



A Plea for Justice

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Micah 6

As we unpack Micah 6, we see a catastrophic breakdown in the covenant relationship between God and his people. God calls his people to trust him and to show this by living his truth.

Why the breakdown? God's people are trying to worship him on their own terms and not his. And it seems like, not only do they think God would be fine about this, but he would actually be pleased with them!

In this chapter God speaks through Micah to tell his people that this is not okay at all. They should not presume on their relationship with God if there is no commitment on their part to worship and serve him on his terms. On the contrary, there are dire consequences waiting if they don't change their ways.

This is the case Micah is bringing to God's people, in an imaginary court of law. That's the scene of this chapter - a courtroom; and what we see unfolding first is the trial in verses 1-8.

In this trial God speaks first. In verses 1-5 he exhorts his prophet Micah to act on his behalf as plaintiff and his opening words leave no room for doubt that something has gone wrong in the relationship between God and his people.

Yet for such a stern opening, what immediately follows is surprising. Rather than launch into Israel's mistakes, God humbly pleads with them. He reasons with them by asking two questions:

Verse 3: My people, (first question) what have I done to you? (Second question) How have I burdened you?

These are the words of the Lord himself, spoken by the prophet, expressing his strong affection for the people of Israel, of which his goodness to them was full proof. They were his people, whom he had chosen and to whom he had remained faithful. God is reminding them he will never leave them or forsake them. He will show them a love that is far more resilient, far more stubborn, even than they are.

Micah is trying to grab the hearts of the Israelites as he relays the words of God. He points the people back to God's protection in their rescue out of Egypt and God's faithfulness bringing them to the Promised Land. He didn't have the privilege of seeing, as we do, that God came again in his stubborn love for his people, showing and calling for justice, loving mercy and humility, and once more his people grew weary of him. These people perpetrated the most unjust and least loving act of all time - they killed God's Son.

And yet the death of Jesus was the means for God's justice and the overflowing of his love...

Back to Micah!

He reminds the people that God has only shown goodness, tender love, and care and so, asks God, why do you behave as though I have been the opposite?

If things have gone wrong in the relationship between God and his people (and they have) there's no fault to be found on God's side.

We turn to verses 6-7; it's Israel's turn to speak. Their approach and line of reasoning also uses the 'question' approach. Israel wants to establish their innocence and demonstrate just how faithful they have been. They are God's people, in God's land, worshipping God in his temple according to his Laws. Surely that counts for something??

The basic point here is that God is not pleased if we elevate one aspect of what he requires of us as his people, while ignoring the rest. Worship must come from a life lived in the pursuit of justice, of love for your neighbour.

Jesus had the same issue with religious practice that was not accompanied by pursuing justice because it was not flowing out of a loving heart. The Pharisees, who were very devoted, Scripture bound members of God's people, found themselves in a similar situation.

(Matthew 23:23) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin.

But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.

You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former."

What God requires is not sacrifice alone; gifts will not appease and please God. It's about the entire life of his people. The whole of life requires our experiences, expressions, applications, and understanding to match and measure how God has called us to live. We cannot measure what is humanly immeasurable. Leave that to God.

Which brings us to the famous verse 8:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

Israel can continue to come and worship God on their own terms by bringing sacrifices to win favour but, if the rest of their life doesn't display justice, mercy and humility, then it is all just an empty ritual that is offensive to God.

Firstly, to act justly. Most people equate justice with punishing wrongs. This is certainly part of the story, but justice is broader than that. Justice is also giving those who cannot stand up for themselves - the victims, the poor, the powerless the vulnerable, the voiceless - the opportunity to flourish and thrive. Can you imagine a society like that? That all would flourish and thrive! Justice gives us a chance to change our tune, to worship with a fresh and beautiful voice in truth with trust.

Secondly, to love mercy with an unqualified love, limitless love - the seeing the best in another and believing we are all doing the best we can kind of love... to love with a spirit of generosity, loyalty, and grace. When we love like this, we are creating a community where all can flourish and thrive.

Thirdly, to walk humbly with God. This refers to bringing each of our lives into conformity with God's will. It must be God's justice that motivates us. It must be God's love and mercy that empowers us. If we walk humbly with our God, we will love to be like our God. We must open our hearts. God has freed us to walk humbly with him. God has created us to flourish and thrive when we walk with him.

The court of creation has been summoned and the defendants named (v 1-2), the standard has been set (v8). Now follows the charge and verdict (v9-12), and then the sentence (v13-16).

The Charge

It is the Lord who brings the charge. Micah adds that it is wisdom to fear the name of the Lord. Does this remind you of Proverbs 1:7?

Who is hearing the charge? The city - Jerusalem.

The content of the charges come in verses 10-12. There is no question Israel is behaving badly; they are violent, aggressive and deceitful. The only question is whether God should forget what they are doing and acquit them.

However, the verdict is, "Guilty".

We may not engage in dishonest manipulation like the Israelites at this time, but can we be a little transactional in our relationships? When do we raise our voices in protest or protection? When should we be called to be silent for the acceptance of difference? When are each of us tempted to manipulate our voices and actions to seek our personal gains?

Church in this current generation, culture and community is grappling with such tensions and differences. If we are honest, do we look at benefit or gain, rather than other-oriented equality and justice? Do we seek to create a society where all can flourish and thrive? This was the charge made by God through Micah.

"I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins." (v13)

Israel is being warned of invasion and exile; They would be separated from all they had worked to gain. And, of course, the ultimate exile is death. Death forces us to leave everything behind and separates us from all we have worked to gain. It is why those who lay up stores in barns but are not rich toward God are, in Jesus' estimation, fools. (Luke 12:20)

One day we will all have to face God. You will come up empty and unsatisfied if left to your own devices. (verse 14). The end game of life is that you were never in control of your life. The point the Bible makes over and over again, as it gives this very honest assessment of the

human heart and of the human condition, is that we are all accountable before our covenant God.

In verse 16 God restates the charge. Omri and Ahab were particularly idolatrous Kings of Israel; he passes verdict and gives sentence. What is being added here is that it all comes back to idolatry. They have been listening to the counsel of idolaters rather than listening to the counsel to walk with God and pursue justice. Now they face desolation and scorn.

Is there hope? We know there is. God is faithful and loyal. He is a promise keeper.

Micah 6 needs to be read with Isaiah 52-53 (written around the same time) where we read of a suffering servant who is wise and exalted. He is not like those around him. He was smitten by God. He was afflicted. He was wounded for their transgressions. He was crushed for their iniquities. He was oppressed, judged, cut off. This is the same language that is used in Micah 5. But God, in the person of Jesus, reverses the verdict on us, by taking our sentence for us. We understand we sit in the same courtroom but, because of Jesus, we develop a deeper sense of awe in the wonderful redemptive love of our Father in heaven.

We are not on trial anymore. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). We don't need to please or appease God. We don't need to manipulate others or think only about how we can flourish. The ultimate

verdict has already been pronounced. We are who we are because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf.

This leads to a life that is free... one that pursues the gain of others and glorifies God...a life that is seeking holiness, because God is holy.

So what does the Lord require of each us?

To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our gracious God. Grace in humility knowing truth so we trust.

Amen!



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