

240623pm Sermon Transcript

James Midwinter

Micah 2:1-13

(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.)

33:44

When were you last angry at the injustice in our world?

33:50

Maybe there is a business leader, a political leader,

33:56

who has got away with something because they are well connected to the right people. And lots of people say it's not what you know, it's who you know. People I used to work with used to say it's not what you know or who you know, it's what you know about who you know.

34:12

And perhaps you can think of specific people

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where you think the only way you've got away with that is because you know something about the people who've enabled you to get away with it.

34:25

Well, perhaps that wrong that comes into your mind is of a church leader

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who has got away with something.

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It might be that they have been

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pretending to be sharing and teaching the word of God, but everything that they have been saying is just false.

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Or maybe

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the leader that you're thinking about

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has done something sinful and wrong, and instead of facing any discipline or any consequences or any judgement,

35:00

they have quietly slipped out of the back door of their church and popped up in another position of leadership in another church.

35:08

And you could think of thousands of other examples where you will have the same kinds of questions that we're gonna be thinking about this evening. Will they always get away with it?

35:21

Are the poor and the struggling always going to be on the hard end?

35:29

Are those rich and powerful who are able to influence things always, always gonna win? And Micah addresses those questions in his day with principles that help us address those questions in ours.

35:42

If you're with us last week, we saw that as Micah begins, he declares this almost apocalyptic judgement against God's people that would be absolutely devastating. And I said at the end of last week that we're gonna unpick some of the reasons for the gravity of that judgement as we go through the book. And we're gonna begin by doing that in chapter 2, because Mika begins to answer those questions. Why was God going to be so angry and bring such judgement against his people? There are two reasons in our passage this evening. Firstly, sinful men in positions of power and authority were taking advantage of the needy,

36:21

and

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false teachers in Micha's day were on their side and cheering them on.

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So there's this group of people who are making all sorts of horrible things happen,

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and nobody is keeping them in check. Nobody is standing up. The civil authorities aren't doing anything, the religious authorities aren't doing anything. And the great hope of Micah Two is a promise that God will,

36:49

He will bring a full and a final and a fair judgement on everything that is happening in his day.

37:01

And he would wonderfully save a remnant who are patiently enduring all of this affliction and crying out to God for some kind of rescue. That is the hope of chapter 2. And we're gonna begin by looking at the first of these group of offenders. Mika promises that covetous plotters will get their just reward. I'm trying to pick up on the language that Micah uses. It's difficult perhaps in our day to use other words that perhaps would carry freight and meaning another direction. So I'm drawing on the

language that Micah himself uses. And I want to start by explaining the problem for you. So this is one and two,

37:42

God exposes what's going on behind the scenes.

37:46

All of these evil people are plotting wickedness in secret at Micah says that they are plotting evil on their beds.

37:56

But the problem is even worse than that,

37:59

because when they decide it's time to execute this plan and actually be evil, rather than thinking about it, they don't have to do that in the shadows so that nobody will see.

38:13

They can do that when the daylight comes

38:17

and everybody can see exactly what they are going to do.

38:22

They don't steal from their fellow Jews under the cover of darkness. So corrupt were the officials and the courts and the system of their day that it was in their power to do whatever they wanted to do.

38:38

When you read Micah Two, you need to think of something like the Wild West.

38:42

This is

38:43

might is right land

38:48

and what they do. Verse two is steal fields and houses. Verse eight, they strip robes of people who were just walking by. I would take that as a more general universal statement. They just steal whatever they like. Verse nine, they drive women out from their homes. They steal the inheritance from their children. All of which, to any right thinking person in this room, sounds awful.

39:13

But it's worse

39:16

in ancient Israel

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for two reasons. Number one, God made it very clear that all of this land ultimately belongs to Him.

39:27

Here's Leviticus 25, verse 23. The land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine. This is God's speaking, and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.

39:42

So these crooks are not just stealing from their fellow Jews,

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they are stealing from what God has said is His.

39:51

But there are also stealing from their dues. And that's even worse than it would be in our day, because when God brought the Jews into the Promised Land,

39:59

he divided the land amongst the tribes.

40:03

And that was very deliberate.

40:05

God was making sure that each and every one of those tribes of His people had sufficient land to not only build a home, but to farm it and provide for themselves.

40:17

And with each generation

40:19

as mum or dad died, that land was then passed on to their next generation within their family. What God had created was a self-sufficient system to provide for His people.

40:34

Now you come back to the scoundrels

40:37

and you realise that what they were doing wasn't just taking some unused land that nobody really needed.

40:45

They were stealing property that ultimately belonged to God. That was the very provision for these Jews and in many senses, their identity within the Israelite community.

40:58

I don't know how serious it would have to be in our day for us to get a handle on this. It's a whole lot worse than somebody breaking into your house, changing the locks and kicking you out.

41:09

It would include them also getting their bank account details for all of your savings and wiping out everything that you had to rely on and getting hold of all of your identity and your National Insurance information so that you couldn't even keep your job.

41:23

That's how big this is.

41:28

That's how massive this problem has become. And you can imagine those faithful, godly Israelites, as many as they would have been in Micha's days, saying God,

41:36

will the wicked always prosper?

41:42

Now we're ready to see God's response. Firstly, in verse one, God sees everything.

41:49

It's interesting that Mike tells us that these people were making plans secretly in their beds. Who could possibly know that

41:56

but an all knowing God who sees everything. It's a reminder to us of what Jesus said in Luke 12. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. And seeing everything, God is going to make a fair and a final judgement. And, and Mike is at pains to show that this judgement that God is going to bring is going to be fair. We can see that if you look at the words in verses one and three.

42:24

These covetous plotters plan iniquity and plot evil on their beds. Look at verse three. God's plans disaster against his people. They're the same words.

42:38

So here have you got evil men plotting, But it's God's plans that prevail, and they're plotting evil. And God is gonna boomerang all of those plans back on them and bring our translation says disaster, but it's the same word in the Hebrew.

42:55

Men are planning. God's plans prevail. Men plan evil. God will bring that evil upon them,

43:03

and His judgement

43:05

would humble them in exactly the same way that they'd hurt others.

43:09

What have they done? They had stolen the land and everything that belonged to their people, and God would take the land and everything that belonged to them.

43:20

All of which brings us to the future of the wicked in verse 5.

43:25

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

43:33

I mentioned that when God's people arrived in

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in, in the promised land, if you wanna read this, you can look at it in Joshua 18 when you get home. And God divided the land by a lot. And the way that was done was he brought the people to the the holy place and made it clear where different parcels of people would live.

43:52

And what Mike is doing here is he's looking forward to the day when there will be another redistribution of the land.

43:58

But all of these land grabbing, selfish couldn't care less about their fellow Jewish people. They're not even going to be represented.

44:04

Their names aren't going to be there to receive any of that lands.

44:11

And everything that Mike has said here comes true. So the Assyrians destroy Samaria and the Babylonians are gonna destroy Jerusalem. And when God eventually brings that remnant back from Babylon,

44:23

the names of those families

44:25

are not gonna be on the map.

44:29

They will not receive that portion. They'd stolen their identity, the identity of fellow Jews, and God would remove their names

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from the future of Israel.

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That's really, really sobering reality of judgement coming as God had promised it. But actually, in one sense, we want to hear

44:52

that when God promises to bring a fair judgement, that judgement is exactly what happens. It's it's reassuring for our faith to know that the God who promises that injustice will be brought to judgement actually does that very thing.

45:07

But it also gives us hope for our day. It's not just a question of growing our confidence in God's Word generally.

45:15

Cause we're surrounded today by those same acts of wickedness and injustice, aren't we?

45:21

They have evil men and women plotting evil in secret. So we we don't live in land that is subject to the same covenantal status as the Jews did when they lived in Israel,

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but we still live with rich and powerful people who not only know people, but they know things about people so that they can do awful things

45:44

to those who are weaker.

45:47

We live in a day when poor and vulnerable people

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keep having the very little that they have taken from them,

45:58

and we need to remember what God promised. Through Micah,

46:03

God sees

46:05

everything

46:07
and God will judge

46:09
everything,

46:11
and if He chooses not to bring that judgement to bear in this life, He will bring it fully and finally and fairly

46:22
in the judgement to come.

46:25
So covetous plotters. They're the first offenders. The second are corrupt preachers. Verses 6 to 11, Micah says that corrupt preachers lead people to judgement,

46:37
not truth.

46:39
And it's a bit harder to follow some of Micah's logic here, but let's let's find find the problem First look at look at verse six. Do not prophecy their profits, say

46:52
these rich, covetous landowners have got their own denomination of preachers, and their function as a group of preachers is essentially twofold.

47:04
Stand up against Micah, and indeed Isaiah as a fellow prophet. But anybody who's speaking those kinds of words, stand up against those people and only tell us the things that we want to hear.

47:17
That's the job of these false preachers

47:21
and

47:22
which in one sense we need to see in the round because it's very easy to say, well, rich and powerful people, that's the kind of thing they do. The rich and powerful people are exactly the same as anybody else.

47:30
None of us by our nature wants to hear that we are naturally sinful. None of us is instinctively gonna

run towards a message that says we will be subject to the just judgement of our holy God and we need a Saviour.

47:44

The only difference is if you're rich and powerful, you can fund an entire denomination of preachers who will only tell you the things that you want to hear. And that's the problem that's going on here. They're standing up verse 6 in opposition to Micah and saying don't prophecy about these things. Don't tell us that God's gonna judge people. Don't tell us that God's all angry. Enough of that.

48:07

Instead, they say, And perhaps at this point, they're turning from Micah and they're speaking to their benefactors.

48:15

Disgrace isn't gonna overtake us.

48:19

We're not gonna be the subject of any form of mockery. Why? Well, because we're the people of God,

48:24

and God wouldn't let his people

48:29

become a disgrace among the nations. So just stop all your scaremongering, Micah.

48:36

That's their stump speech. And it may well carry on into verse seven. You can read as many commentaries as you like. Nobody's sure who's speaking at the beginning of verse seven. There might the microphone could go back to Micah and verse seven could be him beginning to push back on these false teachers. So if you look at the text that the the argument could well be Micah then speaking to these benefactors and everybody listening and saying, listen, is it right for your preachers to say that God doesn't ever run out of patience with these people and might not judge his people? Is that is that really right?

49:11

That could be what's going on, or it could be that the false teachers are still preaching their nonsense.

49:18

And what we might have instead in the first part of verse seven is them saying to their heroes, don't listen to Micah.

49:25

You know, it's nonsense. It God's people should never have to listen to the possibility that God would run out of patience with them and bring judgement upon them.

49:35

I don't know which is which who is saying what, but the the the same point is being made irrespective

of whether it's by Michael or the false prophets. There's spouting the nonsense that God would never, ever run out of patience with people who do not live in obedience.

49:52

And it is Worth is digging into this for a minute because it shows us how dangerous false teaching can be. And it was only a few weeks ago that Matthew was working through Exodus 34 with us. And if you wanna flick back to Exodus 34 with me for a minute, if you've got a church Bible, it's on page #93

50:11

and when we looked at Exodus 34, Matthew focused on just two verses,

50:17

the big verses that are the most important and the different verses from what we've seen before in verses 6 and seven where Moses says this. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Now you go back to M2

50:41

holding your finger in Exodus 34 for a minute and you might think that these false teachers have got a point.

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This is exactly what Moses said God was like.

50:54

He's not the angry kind of God that Micah is making him out to be. He's the God who's abounding in love and who is slow to anger. All of which is wonderfully true,

51:06

but it's not the whole truth. Go back to Exodus 34

51:11

and let's finish the sentence

51:13

in verse 7.

51:15

God is maintaining love. Don't sorry. God does maintain love to thousands and forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin,

51:22

yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

51:25

He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and the 4th generation. That's where the seriousness of this kind of false teaching is, is shown for what it really is.

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Some false teaching is just brazen lies and falsehood. And that's mega easy to spot.

51:48

Some false teaching

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is based on something that is true

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but fails to tell you everything else that's also true.

52:01

So if you think about what these profits, these false teachers, in my case, they would have sounded like it would have sounded like they were sharing the grace of God.

52:09

Don't worry about it guys, cause God's kind and he's your God. So he's got your back, Said everything's fine.

52:18

They were assuring sinful people that they weren't in any trouble.

52:25

And that message is no message of grace at all. Dietrich Bonhoffer nailed this when he he didn't know until this week that he coined the term cheap grace, and this is what he said. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.

52:56

In reality, cheap grace is no grace at all

53:01

and that's why God is so angry with these false prophets

53:06

to holding themselves out to these people as spokesmen forgot. But the things that they are sharing

53:13

are so far from the truth.

53:16

They are simply lies. In fact, they're so useless, verse 11, that they were really nothing more than liars and deceivers.

53:26

They're the promoters of the Eat, Drink and Be Merry ministry.

53:29

That's all they're good for.

53:32

That's the problem. Now let's see God's response, verses 7 to 10. To begin with, He reminds everybody listening of the fullness of His promises.

53:41

Do not my words do good to the One whose ways are upright.

53:48

That's where Micah begins. He reminds the people we have to hear what's gone wrong. But first of all, you need to remember that God has promised to do good to His people

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and is continuing to promise to do good to his people. The problem is that He promises to do good to those who are upright and follow Him, and that's not what's going on. So what God then does through Micah is he explains how sinful they were actually being.

54:14

Their profits were telling them that everything they were doing was fine and they didn't have a problem. But God tells them the truth.

54:21

They weren't living as obedient people. They'd risen up like an enemy,

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stolen from the innocent and the needy and the vulnerable, all of the people whom God, all the way through His Word, particularly causes people to protect.

54:36

And because God tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,

54:43

He then tells these people

54:46

what will happen even if their profits wouldn't do so. So the future of the wicked in verse 10

54:52

is that they'd be removed from the promised land. And the words in verse 10 May well have been the very words that these land grabbing selfish people used as they kicked out their fellow Jews in the first place.

55:06
Get up,

55:08
go away.

55:10
I've never been removed from my home before.

55:13
Kind of imagine how hard it would be to hear those words.

55:18
You imagine hearing those words from the God of heaven

55:22
as He removes you from what was once

55:25
your promised land,

55:28
and that is nothing more than He had promised He would do centuries before if his people disobeyed Him. This is not a surprise judgement of a vindictive God who's just got cross. This is the just punishment of a God who has been bearing and bearing and bearing with His people and is now doing exactly what He said when they entered into a covenant with Him at the beginning. So back in Leviticus 18, God warned the Jews that if they disobeyed His commandments they would defile the land. Leviticus 18:28 And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

56:08
How do we connect with any of that in our day? Well, we do not live in a promised land,

56:13
and there is not one part of God's Word that says to us here in England in the 21st century that if we disobey God's commands, He will evict us from a green and pleasant land.

56:23
But

56:25
every single one of us is still just as susceptible to false teaching

56:29
as the Jews were in Michael's day.

56:33

So much this is such a New Testament problem that Paul said to Timothy,

56:39

for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they'll gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching is, want to hear. They will turn their ears away from truth and turn aside to myths. That's Mike too.

56:56

And Paul says that our problem too.

57:01

Every single one of us

57:04

can fall for this same temptation

57:08

and perhaps the kind of false teaching that we're most susceptible to, if I could put it like that, because we're in a church that teaches the Bible, and everyone of you is used to opening your Bible, turning your Bible on, and reading through it. Perhaps the false teaching we are most susceptible to is the one that appears to be based on truth,

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until you discover it's not based on the whole truth.

57:33

So

57:35

could I ask you to keep praying for me,

57:38

and for Matthew and for every other gospel preacher?

57:43

Every single time you prepare to preach,

57:46

you will have the temptation to only say what your hearts want to hear,

57:54

not what your hearts need to hear.

57:57

And I and we need to hear the fullness of God's Word,

58:03

but it's also a responsibility every single one of us has when we come to sit under God's Word, which I do as often as you do.

58:10

Every single one of us needs to be that discerning Berean

58:15

who looks at what we have heard and examines it under God's Word in order to make sure that what we are hearing is not just the truth, but the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

58:27

Richard Phillips is a is a very helpful pastor from the state. He's got a great way of putting this and he says, we're used to people saying that you are what you eat. We've all heard that lot, haven't we?

58:38

And what Richard says is even more importantly, you are what you hear.

58:44

And he's got this lovely turn of phrase.

58:48

Soft preaching produces hard hearts.

58:53

Hard preaching

58:55

produces soft hearts.

58:58

What he means by that is if you preach softly, not the word of truth or the fullness of it,

59:05

what you end up doing is growing hard hearts towards God

59:11

that will not humble themselves before a holy God. Whereas if you go for hard preaching, by which I don't mean clumsy preaching, that's not carefully, helpfully explained hard preaching in the sense that you talk about the hard subjects

59:25

and you share the fullness of God, what you do

59:28

as you submit yourself. Speaker And here are alike

59:33

to a message of forgiveness and judgement, of mercy and justice,

59:39

and that hard preaching produces soft hearts

59:44

that are drawn to the gospel and grown up in the gospel. So they're the the two chief offenders in Micah. Covetous plotters, corrupt preachers,

59:55

and it's because of their wickedness that this great judgement of God from Michael one is gonna come on God's people. But God's judgement isn't gonna be the end of the story. And Micah, I mentioned last week when we set the context for the whole book, and there's three big oracles as you work through the book of Micah, chapters one and two, three to 5-6, and seven. And at the end of each of those three, you have a statement of hope. So this is the first statement of hope in the book of Micah, closing out that first Oracle in verses 12 and 13 when God promises to gather and guard his remnant.

1:00:31

So no sooner has God finished bringing this word of judgement through Micah than he then speaks to those suffering, persecuted, faithful Jews who are left in that country, who have heard all of this judgement that's gonna come and are no doubt thinking, well, God, that's wonderful, but what's gonna happen to us?

1:00:50

And God says a word of comfort and hope to them. Look at verse 12.

1:00:56

God is so certain in his gathering in that that gathering is as certain as the judgement. Look at the emphasis in in verse 12. I will surely gather you. I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel

1:01:13

and the description of how He does it is just full of language that we love as believers of now the whole older New Testament.

1:01:22

God's protection of them is like a loving shepherd. He promises to draw them into the flock that is His pasture. At verse 13, He promises to be the breaker. I love that description.

1:01:36

Get this sense of God's people being hemmed in.

1:01:40

All of you will have seen some version of an action film, a Marvel film, some superhero with that power to just drive through that impenetrable wall and lead them up. Well, this is this is everything beyond anything fictional.

1:01:55

This is God, the one who is himself describing himself to be both the King and the Lord. He is the one who breaks open the way and leads his people on. Now what is Micah talking about? Well, that's a little bit tricky to be sure about.

1:02:11

I think this is one of those times, if you remember last week when we were talking about going out for that long walk and seeing what you thought was one peak. And then as you got there, you discovered actually there's one peak there and there's another peak to come. I think this is one of those times when Michael is speaking, looking at one peak and actually redemptive history shows us that there are multiple peaks.

1:02:30

Why do I say that? Well, some will connect these verses to the way that God saved Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 BC.

1:02:41

And if you know that bit of history, if you don't, you wanna look at 2 Kings 18 and 19 when you get home. But if you know that piece of history, there's a period when that that remnant of those who are God's people in Judah all gather to Jerusalem because it's massive armies coming and Jerusalem is the safest place to be. The Assyrians then arrive with this enormous army that there is absolutely no human way that the Israelites could outlive, and they're just encamped around the city.

1:03:09

And humanly speaking,

1:03:11

Judah is done

1:03:14

until Hezekiah prays

1:03:17

and God miraculously devastates the army that is surrounding the city.

1:03:23

And God's people come out

1:03:27

now. In time

1:03:30

we would see a second fulfilment of this prophecy, when God brings that scattered remnant back from exile in Babylon, and he gathers his faithful people and brings them back to the sheepfold of his promised land, where they begin to rebuild both the city and the temple.

1:03:51

But you know that that rebuilding does not last long,

1:03:56

because by the time you get to 70 AD,

1:03:59

Jerusalem is completely destroyed,

1:04:04

which I think is why

1:04:06

the final fulfilment of Micah's prophecy

1:04:10

is fixed on Jesus.

1:04:13

Spiritually speaking, Micah was looking forward to a day

1:04:17

when one would come who would be the Good Shepherd

1:04:23

who would describe himself as the gate and the only way that anyone of us can come into God's pasture.

1:04:31

He is such a Good Shepherd

1:04:34

that he would lay down his life to save the sheep.

1:04:38

Unless you think that the only picture you're supposed to have of the Lord Jesus is of sacrifice and humility and a willingness to give up of himself, He is also the breaker. He's the one who smashed through every single barrier that every man and woman has ever feared.

1:04:54

You fear death and the judgement of a holy God. Jesus has risen from the dead that you not fear death, and the only way that he could rise is because the judgement of God has been fully paid. So you need not fear that either.

1:05:10

The Lord Jesus is the one who is going to fulfil all of this, and as He led the way for His people,

1:05:17

He is the first fruit of your eternal life

1:05:22

if you trust in Him this evening.

1:05:25

So as we come to this supper together, we need to fix our eyes on what we remember Jesus fulfilling from Micah 2.

1:05:36

We're going to sink in our next song of us looking back to the cross

1:05:41

where He gave His life for us and our measureless debt was erased. We're gonna look back as we sing to the glorious dawn of that first Easter morning that destroyed the fear of death forever.

1:05:55

And we're gonna look forward to his return, when our King will return for his own. Every knee will bow, every tongue will shout, all glory to Jesus alone.