

Series: No Series	Reference: Micah 6:8	Title: We Didn't Start the Fire?	Date: 08.26.18
Website Writeup:			
We find ourselves in a crazy world. How do we begin to fight the inferno of sin? Will it ever be extinguished? Yes, it will, but we don't fight as the world would. It begins with fostering a heart of God leading to actions which reflect him as we await the fulfillment of his Kingdom. Of experiencing reconciliation with Jesus firstly, enabling us to be agents of reconciliation with others. We trust God, and do the work of the Kingdom as we await it's ultimate full establishment!			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Have someone read Isaiah 58:1-10 in the first worship set.

*We didn't start the fire
It was always burning
Since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No we didn't light it
But we tried to fight it
We didn't start the fire
But when we are gone
Will it still burn on, and on, and on, and on...*

Billy Joel, We Didn't Start the Fire

Maybe as a Jewish boy Billy Joel didn't read his Torah, because in it, God claims we did start the fire. We birthed sin & rarely have we fought against it. Billy claims we have, but the world continually seems to feed the fire. We've listened already to Isaiah 58:1-10, now in the book of Micah, God claims the same...his people hadn't been following his heart, rather they'd been feeding their sin.

We'll be looking Micah today. The setting is the 2nd half of the 8th century after the death of Solomon in 922bc & after the break up of the single nation. Israel & Judah had enjoyed immense prosperity during this period, both kingdoms, Israel in the North (Samaria as capital) & Judah in the south (Jerusalem as capital).

The Promised Land had been allotted to the 12 tribes of Israel by God in Numbers 22:50-56 & Leviticus 25:23 - given in trust, they were stewards of it. They had specific instructions on Jubilee (Lev. 25:1-55). That was for all the land to return to the original owners after 50 years. Those who owned land were called to take care & make special provision for the poor, the helpless, widow, orphan, slave & foreigner (also seen in Duet. 14:28-29, 15:7-11). To live out of the heart of God, concerned with justice & welfare - his people were his agents of His concern.

Jesus claimed the same thing in Luke 4:18-19 & modeled this kind of life to us. And as Micah preached to Judah, looking at surrounding verses we can see the issues. We like to think of Micah 6:8 as this heartwarming verse, but it is couched in a message of

reprimand. There was an increasing callousness amongst those getting wealthier (2:1-2) *1 Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. 2 They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.*

They became involved in corruption (3:1-3, 9-11) - *1 Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, 2 you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; 3 who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?"*

9 Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; 10 who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. 11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."

This callousness & corruption was hidden behind a veneer of religion (3:11). Eventually **there was a blatant disregard for God's laws (6:10-12)** - *10 Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed? 11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? 12 Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.*

They had compartmentalized their religious beliefs from everyday life & believed they could buy God's favor with sacrifice (6:6-7). *6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

Their lives had become a business contract with God, rather than a spiritual covenant (Duet 6:4-5). So, we have Micah & Isaiah in the south, along with Amos & Hosea in the north, four prophets calling the people back to spiritual covenant - to God given purpose. For outward action to match what is supposed to be divinely governed hearts. Exactly what our spiritual formation series taught. Maybe we don't view ourselves as that bad in comparison to them. Ever feel like you trust more in money than Jesus? Is it hard for you to give to a financial need, or is tithing a struggle? Ever sold a car without telling the whole truth about it, or cut corners in a business deal?? Do you ever ask, "What do the Scriptures say?" in life's decisions? Does your god only live here between 9:30-11:00 on Sunday mornings? Ever try to cut a deal with God in prayer? Ever lied to make yourself look good at the expense of another? Ever withheld care from someone because you simply don't like them? Gossip? Do you claim concern for the poor or race relations, but still unwilling to live among others different than you for your own 'safety'? It does come down to our hearts, a matter of trust, sometimes we guard our own lives at the expense of others.

God was fed up with their hard-heartedness, selfish disregard & oppression of others. Israel had forgotten what God had done for them. Yet they wonder why life had no joy; they were outwardly religious with hearts far from God. Mistakenly thinking, God's pleased with surface religiosity & they can live how they please. *Hosea 6:6 says, 6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

Jesus repeated this verse in Matthew 9:13 & Micah tells us plainly in 6:8, 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Billy Joel also asks, "After we're gone, will it burn on & on?" He's missing the hope in God's story for humanity, it won't burn on. But, hope doesn't originate from humankind, from winning fights, wars & getting over on others - we can't fight this ourselves. Rather hope's found in God as stated in Micah 7:7, *But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.* Our hope is not in the sword, or in some great crusade, rather it's in humble submission to God, acting justly, loving mercy ourselves in all ways. Becoming people who reflect God's heart for the world.

This hope started way back in Genesis & will continue to the end. Billy Joel's words factor out the hope in humanities relationship to God. We can't love mercy & act justly in their truest forms, without walking humbly with God. And, those of us in Jesus have the knowledge & power to see the Kingdom of God manifest now.

Why is it so important we're in good relationship with others when we come to the Lord's Table? That we're concerned about justice & goodness. Isn't that moment just between me & Jesus? Not at all.

Micah 6 & Isaiah 58 are born out of the heart of God. The larger picture of us in relationship with God & each other. *A larger picture in 4 stages: What it was supposed to be (creation). What it is like now (fall). What it can be (redemption). What it will be (restoration).*

What it was supposed to be - Creation. A story worth retelling. We do well to understand our origins & the big picture. The Scriptures start out with the statement, *'In the beginning God created the heavens & the earth.'* Which tells us, (1) where everything originates from - the Source. (2) Who is in control - the Judge. (3) Where life comes from - The Creator. And, (4) who sets the rules - The Boss.

Humankind made in his image to reflect His character & heart. Enjoying him in relationship, having abundant life, dependent on & existing in him. He has control over all things & gave us control over ourselves (self-control, one of the fruits of the Spirit). As they listened & followed, they experienced life to the fullest in him - total freedom. No shame, just intimacy with God. He'd walk in the Garden, they'd enjoy Him.

But, it wasn't good for man to be alone, so he made woman from the rib of a man. Shared DNA, close to the man's heart, imaging intimacy in relationship. Naked. No shame...enjoying each other, no nagging, back-handing, harsh words, or selfishness. God's intention - we'd have intimacy with him & each other in relationships marked by fidelity. It's this original intention which makes the Lord's Table & our personal relationships so important - God wants to restore relationship with him & each other.

Jesus reminds them of this as reflected in the greatest commandment... (Mark 12:29b-31) 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30Love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind & with all your strength.' 31The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Original intention = love God/love others. So, as you come into Jesus, you come into faith community. And, in those relationships, roles are defined, what to do, what not to do, who's the source, the boss, the judge & who's not. Who's dependent on whom, who's in control of what - God in control of everything, us with self control, etc. So, when we ask who started the fire, we have to go back to the Fall...

What it is like now (fall) We could blame it on Satan, but we had the power to be self controlled as long as we were dependent on God. We chose to turn our backs. We chose to become gods ourselves & his shame caused Adam to hide from God (Gen 3:10).

"In becoming independent from God we lost relationship with him & with each other. That's what death is. when God said they'd die, he meant they'd be separate from him who is life. Their intimacy & vulnerability had been lost & their ability to trust each other & have good relationship was lost also. From that point on, we see humans trading trust, fairness, love & honesty with each other for alienation, unfairness, adversarial relationships & dishonesty. Love became much harder to find & sustain. We desired to control things we couldn't control, including each other & lost control of ourselves. We tried to become the judge & we ended up being judgmental instead; we lost our ability to experience life & each other by exercising the very judgement we desired." (*How People Grow*, Cloud & Townsend pp. 34-45).

So, now we have Ho Chi Minh, North Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, sex trafficking, slavery & broken relationships at home, church & work. Relationships are hard. We started the fire & fan the flames when we don't act justly, love mercy & walk humbly with God. When we live out of shame, backbiting, gossiping. When we don't ask questions & make statements without considering the other. Living out of the false notion, we can control another & in our pride we hurt each other. It destroys. That's what it's like now. We say we can live as we please & not having to check our hearts against God's. But...Billy's wrong, there's hope in...redemption.

What it can be (redemption). Isaiah 53:5-6 tells us, God laid all this misery & sin on Jesus. In Jesus redemption's possible, things brought back to their original intention. As our shame drove us to hide from God before, we're now hidden in Christ away from our

shame (Colossians 3:3). Instead of running from God, we run to Him in Jesus! We return to God as the Source, Judge, Creator, Sustainer & Boss. It says in Matthew 6:33, when we seek first his Kingdom, all these wonderful things are added to us. In grace we realize our need & from that position we acknowledge him, give up control of self & others, take back again the ability to be self-controlled & find joy. Reconciled to God. Reconciled with each other. The redemption found in the sacrifice of Jesus reverses the effects of the fall with its alienation & isolation from God & each other, enabling us (with work) to be rightly related to each other.

We stop making our own rules & start playing by his, which actually bring freedom instead of condemnation & bondage. This means acknowledging dependence on him in every circumstance. In grace we find a new relationship with God, the richness of his Word, the power of His Spirit & the fellowship of faith.

Sounds wonderful. Try it. See how easy it is. It's not. Remember I said....what it CAN be. We still battle our sin nature in a sinful world. Even when doing well with God, we live in community where someone else may not. It's difficult. However, it's possible to experience it now, God's still not done, we're still waiting for...

What it will be (restoration) When all things are fully restored under the rule of God. Something we can't imagine, we're so jaded by the fights, the pride, the evil, it's almost as if hope's wrung out of life. But it's there & can be experienced now. If we can stop the fighting, competition, judgement & control. If we choose to love, bear with, forgive & care; practice self-control, not feeding into our laziness & lust. To trust. Learn to ask understanding questions, we can experience the Kingdom here & now. Humbly going to God with our own hearts asking, where am I not trusting you, not acting justly, being unmerciful, prideful, or distrustful of others?

Micah 6:8 is God's heart. To walk humbly with him & restore relationships. Blessing, not cursing. Freeing the prisoner & the slave. Being just, good & not exerting control over others. But that's work which many don't want to do. It's giving up our perceived rights & false control; making Kingdom Choices about life - will we pursue life for ourselves, or life for God & others?

...He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'" (Mark 12:29-31)

They say the same & it starts with our heart. Cultivating a listening ear which will go far in our walk with Jesus & each other. In listening to God's Word & the Holy Spirit, our thoughts & actions will be changed. Listening well, we trust God & each other - which means asking good questions (**Asking God**). Do you give God opportunity to speak

daily through his Word? Do you allow the Holy Spirit to speak & convict? What does he want? Do you ask where you're not trusting, or being prideful? What he's calling you to?

Likewise, do we listen to others instead of assuming sinister intention to understand their heart (**Asking Others**). Asking questions of understanding. What do you mean by what you just said? Did you mean to sound distrustful, or am I hearing you wrong? What can I do to make this situation better? Can you help me to understand what you're saying? What have I done to hurt you? How do you see us reconciling our relationship? (the closer we are with people the harder this is)

Do we ask questions of ourselves (**Asking Ourselves**)? Why does this upset me so much? Why do I feel the need to control? Why am I afraid? Am I being prideful? Why do I feel the need to fill my life with something damaging? Am I avoiding the things God wants me to do?

If our hearts are pursuant of God, he'll lead. If our efforts towards reconciliation & justice don't come out of a heart changed by God's restorative power, it'll only be angry fake religiosity & morality - we'll be buying God with our sacrifice. But in desiring & practicing the heart of God, we see the Kingdom blossom in community.

Let's reword verses 6:6-7 to our own situation, it says, ⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Maybe we would say, ⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with 2 hours on a Sunday, with 2 percent of my salary? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with worship songs, with earnest prayers to bless us? Shall I build a mega-church, the fruit of my labor for the sin of my soul?

We've experienced affluence. We've compartmentalized faith from everyday life, been judgmental & moralistic; hidden behind religion. We've chosen to disregard the heart of God - to be our own god. *There are sins of commission (sinful things we intentionally do), but there are also sins of omission (things we choose not to do). Did you not pray for that person when the Holy Spirit said to? Do you have one foot in the faith community, and one foot out? Do you reserve yourself since you value personal comfort more than the ministry you're called to? Is Jesus God of every corner of your life? Walking humbly, loving mercy, acting justly demand lifestyle change, affecting our choices & priorities. Priority goes to God & community - not to self.*

We were created to be in relationship with him. All we are belongs to Him. We're stewards of life & resource. He desires for us to reflect Him in relationships; acting justly, loving mercy, modeling grace & love - sacrificing for goodness & justice.



This church is structured to practice these things. Community Groups begin again this Fall. We're doing work in Lebanon & Syria, and with local Community Partners. Ministries are thriving. We're adding to our spiritual tool bag. Let's engage deeply as we move forward, taking hold of every opportunity afforded us to see God's kingdom come now on earth as it is in heaven. Our hearts & actions more & more pregnant with the news of Jesus as we progress in spiritual formation. Since it matters that our thoughts, feelings, words, bodies, actions & souls reflect the heart of God. That we live out of spiritual integrity - all our actions birthed from the heart & character of God.