

MICAH PART 3

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THIS IS THE CONCLUSION OF A THREE-PART BIBLE STUDY ON MICAH

STANDING FOR HOLINESS

The pursuit of holiness is a most Methodist activity. Engaged by the Word of God, we are transfixed by the gift of Jesus on the cross for our sins and this secures our salvation. What the specifics of sin are is not the subject of this study, but it has long been clear to me that when we stand in the shadow of the cross, and let the gaze of Jesus fall onto us, the sins, guilt and shame of our actions and introspections are brought into the light. It is here that we do the business of salvation through confessing, repenting and receiving forgiveness. Holiness is the growing outcome of sins forgiven. Holiness is then the way by which goodness is spread throughout our locality; loving 'because God first loved us.'

- Take a look at 5:7 for a view of the holy remnant of God:

The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man. (NIV)

I love this verse. It sparkles in the text and is dripping with hope. The structures may be corrupt, the world's orders may

be in wrack and ruin, but the 'remnant' of people - which we looked at in more detail in the previous issue - remain holy, and grace the land with refreshing. This could be a text for you to write out and place in significant places as a reminder of the importance of your holiness and holy response.

- Consider 5:7 and your role in church and community. How do you, your group or your church sparkle and refresh with the Lord's news of goodness?

As you read on through to the end of Chapter 5, you will note the Lord's destruction of idols and the hand-made gods, evil-based spiritualities and his response to disobedience. It is not comfortable reading and maybe warrants our return to the cross of Jesus for further soul searching ...

STANDING UNDER THE LORD'S ACCUSATIONS

Chapter 6 returns to the courtroom setting. It is clear that Micah is walking only under the Lord's direction and his call is not an easy one. The emphasis on justice is something that is appealing on its own to certain parts of the church. However, without the holiness of God working through the lives of the people in every aspect: life, worship, campaigning and activity, it is not the whole of what

is 'required'. You may recognise Chapter 6 from the Good Friday 'reproaches of God' in the Methodist Worship book, pages 256-7.

Chapter 6 falls into 3 sections and is set out like a court hearing. It contains the basis for the charge, presents the evidence and pronounces the judgement. In their previous behaviour, the people of Israel have made their own judgement against Yahweh as a response to his faithfulness. Now Yahweh will make his pronouncement against their rejection of him and his laws.

- Look at the charges in 6:1-5.

In answer to the people's charges against Yahweh, he now brings his own charges. Yahweh outlines his faithfulness in providing redemption, leadership, protection and adventure. He is reliable and not boring. The Exodus is an iconic marker in the history of Israel. It is the One Thing that they could look back on and remember confidently that God's power is 'mighty to save'. It was now being viewed with complacency and as 'out of touch' with the current state of the world.

- Consider the power of God which has saved you and how your testimony is still vibrant with faith. What things have been factors in reducing the 'joy of your salvation' over the passage of time?

- Reflect on how God's greatness is shown in your story.
- Note down the people who have led you in your faith - both ministers and friends. How does this show you God's faithfulness?
- Look up the story of Balaam & Balak in Numbers 22-23. Talk about God's protection.
- Look up the references to Shittim & Gilgal in Joshua 3 & 4, discuss the adventure and delight in being present to see God's actions.

6:6-8: THE WAY OUT.

The response here is one that shows an extravagant and over-the-top approach to sacrifice and offering. The calves were costly and their offering is plural. Verse 7a looks like a royal offering such as King David would have made, extravagant and rich. Verse 7b is horrible, but is not an unprecedented action from the Kings of Israel (see Manasseh; 2 Kings 21:6).

- Talk together about offerings that are showy in their extravagance and in their extreme. How does God respond to such offerings?
- With a gospel lens attached, what areas of the New Testament are still addressing the show of the sacrifice?

In 6:8 are the much-quoted words of requirement for a faithful life of walking in step with the Lord, keeping to the relationship spelt out in the Law and Prophets. Keeping this covenant relationship is the way out of the mess. Verse 8 reminds us that they have already been told this by the prophets and Law. They are in possession of the knowledge and evidence that kindness and justice are key to living the Godly life.

- What does 6:8 teach us about the kind of love God has for his covenant people?
- How is that love to be reflected in the actions of the people?

6:9-16: THE JUDGEMENT.

Yahweh's requirements have not been met. There will be consequences. Of course, as Micah spells out the issues that are besetting the people of Israel; that they have thrown out a God-

honouring and holy loving-kindness and justice in favour of deceit and wickedness; they are past the point where returning to God will seem like an attractive option.

Look 6:9-12 and talk about the depth of sin that the people of Israel have fallen into. Name the different charges and talk about how the same evils affect us today. How is Micah relevant in your culture in the 21st Century?

The consequences will be that they will be overrun by their enemies and their land will be taken from them. 6:13-16 shows how all the city will suffer - the city meaning all the people who had fallen from God's rule. The judgement of God falls on all the people and not just on the few.

- Look carefully at the nature of the punishment. Consider how it ties in with the nature of the offence, for example current greed will lead to constant lack of satisfaction, etc.
- Consider and pray about how you and your group - or your church if possible - can be more proactive in the things of Micah 6:8.

WAITING FOR A HOLY RENEWAL

In Chapter 7 we note that these crimes are firstly against God even though they are also against other people. The crimes are committed because of a failure to stand in God's ways of holiness. The business is God's business and it is of no consequence that the nations who are enemies of God are laughing. Chapter 7 is about getting the priorities sorted out again so that the people of God stand in a holy place and give precedence to God even when the ways of the world are strongly advocating another, seemingly good direction.

- Look at 7:7 and speak it aloud. What hope does it offer you even now?

Getting the focus right is necessary for holy living. We will naturally concern ourselves with the specifics of Micah 6:8 when we are right with God and looking at God alone to shape our thinking and direct our paths. There is a challenge in verse 10 that can serve as a reminder



that God is present, even when the desolation of the present moment leaves others to wonder and mock the faithful who are seemingly abandoned by God.

- Prayerfully ponder on this verse. Is it speaking to the faithfulness of God's people who remain holy and seek God's righteousness above all else when all around them have abandoned God's holy ways and are seeming to prosper?

Rising is God's business. Living with the knowledge of God's ability to resurrect is deeply prophetic when all around there are the agonies of hope's death. It is prophetic to live, waiting and trusting for the Lord to bring life to the desolation.

- Recall biblical examples of this. Do you have stories to tell of this in your personal or church experience?

GOD'S HOLINESS IS UNASSAILABLE

God's law and God's character are unchanged by the impact of popular culture and 'enlightenment' which in its current iteration is the term 'woke'. While we must always embody the heart of flesh, living and responding with softened hearts, God's holiness and laws remain unassailable. Instead of approaching any situation with the loving conviction of those 'who we are under the gaze of God', the prevalent culture erodes this. Soft-hearted people are convinced to eschew holiness in favour of either complete removal of God from their thinking (de-ology). Or a 'we-ology' where God, the 'Theo' of Theology, is removed from the situation and is re-invented in the image of the culture of the gathered people. The danger of this approach is that the unchanging nature of God has been exchanged for the changeability of the minds of people and the passing of popular culture. There are no checks and balances to the system as it is constructed within an echo chamber which bounces around approval to behaviours, attitudes and policies that are not 'of God.'

The courtroom drama of Micah relies on a constant understanding of who is on trial. We are reminded that it is God who is bringing the charge against his people. We are reminded that God's

holy rule is absolute and will require satisfaction.

- Look at 7:18-19. There is hope. God will always call sin what it is and iniquities remain iniquities. These will all be destroyed for the good of God's people.

To stand with Micah is to live a holy and righteous life that makes an impact on the world around us.

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