



KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

A Psalm for the Homeless

Sermon – Steve Stanis

11 & 18 September

Micah 2:1-13

Matthew 2:1-9

1 Peter 5:6-11

INTRODUCTION

Remember the famous line from the classic movie, 'A Few Good Men' - "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!"

Truth will always bring us face to face with reality - our own human failings, our own corruption, what we covet or desire and, from this, our own vulnerability.

As we come to Micah 2 today, we find ourselves with these same questions - the truth about who we are, what we are like and where we stand before Almighty God.

JUDAH'S SIN - UNJUST SEIZURE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE'S LAND AND HOMES: (MICAH 2:1-2, 8-9)

1 Woe to those who plan iniquity,
to those who plot evil on their beds!

At morning's light they carry it out
because it is in their power to do it.

2 They covet fields and seize them,
and houses, and take them.

They defraud people of their homes,
they rob them of their inheritance.

God is sending the remaining Israelite people, Judah, into exile because of their 'iniquity'. The Hebrew word for 'iniquity' is 'Avon', which means 'crooked behaviour' like corruption and injustice and that's exactly what we find in verses 1-2. The powerful in Jerusalem are lying awake at night figuring out how they can take for themselves the

fields and homes of the poor and vulnerable. Verses 8-9 tell us they defraud everyone—men, women, and children. Houses and land weren't like what they are in our culture today. We can buy and sell homes and property with relative ease. But property in Israel belonged to families for generations. Remember this is an agrarian society. There's no industrial revolution. People lived off farms and what they could produce from the land.

The people of Judah were being deceived by the powerful who rationalised this greed to reinforce their way of life. They had taken the power God had given them and coveted, through their actions and in their words. They had taken this power and so twisted the truth as to bend it to their own purposes.

There is a well-known saying, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (Baron Lord Acton, 1834-1902).

The drive for power - it forces you to hide what you covet. The reach for power - it urges you to omit what should be spoken, to leave in the dark what must be brought to light.

Is it any different today? Micah reminds us that faithful lives in God require integrity to be evident in the day to day transactions we undertake and truth to be clear in the words we speak. This is the truth we are called to handle.

In God's rebuke to his people through his prophet, Micah, God speaks both directly and indirectly of the ultimate

justice of his truth... his power that will come to light and his promise that his faithful people will be restored.

I have used the term 'powerful' to refer to those who served out the injustice. Bryan Stevenson founded the *Equal Justice Initiative* (EJI). He's argued cases before the Supreme Court and says this about poverty and justice.

"My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.

Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavoured, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned." - Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*

When we think upon the growing power in the hands of a few in our country, are we challenged to speak for the interests of those whose voices are oppressed? So many different groups are impacted by the decisions we omit to challenge, or the impacts from these we choose not to act upon.

The global village of the world today brings this visible disparity and invisible scheming into even sharper focus. Is it that such confrontation can blind us even more than those we read of in Micah's time?

What is God's warning for us?

What does God promise he will do?

We find the answer in V3-5.

GOD'S JUDGMENT - THOSE WHO STEAL LAND WILL LOSE THEIR LAND: (MICAH 2:3-5)

3 Therefore, the Lord says:

"I am planning disaster against this people,
from which you cannot save yourselves.
You will no longer walk proudly,
for it will be a time of calamity.

4 In that day people will ridicule you;
they will taunt you with this mournful song:

'We are utterly ruined;
my people's possession is divided up.

He takes it from me!

He assigns our fields to traitors."

5 Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot.

God demonstrates perfect fairness towards those who steal from the poor. What does God do? He takes their land and homes. That's exactly what happens when,

generations later, Judah goes into exile and those who practised injustice lose their land. Justice served!

What does injustice look like in our culture?

- Not caring for the poor and those in need.
- Mistreatment of others—the disabled, weak and outsider.
- Racism, bigotry, prejudice (by bigotry I mean intolerance of other's opinions).
- Profit over people.
- Not putting Jesus/God first in all!

As the church we should always be the messenger to our culture. Any honest view of Scripture will declare that the glory of God, as it is being revealed to the hearts of people, is our primary responsibility. But once a heart has been gripped by the glory of God, the other responsibilities that come with true Christian faith must extend to and pervade all areas of life, including how we live in a needy society. We should be the first ones to stand up when an injustice happens and say, "That's not right!"

The Bible is clear we must care for the widow and provide for her needs; we must visit the fatherless and show them care in their suffering. It is not good enough for Christians to merely speak of injustice. It is required, as an expression of true religion, to overtly care for the marginalised of our society, especially those of the household of faith.

But we may not be welcomed with open arms. Micah wasn't!

JUDAH'S SIN - REJECTING GOD'S MESSAGE AND MESSENGER: (MICAH 2:6,11).

In verses 6-7 the false prophets tell Micah to stop prophesying. They don't like his message. They don't want to hear it, so they tell him to "be quiet." Micah openly insults them in verse 11.

*11 If a liar and deceiver comes and says,
'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,'
that would be just the prophet for this people!*

Is this the truth you want spoken, Judah? You can't handle the truth! One of the temptations is to skew, soften or make more palatable scriptures such as these. The hard truth is we can easily live this way - not rocking the boat, complicit to the injustice we see all around us. True justice is lived in a heart that seeks to align with God's purposes. True justice is most visibly lived in the space of speaking and acting in accord with the injustice that does not align with God's plans. It may require us to challenge the power and domination that is self-serving and not God-seeking in its intent.

The true message of the Bible is not one to affirm my beliefs and preferences. In fact, our faith often calls for sacrifice and self-denial. Can you think of significant times when God put you to the test in this?

That's not a message we naturally want to hear. Listen to these words from (2 Timothy 4:3-4):

³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

We must trust the work of the Holy Spirit to speak into the lives of those who suit their own desires. The Spirit is powerful and at work powerfully in the world. The Spirit is not limited and therefore we cannot back down. This is how the Lord has chosen to work and to reveal himself. In this way the righteous realise who he is. How will the unrighteous, covetous, thieves, and corrupt people of society hear of the truth of the gospel unless they are told? So we tell and the Spirit, who is not restricted, does the work of convincing and converting.

So the Scripture urges us in standing up for God's plans and purposes in his strength as these words ordain in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we

take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

GOD'S JUDGMENT - LOSS OF THE TEMPLE AND EXILE: (MICAH 2:7,10).

The people of Israel believed that God would never leave them. They're the descendants of Jacob (v7) and they worship at the true temple; God can't abandon them!

But God is going to destroy the temple and send them away into exile.

10 Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy.

In the 36th Psalm, David wrote of such people that their offences actually declare that there is no fear of God before their eyes and, instead, they flatter themselves and deceive themselves that they are good, when in fact they are not. This self-deception, when one doesn't even recognise that one is consumed with self, is exactly the heart issue that everyone must grapple with and come to terms with before they can turn toward God, accept the life he offers and repent and believe the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Every broken person must come to see that they are broken. From this place we see our need for a Saviour, Jesus, who offers light and life, completeness and wholeness.

This destruction is not how this prophesy ends. We worship a merciful God who desires our repentance and

for us to walk in faith with him. At the end the end of this passage Micah prophesies God himself will lead his people out of exile.

HOPE RESTORED - THE LORD WILL GATHER HIS PEOPLE AND LEAD THEM HOME: (MICAH 2:12-13).

12 "I will surely gather all of you, Jacob;
I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel.
I will bring them together like sheep in a pen,
like a flock in its pasture;
the place will throng with people.

13 The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out.
Their King will pass through before them,
the Lord at their head."

Yes, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are going to be taken into captivity in Babylon, but a Shepherd-King is going to come and gather his sheep, lead them out of captivity, and bring them home. This Shepherd-King isn't going to be just any man, but Yahweh himself, the 'LORD'. God does come to rescue us. Jesus comes into our world as the Shepherd King, as our Good Shepherd. He leads us, his flock, by breaking us free from ourselves and captivity. He does so by dying on the cross and rising again so that anyone who repents and believes in Jesus will receive eternal life. Jesus takes the penalty for our self-centredness. Our life-long tension of justice and

judgement are relinquished forevermore. Justice is served!

Now he is seated on the throne as King preparing the long-term victory. King Jesus is going to return, gather all his people, and break us free from bondage once and for all.

The Lord will gather his people and lead us home.

Conclusion:

Let us read a Psalm as a prayer, as the way forward for God's people to be just, fair, and right with God... a timeless response... we read as we sit and say together!

Psalm 36:

*¹ I have a message from God in my heart
concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:*

*There is no fear of God
before their eyes.*

*² In their own eyes they flatter themselves
too much to detect or hate their sin.*

*³ The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful;
they fail to act wisely or do good.*

*⁴ Even on their beds they plot evil;
they commit themselves to a sinful course
and do not reject what is wrong.*

*⁵ Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.*

- ⁶ Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.
- ⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
- ¹⁰ Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- ¹¹ May the foot of the proud not come against me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- ¹² See how the evildoers lie fallen—
thrown down, not able to rise!

AMEN!

