

A few years ago people started talking about “dysfunctional” families.
Dysfunction is simply a secular way of talking about sin.
If the problem is “dysfunction” – then all we need to do is function properly!

But if the problem is sin – then we also have guilt and shame to deal with.

Micah 7 is a good text for people whose lives are not as they should be.
If your relationships are disordered,
Micah 7 speaks to you.

There are four sections to our sermon tonight –

First, Micah speaks to the remnant of Israel (verses 1-6) –
and says that everything is upside down –
nothing is as it should be.

Second, Zion speaks to her enemy (verses 7-10) –
and says that God *will* hear and vindicate me.

Third, Zion speaks to the LORD (verses 11-17)
and calls him to shepherd Israel like a flock.

And finally, Micah praises God for his steadfast love and compassion (verses 18-20).

You may have noticed that the pronouns shift frequently.
This is a common hymnic device in the Psalms,
(we often use these sorts of Psalms as our call to worship –
since the voice changes from speaking to God, to speaking to the people).
But so long as you pay attention to the pronouns,
it's not too hard to keep track of who is speaking to whom!

1. When Everything Is Upside Down... (v1-6)
a. The harvest is in, but there is nothing to eat (v1)

*Woe is me! For I have become
as when the summer fruit has been gathered,
as when the grapes have been gleaned:
there is no cluster to eat,
no first-ripe fig that my soul desires.*

“Woe is me!”

Pay attention to the picture here:

I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered,
as when the grapes have been gleaned.
In other words, harvest is over.

This is supposed to be a joyous time –
a time of celebration and rejoicing –
the Feast of Booths, as Israel gathers at the temple to celebrate God’s faithfulness.

But as Micah wanders through the vineyard,
he sees that something is dreadfully wrong:
“there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires.”

The vineyard is a common image of Israel.
Micah wanders through the vineyard and finds it barren.
There is no fruit.

What fruit was Micah looking for?
He was looking for the fruit of the Spirit.
Or, as Micah 6:8 put it,
“to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”
He looked for the fruit of the Spirit,
but all he found was the works of the flesh:

b. The godly have perished and mankind hunts each other (v2)

² *The godly has perished from the earth,
and there is no one upright among mankind;
they all lie in wait for blood,
and each hunts the other with a net.*

We looked last time at the meaning of the word *hesed* –
in Micah 6:8, what does God require of us but
“to do justice, to love mercy/kindness [*hesed*],
and to walk humbly/wisely with our God.”

Now Micah says that the “godly” has perished from the earth.
The word for “godly” is *hasid* (namely, those who are characterized by *hesed*).
Maybe you’ve heard of the Hasidim – the ultra-Orthodox Jewish mystics?
They are claiming to be the “godly” – those who are characterized by mercy/kindness.

Micah says that the *hasid* has perished.
There is no one upright among mankind.
They all lie in wait for blood – and each hunts the other with a net.

It would be easy to see this as poetic exaggeration.
But you need to understand Micah on his own terms.
For Micah, it is not possible for an individual to be godly by himself.
The heart of the *hasid* (the godly) is
doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.
There is a strong *corporate* aspect to the life of the godly.

Interestingly enough, I saw this illustrated over the last couple weeks
as I've been reading Marx and Lenin with my high school students!

Marx and Lenin thought that if you could eliminate private property
and thus the class struggle that went with it,
then you would also eliminate the state –
since the state (in their view) was simply the tool of the master class.
They never imagined that this would eliminate human selfishness.
They just believed that if there was no *class* –
if everyone had the same access to the means of production,
then individual acts of selfishness could be dealt with by the community,
without recourse to the oppressive state.
Communism only works if the whole community is on board.

Micah thinks of the *hasid* in a very similar way.
It's not as though the godly are perfect.
But the godly can deal with injustice because the community is properly related to God.

But if the community is not properly related to God,
then dysfunction and disorder follows.

I'm sure all of you know what this looks and feels like.
Perhaps it was in your family, or – sadly enough – in the church:
you find yourself trapped in a cycle of selfishness and destructive behavior.
No one *likes* it – everyone is frustrated with it –
but it continues.

Why?
Because we do not *do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God*.
And therefore we fall into the only other alternative:
“they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net.”

Often it is rooted in a distorted sense of justice:
someone thinks that someone else has done something wrong –
and so they feel justified in holding a grudge or taking offense –
and then they take it out on someone else,
and the cycle continues.

Verse 3 expresses well how the dynamic works:

c. They do evil well (v3)

³ *Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well;
the prince and the judge ask for a bribe,
and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul;
thus they weave it together.*

Those who are in positions of power set the tone:
the prince and the judge ask for a bribe –
 this puts the petitioner in an awkward spot;
either you give the bribe in order to obtain justice,
or you don't – and you are treated unjustly.

I know that many of you have struggled in your own families:
you see dynamics that are not good –
 perhaps your parents (or grandparents) set a tone that is not good.
And the tapestry of your family life is woven with hateful words
or destructive practices.

The first line in verse 3 sets up the irony:
their hands are on what is evil, to do it well.

The verb means to do good – to do well – even to do right!
Normally “good” is opposed to “evil.”
But everything is upside down in Micah's world.

Nothing is as it should be.
They do evil well.

d. The best of them are briars and thorns (v4)

⁴ *The best of them is like a brier,
the most upright of them a thorn hedge.
The day of your watchmen, of your punishment, has come;
now their confusion is at hand.*

The best of them – the most upright – are like briars and thorns.
Israel has failed to establish justice and *hesed*.
Israel has not walked humbly with God.
Therefore the day of confusion has come.

Instead of grapes and figs, they are thorns and briars.

As Waltke puts it,
“These legal sharks have so conspired together
that no one can negotiate the tangle of laws and rulings,
and to attempt it will result only in painful injury.
What a contrast to the sweet grapes and figs they should have been!” (W 427)

In the morning service recently,
we've been talking about the “indicative” and the “imperative” in Paul.
Paul often explains the situation in the “indicative” mood –
the indicative mood expresses statements of fact.
So, for Paul, what Christ has done, and who we are in Christ is the “indicative.”

But then Paul switches to the *imperative* – the command:
since this is who Christ is, and since this is who you are in Christ,
therefore, this is what you should believe and do.

Micah has just laid out the indicative – the situation.

Since Israel has *failed* to do and to be all that they are to do and to be,
therefore, *this* is what you should do about it:

e. So don't trust your friends – or even your wife (v5-6)

⁵ *Put no trust in a neighbor;
have no confidence in a friend;
guard the doors of your mouth
from her who lies in your arms;^[a]*
⁶ *for the son treats the father with contempt,
the daughter rises up against her mother,
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
a man's enemies are the men of his own house.*

It's worth noting that in verse 4, “the day of your watchmen, of your punishment,”
the “you” is masculine singular (probably a reference to Israel),
but here in verse 5, the first two commands are to “you” masculine plural.

In other words, since judgment is coming upon Israel (the singular “you”),
what is the remnant (the plural “you”) supposed to do?

Don't trust your neighbors.
Don't confide in your friends.
Don't rely on your wife.

You can't trust anyone.

And that's true:

*when you live in a community that is not characterized by doing justice and loving mercy
and walking humbly with God.*

Some of you come from families like this.

Others have experienced churches like this.

My parents (who were considered the “model family” in the church)
divorced when I was thirteen.

The next summer my pastor was caught in adultery.

Ever since, I have had no difficulty believing the worst about people!

I am rarely surprised when I hear of someone's “fall.”

Grieved? Yes.

Surprised? No.

How do you break the cycle?

How do you disrupt the woven web of deceit and corruption
in a dysfunctional family or church or society?

Micah says:

Don't trust your wife.

Don't trust your husband.

I told Ginger before we got married, "don't trust me."

She was a little taken aback!

But if we put our trust in each other,
then we will be disappointed.

If our confidence is grounded on the reliability of our friends,
then we will be put to shame.

That's why Micah says in verse 7

2. ...I Will Wait for God... (v7-10)

a. God will hear me (v7)

⁷ *But as for me, I will look to the LORD;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
my God will hear me.*

This is what breaks the cycle!

Stop playing the game.

Family, friends and neighbors will disappoint me.

My eyes must be fixed on the LORD.

My ears must be attentive to his voice.

I must wait for the God of my salvation.

Because God *will hear me*.

The pronouns are important.

Verses 7-10 return to the first person singular.

"I will look to the LORD."

My God will hear me.

But who am I?

Who is the "I" that is speaking in verses 7-17?

Verses 7-17 are spoken by Zion.

Why do I say this?

Because the speaker is feminine.

In verse 10, the enemy says:

“Where is the LORD your God?”
and the “you” is feminine singular.

The “I” of our passage is faithful Zion (the righteous remnant) –
those who still hope in the LORD –
and refuse to live according to the works of the flesh –
in short, those who do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

How do you do justice when no one else is?
How do you love mercy when no one else is?
Micah’s answer: “walk humbly/wisely with your God.”

Jesus said that he came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. (Matthew 10:35-39)

Jesus was practically quoting Micah 7.

And then Jesus commented on Micah 7, and said,
“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...
And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

You are going to have to choose:
will you follow the dysfunctional patterns of your earthly family,
or will you follow me?

Will you play the world’s game – and share in its misery and destruction?
Or will you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus?

Now, it may be that you are sitting there saying,
“I have a great family that loves the Lord and follows Jesus –
they are a real joy to be around,
and we are constantly encouraging each other in the way of our Savior!”

If that is true, then rejoice and be grateful,
because God has shown his mercy to you!

And as God has shown his kindness to you in this way,
make sure that you draw others into this pattern of life and love and hope –
because God has given you this blessing
so that you might be an example to the nations!

After all, Zion is speaking to her “enemy” in verses 8-10:

b. Warning to enemies: when I fall, I shall rise (v8)

⁸ *Rejoice not over me, O my enemy;
when I fall, I shall rise;*

*when I sit in darkness,
the LORD will be a light to me.*

But who is the “enemy”?

Verse 10 identifies the enemy in the feminine:
“shame will cover her who said to me.”

In Hebrew, this is clear in verse 8, since the enemy is addressed in the feminine
[the verb “rejoice” clearly demonstrates the gender of the enemy].

Since the speaker is Zion,
then the enemy would be Zion’s chief foe.

Waltke argues that the enemy is Ninevah – the chief city of Assyria –
but he points out that after Assyria had fallen,
the generic address would also apply to Babylon –
he even comments that the rabbis applied Micah’s prophecy to Rome!

And this is entirely appropriate –
because Micah’s prophecy will be true of any city that attacks Zion!

Micah’s refusal to name either Zion or her enemy has a very important result:
the conflict in view is between two cities, two women:
the city of God and the city of man;
the bride of Christ and the prostitute.

If you reduce the conflict to “Jerusalem vs. Ninevah”
you will wind up with an earth-bound perspective.

Micah wants us to hear this in broader terms:
“Rejoice not over me, O my [feminine] enemy;
when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.”

Micah is saying that the only way to glory is the way of the cross.
The city of God must fall before she will rise.

And the reason for this is made clear in verse 9.

c. God will vindicate me (v9)
*⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD
because I have sinned against him,
until he pleads my cause
and executes judgment for me.
He will bring me out to the light;
I shall look upon his vindication.*

“Indignation” probably falls short of communicating the force of the word.

“Fury” would be more accurate.

When I think of “indignant”,

I think of an old man who is upset at the “younger generation.”

But the idea here is that the LORD is furious with Zion

and therefore will bring disaster upon her.

Waltke translates this verse:

“I will endure the fury of I AM – surely I sinned against him –
until he pleads my case and executes justice for me.”

Zion recognizes that God’s anger is just –

and therefore I must endure his fury – his righteous anger against sin –
until he pleads my case.

That’s a fascinating way of saying it.

The fury of the LORD against sin will have two effects:

1) I must endure his wrath for a time;

2) but then God will see the justice of my cause and he will vindicate me.

He will “bring me out” (this is Exodus language)

and I will look upon his vindication/salvation.

The fury of the LORD in the first line,

and the vindication/salvation of the LORD in the last line

show the movement from judgment to rest.

While verse 10 shows a reverse movement for “my enemy”:

d. Then the one who mocked will be trampled (v10)

¹⁰ *Then my enemy will see,*

and shame will cover her who said to me,

“Where is the LORD your God?”

My eyes will look upon her;

now she will be trampled down

like the mire of the streets.

In verse 9, “*I will look upon his vindication.*”

In verse 10, “*My enemy will look*” and see her shame;

And “*I will look upon her trampled down*”

The city that rises up against the LORD –

the city of man –

will be cast down and put to shame.

If your family has been living according to the practices and patterns of the city of man –

then do not be surprised when they share in her misery.

What does waiting for the LORD look like?

Doing justice, loving *hesed*, and walking humbly with your God!
It looks like the practices and customs of the city of God.

And that is what verses 11-17 say:

3. ...Because One Day All Nations Will Fear the LORD... (v11-17)

a. A three-fold day for expanding your kingdom (v11-13)

¹¹ *A day for the building of your walls!*

In that day the boundary shall be far extended.

¹² *In that day they^[b] will come to you,
from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,*

and from Egypt to the River,

from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

¹³ *But the earth will be desolate*

because of its inhabitants,

for the fruit of their deeds.

There are three statements in verses 11-12 that begin: “a day”

a day for the building of your walls (O Zion);

a day when the boundary shall be far extended;

a day when “he” shall come to “you.”

But whereas the “your” in verse 11 was feminine singular (referring to Zion),

the “you” in verse 12 (“he shall come to you”) is masculine singular.

So whoever “he” is (translated “they” in the ESV),

he is *not* coming to Zion –

but rather to God (look at verse 14 – “Shepherd your people with your staff”).

I think it’s clear that the masculine you singular in verses 12ff is God.

But who is the “he” who is coming to God from Assyria and the cities of Egypt?!!

I would suggest that this is the faithful remnant.

The reason why “he” is singular

is because Micah wants to use “they” (masculine plural)

to refer to the wicked and rebellious nations.

Because in that day – in the day of judgment when the elect see the vindication/salvation of God,

then the earth will be made desolate –

judgment will come upon the whole earth “because of its inhabitants.”

And then Micah turns to the LORD and pleads:

b. Shepherd your people like you did in the Exodus (v14-15)

¹⁴ *Shepherd your people with your staff,*

the flock of your inheritance,

who dwell alone in a forest

*in the midst of a garden land,^[c]
let them graze in Bashan and Gilead
as in the days of old.*

We long for the “days of old” –
when the LORD was my shepherd,
and all Israel grazed on the good land of Gilead!

We have a new family in Jesus.
God has given Jesus the glorious inheritance of all the earth.
Remember that, when you are tempted to get frustrated with your family on earth!
You have an inheritance in Jesus – in this new family –
that will endure forever.

And so in verse 15, Yahweh replies:
¹⁵*As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt,
I will show them^[d] marvelous things.*

God promises that he will again do the wondrous works
that he did when he brought Israel out of Egypt!

Now in verse 15, the “them” is really a “him.”
[the ESV says “them” but notes that the Hebrew is singular].
After all, Israel is the name of Abraham’s grandson.
Israel is a singular.

Paul, in Galatians 3, urges us to see this sort of grammatical point as intentional on God’s part.
In Galatians 3, Paul says that the promise was to the seed (singular),
and so we should see this as a promise to Christ.
Grammarians cringe over this, because in Hebrew, Greek, and English,
“seed” is a collective singular.
“You and your seed” *means* you and your offspring – your children – all of them!

But Paul says that this grammatical point has theological significance.
The God who ordained all of history is also the Lord of language!

And so also Micah’s use of the singular pronouns to refer to Israel should be seen alike:
Jesus is the true Israel;
He is the one who came out of Egypt –
and he is the one to whom God shows marvelous, wonderful things.

God has done mighty deeds for Jesus – in raising him up from the dead!
And what else will God do?
Keep reading!

c. Then the nations will eat dust and turn in dread to the LORD (v16-17)

¹⁶ *The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;
they shall lay their hands on their mouths;
their ears shall be deaf;*
¹⁷ *they shall lick the dust like a serpent,
like the crawling things of the earth;
they shall come trembling out of their strongholds;
they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God,
and they shall be in fear of you.*

In verse 16, the nations see and are ashamed
(just like the “enemy” was ashamed in verse 10).

It’s not just one city that will be put to shame –
it is every city – every nation – every people –
that rejects the LORD.

There are echoes here of God’s curse against the serpent –
they shall eat dust like a serpent (as God had said that the serpent would “eat dust”).
And in the final judgment all the nations will be in dread of the Lord Jesus.

4. ...So You Need to Remember Who God Is! (v18-20)

a. A God who pardons our iniquity (like you said to Moses) (v18)

¹⁸ *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.*

Micah concludes by addressing God –
but his closing prayer is equally addressed to Israel,
as he switches back and forth between the “you” of direct address to God,
and the “he” of reminding Israel of who God is!

Because this is the basic thing that all of us need to remember!
Remember who your God is!

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
Why does God do this for his people?
Because he *delights in hesed* (steadfast love)!
God *delights* to show kindness and mercy to the weak and frail.

b. A God who casts our sin into the depths of the sea (v19)

¹⁹ *He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our^{JeI} sins
into the depths of the sea.*

Again, there are echoes of the Exodus –

There are lots of verbal connections with Moses “song of the sea” (Ex 15).

The vanquished “tremble,” “quake,” and become silent.

Yahweh does wonders, shows *hesed*, and owns Israel as his inheritance.

Both hymns ask, “Who is a God like you?”

But whereas in Moses’ day, God cast Pharaoh’s army into the depths of the sea,
here God casts our sins into the depths of the sea. (Waltke, 450)

And in Jesus, that’s what God has done!

The great triumph over Pharaoh prefigured Christ’s even greater triumph over Satan!

c. A God who shows *hesed* to Abraham (v20)

²⁰ *You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.*

Because behind the Exodus – behind all of God’s covenant faithfulness –
is his promise.

God told Abraham that he would do this.

And you, by faith, have been joined to Abraham’s family.

In your family, you need to do justice, love *hesed* (mercy/kindness), and walk humbly with God.

Because you are now part of Jesus’s family.

If your family won’t go with you in the way of justice, mercy, and walking with God,
then you need to follow Jesus anyway!

Because God is faithful to his promises –

and God is kind and merciful to those to whom he has promised.