

The Pollution of Sin
Micah 2:1-2; Micah 3:9-11
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Good morning. It's great to see all of you here, and I'm glad to be worshiping with you. I want to welcome those as well who are joining us on the livestream. And we're glad that we can gather together to read God's word and to hear what God has to say to us. And this morning, we continue in this series on the book of Micah.

Last week, I began in the middle of the book, or actually towards the end, and that may seem odd to some. If you joined us last week, I began in Micah 6:8. And the reason for that is because Micah 6:8, the famous verse of what does God require of you? To do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. It is a call and a reminder that what God most desires is our hearts and the way in which we seek to live out our trust in Him among others and with others. And it is in many ways what Micah is ultimately calling the nation of Israel back to.

If you recall last week, I said that Micah was raised outside the city of Jerusalem. So he would've been considered a country boy brought into the city, commissioned by God to be a prophet to the nation while they and the city of Jerusalem were under siege by their enemies. And he gives a reason for why they are experiencing this besiegement, and, also, what God would have to say to them in calling them as a nation to repentance.

And so this week is looking at, if you will, the greatest hits that Micah has with regard to the sins of Israel. They're not unique to this time, but they are yet showing their heads again, and Micah speaks to it. And so this morning as we look at these three brief passages, which cover the primary areas that Micah is prophesying to them and calling them in repentance in, I will tell you it is not easy to hear. And what we'll also note is that, in fact, these things which Micah speaks of and speaks to are not merely the providence of the Old Testament. The sins of God's people and the sins of human hearts do not confine themselves to one generation or another but repeat like a broken record. And we will hear the ways in which God demonstrates through His Son, the incarnate Lord, how He speaks to these same sins as He comes to minister the gospel. And it is a message to us as well.

So hear now God's word as we hear about the pollution of sin beginning in Micah 2:1-2. Hear now God's word.

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. [ESV]

Then in Micah 3:9-11.

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." [ESV]

And then in Micah 6:9-12.

The voice of the Lord cries to the city — and it is sound wisdom to fear your name: "Hear of the rod and of him who appointed it! Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with

a bag of deceitful weights? Your rich men are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth." [ESV]

Now, that is a mouthful. There is a lot that he is uncovering. And so I say it with great humility. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me.

Father, we ask that you would, by your Holy Spirit, speak to our hearts. Help us, Lord, not to point fingers at others but to hear that your word would speak to our hearts and that your Holy Spirit, which is present by the promise of the Lord Jesus, I pray that you would teach us and help us to be aware of the ways in which sin pollutes us, pollutes our motives, pollutes our words and our actions, because we look to you, Lord Jesus, the redeemer and the savior, that you would do more than merely redeem us from the brokenness of our sin but that you would equip us to walk with you faithfully in a response to your great grace that the pollution of sin might be gotten rid of and that you would restore us to your glory and for the building up of your kingdom in the world. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Several years ago, a man by the name of Dr. Cornelius Plantinga wrote a book called *It's Not the Way It's Supposed to be: A Breviary of Sin*. He is a philosophy and theological professor at Calvin College in seminary. And it is still one of my favorite books in my entire library because I think he precisely hits a cultural moment. But I believe that the book, while several years old, is still very relevant. And what he points to at the beginning of the book is actually something that keeps me up at night. And I wake up in the middle of the night because I have to take care of my dog or whatever the case may be, in those crystal-clear moments of the morning, I think could this be operating in me?

And what it does is it points us to the pollution of sin because I would suggest that the sins which Micah is speaking to are the results of the sins which Cornelius Plantinga points out. And I think it flows throughout the nation of Israel, the time of Micah, the time of Isaiah, the time of Zechariah, and even as Jesus would come in His ministry of the gospel. Hear now what Plantinga says. He says, "For our slippage in our consciousness of sin, like most fashionable follies, may be pleasant, but it is also devastating." Okay. Well, what is he saying? It's this.

"Self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What's devastating about it is that we lack an ear for wrong notes in our lives, and we cannot play or see or hear the right notes when it's in the performance of others. Eventually, we make ourselves religiously so unmusical that we miss both the exposition and recapitulation of the main themes of God and the way it plays in human life. The music of creation, and still the greater music of grace, whistles right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue. Moral beauty begins to bore us. The idea that the human race needs a savior sounds quaint."

What is the birthplace for the actions of sin in the nation of Israel? What is the birthplace of the actions of sin in our lives? I believe it finds its home in the reality of the self-deception of our sin. Could it be? No, surely not. And slowly but surely, the narcotic of our own righteousness seeps into the bloodstream, affects our motivations and our own understandings of ourselves, but ironically changes our views of other people. We become self-deceived by the realities of our own sin, but curiously, we become quite astute at being able to recognize the sins of others but not us. Surely, we're not wrong. And slowly but surely, the notes of grace of God's gospel, God's mercy, the justice of God and the work of Christ no longer causes us wonder. And, frankly, moral beauty can easily bore us.

This is what was happening under the hood, if you will, in the nation of Israel at the time of Micah's prophesying. But as we look at these three passages this morning, they outline the three forms of sin, the three musketeers of Israel's downfall. And they are this: the oppression of the other, corrupted leadership, and unjust business practices. Let's just look at it briefly in the description in the ways in which Micah gives it to us. And by the way, these aren't even the most explicit that he gets.

But this is what he says. He says, "Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds!" This is the idea that the human heart never sleeps, and how easy it is that we can stay up all night long and try to devise ways in which we can enrich ourselves at the expense of others.

My mother worked for 25 years for State Farm, and she would come home regularly and tell me, and tell us as a family, that it never ceases to amaze her how often people will stay up all night trying to figure out ways to put in false insurance claims in the hopes of putting more money in their pockets at the expense of corporations and at the expense of other individuals all the way down to creating damage and destruction even to their own property so that they can pad their own pockets. Because who's the insurance company? They've got plenty of money. I've been paying them for years.

But, sadly, this isn't just something out there. This is the nation of Israel, the practices of those who are in power. Notice what he says. He says, "because it is in the power of their hand." So those who have the ability to lead set policy, execute that policy, and then to police the policy are those who are staying up all night long figuring out ways like, how can I enrich myself? By seizing fields, houses, and even, if necessary, the inheritance of the other so that I can make myself more wealthy and enjoy the luxury. All the while, they're showing up to church.

Remember? This is the leaders of Israel's house. These are God's people and God's leaders who are set over the nation of Israel. And, yet, they are the same ones who say, Lord, Lord, hallelujah. This is our fasting. This is our religious practice. Doesn't it look great? And, sadly, this isn't just the theme of Micah. It's also the repeated theme of the prophet of Isaiah. Isaiah 58 says the same thing. And it would say, hey, we fast all day long. These are the things that we do. And, yet, God says to them, do you want to know what kind of fast I desire? This is the fast that I desire.

"To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yolk, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yolk? Is it not to share your bread with hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" [ESV]

This Isaiah is telling us as well as Zechariah 7.

I don't know what Bible app you have, whether you're still using a concordance or whatever the case may be. Go onto Google or whatever you want to use and simply look up the phrase "the poor" in the book of Psalms. What you will be overwhelmed by is just how much the repeated refrain of caring for the poor, the Lord's eyes are on the poor and the oppressed. Now, here, he's not talking about those who are low in emotion or who are in a difficult time of their life. They're replete with that reality. But, also, what is inescapable is the overall repeated theme of scripture that the Lord looks on those who are the oppressed and who are the poor. But, now, by His own prophet's voice, He's having to say to His own people and to their leaders, you are using your power to take from others.

Now, we might disagree about policies. We might disagree about how those policies should be enacted or policed. But the realities are this still is at work even in our day every day. And the Lord calls us to have an eye towards those who are experiencing this kind of oppression and not turn a blind eye.

But it isn't just the oppression of the other. It's also corrupted leadership. Now, note it's not just the corrupted leadership of those who are the political leaders. But notice what he says in chapter 3. "House of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight," that sentence alone should cause the people of God to shudder and wonder, Lord, O Lord, have mercy. If your very people who are called to lead in your house, in the capital city, have made the ways of justice crooked, Lord, have mercy. How easily self-deception can set in.

Well, what were they doing? They were literally willing and able to take the lives of others so that they could profit from it so that the very city could flourish. And then to give judgment, they're willing to give the judgment if you can just give me a little \$20 on the side. Or the preachers. The preachers are willing to preach so long as you give them a little bit of money, they'll make sure that the message lands

softly so that you can find agreement because we wouldn't want to offend you, now, would we? Or, also, the prophets. No, we're not going to give judgments because you're not going to like it. You're not going to listen. Give me a little bit of what I need, I'll make sure those judgments land nicely with your bacon and eggs. Okay. Not bacon, but certainly with your food. At least not at that time. Now, we can have bacon.

But it also is the idea when he says that the prophets practice divination for money. They're willing to practice synchronistic things, the mixture of other religions to keep the house of God happy because if you're happy, I'm happy. And this is scary, is it not? Because you know how easy it would be, right? To minister to you and with you for years, and yet make sure I do not offend, to make sure I don't upset you because if I keep you happy, you keep paying my paycheck.

Here's the reality. The reality is on the one hand, people want you to say more. On the other hand, people want you to say less. Do you know how tempting it is to make sure you take that ball and you drive it right down the middle of the fairway? The realities are if I can minister to you and in your midst for years and yet never call you to question anything or never offend you, then I don't think I'm doing my job. This is not because my job is to offend, but because my job is to deliver the word of God, the word of truth. And the word of God and the word of truth even offends me. And if I fail to bring it forth in its full glory that the Spirit might use it to even convict us and you, then I believe I'm not doing my job. But how easy it is to say that which will tickle your ears. There is nothing new under the sun. This is what was happening in the midst of Jerusalem.

But, finally, not just the corrupted leadership but there is also unjust practices. Why does it matter how you and I go about our enterprise and our commerce either as business owners or as those who work in the marketplace, or who participate, in the marketplace, or care about the marketplace? Why does it matter?

Ladies and gentlemen, please, let me remind you that we reject fully the idea of sacred secular. Every square inch of this earth and all that happens belongs to the Lord. Why is that the case? Because listen to what Micah says. He says, hey, you business owners who are taking in people who need something from you, you're using unjust weights in favor that you get more money and your customer gets less. That's simply about ethical business practices. And you can stretch that out. I can lie on my taxes. Well, I'll make sure I hide the fact that the car was in an accident. All of these things, it seems so small. But all of it is about the realities of the marketplace, and that when we begin to practice in an unjust way, we are actually creating havoc and chaos. And, actually, in so doing, he says, you rich men are full of violence. And it's the violence of speech. You allow lying speech and deceitful mouths, meaning you're not telling the truth about what people are getting and what you're getting in return.

Is this not still at work in the marketplace here in the United States? Why does it matter what you and I do from Monday to Saturday? It's because the Lord cares about the business ethics that we work itself out because it comes from this place, from the human heart. And we can see when hearts are self-deceived, it creates a pollution, and it stains everything.

Carl Ellis, author, pastor, teacher, in his book *Free at Last* writes this about the realities of what happens when self-deception sets in. He says,

"When people lack a basic commitment to God, unrighteousness follows. Scripture describes at least two types of unrighteousness: ungodliness and oppression. Ungodliness happens when people rebel against God in His revelation, disregarding their responsibility toward God and others. They themselves suffer the consequences of their wrongdoing. Oppression occurs when people impose their ungodliness on others, whether they know it or not, causing them to suffer the consequences."

This is the reality of what happens. Sin, corruption, and oppression never stay by themselves quietly not bothering anybody else. They become the two-headed horsemen that wreaks havoc in families, in neighborhoods, in cities, in nations, and in the world. This is the pollution of sin.

But as I said in my opening, this is not merely the providence of the Old Testament and that somehow Jesus sort of skirted around these issues because He didn't. And as God revealed Himself in the incarnation of the ministry of His Son from the beginning to the end of His public ministry, Jesus continued to rail against the realities of what He saw with regard to unrighteousness and oppression. If you consider merely what Jesus says in Matthew 25 when He says to them, did you clothe me? Did you give me drink? Did you visit me in prison? He's giving them a vision for the end of time when the Lord comes. And they said, when did we see you, Jesus, in these things? Well, that what you did to the least of these when you fed someone, when you visited someone in prison, you did to me. And they said, when did we not do this? When you did not do it to the least of these, you did not do it unto me.

What is Jesus saying? What is Jesus saying when He's coming into question the Pharisees and He calls them whitewashed tombs? What is He saying to the church? What is He saying to those who would follow Him? I think it's this. He's giving us the beauty and the hard word of the gospel. And what is that? Okay. It's this, that God from the old to the new, from God the Father in His revelation of His righteousness and the people of Israel to Jesus Christ being the special revelation of the grace of God to bring about salvation, and to the ministry of the Holy Spirit now that God is on the side of the oppressed but not because the oppressed are more righteous. Do you hear that? God is on the side of the oppressed but not because the oppressed are more righteous. It's because God hates the works of the oppressor.

If you will, let's look at the long arc of God's word. At the beginning, He says He called a nation unto Himself. Because Israel was righteous? No. It's because God chose them because of His grace and His mercy, and He freed them from their oppressors. And once they were brought out of Egypt, what happens? God is not done. He demonstrates and shows them that they are not righteous either, but He means to make them so. He chose them as the oppressed not because they were righteous, but because of His grace, because He wants to make them holy which is why He sends His prophets to remind them, do you not see what I've meant you to be? Jesus Christ comes to save. And He, too, cares for the widow, and the orphan, and the oppressed, and the poor. His public ministry is rife with it, but not because they were righteous in and of themselves. But in freeing them, He tells them they are both sinners in need of grace, but they have been freed from the oppression of sin but, also, their own oppressors. And He calls the oppressors to repentance.

You see, here's the reality. The gospel has both parts of it. We can't on the one hand say that merely what we need to do is free the oppressed, because we can free those who are oppressed. We can clothe those who are naked and feed those who are hungry. But if we fail to tell them about the true oppression of the human heart because of sin, then we haven't dealt with the biggest problem.

But if all we do is talk about the need for forgiveness and the need for repentance while turning a blind eye to the realities of injustice and oppression, then we aren't hearing the full orb'd nature and power of the gospel because what God is doing is not just making a bunch of people who are sinners into His children and He's done. He's restoring all things. He means to undo the injustice. He means to undo the work of the oppressor. He means for His people to be about His hands and feet bringing about justice, and clothing, and food, and care for the widow, and the orphan, and the poor because that is what He has done in us.

While we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. While we were dead in our transgressions and sins, He has made us alive. While we were under the oppression in the yolk of Satan, He's given us a non-yolk for He is gentle and lowly. He has taken our burden that we might have eyes for those who are still burdened. It's both.

My friends, we must not allow ourselves and we must not allow the church of Jesus Christ to be drowned in the politicization and the division of our day. And here in terms of application, I want us to

just think about how we speak to one another about these issues. I know you know what I'm talking about. There are families even perhaps who are hearing my voice this morning who are watching this, or maybe who are here this morning, whose families are divided on just these issues. How do we address one another? I am convinced that we must confess and ask for forgiveness when we give ourselves over either to using epithets or presuming the motives and intentions of another regardless of their views. If we cannot talk about what the gospel tells us to address, oppression, injustice, the poor, and the gospel, and if we give ourselves over to what the culture is doing, then all we're going to do is say, well, you're just a social justice warrior. Oh, yeah, well, you're just a Marxist who's saying black lives matter.

Where is that getting us? What is the world hearing? I'll tell you what the world is hearing. You're no different than us, and yet you preach at us about the love of the gospel. But we struggle to love each other, and we struggle to disagree respectfully and lovingly. And disagree we will. We see the injustice and oppression whether it's law and order, or whether it's the use of business practices, or whether it's political policies in government and Washington, and all of it. We are going to have disagreements about those things. And we're going to have disagreements about how to deal with them. All the while, we might all be starting at the same point of the gospel of grace which brings about restoration of all things. Same starting space, but we might disagree on the solutions. And that's okay. But if we give ourselves into believing our own positions are more righteous, and yours is Marxist, or yours is racist, or yours is this, or yours is that, then what we're doing is we're actually falling prey to self-deception. And the pollution of sin will wreak havoc in families, will divide churches, and the gospel will not be able to flourish as the Lord intends.

We're going to get this wrong. But by God's grace, because of what Christ has done in us, what Christ has done in the church is far greater than we could ever imagine. This grace is such a beautiful song. But how easily we forget to sing it when we're speaking to one another.

We cannot give ourselves over to a false gospel that is merely just forgiveness or that is merely social justice. It's both together drawing us to the glory of Christ who became oppressed, allowing Himself and giving Himself over to the evil of others that He might give His life and be raised on the third day, victorious over the ultimate oppressor, which is Satan, over the ultimate oppression, which is sin and death, and is now victorious. He is our king, not the President of the United States, whoever that person may be, not the governor, whoever that person may be, or county executive, or Supreme Court Justice. Jesus is our king. And in this kingdom, we speak, and we work, and we love, and we think, and we do all of these things for His glory because He's restoring. And God by His Spirit may give us ears to hear and eyes to see where our own self-righteousness may be blinding us to hearing what He has to say.

I know this is an election year. I know I am pressing in. But I don't want to see the church of Jesus Christ split and divided along the cultural dividing lines. I want us to wrestle with our disagreements. I want us to wrestle with scripture so that we can say, Lord Jesus, how would you want us to live this out here in Howard County, or in Baltimore, or in Washington, D.C.? Because you're not just about what you're doing here at this zip code. You're about doing what's in the world. How can we be a part?

And many of you are already doing that. Our deaconate, our mercy ministries, you're already doing that. But I think He has a greater mission for us. But we can't be on that mission if we're divided from the start in our own self-righteousness. May the Lord rescue us from that. And may He make us a people who not only hear the music of grace, sing it, and dance it with others even though we might disagree that the pollution of sin might be done away with for the glory of His name and the flourishing of His church. Let's pray together.

Lord, we now ask that you would make us your people who hear the work of your Spirit, who become more attuned to how self-deceived we can become. But, Lord, we thank you that you do not come to us with contempt or shame, but you come to us with grace to bring restoration. Lord, begin with us that your church would not be divided, but rather that we would be united under king Jesus that the church and the gospel and the kingdom of God might flourish, and that we might be about what you are

doing. And, thanks be to God, you not only forgive us of our sins, but you also call us to minister out of grace to those in need. Lord, give us eyes to see. And may we be the hands and feet of Jesus for the restoration of all things. In Jesus's name. Amen.