



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### ***Majoring In The Minors: Micah*** **God Of Love. . . God Of Wrath**

~ Micah 1:1-2; 6:8; 7:18-19 ~

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#### INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

“*I hate you*”, she screams, and runs from the room. Words from a child, thrown as emotional darts. Perhaps she learned the phrase from peers or the media, or maybe it just burst forth from that inner well known as the “sinful nature”. Whatever the case, hate and love have become flippant bywords, tossed carelessly at objects, situations, and even people.

The casual use of such words as “*love*” and “*hate*” has emptied them of their meaning. We no longer understand statements that describe a loving God who hates sin. So we picture God as gentle and kind—a cosmic pushover—and in our wishful thinking, the notion that there are things He hates is blocked from our mind

The words of the prophets stand in stark contrast to such misconceptions. God’s hatred is real—burning, consuming, devastating:

- Ø GOD HATES SIN, and He stands as the righteous judge, ready to mete out just punishment to all who defy His rule.
- Ø HIS LOVE IS ALSO REAL. So real that He sent His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to save and accept judgment in our place.

Both LOVE & WRATH are in God’s character, and Micah helps us sort it all out. In 7 short chapters, he presents a true picture of God—the almighty Lord who hates sin yet loves the sinner.

As you read Micah, you will catch a glimpse of *God’s anger* in action as He judges and punishes sin. But you will also see *God’s love* in action as He offers eternal life to all who repent and believe.

#### MICAH’S CONTEMPORARIES

Micah was a contemporary of Amos (3 weeks ago) and Isaiah (ca. 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC):

- Ø Like AMOS, Micah pounded away at the theme of JUSTICE. Like AMOS (and all the prophets), he focused on JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS—the right and fair way to treat people, especially the disadvantaged. But MICAH focused even more on JUSTICE AS PUNISHMENT—on justice as upholding what is right. . . and meting out reward or penalty as deserved.

Ø Like ISAIAH, Micah also looked ahead to the coming of Jesus as Messiah. There's more about the coming of Christ in MICAH than any other Minor Prophet. He could see that a Messiah was coming, "A King who would pass through before them and be the Lord at their head" [2:13]. He even predicted that he would be born as a baby in Bethlehem, an obscure Judean village—700 years before it happened [5:2]!

So, in the midst of all this talk about impending doom, Micah gives hope and consolation as he describes God's love and how God will actualize that love.

Let's look at chapter 1, verse 1: [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.](#)

It says "*the word of the Lord came to Micah*". His ministry was received, not achieved. He didn't seek it out; it came to him.

It also says he saw a vision "*concerning Samaria and Jerusalem*". Those were the capital cities of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah respectively. He predicted the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and the capture of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon. These two events occurred 150 years apart. One reason Judah lasted that much longer than Israel is attributed to the fact that Micah's preaching had an impact. He got through to them (like JONAH did at Nineveh)! It bought them some time to get it right.

That's reflected in HEZEKIAH, one of the kings mentioned in verse 1. This king was a breath of fresh air. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord. He tore down altars and idols. . .and unlocked the doors of the Temple for worship (i.e.: it became more than a museum).

But in spite of that AND in spite of having a front-row seat to what was happening in the Northern Kingdom, they failed to pass it on. That should remind us that the Christian faith is never more than one generation away from extinction. We must be proactive in sharing our faith. . .diligent about passing it on to our children.

## FIRST MAJOR ISSUE

Let's go to chapter 1, verse 2: [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.](#)

That phrase "*Listen, O earth and all who are in it*" raises one of two big issues I want to address this morning.

Micah's message was a call to accountability to ALL people, not just Israel & Judah. Because God is God, we are accountable to Him.

"Well, that's your belief", cry the skeptics of our day. "But you're just one religion among many. Why do you have to insist everyone believe the way you do; why do you say if you're not a Christian you're going to hell?"

People hate it that Christians are so evangelistic, so missionary-minded, so into outreach. Why not just live and let live? Why the urgency to "*go make disciples*"?

For Micah (and all the prophets), it was not just “my way” vs. “some other way”. It was “my way” vs. “God’s way”. Since “*the Word of the Lord came to Micah. . .*” (v. 1), he could rightly claim: “*I didn’t say it; He said it. I didn’t make the rules; He made them.*”

The world-at-large doesn’t understand that. So when a preacher preaches or a believer shares his/her faith, it’s called *proselytizing*. But there’s a difference between proselytizing and evangelizing:

- Ø PROSELYTIZE == To bring to my (or our) way of thinking.
- Ø EVANGELIZE == To bring to God’s way of thinking. It’s sharing God’s view, what God says. . .then leaving you to make the decision.

All we’re really doing is announcing the Good News of salvation in Jesus’ name. It’s like being a beggar and telling some other fellow beggars where to find food!

That said, we always need to have the right attitude toward those who see things differently than we do. Micah says in 6:8: “*Walk humbly before your God.*” He doesn’t say: “*Strut proudly. . . or arrogantly, with an air of superiority.*” When I talk to someone about my faith, I always say:

- Ø “I’m a sinner too, it’s just I’ve been saved by grace and been forgiven.”
- Ø “I’m not better than anybody. I’m just better than I was or would be without Christ.”

We should never shy away from an opportunity to share our faith:

- Ø [I Peter 3:15](#) – “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*”
- Ø [II Timothy 4:1-2](#) – “*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, to whom we will give an account, I give you this charge: “Preach the Word! Be prepared in season and out of season.” (i.e.: whether you feel “in the groove” or “out of it”).*

So, witnessing, evangelism (where we give people an opportunity to receive Christ), and faith-sharing are not options. We’re not trying to win the world. That’s not our job; it’s His job! We’re just the broadcasters, the newsboys/girls standing on a street corner trying to get the word (the newspaper) out.

## SECOND MAJOR ISSUE

The 2<sup>nd</sup> major issue that Micah’s prophecy raises for us—and it’s not just Micah’s prophecy, but all the prophets; it’s just more pronounced in his prophecy—is *the interplay between God’s Love + His Justice*.

Critics outside the faith often make this broad generalization:

- Ø The God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, vengeance and judgment.
- Ø The God of the New Testament is a God of love, mercy and forgiveness.

It doesn’t stand up to scrutiny:

- Ø A look at any good commentary will show as many (or more) references to “love” and “grace” in the Old Testament as in the New Testament.
- Ø There’s anger & wrath & the promise of judgment in the New Testament. Check out Matthew 24 [OLIVET DISCOURSE = *Signs of the End of the Age*]; and of course Jesus & the money-changers.

God is a loving God. God is a just God. He has granted us freedom of choice. We humans work on the basis of choice rather than instinct. Our dog **JADA** has certain wired-in behavior. For example, she can't refrain from eating the cat food if it's left out, no matter how many times you say "*bad dog*". Our cat **SHAMMIE** is going to chase and eat mice, because that is how he is programmed. But we are not programmed like an animal.

I suppose God could have designed us to automatically love Him and obey His laws; He could have made us like robots or puppets. But instead He created us in and for freedom. That way our love for Him is a matter of response and choice, not automatic instinct. However, by creating choice, He was setting Himself up for the possibility that someone somewhere would choose NOT to love Him, NOT to obey Him. And of course, that happened.

So, a DILEMMA arises: God loves us and wants desperately to forgive us and wipe away our sin. But in spite of His great love, He did set up the universe and the laws it runs by. So His justice requires some kind of judgment, some kind of retribution for disobedience. That's true in the physical universe (example: gravity). The Bible does talk about the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). . . about a price to be paid. . . about reaping what is sown. . . about consequences. . . about every wrong having to be rectified and atoned for. SO:

Ø Does God act out of love and ignore justice (e.g.: pass over our sin, sweep it under the rug, pretend it didn't happen)?

~~ OR ~~

Ø Does God act out of justice and ignore love (e.g.: respond to our sinful disobedience by paying out the consequences that are promised)?

Both are in God's nature! God is a loving God. God is a just God. . . a God for whom right & wrong, good & bad matter. So to overlook them is to violate His moral character.

What a DELIMMA!

Bet you face that as a PARENT, don't you? You love your kids and don't want to punish them. Yet you know that if they don't experience some of the consequences of their wrong choices, they're going to be in trouble down the line.

Ø HUMOR: I remember my mom & dad saying how much it hurt them to spank me.  
I wanted to say, "Then don't!"

What's the SOLUTION? God placed His very own Son on this earth. He was without sin and deserved absolutely no punishment. Yet on Him, Isaiah says in chapter 53, God laid the guilt and sins of everyone of us. All the grief and sorrow he bore was not for His sins, but for ours. He was wounded and bruised in our place. He was chastised that we might have peace (with God). He was lashed—and we (who deserve to die) are healed.

I hope that comes across as GOOD NEWS this morning! Yet, because we are creatures of choice, God cannot and will not force this plan of salvation on us. We must receive it by faith. It's your choice. . . your decision. The most famous verse in the Bible says.....[John 3:16].

### CONCLUSION

That brings us back to MICAH! He had some bad news for Israel. . .for Judah. . .for the whole world. But he also had some good news. Here's the good news; it's found in chapter 7:18-19:

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's message was ultimately a message of hope & promise; a message that forgiveness is available. And he delivered it in such a way that neither God's LOVE nor His JUSTICE were sacrificed.

You ask, what does God want from me? Not a lot of religious ritual. . .not a lot of fanfare. Just a heart relationship with Him that produces justice and mercy in our actions. In chapter 6:8, he shows us very practically how to please God:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?

- Ø To act justly (in a world in which people are not treated fairly);
- Ø To love mercy (in a world of tough breaks); and
- Ø To walk humbly and obediently with your God (in a world of pride and self-sufficiency).

Let's end with the THIRD. May I take you through the *Sinner's Prayer*. If you've never prayed it, then I invite you to humble yourself and pray it in faith believing that God will hear and answer your prayer. Feel free to use my words as your words. Here we go. . . . .