

# Micah: Beyond Forgiveness to Justice

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open to a book in your Bible that you may have rarely or never turned to in a setting such as this, it is the book of Micah. Now the book of Micah is found in the last section of our Old Testament where we collectively entitle the minor prophets, again not minor because their message is minor, but because oftentimes the lack of quantity thereof.

Now as you're turning to Micah, we're gonna do something very unique this week that we haven't done in a while, we're actually gonna spend a large portion of our time in the New Testament, we're gonna be in the book of Matthew 18 and the book of Luke 19 a little bit later, so you may want to either hold your place or write that down, and I realize there are many of you today that are with us as guests, and you're maybe saying, "Why Micah? Why? What's happening?" Well, we're walking through a Bible reading program as a church body that typically asks us to read about a chapter of Scripture a day and I want you to hear that when we put this plan together over a year ago, the only strategy that we really had was that we wanted to make sure that during what we call the Christmas season we were reading through one of the Gospels. To be quite honest with you, most of the strategy was which books of the Bible based on their length fit with the weeks and the schedule and such, and I'm just here to share with you this morning there could not have been a better book of the Bible to read this week than what we know as the book of Micah and here's why: as you walk through the prophets, particularly the minor prophets, we see that their audience is usually either Israel the northern kingdom or Judah the southern kingdom, of course, last week Jonah was to those that were in Nineveh, but the book of Micah is unique because he addresses every land, every entity, every country, he addresses the north, the south and he even addresses the Samaritans in the middle. It's almost as if this message rises above boundary lines and sovereign states. This is a message that wasn't just for the north or for the south, not for even the middle Samaritans, this was the message that were for all people at all times.

In just a moment, we're gonna find ourselves in a very familiar passage of Micah 6, but before we do so, allow me to give you somewhat of an overview or a perspective of the book of Micah. As you're walking through the book of Micah, everything seems very gloom and doom, in fact, the first three chapters are the Lord's pronouncements that if the people, no matter where they live or what allegiance they claim, if they do not repent of

their sins, judgment is going to befall them. In fact, we see this come to fruition in days past when in 722 BC the northern kingdom fell, in 586 the southern kingdom fell, and even 100+ years later, even those in Nineveh were ransacked by their enemies. By the time you get to chapter 4 right in the middle of the book of Micah, there is that word again, you know what word I'm talking about, right? But. You've received a letter, an email or a text where there's a communication headed one way but when that conjunction "but" is utilized, it changes course. When you get to chapter 4 of the book of Micah rather than addressing the impending judgment if they do not repent of their current sins, the Lord prophetically pronounces that the days are coming where he will ultimately judge the sins of the nations and the peoples that represent therein, where he speaks of what we would call today in our vernacular the second coming. He speaks of the fact there is coming that day where the Lord himself shall descend, where judgment shall be rendered, and eventually his kingdom shall be established.

Now when we look at the book of Micah, the first half is dealing with events of the past, the latter half is dealing with the events of the future, which means that you and I today find ourselves right in the middle, in fact, if there's a way to do so, you may want to write either above chapter 4 or after chapter 3, "This is where I am," because historically speaking, judgment has happened of the first three chapters, and prophetically speaking, chapters 4 and onward are yet to be seen. So the question for each of us today is this: how do you and I live our lives in light of these two realities? We've seen the Lord move mightily in days past, we believe he's gonna move mightily in days ahead, so how do we exist, how do we live, how do we go forward in this our lives that we live each and every day? And what we're gonna see from the book of Micah is what does it look like to live in the power of these truths? What does it look like to do as we're gonna see in a moment, to move past forgiveness to justice?

I'm gonna encourage you to move to the book of Micah 6 and verse 8 is one of the most famous verses in all of the Bible. I'm sure you've seen it on t-shirts and posters and slogans and such, but I'm gonna read verse 7 for the sake of context. It says,

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

I'm gonna push the pause button right there. What is happening is the Lord is saying in spite of all of our sacrifice, in spite of all of our religious endeavors, down deeply realize it truly never satisfies a holy God which is why verse 8 is so critical.

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Now that's a series of statements that you might be very familiar with, to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God, and what I want to do today is actually for lack of better terms, unpeel the layers there and see what does that really mean, what does

it mean for a person such as myself and hopefully you, who stands 2,000 years on this side of an empty tomb, who wasn't there for the judgment of the first three chapters, and the judgment of the chapters 4 and onward are yet to be seen. What does it mean to do justice? What does it mean to love mercy? What does it mean to walk humbly with our God?

Three very simple things that I want to address this morning. The first one is this: we see that God has a very unique system, very contrary to any other system not only on earth but of any other religious or spiritual order. I want you to notice the pronoun that is used toward the end of the verse, walk humbly with your God. Not humbly with a god. Not even humbly with the God, for we live in a culture and humanity as a whole has worshiped a plethora and a multitude of gods from time beginning, in fact, what we see in the Israelites' history is this is what made them unique. In fact, it was in the book of Deuteronomy 6 when the Israelites are preparing to go into the Promised Land, they'd come out of Egypt, they've come through what we know as the Red Sea, and as they await that famous Promised Land, one of the things the Lord says to them in Deuteronomy 6 is to make sure that his word, his promises and his commandments are at the forefront of everything they do, so much so talk about them when you wake up, discuss them when you go to bed, he even says in their culture to put it on the frontlets of your body and on the doorposts of your house. What's interesting in the context of those 11 famous verses, in verse 4 it says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." You know, many people have said that's the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. If we could summarize the New Testament, quite simply John 3:16 pretty much sums it all, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." But in the Old Testament on the other side of the empty tomb it says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." Such an important declaration that if you were to go back and you were to grab the scrolls of the ancient rabbis, it's the only verse in the Old Testament that has capital letters. It's almost as if God is screaming at them, "If you don't get anything else, get this, that my relationship to you is distinctly unique from any other relationship known to man whether it be earthly or of the beyond.

Allow me to illustrate. In every belief system known to man, there is some type of an appeasement that must be done, but yet what do we see in the Scriptures? We see a God who though he is Creator of all makes this incredible valiant effort to get our attention. Think about this for a moment. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, what did the Lord do? He came to them. When wickedness was all over the earth in the days of Noah, he came to Noah. When humanity continued to rebel even after that flood experience, he went to Abraham and he said, "Hey, I'm gonna start something here, are you interested in being a part of my plan?" When Samuel was in the temple with Eli and the word of the Lord was sparse in those days, the Lord spoke unto him and he said, "Samuel, Samuel," he said, "Here am I, Lord." All throughout the Scriptures what do we see? We see the Lord reaching out desiring to be a part of our lives in a very unique system, not a system – hear me – of religion but a system of relationship.

You see, verse 7 is religion, a certain amount of oil, a certain amount of fire, a certain amount of sacrifice. He says no, do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. It's personal. It's possessive. And obviously it is John 3:16 that is the ultimate expression of that, "For God so loved the world that he gave his Son that whosoever believes should not perish but have everlasting life." Oh sure, it was exemplified through the Old Testament but there's no greater picture than Jesus Christ being born on our behalf, living a sinless life on our behalf, taking the sins of our lives to his cross, and eventually rising from the dead. Why? So that we could be called his sons and daughters, we could be heirs and joint heirs with Christ. You see, God has a very unique system that he has set up to where he desires for you and I to be in an active real relationship with him.

So why have I placed so much emphasis on that? Because it is the two phrases before walk humbly with your God that I think oftentimes we couch or we cover in earthly philosophy, to do justice and to love mercy. Neither of those things can be properly done apart from a proper relationship with Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, without a saving relationship with him, there really is no true expression of mercy nor is there true enactment of justice.

So today I want to kind of walk those backwards. What does it mean to have mercy? Or let me state it a different way, how should we act when somebody does us wrong, because is that not what mercy is? Mercy by definition is not doing or giving unto somebody that which they rightfully deserve and when somebody does us wrong, what is our natural fleshly inclination? That they need to be punished, they need to have some type of consequence, and they need to have it all brought on them as quickly and as painfully as possible. But what does he say? Have mercy.

Let me encourage you to turn to the book of Matthew 18 and I want you to see where this concept was put on trial for there Jesus was consistently surrounded by those who were antagonistic toward him, those who were contrary to him, and he's dealing with a subject matter known as forgiveness. Now you do realize that forgiveness and mercy are holding hands along the path of life. When you do not give that which is rightfully due somebody for their ill behavior or mannerisms, ultimately you are forgiving them and Peter, among many other things, had the same issues that you and I do, from verse 21 of Matthew 18, I want you to hear this conversation between Peter and Jesus. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Now stop for just a moment, here's what Peter's saying, "Jesus, you don't understand, there's some messed up people out there and it seems to all be aimed at me and I'm tired of it and I've extended mercy and I've forgiven folks and I keep getting run over here and there. How many times do I have to do this, seven times?" Notice what Jesus says in verse 22, "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Now you look at that number which I know equates to 490 and you say is that just some arbitrary random number that the Lord picked out? No, not at all. In fact, the number 490 is so significant because back in the book of Daniel, I want you to hear what the Lord said to his people. He said that because of their rebellion, because of their insistent contrariness to their Lord and their Creator, he said that judgment would befall them, I know you're gonna be surprised, for a total of 490 years.

In other words, what the Lord is saying unto Peter and what he's saying unto us is that we ought to forgive others to the extent of which we are guilty as well, and you and I are so apt to do what Jesus warned us about in the Sermon on the Mount, be careful when you pluck that little small piece of wood out of your brother's eye when you've got a big old log sticking out of your own.

But then Jesus goes to expand and beginning in verse 23 and for the sake of time we won't read the totality of it, he tells a parable and it's a parable about a man who was in debt. He owed this individual a grand sum of money. He couldn't ever repay it. He'd fallen on hard times and he asked for forgiveness. He asked for mercy. He fell at the mercy of the court, as we would say in our culture, and in this story that who was in authority over him granted him mercy and, listen, forgave him of his debt. So what does this guy do? He turns around and there's an individual who owes him a very small amount of money and he not only punishes him but tries to put him in jail, and the parable is such why would we do unto others that so much less significant than that has what has been done unto us? What does he say in Micah 6? Have mercy. What did Jesus say? That we are to forgive, we're to extend this hand of mercy, that we are to extend mercy because, listen, the Lord has granted us mercy.

You see, oftentimes we see that one thing that somebody has done contrary to us and we say, "Man, I don't know if I can forgive that. I don't know if I can have mercy there." And then we look at the totality of what Jesus Christ has forgiven us, we look at the breadth of that, we look at the quantity of that, we look at the totality of that and we see in the Lord's perspective that that which he has granted mercy and forgiveness for us is much greater than what he asks us to do toward others.

You know, he said in Micah 6 that we're to have mercy, we're to forgive, we're to extend even when those that do wrong against us. By the way for the sake of time, if you want to do a little research today, go back up into chapter 18 and it talks about how to address individuals when that wrong is done and the proper process and the proper order, and can I give you a hint? When somebody does you wrong, you're not supposed to blast it on social media. I just want to go ahead and share that in advance.

But back to Micah 6. There is this last concept that I think has been so misconstrued both outside and inside the church, to do justly or to do justice. What does the Lord require of us? Do justice, have mercy, walk humbly with our God. If you walk it backwards, realize God's system is unique, it begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ and because he's forgiven us much, we from his perspective ought to forgive others of little when they've done us wrong. But it's the next question that you may not have thought of much, is how do we respond when we've done somebody else wrong? You see, justice is doing that which is right, justice is doing that in our vernacular is how do we pay back, how do we give back, how do we atone for that which we've violated or gone contrary to somebody else?

You know, I think the best example is found in the Gospel of Luke 19. In fact, in chapter 19 of the Gospel of Luke, beginning in verse 1, we find one of my favorite characters in

the Bible. Now as I begin to read this story, some of you will understand why he's one of my favorite characters. In Luke 19, beginning in verse 1, it says, "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus," I hear the laughter. I hope it's not because of the next statement, he "was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature." I feel your pain, brother. "And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Do you find it interesting that when Zacchaeus is face-to-face with Jesus, when he's in the midst and the presence thereof, he was a publican, he was a known thief, in spite of his stature, I don't know if it makes it worse to get stolen by from a shorter guy than a taller guy, I don't know, but he's a publican and he says, "If I've stolen from anybody, I will return it fourfold." Now you're thinking, now was that just some, you know, colloquialism of the day? No, back in the book of Exodus 22:1, do you know what it said? If you steal a neighbor's sheep, replace it with four. In other words, the Lord said, and by the way, if you read the book of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and all those books of the Bible, there's this incredible practical wisdom that when we violate somebody else, that we should go, listen, above and beyond to make amends and to make things right.

Allow me to illustrate. A little while back, I found myself in a typical scenario of life that oftentimes because of not only this occasion but weddings and funerals and such, I have clothes that I, you know, I like to take to the dry cleaners. Went to the dry cleaners, dropped them off, went about my business, came back a couple days later and was met at the door by the owner, very upset about a specific situation. She said, "Oh Jeff, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm glad you're here. We need to talk about your order." I'm like, "Well, what happened?" And she brought out a shirt and on the shirt it looked like I'd gotten hit by a red paintball in the heart area, what had happened was that I had left a mint in the pocket of my dress shirt, it had gone through the process of dry cleaning and expanded itself in liquefied permanent form on the shirt to which she said, "We're so sorry we did this. Don't worry, not only is this gonna be taken care of, we're gonna give you store credit." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because we ruined your shirt." I said, "I'm the one that left the mint in the pocket. If it's anybody's fault, it's mine." She argued with me. She said, "No, it's our job to make sure everything's out of the pockets." She said, "Not only is this order on the house, the next one is too." I said, "You don't have to do this." She said, "I know I don't have to, I want to." You think I'm going anywhere else for dry cleaning?

It is amazing what happens in our lives when we receive justice. When somebody is willing to acknowledge, "I messed up," when somebody this is new to our world today,

take ownership, I got news for you, it's not always somebody else's fault and we say, "Hey, I did this and I'm willing to go above and beyond what it takes to make things right." You know, the sad part is and I'm gonna end with this, most of us even as born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we're just trying to get ahead and try to get away with whatever we can and what does he say? You need to do justice. You know that we, the Christian community, we ought to be known as the most giving, most loving, most generous people on planet earth and I got news for you: you go to a restaurant today in town that has a waiter or a waitress and they see you dress like you went to church, they're not happy to see you because you're known as cheap and irritable. I'm just talking to the Baptists, I'm not gonna talk about the Methodists today. You don't believe me? Ask them today. You want to see justice in the world? Then go above and beyond the call of duty even when it doesn't call for it. Have mercy on those as Jesus talked about Peter. But more than anything, do you know what makes all the difference in the world is to walk humbly with your God. You see, folks, all the definitions to all the words in the world don't make a difference if there's no Jesus at the center.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today, you find yourself with us for the very first time, maybe you've been with us thousands of times either in this building or outside by way of our media ministry, and maybe today, maybe today you realized that even though you give your best effort, even though you try, you realize that there's something missing and that something is the power and the presence of Jesus Christ in your life. He's the only one that can allow us to extend mercy and justice because that's what he's done on our behalf. Maybe today you're that individual who said, "Do you know what? It's time to get this relationship with God right." And if you're that person today, can I encourage you to do what Romans 10:13 says, just call on the name of the Lord. When I say call on the name of the Lord that just means have a conversation with the Lord. It's not a conversation that necessarily you have to have out loud or maybe even use the same word or phrases that I might use, but maybe your conversation would go something like this. You say, "God, today I realize that in spite of what others may have shared with me or what I thought, I realize that I'm the problem, that I'm the one who's messed up, I've sinned, but I also understand that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. God, today I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much, I believe he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross and, God, I believe that three days later when they discovered the tomb was empty, that Jesus Christ made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to world's problems but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem so the best way I know how, I'm asking you to save me, I'm asking you to forgive me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation. We'd love to encourage you just to step out and step forward in a moment as we have a time of response, a time of invitation after I pray. We're gonna be standing and singing, just come forward so we can celebrate with you. Maybe today your

decision isn't as a first time believer, maybe it's like we witnessed with the baptism, maybe you've been a believer for years or even decades and you've never followed in baptism, or maybe you're like individuals we meet each and every week who say, do you know what? This is my spiritual home. This is my church body. This is what I want to be a part of. Maybe you just need to be prayed with or prayed for. We just want to celebrate whatever the Lord's doing in your life this day.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that as your word challenges us to extend forgiveness and mercy, thank you as your word challenges us to do justice that we recognize that that is what you have done on our behalf. Thank you that you have not left us to our own devices and in our flesh but you have empowered us through a relationship through Jesus Christ with the presence of your Holy Spirit. O God, help us at this time, at this place, to just simply be where you've called us to be. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as Jimmy leads us, whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.