

WALKING WITH GOD

MICAH THE PROPHET

Micah's prophecies were aimed mainly at Jerusalem, where the religious observances associated with the Temple took place. This was a period of political alliances between neighbouring nations, and in this period Israel and Judah were very conscious of the neighbouring superpowers of Assyria and Egypt. The alliances made were usually aimed at securing financial and trading benefits.

When Micah appeared in Jerusalem, the people were enjoying a time of prosperity. But it was not prosperity with equality. The fat-cat landowners were getting rich at the expense of the poor and were straying from the commitment the people of Israel had made with God when they were founded as a covenant nation. Even more disturbing was that despite all the extortion and greed, the people thought that they could continue business as usual.

Worship, in their minds, had nothing to do with their lifestyle outside the Temple. As far as they were concerned a lavish offering would make up for the more basic requirements of justice, mercy and kindness. Micah would have been an uncomfortable presence for the people – not so much because his words were penetrating but because he was calling them back to what they already knew: that God wanted far more than religion. God wanted them to keep the promises which had shaped them as a nation (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 10:12).

“Micah is not giving a new answer, he is simply reminding them of the covenant law.”

Mary Evans, Bible teacher
Walking with God

Micah's prophecy includes warning of God's judgment to come (1:2–2:11), denouncing the corrupt leaders (3:1–12), presenting a sense of the salvation which will follow despair (2:12–13; 4:1–5:15), and a powerful account of God's case against the nation (6:1–16). What is also uplifting about this man is that in all of this he is also. However, Micah is also completely aware of God's hope, with a message of hope and redemption following his challenge of God's judgement (7:8–20).

The message of the Bible is ultimately one of hope. God challenges us not just to make us feel bad about what we haven't done but to get us to change our ways and to make sure we don't miss out on hope. Micah would have been at home at an Africa Aid concert like Jubilee 2000, or wearing his white armband in Make Poverty History. As far as he was concerned everything connected with worship involved doing justice and loving mercy. And this was made possible by a lifestyle of humility.

WATCH YOUR WALK

The Bible has quite a lot to say about ‘walking’. In Genesis, for instance, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Isaac are all described as men who walked with God (Gen. 5:22,24; 6:9; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15). It is one of the most natural things able-bodied people do. And, as far as Micah is concerned, in our walk with God three things should always mark us out from everyone else: we act justly, we love mercy, we flow with humility (Micah 6:8).

- What makes your ‘walk’ distinctive today, and how could you make it more so?

JUST DOING JUSTLY

After idolatry, God says more in the Bible about injustice than any other subject. But, even so, many of us who have attended church for decades can still count on our fingers and toes the number of Sunday sermons we have heard on justice. And this really does matter because what we preach and talk about affects what we do.

- What has made justice, so important and prominent, become so marginalised?

Too political? Well, for a start, justice is likely to end up being far too political for most of us. And there is no point denying it. No great movement for emancipation – from that of the Israelites in Egypt and the Jews in Babylon to the movements led by Wilberforce, Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jnr – is likely to avoid some degree of political involvement.

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

- How do you react to this quote from Archbishop Tutu?

IS JUSTICE THE GOSPEL?

- How do you think justice is linked to the gospel?

This is an odd question because the Bible makes no distinction between God’s justice, which redeems us at the cross, His holiness, which we share, or His righteousness, which we display. Justice is the river that flows from the heart of God, responding to our sin and sinfulness in all its private and public manifestations. A theology that puts a wedge between personal holiness and prophetic advocacy uses the Bible to build a dam in that river.

“In our time God’s yes to the world reveals itself, to a large extent, in the church’s missionary engagement in respect of the realities of injustice, oppression, poverty, discrimination and violence.”

David Bosch, Transforming Mission

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Amos 5:24, ESV

- So, what is justice?

Simply put, justice isn't politics. It's far more than that. Justice is righteousness responding to wrong. And this means that doing justice is central to the Christian faith. God's justice marks us out by the way we walk at work and play. Everyone can act justly.

People who act justly are known in the workplace to be the kind of people who deal fairly with friends and foe alike. Acting justly means that we do everything in our power to ensure that we all belong to a society in which righteousness exists in our social systems and businesses as much as in our public and private worlds.

- What purpose does God's justice have?

God's justice is more than a message. It's God's mission to a broken world.

- What lessons can we draw from the relationship between justice and righteousness in the two following passages of Scripture?

Psalm 72:1–4

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.

He will judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.

The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.

He will defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
he will crush the oppressor.

Romans 3:21–26

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

LOVING MERCY

It's really hard to teach someone about mercy. Mercy is innate to our humanity, and when it goes the very meaning of being human is undermined.

Our biblical understanding of mercy is ultimately best demonstrated at the cross of Christ. No deed done on earth has ever demonstrated mercy so fully and unconditionally. But for us God's mercy is delivered in fresh supplies each day. And the people who should best show mercy are those who have received it.

"Is it possible that those who experience our ministry will have the slightest suspicion that God really cares for them?"

Moss Nthla, General Secretary, South African Evangelical Alliance

The Christian walk should therefore be typified by delight in showing mercy. Those who do so are the first to restore rather than condemn. The first to forgive rather than keep scores. The first to befriend the workmate or immigrant. People will know God is mercy only when they see mercy in us.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Matt. 5:7, AV

- When did someone last show you an act of mercy?
- What was your response to this?

REFLECTION

- How have you been challenged in your views of justice and mercy?
- How can you change in your daily living so that you are more fully living out God's justice and mercy?

A PRAYER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.

May His beauty rest upon me
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.

Kate Barclay Wilkinson