

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for May 31: Commitment: A path to effectiveness

May 18, 2009

Micah has his finger on the pulse of America. Awesomely blessed throughout our past, uniquely used to missionize the world, built on Christian principles of justice for all, the dominant Christian influence around the world, the leading economy of the world, the protectorate of the weak, the standard of high ideals and opportunity, and its unique adventure in government of the people and for the people, secularism has its foot in the air attempting to trample our national legacy and Christian faith into the dust of affluence and selfishness.

Christianity, the best friend of liberty and justice and the best example of a moral integrity, has seen her influence weakened, not so much by the laws of the land as by her own sins of neglect and disobedience.

Change is happening at an incredible rate. "Meism" is rampant with people demanding freedom without responsibility to man or God. Each individual becomes the center of the universe in matters of faith and morality. Science has dumbed down faith, taking away the mystery of God and faith's relevance to the universe. Scripture is considered a fragment of ancient history, a book of stories for the weak and harmless. Criminal activity is rampant. Teachers give up the classroom because of hostile and belligerent children. Teachers abuse their positions by abusing young people sexually. Trust has given away to in-your-face animosity. Prisons are full and overflowing. Drive-by shootings and mass killings of innocent people are a

kind of American terrorism.

Within this context, Micah speaks again to those in the country and the city, the byways and highways, in homes and the high-rises, in the mountains and valleys: “He has shown you, O man, 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” (Micah 6:8). God expects his people to be faithful regardless of the godlessness that captivates our nation, cities, friends and neighbors.

Micah observed his nation falling apart around him. The misery and dysfunction of Israel brought the most damning judgment of all: “Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations” (6:16). Israel’s rejection of God would result in their becoming a laughing stock of nations and suffer ridicule and contempt. The history of Israel would continue to document this prophecy from the Babylonian captivity to the New Testament Messiah and from Christ to this very day.

Disobedient citizens (Micah 7:1-6)

Disobedient citizens bring about a disappointed prophet and a depressive culture. After years of preaching, teaching and warning the leadership of Israel and her people, the moral climate continued to slide into the abyss. God’s word had not made a difference nor had Micah’s dedicated service and ministry.

Micah admits to himself the perversity of his nation and his utter frustration with the state of affairs. He exclaims, “What misery is mine!” in that “the godly man has perished from the earth, and there is none upright among men” (vv. 1-2).

How many pastors and evangelists have had the same or similar miserable feelings about their church and community? Diligent praying and preaching

regarding the sins of the community and church produced little or no results. Too easy to sit in the lap of luxury and the chair of convenience, the community continues with its sinful and grievous ways while the church turns its head and tips its hat with visions of lesser priorities. How many pastors serve the congregation, take their perks and pay, but refuse to get under the burden of community waywardness or church apathy?

Assuming Micah was accurate with his assessment, even those who frequented the synagogue went untouched and unmoved by the prospects of God's judgment. Such is not unlike hearing the warning of "Fire," but sitting lackadaisical on the couch, hearing "Get down, we are under attack," but not heading for cover; or the captain on the intercom saying, "We are going to crash!" and not getting right with God. Communicating with metaphors, Micah confided it was like being hungry but searching in vain for a grape or fig to quench his starving stomach or feed his heart-broken spirit (v. 1).

Though he could not find a righteous man, he was aware of those who "lie in wait for blood" and those who hunt "his brother with a net" (v. 3). The city was lawless and the citizens did evil deeds diligently (v. 3). The socially elite and city fathers who were to see justice was done took bribes and spoke of the "evil desires" of their souls. Collusion made matters even worse as they networked together for evil and devious deeds. The best person Micah could find was like a "thorn hedge" (vv. 4-7). The watchman failed (v. 4), leaving the city unprotected, and when the enemy breached the walls, total confusion took place.

Micah took the horror of Israel's rebellion to its ultimate failure in describing the dysfunction of family and friends. Neither neighbors nor friends could be trusted. The foulness of man's mind, spirit and behavior reached into the family so that a husband could not confide in his wife, sons and daughters acted with contempt against their parents, and all the people in the home were considered enemies.

Micah gives an excellent description of how society and culture will act when it is everyman for himself, when selfishness rules people's hearts, when there is no respected authority. When God is left out of society's equation, there will be total disorientation, disorganization, and demise.

Dogmatic choice (Micah 7:7)

Out of the despair, Micah affirmed his own faithfulness to the Lord and his choice to be a godly man. A man after God's own heart, Micah would wait patiently to see the end of captivity by Babylon and the salvation that would eventually come. While some of the most evil in Israel would blame God for their plight, Micah placed the blame on the sins of Israel and would live in hope that God might soon see a repentant nation and bring them home again.

Devout conviction (Micah 7:18-20)

Micah's name means "Who is like Jehovah?" At least two answers to the question in his name can be given out of Micah's writings. First, Micah, called as a prophet, sought to live up to his name by being the righteous man of God who could bring the message of judgment and hope out of a credible life in harmony with God. In the terrible conditions of his nation, where a righteous man could not be found, Micah was exemplary as a man of moral purity and godly character. Second is Micah's affirmation that there is no god like Jehovah, the one and only God, the God of Israel. Both are applicable, but the later is most likely.

No doubt in the praise of Jehovah, there is a blast against polytheism and idols. Micah's insight into the heart of God is awesome and accurate. Israel's living God, Jehovah, is distinguished because beyond his judgment and his justice, he "delights to show mercy," that "pardons sin and forgives transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance" (v. 18). God would "again have compassion" and "tread ... sin underfoot and hurl all of our iniquities

into the depths of the sea" (v. 19).

With judgment in the background, the prophet looks ahead to deliverance from captivity, reclaiming the promised home land, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and extending Israel's influence among the nations.

Conclusion

Micah does a masterful job of telling the world of the failure of Israel. Every righteous thing God expected from his people of covenant was rejected. That rejection was total and complete, leaving Israel devoid of moral character, dependable and responsible leadership, and functioning families and neighborhoods.

Though America is sliding further and further away from God, the rule of law and a respectable conscience steadies the demise and slows its recession, at least for the time being. The hand of God still is on America, but there are diminishing returns from the work of God's people who have taken their finger out of the dike. The good still prevails, but evil is struggling to rebalance the scales in its favor. Major issues to be addressed are poverty, injustice, bribery, greed, affluence, substance abuse, perversion, apathy, attitude, broken homes, teenage pregnancies, adultery, Hollywood, youthful disrespect of parents, child abuse and neglect, Internet filth, judicial failure, gangs, and above all, the people of God enjoying life and spurning responsibility to be a conscience for the nation.

The church has tended to institutionalize itself into the fabric of society where it is blessed and sanctioned, grateful for its freedom but taking little responsibility other than listless attention to a sermon on Sunday morning. Obviously, there are many exceptions to this kind of assessment, where good ministry and work are being done, but, the church tends to brag about its distant missions while its Jerusalem dies a thousand spiritual deaths.

Neighbors are hard to reach for Christ given decent living conditions, good jobs, general success, reasonable happiness, only a smidgen of international threat, dependable justice system, open opportunity, low taxes, the right to vote, progressive affluence, caring leadership and a friendly government. Underneath all of this is a seething rottenness, an insipid demoralization, an arrogant attitude, a distrusting constituency, dysfunctional families, disrespectful children, greedy upper class, resentful lower class, racial hatred, mass murders, complex stress, etc., and people are ducking their heads and saying, "Can you believe what is going on in our world?"