

6¹ Listen to what the Lord says:
‘Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.
2 ‘Hear, you mountains, the Lord’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the Lord has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.
3 ‘My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.
4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.
5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.’
6 With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
8 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
9 Listen! The Lord is calling to the city –
and to fear **[the Lord’s]** name is wisdom.
Take note from the rod
that threatens you and the One who appointed it.
10 You store up stolen treasures and use dishonest scales.
11 But I, the Lord, will punish you for cheating with weights
and with measures.
12 You rich people are violent, and everyone tells lies.

13 Because of your sins, will wound you and leave you ruined and defenceless. 14 You will eat, but still be hungry;
you will store up goods, but lose everything—
I, the Lord, will let it all be captured in war.
15 You won’t harvest what you plant or use the oil from your olive trees
or drink the wine from grapes you grow.
16 Jerusalem, this will happen because you followed
the sinful example of kings Omri and Ahab.
Therefore I will give thee up for destruction and its inhabitants to derision; you will bear the reproach of my people.’
7¹ What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat,
none of the early figs that I crave.
2 The faithful have been swept from the land;
not one upright person remains.
Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets.
3 Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts,
the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire
– they all conspire together.
4 The best of them is like a brier,
the most upright worse than a thorn hedge.
The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of your confusion.
5 Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend.
Even with the woman who lies in your embrace
guard the words of your lips.
6 For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother,
a daughter -in-law against her mother-in-law –
a man’s enemies are the members of his own household.

7 But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord,
I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear
me.

8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I
have fallen, I will rise.

Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my
light.

9 Because I have sinned against him, I will
bear the Lord's wrath,
until he pleads my case and upholds my cause.

He will bring me out into the light; I will see
his righteousness.

18 Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the
transgression

of the remnant of his inheritance?

You do not stay angry for ever but delight to
show mercy.

19 You will again have compassion on us;

you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of
the sea.

20 You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love
to Abraham,

as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in
days long ago

We live in worrying times. After decades of growing confidence as a nation, we now seem to be digging ourselves into a deeper and deeper hole. It's not just the total mess of Brexit, but the way we seem to have cast ourselves adrift from our Christian foundations. *When you're sick, you don't want someone to tell you that you're just fine really. You want someone to tell you what the problem is and how you can get better.* This is what God does through Micah and especially in the last 2 chapters of his message.

In chapter 6 God brings his case against his people in the court of creation itself. God had already declared the charges in chs 1 & 3: injustice, oppression, abuse of privilege and power and all of this stemming from idolatry.

The trouble is when we become enmeshed in a sinful lifestyle, we stop listening to those to seek to point it out, even if that person is God Himself. So now God seeks to open their hearts by reminding his people of all that He has done for them, the love and mercy He' shown to them in rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and saving them time and again in the desert.

Have I wearied you with my love?

For us, we look back at, not the Exodus from Egypt, but the even greater Exodus when Jesus rescued us from the slavery of sin through his death on the Cross. *Have we forgotten how much God loves us, what He has done for us.* Has our love for him become purely a matter of habit and confined to an hour and a bit on Sundays, but really we would prefer to keep him shut out of the rest of our week, our relationships, our working practices, our leisure time, our decisions?

God knows that many of his people will say *"But at least we go to church!" "We're always going to the temple, making sacrifices. What more does God want?"* God says: *"You might give all you have to the Temple but if you are not doing what I require of you— doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly with your God — your worship, however impressive in human terms, counts for nothing!"* c.f. *1 Cor 13:3 What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, unless I have love.*

c.f. *Jesus re the Pharisees who worshipped assiduously*

Doing justly is not just punishing the wrong-doer, it is far more positive than that; it is treating everybody, especially the weak and the vulnerable fairly i.e. loving your neighbour whoever that person is who comes across your path.

The word for mercy is *chesed* = loving-kindness and refers also to God's covenant love for his people *viz 7:16 You ... delight to show mercy..*

Doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly with your God is another way of saying the great commandments as summed up by Jesus: *Love God and love..*

6 v.9 Micah says *Listen* – for only a fool would refuse to listen when God himself calls out to us.

His charge is against the city of Jerusalem. We might think none of these charges apply to us as individuals but they do apply to our "city" For as Britons we are part of a hugely privileged society that enjoys much of its wealth effectively at the expense of the poorest in the world. *Cheap goods made in sweat shops,, cheap oil leading to climate change, cheap labour.*

6 vv.14,15 God pronounces the sentence

Everything you sought to achieve will come to nothing.

¹⁴ *You will eat, but still be hungry;* You seek fulfilment in ever greater consumption but you will just feel emptier and emptier.

you will store up goods, but lose everything—You seek fulfilment in possessions but you will lose everything.

¹⁵ *You won't harvest what you plant or use the oil from your olive trees or drink the wine from grapes you grow.* You will not be able to enjoy the fruits of everything that you work for.

I, the Lord, will let it all be captured in war. Everything will be removed as a result of conflict and strife.

What a relevant warning to our society. We've had foretastes and forewarnings of all of this: think of the economic crash of 2008, think of how our mad desire to fulfil every appetite whether for food, or drink, or sex, or experiential highs through drugs has led to greater and greater dissatisfaction in life and higher and higher levels of mental illness.

Our opening of the doors to sex without commitment has led to people having less sex because far fewer people are in committed relationships or indeed any kind of meaningful relationship. Think of the foretastes of climate change disaster – this year even devastating the lives of those living in one of the richest states in the world – the fires in California. Think of the increasing pressures in Europe and USA as a result of growing immigration which is a result of the poverty and instability in the 3rd world often as a result of greedy western policies.

And if you think I am being a bit too apocalyptic one thing is certain: every single one of us will face the judgement of death when we will lose everything we have and have worked for in this world. *viz*

¹² *If anyone builds on this foundation [i.e. of Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* ¹³ *their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.* Gold, silver and costly stones symbolise the lasting material from which the Kingdom of God is built, whereas wood, hay and straw represent the earthly things which however valuable they may appear to us in this life.

disappear on death. As we say, *You can't take it with you.* And that includes not just possessions, but power, privilege, status, position. In fact we often lose many of these things before we die and they certainly count for nothing when we stand before God. So why do we put so much of our time, energy and passion into them?

3rdly there is a hint again that as in Micah's contemporary Isaiah, the brunt of this judgement will be taken by *the servant of the Lord* – sometimes this phrase refers to a faithful minority and sometimes to one individual i.e. the Messiah

viz 6:16 Therefore I will give you[thee] up for destruction and its inhabitants to derision; you[ye] will bear the reproach of my people. [ARSV]

How are we, as hopefully a faithful minority, in the midst of a fallen nation, to respond in the face of such judgement? Do we quake with fear? Do we simply rejoice that Jesus has shouldered God's judgement in our place? Or do we bury our heads in the sand?

Micah's response is grief, faith and hope.

Firstly **Grief:** 7 v.1 *What misery is mine! = Woe is me.* It might seem at first that Micah is grieving merely about the loss of wine and figs - *I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.* #1st-world-problems!

But v.2 quickly corrects this impression:

² *The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains.*

The grapes and the figs are a picture of the faithful followers of God bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit. Micah's contemporary Isaiah sang a prophetic song *My beloved had a vineyard (Isaiah ch.5)* all about his beloved who created this vineyard and did everything he could to tend and nurture it.

And yet when harvest time came it only produced sour grapes. The whole song is really about the Lord and Israel, whom he formed, tended and nurtured and who only produced bad fruit.

It's a picture that Jesus also constantly uses. And in a similar way to Micah, He himself wept over the city of Jerusalem because of its blindness, stubbornness and corruption. Micah's grief foreshadows the grief of Jesus.

Do we see our city – our society – through the eyes of Jesus?

Do we weep over our society as Micah and Jesus wept over Jerusalem?

Yes we might weep over Brexit and the mess the politicians are making of it, we might weep over the divisions in society that it reveals. But do we weep over the underlying spiritual causes and above all the turning away from God and his ways. Micah and Jesus grieve on behalf of God but also for the city itself because they can see how such rejection of God will lead to its ruin: not necessarily apocalyptic destruction but the complete breakdown of society and of relationships: *Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips.*

Me too movement. *App for Men seeking to record the consent of the woman before they make love in case at a later date she might try to accuse him of rape.*

Such lack of trust then infects our homes and families: ⁶ *For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter -in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies are the members of his own household.*

It is only when we truly see our society as Jesus does that our natural complacency begins to melt and that we begin seriously to pray and perhaps begin to take action. As followers of Jesus we are called to grieve - but not to despair. *v.7 But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me.* Micah watches – he looks to the Lord and waits in faith and in hope. When we look to the Lord – gaze upon him in worship, or meditate on his word, we remind ourselves who He is.

v.18. Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Knowing this, Micah knew that no situation, however dark and dire, is beyond hope; no person is beyond God's grace. *Though I have fallen, I will rise.*

Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. As we approach Christmas, we are reminded once again how when the world was so dark and God's people so lost and defeated, God stole in as tiny baby to bring light and life and rescue.

Micah's faith meant he could look beyond God's judgement to his complete restoration to new life and freedom: ⁹ *Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath... until he pleads my case and upholds my cause.*

He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

For us it is even more wonderful: We have sinned, but **Jesus** has borne the Lord's wrath and now pleads our case and upholds our cause.

Yes the world is in a mess and it may well become messier still, but Micah reminds us that God is on the case. He has a plan - and being God, He will ensure that plan comes to pass. It is a plan that like God embodies justice, mercy, faithfulness, and loving-kindness. It is a plan to redeem his people. That is, not only to rescue them but to bless them and transform them into the people He created them to be. And then his plan is through them to redeem the world. We have already seen God put that plan into action in the birth and life and death and resurrection of Christ. And now there is a pause when often it seems that the forces of chaos and destruction are taking over. But God is still here; still on the case. And, to quote Christian author Simon Ponsoby and pastor at St Aldates in Oxford: *In the end, the Lamb wins.*