

240630pm Sermon Transcript

Matthew Seymour

Micah 3:1-12

(This sermon transcript is an extract of a video recording of the full service. The numbering is auto-applied and reflects the number of minutes into recording that the transcript relates to.)

22:32

What would be the greatest loss that you could experience? If that was a financial question, you might think of your income and the loss of your income or perhaps your home or your savings.

22:46

If that was applied to relationships, maybe it would be your spouse or your family or your friends or your church.

22:55

While our passage this evening reminds us that the greatest loss that any human being could experience is God no longer with us.

23:08

God's no longer with us so that there is no help from Him when we call upon His name,

23:16

so that when we need to hear from Him, there is no word from Him and we seek His wisdom.

23:23

And when we need His help and sustaining grace, there is no comfort from His ongoing presence in our lives.

23:33

And to shake

23:35

the leaders, the prophets, and the people of God in the time of Micah, to bring them to repentance and change.

23:44

God threatens that very thing in our passage this evening.

23:51

The greatest loss

23:54

we're continuing our series in the boot of my car on Sunday evenings. We've been working through the book over the last two Sundays and we've learnt that that Michael is an Old Testament prophet. He is a spokesman for God. He speaks God's words in that all Testament. And we've we've seen the book is structured in threes. If you want to remember what Mike has things about structural Mike, I think threes because there are three separate cycles at three separate cycles of

24:25

was speaking to his people and each of those 3 cycles, 3 moments of God speaking, there is judgement upon the people and then hope given to them as they respond in faith. So each of those threes has judgments and hope. And over the last two Sundays we we've worked through chapter one and chapter 2, which is at first cycle of judgments and then hope. And now we come to the middle cycle, the second of the three,

24:57

and this evening we're going to look at the judgement section in chapter 3. There is a longer section of hope in chapters four and five, and one of the markers of the book is that the hope sections get longer and bigger. And that's a great thing, isn't it, as we work through the book.

25:13

But as we come this evening, we're just gonna focus in on Chapter 3,

25:18

which breaks down into three parts. So Mike is a book of threes. 3 different statements of speech from God. Each has judgement and hope,

25:28

and this passage this evening breaks down into three parts. God is going to confront the sins of the political leaders of Judah,

25:37

then in the middle section is going to confront the sins of the spiritual leaders of Judah, and then in the final section, God is going to challenge both those groups in summary form.

25:49

And it will, as we've found previously working through MICA, It will be hard to see.

25:56

It will be hard to read. We will be longing for that extended section of hope as we come to Chapters 4:00 and 5:00.

26:06

But we mustn't rush there.

26:08

And we mustn't rush there because we need to be rightly affected by what we see this evening,

26:14

because this passage is a warning to the people of God in the time of the Old Testament, to Judah,

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and it's a warning to us today.

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It's a bit like seeing a car crash on the motorway.

26:30

You know when you're driving along and you see the speed limit signs and they say go slower, it's dangerous, reduce your speed. Take care

26:39

and they have some effect on us,

26:42

but the thing that really affects us is when we see the cars slowing down in both directions

26:48

and we look to the side there

26:51

and we see the cars broken up and smashed up.

26:55

We see the roofs cut away as they've needed to get people out their vehicles

26:59

and we see the debris all over the road. That's what affects us most, isn't it?

27:04

And this passage is a bit like that. It is there to shock us rightly

27:08

that we might respond to God's great warning. So we're going to see in our first section versus one to four, a failure of responsibility, a failure of responsibility. And here the leaders of Israel, of judiciary are addressed. And these leaders of Judah should have been shepherds of God's people,

27:31

but instead they have feasted on the people of God.

27:36

There is a charge there in verses one to three, and the charge is that they have failed to defend exploited people. Now, if you remember, we we've seen last time that the the concern that was going on was that rich people were exploiting those who had less.

27:56

And in Chapter 2, the previous chapter, the challenge was to those who did that work of exploitation, those who used their privilege and their finance to exploit those who had less. But now the focus turns not from those who do it specifically, but rather to the leaders

28:16

who allowed it to happen and did nothing,

28:19

who didn't stop

28:21

this great sin.

28:23

Because we read in verse one that the calling of every leader, they're rulers of Jacob, the the leaders of Israel, is that they should embrace justice. First part of verse two. They are to hate what is evil and love what is good.

28:40

They should do that because biblical justice is grounded upon the character of gods. It is grounded upon his moral law, and it is applied to all of life.

28:53

And so when fields were stolen and houses were taken away and people were defrauded of their homes and their inheritance was robbed from them, what should their leaders have done?

29:05

While they should have held the 8th Commandment and protected private property, personal property,

29:12

they had responsibility as leaders. They had opportunity. God had given them the power to do something,

29:20

but they did nothing

29:22

because they didn't embrace justice.

29:25

They didn't love good and hate evil. Instead, they hated good and loved evil.

29:35

They allowed, we read in verse 10 jumping on they allow Jerusalem to be built with wickedness for Zion to be built with blood sheds. Now perhaps what's going on here is that there's a reference here to if you remember that the book of Micah is written when there are two kingdoms in Israel and the northern Kingdom falls as Samaria, the capital is overrun by the Assyrians and then the people flood South. And when the people move, they need somewhere to live. And so as they move,

30:06

they need to expand that the housing stock. And during the time of King Hezekiah, there was a great expansion of Jerusalem. We're told it grew by four times. The city grew four times to its size. And so this rapid expansion came, which seems at great cost in the suffering of the people's. Homes were taken so that others could be built. Land was taken so that housing could be put on it

30:35

and the leaders did nothing.

30:38

They think nothing of it. And so Mike or the prophet to shock them,

30:44

and it is to shock them. He compares our action to cannibalism. Did you notice that there in verse two and verse three, it's vivid language, isn't it? They tear the skin off the people. They rip the flesh off the bones. They break the bones into pieces. They chop their bodies up like meat for the pan

31:05

and they eat people's flesh.

31:09

That actions are like that of a cannibal because

31:15

they do not value life as they should.

31:18

They didn't treat people as image bearers, instead they treated them like animals.

31:25

That was wrong.

31:28

Very wrong.

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As we see the vivid language here in verses two and three, we are reminded that sometimes we need to be shocked about our sin.

31:39

Sometimes we view our sin too lightly. We think of it as something small, even just nothing. But God sees it as very, very serious,

31:50

and all our mistreatment of other people is a devaluing of other human beings made in God's image.

32:00

It is like cannibalism

32:04

because sinful anger, What is it we're doing there? We are saying we don't value that person as another human being. And so we're going to get angry with them, with our hearts and our hands and our voices, with verbal snipes against others. What are we doing? We're not value them as a human being.

32:23

We would be helped to avoid those kind of sins if we made a similar vivid comparison as Mika does.

32:31

So that's the charge against the leaders of Israel. The failure of responsibility was that they failed to defend exploited people.

32:39

When they cried out, they did nothing.

32:42

And so we come to the consequences in verse 4.

32:46

When they cry out to God, there will be no answer. Look down at verse four we read. When they cry out the Lord, He will not answer them, but at that time He will hide His face from them because of the evil they have done.

33:02

So a time of judgement comes that Michael spoke about in chapter 2. They cry out to God to help them, but

33:10

they hear nothing back.

33:12

There is silence from the Lord. He hides his face from them. He withdraws

33:17

the assurance of his presence. He does not rescue them

33:22

because he is not with them.

33:26

One of the striking things in each of these sections, where there is a charge and a consequence,

33:32

is that God's punishment fits the crime that has been done.

33:37

So think of what the leaders of Israel did. They did not hear the cries of the people when they were being exploited and their land was being taken from them.

33:46

So what will God do? Well, God will not hear their cries when they call out to Him.

33:53

It is a very direct application of the principle of Proverbs 21, verse 13, Proverbs 21, and verse 13, which says whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor

34:07

will also cry out and not be answered.

34:13

The precious hope of every believer is that we can cry out to God, and God hears us in our trouble.

34:20

That God's warning here to the leaders of Israel

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is that He might remove this. Such is the serious sin of not heeding the cries of the needy

34:35

leaders. The principle here is it's a serious thing for leaders not to protect those who are under their care.

34:43

And it's not enough to say that you weren't the one who actually did the harm,

34:49

because if you're a leader, you have responsibility and you have opportunity, and you should protect those whom you have entrusted to care for.

35:00

Reminds us that that leadership is not just about positive direction, but it's also about protecting those who have been entrusted to your care. And sometimes that's a neglected aspect.

35:13

We think of what that means nationally for our leaders, and our leaders nationally, that the moral law of God calls us to protect the vulnerable from conception to the end of life.

35:25

But our national leaders don't do that.

35:28

The the moral law of God calls us to to protect against harmful false teaching about gender and sexuality.

35:36

But our national leaders do not do that.

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It's a warning to leaders in churches. Part of the the role of a leader is to guard against danger as well as set positive direction. And those of us who lead must be aware, warning people of dangers and warding off dangers from the people of gods.

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And as you think about leadership in the home,

36:00

it is a challenge to fathers to protect their wives and children from spiritual dangers.

36:07

Filling the home with what is goods

36:10

and not with what is evil.

36:13

Being guarded about the content that comes into the home.

36:18

Being careful about what comes into the hearts of those in our homes.

36:24

Someone has described godly leadership as the glad assumption of responsibility,

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and those of us who leads should take our responsibilities in protecting others seriously.

36:38

There is a failure of responsibility here that is challenged in verses 1:00 to 4:00. But then we come to a failure of proclamation in verses 5 to 8

36:48

that profits that in Israel and Judah were leading God's people astray by prophesying for prophets rather than being committed to the truth of God's Word. And here we have the same pattern. We have a charge in verse five. We have consequences in verses 6:00 and 7:00,

37:09

and then we have a solution in verse 8. So let's see, first of all, the charge. The charge to the prophets of Israel is that they change their message.

37:20

A fun money.

37:22

Look there at verse five. It says when the people give them something to eat when they have been paid, they speak peace to them. They proclaim peace,

37:31

but they wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them. So if you don't give them any money, if you don't feed them, then they only speak of water. Come. They were manipulating their message

37:45

for monetary gain.

37:47

Money talked louder than God for them.

37:52

Now there's nothing wrong with paying profits, it was a common practise in the Old Testament. But the problem is that they changed their message according to the payment they received.

38:03

They spoke the words people wanted to hear, not what God had told them that they should say.

38:11

That's the charge.

38:13

And notice in verse six and seven we have the consequences for that. And remember, we're seeing that the sin is paralleled in the consequences, and the consequence is that since they abuse the Word of God,

38:29

then God will withdraw that word from them.

38:33

Therefore night will come over you. Darkness will come, but there will be no visions.

38:39

The sun will set for the prophets and the day will go dark for them. There will be silence. There will be no light of the revelation of God's words,

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and when the people come to their profits to ask what it is God was going to say to them,

38:57

they will have nothing to say.

39:00

They will have nothing to say. They will be ashamed. They will be disgraced

39:05

an end of the seven. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God. Now literally the Hebrew there is. They will cover their mouths and the profits that are mouthpiece for God. So they will have nothing to say from the Lord. Their mouths will be covered. They will not communicate God's truth. They will no longer be God's mouthpiece.

39:26

And once again we see that God withdrawals in His judgments. They lose their precious help of His Word.

39:37

My friends,

39:38

these verses are a warning to preachers.

39:43

The danger for every preacher is to manipulate the message for material gain.

39:51

Perhaps they look around, they see the churches emptying and they think what will that mean for for income and for future?

39:58

And so they changed their message. They manipulate the message so that people will come.

40:05

They stop challenging about sin and they start affirming people in sin

40:13

and that might put food on the table, but it will bring a drought of the Word of God.

40:21

The real heart problem that God wants every preacher to engage with, and he challenges the prophets about here is the fear of man.

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Ultimately, every preacher is challenged because we don't want to offend, we want everyone to be happy.

40:39

But if that fear controls us rather than the fear of God,

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then the message will always be shaped according to the audience you are speaking to.

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And one of the greatest needs for preachers is for fear of God and courage to fearlessly proclaim God's truth,

41:00

which is where we come to the solution. In verse 8,

41:04

this didn't happen. In verses one to four, there was just the charge and the consequence. But in the second and third sections there is a charge of consequence. And we'll see there is a hope as well,

41:14

because whilst there is a failure of proclamation among the prophets who have been set aside to proclaim God's truth, there is a solution in verse 8 and it is spirit filled ministry. Because here we see Micah speaks about his own ministry. Do you notice in verse eight it says, 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 to Israel, his sin. So having criticised the false prophets,

41:45

Mike and now declares that he is a true prophet, he is being contrasted to the false prophets and the key attributes for a true prophet is that he is filled with the Spirit of the Lord. It's very clear in the Hebrew. It's slightly, it's not quite so clear. They're in English translation, but actually literally Hebrew is. But As for me, I am filled with the Spirit of the Lords, and then everything else flows from that.

42:16

In these verses, the central thing is that the true prophet is filled with the Spirit of the Lord. And because he is filled with the Spirit of the Lords, he is filled with power, physical and psychological strength to speak God's truth. He is filled with might, having courage and confidence. He is filled with justice that he might love what is good and hate what is evil.

42:45

And what does he declare?

42:47

He declares transgression and sin

42:51

to the people. He speaks directly about the problem of the human hearts.

42:59

And just like we saw the parallel in the challenge to the prophets was a challenge to preachers,

43:05

so here in verse 8, the parallel reminds us that the greatest need,

43:11

the greatest need for any preacher of God's Word is that they might be filled with the Spirit. Because when the Spirit fills a preacher, he has supernatural courage and strength to speak true words that challenge sin.

43:30

That's the marker of the Spirit's work in a preacher.

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Friends, let us pray for that in those who preach.

43:40

Let us seek out that kind of ministry in our preachers. And as we look for churches, let us value that. First of all, above style or anything else engaging preaching matters,

43:54

but it is not as important as Holy Spirit enabled preaching.

44:01

And what is the measure of that Holy Spirit enable preaching?

44:06

Well, it's not a powerful voice.

44:09

It's not polished delivery,

44:11

it's not gripping illustrations. Whilst those things matter,

44:16

it is courage to confront about sin.

44:21

It is courage to speak with might and power,

44:27

to declare God's justice what is good and true,

44:31

and to directly challenge sin and transgression.

44:38

If you look through

44:40

history and church history,

44:43

you will find that that kind of preaching was one of the primary means God used to work in times of great revival.

44:55

Came across a a saying of Chinese church leaders

45:00

and it was this dare to preach and people will believe. Now that's not presumptuous, but it's saying that God works as preachers are filled with His Spirit

45:14

with. We're beginning to plan for a week long mission in 2025 and this week we went to go and visit another church who was holding a mission

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and it was it was great to be there. There was a, a testimony and interview and then a a talk, a a sermon.

45:32

And I was struck listening to the preacher that he had a real directness in his delivery.

45:39

He, he really challenged people about sin. He really called them to respond. You could see the spirits work in him

45:49

and friends. We need that kind of preaching in our land.

45:54

Too often there are there is a danger that that evangelistic preaching can sound, well, a bit like there is one option for your spiritual life, which is Christianity. But you can take it or leave it. And the implicit message is there are other valid options.

46:16

Friends, we need this spirit filled preaching

46:21

that has faithfulness, that has challenge, and that has urgency.

46:29

Let's pray for that kind of preaching in our land. That's the solution that Micah highlights in verse 8

46:35

in that failure of proclamation, the solution of spirit filled ministry. But then thirdly, there is a failure of presumption in verses 9 to 12A. Failure of presumption

46:48

And here Micah as the Spirit filled preacher speaks truth to the leaders of Israel and to the prophets of Israel

47:00

and his challenge is to not presume upon God's blessing.

47:07

Let's look at the charge. The charge, the pattern again is the charge is starts and it's in verses 9 to 11 and

the the themes are similar to what we've seen before. There is this distortion of justice. There is this distortion of the truth

47:23

than the summary. There in verse 11,

47:26

the leaders judge for a bribe,

47:28

the priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.

47:36

Now why do they do that? What was the heart that was behind that? Well, it's there at the end of verse 11. They look for the Lord's support and say,

47:45

is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us. There's sin here are the people is complacency. They think that God will be with us and among us whatever we do.

48:02

There will be no disaster. There will be no judgement because we are secure and always will be whatever we do.

48:10

They presumed upon God's ongoing help and blessing regardless of their actions. Even though they judged for a bribe, they taught for a price and they share. They, they, they, they shared God's truth for money.

48:27

That is the charge. And of course the charge has a consequence,

48:33

and it's there in verse 12,

48:36

the consequences. Therefore, because of you, Zion, we ploughed like a fields. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble and the Temple Hill a mound overgrown with thickets.

48:50

So remember that Zion was being built up in verse 10. Jerusalem was being built up as a city. But what's going to happen to this great city that's being expanded?

49:03

It's gonna be ploughed flat like a field,

49:07

and then the great city of Jerusalem, which of course is on a hill which stands there and and shines out from there. What is going to happen to it?

49:17

It's gonna become like a heap of rubble.

49:21

It's a parallel of what the Lord says will happen to Samaria and happen to Samaria in chapter one and verse 6 where he says Simaria will be also like a heap of rubble. The northern

49:31

Kingdom, city, central and capital,

49:35

and then the Temple Hill

49:38

will no longer be the dwelling place of God,

49:42

but it will become a mound overgrown with thickets.

49:48

Vegetation will overtake that place where God dwelt.

49:54

Sometimes when we drive back to York, we drive in on one of the roads that goes past my old school Manor, Church of England Primary Secondary School in York,

50:05

and for me that felt like a really big school, a big place.

50:09

But about 10 years ago, they built a new school around the corner

50:14

and they completely flatten the school.

50:17

And where the buildings once were,

50:19

there is just thickets and shrubs.

50:24

And you look at it and you think that was a felt like a really big place,

50:28

but now it's nothing.

50:30

And here the threat is something even greater. The temple hill. It's not even the Lord's temple because God has departed from the people. It's just the temple hill got us left. That great sign of God's presence that was visible from all over Jerusalem and from the surrounding lands. It disappears from sights

50:53

and friends. We know in the history that God did this

50:56

because in 586 BC the city was overrun by the Babylonians. Many were taken captive and the city and the temple was left in ruins.

51:09

What God said would happen, did happen.

51:13

So the warning for the people

51:16

was to not be presumptuous about God's blessing,

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and we need to reckon with that same warning this evening.

51:24

We need to be so careful

51:27

that we don't rest upon the fact that we have a great heritage in history,

51:32

that we don't rest upon the fact that we hold on to right doctrine,

51:37

that we don't rest upon the fact that we believe we have the right kind of worship and we think God will always bless us. And then we're complacent about our sin.

51:51

I wrote this before James preach this morning, but he reminded us in Ephesian Revelation chapter two and three of the church in Ephesus

52:00

who were called to repent or the Lord would remove his blessing and his presence.

52:05

We might also think of the church at Pergamum again in Revelation 2 and three who were called to repent otherwise were God would come and fight against the sin in their midst.

52:16

Friends, be careful about a presumptuous hearts. What do we need? We need soft hearts before the Word of God.

52:25

We need to be ready to be willing and to receive from God's word to act in response to God's words as God challenges us through the scriptures. Watch out for a presumptuous spirits that thinks we can do anything and God will always bless.

52:43

But then there is hope as well. We've seen charge, we've seen consequences. Now we see hope.

52:52

These words spoken by Micah were spoken in the closing years of the 8th century BC.

53:01

But if you remember, I said that destruction of Jerusalem didn't happen until 586 BC, which is around 100 years later. And what we find, friends, is that the people of God heeded God's warning and God relented from a disaster that he said he was going to sense.

53:22

And he did that because of the promise of Jeremiah 18 verses 7:00 and 8:00.

53:29

In Jeremiah 18 verse seven we read this. If at anytime I announce a nation or Kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed,

53:39

and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned

53:51

and that very promise of Jeremiah 18. Then as we read in Jeremiah 26 becomes a reality

53:59

because Micah the prophet preaches this message to the people of Judah, and we read in Jeremiah 26 versus 18 and 19. These words are a historical record of what happened after this very chapter was preached.

54:16

We read Micah of More Ashe prophesied in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah.

54:24

He told all the people of Judah. This is what the Lord Almighty says.

54:30

Zion will be ploughed like a fields. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,

54:37

the temple hill amound overgrown with thickets. So that's verse 12 isn't it? They're very thing that God threatened in verse 12 of Mika 3 is their recorded as what has said and then this is the response.

54:51

Did Hezekiah king of Judah, or or anyone else in Judah put him to death?

54:58

No, they didn't. Did not Hezekiah fear the Lords and seek his favour? And did not the Lord relent so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them?

55:12

It's an amazing thing, isn't it,

55:14

that the God of heaven would do

55:16

what he said he would do in Jeremiah 18. If we respond in repentance to the judgement that he says is coming,

55:26

then what? What seemed like a judicial sentence

55:31

is a threat that if we do not repent, God will do this,

55:35

and God shows grace.

55:39

The God who brings his charges against Israel, who warns of consequences and will act in justice, is not just a God who judges,

55:50

but he is also a God who saves when we turn to him.

55:56

Friends, that's the great focus of this passage, that we need to heed the warning that God will take away His presence from us

56:07

and turn from our sin and look again to the Lord Jesus Christ.

56:14

No, the forgiveness that comes in the Lord Jesus. And when you turn back to God, when you repent and look to Jesus Christ, what do you find

56:25

where you find that the God of heaven who is both judge, is both judge and is is both a God of justice and a God of forgiveness

56:36

in Micah Chapter 7. We'll come to it in the weeks to come. We read these words in verse 18, Micah Chapter 7 and verse 18.

56:44

Who is a God like you who pardon sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance?

56:54

You do not stay angry forever,

56:57

but delight to show mercy.

56:59

You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins under foot

57:05

and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

57:16

The God of heaven pardons and forgives like that. He treads sins under foot and hurls our iniquities in the depths into the depths of the sea. Why?

57:28

Because Jesus Christ has come to pay for those sins, friends.

57:33

Jesus Christ has come that if we repent and look to Him,

57:38

then we can be assured of God's pardon

57:41

and because of and be assured of God's ongoing presence, not because we presume upon it, but because it has been secured by the death of our Saviour for our sins.

57:57

We're going to take up those words of Micah Chapter 7. I'm sure it won't be the last time we do this, but in Micah Chapter 7, those words who is a God like you who pardon sin and forgives transgression? As we sing our closing hymn, Great God of Wonders, let's stand together

58:14

and respond to God's Word.