

03.08.2019 THE CRY OF THE PROPHETS

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Our lesson this week looks at the Old Testament prophets' passionate calls for justice and mercy to be shown by God's people. In contrast to our complacency about the state of society today, the prophets spoke with great urgency.

The Recurring Call to Justice

In the story of Israel's desire for a king and the Prophet Samuel's response to them (1 Samuel 8:1-18), we recognise that power often leads to the perversion of Justice. God raised up prophets time and again to warn kings and priests and false prophets but they were persecuted and martyred for their faithfulness.

God's people are called to be just because their God is a just and righteous God:

He shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness...the Lord is known by the judgment He executes. Psalm 9:8, 16

Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him. Isaiah 30:18

Of Jesus, the Messiah it was prophesied:

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. Isaiah 9:7

His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. Isaiah 11:3, 4

"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles (nations)... He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth." Isaiah 42:1, 4

The Cry of the Prophets

There is a similar pattern to the prophetic messages. First, the prophets point out the sins of Israel (which are primarily external religion and worship of false gods) and God's anger against such sins. Then they call upon the people to repent. True repentance will result in restoration by God.

We shall consider some of the Minor Prophets first.

Hosea:

"I have slain them by the words of My mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against Me." Hosea 6:5-7.

But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice and wait for your God always. Hosea 12:6

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord," the prophet entreated; "for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hosea 6:1-3.

Amos

Amos prophesied from about 760-753 BC. He tells us his messages were given during the time of Uzziah, King of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel. He did not come from a family of priests or prophets, but was rather, a 'layman'; a herdsman and farmer (1:1; 7:14, 15). His name means 'burden-bearer' - he had a burden for his people and interceded for them; he also had the burden of declaring the judgment of God to a people who did not want to hear a message of rebuke.

Amos' first messages were against the surrounding nations (Amos ch.1 and 2). Before the Israelites got too complacent however, he quickly moves to point out the sins of Israel.

He accuses Israel much more extensively. He accused them of cruelty and oppression of the poor (2:6-8), immorality (2:7), refusal to listen to the prophets and causing the covenant people to sin (2:12).

They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate. Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time. Amos 5:11-14 (also 8:4-6)

Amos also tells them the message of "God's plumb line" urging them to straighten their ways in accordance with God's standards, and reminds them of their accountability to God in an ultimate reckoning. Though judgment today is withheld by intercession, nevertheless there will be a final Day of Judgment (Amos 7:7-9).

Amos' message was not pleasing to the ears of the people. The call to repentance is not pleasing to sinners, unless they have a vision of the goodness of God (Romans 2:4).

The Call to Repentance and the Promise of Restoration

Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate...maybe the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. 5:14, 15

Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. 5:22-24

"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages. I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old. 9:11

Micah

Micah, the 6th of the Minor Prophets, was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. He had a burden against Judah for the wickedness and oppression practised in the nation and particularly by the King Ahaz. He was an idolater and had alliances with the heathen (see 2 Chronicles 28 and 2 Kings 16).

Though Micah had a burden for the many sins of Judah, he addresses their injustices thus:

Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Micah 2:1, 2

"Lately My people have risen up as an enemy—You pull off the robe with the garment from those who trust you, as they pass by, like men returned from war. The women of My people you cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children you have taken away My glory forever. 2: 8, 9

They abhor justice, pervert truth, murder, take bribes, seek monetary gain, and have the spirit of Balaam – they ‘*prophesy for money*’. 3:9-12

In Micah 6:1-5 and 10-16, God pleads with them to repent. He calls upon His people to judge Him, to tell Him their complaint against Him.

*With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 6:6, 7*

God is not interested in external religion, no matter how extravagant. He is only interested in the fruit of a heart-relationship with Him. In contrast to the Jewish manner of thinking, which starts from effect and ends with the cause, God says that if we firstly, walk humbly with God (the cause), we will love mercy and do justly and righteously (the effect).

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

Micah’s name means ‘*Who is like Jehovah?*’ At the end of his book, Micah asks ‘*Who is a God like unto You...pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18, 19*

Micah declares that what God wants us to be is what He Himself is – a God of justice and righteousness, who loves mercy and has compassion on His people.

Ezekiel

“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.” Ezekiel 34:16

In contrast to God, the True Shepherd, God’s people have turned out to be unfaithful shepherds.

Some of the sins of Judah:

False Shepherds: *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.” Ezekiel 34:1-6*

“As I live,” says the Lord God, “neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they...” 16:48-51

The Call to Repentance: Remembering God’s Goodness Leads to Repentance

“Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed...” 16:60, 61

The Promise of Restoration

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes...then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God." 36:22-28

See also: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Isaiah

The first 5 chapters of Isaiah are prophecies against Judah. Judah is warned of coming judgment because of her spiritual idolatry, social injustice and immorality.

How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them. Isaiah 1:21-23

The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes: "For you have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?" says the Lord God of hosts. 3:14, 15

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. 59:14

The Call to Repentance

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. 1:16-20

The Promise of Restoration to the Repentant

"I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents with righteousness. 1:26, 27

'Modern Israel are in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people. Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbath keepers... A blessing or a curse is now before the people of God—a blessing if they come out from the world and are separate, and walk in the path of humble obedience; and a curse if they unite with the idolatrous, who trample upon the high claims of heaven. The sins and iniquities of rebellious Israel are recorded and the picture presented before us as a warning that if we imitate their example of transgression and depart from God we shall fall as surely as did they. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." ' *Testimonies to the Church: 1. p.609*

We are far from being the people God would have us to be, because we do not elevate the soul and refine the character in harmony with the wonderful unfolding of God's truth and His purposes. "Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" [Proverbs 14:34]. Sin is a disorganizer. Wherever it is cherished—in the individual heart, in the

household, in the church—there is disorder, strife, variance, enmity, envy, jealousy, because the enemy of man and of God has the controlling power over the mind. But let the truth be loved and brought into the life, as well as advocated, and that man or woman will hate sin and will be a living representative of Jesus Christ to the world.’ *Manuscript Releases. 12:319, 320.*

But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Amos 5:24
