

God's judgment on Israel and God's judgment on Judah serve as a warning to all God's children for all times—including America today.

Will God sit in silence when our closets are full of clothing we don't wear, and yet children in Africa attend both school and church meetings naked? When the water in our toilets is cleaner than the drinking water of many people in the developing nations of the world? When the food that we throw away each day can feed thousands of refugees?

Ponder over these alarming statistics: the per capita income of the United States alone is more than

that of the poorest seventy countries put together. The books thrown away at the end of each semester by students in Christian colleges and universities in the United States are more than enough to fill the empty shelves of Christian schools in developing countries around the world. Two and a half million Africans will die this year from the lack of anti-retroviral drugs to fight HIV/AIDS. (That is more than all the members of Churches of Christ in the entire United States of America.) This figure excludes those who will die from malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. Every eleven seconds, a person in Africa dies from AIDS—that is 6,500 people a day. By 2010, the continent of Africa will be home to twenty-five million AIDS orphans. One cannot help but ask, “Who will take care of them? Where will they live? What will they eat?”

Will God sit unconcerned and do nothing when we live in luxury and abundance while the world around us suffers in misery? The answer is a resounding, “No!” God will not sit unconcerned in silence. God will not sit and do nothing. On the contrary, God will do something. The sovereign Lord of all the earth will come down with judgment on his own children.

Micah’s warning to all of God’s children is that, before God’s judgment comes, we should not just sit down in indifference. The child of God is urged to help the poor, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked and lift up the downtrodden. While there is time, let us “rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave, weep over the erring one, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus the Mighty to save.” These words should not just be limited to our singing but be part of our actions.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ should be a constant reminder to us all, “To whom much has been given, much will be expected” (Luke 12.48). Amen!

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