

Micah Part One – "Guard Your Heart"

This week, we begin looking at the prophet Micah, a prophet to the people of God contemporary with Isaiah and Hosea. Before we dig into the ethical concerns of Chapter 2, we will see that the messages of Micah concerned the evils within Samaria and Jerusalem, the respective capitals of the Northern and Southern kingdoms. We have witnessed this with other prophets. The book contains three sermons, each beginning with the same formula: "Hear" or "Listen." Ultimately, each message addresses all of earth's nations, declaring God's coming judgment. In return, the nations are called upon to hear and witness God's pronouncement of divine judgment. It was Micah to whom God bore witness concerning Himself to all the nations of the world, and this is still so if the rulers of nations have minds to consider the history of the Hebrew people. It's a scene straight out of a Leave It to Beaver rerun. Two brothers are misbehaving, both equally at fault., but when Dad arrives, he ignores one of the boys and heads for his brother, saying something like, "I saw what you did!" In the meantime, the first brother breathes a sigh of relief, thinking Dad was overlooking his part in the fiasco. His comfort melts when his father suddenly turns to him and says, "And now for you, young man!" We all have those times when we hear only what we want to hear, not what we need to hear. Those in faith We should heed the call to open our ears and "Guard our hearts." We should pause, pray, and ask the Lord to tell us what we need to hear so that His Word leaves no doubt.

Let's pray

Father, today we put on the armor of God. We strap on the belt of truth of Your Word. We thank you for your goodness that you are faithful, and you are our defender and protector. Please guard our hearts from the enemy. You know what we face today, and we are so thankful we do not have to do this life alone, for we have you. Amen.

What do we know about Micah? Mich was a messenger to the ordinary people who served during the reigns of three successive kings. Jotham is a good king. Jotham's son Ahaz is a wicked man who corrupted God's people with evil worship practices of the northern kingdom, and Ahaz's son Hezekiah was one of Judah's best kings who turned the nation back to serving the Lord. We can picture Micah standing on the "Wall Street" of Jerusalem, perhaps near the "Palestine Stock Exchange," where he delivers a message centered on social justice, authentic worship, and false security. The prophet lived In Moresheth, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem, helping us to date his ministry to approximately 740-700 B.C.

Micah seemed like a stubborn naysayer who refused to paint a rosy picture of the future, for there was no lack of false prophets to say what the people wanted to hear. Times have not changed. Those in power, both socially and in the government, defrauded their brother and sister Israelites of their land, coveting and defrauding. In basic terms, sentencing families to poverty robbed generations of children of their future inheritance. Through violence and fraud, foreign invaders would take their land away. Here is the caution, folks. "It is so human to hear only the good things people tell us. Even the government! However, it is a temptation we need to guard against! Guard your hearts.

What I honestly want to talk about today is coveting while lying awake at night, dreaming about scheming against common sense between right and wrong. The kind of deliberate evil dwelling in different moral worlds. Those who plot evil in full awareness, even to the point of lying awake in bed awaiting the sun to arise. Beginning in verse 1 again, "Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! They carry it out at morning light because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance." As we look at this passage, we can ask, "What kind of moral discipline and sin of such people who have no fear of God?" In Psalm 36, David writes, "An oracle is within my heart, concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear in God before his eyes. For in his own eyes, he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed, he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong."

In our small group last week, there appeared to be a consensus that we are naturally born aware of right and wrong. However, as we grow and mature, the aim of being a moral Christian citizen is discipline directed at the heart, and to be sure, knowing God helps to deliver an approach to some level of happiness. We all know that the Christian life is not always bundled with joy, blessing, health, and prosperity. But in knowing God, when we become entirely consumed with exceeding sin, we know that we can then be delivered from it. The root cause of the sins we see in these verses alludes to the sin of covetousness, or "idolatry," as the apostle Paul calls it. Throughout this chapter, the sin of greed rears its scaly head.

Covetousness is a strong desire to have that which belongs to another. "You shall not covet" is the tenth commandment in the book of Exodus, one of God's laws for humanity when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." So, Micah confronts the people because their covetousness led them to commit fraud, as some resorted to violence and intimidation to ensure their desires were met, stealing land that belonged to others.

How about us as Christians today? Christians can indeed be covetous. The consequences of covetousness are three things. That it consumes (sleepless nights thinking up evil plans), covetousness destroys (making us ungrateful and jealous with envy), and deceives (believing such disasters will never come our way). I think about Black Friday! It's coming up, you know. What is the opposite of covetousness, for if God commands us not to covet, then is it contentment? Contentment is being satisfied with what we have received from God's hand. If it is being satisfied with what we have received from God, then is it an attitude of gratitude leading to bountiful giving? Only you can answer these questions for yourself. What about in contrast to the world? Did you know that covetousness contradicts God's plan for His people? People are always in conflict with self and God, especially regarding repentance.

In contrast to coveting, contentment is difficult. We read in 1 Timothy 6:6-10. "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and

harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith through this craving and pierced themselves with many pangs."

As people of faith, we should desire to be faithful Christians bound to the covenant given to Moses. Not only handed to Moses but also as people of the New Testament and covenant, our responsibility continues with a primary responsibility to address suffering in the world. The suffering of the poor and at-risk people of society. In verses 8-9, Micah speaks to how the unrighteous treated the vulnerable, stealing the coat of the returning soldier, the land, and homes from widows and orphans only to satisfy greedy hands. The repeated biblical injunction in James 1:27 tells us, "Religion that God our Father accepts as poor and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." It is required as an expression of true religion.

Let's take a look at verse 11 now. "If a liar and deceiver come and says, I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer, he would be just the prophet for this people." Another deficiency in which God's chosen people were guilty continues in American society. We ignore the instructions conveyed to God's prophets and his messengers, disregarding and despising their message. Evangelical and conservative Christians who stand on the eternal principles of heterosexual marriage, distinct gender roles, and the sanctity of all life are criticized by society and considered outsiders. Essentially, society says that the Spirit of the Lord is limited on what to speak on in people's lives in this modern age of sheer evil. It's as if society thinks it has the final authority in who gets to say what, and it's the false prophets who speak of wine and a good time, as we read in verse 11. "If a liar and deceiver come and says, I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer, he would be just the prophet for this people." But God's Spirit is never so restricted. How will society's unrighteous, covetous, and corrupt people hear the gospel's truth unless they are told? So, we pass it on, and the Spirit, who is not restricted, does the work of convincing and converting.

The prophets tell us that the anti-God kingdoms will eventually crumble and disappear when the absurdity of their opposition to God's truth in all spheres comes to realization. Nations will crumble when people admit there is a better way, an absolute way based on objective reality and not the whim or will of humanity. The Lord will respond to wrongdoing, for he is faithful to his word. The Jews to whom Micah spoke devised evil against their fellow citizens; for that, they were judged and disciplined by the Lord. The Lord planned a disaster to come upon the dishonest ones. Micah spoke to Zedekiah, advising the king of Judah to "bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. In this way, they would avoid the harsh treatment reserved for those who would not submit to God's agent of punishment. This all came to pass to this nation in their exile and captivity. God is faithful to his word.

We are bombarded daily with ads enticing us to acquire this or buy that. But if we were to look closely, we would see how gracious and loving our Heavenly provider is to us. In closing thoughts, when it comes to covetousness, we need to remember that it consumes, destroys, deceives, and is contrary to God's plan for His people. In response, we need to recognize it, confess it – call it out to the Lord and maybe even to those of whom you are coveting, repent –

turn around – do a 180, ask God for strength to be content, and be grateful for what God has given you. Thankfully, Jesus has paid for our covetousness and all of our sins. If you have trusted in him, he has taken your judgment. Now, we get to learn how to walk in a way that pleases and aligns with him. Saint Augustine once wrote, "You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." May we find our rest and contentment in God alone in His good and wise provision for us. Amen.