

The Message of Micah

by G. Campbell Morgan

The book of Micah reveals the sovereignty of Jehovah and the unmasking and denunciation of false rulers, as well as the unveiling and proclamation of the true Ruler, who will bring peace and establish the Kingdom of God.

Scripture: Proverbs 29:2, Isaiah 9:6, Micah 3:11, Micah 5:2, Micah 5:4, Matthew 5:14, Romans 13:1

Topics: "Authority", "True Leadership"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan delivers a powerful sermon on 'The Message of Micah,' emphasizing the unmasking of false authority among civil, spiritual, and moral rulers who act for personal gain rather than the welfare of the people. He contrasts this with the unveiling of the true Ruler, who comes from Bethlehem and embodies peace and divine strength. Morgan highlights that the test of authority lies in its motive, and true strength is found in recognizing God's sovereignty. He calls for obedience to this true authority and encourages believers to live out and enforce His ideals while awaiting His return to establish perfect governance. The sermon ultimately underscores the importance of aligning with God's will to experience true peace and righteousness.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Unmasking of false Authority. 3:11.

i. Civil Rulers. Judge for Reward. 3:2.

a. Character. Hate good, love evil.

b. Conduct. Spoliation of the People.

ii. Spiritual Rulers. Teach for Hire.

a. Their Claim. They lean upon the Lord.

b. Their Corruption. The corrupted Motive.

iii. Moral Rulers. Divine for Money. 3:5.

a. Their Influence. They make my People err.

b. Their Methods.

Fed. Thy cry peace.

Unfed. They make War.

II. The Unveiling of true Authority

i. The Coming One.

a. From human Obscurity.

b. From Everlasting.

ii. His Administration.

a. He shall stand.

b. He shall feed.

iii. The Issue.

a. Positive. This Man shall be Peace.

b. Negative. Destruction of all false Methods. 5:10-14.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. The Test of all Authority is in its Motive

Civil, spiritual or moral Selfishness is evil.

II. The Strength of Authority

i. The Strength of the Lord.

ii. The Majesty of the Name of the Lord.

III. The Hope

i. The One came to Jay Foundations.

ii. He will come to complete the Work.

IV. The Duty

i. To Obey.

ii. To Enforce.

iii. To Wait.

The position this book occupies in the Divine library maintains an interesting sequence. I do not suggest that the placing of these books is inspired. In the Septuagint the arrangement is entirely different. I do, however, say quite seriously that I am a Churchman, believing in the Catholic Church, and believing in the Catholic Church as an instrument of God. As I study my Bible I am more and more convinced that there is a reason for the order in which the books are placed. We have seen in our last two or three lectures that there has been an evident sequence of thought. Let us call to mind the three immediately preceding this one. In Amos the burden was that of the Divine government of nations, and of national accountability. In Obadiah it was that of Divine government proceeding to judgment against sin. In Jonah it was that of the Divine government proceeding in mercy in answer to repentance.

In Micah we have a picture of the administration of that government in the affairs of men. The nations are addressed. There is, of course, a sense in which this prophecy was not to the nations outside; but they are in view; and as we read, we find that the prophet's method was that of calling upon the nations to observe God's method with His own people. He recognized that the chosen people were created in order that through them the fact of the sovereignty of God might be made manifest to the nations. Therefore he called upon those nations to observe the judgment of the chosen people.

When God has chosen a nation or called a man, the truth of His government is made real through the nation or through the man, either by failure or by success. If the nation be obedient, there follows the revelation to other nations of the grace and tenderness of the Divine government in the realization of life at its highest and best; such realization resulting from such obedience. Had Israel fulfilled the purpose of God in the midst of the nations they would have seen in her prosperity, in her blessing, how good and gracious a thing the government of God is. Israel failed to bear that testimony to the nations. Then is there no message for them through her history? Micah shows that in the judgment of God upon the failing people a truth of vast importance is proclaimed to the surrounding nations. Therefore he makes his appeal to them, summons them to see the judgment of God upon the people who failed, in order that they may learn something of the meaning of His government.

The fundamental conception of this book in common with all the prophetic writings is that of the sovereignty of Jehovah. Micah was familiar with the condition of the people resulting from the misrule of Ahaz. He was first, and last, and always, conscious of, and confident in, the throne and the government of God. He was undoubtedly during a large part of his prophetic ministry contemporary with Isaiah, and their conceptions are strikingly similar. There is, however, a distinct difference between them, and in the difference we discover the peculiar value of this book. Isaiah saw the uplifted throne of Jehovah; and all through his wonderful ministry, whether in the prophecies of judgment proceeding to peace, or in those of peace proceeding to judgment, he dealt with men and affairs as having immediate relation to that throne.

Micah recognizes the place of delegated authority in the economy of God, and he spoke to princes, priests, and prophets as to the representatives of the Divine authority. "The powers that be are ordained of God," declared the Christian apostle, and so also taught the Hebrew prophet; and that conception of God's sovereignty as delegated and exercised through appointed rulers is discoverable throughout the prophecy. He traced the sin and corruption, the sighing and crying, the agony and tears of the people, to the misrule of the men in authority.

The permanent values of this prophecy of Micah then are two; first, the unmasking and denunciation of false rulers; and, secondly, the unveiling and proclamation of the true Ruler. In each case the authority is seen not in the abstract, but in the concrete. False authority is seen in the princes, priests, and prophets,

by whom Micah was surrounded; true authority in the One, Whose advent he saw in an hour of exalted and holy vision, and of Whom he spoke remarkable words which are evidently Messianic.

Let us first consider what this prophecy teaches concerning false authority. It is completely unmasked in one brief statement, "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money." In these words Micah named the three sections of rulers; civil, the princes; spiritual, the priests; and moral, the prophets. He showed wherein lay the secret of failure to rule in each case and consequently the secret of the corruption of the people over whom they ruled. There is more satire in his last description than in the first two, for in that he was dealing with men of his own order, whom he understood more perfectly than he did either princes or priests. When speaking of the princes he used a word which characterized their proper activity; they judge, but they do it for reward. When he spoke of the priests he used a word which characterized their responsibility; they teach, but they do it for hire. When he came to deal with the prophets he used a word which did not characterize their responsibility, but which revealed what they were really doing. The prophets were not prophesying, they were divining. The Hebrew word here translated divining is one which indicates the activity which God had forbidden, that of sorcery and witchcraft. He thus employed a word which showed how deep their sin was. They divined for money.

Take each of these for brief examination "The heads thereof judge for reward." In the earlier part of the chapter we find more particularly what that means. The prophet described their proper function, "Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: is it not for you to know judgment?" Then he described their character, "who hate the good, and love the evil." Finally, he described their conduct, "who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people; and they flay their skin from off them, and break their bones: yea, they chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron." The men who ought to know judgment, and exercise judgment, and rule over the people, are men who hate the good and love the evil, and the result is the spoliation of the people. "The heads thereof judge for reward." They are men who take bribes, men who can be bought, men who make it impossible for the poor and oppressed to find judgment and justice. A corrupt ruler is one who exercises the office to which he is appointed, not impartially and not as the representative of the throne of eternal judgment, but for reward. There is no need that we should dwell upon the heinousness of that sin. Men, whether Christian or not, know theoretically how dastardly a thing it is for a judge to receive a bribe.

"The priests thereof teach for hire." The priests are the spiritual rulers, and one is almost startled to find the word Micah used of them, they teach. We have so far wandered from the Old Testament idea of priesthood as to imagine that teaching is not a part of its work. So far as the relation of the priest to man is concerned, this is the principal part of his work. So far as his relation to God is concerned he had to carry out the ceremonial instruction and sacrifices. But towards men the priest was a teacher. Moses in his final message had declared, "Thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites . . . and thou shalt enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment, and thou shalt do according to the tenor of the sentence, which they shall shew thee from that place which the Lord shall choose; and thou shalt observe to do all that they shall teach thee; according to the tenor of the law which they shall teach thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence." When Micah denounced the priests he evidently had in mind that ancient provision in the economy of God. The true function, the spiritual function of the ancient priesthood was that of knowing the will of God and interpreting it to men. The work of the priest was that of bringing to bear upon material things the light and force of spiritual things. That is the meaning of teaching.

The false priest holds out his hand for hire, and so corrupts the people.

Then we have the last description, "the prophets thereof divine for money." The true word descriptive of the prophetic work should have been proclaim. The prophets stood for the moral standards of the people. Of these men Micah declared, they "bite with their teeth and cry, Peace; and whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him." That is to say, the prophets were prepared to say certain things to the people on certain conditions. If the people would feed them they would say, Peace; if they would not, then the prophets would denounce them.

Thus in this brief description we have the most complete unmasking of false authority. Wherever we find distressed and suffering people the cause is to be discovered finally in the rulers. "The powers that be are ordained of God." If the powers that be are out of harmony with God, if they love evil and hate good, if they are mastered by pure selfishness, the people pass into the place of suffering and corruption. I care not whether the system of human government be autocracy, limited monarchy, or republicanism, we still find these orders referred to by Micah; there are the civil rulers, kings, princes or presidents; the spiritual rulers, the priests, men who stand among the people to tell them the things of the eternal world; the moral rulers, the prophets, the men who interpret to their age the standards of right. These are the leaders of men. Whatever may be the form of human government, men are still under the threefold rule of civil, spiritual and moral authority. When the civil rulers enrich themselves out of their office, the result is a demoralized people. When the spiritual rulers are seeking hire, the people are corrupted, and desolation ensues. When the moral rulers are seeking for money, the people are degraded. False authority is authority exercised on behalf of the men who exercise it.

When the reason why a man rules is that he may get gain out of his ruling, the people suffer. The right to rule is the right of a self-emptied life, the right of a life that has no thought of its own aggrandizement or enrichment. That is the life that rises to a position of true power in the economy of God. When men in positions of authority in the spiritual, civil, or moral realms work for reward, hire, money, the people become demoralized, and corruption is the issue.

Through the mists, beyond the immediate, Micah saw the coming Ruler. He saw Him coming out of human obscurity, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall One come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel." The prophet, borne along through the centuries, carried away from the immediate surroundings in the midst of which he found himself, sick at heart of the false rule under which he lived and under which the people groaned and suffered, saw in the distance the one true Ruler to Whom Jehovah delegated His authority. Micah did not perhaps perfectly understand the things he saw, or the things he wrote upon the page of his prophecy, which we must date at least six or seven hundred years before Christ ; but they are the facts chronicled in the gospel story. He saw One coming out of human obscurity, out of Bethlehem Ephrathah; and yet not finally from Bethlehem, hut from everlasting.

He then described the administration of the coming One in the words, "He shall stand, and shall feed His flock in the strength of the Lord." The false rulers, civil, spiritual, moral, were selfcentred men who governed in their own interest and not in the interest of the people; seeking for reward, hire, money. The true ruler will stand inflexible and invincible in authority, feeding His flock in the strength of Jehovah. The true Ruler will represent Jehovah and act in His strength. The contrast is patent and forceful.

Micah finally described the effect of the rule of the true Ruler, in one simple statement. "This Man shall be our peace." That is the positive issue. The prophet saw, moreover, in the establishment of the true rule, the destruction of all the things in which the people had put their confidence when they were under false rule ; horses, chariots, cities, strongholds, witchcraft, images, the Asherim.

The strength of a nation is never in its horses and chariots. The safety of a nation does not consist in its adoption of a two-power standard. The strength of a nation is not in its cities and strongholds, fortifications and armaments, soothsaying and witchcraft. The strength of a nation is in its Ruler.

The permanent values constitute the living message. The test of authority is its motive. If the motive of civil authority is the aggrandizement of the ruler; if the motive of spiritual authority is the creation of power on behalf of the priest ; if the motive of moral authority is the enrichment of the prophet, then all such authority is false in itself, and pernicious in its effect.

The strength of authority is in recognition of Jehovah. We have seen it perfectly realized in the One to Whom Micah looked on, Who came from Bethlehem Ephratah, out of everlasting into time, to lay the broad foundations of the ultimate Kingdom. He will come again to complete His work, and we shall never see perfect government, authority, rule, by civil, spiritual, or moral rulers, until that hour in which He Who came shall come again, for the completion of His work.

Our duty is to obey Him, for our eyes have seen Him and our hearts know Him. We must enforce His ideals by our living and by our teaching. With loins girt about, and lamps burning, we must wait for the flaming of the glory of His advent feet; and we must watch, not gloomily, but with sunlight in the heart, and confidence in the life, knowing that at last He will abolish chariots and horses, cities, strongholds, and all the things of the dust in which men put their confidence; and establish the Kingdom of God in the eternal strength of righteousness.

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