



# Christ Reformed Community Church

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## “Puppet Preachers” Mark 7:31–37

As we just read in verses 6 through 11 of chapter 2, it was the popular prophets of the day who were aiding and abetting the wealthy elite to continue their ungodly practice of stealing land from the people of God, and they did this in a couple of ways. Number one, they refused to preach God’s truth of coming judgment, and secondly, they tried to silence the true prophets of God. These were puppet preachers. These were puppet prophets, and they were in high demand. They were doing the bidding of the wealthy elite, refusing to confront the people of God with the divine standard of holiness.

In today’s message, we look at Micah 2:6–11 in which the prophet Micah denounces the false teachers, number one, for assuring the people that God’s judgment would not come; and secondly, for trying to silence the true prophets, prophets like Micah and Isaiah. Such is such a relevant portion of Scripture for our own day. So let’s take our Bibles, open up to the book of Micah, and get started.

Please remain standing and take your Bibles this morning and turn with me again to the Old Testament to the book of Micah, Micah chapter 2. Our sermon text this evening will be verses 6 through 11.

*“Do not preach”—thus they preach—  
“one should not preach of such things;  
disgrace will not overtake us.”  
Should this be said, O house of Jacob?  
Has the LORD grown impatient?  
Are these his deeds?  
Do not my words do good  
to him who walks uprightly?  
But lately my people have risen up as an enemy;  
you strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly  
with no thought of war.  
The women of my people you drive out  
from their delightful houses;  
from their young children you take away  
my splendor forever.  
Arise and go,  
for this is no place to rest,*

*because of uncleanness that destroys  
with a grievous destruction.  
If a man should go about and utter wind and lies,  
saying, “I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,”  
he would be the preacher for this people!*

Please be seated as we go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Our Father, as we worship You this evening we come now to Your Holy Word with a full expectation that Your Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts. We pray that He would speak to our hearts with full conviction. We pray that our minds might be engaged with full contemplation, and we pray, Lord, that You might consecrate us for Your glory. Make us the people You have called us to be, as we hear Your blessed Word. We pray and ask this in the blessed name of Jesus Christ and for His glory. Amen.

It was a well-known preacher by the name of Robert Hall. He was a Particular Baptist in England, otherwise known as a Calvinistic Baptist. He lived in the 1700s, and he was once asked his thoughts on a sermon that emotionally stimulated the congregation. Hall, who had been in attendance to hear this sermon said in response, “Very fine sermon indeed, sir, but a man cannot feed upon flowers.” A sermon simply delivered with flowery oratorical skill might make things smell good spiritually, I think is what Hall was getting to. It might make things smell good spiritually to the listener, but a sermon which feeds God’s people with the meat of the Word causes contemplation and conviction, and ultimately, spiritual growth—and that kind of sermon is far more important. It’s the solid food of Scripture, to borrow the language of Hebrews 5:14, that is “*for the mature,*” causing “*their powers of discernment,*” the Bible says, to be “*trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*” Now, as we have begun our study in the book of Micah, what we have seen is that there was no discernment among the people of God to distinguish between good and evil. The prophet Micah was prophesying to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and he had a contemporary whose name was Isaiah. You’re more familiar with him, and Isaiah said of these very people in Isaiah chapter 5, “*My people are foolish. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.*”

These people were calling evil good and good evil. There was an inability to discern. There wasn’t the power to understand what was right and what was wrong, and as we have seen, they didn’t think it was evil, for instance, to erect high places of paganism. They didn’t think that it was evil to have relations with cultic prostitutes, nor did they think it was evil or sinful in spite of what God’s Word had clearly said, to erect within their hearts the idol of materialism. It was so bad we saw last time that the leaders of the Southern Kingdom of Judah were actually amassing great fortunes through systematically exploiting the people of God through the court system. They were mugging people—not in the broad daylight on the streets, but they were taking people to court. They were suing people. They were taking from the people of God their lands and their possessions. Now, such may have been according to their lawful standards of their perverted day, but it was a violation of God’s law. Their greed was covetousness. We learned that last week from verse 2, “*They covet fields and seize them.*” Covetousness, we learn from Colossians 3:5 always leads to idolatry. Covetousness is idolatry. So, it was their greed of covetousness, which was a violation of the tenth commandment, which then led to their thievery, which was a violation of the

eighth commandment, and all of this was rooted in a violation of the first and second commandments of committing idolatry.

Idols in the high places of their worship. Idols in their hearts; a people overcome with materialism, and essentially the message of Micah is that God will judge His people for these sins. The whole culture had become a survival of the fittest, and this was not merely the leaders who were exploiting people. This was the rank-and-file citizen, not only of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but also the Northern Kingdom to which Amos was a prophet against. In fact, in verse 3 we saw last week, *“Therefore, thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster.”* That is the whole family of Jacob, but both kingdoms, from top to bottom, had an issue with the sin of materialism. This sin of materialism was idolatry. It was the result of not placing God first upon the throne of their hearts, and what that then resulted in was a lack of placing others before themselves. If you don’t love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, then you won’t love your neighbor as yourself. That’s how Jesus summarized the law later in the New Testament, but as bad as that sounds—and it was bad—there was something even more sinister going on. As we just read in verses 6 through 11 of chapter 2, it was the popular prophets of the day who were aiding and abetting the wealthy elite to continue their ungodly practice of stealing land from the people of God, and they did this in a couple of ways.

Number one, they refused to preach God’s truth of coming judgment, and secondly, they tried to silence the true prophets of God. These were puppet preachers. These were puppet prophets, and they were in high demand. They were doing the bidding of the wealthy elite, refusing to confront the people of God with the divine standard of holiness. Now, there were exceptions. Micah was an exception, obviously. Isaiah was an exception, but the vast majority of prophets during Micah and Isaiah’s day were puppet prophets. They operated according to the strings that were being pulled by the wealthy elite to feed their sinful habits. And I don’t need to convince you today regarding the relevancy of this text. Our day is not that much different than Micah’s day. The temptation of the merely popular preacher is always to furnish the latest tickle, and if there is ever to be a reformation, it will require preachers like Micah who refused to be muzzled and silenced regarding God’s truth. Micah didn’t need puppet prophets in his day, and we don’t need puppet preachers in our day. We need men of God who will pronounce, *“Thus saith the Lord,”* regardless of the consequences. And as I said earlier, God’s people cannot sustain a healthy spiritual diet off of flowery appeals. No, God’s preacher must stand behind God’s pulpit and bring the heat of conviction. Micah’s day was not a day for flowery speech that tickles the ears, nor is our own day. No, it’s the fire of God’s truth and the bones of the preacher of God that will spread and burn in the hearts of God’s people. You remove the pulpit, and you remove all holiness. You remove the pulpit, and you remove the authoritative Word of God regardless of the age, whether it’s the Old Testament or it’s the New Testament. And this passage before us, verses 6 through 11, is all about preaching. In fact, the two bookends to this passage, verse 6 says:

*“Do not preach”—thus they preach—  
“one should not preach of such things;*

And then verse 11:

*If a man should go about and utter wind and lies,*

*saying, “I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,”*

Preaching is the bookends of this passage, and what Micah does in these verses is he reveals the plot of the wealthy elite to silence the true prophets of the day. It was through the false prophets who acted as the puppets of the wealthy elite that the people as a whole were convinced that they did not need to hear the hard preaching of God’s truth, but they wanted soft preaching. And Micah shows in this passage the folly of God’s people of any age demanding soft preaching, and Micah does it by making three points. First of all, he shows the utter audacity of their demand in verses 6 and 7. Secondly, he shows the ulterior aim in their demand in verses 8 and 9; and third, he shows the unthinkable answer to their demand in verses 10 and 11. Let’s look at these in their turn. Number one, in verse 6 and 7, Micah reveals the folly of God’s people demanding soft preaching by pointing to the utter audacity of their demand. Just look at their demand, verse 6:

*“Do not preach”—thus they preach—  
“one should not preach of such things;*

Now, one would expect the greedy wealthy elite to stand against the prophets of God, but not other prophets, not other prophets who would defend the ruler’s right to sin; not other prophets who would at the same time denounce the prophets of truth. But that’s what they did. They declared, as verse 6 says, *“Do not preach.”* And the Hebrew word for *preach*—this is really interesting—literally means “drop” or “drip.” It’s as if the drops of truth dripping from Micah’s preaching of judgment and Isaiah’s preaching of judgment were too much for the people to handle, so they told the prophets, “Stop preaching. You are making business bad for us.” And we must ask the question, what audacity? Who would have the gall to tell God’s preachers to stop preaching truth? But that’s exactly what they did. Micah says, *“thus they preach,”* and what did they say? *“One should not preach of such things.”* That’s what they said. Who are they? Those are the puppet prophets of the wealthy elite. What things were they telling the prophets of God not to preach? Well, the things of coming judgment and disaster that Micah spoke about back in verses 3 and 4 where God said:

*against this family I am devising disaster,  
from which you cannot remove your necks,  
and shall not walk haughtily,  
for it will be a time of disaster.  
In that day they will take up a taunt song against you  
and moan bitterly, and say,  
“We are utterly ruined.”*

Those things! The false prophets said, “You shouldn’t say that.” Notice the end of verse 6. You know as well as we do that *“disgrace will not overtake us.”* In other words, they said something like, “The shame of being yoked to a foreign oppressor, taking us into exile, that’s not going to happen. God would never do that.” So, in one breath they are speaking against the right of God’s true prophets to preach the truth, and on the other hand, they are putting to sleep with assurance that God’s judgment would not come, and how could they possess such audacity to tell Micah and the others to cease and desist? Well, it ought to be obvious to you, something that is true in every age of false prophets, and that is these false puppet preachers were in cahoots with the wealthy leaders, and they were obviously benefiting financially from this partnership. This was a

conspiracy from the top political and religious officials of the nation. How organized was such a conspiracy? We’ll never know, but these false prophets were no more than court jesters. They entertained the sins of the wealthy elite by not preaching the truth of God’s coming judgment, which is anything but loving. That’s evil not to preach the truth. They were sell-outs to the truth. The very ones that could have and should have lent their voice to what Micah and Isaiah were saying, instead fueled the rebellion and stifled any attempt at reformation, telling the true preachers of God to stop preaching truth.

Such a thing prompted Matthew Henry to write in his commentary on Micah that silencing and suppressing God’s prophets “is a sin that provokes God as much as anything, for it not only spits in the face of his authority over us, but it spurns at the bowels of his mercy to us; for his sending prophets,” Henry says, “is a sure and valuable token of his good will.” A true preaching of God’s Word, even when it is a word of judgment, are the droppings of dew from heaven. It’s only those who hate to be reproved that hate to be reformed by the preaching of God’s Word, and so Micah is exposing these false prophets at great risk. They were not true pulpiteers; they were prostituting God’s sacred Word for sinful purposes. And let me just say that all preachers of truth at some point, someone will attempt to silence them. Jeremiah, the prophet, God told *“the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, or you will die by our hand.’”*

If you take your Bibles and turn with me to Isaiah chapter 30, the same sort of threat was against Isaiah. *“For they are a rebellious people,”* Isaiah 30:9, *“lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’ and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right.’”* They even know what is right, and they don’t want to hear it. *“But speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions.”* Tell us what we want to hear, even if it’s not true. It’ll make us feel better. We don’t want to hear the truth of God’s Word. Now, Micah, they are trying to muzzle his mouth. Amos was another prophet that they tried to muzzle. They said to Amos, *“You shall not prophesy,”* in Amos 2:12. A really interesting story, because Amos essentially said, “Thanks but no thanks, I’m still going to preach the Word of God.” There was a priest by the name of Amaziah who resided in the cultic city of Bethel. Amos 7 speaks about this, and he wrote a letter to King Jeroboam, accusing the prophet of plotting a conspiracy against the king, which by the way wasn’t true, but what was true was that Amos would not stop pronouncing the judgment that would befall Israel regardless of what it may have cost him. We read in Amos chapter 7:

*And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” And then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.*

*“You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,  
And do not preach against the house of Isaac.’*

*Therefore thus says the LORD:*

*“Your wife will be a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,  
and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line;  
you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go  
into exile away from its land.”*

Now, that’s someone who fears God more than man. The false prophets feared man over God. These powerful elite of the Southern Kingdom of Judah were trying to muzzle Micah. They tried to muzzle Isaiah. They tried to muzzle Jeremiah. They tried to muzzle Amos, and now they’re trying to muzzle Micah. And he continues quoting them, notice in verse 7 of Micah 2:; *“Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Has the LORD grown impatient? Are these his deeds?”* He is still quoting the false prophets. This was the content of their messages. These were the three rhetorical questions they would ask. They would say to their people, *“Should this be said, Oh house of Jacob?”* They appeal to the pride of being named after Jacob, as if they are saying, “Surely God’s deeds of destruction pronounced and preached by Micah and others don’t fit God’s character. *“Should this be said, Oh house of Jacob?”*

The second question, *“Has the LORD grown impatient?”* “You don’t think the Lord has grown impatient, do you? Do you think the Lord could grow impatient with His people? The Lord loves His people. The Lord would never judge His people.” Sounds familiar. That verb in verse 7, impatient, *qāṣar* in the Hebrew, it literally means “be short.” So, it has the idea of someone losing their temper, and perhaps the false prophets appealed to verses like Proverbs 14:29: *“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”* Perhaps they quoted that, even quoting the Bible and wrongly applied it to God as if God was losing His temper and somehow lacking control if He was to bring judgment. Interestingly, though, the Proverbs were written in the tenth century by Solomon. Not all of them were collected and copied until Micah’s day. King Hezekiah, who was the king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, actually included many of the Proverbs that we have in sacred Scripture today. But whatever passages they were appealing to, essentially what the false prophets were doing was preaching half-truths. They were playing fast and loose with Scripture. They were basically teaching that God’s patience has no limits, that God is only love. These were not faithful expositors. They were not teaching the full counsel of God’s Word. They were not handling Scripture honestly or carefully or accurately at all.

For example, they were teaching part of Exodus 34:6–7, but not all of it. Turn back to Exodus 34. I know you’re familiar with it, but I want you to see how they distorted Scripture to their own destruction. Exodus 34—these are the famous words of God to Moses where we pick up in verse 6, *“The Lord passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD.’”* And now He reveals His character: *“A God merciful and gracious,”* notice the language, *“slow to anger,”* not impatient, so far so good, *“and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”* even verse 7: *“keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”* Anyone reading that would affirm this is the character of God. This is the essence of who God is. He is a God of grace, and He is a God of love, and He is a God of mercy, and He demonstrates that by sending His only begotten Son into the world to die for transgressors and sinners, and to freely give them eternal life. This is a loving God. This is a gracious God. This is a merciful God at His

very core, at His very heart. But that’s not all God is, because notice the rest of verse 7: *“but who will by no means clear the guilty.”* Listen to this language: *“visiting even the visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”* Micah understood that to leave out the second part of verse 7 meant the destruction of the nation.

Go back to Micah chapter 2. How do I know that? Well, because Micah corrects their faulty theology. Notice the end of verse 7. He is done quoting the false prophets and now he gives a word to them at the end of verse 7, quoting God. He says, *“Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?”* It’s a very simple point Micah is making. If the greedy elite would stop their thieving and covetous ways and walk uprightly, then they would receive a blessing from God instead of judgment. In this sense, the message of judgment would be good words from God, because those good words would lead to repentance, and repentance would lead to reformation, and reformation would lead to a removal of God’s threats. But the false prophets would only preach part of Exodus 34:6 and 7, and they wrongly insisted to the people that God would never judge them. “It’s just not in His nature to do that. God is only full of love.” Such is the classic and depraved desire of men to always want to create God in their own image, and what is at stake? The preaching of the Word of God. A lack of preaching truth—that leads God’s people astray. And Micah’s words ring true for us. We know that God’s words always do good, even His threatening words to those who walk uprightly; that is, to those who respond appropriately to them. God’s Word, when it reveals sin, brings life and salvation.

For the Christian, obeying God’s words are pleasant and joyful. The psalmist said, *“You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.”* So, the fault is never with God when the Word of God and the preaching of God tastes bitter to us. That is the fault of the sinner. God’s Word is good and sweet to the godly. It is goodly to the godly, we could say. Psalm 19:10: *“More to be desired are they [God’s words] than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.”* And what did I say the Hebrew word for preach in this passage meant? It means “drip” or “drop.” Does the preaching of God’s truth drip into your mouth so that it tastes like honey, or is it bitter to you? The sign of a true follower of God is that the Word of God tastes sweet, even when they are words of threatening, even when they are words of judgment, because that reveals the chastening love of a Father who is putting back on the path the one that He sent His Son to die for. Calvin speaking about this phrase, *“Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?”* says this in his commentary. He says, and I quote:

Let us then learn to become submissive to God, and then he will convey to us by his word nothing but sweetness, nothing but delights; we shall then find nothing more desirable than to be fed by this spiritual food; and it will even be a real joy to us, whenever the Lord will open his mouth to teach us. But when at any time the word of Lord goads and wounds, and thus exacerbates us, let us know [Calvin says, it is not God’s fault] that it is through our own fault.

You see, the lesson from Micah’s day is the lesson for our day. Not accepting biblical truth through the preaching of God’s Word is sheer folly. It is the equivalent to having the same utter audacity of those in Micah’s day to silence the very mouth of God, but Micah is not done. The plot of the elite to silence true messengers of God’s Word, though it was sheer folly, Micah exposes part of this in verses 6 and 7. He points to the utter audacity of their demand for the preachers to stop preaching, but in verses 8 and 9 Micah gets to the motive behind their attempt at silencing the preachers. We move from the utter audacity of their demands, secondly, to the ulterior aim in their

demand. And here in these verses, verses 8 and 9, the prophet goes a little bit deeper than what he did earlier in verses 1 through 5 where he generally gave an indictment against God’s people and generally told them they would be taken into exile. Here in verses 8 and 9, he puts, I guess we could say, some names with the faces or faces with the names, and he exposes the horror of their covetousness because these were sins not committed merely against the poorest of society. That is not the type of oppression that was going on. This was social injustice on the common man, woman, and child. They made no discrimination, and notice, it begins with the men in verse 8. *“But lately my people [Micah says] have risen up as an enemy; you strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war.”*

This is the rich robe of the man. The rich robe of the man in Israelite society conveyed his dignity. You remember in the New Testament in the parable of the prodigal. The father shows his uninhibited love for this son, because when he could see at a distance his son returning home, Luke 15: 20 records: *“his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”* Something you would never see a Middle Eastern man do, unless he just didn’t care, because in order to run he had to lift up his cloak, he had to lift up his robe, he had to expose his legs, and no Middle Eastern man would put himself to such lack of dignity, but this father did. He was willing to do that. An Israelite man had dignity, Micah is saying. He had dignity and safety within his borders just like a soldier coming back to the borders of his own country, feeling safe after the war. But he wasn’t safe. There was a war going on and it was the religious leaders, the prophets, aiding and abetting the wealthy political leaders to pillage these men, to take from them their cloak. And these prophets would not confront these wealthy leaders for doing this because they were being paid.

Now, what Micah might have in mind here—and we don’t have time this evening to go look at it, but later you can read Exodus 22 and Deuteronomy chapter 24. There is a specific law perhaps Micah is alluding to here. In those passages, you will read that there were laws in Israel that if someone gave his cloak as a pledge that it had to be returned to him before sunset, and the reason for this was so that when he went to bed he had something to cover his body with. He used his robe as not just a robe but also as a blanket. It could be that Micah is referring to that, but more than likely he is referring to the systematic exploitation and the ripping off of men of their dignity by taking from them their land and taking from them their possessions. Micah even uses imagery of war to say something like that before the Assyrians come, you have an enemy within the camp who are stealing the dignity of men.

Now, I just want to stop for a minute and say, we need to contemplate for a moment how the Western world has stolen the dignity of man. All around our culture today, strong male leadership is hated. The feminization of men. Man has had stolen from him his right to be a man. A man has had stolen from him his right and duty to be the head of his home. It has been stolen even from the church and our culture today for men alone to serve in the office of pastor, the office of elder. And when you remove a man’s dignity, you are stealing from him something God has given him, and such a theft will bring God’s judgment on any culture and society, and even church.

But it wasn’t just the men; they had ulterior aims in wanting to silence the prophets because they were also stealing from the women. Notice verse 9: *“The women of my people you drive out from their delightful houses.”* Now, such women may have been widows. Widows were obviously



exploited even in Jesus’s day. If you fast forward, Jesus spoke about those who devour widows’ houses. These were probably delightful homes, estates, that these husbands who perhaps they died in the cold of the night because their robe was taken away, now they left their estate to their wives, and the leaders went after the women and took from them their homes. Again, we need to stop and ask how are women being robbed today? Well, the woman today has had taken from her the delightful and dutiful design to have as her greatest influence the sphere of the home. The woman today has the cultural pressure to work and to build a career. She effectively has had stolen from her what will give to her her greatest fulfillment—and that is serving her husband, serving her children. She’s had her home taken away from her. Where are the preachers today who preach against that sin? Women have been robbed of their duty. Men have been robbed of their dignity. This is equivalent to raping and pillaging the roles of men and women within society. You know a society has gone into sheer chaos when you can’t even make a distinction between what is male and female, and what a man should do and what a woman should do. Such is not new. The men and women were being robbed in Micah’s day, and it wasn’t just the men and women. It was also the children.

Notice the end of verse 9. *“From their young children you take away,”* God says, *“my splendor forever.”* So, in the process of dispossessing the women from their homes, it resulted in the children being disinherited. No home meant no support, no supervision, no security; and God took special offense at this, because He says *“their young children you take away my splendor forever.”* Psalm 127 says that *“children are a heritage from the Lord.”* Children, first of all, belong to the Lord before they belong to parents, and children certainly do not belong to any government. It is the authority of parents that they have that’s been given to them by God to raise their children as they see fit according to Scripture. And children are a heritage of the Lord because God’s people perpetuate generations of gospel grace which serves as salt and light in a society, but there wasn’t going to be salt and light in this society, because the men were killed; the women and their homes were taken away, and so children were orphans. They robbed men, women, and children.

Listen, when people do not want to hear God’s truth, it’s always because of an ulterior motive of not wanting to be confronted with their own sin. And such people have made themselves not just an enemy of other people, but they have made themselves an enemy of God. Notice back up at the beginning of verse 8: *“But lately my people have risen up,”* God says, *“as an enemy.”* As an enemy. We’ve returned to it over and over and over again, but the summary of the law is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. And when we don’t follow that command, which is a summary of all of the law, we are making ourselves enemies of God. We are rising up against God. Because of our union with Christ, we are in union with all other believers, and when we sin against other believers, when we rob them, when we covet what they have, and when we hurt them to the point that we try to take what they have, even if only within our hearts, we are no better than the religious and political leaders of Micah’s day. It was Luther who once said, *“God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does.”* Your neighbor does. Such covetousness destroys societies and churches. What did Jesus say? Well, He said on that final day:

*“When the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will set on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right,*

*but the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world.”*

And listen to this:

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.” This is Jesus speaking. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And then the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.’”*

The message of Micah in many ways is judgment begins with the household of God. God’s people must repent of adopting the cultural and societal norms of covetousness and materialism, which is not loving neighbor as oneself. The church must repent for harboring false teachers and charlatans, and hucksters of every stripe that have aided and abetted false theology, and they have actually fueled rebellion against God—not prevented it—all done by an ulterior aim, a love of sin. That’s always the reason. So, trying to silence the true preaching of God’s Word is sheer folly, and Micah exposes how foolish it is. He exposes, number one, as we saw, the utter audacity of their demand to do that in verses 6 and 7; number two, the ulterior aim in their demand in verses 8 and 9. Notice with me finally, he also exposes the unthinkable answer to their demand in verses 10 and 11.

Now, the prophet Micah here in these verses uses what theologians call a *lex talionis*. This is a law of retaliation. This is the punishment matches the crime. So, back in chapter 2, verse 1, when the wicked were devising their wickedness, Micah says in verse 3, God was “*devising disaster.*” An eye for an eye, law of retaliation. We see another example of that back in verse 8. The people rose up like an enemy. Now in verses 10 and 11, God is going to tell them to rise up. You rose up against Me, now I’m going to tell you to rise up, and I’m going to judge you. I’m going to exile you from the land. Notice verse 10: “*Arise and go, for this is no place to rest.*” That is what the land of Canaan was, wasn’t it? It was a place of not only inheritance, as Deuteronomy 12:9 says, but also a place of rest; that is, a place of safety and protection, but they had desecrated that land. They had turned it into a breeding ground for corruption and covetousness, so God is evicting them from the land. They evicted women and children from their own homes, and God says, “I’m going to evict you from the land.” Why? Verse 10: “*because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction.*”

No possession of the land meant no peace. No possession of the land meant no rest. In fact, it meant restlessness under a foreign oppressor. “You evicted women from their homes?” God says, “I’ll evict you from your homeland.” Now, we need to remember we are not in the same covenant that the nation of Israel was in, in the Mosaic covenant. God had promised that He would vomit them out of the land when they dirtied the land, as verse 10 says, when they made it unclean. In fact, go back to Leviticus chapter 18. This is too important to pass up. In Leviticus 18, what I want you to understand is that God obviously has a right to do whatever He wants and for whatever reason He wants to do it, but God is not capricious, and God is not arbitrary. He is sovereign on the one hand, but He is just on the other hand. He is powerful on the one hand, but He is also

orderly on the other hand, and what God is doing here by threatening destruction is just following the promises that He made originally to Israel when they entered covenant with God at Mount Sinai.

Leviticus 18:24, God says, *“Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean.”* So, all the foreign nations the Israelites drove out, the reason God was driving those foreign nations out to give to Israel the land of Canaan was because of the uncleanness and paganism and sin of those nations. And God says in verse 25, *“I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.”* Verse 26:

*“But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.”*

God’s only threatening what He had already promised to do. God’s not capricious or arbitrary. God’s people had violated their covenant with God. Now, Israel’s Sabbath rest was a picture of their spiritual security, and in the new covenant, also a covenant under the larger Covenant of Grace, our Sabbath rest is Christ to which Old Testament Israel’s rest in the land of Canaan pointed forward to. And so, in this sense, our rest from our sins, our rest from our good works, can never be taken away from us, but what can happen which is similar to Israel, is that we can incur the displeasure and disappointment of our Father, who loves us. In fact, He loves us so much that He might make life miserable for us due to our uncleanness of sin. We read about this in Hebrews 12. He is a Father that loves us and He will discipline His children. He will not cast us off forever. We can never be removed from our Sabbath rest in Christ, but He can temporarily bring chastisement upon the church, upon the people of God, which is why we need the preaching of God’s truth. We need it more than bread itself because it helps us avoid disaster and destruction and devastation. But what I want you to see is that part of God’s answer to the wealthy elites, because they harbored these puppet preachers who tried to silence the true prophets to feed their own sin—this is only part of the answer, this threat.

Verse 11 reveals a haunting and horrifying other side to God’s unthinkable answer to their demands. You want false preaching? Notice your Bibles, verse 11. Micah says, *“If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, ‘I will preach to you of wine and strong drink.’”* Micah says, *“he would be the preacher for this people!”* He would be a preacher for this people. The false prophets uttered wind and lies. Back over in chapter 3 and verse 8 it says that Micah was *“filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord.”* The word *spirit*, the breath of God, the wind of God, it’s powerful. No, these false prophets uttered wind and lies. They were flimsy and windy. They didn’t breathe out Spirit truth, and their philosophy was uncovered by Micah. Notice in verse 11, they said to themselves, *“I will preach to you of wine and strong drink.”* That was the content of their message. You know what that means? It means they gave people what they wanted to hear. It means they gave them what tasted good—and catch this—they gave them what would numb their spiritual sensitivities and consciences so that they were under the influence of a debauched conscience.

This was God’s unthinkable answer. This was His judgment. He would allow them to remain in their drunk and dark oblivion. They wanted wine and strong drink to drip from the mouths of the false prophets, and God says, “Drink all you want.” Notice at the end of verse 11, they say, *“I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,”* and Micah says that type of person would be the preacher for this people. Did you catch that? God is meeting their demand, not as a compromise but as a judgment. He’s sealing their fate. They want a message that tickles the ears. They want a message that takes them into oblivion of not knowing right from wrong. They want their sensitivities numbed. They want a feel-good message, and God says, “You’ve demanded it, and actually you’re going to get it, because that’s what you deserve.” They would be drunk with lies, foaming at the mouth from the intoxicating froth of their own preachers’ messages, the peddling puppet preachers. And what is the lesson? The lesson is that false preaching is not merely a symptom of apostasy, but it is sometimes the very judgment of God for tolerating apostasy. And the New Testament is equally clear about this. Those who peddle God’s Word for profit, Paul spoke about them in 2 Corinthians chapter 2. Jesus spoke about the rising of false prophets. We are in the last days. The last days began when Jesus walked this earth. They continue until now.

Jesus said, *“See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray...And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray,”* Jesus says. *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it,”* Jesus says, *“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible,”* Jesus says, *“even the elect.”* We aren’t to be surprised about this. John repeated the refrain of Jesus in 1 John 2:18:

*“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that this is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain they all are not of us.”*

We’re in that last hour. We have been in that last hour for a long time, and there have always been false christs and false apostles. John says, *“Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* Warning after warning after warning in Scripture. What does Paul say?

*“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teaching of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”*

This is false teaching all the way around; and so, Paul, in many ways would tell young Timothy the same sort of message that we hear in Micah: *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge of the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be ready in season and out of season;”* that is, when people want to receive it, when they don’t want to receive it, *“reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from*

*listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*” Did you catch that? *“People will accumulate for themselves teachers to suite their own passions.”* There’s always an ulterior aim in wanting to silence truth—always. It’s always been that way. It’s the meat of God’s Word that helps us exercise our *“powers of discernment,”* to quote Hebrews 5:14 again, so that everything stands or falls behind the pulpit. The greatest decision you and I will ever make as Christians is what teachers we place ourselves under.

And by the way, in Micah’s day, like our own day, Amos said—who was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom—that there was a famine in the land. Do you remember that verse? Let me read it to you. *“Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord GOD,”* now, listen to this, *“when I,”* God says, *“will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread,”* not physical bread, *“nor a thirst for water.”* But here is the famine I’ll send: *“of hearing the words of the LORD.”* You see, such is not merely a sign of apostasy lurking around the church. It’s a sign of God’s judgment for God’s people tolerating apostasy and false teaching. We need to pray that God would bring healing to our land, not so much physical healing but spiritual healing. We need to pray that the pure preaching of God’s Word returns to the pulpit for a true reformation to take place, and I’m going to say something that probably will offend many that are watching this live. I don’t suspect it will offend any of you. There are many pulpits today, *today*, and many churches that were silent. There was no preaching, there was no one there. Let us pray they stay that way until they agree to preach the truth of God’s Word. That’s not unloving. That’s revealing the character of God to say, *“Look, the preaching of truth is to wake people up, to lead them to repentance that they might come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to lead God’s people into purity.”* Anyone who’s afraid to preach that message isn’t preaching truth, and anyone who is harboring a preacher that refuses to preach that message is compromising at a minimum, and at a maximum is doing that to feed their own motives of self-service and their love of sin. Times have not changed that much since Micah’s day. *“Thus says the Lord,”* and God’s people need to take heed. Let us pray.

Father, Your Word is a strong word. It is a convicting word; and Lord, we do not preach it lightly. We thank You for the clarity of Your Word. We also thank You for the blessed assurance of Jesus. We thank You, Lord, that we are safe in His arms. We are safe in His kingdom. Even if the kingdom of this world falls part, even if apostasy is all around us, we’re safe in Christ if we know Him, if we know Him as our Savior. Father, we pray for healing in our land, spiritual healing. We pray that the gospel would go forth powerfully with great conviction, that even those who think they know You, but don’t, would be humbled. We pray You would use the virus even to do that, if it be Thy will. We pray in all things that You would keep Your people, Your remnants safe. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Help us to know He is our Savior, He is our Lord. He deserves our full devotion. May we never compromise truth for the sake of our own sin or own reputation. May we boldly stand for truth, and may all of us be preachers of truth in that sense for the world that You’ve placed us in. We pray these things in the blessed name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.