



Last week we looked at the book of Jonah. What we learned in that book was the stunning lengths God will go in order to show His grace and compassion. That is an encouraging message because all of us can identify with the need for grace. We know we blow it and we need God's grace and forgiveness. We know we are weak against temptation and we need God's grace and forgiveness.

So the message of Jonah is a very encouraging and motivating one. We say to ourselves, "This is great, I've been shown grace and I'm going to show it to others." That's the exact response God wants from us. A response of heart-felt repentance and change. But what happens if people repetitively ignore God's offer of love and grace? What happens if people dismiss God's expectations of obedience?

» Have you ever wondered how long God will show mercy to a country with immoral politicians?

» With immoral spiritual leaders?

» With the rich taking advantage of the powerless?

» With those entrusted to protect the weak, neglecting the weak?

How long will God show mercy?

These questions are answered for us today in the book of Micah. Like we learned in Jonah, God remains a gracious and compassionate God. But we will see today in Micah that He has come to His limit.

The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem (Micah 1:1).

The book of Micah records the visions that Micah receives from God concerning the two nations of God's people: The Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom.

His message is written to the people who live in the South: Jerusalem and Judah. That's why it mentions Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. They were kings in the South.

Bear Witness Against

Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign LORD may bear witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple (1:2).

When the Sovereign Lord bears witness against you, you know you are in a horrible position. We're not told yet why the Lord is bearing witness against them. However, we do know from history that the warnings that the prophets have been giving to the people in the North have been ignored. God's grace and forgiveness has been ignored. God's expectations of obedience have been ignored.

The Lord's Judgment Regarding Samaria

All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the people of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? (1:5).

This transgression was the breaking of the covenant. This sin was not keeping the stipulations of the covenant.

What Was the Covenant?

Before we get into the specific actions that are causing the Lord to bear witness against His people, it would be helpful to understand the nature of this covenant that the Israelites have broken with God. A covenant was an Ancient Near Eastern agreement between two parties. Today, covenant agreements are rare. Contracts and agreements are more common. And a covenant was similar to these in that there are stipulations described: Stipulations of what is expected of both sides.

One major difference is that a covenant involved a pledge of voluntary death to the person who broke the covenant. To symbolize this, the two parties making the covenant would rip or tear animals apart and then walk a path between the two pieces of the animals. This meant, if I break my part of the covenant, I will willingly allow this to happen to me. For obvious reasons, people did not make covenant agreements light-heartedly. This is the agreement God and Israel had between them.

In Deuteronomy 6–8 the covenant between God and Israel is described.

Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These

commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts (Deuteronomy 6:3–6).

Verse 3—careful to obey; may go well with you; you may increase greatly.

Verse 5—Love the Lord your God.

Verse 6—These commandments are to be on their hearts. This is not supposed to be a robotic obedience but a heartfelt obedience.

In chapters 6–8, the covenant promises are described:

» Promises of protection against enemies. Don't be lured into alliances with other nations for protection. I will protect you.

» Promises of tangible blessings of land and prosperity.

» Promises of the favor of the God of the universe being with them and all of their future generations. God's love and goodness are strongly emphasized.

In Deuteronomy 8:19 they are warned of the consequence of breaking covenant with the Lord.

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.

If the Israelites break their covenant agreement, God says, "I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed."

In Micah 1:2 God says He is now bearing witness/testifying against His people. Sadly, the Israelites have repetitively broken this covenant. The lengths of God's grace and compassion have reached their end. By the time Micah comes to announce the coming judgment of God, how long do you think the Israelites have been breaking covenant? 3 months? 3 years? 30 years? 200 years?

The answer is over 200 years. We see in this that the grace and compassion of God is vast. But the people in the Northern Kingdom, the people of Samaria, have reached their limit.

"Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used" (1:6–7).

Verse 6—heap of rubble, a place of planting vineyards. The destruction will be so thorough that there will be no building structures left and future generations will only wonder what used to be there because it will be used as farm land.

Verse 7—idols will be broken. Idol worship was blatant in Samaria. Various statues of these false gods were everywhere:

in organized places of worship, in homes and businesses. People would bow before them, say prayers to them and perform various acts to please the gods, such as make offerings or engage in sexual acts.

God is saying that He will destroy it all.

That's exactly what He did through the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. The capitol of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria, was overtaken. The building structures were destroyed and the people either killed or taken captive.

This all takes place during the life of Micah and God uses Micah to issue a stern warning to Jerusalem: God's mercy and compassion has limits. Don't push them. If you follow in the ways of Samaria, your destruction will come next.

The Lord's Judgment Regarding Jerusalem

Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For Samaria's plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself (1:8–9).

Verse 8—"this" destruction of Samaria. Micah's heart is wrecked. He is not pronouncing the judgment of God as a passive bystander. He is personally engaged and he is miserable in his sorrow. Uncontrollable. Unconcerned with normal and appropriate behaviors of decency and modesty, he is walking around Jerusalem naked and wailing like an animal.

How does our heart react when we see rebellion against God? In his behavior, Micah shows us that a person faithful to God feels the pain of God when sin and rebellion are rampant.

Verse 9 —Incurable = the destruction coming to Samaria is done. There is no escape. Like an incurable disease that will take a life, the rebellion of Samaria will take their lives.

Reached Jerusalem = the acts of idolatry have been learned and embraced by the people in Jerusalem. God's Temple is now filled with idols. The sacred furniture has been removed and the sacred worship of the Lord is a forgotten practice.

This incurable plague has spread to Jerusalem from Samaria. Through the rest of the book Micah describes this plague and the punishment for it. This is not a plague of disease but a plague of sin and rebellion.

Plague of Sin and Rebellion

Prophets

This is what the LORD says: "As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim 'peace' if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them" (3:5).

If a liar and deceiver comes and says, "I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer," that would be just the prophet for this people! (2:11).

Government and Political Leaders

Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, . . . her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money (3:9–11).

Unethical Businesses

Am I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures, you wicked house, and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? (6:10–11).

This kind of behavior is not appropriate for the Lord's people. God's patience has been pushed to the limits. God's expectation of righteous behavior from His people is missing the mark. He's given them chance after chance after chance. He's warned them. He's told them through the prophets to change their ways. He's told them that judgment is coming. He offered them love. As time is ticking along, the buzzer may sound at any moment.

Can anything be done to escape the Lord's Judgment?

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (6:8).

Micah offers this reminder of what can be done to escape the Lord's looming judgment.

Act justly. Do what is right, even if you can get away with doing the wrong thing. Tell the truth, all of the time.

Love mercy. Feel the pain of the oppressed; empathize with the person who is helpless; put yourself into the shoes of the ostracized. Then act justly.

Walk humbly with God. Accept the authority of God over you; conform all of your mind and heart to the Lord's ways. Repent. Confess your rebellion and turn away from it.

This is exactly what King Hezekiah did. He was the third King of Judah during Micah's ministry. He listened to the words of Micah and Isaiah. He led the nation to holy living and a restored relationship with the Lord. (Read 2 Chronicles 29–32).

Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.' Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the LORD and seek his favor? And did not the LORD relent, so that he did not bring

the disaster he pronounced against them? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!" (Jeremiah 26:18–19).

Do you remember the questions I asked at the beginning? We learn from Micah that God will not show mercy to a country like this forever. Time is ticking. And this is a sobering message for us today because our country bears many of the same characteristics as the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. God's mercy will not be extended to us forever.

The appropriate response would be for us corporately and individually to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God. Every great spiritual revival through history starts with these with an emphasis on "walking humbly with God," primarily expressed in repentance.

By providing this clear warning and choice, God is providing the opportunity to joyfully and gladly become part of His eternal and glorious kingdom or to miss out. Regardless of our choice, the eternal Kingdom of God will continue. The eternal Kingdom of God will be glorious. The eternal Kingdom of God will be great. Which choice do we want to make?

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (5:2).

In this verse Micah is foretelling the coming of The Messiah, Jesus Christ: The perfect King of God's people. Talking about His eternal Kingdom, God says,

As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you. Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago (7:15–20).

The choice before us is this: Choose to give our lives to fleeting things, rebel against the God of the universe, experience the judgment that comes with rebellion and miss out on becoming part of His eternal Kingdom, or choose to give our lives to the Lord. To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2011 *Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA*
Catalog No. 1362-7

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, October 23, 2011 at Central Peninsula Church
1005 Shell Boulevard | Foster City CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcfc.org. Additional copies available on request.