

Bearded Men – The Minor Prophets – Micah, Part 2

Bearded Men

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Bible Text: Micah 6:1-8

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I want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles in the Old Testament to a book by the name of Micah. Micah is actually the sixth book in a series of twelve books at the end of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets. Today, we're going to be in chapter 6 and in chapter 7 of the Book of Micah. And as I mentioned, this is kind of caboose Sunday; this is the end of the messages regarding the Minor Prophets. You may be thinking, "But there's twelve Minor Prophets. Why are we only dealing with the first six?" From the very beginning, we had this as the strategy, this was the game plan because the last six books of your Old Testament, the last six books of the Minor Prophets deal with two primary subject matters: they deal with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and they deal with the actual physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Though we could study those things and we could go into great detail, our purpose this summer season was how do we prepare our hearts to live in light of those two realities, as we see prophecies being fulfilled, as we see the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, how do we live life today in preparation for it.

Today is the ultimate exclamation point. Today is the ultimate conclusion as we look at the Book of Micah, chapter 6 and 7, for the Book of Micah ends with this word that is so critical for our understanding. In chapter 7:18, the Lord uses the word "remnant." He uses this word to describe, as we'll see in a moment, a group of people who stay faithful when everybody else is faithless, a group of people who stand strong when everybody else, by all appearances, is weak. What we're going to see today is that the message of Hosea, the message of Amos, the message of Obadiah, of Joel, all of these messages were warnings. All of these messages were very strategic as to prepare us for leaving this place, going out into the world and changing the world starting right here.

That being said, I want to encourage you to turn to chapter 6 as we read verses 1-8 to give us a little context here. The first seven verses when we read them may seem a little disjointed to you but it is verse 8 that is probably the most well-known verse of this book of the Bible and possibly even the Minor Prophets.

"Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, 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: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from

Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD. Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? 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? 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?"

As I mentioned in the context note, the conclusion of this study of the Minor Prophets is this idea of a remnant; an idea of a group of people called to do what chapter 6:8 says. A couple of aspects or points about this remnant. The first one is this: the actuality of a remnant. What is this that chapter 7:18 is speaking of? What is this concept that is this section of your Bible. By strict definition, a remnant is a small faithful few. It's that group of people who when everybody else goes with the tide of the day, stay strong. It's that group of people who when the latest fad or the latest poll says to go one way, they stay true to their convictions and their beliefs. It is that group of people who do not give in, give up or give out.

If we were going to define this remnant, I think the best way to do so is to look at some biblical examples of how we see it working in the Bible so we'll see how it works in our lives. One of the great examples is found in the book of 1 Kings, primarily chapter 19. In the context there, there is a prophet of God that's been raised up by the name of Elijah. Elijah is the one who one day will take his mantle, put it on Elisha and there's that prayer for the double fold blessing. Elijah is the one who prayed and it did not rain for three years. Elijah is the one who went to the widow's house and the oil and the food kept coming and the child was raised back to life.

All these incredible stories of this man, but none greater than that fateful day on Mount Carmel. That day when he went against the Baal worshippers, those who were falsely worshipping idols and such. Four hundred and fifty Baal worshipers and over four hundred priests of the female goddess Ashteroth meet the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel. There is going to be a duel for fire. There are two altars prepared and the challenge is this: whoever's God is called upon and answers with fire, that is the one true God. You have almost 1,000 priests and prophets of what we know as the Baal faith. They prepare their altar and when the sun comes up, they begin to shout, they begin to sing, they begin to holler, they begin to even cut themselves and make all kinds of racket and noise. All the way up until the sun goes down to no avail.

Ah, but then there was Elijah. Elijah comes in and says, "You know, let's make this a little bit more difficult. Instead of just a simple offering, why don't we pour water on it? Not just one time, not twice, but three times, let's soak it. In fact, let's make it so wet that even the moat around it is overflowing with water." One simple prayer. Fire descends from heaven, consumes the entire thing including every drop of water. On that day, those almost 1,000 false prophets and priests were slain on the hill called Mount Carmel. It is that day in the life of Elijah that marks him as truly one of the great men that God used.

The problem with this story is this: there was a king that day who did not like what he did. His name was Ahab and if you look at Ahab's history it says that he was one of the worst that Israel had. And it wasn't Ahab that was so bad, it was actually his wife. You think Ahab was bad, his wife had a name we hardly even like to say. Her name was Jezebel and Jezebel worshiped Ashteroth and Baal and she was a horrible woman and he was a horrible king and they did not like that their religious leaders had now been slain by this prophet, this bearded man by the name of Elijah.

So they did what any vile, false worshiping individual would do when they are bad: they sought to kill Elijah. They went chasing after Elijah and Elijah did exactly what you would probably do: he found a juniper tree, if you could find one, and he hid under it. And he said, "God, this is horrible. I'm the only one who believes in you. I'm the only one who preaches you. I'm the only one who has the morals. I'm the only one who has the ethics. I'm the only one. The world's gone nuts, God, I'm it." Is that how you feel when you go to work? Is that how you feel sometimes when you watch the news? And you're among people and you're like, "I feel like I'm the only one who believes in Jesus. I feel like I'm the only one who has these convictions. I feel like I'm the only one who has these standards in my life." Welcome to Elijah's world.

But here's the good news: the Lord comes to him and says, "Elijah, I know how you feel. I've got good news. Go back to Israel, Ahab's not going to catch you, Jezebel is not going to catch you because I'm going to let you run faster than you've ever run before. Go back to Israel and you're going to find 7,000 people who have not bowed the knee to Baal; 7,000 people who believe like you do and live like you do." And there's this idea that there is a remnant of people; there are those faithful few even in the midst of a nation that was ransacked with apostasy, they did not bow the knee.

You know, when I speak of the remnant or the idea thereof, a lot of times people will come and say, "Jeff, what is that number? How many is that really?" I don't think we can put a specific number on it, but the Book of Isaiah really helps us out a lot. Isaiah 6, the famous missions chapter, you know how it begins, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." It's that famous passage where Isaiah says, "I'm a man of unclean lips," and a being comes and places a coal upon his lips. It's that famous passage where the Lord says, "Who will I send and who will go for me?" And Isaiah says, "Here I am. Send me." Immediately thereafter the Lord says, "Isaiah, here's the deal. You're going to go preach to people who will not listen to you. They're going to ignore you. They're going to scoff at you. They're going to make fun of you. But, I have left a remnant. There will be that group who will not give in, give up or give out. They will be there."

Listen to what the Lord calls them, you ready? He calls them a tithe. Some of you think that preachers made up that word a couple of years ago just to bring money to the church. The tithe literally means 10% and when it says that we tithe, we give 10%. Just as we do financially of our income, the Bible equates the remnant to the tithe. Not only when we tithe do we say, "I'm a part of the remnant," because that's about the statistic of people

who do, but on the other hand, it is saying that most likely when push comes to shove, of all those who profess and of all those who are on the bandwagon, really only about 1 in 10 is really serious about living for Jesus Christ.

You know, in the sports world that I'm such a fan thereof, we know about this bandwagon, right? Everybody wants the uniform of the team that is winning. Everybody wants the jersey of him who is successful. And, dare I say, there are but a few of you in this room who understand this because we are the proud alumni of that football powerhouse known as Baylor University. Yeah, that's it. Nobody cared to buy jerseys, nobody wanted to buy anything that had Baylor and a football on it until somebody in their uniform won the Heisman Trophy and then all of a sudden everybody wanted an RG3 jersey. Wow, do you know what the amazing thing is? Last year I found out there weren't as many Baylor fans as there were the year before. Why? Because it was the bandwagon. It was the thing to do. Everything was great when there was winning and trophies and success but how many of you have rooted for a team that's gone 1-15 or 0 and something? How many of you have rooted for a team who haven't made it to the playoffs in, say, 106 years, Chicago Cubs? The World Series Champion, that is.

We understand that and that's what the remnant is. This is the definition: it's those people that no matter what the polls say, no matter what the pundit's say, no matter what anybody says, they say, "I will not give in, give up or give out." This is, not just their definition, but this is their description. The description of the remnant is that no matter where the world goes, if it's against the Word of God, I won't go there.

I'm reminded of the Book of 2 Thessalonians 2. There's this entire chapter, or at least pretty much most of the chapter, that is dedicated to a study of the antichrist; a study of this character who will show up one day on planet earth who will deceive the masses. He will represent the cause of this entity known as Satan. He is the vilest of vile and it says right before he takes over, "There shall be a great falling away." And it speaks of the fact that as it gets tougher to be a believer, as it becomes more difficult to stand for truth, that the remnant are those who stay faithful when nobody else does. That's the description. And at the end of this study of the Minor Prophets and in our lives and in our families, what we need today is a group of people who will say, "No matter what the polls say, no matter what the tide of our culture says, it doesn't change the truth of what God's Word is."

That's the description which leads to this determination that no matter what happens, no matter who comes against me, I know, as we sung here,

"I know Who goes before me
I know Who comes behind
The God of angel armies
Is always by my side."

That's the determination. That if everybody in the office is contrary to it, everybody in the schoolhouse, everybody wherever you are, in your family, is against the things of

God, you say, “I don’t care if I’m outnumbered, I’m outmatched, I will not budge on the truth of Jesus Christ and the Word of God in my life.” That’s the actuality of what a remnant is.

Which leads to the second thing: how does it actually look? What are the actions of the remnant? And this is where verse 8 of Micah chapter 6 comes in. It talks about you can bring sacrifices, you can go to worship services, you can do all this pomp and circumstance but what does it really look like? It says, “To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” What does that look like in everyday life? To do justice: that means right is right whether anybody else says it is or not. That means truth is truth no matter who comes against it. Justice is declaring, “Thus saith the Lord. This is what God said. This is what it is.” And sometimes we get into these bad habits of what I call “Caveman Christianity” where we go into our cave and say, “Well, everybody sees everything exactly the way I do and I don’t want to hang out with anybody who sees things even a tad bit differently.” Folks, you get two Baptists together and you’re going to get three different opinions, that’s just part of it.

Let me tell you how you do justice. Who do you stand with? When do you say, “These are the people that I’m going to be on the team with.” Listen, if they believe the Bible is true from cover to cover, if they believe that Jesus was conceived of a virgin, if they believe he lived a sinless life, if they believe that he physically died on a cross and physically rose from the dead and physically is coming back one day, you can work with them. Those are the people you can hold hands with and say, “Hey, this is what God said.”

That’s justice. What’s mercy? Mercy is extending to people favor that they do not deserve. Folks, there are lots and lots of congregations and lots of churches and lots of believers all around the world. Some of them are in large rooms such as this and some of them are in house churches. Some of them are well organized and some of them are hardly organized at all. But let me share with you the one thing that no church should ever become and every church should always be: a church should always strive to be a hospital rather than a country club. What that means is when people are struggling, people are down on their luck, people are having a difficult time with this thing called life, they’ve made horrible decisions, all kinds of baggage, mercy is saying, “We will love you even though you appear to be unlovable. We will take care of you even though you look like you haven’t been well taken care of. We will extend mercy.”

And then there’s this thing called humility. Wow, that’s something we’re not good at but I’ve labeled it this: flying under the radar. I’m very concerned with what we call 21st century Christianity that it seems that every endeavor seems to have a press release that goes with it. I have an old friend in the Baptist tradition, a little bit different than Southern Baptist, who makes this statement, “The level in which a church or group of Christians is willing to receive press from the secular world is the level at which one day they’re going to have to compromise.” In other words, they’ve scratched our back, now we’ve got to scratch theirs.

When it says that you do this justice and you do this mercy and you do it in a humble, under-the-radar way, let me tell you what happens when you get on the radar: you get shot at. Under-the-radar you don't. I know some of you think, "Jeff, ok I hear all that and it sounds good and that's preaching and Bible Study." Let me give you the perfect example: Jesus Christ. In John 8, there is a woman who is thrown at his feet who is "caught in adultery." Have you ever found it odd that the man wasn't thrown too? But the woman is caught in adultery, she is thrown at his feet, she has a lifestyle, she has made a decision, she has got baggage in her life that is not only non-productive for her but her family. This is a bad situation.

She is thrown at the feet of Jesus and there in John 8 Jesus writes something on the ground. We don't know exactly what it is, but what we do see is Jesus completely lived out Micah 6:8. To do justice, right? You know the first thing Jesus did was justice. He turned to that group of men who wanted her stoned to death and said, "He who has not sinned, cast the first stone." That's justice. He's saying, "Guys, if you want to call what she's done sin, then you need to call what you've done sin as well." The Bible records that from the oldest to the youngest, they walked away. Jesus enacted justice. He didn't change the rules based on the audience that was there; he did not conform to the mass opinion of the day. He stood as the only one who said, "This is the line. She may have crossed it but so have you." That's justice.

Then he enacted mercy. Here was a woman at the end of her rope; here was a woman who saw everything in her life about to come to a bitter end. Do you know what he says to her? "Where are your accusers? Neither do I accuse you. Rise and sin no more." Wow, what words to hear. Based on past decisions and problems and say, "Hey, just arise and sin no more."

And then, there's humility. You say, "Well, where's the humility in that story?" Jesus did not hold a press conference based on what he just did. He went to the next act of mercy and the next declaration of justice, to declare what truth is and to love those who desperately need loving without telling everybody what you just did. Which is what Jesus told us, right? He said, "Don't pray outside in the streets with loud voices. Go in your closet."

I'm reminded of an individual in the Old Testament by the name of Daniel. Remember Nebuchadnezzar created a statue and when he created that statue he said, "Anyone who does not bow down to it will be cast into the lion's den." What does Daniel do? According to the Bible, he goes into his prayer closet in his house as he did every day. He didn't change, he didn't alter, he just simply goes in, does what he's done every day and he lets the Lord take care of it. You said, "But he got arrested. But he got thrown into the lion's den." Yes, and the Lord came down and held the lions' mouths shut and not around his neck. The Lord took care of him. Why? Because he enacted the same issue as what we're seeing here: to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. That's the action of the remnant.

The last thing I want to share with you is this: the assurance. If we choose to be faithful, if we choose to believe and not waver to the current tide of where the world wants to take us, what can we be assured of? I'm glad you asked. Look at the last two verses of Micah 7:19-20 which tell us what happens to the remnant, what happens to the group of people who don't give in, give up or give out. It says these words, "He will turn again," that's the Lord,

"He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

Basically, what Micah is saying that is all the promises that God gave in the past are eventually, one day, going to come to fruition. He uses the example of Abraham and Jacob: a man who had no children yet the Lord said, "Your children will be more numerous than the stars above." And it came to pass just as the Lord said.

Let me tell you what the assurance is: the assurance, according to the Word of God in the last two chapters is this, one day the Lord is going to remake the heavens and the earth. One day for those who believe, there will be no more pain, no more sorrow, I'm going to be 6'5", it's going to be a wonderful day with new bodies. Y'all don't believe that, do you? I had somebody tell me the other day, "Yeah, the problem is we're all going to be 7'4"." Ok, I get it. That being said, the assurance is: one day sorrow is gone, pain is gone, misery is gone, everything we wish would be eradicated today, we have the assurance that one day it will happen.

Here's the struggle with that is that there's a delay. Why? Because this won't happen until the Lord himself returns. And he has not, as of this very moment, returned yet he could this hour, he could this day. But if we wake up tomorrow, there is, at least from my perspective, another delay. I want you to look back up in verse 7 of chapter 7. I want you to notice what it says,

"Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

Folks, if you think we have it bad and you see what's happening in our world and it's not a pretty picture and we're on a slippery slope as a culture, let me take you back to an Old Testament character by the name of Job. This was a man who lost all of his family, he lost all of his resources, he lost his wife, even his friends, or so-called friends, who wanted to console him. He lost them philosophically, the problem was they stayed with him. And yet, midway through the Book of Job, having sores all over his body, having no financial resources and nobody on his side, here's what he says, "I think my Redeemer lives." No, he says, "I know my Redeemer lives and one day he shall stand on the earth." And Job makes this declaration that, "Even though I don't enjoy today, tomorrow is coming." Even though today there is a delay, one day deliverance will come.

See, it is the remnant that presses forward through the delay. It is the remnant that says, “I know that my Redeemer lives and I will stay strong even though my surroundings do not sing that song.” Which leads to this last thing, look at verse 8,

“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.”

When you're the only believer in your firm or you're the only believer in the classroom, when you're the only believer in your family, when you're the only family on your block who goes to church, listen, you feel like you're sitting in darkness. You feel that everywhere around you it is encroaching. Do you know what the Word of God is teaching us as the remnant today? Just when we know that a storm is coming, it is always darkest right before the dawn.

And I would hope that we would see revival. I would hope that we would see an awakening in our country but let me be honest with you: the way things are headed, folks, the days are only going to get darker. The days are only going to get darker. Why? The influence of biblical Christianity is on the decline and the influence of everything else is on the incline. It appears that dark days are ahead of us. So we've got a decision, we either go with the dark tide or we stay strong. We've got a choice to make.

You know, I joked about my university a couple of moments ago but when I went there, obviously, I was not on the football team but when I went there, there is something about freshman college guys who think that even though they're not on the team, they should play at least tackle football some place to prove themselves. I don't know what it is, at least that's what I and the guys that lived in my dorm did. The only problem with that is when you go out and you play football and you're out of shape and you don't have pads on, people get hurt a lot. And we had on our campus a medical facility. It was not a hospital, it was not a “clinic.” I don't know what they called it but we called it the Quack Shack because the medical care was kind of, you didn't know what you were going to get and you kind of got nervous, is this a good decision or not.

Well, time after time, I would end up at this facility because I would do things that were not the most intelligent and I would hurt my body or I'd get sick and I'd be there. There was this one doctor who I always seemed to get. I don't know why we thought it was a smart idea to play tackle football at one in the morning. I don't know what that is, but that's just the college freshman. The guy that was on the late night shift was this one doctor and he had this look. He was kind of the short-haired version of an Albert Einstein. Imagine that. He was a little bit older in age and he had one eye that whenever he looked at him, it didn't follow you. Here's the guy that's about the put stitches in your body and it just didn't look good, to say the least. After you visit him time and time again, you eventually get to know this individual. And one of the things I found out is that he enacted Micah 6:8 in my life. He gave me justice. He said, “Jeff, you need to quit playing football at night. That's stupid.” Pretty good wisdom, isn't it? He enacted mercy. One time I hurt myself and he said, “I'm not even going to call your Dad.” But last but not least, he always walked humbly because every time I went in for a decision that was

wise in my life, he would always sit down with me. He would talk with me, often times he would pray with me. You know what I discovered about that doctor? That his age, he wasn't there because he could no longer practice effectively, he had spent his entire life as a medical missionary in Africa and his retirement plan was to come back to a university and to core into the lives of these students. Not only was he a medical missionary but he was in an area that was very hostile to Christianity and I found out that he spent over five years of his life locked in a dark isolation box. That's how he lost his eye. That's how he ended up looking the way he looked, kind of frazzled on the outside.

I want to tell you, there was nobody that you'd rather be in the hands of if you were hurt than this man. Why? He was the remnant. He was the one who had been through the dark days. He's the one that had been through the hard times. He was the one that said, "Son, I've seen a lot worse than this. You're going to be okay." This is the one who said, "Hey, I've been locked in a box for over five years. I think we're going to make it even though the electricity just went out."

See, it is those dark days that just like Jesus gave us the parable of a pearl, it's that adversity and those struggles that make the beauty of a believer. Folks, I don't wish the dark days on our culture, I don't wish what I see happening in our civilization but if we will be the tide, if we will be the remnant, if we will be the ones who won't give up, give in or give out, maybe one day when all is said and done, we'll be like that doctor in people's lives and we will instill justice and mercy and will give them hope.

Folks, that's the conclusion of the Minor Prophets. We have been called to change the world starting right now.