

God's Covenant Faithfulness

Micah 6:1-5; Romans 11:29

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In a previous church I pastored, there was an example of covenant love which I believe will remain in my memory as long as I live. A young couple became members of the church and before long I learned that the wife had forsaken her marriage covenant to find her pleasure with another man. Over the next few months, I spoke with the young lady seeking to draw her back in repentance to her God and to her husband. She had no desire to return. Her mind seemed resistant to any appeals I made. She was eventually excommunicated from the church as we pleaded with the Lord with many tears to restore this marriage. The young husband, even though he had grounds for a divorce, continued to pray for his wife, to plead with her to return. God rewarded the faithful perseverance of this young man, for one day I received a call from him asking me to call his wife who had moved to another state. What I heard on the other end of the line was a broken woman who in tears confessed her sin, and desired to be restored to the Lord and to her husband. She moved back and was restored to her husband and what a joyous time of weeping and celebration it was on that Lord's Day when this couple stood before the congregation, and this young wife confessed her sin and her gratitude to the covenant faithfulness of the Lord and of her husband who the Lord used in her life to drive her to her Savior.

Dear ones, is there a motive more likely to crush the hardened heart of sinful man, than the covenant love of the Lord Jesus Christ? I know of none. I know and believe that the holy reverential fear of God is necessary in the life of a Christian and without it we would not take God seriously. I know and believe that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. But dear ones, when we know we have sinned against the eternal love of Christ who suffered hell on the cross in order that we might be forever joined to him in a marriage covenant, there is no greater shame that can smite the soul of man. Indeed, it is a great reproach to sin against the absolute authority of the Lord in breaking His commandments, but, oh, the brokenness and pain in the heart to understand that we have poured contempt upon the infinite love and mercy of Christ who purchased us from the slave market of sin with His own blood.

From our text, the Lord appeals by means of a covenant lawsuit to His people to return to Him, a faithful husband, on the basis of his covenant faithfulness to them. The two main points from our text are these: (1) The Lord's Announcement of the Covenant Lawsuit against His People (Micah 6:1-2); (2) The Lord's Heart Opened to His People in the Covenant Lawsuit (Micah 6:3-5).

I. The Lord's Announcement of the Covenant Lawsuit against His People (Micah 6:1-2).

A. Micah, having declared to Israel and Judah the judgment of the Lord that would befall them for their obstinate idolatry and oppression of their neighbor, and having declared the future salvation and glory that awaited them, now is given appeals and overtures of grace from which only the most hardened creatures could shut their ears.

B. Micah may have thought that his work as God's minister to Israel was finished now that he had shown them their sin, their need of the Lord, the judgment that would come, and had even given them hope of a future restoration. What more could the Lord say to this obstinate people?

C. The Lord commands His minister to arise and contend (i.e. argue the case of the Lord against His people as if he were in a court of law). Now according to the text, who are the witnesses who are called to hear the case? The mountains and the hills (Micah 6:1-2). One might think that these mountains and hills are to be understood figuratively, but, no, that is not the case. For just as the mountains and the hills are the

witnesses who are to hear the covenant lawsuit (“contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth” Micah 6:1b-2a), it is the Lord’s people, Israel, against whom the covenant law suit is brought (“for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel” Micah 6:2b).

D. Why has God commanded his prophet, Micah, to go and bring God’s covenant lawsuit against Israel before the mountains? Calvin summarizes the reason very well in his commentary on this text (p. 328) when he says,

[F]or there is here an implied comparison between the mountains and the Jews; as though the Prophet said, “The mountains are void of understanding and reason, and yet the Lord prefers to have them as witness of his cause rather than you, who exceed in stupidity all the mountains and rocks.

The Lord seeks to shame His people by this action in order to reveal to them the depth of callousness and hardness of heart to which they had sunk.

E. Oh, dear ones, is there anything worse in our lives than a hardness of heart to the Lord our God? To shut our ears to the preaching of God’s Word, to close our minds in darkness to the light of God’s truth, to callous our hearts to the spiritual pricking and conviction of God’s Spirit is a most dangerous place in which to be. If we belong to the Lord and continue in such a condition, we may be assured that Christ will bring His bruising ministry into our lives in order to soften our hearts. If the gentleness of Christ’s love will not soften us, the sternness of Christ’s love will indeed soften us. Parents, we see in our children all too well how at times our loving kindness is rebuffed and we must then take a much more stern and severe approach with them. Haven’t you pleaded with your children at such times, “Please don’t force me to become more severe. Listen how I am appealing to you in love to obey me.” But we then turn around with God our Father and do the same thing with Him as our children do with us—we harden our hearts to His loving reproof.

F. Dear ones, the Lord not only had a controversy with His people of old, but He has a controversy with His church today. For Christ’s Church today is rent into thousands of pieces by schisms, heresies, idolatry, covenant breaking, Sabbath breaking, lack of genuine affection for Christ and fellow brethren, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness. And the saddest part is that the Church of Christ “loves to have it so”, as if this were the unity in truth and love of brethren of which Christ spoke in His prayer in John 17:21. If the present divisions in the body of Christ stir up within us only vengeance and bitterness toward others, spiritual pride, yea even a spirit of hatred for brethren either inside or outside of the Puritan Reformed Church, then God has a controversy with us as much as He has a controversy with others (“How does the love of Christ dwell in us?”). You will remember this was Jonah’s problem. We cannot truly pray David’s prayer in Psalm 35:26 until we have known the humility, grief, and pity of David in Psalm 35:11-14. If we are not brought by the Spirit of God to the point of sincere sorrow, weeping, fasting, and pity over these divisions, are not our hearts like those of Israel of old? Where there is a division in the body of Christ (even where that division is justified is over the truth), if we do not humbly seek with everything that is within us to heal that division by fervent prayer, by periods of fasting, by meekly applying the Word of truth, and by demonstrating an unfeigned love for the brethren, then our hearts have become like the mountains and the hills before which Micah brought God’s covenant lawsuit. Dear brethren, strive for purity of the church, but also strive for the peace and unity of the church with the same steadfast effort. Yes, we covet and pray for a covenanted uniformity throughout the world, but we must not only bring the truth in one hand, but in the other hand we must bring an unfeigned love for the brethren before such a covenanted uniformity will be realized.

II. The Lord’s Heart Opened to His People in the Covenant Lawsuit (Micah 6:3-5).

A. In the remaining three verses of our text (Micah 6:3-5), we see the loving kindness of the Lord displayed to His people even when He must (reluctantly though necessarily) bring His covenant lawsuit against them.

B. The Lord begins this section with a most affectionate appeal, "O my people." Although rebellious, although hardened to the voice of the Lord, He yet comes to Israel pleading with her as a faithful husband to an unfaithful wife. Although the Lord is issuing to unfaithful Israel a covenant lawsuit, charging her with having broken the marriage covenant, yet He doesn't forget the covenant He has made with her. Although the marriage covenant between human beings may be dissolved (upon the grounds of adultery or willful desertion that cannot be remedied), the marriage covenant between God and His people cannot be utterly dissolved, for God in His covenant faithfulness and sovereign power will restore His unfaithful bride unto Himself ("For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" Romans 11:29). This the Lord will do so as to demonstrate to us our calloused unfaithfulness and His undying faithfulness, so as to reveal our utter unworthiness and His undeserved grace. Dear ones, if the Lord has His people to call out of even the whore of Babylon (i.e. the Church of Rome), then we also ought to appeal to all of His people to come out of unfaithful churches which have become daughters of the whore through their heresy, idolatry, and covenant breaking. And we ought to appeal to them as God does here in Micah 6:3: "O my people" or "O my brethren." How our communication with defecting, backsliding brethren should be characterized by this attitude: "O my brethren."

C. O the loving condescension of the Lord in Micah 6:3 wherein He lovingly entreats His people to tell Him where He has mistreated them, where He has failed them, where He has been unfaithful to them. How the Lord pleads with His people to return to Him on the basis of His covenant faithfulness to them. Now if the Lord Himself who only does that which is good for His people (even when He carries them through the desolate wilderness of deprivation when the comforts of life have been taken from us, or through the tempestuous storm when it looks as though we will certainly perish, or through the fiery furnace of persecution), if the good and holy One can ask the question, "What have I done unto thee?", how much more each of us (who are yet plagued by pride and self-conceit), how much more we should begin by asking that question when there is a problem in our marriage, in our family, or in the church: "What have I done unto thee?" Jesus made it clear that each of us ought not to begin with the faults of others, but rather to begin by removing the beam from our own eye so that we can see more clearly how to help the brother who has a mere mote in his eye (Matthew 7:5). Dear ones, have we not realized the peace and unity in marriage, family, and church because we have been unwilling to earnestly begin with the question, What have I done unto thee?

D. There is nothing that reveals so clearly the heinousness of our sinful pride and stubbornness of our willful way than when Christ sends us messages of love and invitations of mercy by His Word, His Spirit, and His people, and rather than softening our hearts, it makes us even more angry and more obstinate. Here is a way to determine what is really in a man's heart. How does he respond to the overtures of loving kindness? Is he hardened or softened? Is he made proud or humbled? Is he angered or ashamed? Dear ones, this not only applies to those who need the gospel of salvation, but to each of us who have come to Christ by faith. When there has been a falling out between yourself and a brother or a sister, do you become indignant, angry, and bitter at invitations to be reconciled (Who does he think he is? I'm not going to forget about what happened that easily?). But dear ones, when we see such a reaction in our own souls to humility and kindness, how we should cast ourselves at the mercy seat of Christ to rescue us from such pride, anger, unforgiveness, and unthankfulness. When the kindness of a brother or sister is like heaping coals of fire on our heads, then we have been overcome with evil rather than overcoming evil with good. The root problem in that person's life is that the greater appeals of Christ's love and mercy have been scorned, so naturally the lesser appeals of

kindness from a husband or wife, brother or sister in Christ will likewise be scorned. Today harden not your hearts to God's invitations of mercy in Christ Jesus (be not like Cain in Genesis 4:5-9).

E. Finally, the Lord summarizes for His people some specific examples of His covenant faithfulness to them (Micah 6:4-5). How quick we are to recount and how good our memories are when it comes to the trials, hardships, and mistreatment of others we have experienced. We seem to have selective memories and conveniently forget the mercies of God in carrying us through those floods that appeared to overwhelm us, and to forget the loving kindness shown to us by those with whom we presently have problems. If we would train ourselves to remember the mercies of God and the loving kindness of the brethren in times past, our indignation and vengeance might be more quickly tempered. You see, addressing problems is always a question of perspective. Will you look at a problem with another only in light of the immediate offense, or will you also take into consideration the many acts of kindness and mercy shown as well?

1. The Lord redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was one of the greatest demonstrations of God's power and mercy in the life of Israel. What is the greatest demonstration of Christ's power and mercy in your life? He redeemed you from slavery to sin into which you had been sold, and by offering His life as a ransom payment, He set you free, leading you out of the death of the Red Sea and into the life of the Promise Land. You who have trusted Christ alone for your eternal salvation have been purchased from the curse of the law, from bondage to sin, from the sting of death, and you have been purchased unto life forever more. Have you wandered in apathy and complacency from the Lord? Have you become hardened in some sin toward God or others? If so, you have forgotten what you were redeemed from and redeemed unto (2 Peter 1:9).

2. The Lord provided faithful shepherds (not perfect shepherds) in Moses and Aaron and even a faithful prophetess for the women in the person of Miriam. Are you able to give thanks for the faithful elders (not perfect elders) God has given to you in order to lead you? Do you love your elders in the Lord? Do you fervently pray for their strength and for humility, knowledge, and wisdom to be abundantly supplied to them? Do you seek to hold up the arms of the elders, or would you rather someone else take that job? Dear ones, one of the greatest mercies God gives to His people is faithful ruling and preaching elders.

3. The Lord preserved His people from false prophets like Balaam who sought the destruction of His people. Have you praised the living God for preserving you from the various false prophets that are running around in the world and in the church today? Why aren't you following them, whereas so many others are? Is it not only for the mercy of God shown unto you that He has opened your eyes to see and love the truth?

4. He carried His people from their lowest point when they joined with the Moabites in their idolatry and fornicating feasts there in Shittim (he did not forsake them at their very worst), and brought them through the Jordan River to renew covenant with Him at Gilgal (by means of circumcision and the Passover). Though like an adulterous woman Israel had gone after her many lovers, yet the Lord by His sovereign grace gave His people a willing heart and renewed their faith in Him by showing them, that in spite of their unfaithfulness in every way, He had ever been faithful to them and He gave them the seals of His covenant to remind them whose wife they were.

5. Those of you who are far from the Lord today, come unto Him and embrace Christ by faith alone and turn from your sins. Those of you who are near unto Him, but your love has grown cold, you have allowed bitterness to take root in your life, you have nursed a secret sin in your life, you have been unthankful for God's many mercies, you have gone merely through the motions of a Christian life, you have struggled with that besetting sin and feel like giving up, you who are discouraged and downcast today, come all of you, come one and all to Christ. His mercy is greater than all of your sin.

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