bible | study

Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury’s Adult Bible Study Series

July 5, 2015
Text: Micah 2:4-11
“No Rest for the Wicked”

How would you feel if God used you as an example for others...as a bad example? The prophet was inspired by God to challenge the way the people of Judah were living. Do you think they were chastised and repented? Do you think they were in denial and figured that Micah had not told the truth? Do you think they resented the accusations and simply dug in their heels?

What were the issues? In these verses Micah says that the privileged continue to take away the inheritance (identity) of the poor (Micah 2:4-5). The people will not listen to the truth (Micah 2:6). Judah wants to settle differences by fighting (Micah 2:8). Bad things are called good, such as intoxicating drink being praised (Micah 2:11). No wonder that many in Judah did not want to hear the recital of their sins! No wonder they yelled, “One should not preach of such things!” (Micah 2:6)

Micah (that name means “he who is like the Lord”) is clear that God’s people are not free to act any way they choose. God’s people are accountable to God. The opening verse of this book (Micah 1:1-3) says this message comes from the Lord and God’s very self will be a witness against the people. How would you like to go to court only to discover that the judge is also the chief witness against you? Aren’t you glad that this text was written some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ? That’s twenty-seven centuries ago. Surely that means it does not apply to us. Maybe.

What Someone Else Has Said:
In Living Our Beliefs (Discipleship Resources), Kenneth Carder writes, “Sin is personal, individual, corporate, and systemic. It is lodged within the human heart and within the structures and practices of cultures, nations, and institutions.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Me, Lord? Do you mean me?”

July 12, 2015
Text: Micah 3:5-12, “No Tolerance for Corrupt Leaders and Prophets”

Let me get this out of my system. Do you remember Muggsy Bogues? He played basketball at Wake Forest and later had a professional career as player and coach. He was a good player, but is often remembered simply because he was short, the shortest man ever to play in the National Basketball Association. He was five feet, three inches tall.

Once I was leading a class on the biblical minor prophets. I pointed out that we call them “minor” because of their length, not because what they had to say was not important. They were - yes, I actually said this - the Muggsy Bogues of biblical literature. It’s true. Micah only runs about seven pages, but the text is packed with powerful and challenging and provoking words from the prophet. Its insights are not defined by its length.

In this weeks’ take-no-prison-er study verses, the prophet is lambasting those who are called to proclaim God’s corrective word, but who, instead, tolerate injustice and corruption (Micah 3:9). Those so-called leaders can be bought off with money (Micah 3:11a) or utter pious phrases just to fool the people...
July 19, 2015
Text: Micah 6:3-8
"Justice, Love, and Humility"

The key verse in this week’s study is Micah 6:8. "He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

Let’s explore some of the pivotal words in this text.

What is good? The word translated "good" comes from a word that implies action: do good, make good. It doesn’t just happen. In this verse, "good" is something we do rather than something done for us.

What does it mean to be restored to doing something? The root of this Old Testament word means "to follow" or "to walk frequently." If we are to follow the path God intends, this is how we shall walk.

What is justice? The root of "justice" means "to make a verdict"; it is, one decides if what is observed is right or wrong. If it is wrong, one seeks to make it right.

What about "abundant love," or the NRSV translates, "love kindness," or as the King James Version says, "love mercy"? As you might guess from the variety of translations, language scholars disagree on the meaning of the Hebrew word used. One helpful insight comes from Nelson Glueck. He said this was not just any kind act; it was one rooted in covenant loyalty. We might say that it is how we express the covenant engaged in our baptism. Do you remember those promises or the ones made by those who were to nurture you in the faith?

What does it mean "to walk humbly with your God"? The word here rendered "humbly" appears only once in the Old Testament. It means "lowly or humiliated." Is that what I signed up for when I agreed to follow God? The word translated "walk" is used for a journey. A relationship with God is not so much a destination as it is a trip.

What does Someone Else Have Said: Hans Walter Wolff (Micah the Prophet, Fortress Press) has written: "The third thing that is good for us humans is “walking humbly with our God.” The last item is not something separate from the first two. Instead, it points to the driving force that makes it even possible for persons to foster new community and to direct their will according to God’s deeds and commands."

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "God of the ages, Your voice comes to us through Your prophet Micah. Open our ears to hear. Open our hearts to totality of Your Gospel when Jesus says, ‘I am the good shepherd.’ (John 10:11)."

Who would have thought there would be a happy ending to Micah? But this is the story of One who holds us accountable but who provides the grace for living beyond our sin and brokenness. I am reminded of what Philip William Otterbein said: "The Gospel demands, and the Gospel gives what it demands."

I know some people who read the end of a book before they read the beginning; they want to know how it turns out. To read Micah in that way would be to miss the power of this undeserved and unexpected grace. Having plodded our way through the oracles of Micah’s deep accusations, we are to use C. S. Lewis’ term, surprised by joy. Thanks be to God.

What Someone Else Has Said: Richard Job (Three Simple Questions, Abingdon) wrote: "In Jesus we see a God who reverses the values of our culture and turns upside down our scheme of priorities, leaving us gasping at the sight of such bone-deep love, justice, and mercy."

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin, “Lord Jesus, forgive...”

Looking back over a lifetime, I see that love was the answer to everything. Ray Bradbury 1920

Upcoming Liberia Project: Sierra Leone Update

Thanks to the tremendous response from NCC churches, 1,406 Food Buckets were packed and shipped off to Sierra Leone the week of May 20, 2015, to help address the crisis in access to food by victims of the Ebola crisis. As we pray God that incidences of Ebola continue to decline in West Africa, we look towards our next relief shipment of school kits and agricultural equipment in August. Please begin collecting school supplies and mark your calendar for Sunday, August 29, 2015, a mission work day for your church, to prepare school kits for shipment to Liberia. We are excited to announce that our missionary Mary Zibgno (assigned to Liberia) plans to be with us at the Mission Warehouse at 9 AM on August 29th. This will be followed by Elling school kits and packing the container unit for shipping. Plan now to spend the day with your NCC Mission Team, packing school kits for Liberia. Folks over age 65 are especially encouraged to come out and help.

Contents:
1 pair blunt scissors: Rounded tip only; No plastic scissors, please.
3 pads of paper: Spiral- top bound pads; 150 sheets or less of less of leafless paper can be substituted for 1 pad; Combination of spiral, top-bound, side-bound, or less of leafless paper is acceptable; No composition books, please.
1 hand-held pencil sharpener: Must be at least 1 inch long; Remove free packaging.
1 30-centimeter ruler: Hard or flexible; Cartoon characters are acceptable; No advertisements please.
6 unsharpened pencils: No advertisements, religious, patriotic, military, or camouflage symbols, please; Cartoon characters are acceptable.

Assembly Directions
Place all loose items on top of paper. Turn items sideways and slide into the cloth bag. Fold over the top of the bag so loose items don’t fall out. Important Notes: All items must be new. All emergency kits are carefully planned to make them usable in the greatest number of situations. Since strict rules often govern product entry into international countries, it is important that kits contain only the requested items, nothing more. Do not include any personal notes, money, or additional material in the kits. These things must be painstakingly removed and will delay the shipment.

Packaging & Shipping Instructions
Box Weight: Each packed box cannot exceed 66 pounds. Complete 2 packing lists: one for your records and one to put on the shipping box. Place the shipping label / packing list on the outside of each box you send. The shipping list helps the depot to quickly process kits. Processing & Shipping Costs: Please enclose an envelope containing at least $1 for each kit you send. This donation enables kits to be sent to areas in need.

For Cleaning Buckets, please enclose $1.50.
After torrential rain caused severe flooding in Texas and Oklahoma over the Memorial Day weekend, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has issued five emergency grants in support of relief activities undertaken by the affected United Methodist annual (regional) conferences where flooding and tornadoes damaged hundreds of homes.

Your gift to UMCOR U.S. Disaster Response, Advance #901670, helps UMCOR respond to the most vulnerable people affected by this and other disasters in the United States. To donate by check, please make your check payable to Advance GCFA and the Advance number on the memo line and mail to: Advance GCFA, PO Box 9068 New York, NY 10087-9068.

Creative Summer Sermon/Lesson Ideas

Summer Reading - Many churches do a "Summer Blockbuster" lesson series that pulls information from books or movies.

Heaven on Earth - This summer, identify four to six small, specific ways every member of your congregation can make earth look more like heaven.

Beautiful Things: Exploring God through Art - We find art and artists spoken of throughout Scripture. Spend several weeks focusing on these beautiful art forms and how God can be seen through them.