

## Sermon Notes

### What Does God Require of His People? The Message of Micah (Micah chapter 6:1-8)

**Please note:** These notes are designed to aid in the preparation of a sermon. They outline a frame work of the Book of Micah. We encourage you to take time to prayerfully read the entire book of Micah, familiarizing yourself with the emotion and strength of God's call for a justice seeking people. It is God's message to the nation of Israel at a time when they were marked by neglect of the poor and covenant infidelity. Make the sermon your own, utilising these notes as you share a powerful message from God through is mouthpiece Micah.

#### Introduction

Micah 6:8 clearly spells out what the Lord requires of His people; to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with Him. To serve our Lord is to be actively pursuing justice and relief for the oppressed, ensuring mercy is the theme of our life, carrying this out with a spirit of humility. To fully examine what it means to be people of God, we do well to consider Micah and his declaration to the people of Israel. This message is extremely relevant in our current national and global setting.

#### Background information

Little is known about the prophet Micah who came from the small town called Moresheth-gath approximately 15 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem. Micah was clearly certain of his calling before God (Micah 3:8). He lived around the 8<sup>th</sup> C BC, at a time when the Jewish people were divided into two kingdoms. Jerusalem, the main city of the southern kingdom, where he most likely lived, was the centre for religious worship. He and other eighth century prophets frequently crossed political boundaries as they shared God's message with the divided people.

Micah's time (as with most other periods in history) was marked by political alliances. The empires of Egypt and Assyria had enormous power. Both kingdoms (Israel and Judah) were very aware of the superpowers in their neighbourhood and formed alliances for the benefit of trade and security. It seems that the southern kingdom were enjoying a period of prosperity, but it was far from equitable. The rich land-owners had established their wealth and power at the expense of the poor and oppressed. The people were heavily influenced by the values of the neighbouring empires. While they appeared to be very religious, continuing to worship at the temple, they had failed to honor the covenant they had made with Yahweh. It was into this context that Micah delivered a word from God.

#### The Message of Micah

The message of Micah was clear – he was calling for a return to what the Israelites already knew to be true; God wanted far more than superficial religion. God wanted fidelity to the covenant and obedience to its terms. Covenant fidelity meant more than mere outer appearance of religious belief. It required a life consistent with love of God and love of neighbour.

The book begins with a very short introduction of the prophet then continues with a warning of God's judgment (Ch. 1-2), specific judgment of evil leaders (Ch. 3), the hope of salvation following despair (Ch. 6-7:7), and a nation returning to God (Ch. 7:8-20)

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### Key points of Micah's Message

#### **Micah's Warning**

Micah warns the nation of Israel that judgment will come because of their lack of faithfulness to Yahweh. They have not stayed true to the covenant that Jesus later summarized as 'Loving God and loving others' and will suffer the consequences of stepping away from these principles of living. Stepping out of the covenant to assert their own power has now led God to issue judgment.

#### **God's Judgment on Evil Rulers (2&3)**

The Israelites had been hypocritically living a godless life while still performing their religious ceremonies. Micah makes particular reference to the responsibility and failure of the nation's leaders and the particular judgment awaiting them (3:1-4). Micah told Israel's leaders they had not stayed true to God's call for justice, had taken bribes and acted corruptly even while publically carrying out their religious practices (3:11). They had not taken their sins seriously and judgment was needed (3:12). The Israelites had been down this track before. Micah referred them back to the Torah, to what it required of them – fidelity to Yahweh and His ways. Micah highlights neglect of the poor as a sign of the people's unfaithfulness to their covenant with God.

#### **The Promise of Hope (2:12-13)**

At the end of chapter 2 God promises to preserve and bless a faithful remnant from within the nation. Despite Israel's disobedience and unfaithfulness God continues to show grace. This is consistent with God's character as displayed throughout the Old Testament, where Yahweh continually disciplines and offers forgiveness to His people, thereby providing an opportunity for them to return to their covenant with Yahweh.

#### **The Marks of a People Attuned to the Ways of the Lord (6:1-8)**

In chapter 6, Yahweh brings a case against his people. There is only one appropriate response to the faithfulness of God (as outlined in 6:4-5), and it has nothing to do with sacrifices. Seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

This verse (Micah 6:8) is so pertinent for the fight against poverty because it calls God's people to a way of life. It is a covenant way of life that requires believers to ensure all people are treated fairly, equitably and with dignity. Israel's unfaithfulness was marked by her lack of commitment to ensuring justice and too often the contemporary church is in danger of the same unfaithfulness. Our world has many small and large scale examples of injustice. Micah calls the people of God to 'step up to the plate'. Whether the injustice and pain is on our doorstep or in the lives of our human family around our globe, the call is clear – meet injustice with justice.

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### The Call for Recommitment to the Heart of God

An extremely challenging quote; that calls for both great consideration and imminent action, was made by a man who lived out the call of Micah. It leaves us with an even wider understanding of our relationship to injustice:

*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor".* Desmond Tutu

Such an idea is deeply troubling. How do we deal with such a problem? Ignorance is the first hurdle to overcome, and this has been largely dealt with a long time ago, care of the media (especially the evening television news). The question now resides with us. What will we do? Are we willing to get involved and speak up for the poor and marginalized of this world? Maybe the better question is; are we willing to stand alongside those who are already calling for Godly justice? Will we join the millions of Christians around God's world calling for an end to poverty?

### Reflection

*(Use all or some of these questions as a catalyst for the church to consider how they can apply the message of the prophet Micah)*

- What are the injustices around us? Are we engaged with these issues and people?
- Are we a people of integrity and faithfulness to God?
  - In what ways can we seek God's justice in this unjust world? In our nation? In our local setting?
  - Who is oppressing who in our world?
  - Is our church known as a people who are merciful by nature? Who are we showing mercy to? How can we do this weekly?
  - Are our lives characterised by humility? How do we serve the marginalised in our community?
  - Are our shopping habits and lifestyle supporting or oppressing others?
  - Who are the contemporary versions of the 'widows and orphans' described in scriptures?
  - Am I speaking up for and with the poor? How can we as a church body 'speak up for and with the poor?' Who do I know that is in need of an advocate?

### Suggested Actions

- Make a handprint on a 10.10.10 canvas. Pledge as individuals and as a church to fight the injustice of poverty
- Visit your local Minister of Parliament to deliver your canvas and let them know that you are concerned for the poor and oppressed. Ask and encourage your MP to make a similar commitment to use her/his influence to advocate for the poor. See <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/contact-your-politician> for a meeting guide
- Get informed about poverty and the part you can play in stopping it
- Sign the Micah Call
- Write handwritten letters to your local Member of Parliament stating the need for the Australian Government to stay faithful to their commitment to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

**Resources for these and other action ideas can be found at [www.micahchallenge.org.au](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au)**