

INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth message in the series, "The Major Message of the Minor Prophets." It's unfortunate that these small books in the Bible are often ignored, because they contain many powerful insights into how God relates to individuals and to nations. The majority of these prophets spoke God's word of warning to Israel and Judah, but they also were sent to other nations as well.

We've uncovered a recurring pattern: A nation is blessed, and this leads to affluence and apathy and they slide into immorality. God sends a prophet to warn that unless they repent He will send judgment. If the nation turns to God, they are spared His punishment. If they ignore the message, then the result is national disaster. In most cases, the warnings of the prophets were ignored.

In our lives there have been events so life-changing that we remember where we were when we first heard about them. Americans in the Greatest Generation remember where they were when they heard the news about Pearl Harbor. Those of my generation remember where they were when they heard about JFK's assassination. We all remember where we were when we first got the news about the attacks on 9/11.

And many of us remember where we were on a cold morning in January of 1986. It was a chilly 36 degrees at Cape Canaveral when we heard that the Space Shuttle Challenger was launched. It was 15 degrees colder than any previous Space Shuttle launch. 76 seconds after takeoff a ½ wide O-ring hardened by the cold failed causing the solid-rocket booster to explode. All seven crewmembers were killed. The really tragic thing about this disaster is that it could have been prevented. The NASA officials had been warned, but they ignored the warning.

Six months earlier Morton Thiokol engineer Roger Boisjoly discovered that the O-rings would harden and fail when subjected to low temperatures. He sent this memo to a VP at Morton Thiokol: "It is my honest and very real fear that if we do not take immediate action to dedicate a team to solve the problem, then we stand in jeopardy of losing a flight." On the night before the launch Boisjoly and three other engineers warned about the O-ring problem and advised that the launch be postponed. However an upper management decision from Morton Thiokol and NASA was made and their warning was ignored. We all know the tragic results.

God sent prophets to do exactly what Roger Boisjoly did—to warn that unless there are some changes, disaster would follow. Israel and Judah both ignored the warnings of the prophets, and they were carried into exile. Will America listen to the warnings or ignore God's call for us to return to Him?

Today, we study the powerful prophecy of Micah, whose name means, "Who is like God?"

Micah 1:1-9. "The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign Lord may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the

earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?

'Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.'

Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself."

Jeremiah has been called "The Weeping Prophet," but he wasn't the only prophet who wept. The sinful conditions in Israel and Judah so broke his heart that Micah found himself wailing like a jackal and moaning like an owl. Sometimes inside the city limits of Tyler you can hear a pack of coyotes wailing; it's an eerie sound. Can you imagine how it must have sounded for a preacher to make a sound like that? Micah was heartbroken when he looked at how God had blessed Israel and Judah, yet the people continued to ignore God's Word.

During this series I've been applying these prophetic principles to America. Maybe it's time for some of us to weep and wail about America's moral condition. Will God send judgment against America? Maybe we're experiencing it right now.

We've had plenty of warnings. Four decades ago God's prophet in Garden Valley, Leonard Ravenhill, wrote: "Compared to the ancient civilizations, America was born only yesterday. But, and here is the rub, she is dying today and will be dead tomorrow unless there is a spiritual awakening... America can die, but it would have to be by suicide. It would be because she thinks God is dead, and because she believes that His laws, which, when broken, have felled every nation that ever lived, do not, in her hour of freedom and affluence, include her. America fights a battle that cannot be won at the ballot box. Her need is not the "new morality" of the hour, but the new morals based on the old laws of God." (*America is Too Young to Die*, p. 33)

Micah preached his message 2,700 years ago, but it is a message we need to hear today. First let's examine the signs of a nation in moral decline and the promise that God gives to us.

I. THE EVIDENCE OF A NATION IN MORAL DECLINE

I grew up watching Perry Mason, a television show about a sharp lawyer. In fact, until I was 17 years old and God called me to preach, I was planning on becoming a lawyer. It was always a dramatic part of the show when Perry Mason would introduce a piece of evidence that would sway the jury in favor of his client. The prophet Micah employs courtroom language as he pictures God as a prosecuting attorney presenting a case against Israel. The Divine Prosecutor presents ample evidence of the moral decline of the nation. In Micah 6:1-2 we read, "Listen to

what the Lord says: 'Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O 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.'" In Micah's prophecy, God presents three sources of evidence of moral decline—things we're seeing in America.

A. God's Exhibit A of moral decline was corrupt politicians

God has a word addressed to the leaders of the nation, the ones we would call the politicians. He asks, "Listen, leaders of Jacob, leaders of Israel: Don't you know anything of justice? Haters of good, lovers of evil: Isn't justice in your job description? But you skin my people alive. You rip the meat off their bones. You break up the bones, chop the meat, and throw it in a pot for cannibal stew." The time's coming, though, when these same leaders will cry out for help to God, but he won't listen. He'll turn his face the other way because of their history of evil." (Micah 3:1-4 *The Message*)

When Tom Brokaw was anchor for the NBC nightly news he used to have a segment entitled, "The Fleecing of America," in which he pointed out the price Americans were paying on government spending that was out of control. I think he could have put those verses from Micah in the teleprompter and no one would have noticed!

There have always been corrupt politicians, even during Micah's time. We've seen our share of them in America over the past few years, whether it's a congressman using inside information to beat the stock market, or a governor trying to sell a Senate seat to the highest bidder.

Let me give you some more historical evidence to support the fact that our Founding Fathers loved God and loved the Bible. Recent historians have tried to alter the picture of George Washington and describe him as a Deist. A Deist believes in an impersonal God who isn't involved in His creation. But let me read to you an entry from his personal prayer journal when Washington was 20 years old. Does this sound like the prayer of a disinterested Deist? "O most glorious God ... remember that I am but dust and remit my transgressions, negligences, and ignorances, and cover them all with the absolute obedience of thy dear Son, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ offered upon the cross for me ... wash away my sin in the immaculate blood of the Lamb; and purge my heart by thy Holy Spirit."

Our Constitution has worked for two centuries, because it was written with a presupposition that Americans would be a God-fearing, moral nation. John Adams our second President wrote: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

B. God's Exhibit B of moral decline was cowardly pastors

Micah brought this indictment against the priests who ministered during his time: Here is God's Message to the prophets, the preachers who lie to my people: "For as long as they're well paid and well fed, the prophets preach, 'Isn't life wonderful! Peace to all!' ... The sun has set on the prophets. They've had their day; from now on it's night. Visionaries will be confused, experts

will be all mixed up. They'll hide behind their reputations and make lame excuses to cover up their God-ignorance." (Micah 3:5, 7 *The Message*)

Now excuse me for a minute while I preach against myself and every other pastor who may read or hear this message. America is in a moral mess, but I don't blame the corrupt politicians; they've always been around. I think the fault lies with the preachers—*we're* to blame that our nation has spiraled out of control. We've been cowered into submission thinking that if we said anything even sounding political that the big bad IRS was coming to get us. But more than that I believe pastors have resisted speaking the hard truth because we want people to like us and we didn't want to say anything that might offend someone. Like Micah wrote, we've been saying, "Life is wonderful! Everything is fine!" Instead, we should have been sounding the alarm.

There have been several spiritual awakenings during American history, and one of the leaders of the second great awakening in the 19th century was Charles G. Finney, a lawyer who became an evangelist. He was pretty scary looking, and it is reported that Finney could walk into a factory and under his steely gaze, workers would fall on their knees in repentance. He had this to say about cowardly preachers: "If immorality prevails in the land, the fault is ours in a great degree. If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it. Let us not ignore this fact, my dear brethren; but let us lay it to heart, and be thoroughly awake to our responsibility in respect to the morals of this nation."

I believe Finney was right. The fault doesn't lie with the politicians or the people as much as it does with us, the pastors who have been too afraid to speak the truth. So, I need to offer a public apology to you. I've already confessed it to God. I apologize for not being more direct and confrontational about the sin that exists in our nation. And some of you may not like what I have to say, but I can no longer remain silent.

People have asked me what I thought about the election this past week, so here goes: I pledge to pray for President Obama and respect the office of President, because God's word is clear that we should pray for those in authority over us. However, I believe America missed a good chance to put our nation back on track to God and to Biblical morality. But instead of stemming the flow of blood from the abortion clinics, instead of protecting the sanctity of marriage, we have thumbed our nose at God. As we stand at both a fiscal cliff and a moral cliff, America has voted. We're moving forward. And when you're on a cliff, forward is the only direction you should avoid.

C. God's Exhibit C of moral decline was complacent people

Micah continued to present God's case against a nation. He said: "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. [those are the politicians and the preachers] Yet they [the people] lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us.' Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets."

(Micah 3:11-12) The people say, "Everything's going to be okay. God is with us. Nothing bad will happen." And God says, "It's plowing time. Get ready, I've got my heavenly John Deere tractor revved up and I'm headed your way with a 16 bottom plow."

When you look at the evidence of the last election, it seems most Americans don't believe or don't care that we're in a moral tailspin. All four states that voted on legalizing same-sex unions as marriage approved it. The party that celebrated abortion retained the White House. But let me remind you that saying something is LEGALLY right doesn't mean it is MORALLY right. What does it mean for us who embrace Biblical values? It means we need to prepare to be a shrinking minority in our nation. It means we must continue to be salt and light in a culture that is becoming increasingly more corrupt and increasingly darker.

Millions of Americans didn't even care enough to vote. An AP article on the front of the Tyler paper last Friday reported that 94 million registered voters didn't vote in the election last Tuesday. In fact a smaller number of Americans voted than in 2004 and 2008. Evangelical Christians make up about 23% of our population, so if the same degree of voter apathy applies, then about 24 million evangelical Christians didn't vote.

President Ronald Reagan made an astute observation almost 45 years ago. In a speech he gave at a rally for Barry Goldwater on March 5, 1964, he said: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover they can vote themselves largesse [money] out of the public treasury. From that moment on the majority always vote for the candidate promising the most benefits from the treasury with the result that democracy always collapses over a loose fiscal policy."

To put it another way, the famous French Historian Alex de Tocqueville who studied America in the 19th century observed: "The American Republic will endure, until politicians realize they can bribe the people with their own money."

Through Micah, God had some harsh things to say about a nation in moral decline, but as with every message from God, there is a powerful promise of HOPE.

II. THE PROMISE TO A NATION IN SPIRITUAL DESPERATION

Not only was Israel in a time of moral decline, there was spiritual desperation. They had forsaken God and turned to worshipping idols. America is a land in need of a Savior. Like Israel, we're a nation of corrupt politicians, but not all of them are corrupt. We're a nation of cowardly pastors, but some of us are changing that. And we're a nation of complacent people and I challenge you to ask God to move you out of your apathy.

Things may seem bad, but when it's darkest, that's when light is most needed, and Micah saw a distant light in the darkness. He saw a pinprick of light that would eventually grow into the brilliant light of a millions suns. He saw Jesus coming to give light where there was only darkness. He wrote: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times...He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the

majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.” (Micah 5:2, 4-5)

730 years before Jesus was born, Micah saw that He was going to be born in Bethlehem. When the Magi came looking for the one who was born King of the Jews, the scholars of Herod the Great directed them to Bethlehem based on this prophecy.

Micah saw that Jesus wouldn't be just any shepherd. This Shepherd's origins were from ancient times, literally from everlasting ages ago. Even though this Shepherd would be born in a little obscure village, His worldwide impact would be great. Of course, we know now that the Shepherd Micah prophesied was Jesus. Israel desperately needed this Shepherd and so does America. There are three things Micah said this Shepherd would accomplish, and these are things we desperately need in America today.

A. We need a Shepherd to give us guidance

We're like sheep in need of a Shepherd. Isaiah wrote, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) Sheep are dumb. You'll never see trained sheep in the circus for a good reason: They are too dumb to be trained.

Like dumb sheep, America is stumbling around looking for guidance. And this Shepherd, Jesus, shows us the direction God requires of us. The Bible says, "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? He has showed 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 6:7-8)

If you're wondering what God expects of you, you don't have to wonder any longer. He wants you to treat others with fairness (justice). He wants you to show kindness (loving mercy). And He wants you to have a personal relationship with Him in which you demonstrate humility.

B. We need a Shepherd to give us security

We have Social Security, but it doesn't seem very secure right now. We have a Department of Homeland Security, and even a National Security Agency, but most Americans feel insecure.

Micah observed that part of Israel's problem was the breakdown of families. The family is the basic building block of a society and when families fail, a culture crumbles. Michael Dowd, a campaign advisor for George W. Bush, commented that the GOP is a "Mad Men" party (1950s) but we're living in a "Modern Family" (2012) America.

Listen to Micah's description of fractured families and see if it doesn't sound like our culture. "For a son dishonors 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. But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior." (Micah 7:6-7)

Micah says that in the midst of a crumbling nation and a crumbling family unit, our only HOPE is in the Lord! He is our only source of security.

C. We need a Shepherd to give us peace

The greatest problem we face in America isn't the economy. It isn't abortion or the redefinition of marriage. Our biggest problem is sin. All the other problems are manifestations of the basic problem of every person—sin. The government doesn't have an answer for the sin problem, but the Bible does. Remember, Micah's name meant, "Who is like God?" Micah answers his name in one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible. "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19)

The deepest valley in the ocean is deeper than the highest mountain on earth. Mt. Everest soars 29,000 feet, but the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean drops to 36,000 feet below sea level. When you place your faith in Jesus, that's where God puts your sins. I love the fact that the Bible says that God HURLS our sins into the depths of the sea—He doesn't just drop them overboard, He throws them into the depths of the sea and puts a NO FISHING sign over them. That knowledge will give you a peace that passes all understanding!

CONCLUSION

After two years of campaigning, life goes on. We've seen the division of blue states and red states. We are a divided nation. We've watched the Democratic Donkey and the Republican Elephant go at it. But for those of us who follow Jesus, we already have a King. His name is King Jesus and He's not up for re-election. He's still in control. And one day soon this King will return. When He comes He won't be riding on a donkey or an elephant. Revelation 19:11, 16 says He'll be riding on a white horse and on His robe and on His thigh will be written "King of Kings and Lord of Lords!"

Jesus is our only Hope, so will you allow Him to be your Shepherd?

OUTLINE

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God's courtroom exhibits of moral decline

- A. Corrupt politicians (Micah 3:1-4)
- B. Cowardly pastors (Micah 3:5, 7)
- C. Complacent people (Micah 3:9-12)

II. THE PROMISE TO A NATION IN SPIRITUAL DESPERATION

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times...He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace."
Micah 5:2, 4-5

We need a Shepherd to give us

- A. Guidance
- B. Security
- C. Peace

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes