

RUF Bible Study – The Minor Prophets
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister¹
March 3, 2010
Micah – What Does God Want?

Have you ever gotten to a place in an argument when you said in exasperation, ‘What do you want from me?!’ That’s usually a last resort when you’re overwhelmed and don’t know what else to say. What type of answer do you want from that? Do you really want to know what the other person wants?

You can ask the Spice Girls, of course. In “Wannabe” they start off with and repeat this profound ditty:

*Yo, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want,
So tell me what you want, what you really really want,
I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want,
So tell me what you want, what you really really want,*

I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna really really wanna zigzag ha.

I’m not sure what it is they really want when it’s all said and done. I think they want you to be friends with their friends, and then at some point to slam your body down and wind it all around. Well, that and to “zigzag ha,” of course.

Figuring out what people want is pretty important. This is the what makes capitalism go, what makes relationships sustainable, what makes competition work. What am I supposed to do? What is required from me? What do you want?

Have you thought about what God wants?

The book of Micah offers an answer to that question – What does God want? Micah is an ancient book, written in the 700s B.C. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, who is a more famous prophet and the King Hezekiah from 2 Kings 18.

Micah is considered to be one of the minor prophets, a designation for this group based on the size of the books, not their importance or worth. Micah has been called the prophet of the oppressed middle class, as he speaks to a time and a place where people are being taken advantage of both inside and outside his own country. The Assyrian empire was rising to power, and its army seemed invincible. It was made up of fearsome mercenaries, and Assyria’s leader Tiglath-pileser III was bent on expanding his kingdom.

What do you think God wants? I’m not sure if you’re a list person or not. I’m mostly not, but I try to make some when I just can’t keep it all straight. My wife Julie makes a lot more list. In her Daytimer she has a secret list of stuff she wants. I’m not sure how often she adds to it, but when I get stuck for a present idea, I can go there and find out what she’s been thinking about. I can get her a scarf, or a massage or a specific face washer cleansing cream – something she wants. It’s tremendously helpful.

Let’s look at Micah to find out what God says he wants, what’s on his wish list. Let’s peek into his inspired, inerrant Daytimer given to and published for us so we can see what he wants. God is a person after all. He can want things.

God wants evil to stop!

If you start reading Micah, you come across God’s stance against evil pretty quickly. In verse 2 we read, *Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will be split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgressions of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. (1:2-5)*

The holy one, the Lord of all hosts, the God of Israel is going to be a witness against his people. And not only a witness, but he’s not going to send a repo man – he himself is going to come and judge and walk among the people in judgment and wrath.

God hates sin. This is something we have to remember. We don’t like to think about this very much, and pass it over for a much more lovey-dovey warm fuzzies God. God hates sin. He is against it, and he stands against it. Sin is the breaking of relationship with God. And that break of relationship that ignores or denigrates or demotes God also manifests itself in the hurting of our relationships with each other.

¹ © Doug Serven, 2010 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2010, website: www.ouruf.org.

For this series, I used commentaries by McComiskey, Boice and Dever, and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Jeff Ferguson. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

God hates. God hates evil. He says, *Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil in their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.*” (2:1-2)

These are social evils, collective evils perpetrated against humanity. Are you aware of these today? Surely you don't think they are gone and wiped out from our day do you?

Let me give you just one example of something that you should know about and care about – the Invisible Children of Uganda. I can't go into all of it, but there has been a 23-year war being waged in Uganda where over 2 million people have been displaced from their homes. One of the sides, the Lord's Resistance Army has been capturing children to fight in their army for years. It's estimated that they have conscripted over 30,000 children, over 3000 in the last year alone. These children are given guns and forced into killing even their own parents. It is slavery, murder and the worst social evil in the extreme, and it's happening in 2010. God hates it. God cares about justice.²

Learn more about the Invisible Children at their website, invisiblechildren.com. In fact, there are a bunch of people who are mobilized even at OU to get the word out and affect change for this effort. Some of them are camping out in downtown Oklahoma City as we speak in order to get one of the Oklahoma senators to sign a bill to enact some strong policies to get change in Uganda. These people are doing something that God cares about – they are speaking against evil.

I think all of us would agree that kids shouldn't be enslaved to be in an army to kill their parents. But that is just one end of the spectrum. The Bible tells us that there is evil in all of our hearts. We can't just point to the worst types of evil and say, "I would never do that" and think we're off the hook.

There are sins of the heart. Sins of pride, hatred, covetousness, lying, greed and more. These come from places of false worship in our lives, idols we serve and trust. For God's people in Micah, they were trusting in horses and in the defensive walls of their city, but also in magic and sacred stones.

We trust in our degrees, our ACT scores, our suburbs and our financials. We trust in our status as soccer moms, or social activists or right-wing radicals, or moral people. But it's all the same. It's putting something in the place of where God should be. That is idolatry. That is something God hates – it comes out as evil.

Sure it all starts off so innocently. But when your idol isn't getting what it wants by ordinary means, you start to cheat or steal or beg or borrow or even kill to get it. It may be adrenaline and the thrill. You're going to need more and more and more. It may be peace. You can idolize peace, to where you would never ever speak the truth because you're afraid it's going to make waves. It could be sex or marriage or status or intelligence or anything.

God speaks against these things. He wants first place in our lives, in our hearts, and in our societies. God hates sin so much that he will enter in and judge the wicked. Do you see this? Do you believe this? Do you understand this? I would submit that you actually want this if you think about it. You do not want to live in a world or a universe where evil will be let go. Yes, there will be a delay, but evil will ultimately be judged and there will be a verdict and punishment and all will be set right.

Do you know what the worst judgment of all is? It comes in 3:4 and 3:7 – *Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil.... The seers shall be disgraced and the diviners put to shame; they shall cover their lips, for there is no answer from God.*

This is the worst. No attention is far worse than negative attention. Every kid knows that, and you can see that acted out in kindergarten class every day. Here God is saying he will not hear them. They've been blocked on facebook! We all know how bad that is.

I had a situation where I had to block someone on facebook once. He was mad about that. I asked him, "What about our real friendship? It seems like you care more about our facebook status friendship than our real actual friendship."

God says he will not hear. Brothers and sisters, you don't want that. You do not want God to hide his face from you. Search his face out. Seek it out. Look for it. Go and find it. Make sure you don't lose that. Don't lose God's ear, for that is the worst that can happen to you.

² ***From a press release dated Jan 27, 2010 from Lisa Dougan of Resolve Uganda:*** For over two decades, a man named Joseph Kony has led a rebel force called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in a campaign of violence across central Africa. In a perverse use of the Lord's name, Kony claims to be called by God and led by spirits on an apocalyptic quest to take over Uganda and rule it under the parameters of the Ten Commandments. Lacking support from local communities, Kony seeks to gain control through the use of brutal violence and terror. LRA violence against communities in Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and contributed to extreme poverty and desperation. It is estimated that since the start of his rebellion, Kony has been responsible for the abduction of over 30,000 children, most of whom are conscripted as soldiers and forced to kill, mutilate, and destroy villages. In the past year alone, the LRA massacred over 2,000 people and abducted close to 3,000 more. Many of those abducted are children now being forced to serve as soldiers and sex slaves in the rebel army. Moreover, LRA violence in recent months demonstrates a systematic targeting of Christians and religious leaders. Rebel fighters have attacked and burned churches with worshippers trapped inside and mutilated and killed a number gruesomely akin to crucifixion.

God wants his people and his name to be restored.

God hates evil, but there are surprising words of light in the darkness and judgment. In chapter two God says, *I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather together the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.* (2:12)

God is going to restore and protect his people. The very next verse, 2:13, speaks of some breach in the door so that the people can be saved. If you turn to Isaiah 37, you can read about something amazing and incredible that happened. Remember that Isaiah and King Hezekiah were contemporaries of Micah, so Micah was around for this. The Assyrian leader Sennacherib had Jerusalem surrounded and there was no escape possible.

But God delivered them. God saved them. God sent an angel of the Lord and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians, which decimated their army, and they left.

God may not do quite that same thing for you tonight, but he is at work restoring his people and their fortunes.

In verse 4, you can read about the Lord establishing his house in the mountains, and people from all nations flowing to it, saying, *Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.* (4:3-5) Hallelujah! To the King! To the Restoration! This gets my blood pumping, this awesome vision for the future.

We've read of this before. We heard about this in Amos. God has a plan for restoration of his whole kingdom. We're not in a world that just started by chance and will end by chance and therefore what is this moment but chance? We aren't in a world with a meaningless beginning and a meaningless end, so therefore why isn't this moment meaningless? We're not in a world ruled by chance or mere survival or biological productions. We live in world with God. It has been ruined by sin, but God is still in charge, and he will restore the whole world someday, setting everything right.

In one of the latest episodes of *This American Life*, a man told about a house that he used to sneak into. It was an old house filled with junk everywhere, but he would sort and sift through it, trying to figure out who used to live there. He stole some things from that house, little treasures and pictures that he collected through the years of his burglary.

Eventually the house was demolished. The people who had inherited didn't want the house or the liability of it or to even pay the property taxes, so they just wrecked the whole thing.

In the story, the narrator and several others wondered about that. Why did they tear the house down after all? Why did they just blow it up? What did that mean about the house and the people and all that was in there. The narrator tracked down a few of the descendants and gave them the stuff he had stolen and kept all these years, and they started telling stories, started talking about who these people were and why they mattered.

God isn't just going to blow up this house, this world. He's going to change it and make it the way he wants it to be, proving that everything mattered in the first place. This world matters! This world will be restored and made right!

He will do that globally, but also personally. He wants his people to live rightly. Look at 6:8, which is one you may have heard before: *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.*

God is restoring our world because he cares about it. He is also restoring his people to become more like him. This is called the process of sanctification, as we are made more and more into the likeness of Christ.

Some of you may be thinking that you're just not seeing that very much from Christians. Shouldn't they be better people? Yes, they should. Christians aren't good people after all. They are people who are forgiven. But then their lives are supposed to be changing. The problem is that so many have so far to go. So they may be getting more like Jesus, but their starting place was really far away so it is taking longer than you think. There isn't some instant transmogrifier that you get into that zaps you and you come out all holy. But people are changing. Are you changing? Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God. Care about the world and the injustices you see. Pursue good and grace. Don't think so much of yourself. Don't take yourself so seriously.

Our great hope is that God loves his people. God will show his people marvelous things. (7:15) I know that is hard to believe sometimes, but it is true, and it must be true.

God not only will restore his people, but he will restore his very name. It is because of his name that he will restore his people. Look at the end of the book in chapter seven:

Who is 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. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (7:18-20)

This is who God is. He's pardoning iniquity. He's delighting in love. He's compassion on us. He is the sin caster.

God wants his king to reign.

Okay, great. We have this vision against evil. We have this vision for the world. We have a vision for God's restoring of his people and also his name being a Forgiver, A Restorer, a Delighter in Grace, One of Compassion, a Judge of Sin.

How?

Look at chapter 5:1-4: *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their peace.*

How is this going to happen? All these good things will come from some king, who will be born in Bethlehem and will ruler his people.

Matthew tells us that this is Jesus himself. Look at Matthew 2:6, which is a direct quote from this passage. Jesus was and is and is going to be the King we're talking about. He wasn't even born in Jerusalem, but was born in some sort of backwards, Podunk city like Tahlequah, Oklahoma. It's not what you would expect. Not from the huge estates or places of privilege or families that would be in line for high positions like this. He would be from Bethlehem.

It says that this king will be from old, from ancient days. That's a strange thing to say. In listening to Tim Keller and also reading a book called *The God of the Fairy Tale* I've been thinking about this for awhile.

All good stories and actually I would argue that all stories point to this. There is real evil in the world. All fairy tells know this. They just accept this as a fact. There is evil. And there is an evil person lurking around trying to do damage to people. It may be a troll or a witch or a dragon or a Sauron or an alien – there is something trying to get you.

And all good stories have a sacrifice to save the day. You can't beat evil without some sort of sacrificial love. These are the stories you love, these are the stories that people know and flock to.

Because these stories are the story of the world. This is written into the fabric of our world – there is a created world. There is evil in it. There is an evil one who is seeking to devour and wreaks all sorts of devastation. There is a king who saves the world through sacrificial love. These aren't just fairy tales – one of them is true and all the others point to this one.

One of them is true. Jesus is the king, the one of old, the ancient one. He wasn't just some guy who came and taught and was misunderstood, but he was the once and future king.

He will come again to rule the world. These prophecies we're reading about have some sort of present reality, but mostly they seem to speak of the future, don't they? We aren't dwelling securely yet. The nations haven't been brought in yet. There is a future element to this that we must see.

Jesus is the great shepherd tending his flock. He's the warrior shepherd, the king shepherd, and he will return to judge the world in love and righteousness, restoring his people and all shall bow the knee to his steadfast love and rule.

This is a Christmas sermon. This is about Bethlehem and God breaking into the world to save his people and restore them to relationship with him.

What can you do?

You can worship and submit to him. If you see Jesus in your life, then you should follow him and all of God's words and ways. As Keller says, this is not a democracy. There is no democracy in the sheep pen. The shepherd is in charge. This shepherd Jesus is the great shepherd, and he stands in his flock in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

So obey him. Decide that you will do what God says, even if you don't agree with it or understand it. He doesn't have to explain himself to you. He may. But he doesn't have to. You can actually trust him, that he wants what's best for you, and that he cares for you. So obey him and his words. Submit your life and heart to him.

You can also stop worrying and start trusting. Give him your life and your plans. Trust that he wants your good and stop trying to be God yourself. You make a terrible, terrible God. Take a deep breath and walk with him in humility, letting him be God and getting off the throne.

You can also love and be loved. In the midst of a book about sin and justice, about oppression and judgment, there are sweet words of pardoning love and grace. That word we read in Micah 7:18 that we translate "steadfast love." That is the word *Hesed*, which is one of the greatest words in the Bible. It is grace. It is not getting what you deserve. It is getting love when you deserve to get punishment.

That is only possible because there was a shepherd king born in Bethlehem that was actually and really God in the flesh. He came to this world and lived the perfect life and then died a horrible, horrible death on the cross as the worst criminal would.

Why did he do that? Why would God do that? He showed his love, and his own sacrifice for his people that he loved. He delights in grace! He delights in mercy. He delights in justice, and that was poured out on Jesus for you if you are his people.

See, hear and taste that gospel tonight. Don't want zigzag ha. That is stupid. Want relationship with Jesus, the one who loved and died for you. Don't look into God's want list and then get what *you* want. See what he wants and then get that for him. He wants you. He wants all of you. He wants to show you his love and mercy and then he wants you to be a part of

this redemption of the world, this huge vision of reaching our campus, our town, our state, our nation, our world with steadfast love, justice, kindness and humility. This is only possible in and through and because of Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

God wants evil to stop, but he stopped it by letting evil win on the cross. Walking with Jesus might mean letting evil win in your heart so you can finally feel and see the love of the Father through his son, Jesus Christ.