

"Will We Build Up or Tear Down?"

Micah 3

No doubt many of you watched or at least saw highlights of the US debate between President Trump and Joe Biden, who is running for President. Let me rephrase the word 'highlights' to 'lowlights'. It was embarrassing to watch a world leader and a possible future world leader tear each other down in front of millions of viewers not just in the USA but all over the world. When leaders treat each other shamefully what gives us the confidence that they will treat the people they are called to serve any differently?

In a Christian context we also know how important it is for God's leaders to demonstrate integrity and genuine compassion for the needs of the people they serve. Because as go the leaders so go the people. Here in Micah 3, Micah the prophet now speaks directly to the leaders of Israel who were guilty of mistreating the people God had called them to care for. Political leaders and religious leaders (priests and so-called prophets) were guilty of injustice towards the people they were supposed to serve. We were introduced to some of this last week when we saw Micah confronting the advantaged for stealing land from their fellow Israelites who could not keep up with making a loan payment, most likely because the interest rate was too high. Of course, selling land to an Israelite was only supposed to be a loan because all land belonged to God who distributed it to the tribes and their families and so all land was ancestral. All debts were to be forgiven in the year of Jubilee (once every 50 years) which we know didn't happen because that's why Israel was exiled 70 years to Babylon, each year representing a Jubilee period dating back to the time when the Kingdom of Israel first split.

So in Ch. 1 Micah announced God was confronting the sins of injustice in both the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdoms of Israel and in Ch. 2 he told us why, using their advantages to hurt the disadvantaged, and here in Ch. 3 he gets specific by confronting the guilty parties. However, Micah has messages of hope in his letter and Ch. 2 ended with hope. Micah prophesied in 2:12-13 that one day a remnant of Israelites will experience freedom under the wise, gentle caring shepherding of God's King who will break through the bars of their enemies and establish peace and unity for the nation (Jesus' future return, of which Micah will prophesy more info later).

So Micah reminds Israel of God's plan to build them up and not tear them down. Whenever God announces judgment its always an invitation to repent. So as Micah comes and announces God's justice on the leaders of Israel's injustice, its an opportunity for them to confront their own sin, Lord-willing repent and follow God's Word to build people up and not tear them down.

As it is for us as well, when we hear the messages of the prophets God is giving us our own opportunity to confront any sin in our life, repent and follow God's Word to build up the community of believers we're committed to.

When Micah ends Ch. 2 saying of the future Messiah,

¹³ *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."*

And then he turns to the leaders and says

*Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel.
Should you not know justice, ²you who hate good and love evil;*

The word for 'head' and leader are the same word in Hebrew. Micah is deliberately reminding Israel's leaders they are acting for God, their 'Head' who has given them very clear standards in His Word on how to shepherd His people. And God expects all of His people down through history,

To Lead by Example in Showing God's Mercy **(3:1-4)**

We know this is how we are to lead because God rebukes these leaders for doing the exact opposite. Doesn't matter what we are leaders in – work, ministry, teams, in our home or the lifestyle we model as disciples of Jesus – we are to model Jesus to each other and a lost community. Sadly, Micah has to confront the leaders of the people of God to stop mistreating the people of God. Again, as we saw last week, using their advantages (economical, political, intellectual) to harm others or make them feel inferior.

Micah says you hate good and do evil! Then uses hyperbolic language to describe them as cannibals because you're ripping the hearts out of people who need your help, who need to be treated with grace and mercy because God has treated us as we don't deserve and not giving us what we do deserve. Unless, we refuse to repent of sin in our life then we basically force God's hand to judge our sinfulness because His Word says He must. But God is longsuffering and slow to anger and gives us lots of time to change, but not indefinitely.

This was the message of the prophets to God's people:

We who have the truth need to apply it (vv.1-2)

Just as Israel accepted the terms of God's covenant relationship with them so too did we also accept the terms of the New Covenant when we accepted Christ. Our relationship with Christ involves obedience to the Word of God. Here, Israel's political and spiritual leaders failed to care for the people who had needs. Micah describes them as ripping the skin off their flesh.

Unlike these Israelite leaders, showing God's mercy means

Using our advantages to show God's concern (v.3)

To those with needs. As we mentioned last week our advantages only have to be small, like a little more money than the person in need, a little more knowledge about a subject or a job than the person needing answers. When we use our advantage to 'shrug' someone off who doesn't know or have as much as we do, we fail to show mercy. These leaders are rebuked for using their advantages to make themselves look better or more powerful. They take advantage of those who need mercy shown. Not unlike the story Jesus told in Matt. 18 when a king showed mercy to his servant and forgave him a great debt of 10,000 talents, only to see the same servant mercilessly throw a friend who owed him 100 denarii in jail for not paying. 10,000 talents is equivalent to 4 ½ billion dollars today while 100 denarii is equivalent to \$50. We all have some-thing more than someone else that God encourages us to bless others with. It could be our time and talents.

Why do we need to show mercy when we have the opportunity to those who have a need at that time?

So we can keep enjoying fellowship with God (v.4)

Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them.

At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done.

When does God not answer our prayers? When we refuse to deal with sin in our life. Ps. 66:16 says,

¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.

¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

¹⁹ but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.

²⁰ Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

The psalmist was fully aware that cherishing sin means to enjoy it, knowingly not deal with it, which disrupts our fellowship with God. God will always hear the prayers of His people when we are in fellowship with Him. But if I am purposely not dealing with my sin then don't bother praying because my sin always disrupts my fellowship with God.

Micah also says that not dealing with obvious sin means God will hide his face from us. This is a reference to the priestly prayer in Num. 6, the blessing given at the end of one's time with God at the temple when after making all the sacrifices and renewing your relationship with God, the priests affirm God's blessing on you:

²⁴ "The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

For God to hide His face means not to bless, not be gracious and you won't have peace. So Micah is very clear to those in his day who were using their advantages to hurt the disadvantaged that this is not of God and don't expect God to bless you. Then Micah turns to the spiritual leaders in v.5,

This is what the LORD says: "As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim 'peace'; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him.

⁶ Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them.

⁷ The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God."

⁸ But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.

Micah unashamedly yet not arrogantly, states how God's true prophets serve God and build up the community of believers,

By Being Led by the Spirit
(3:5-8)

How do you know when someone is claiming to declare to speak God's Words that they actually are? Micah says he is filled with power by the Spirit with justice and might. The Hebrew word for justice means 'correct rulings, standards'. Whose standards? God's. Where are they found? In His Word. So then, we need to check their words and actions according to God's Word.

In Gal. 5:24-26 Paul outlines what keeping in step with the Holy Spirit looks like. One who follows God's Spirit (who wrote God's Word) obeys God's Word and the visible evidence in their life is more loving, joyful, peacemaker, patient, kind/mercy, good towards others, acts gently not harshly, trusts God by faith and showing God is in control of his life. A few verses earlier in Galatians Paul says the evidence of walking in the flesh is visible as well, many of the things he lists are immoral. But he also mentions "*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition,*" That sounds a lot like these false prophets who misled the people and created unrest. They only gave a message of peace if you 'feed' them, give them something financially. But when we follow the Spirit we serve God

For His glory not for our gain (vv.5-7)

Notice that these prophets did prophesy judgment ('declared war against him' v.5) but only if you didn't give them something. My guess is they declared God would judge the people who didn't 'give to the Lord' by not feeding the prophets. It's too bad we have no contemporary illustrations to compare that too!

As a result God won't give them any vision or any message to declare. They will ask God for a message but again notice, He doesn't answer their prayers; "*because there is no answer from God*" (v.7). It's difficult to know whether these were legitimate prophets who had received visions from God but had now gone bad or that because they were bad they would never get a revelation from God.

But the purpose of every believer's life is found in 1 Cor. 10:31,

'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.'

Or an Old Testament version of the same principle is found in Ps. 115:1

Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Micah also shows us that when we are in fellowship with the Spirit we will

Graciously and courageously confront sin (v.8)

No one wants to confront anyone with their sin. We often use excuses like 'Well, the Bible says don't judge' [not true according to Matt. 7:1-14] or, 'Who am I to judge someone else, I have my own sins' [true but James 5:20 says when we do this we may turn someone away from premature death!'] How do we know it is of the Spirit? When we are burdened by someone's sin and see the way its hurting their life and others, and we have a connection to them, a reason for confronting them. It is best to always ask God for wisdom in these situations (James 1:5).

Micah turns back to the tribal leaders who are responsible for sharing God's truths to their families and yet who

despise justice and distort all that is right;

¹⁰ *who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. ¹¹ Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.*

Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."

¹² *Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.*

Again, if we're learning how to build God's community of believers up where we live and not tear them down, we do the exact opposite of what these people were doing:

Lean on the Lord to Build His Community of Faith **(3:9-12)**

These selfish leaders had the audacity to say they were 'Leaning on the Lord' and falsely claiming no 'disaster will come upon us' because they weren't reading God's Word properly. Many places in the Law and numerous warnings by prophets down through the years reminded them what God told Moses if Israel worshipped other gods and didn't look after their own. Again as we learn from their sins, we show we're actually leaning on the Lord when we

Teach the truth without compromise (vv.9-11a)

Micah calls out the leaders because they were 'building' their own little empires, not the family of God. They were tearing down the community while building their own nest eggs and portfolios. And sadly living with the false security that they actually thought they were doing God's work. If we want God to work we have to share what God says without compromise (not arrogantly) leaning on Him to build His church in His time and way. That way we know its of Him when we see people grow and some come to faith and a few others trusting in God through difficulty and when the church family rises to meet the needs of others. The Word of God wont fail. The Word of God is eternal. God promises that the ministry of His Word will accomplish the purpose for which he sends it (Is. 55). So our end of the covenant is send the Word and God will work through that.

These false leaders and teachers wrongly thought that since they were God's people and God had chosen Jerusalem for the temple to dwell, that they were secure. That the existence of these things proved they were okay. That because their circumstances were good that meant God was blessing. Rather,

Be secure in the Lord not in your circumstances (vv.11b-12)

The temple and Jerusalem would be plowed down when Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem for the 3rd time in 586 BC. The first two times and partial exiles were warnings. They still didn't get it. They actually believed that since Nebuchadnezzar wasn't successful the first two times then they were secure. This is what happens when you are blind to your own sin; you don't see what God is actually saying. Like these leaders you twist the Word to make it say what you want it to say.

Micah 3 is a good reminder for all of us to be building up God's community and not tearing it down. To be aware of the needs around us inside and outside the church and help people draw closer to God or come to know Him for the first time.

How are we doing at that? Are we doing more building up of each other or tearing down? Are we more interested in making ourselves look good than making God look good? Maybe one way of answering that question can be who did we intentionally reach out to this week, just to see how they were doing or specifically looking to meet a need we were aware of?

Yes we all have only so much time on our hands yet strange how we find time for ourselves or waste time on ourselves in front of a screen. When my sinful nature whines and rationalizes my need for 'time to myself' I inadvertently am putting myself ahead of what I know God wants.

We'll all read God's Word this week, but let's really pay attention to what God is saying. If the Spirit brings someone to mind, let's act on it and not brush it aside and say 'some day'. If we're trusting too much in our own circumstantial security, ask God, 'Lord, you have blessed us in many ways. How can we share our advantages, Your blessing to others?'

If we're worried or anxious about a situation, share it with someone else and ask them to pray for you to lean on the Lord and not in your own strength or resources to handle this situation. Ask God to work it out in His time and way, not your time and your way.

Hebrews 3:13 commands us

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Make it a personal goal to build someone up each day. Maybe we need to start with a family member, someone we probably take for granted. Ask God to bring someone in to your life to encourage, to thank, to smile at, to share God's truth of hope and encouragement. Let us encourage one another all the more as the day of Jesus' return draws closer each day.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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