

Accusation of the Nation

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[0 : 00] But we are going to be reading our Bibles now, and I'd like to ask you to turn to the Old Testament, the prophecy of Micah, and we're going to be reading in Micah chapter 6. It's near the end of the Old Testament, a bit after Hosea and Amos, and then Jonah, and then you'll find Micah.

And a little earlier this year, Stephen, or was it last year, Stephen Ballingall has been preaching us through this prophet. We're coming back to it now to finish it off, chapter 6, and next week, chapter 7, and I'm going to read this evening Micah chapter 6.

Hear what the Lord says. Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord. And you enduring foundations of the earth. For the Lord has an indictment against his people.

And he will contend with Israel. O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery.

[1 : 13] And I sent before you Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam. And my people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, devised, and what Balaam, the son of Baal, answered him.

And what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord. With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?

The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. The voice of the Lord cries to the city, and it is sound wisdom to fear your name.

[2 : 25] Hear of the rod, and of him who appointed it. Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness, and 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.

Therefore I strike you with a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins. You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger within you.

You shall put away, but not preserve. And what you preserve, I shall give to the sword. You shall sow, but not reap. You shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil.

You shall tread grapes, but not drink wine. Amen. For you have kept the statutes of Omri, and all the works of the house of Ahab.

[3 : 41] And you have walked in their councils, that I may make you a desolation. And your inhabitants are hissing. And so, you shall bear the scorn of my people.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this solemn word. And it is a solemn word, isn't it, of God speaking to his own people. But the Bible is full of such solemn and difficult warnings, as we were seeing just this morning.

Well, welcome back to the book of Micah. And it would be very helpful for you to have chapter 6 open in front of you as we go through this passage together this evening. But before we get stuck into these verses, let me tell you the story of the whiny child and the righteous judgment of mashed potatoes.

I want you to picture the whiniest child you know. Nothing is good enough for them. Their feet are too sore. Their milk is too cold. Their milk is too hot. Their sunglasses are too dark. The sky is too

big.

And on and on and on and on. Well, that was this girl. And one night she was presented with a lovingly home-cooked meal which included a delicious helping of mashed potato, one of her favorite things in the whole world.

[5 : 07] But of course, they were too fluffy. The peas weren't mushy enough. The sausages were too squidgy. Cue the mother of this child so very lovingly warning her that if she didn't stop whining, she would wear the mashed potatoes as a hat.

But the child carried on. She wanted juice, not water. She wanted the green plate, not the blue one. And she went on and on and on. Well, in a stroke of exceptional parental judgment, the mother swiftly picks up the plate of mashed potato and smashes it on the head of the child.

You can just imagine it, can't you? The room goes quiet and the terrified siblings look on as the only thing they can hear is a small dollop of mashed potato drop onto the floor.

She was warned, but she carried on regardless. And for the avoidance of doubt, I can confirm that this whiny child grew up to become my wife.

We all know what the ungrateful child is like, mainly because at various stages, we've all been one. But tonight in our passage, we're going to see what happens when the most blessed, privileged, fortunate people on the whole planet act like a petulant, ungrateful child.

[6 : 33] The prophet Micah has been preaching to a nation behaving badly. The people of Israel have abandoned the Lord and were living lives that displayed it. They were treating people shamefully, cheating, stealing, and doing everything they could to not look like the people of the Lord, like they worshipped him.

And because of that, God raised up Micah, a prophet sent with a message of coming judgment that the Lord wouldn't stand for their sin endlessly, but would send them into exile if they refused to repent.

Israel at that point was split into two kingdoms, one in the north and one in the south of the country. And Micah was preaching to the south, and he told them that they were given front row seats to the destruction of their neighbors to the north, watching on as the Assyrian army came in to destroy them and ravage them and take away everything they had.

The Lord was using the military might of the Assyrian army to punish the north for rebelling against them. And the south were meant to look on, see the destruction that was going to be coming their way, and take decisive action to avoid the same fate.

But as we join our passage tonight, over 20 years have passed since the northern kingdom has fallen and was exiled. And the southern kingdom, after decades of Micah warning them, have done nothing.

[8 : 17] They've witnessed the north be torn away from their homes, exiled away to another country, and have done nothing in response. They've seen God's judgment in action and decided to ignore it, to go on with their lives, business as usual.

Our chapter tonight splits into two parts, where we firstly see that the covenant that God has made with his people has been broken. And secondly, we see that covenant being enforced, the consequences of breaking the covenant.

Now the word covenant doesn't appear in this chapter or in the book of Micah at all. But there are traces of it everywhere. Everywhere. God is the covenant God, and his people are in relationship with him.

Promised to be his very own people. Distinct among all the nations. One of the big questions that the book of Micah asks is, what will the covenant God do with his covenant-breaking people? And tonight, we get towards getting an answer on that. Our first section paints a picture of God sending a message to his people.

[9 : 31] So here's what happens when the covenant God speaks with his covenant-breaking people. As we see in verses 1 to 8, the covenant broken. And this section has three voices speaking, so we'll listen to each of them in turn to hear what they have to say.

The Lord speaks first in verses 1 to 5. His people respond in verses 6 and 7. And then Micah responds at the end of verse 8. So what does the Lord have to say to his people who have been ignoring him for decades?

Well, he extends an invitation for them to join him for a day in court. Verses 1 and 2 function as a court summons as the Lord opens up his case against the people.

The mountains and foundations of the earth are even called in as witnesses to see all that's happening. Because they're the ones who have witnessed how the Lord has treated his people over the generations.

And they can vouch for how the people have treated the Lord in response. But the Lord is, at the end of verse 2, against Israel.

[10:41] He's contending with them. He's against his people. He's coming to accuse them. As the party who has been wronged, God is taking his complaint directly to the people of Israel.

And what does he accuse them of? Verse 3. Oh my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you?

Answer me. Simply put, God is asking them, Have I bored you? Are you exhausted by me? Is being in relationship with me such a drain to you? We don't hear the people's answer just yet because the Lord dives straight into his defense.

The Lord reminds the people of what he has done for them. Just some of the ways in which he has graciously cared for and provided for them. Before the Lord stepped in, Israel was a nation of slaves living in someone else's land.

[11:49] But verse 4. God brought them up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He redeemed them. Did that bore them? Did the stories of how the Lord miraculously saved them through the ten plagues, did that bore them?

Did it tire them out? Was God saving them through the parting of the Red Sea while crushing their enemies? Quite tedious, predictable, boring.

And he didn't just get them out of the country and stick them in the middle of nowhere with no help. He gave them Moses, their leader and mediator. He gave them Aaron, their high priest.

And he gave them Miriam, who was a prophet and had musical gifts. He gave the people real leadership. Ordained by him. So that they weren't left on their own, but they were led well.

Led properly. And verse 5 adds to this in that the Lord gave the people protection. When Israel was traveling towards the promised land, Balak the king of Moab, he saw the great number of Israelites and heard about what God was doing through them.

[12:58] And he was threatened. He was terrified of them. This nation of slaves, he was terrified of them. So he told Balaam to put a curse on them, hoping to destroy the Israelites.

But God intervened. And because of God's protection, Balaam refused to curse the Israelites. And instead, blessed them. Once he'd done that, God's care for his people continued.

He protected them all the way through to Gilgal, when they had finally crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land. And all of this shows not just God's goodness and his kindness, but verse 5, his righteousness.

All the way, he led and protected them with perfect righteousness. He's not the guilty party here. He's done nothing wrong, but has treated Israel with loving kindness. And Israel wasn't to just learn this information as events to put in a history textbook somewhere, ready to sit an exam on the topic.

[14:07] Instead, they were to cherish them. For God's saving acts display that he is their God. It might have happened 700 years before Micah was written, but it's their salvation, it's their people.

And they really do belong to him. They're in covenant relationship, because the grace of the Lord has shown in making them his own.

And that's what makes their response even more hurtful. Have their hearts been warmed by the reminder of how God has loved and cared for them? Let's hear how the people respond in verses 6 and 7.

With a great dollop of religious rubbish. Verse 6. With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

[15:21] The Israelites respond with an over-the-top, exaggerated list of sacrifices they could make to appease God. This isn't the list of a humble and contrite heart, but of a petulant child who's saying, you're so unreasonable, it's nothing going to make you happy.

What do you want me to do for you, give you the whole world? They've thrown their toys right out the pram. They take the sacrificial system, which itself is a product of God's grace, God's gracious provision, because he knows that his people are sinful and will need it.

And they turn it into a get-out-of-jail-free card. What is it this time, Lord? A calf? A thousand rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil?

My own child? Will that finally make you happy? Clearly, they do think that God is a burden on them.

that he has wearied them and is asking far too much. Their religious response exposes their sinful hearts.

[16:31] That they are not living up to their covenant responsibilities. Being in relationship with the Lord and benefiting from all the blessings he gives brings responsibilities as well as joys.

And in Micah's response to them, he brings them right to the heart of it. Verse 8. He has told you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah says, you know what God wants. He's made it plain to you in his word and it's remarkably simple. Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly or carefully with the Lord.

That's what the Lord wants from his people. Not some mad frenzy of sacrifices like the pagans do. God can't be bought like that. But he desires faithful lives, fruitful lives that display his lordship.

He's not interested in your sacrifices when you're knowingly continuing in sin. Micah's just picturing humble repentance, the obedience of faith.

[17:57] Not 10,000 rivers of oil but loving God and loving your neighbor. It's worth taking a moment to say clearly that this isn't a salvation of works.

Micah isn't saying that by doing these three things that you're saved because it's all rooted in God's grace towards his people. That always comes first both then and now. Micah's reasserting how those who have already received God's grace are to live in relationship with their God.

This is how you live in fellowship with him. Not the big brash offerings of someone trying to cover up their present sin but the quietly faithful life of someone walking with the Lord.

Quite often verse 8 is used as a call for social action. A call to make the world more just to fight for justice on a political scale. But that's not where Micah's aiming here and it's obvious by looking at the context.

You can see that quite clearly. And we ought to be faithful to Micah's purpose because it's the Lord's purpose. Micah doesn't want us to sit up and take a look around the world outside and start pointing fingers and judging it outside.

[19:12] But instead he uses this verse for us to take a deep look in our own hearts and see where we aren't being kind where we're not doing right where we're not being humble in our walk with the Lord.

This verse isn't a stick to beat those around you with but it's a mirror for you to humbly look into yourself showing up all the ways in which you fail. Well, the Lord has accused his people and they have come up guilty.

Their relationship with him is all wrong. Their over-exaggerated and overly religious response exposes their ungrateful hearts.

They're bored of the covenant they enjoy with God and are acting like ungrateful, petulant children. Having just seen the thoroughly wrong response to God's grace in an ungrateful and presumptuous nation, we're now going to have a brief pause while we listen to a song from the band.

Alas, and did my saviour bleed. And please listen carefully to the words as they picture the right response to God saving us in an act of pure grace for us standing as God's covenant people on this side of the cross.

[20:35] singing the χ acceso Amen. Was that sacred For such a One hour's Of the way?

Was it For sins that I had done He suffered On the Tree?

Amazing Pity Grace on And Happy On Degree Well Might the Sun in Darkness Light and Shot his Glory Is it When God the Mighty Maker Died For Man The Creature Said So Might I Hide My Blushing Face While His Dear Cross Appears Dissolve Dissolve

My Heart In Thankfulness And Melt My Eyes To Tears Dear Savior How Can I Repent The Dead The Dead All Love I Own Lord Take My Very Self I Pray All I Give To To You Alas And Did My Savior Bleat And Did My Sovereign Die Amazing Pity

Grace On And Love Be Not De Dream Let's continue in our passage together as we see in verses 9 to 16 the covenant enforced.

[24 : 05] Because the people have rejected the covenant, the Lord simply must act in judgment, for he is just, he's a righteous God.

Israel have been acting like the petulant child who's been given everything they could ever want from a place of pure loving kindness and turn their back on the giver of those gifts.

Their sin has gone on for so long and slowly dripped into every part of their lives that when God looks at them, well, they don't look like his covenant people anymore.

Let's read verses 10 to 12 together and as we do so, remember who this is speaking about. As we read this, keep this in your mind that this is God's covenant people who were chosen to be a royal priesthood, a light to the nations, distinct and special among all the peoples of the world.

Here's what the Lord says about them in verse 10. Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked and the scant measure that is accursed?

[25 : 18] 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.

Wickedness, cheating, violence, lies, deceit. This is the portrait that God paints of his covenant people, his people, Israel.

Verse 10, they profit from wickedness, making money by unsavory means any way they can. Verse 11, they steal at the marketplace by constantly lying about what they're selling, deliberately charging people for more than their product is worth with some creative accounting.

Verse 12, they're violent liars who cannot be trusted. And we see plenty of evidence of that in the earlier chapters in Micah. The people's covenant breaking is the presenting issue on the surface. But God's character is the deeper matter here. It's the 80% of the iceberg sitting beneath the surface. How can God go on letting his people get away with this?

[26 : 39] How can a righteous God just let his people keep on hurting others? Evicting widows from their homes. How can he let his covenant people do that?

And they are his people. He calls them my people, my people, verse 3 and 5. They've been doing this for decades. And is God just going to let this keep on going forever?

That's the question that the Lord is asking of himself here. Can I forget all the wealth you've earned from stealing land from the poor? Can I let you go free when you proudly steal from my people with your false weights and inflated prices at the market?

While his people are definitely in the wrong, God is almost putting himself on trial here. Can he be righteous if he lets all this slide?

Well, thankfully in verses 13 to 16 we see that he won't. He won't be endlessly patient while his people make a mockery of him. But will judge their sin fairly and fully.

[27 : 52] How is God going to judge them? Well, he's going to strike them grievously. God doesn't mince his words here, but is about to unleash a severe strike on his people as judgment for all they have done against him.

And he's emphatic about it being him who's doing it. This is his judgment on the people. It's not just a couple of years of bad weather or a lack of rain.

It's not just circumstance. But it's him and his work. God striking the people is going to take the shape of making everything they do exhausting.

And with no reward. Everything's going to be futile. Verse 14, they're going to eat, but never be satisfied. They'll preserve, but nothing's going to keep.

Verse 15, they're going to sow crops, but not harvest a thing. And they're going to tread olives and grapes with no oil or wine coming from it.

[28 : 56] In any nation, this is severe. But in a nation like Israel, which is entirely focused on agriculture, this would be devastating. And these are covenant curses.

If you want to later, you can go and read Leviticus chapter 26. It spells out the ways in which Israel would be blessed if they walked with the Lord. Or cursed if they rebelled against him.

In the hope that these curses would make them realize how foolish they'd been. And encourage them to repent towards the Lord. They were plainly written out in the law.

They were designed for kindness so that people would repent. God's people knew them. And he was promising that they weren't empty words. He would enforce his own law.

For verse 16, the people have abandoned walking with him. And instead are walking with Omri and Ahab. Two evil kings of the northern kingdom.

[29 : 58] The kingdom that had just been destroyed. Their reigns were marked by corruption and crushing those who dared to oppose them. They were idolaters.

And the conduct of the country was molded by that. It seeped into their culture in the form of sin. Therefore, it follows that just as the north was recently punished.

The southern kingdom would be too. They'll be made utterly desolate. A laughing stock among the nations. Everyone would hear of their shame.

When he says that the inhabitants will be made a hissing. It means they're going to be made a thing of horror. That everyone outside of Israel would look at them in their sorry state. And mock them. Knowing that they'd brought it on themselves.

They will one day bear their own scorn. God wasn't going to let them continue in their exploitative sin forever. Their rebellion against him would be judged.

[31 : 03] And they would have to answer for what they had done. God isn't someone to be messed with. God is going to be judged. And his kindness, his patience, isn't to be presumed upon or taken for granted.

Because he's righteous. And he will judge the sin. Even of those who claim communion with him. If they're not submitting to him in heart. Just because he was patient with their sin for decades.

Giving them repeated opportunities to repent. Sending a prophet to tell them to do exactly that. It doesn't mean that this period of grace has no time limit on it.

Real judgment is coming for all who rebel against the Lord. So verse 9. It's sound wisdom to fear his name.

The Lord has accused his people. They've come up with a defense that only serves to make them even more guilty. And God will act righteously upon their sin.

[32 : 08] I think that this passage begs two questions of us. And I hope that we as a church family tonight are willing to face them straight on. Head on. Firstly. Firstly.

Are you living today? Like God will really judge sin? Just as the pictures we see in the Old Testament of future promised land.

Are a sign of the greater joys to come. These covenant curses. Are a sign of greater judgment to come. Not just of crops failing.

Or being exiled from your country for a time. But of permanently. Eternally. Being exiled from the Lord. And all of his goodness. All of any goodness. These curses are just a taste.

Of what's to come for those who don't repent towards the Lord. And for those in the church who have rebelled against him. And are wearied of him. Bored of hearing about him and his demands.

[33 : 09] And wanting just to shut him up with a few token gestures. The judgment the Lord promises. Is forever drenched. In grace.

For in telling us that it will happen. He gives real opportunity to repent. And we ought to be very grateful that the Lord is patient with our sin. Otherwise there wouldn't be a human race to redeem.

We would have been wiped off the face of the earth a long time ago. But don't be fooled into thinking that. Just because you're getting away with the continued life in your sin.

The continued sin in your life now. Without facing obvious judgment. That it means you've got away with it eternally. Also there's real comfort in this message.

That God will judge. Because since the Lord is righteous. He simply cannot let sin slide. He's not going to brush it under the carpet. Even if the person is very religious.

[34 : 12] Like those Israelites. Even if they're part of his covenant community today. Even if they're part of the church. No sin will go unanswered. Whether that is through judgment falling on that person themselves eternally.

Or whether Christ took it on himself on the cross. It's only for the Lord to know. But we can take comfort knowing that sin never goes unanswered.

Because the Lord is a righteous judge. In light of that I'd like to ask you secondly. Is your religion real?

Israel in their defense offered to go to extreme lengths. To show their commitment to God. And we can't look at that and feel smug in what we do. We might think well.

I don't offer over the top sacrifices. I would never fall into a trap like that. I would never try to you know. Pay God off. But is the faith you claim. The covenant status you claim.

[35 : 15] Impacting your day to day life. Because real relationship with the Lord. Must impact our real lives. God saw through their religious works.

And saw the consequences of rebelling against him. In the way they worked. In the marketplace. Their honesty outside of the temple. The Israelites. They were putting on a great show on the Sabbath. But outside of it. They were empty. With no real substance in what they were doing. The Lord is there. As you decide how to spend your paycheck each month. He's there. As you speak to your neighbor. About your other neighbors. He's there. As you teach that class at school. He's there. As you air your opinions. About politics. And social issues. He's there. [36 : 16] As you study for that exam. And plan out your future. He's there. When you choose priorities. For your own children. He's there. As you prepare that sermon. Or Bible study. But he's not there. To look over your shoulder. And judge you harshly. Or jump on the first bit. Of slight unfaithfulness. But he's with you. As your covenant God. Who has saved you. Out of pure grace. Helping you by his spirit. To live for him. Are you distinctively displaying your faith. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Or are you living just like. Everyone else around you. Except with the word. Christian. Attached to you. You put on a good show. On a Sunday. Before I finish. [37 : 12] I do want to make sure. Something is exceedingly clear. That not one person. Listening tonight. Will be able to say yes. In every area of their life. Of course we won't. Because well. Sin is a vicious disease. That it soaks into our bones. So let's rejoice. In the fact. That we can sing those words. That Matt sang earlier for us. My God. Why would you shed your blood. So pure. And undefiled. To make. A sinful one like me. Your chosen. Precious child. But make no mistake. There is. A huge difference. Between the one. Who sins. Over and over. And yet comes back. In repentance. Versus the one. Who knows. Exactly how they're sinning. And carries on. Because they think. They're getting away with it. That's not real faith. [38 : 11] But it will have. Very real consequences. The Lord has graciously warned us. And let's thank him that he has. Real faith knows. That the Lord has shown. Love beyond measure to us. In every way we could ever imagine. And he wants relationship with us. He wants us to walk with him. To belong with him. And fellowship with the maker. Of heavens and earth. So brothers and sisters. Let's pray that by God's grace. We live up to that calling. Let's pray together. Our Lord and Father. Father. We are sorry. That we your people. So often take your kindness. And mercy and grace. For granted. [39 : 14] Please remind us Father. Of all the grace you have bestowed upon us. Most of all in the life we have. Through the death of your son. Freely given. For our salvation. Please help us Father. To live up to your covenant calling. To display real faith. In our day to day lives. Motivated by all the grace you have shown to us. In Jesus name. Amen.