

Bible Notes.... Micah 3

Overview

In this chapter, Micah continues his indictment of the civil and religious leadership of Judah in his day. Why does the kingdom face doom? Because the rich and powerful have exploited the poor mercilessly, treating them like so much meat to be devoured (3:1-3). Because those who should have spoken God's Word in this situation have neglected to do so, preferring to be rewarded by the powerful for preaching a neutered and comfortable message than to confront injustice (3:5-8) The whole society, concludes Micah, is built on deceit, corruption and violence – and so it will all come crashing down, even the Temple which was seen by so many as representing a divine guarantee of peace and prosperity (3:9-12).

Things to think about

From the BBC website last Friday morning:

Newcastle shot girls say harassment was 'part of job'

Three so-called shot girls in Newcastle have told the BBC that they were sexually assaulted by customers and paid below the national minimum wage. They carried shots of alcohol on a tray around nightclubs and tried to sell them, and were told by bosses that being groped was "just part of the job". Sometimes their earnings for the night were not enough to cover their taxi fare home.

In fairness, we should note that the company involved strenuously denied the girls' claims. But if they were true – and they are far from isolated complaints – then they're a fairly good illustration of the kind of thing Micah chapter three is on about. These girls were not *people* to their boozed-up customers and managers – they were simply there to be exploited, sexually and economically, pieces of meat 'like flesh in a cauldron.' The world Micah is describing is *our* world: perhaps not literally cannibalistic, but certainly full of people devouring one another.

The great Edwardian Anglican Bishop, Charles Gore, thought that perhaps the greatest failure of the Church of England (and he saw many) was the fact that, like the religious figures Micah denounced, it had failed to discern, judge and counter the exploitation at the heart of our economy and society. The whole Industrial Revolution, he argued, had been “built up on a basis of profound revolt against the central law of Christian morality, ‘thou shalt love thy neighbour as yourself.’ There are few things in history more astonishing than the silent acquiescence of the Christian world in the radical betrayal of its ethical foundation.” (*Belief in God*, p.23). It is in large part for this reason, suggests Gore, that we find ourselves now in a radically de-Christianised society: in our public life we breached the greatest commandment, and so that public life inexorably descended into a moral and spiritual wilderness.

Micah suggests that a similar pattern works itself out on an individual level as well. The prophets of his day (the prophets whose books we have in the Bible were not the *only* prophets in Israel – far from it, the books themselves testify to a large range of others claiming to speak with an authoritative message from God) chose, for reasons of comfort or perhaps even straightforward corruption, *not* to challenge the injustice of their society. The result, says Micah, is that whatever spiritual vision they had is taken from them: ‘the sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them.’ (3:6).

It might well be worth asking whether some of our own difficulties in prayer (why does God seem so distant? Why does our spiritual life often seem to lack vitality and relevance?) are because of our own lack of engagement with practical issues of justice and peace. Might our own spiritual growth and power be directly correlated to our personal involvement in the struggles against injustice? This, incidentally, is one reason why ‘Transforming Communities’ is such an integral part of the parish’s Mission Action Plan, or MAP: supporting the Malawi project or our local foodbank, and becoming involved in action to change the structures that make people poor, is not only a good in itself but crucial to our spiritual development.

What issue of justice and peace might *you* be called to become more deeply engaged in?
And this church?