

Through the Bible - Jonah, Micah

by Zac Poonen

The sermon highlights the importance of human cooperation, the power of prejudice, and the need for fellowship with God's heart in effective ministry.

Duration: 53:54

Scripture: Micah 2:6-10, Micah 6:1-7, Micah 6:9, Micah 7:14-16, Micah 7:18

Topics: "Repentance", "Gods Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses God's controversy with His people as described in Micah chapters six and seven. The Lord challenges Israel to state their case against Him, reminding them of all the ways He has blessed and redeemed them. The speaker emphasizes the importance of sincere repentance and turning back to the Lord. The sermon concludes with a message of hope and encouragement, highlighting God's mercy and forgiveness for His people.

Transcript

Let's turn this evening to the book of Jonah in chapter 1. Jonah lived just a few decades after Elisha and I've often thought if Gehazi had not run after Naaman to make money, is it possible that he could have got a double portion of the anointing that was upon Elisha, like Elisha got from Elijah, in which case he would have been the next prophet and perhaps he would have been the one who prophesied instead of Jonah or Amos, one of those people, but he missed something. I just mentioned this to say that there is a verse in Revelation chapter 3 which says, take heed that no one takes your crown. How can someone take your crown? That means a reward that God has placed, kept for you as you are faithful in the ministry God has planned for you.

You can miss it altogether if you are unfaithful in your life and that ministry which you were supposed to fulfill goes to somebody else. I say that because Jonah was the next prophet after Elisha and here we read, it's not a prophecy, this book really, among all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi, this is one book which is not a prophecy, it's a story and perhaps he writes it himself in the third person and basically it's a story of God's tremendous love for all people, just like Amos said that God loved all people. Here we see in the book of Jonah, this is the great missionary book of the Old Testament and it speaks of the narrow, it shows the narrow heartedness of the Jewish people and the large heartedness of God in his concern and his love for the nations, even for the most wicked nation which at that time was Assyria whose capital was Nineveh and when God needed a messenger to go to Nineveh, he picked on Jonah.

I think it was a tremendous honor because he was to be a prophet, almost the first prophet to the outside world, outside Israel and Judah but he missed that opportunity to be the prophet, I mean the willing prophet that God wanted him to be by disobedience but finally God still sent him. But we see here God's great heart of love, we'll come to that towards the end of the book but primarily I want you to notice that God is dependent on a human messenger. If the human messenger is not willing to cooperate, God is limited, he has to wait, you know just like with Moses.

Israel in Egypt was ready to be delivered but Moses was not ready and God had to prepare Moses to lead the people and until he is ready, God's people cannot be delivered and we see something similar here. Nineveh has got to get a message but God has to prepare his servant to take that message and Jonah found it very difficult to go just like when God told Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, it was very difficult for Peter to go. Prejudice is such a strong thing, it's one of the things we see in this book, the tremendous power of prejudice.

All of us remember we've got certain prejudices and if God is not able to break down those prejudices, your service for the Lord will be limited. Prejudices means I've got certain conceptions from childhood that this is the way it should be and this is the way it should be and if I stick to that, God may still use me but it'll be limited in the way he can use me because God's heart is much larger than yours and mine. So that's what we need to learn, how difficult it was for Peter to go to Cornelius house, how difficult it was for Jonah to go to Nineveh.

Of course Nineveh was about 600 kilometers east, it was a long distance but that was not the primary factor. He just did not want those people who were so wicked in Nineveh to be converted because they were so evil, everybody in the world hated them and he knew that if they repent, God would spare them and they would come and destroy Israel. So when the word of the Lord came to Jonah, there are really two sections in this book, first two chapters are first commission and the second two are the next commission and the Lord tells Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh because their wickedness has come up before me and I want you to cry against that city and he got up and instead of going east he went west.

It says he fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, he went to Joppa, found a ship, verse 3, and paid the fare and went down to Tarshish. I see something here which I've noticed for many many years, because he had money to buy a ticket, he missed the will of God. Just think how blessed it would have been if he didn't have money.

Sometimes when God wants us to go somewhere and we want to go somewhere else, if we don't have the money to go to that other place, we are blessed. The very fact that you have money does not mean that you're moving in the will of God. That's one thing we learn here.

A lot of Christian workers think, oh I've got the money, God's provided the money, that means I can go. Well if that is the argument, then Jonah was in the will of God when he was going to Tarshish. So learn something from that, that just because you have the money to buy a ticket or to buy something or go somewhere, does not necessarily mean that it is God's will for you to buy it or to go there.

God may want you to go in some other direction completely. Money is a great deceiver. So that's one lesson that we learn here.

And we read that when he went away from the will of God, the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and a great storm. The ship was about to break up and the sailors were afraid and they each cried to their God

and the thing didn't subside. And they found Jonah sleeping and they went and woke him up, woke him up and said, you call upon your God.

And when they cast lots, God pointed out, God sovereignly controlled that lot so that the lot fell on Jonah and Jonah admitted his sin. He said he was running away from the Lord and they tried their best to row to the shore. They couldn't succeed.

The sea was very stormy and then Jonah said, please pick me up and throw me outside into the sea and it'll stop because I know this storm has come upon you, verse 12, because of me. And then they were scared. They thought God would punish them for throwing this man in the middle of the sea.

They seemed, these heathens seemed to have more fear of God than God's prophet. And they picked up Jonah and threw him out and the sea stopped raging and the men feared the Lord. And the Lord had appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.

Now, I believe that God's word is inspired just like it is written. And so I read it exactly like it's written. I don't question it.

I believe that there was a fish large enough to swallow Jonah and that he was in the stomach of that fish for three days and three nights. Jesus himself said, endorsed it once when he said, I think it's Matthew chapter 12, he said that as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, so shall the son of man be in the heart of the earth. That is where paradise was located at that time.

And Jesus was there in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. His body was in the grave, but he was in the heart of the earth. And what it says here is then Jonah prayed.

I believe that's inspired. I believe that's the truth. So I believe for three days and three nights, he didn't pray because it says for three days and three nights, he was in the stomach of the fish.

And it's after that, or then that Jonah decided to pray. So what was he doing for three days and three nights? He was trying to crawl out of the stomach of the whale or the great fish, whatever it was trying to get out, trying to get out, trying to get out. He didn't succeed.

Always slipped back in. Finally, he decided to pray. And that's how you and I are usually when we get into some difficulty, which is like a belly of a whale or a fish.

The first thing we usually do is try to get out of it. And when all our efforts don't succeed, then we pray. And so Jonah then prayed and still nothing happened.

He prayed and he says, Lord, I called out of my distress. You cast me into the depth of the sea. I've been expelled from your sight and so on.

Waters encompassed me. And that long prayer and nothing happened until he came to one sentence at the end. And then again, you read the word then.

In the end, he stopped praying and he started praising the Lord. And he said, Lord, I'm going to sacrifice to you, verse nine, with the voice of thanksgiving. Salvation is from the Lord.

Deliverance comes only from you and you can deliver me whenever you like. I'm going to praise you with all of my heart. As soon as he started praising God, then, verse 10, the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out into the land.

Now, there's a principle here. We saw that verse when we were studying the Psalms. It says in Psalm 50 and verse 23 that whoever offers praise, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, the same word used here, a voice of thanksgiving and sacrifice.

Whoever offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving thereby makes the way for me to deliver him. In other words, if you start praising me instead of just complaining, you will open a way for me to deliver you. We see in 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat did that.

Surrounded by great armies, he began to praise the Lord and that praising the Lord opened a way for God to deliver him from those enemies. Jonah prayed and nothing happened and then he came to the place where he started praising God. And as soon as he did that, God said, okay, praise.

He told the fish, now you can vomit him out. Praise is the expression of faith. Prayer is not an expression of faith.

You may pray without faith, but when you praise God, when the situation has not been solved yet, when the problem is still like that, the situation hasn't changed, the problem is not solved, then you are expressing your faith. I believe God's deliverance comes from God. Salvation is of the Lord.

And immediately the answer comes. And Jonah was vomited out in the dry land and then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. We praise the Lord that if we have failed the Lord once, God gives us another chance.

That's another message that comes from the book of Jonah. Have you failed the Lord? God waits to give you another chance. Have you failed him a second time? He gives you another chance.

There is an expression that he's the God of the second chance. Well, I thank God he's not the God of the second chance because most of us have blown our second chance long, long ago. He's the God of another chance.

No matter how many times you fail, not just the second one. Praise the Lord for that. That he's long suffering and he gives you another chance to go and fulfill that ministry which he had planned for you from the beginning.

And this time he's learned his lesson, he's been chastened and he goes and he walks. Nineveh, it says in verse 3, was a great city. It took him three days to walk through that city, proclaiming in every street that in 40 days Nineveh will be overthrown.

And the people of Nineveh, it was one of the greatest spontaneous revivals that took place in the Old Testament. And it was in a heathen land. Just this one sentence brought the power of God upon these people and they began to repent.

See, when God has dealt with his servant and done a work in a man, one sentence from that man's mouth has got such power. And that's something we can learn. If God has not succeeded in dealing with you, your stubbornness and your disobedience and your rebellion and your pride, if he's not succeeded in

dealing with you, even long sermons won't accomplish anything.

But if God has succeeded in breaking you, one sentence can be so powerful. And the king, from the king down to the last person, there was such weeping. They put sackcloth, they repented, and they called upon God to forgive them.

And they were really afraid that Nineveh would be judged. Verse 10, when God saw their deeds, he turned and did not punish them. See, one of the things that encourages me here is that even when a wicked city like Nineveh repented, God was merciful when they humbled themselves.

There's never a case in scripture where a person repents and turns to God where God didn't forgive. If Judas Iscariot, instead of going to the priests, had gone to the Lord, he'd have been forgiven. But he made that big mistake.

Instead of going to the Lord and asking his forgiveness, he went to the priests and told them that he had sinned. You don't get forgiveness by confessing your sin to a priest. Judas Iscariot tried it, and it didn't succeed.

And it won't succeed today. And we see here that this wicked city, God had mercy on them, and one would have thought that Jonah should have been excited. But he wasn't.

Imagine an evangelist who's seen one of the greatest revivals in history almost, up to that time, and he's not excited. He was concerned because, first of all, his prophecy was not fulfilled. Nineveh was not destroyed.

He was really hoping that Nineveh would be destroyed. And it wasn't. And Jonah was angry.

And then we read that story of how the Lord allowed a plant to grow up over Jonah to teach him a lesson. And Jonah was very happy for the plant. When the plant withered up the next day because God made a worm eat it up, Jonah was very disturbed because the sun was beating on him.

And he said, it's better for me to die than live. And then God could speak to Jonah and said, you're worried about that plant. You're worried about a little heat on your head.

Think of these multitudes of people in Nineveh who are on their way to hell. There are more than 120,000 persons, verse 11, there who don't know the difference between their right hand and the left hand. That means 120,000 babies and even animals.

God's concerned about the animals too. And what we see here is God's tremendous compassion for lost souls that comes through in this one verse more than perhaps in any book of the Old Testament. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that no one should perish.

Jonah somehow didn't get into fellowship with God in this area. And there are a lot of people who can go out and preach like Jonah who don't have fellowship with the heart of compassion of God. And then they don't fulfill their ministry the way God wants them to.

Jonah preached, there was a revival. And you can go and preach and people can get saved. And at the end of it all, like Jonah, you may have no fellowship with God in the compassion he feels in his heart for lost people.

The basis of all evangelistic ministry is a fellowship with the heart of God where God has such tremendous compassion on people who don't have life. The Bible says God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The Bible says God wants all men to repent.

He longs for that. And the more I come into fellowship with God's heart, the more I get that burden. If you're an evangelist, if God called you to be an evangelist, he'll give you a burden, the burden that's in his heart of compassion for lost souls.

If God calls, called you to be a teacher, he'll give you a compassion for believers who are blinded, deceived, and who are not coming through to a life of victory. But fellowship with the heart of God and sharing his compassion is essential. If we are to fulfill our ministry effectively, that's what we learned here.

Now we turn to the book of Micah. Micah was lived at the same time as Isaiah. We saw that when we were studying Isaiah.

And Micah prophesied to both Israel and Judah. And Micah is primarily speaking to the religious leaders in Israel and Judah who have misused their privileges in serving God and exploited the poor people in their congregations. Just like Christian leaders who exploit poor people and lead them astray.

It's amazing to see how many Old Testament prophets had a concern for these poor people in Israel and Judah who are being led astray by covetous, selfish, proud leaders. So let's look at in the first three chapters, we read of God's judgment on Samaria, which is the capital of Israel and Judah. And then in chapters four and five, we read of the coming of the Lord Jesus in the millennium and establishing his kingdom.

And then in chapter six and seven, we read about God's controversy with his people. So first of all, he says in Micah and chapter one and verse two, he calls the people to listen to him because the Lord is coming as a witness against you from his holy temple. He leaves his throne in heaven and comes to earth.

And I want to move on to chapter two and see some of the reasons and the type of sins that Micah is exposing among the leaders. See, wherever God's word speaks to leaders, it's good for all of us who preach God's word to examine ourselves and judge ourselves. And there's a lot of prophecies given to preachers and leaders in the Old Testament.

And it says here how terrible Micah chapter two, verse one, it'll be for you who lie awake at night thinking up evil plans. You rise at dawn and hurry to carry out those wicked schemes that you have the power to accomplish. Verse two, when you want a certain piece of land, you find a way to seize it.

When you want somebody's house, you find a way to get it by fraud or violence. No one's family or inheritance is safe with people like you around. This is leaders who are exploiting poor people.

And we could apply it today to people who tell poor people to pay their tithes and take money from them and to live at a higher standard themselves. I believe it's perfectly right for a person to receive gifts from others. If he's serving the Lord, the Lord has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

But it's totally wrong to receive money from people who earn less than you. How can I take money from people who earn less than me to live at a higher standard than them? That is totally unchristian. This is what the leaders were doing.

They were exploiting poor people. And this is what a lot of Christian preachers and pastors are doing today. They take money from people who live in small houses and live in grand houses themselves.

They take the tithes from people who earn so little and live at a standard five times their standard themselves. Totally unrighteous. And that's why the anointing of God goes away.

And those of you who serve God, let me give you my advice. This is a principle I have followed for ever since I came out to serve the Lord full-time 34 years ago. Never to take money from people who earn less than you for your personal needs.

They have a right to give. If they give it to you, put it in the offering box. Let it go to the church.

Don't touch one rupee of that for your own needs. God will bless you. He'll provide your need.

If the person who gives you a gift is better off than you are, richer than you are, that's okay. But otherwise, it's defrauding people. And I find that many people are not serious about a very small thing like this.

I cannot imagine that Jesus would have done that. Jesus received money from rich women, we read in Luke chapter 8. And he also received from poor people. But then how did he spend it? He didn't take that money and live in a much grander style than those people.

He slept in the Mount of Olives. Now there was a lot of money in Judas Iscariot's bag. He could have said, well, let's rent a lodge and stay there a little more comfortably.

But he was so careful in the use of that money that he slept in the open. Now there's something that we can learn from that. You learn from Jesus.

If you are faithful in the use of God's money given by poor people, I tell you, you will retain the anointing of God till the end of your life. You can hear it if you want. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

If you don't do that, the same fate will befall you that has befallen so many preachers in our land. It's a very simple thing. And the Lord says in verse 3, I will reward your evil with evil.

You won't be able to escape. In chapter 2, verse 6 to 10, the false prophets say, the people say, don't say such things, don't prophesy like that. And Micah says, should you talk that way of family of Israel? Will the Lord have patience with such behavior? If you do what is right, you'll find my words to be good.

Yet this very hour, the Lord says, my people rise up against me. You steal the shirts from the backs of those who trusted you and you make them ragged. You have evicted women from their homes, stripped their children of their God-given rights.

Be gone. I'm going to judge you. This land is not going to be your home anymore.

You are going to Babylon. On the other hand, verse 11, if a false prophet full of lies comes to you and says, I'll preach to you about joys of wine and drink, that's the kind of prophet you like. Throughout history, it's been true that the people of God have always preferred false prophets who tickle their ears, say things to soothe them, make them happy.

And most of God's people have never cared to listen to true prophets who tell them the truth. So if you want to be a servant of God who's going to speak God's word to people, remember one thing, you are not

going to be popular. You're not going to make a lot of money.

You're probably going to be despised and rejected just like all these Old Testament prophets were. Now, yet, in spite of all this, the condition of most people in Israel, the Lord still says in verse 12, I will gather a few of you who are left and I will bring you together. All the prophets have this prophecy that there will always be a remnant.

In spite of all the backsliding of God's people, there'll be a remnant. And this is true even today. When Christendom backslides, you can be sure there'll be a remnant.

And if you're God-fearing, you look for that remnant. If you are transferred to a new town, you look for the remnant. If you go to another place, you look for the remnant.

You look for those few whom God is pulling out, who are sincere and seeking God. And I'll tell you, they won't all be in one denomination. You may go to one town and you may find it in one type of church and you go to another town and the branch church of this does not have the remnant.

They're all proud people there. You got to see there, where are the godly people here? And it may not be in my denomination. You got to be open to God to say, where is God gathering that few? In chapter three, again to the leaders, listen to you leaders of Israel.

You're supposed to know right from wrong, but you're the very ones who hate good and love evil. You skin my people alive and tear the flesh off their bones. What does he mean when he says words like this, that you eat my people's flesh and cut away their skin and break their bones.

Verse three, you chop them up like meat for the cooking pot. And then you beg the Lord for help in times of trouble. What is he meaning? His meaning is this.

He explains it in verse five. This is what the Lord is saying to you false prophets. You are leading my people astray.

And listen to this. If somebody gives you food, you bless him. If he gives you a good meal, you promise peace upon that house.

But if somebody refuses to pay you, you declare war on him. See, this is not something that's happening in the 20th century. It happened even in those days, 2600 years ago, that preachers loved those who gave them large gifts.

And they prophesied nice things to them. But if somebody was poor and could not even invite them for a good meal to their house, they were very stern with such people. These are not servants of God, not in sixth century BC and not in the 20th century AD.

These are the false prophets of all time. And the Lord says to them, now the night will close around you, cutting off all your so-called visions. These people speak out visions.

Darkness will cover you, making it impossible for you to predict the future. The sun will set for you false prophets and your day will come to an end. And you false seers will cover your faces in shame.

But Micah says, as for me, I am filled with power and the spirit of the Lord. Now that looks like boasting. It's not boasting.

It cannot be boasting because it's inspired scripture. Micah says, you fellows are like this, but I'm like this. Now, when you listen to that, it looks like boasting.

But do you know the Apostle Paul also said the same thing? He said in 2 Corinthians 11, he says, I work with my own hands to cut the ground from under the feet. That's how the Living Bible paraphrases it. From these people who say they are serving the Lord like I do.

They are serving for money. I'm not, he says. It doesn't mean that Paul didn't receive any gifts.

He himself says that he received gifts from a number of churches. But he did not serve God for money. And Micah has a lot to speak about this subject of workers, the Lord's servants who are working for money and people like Micah who are serving the Lord sincerely.

He says, I'm filled with power and the Holy Spirit. I'm filled with justice and might, fearlessly pointing out Israel's sin and rebellion. Listen to me, you leaders of Israel.

You're building Jerusalem on a foundation of murder and corruption. Verse 11, you govern for bribes. And again, he gets back to the same subject.

Sometimes you wonder, why do these prophets keep on talking on the same thing about money and money and money and money all the time? A lot of the prophets spoke about it because that was the one thing that was corrupting the leaders in those days. And it's the thing that's corrupting leaders today. So he comes back to his subject of money again.

You priests teach God's laws only for a price. And you prophets won't prophesy until you're paid. And yet all of you claim that you're depending on the Lord.

You say the Lord is here among us. Now the question is, when we serve the Lord, should we be paid? Jesus said, the laborer is worthy of his hire. And the Bible says, the ox that treads out the corn, its mouth should not be shut.

And the Lord has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. So scripture is very clear in the Old Testament and New Testament that God's servants, those who serve the Lord full time, can be supported by the gifts of God's people. And as I said, if someone who is not poorer than you gives you a gift, you can receive it and use it for your personal needs.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. It's perfectly right. Not only perfectly right, God has ordained it.

But there's a difference between that and a man saying that I'll serve God if you pay me. See, what is the difference between a salary and a gift? When you work in the office, in some secular office or company, you'll work there only if you get a salary. What if one day they don't pay you? You'll stop working.

In the Lord's work, it's not like that. A gift means you don't demand it. If you get it, praise the Lord.

If you don't get it, praise the Lord. Now, if you receive money every month, you can take it as a gift or you can take it as a salary. That's up to you.

The right way to do it is to take it as a gift and you'll never have a problem. Maybe you work somewhere for the Lord and you're getting a fixed amount every month. Okay, that's fine.

There's nothing wrong with that. But don't ever think of it as a salary that you get because I'm doing some work and I'm being paid. I cannot claim it.

Lord, if one day I don't get it, it makes absolutely no difference. You call me to serve you and I'll still serve you. I'm thankful for those who give it, but I'm not dependent on it.

That is the right way to serve the Lord, where I trust the Lord to provide my needs. He may provide it on a regular basis through someone or through an organization, or He may provide it on an irregular basis through different people. Different people choose different ways.

But whichever way it is, I must not prophesy because I'm paid. I must not do any service for the Lord for money. It's quite independent from that.

I do this and I have no interest in money. I do it for the Lord. My brothers and sisters, if you follow this principle, God will provide your need one way or the other and you will be protected from the snares that these people got into.

I believe it's very, very important to understand this. In chapter four, he speaks about the coming of the Lord and the temple of the Lord being built in Jerusalem. And it'll be the most important place on earth, it says.

And people will say, let us go up to this mountain of the Lord and He will teach us His ways. In that day, I will gather those who are lame, who've been exiles and filled with griefs, and I'll bring them to Jerusalem. Now, here, for the first time, you find Micah prophesying that before all that happens in the future, there's going to be a period of punishment for you people in Jerusalem because you have disobeyed the Lord, because your leaders are like this.

And he says in the middle of verse 10, you will soon be sent into exile to Babylon. Now, about a hundred years later, only they went to Babylon in the time of Jeremiah. One hundred years before they went into exile, when Babylon was a small, unknown country, the great power of those days was Assyria.

Babylon was a small, unknown little country. And Micah prophesies by the Spirit of the Lord, Babylon is going to be a great power and it's going to come and capture you. And that prophecy was fulfilled a hundred years later.

In chapter 5, verse 1, the Lord speaks, I believe He's speaking here about the last king of Judah, probably Zedekiah, who was going to be taken captive into Babylon. And Micah says, mobilize, marshal your troops. The enemy that is Babylon is laying siege to Jerusalem with a rod.

They will strike the king of Israel in his face. That was Zedekiah. But the next king, after Zedekiah goes to Babylon, there will never be any more king.

The next king, Micah says, will be, verse 2, one who is born in Bethlehem, Ephrata, which is just a small village in Judah. You see that connection there. And we know that after that last king of Israel, of Judah, was taken captive to Babylon for 600 years, there were no kings, or more than 500 years.

And the next king was the one who was born in Bethlehem. And this is the verse that the priests quoted to Herod, when the wise men came asking Herod, where is he that is born king of the Jews? And they said, yeah, Micah has prophesied. So they understood that this verse applied to the Messiah.

A ruler will come from you, Bethlehem, one whose origins are from the distant past. That means he will not be just an ordinary baby, it will be one who has lived from eternity, who is going to come and be born in Bethlehem, speaking about God coming in human flesh. And then in verses 7 and 8, it again speaks about the remnant.

You see, the prophets always keep coming back to the remnant. And there will be few left in Israel, and they will go out to the nations, and they will be like the dew and the rain falling on the grass. And I believe that's how the remnant should be even today.

You know how refreshing it is for the dew and the rain to fall upon the grass. And the remnant that God is gathering today of people who are sincerely seeking to follow the Lord should be a refreshing influence on Christians around them. And that's a good question for us to ask ourselves.

In chapter 6 and 7, we read about God's controversy with his people. It's like a court scene where God is saying to Israel, stand up. And the Lord says, state your case against me.

And let the mountains and hills be witness to your complaints. And now the Lord says, I will state my case against you. And the Lord says, my people, what have I done for you to turn away from me? I brought you out of Egypt.

I redeemed you from your slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, Miriam. Don't you remember when Balaam tried to curse you through King Balak's suggestion? I blessed you instead.

Don't you remember that long journey from Acacia to Gilgal? When I, the Lord, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness. What have you got against me? That's the Lord says, tell me, why are you turning away from me? Why do you backslide? Have I treated you badly? The Lord's putting them in court and saying, tell me. And the response of Micah says to the people here, how shall we come to the Lord when we think of all that God has done for us? This is a good question for you and me to ask ourselves.

Shall we bring a lot of offerings? Shall we bring our tithes? Shall we bring our money? Shall we offer him thousands of rams for seven, 10,000 rivers of oil? You think that will please the Lord? Shall we give our firstborn children as sacrifices? No. And listen to this wonderful verse. This is one of the beautiful verses in the book of Micah, which all of you should remember by heart.

Micah chapter 6 and verse 8. What does the Lord want from you? O people, the Lord has already told you what is good. And this is what he requires from you. Three things.

He wants you to do what is right, to be righteous and upright, which means no partiality, to do what is right in every situation and never to do what is wrong. Are you one of the remnant? Are you seeking to follow the Lord? Here's the number one thing God requires from you to do what is right. Secondly, he wants you to love mercy.

That means not just to be merciful, but to love it. To be merciful means to forgive other people, to do good deeds to those who need help. That is mercy.

To love it. Be quick to forgive people who have harmed you. He says that's what the Lord wants from you.

Are you really grateful to me for all that I've done for you? I don't want your money. I don't want your offerings. Give me your life where you do what is right and treat other people in a merciful way.

Don't be hard on them when they make a mistake. Remember, you also make mistakes. Forgive them.

Have they slipped up and done something wrong? Forgive them. Love mercy. And thirdly, walk in humility before your God.

That's all God requires from you, he says. And if the leaders had done that, Israel would never have gone captive to Babylon. And further, we read in verses 9 to 15 about businessmen who were cheating.

He says in verse 11, how can I tolerate it? You know, he says in verse 10, you're dishonestly measuring out grain and short measures. Your merchants use dishonest scales and weights. The rich among you, verse 12, have become wealthy through extortion and violence.

See, if you are rich, I want to tell you that God is very interested to know how you made your money. Nobody else may know it, but God is very interested to know how you made your money. Did you cheat anyone? Is there any tax that you cheated the government off? Have you done something unrighteous? That's what he's trying to say here.

He says, you've become wealthy in a wrong way. And he says, your citizens are so used to telling lies that their tongues can no longer tell the truth. Therefore, I'm going to ruin you for all your sins.

And what will happen is you will never have enough. You'll always be hungry. And when you try to save your money, verse 14, it'll finally come to nothing in the end.

You will save a little, but I'll give it to those who conquer you. You will plant crops, but you will not harvest them. So God keeps a close watch on our sins.

Chapter 7, verse 2, Micah says, he's describing the condition of Israel, why Israel is now going to go to Babylon. He says, the godly people have all disappeared. And there's not one fair-minded person.

They're all murderers who set traps for their own brothers. And they go about doing their evil with both hands. And the officials and judges, verse 3, demand bribes.

And the people with money and influence pay them off. And together they twist justice. But your judgment day is coming.

We live in a situation today where there's a lot of injustice like this, bribery, corruption, poor people are being exploited. God is watching all this. And He waited a long time with Israel.

And I tell you, all these people around us who are heathen, who are doing it, they will not escape. One day God will make them account for every single bribe they took to pervert justice, every wrong thing that any person has ever done against particularly poor people. One day God will hold them all to account.

And here's a verse that Jesus quoted. The son, verse 6, despises his father. And the daughter defies her mother.

The daughter-in-law defies her mother-in-law. And your enemies will be right in your own household. Jesus said that if you follow me, you will find your enemies right in the midst of your household.

He quoted this verse. And he said, I've come to set a son against his father and a daughter against his mother. When you read this Old Testament verse, it doesn't look as if it's referring to that.

But Jesus picked out these verses which teach us one thing, that when these prophets spoke the word of God, there was more than one meaning hidden in those verses. Many prophecies had a double fulfillment. And here is one of those examples of double fulfillment where Jesus picks out this verse from the Old Testament and says, this refers to what's going to happen when I come into your life.

Your enemies will be in your own house. And Micah says wonderful words here, which I believe those of us who serve the Lord, each of you can claim these verses for yourself. Think of it.

Verse 7. As for me, I look to the Lord for my help. I will wait confidently for God to save me. And my God will certainly hear me.

And don't gloat over me, my enemies. Though I fall, I will rise again. That's a word we can speak to the devil.

Don't gloat over me, Satan, particularly when you fall. Supposing you fall sometime, as all of us will. When you fall, come to this verse and say to the devil, don't gloat over me, Satan.

Okay, I fell, but I will rise again. The Lord is going to lift me up. And even if I'm sitting in darkness right now, the Lord will be my light.

It's true. The Lord is punishing me now. I will be patient as the Lord punishes me because I've sinned against him.

But after that, he will take up my case and punish my enemies. Satan, you're not going to triumph over me. Don't let Satan ever sit on your head and discourage you saying you have fallen.

This is a wonderful verse for believers who fall. And maybe you're chastened by the Lord, punished by the Lord when you did something wrong. Don't get discouraged even then.

Speak to the devil and say, don't gloat over me, Satan. It's true. I punished.

I'm punished. I've sinned, but the Lord is punishing me now. But after he's finished with me, he's going to punish you for all the evil that you've done to me.

And the Lord will bring me out of my darkness, verse nine, last part, into light. And I will see his righteousness. And then my enemies will see that the Lord is on my side.

And they will be ashamed who taunted me at that time saying, where is the Lord, that God of yours? With my own eyes, I will see my enemies trampled in the streets. And then we come to the end of this section, verses 14 to 16. Micah says, Oh Lord, please come and rule over your people.

Lead your flock into green pastures and let all the nations, verse 16, stand amazed when they see what the Lord will do for us. Here is a tremendous promise. I will do mighty miracles for you, says the Lord, verse 15, like those I did when I rescued you from slavery in Egypt.

In conclusion, verse 18. This is another lovely verse for those who feel they have failed the Lord and the prophets always finally conclude their prophecy after all these terrible pronouncements of judgment. They

conclude their prophecy with a word of encouragement and hope, which is an example for all of us who preach the word of God.

How does he conclude? Where is another God like you, verse 18, who pardons all the sins of his people? You cannot stay angry with your people forever because you delight in showing mercy. Once again, you will have compassion on us. You'll trample our sins under your feet and you'll throw our sins into the depths of the ocean and you'll show us your faithfulness, unfailing love as you promised our ancestors.

How should we conclude when we have to give a strong message of judgment or rebuke and exhortation, always with a word of encouragement that God is on your side. Remember this. God is always on your side against the devil.

He will never be on the devil's side against you, no matter how much you have sinned. He waits for you to repent, but he'll always stand by you. The moment he sees you turn towards him, he's on your side against the devil.

And as a preacher, if you preach the word of God, you're like a surgeon in an operating theater who's trying to remove a cancer from someone. You cut him open, expose the cancer, then what do you do? Remove the cancer and stitch it up, give him a sleeping pill, a painkiller, and send him back happy. But a lot of preachers, what they do is they cut the person open, expose the cancer, and send him out like that.

Don't ever do that. Stitch him up, give him a painkiller, let there be a smile on his face when he goes out. Let your preaching always be like these Old Testament prophets with a word of hope.

God is on your side against the devil. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be true servants of yours, to have a right attitude to poor people, to a right attitude to money, and all these different things that you teach us from your word.

Help us to walk in your light, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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