

The Corrosion of Coveting **Micah 2:1-13**

Pastor Kelly R. Randolph
April 18, 2021

There is a menace at work in our world that is costlier than all other natural disasters combined. It amounts to \$437 billion annually. That's \$1500 per person every year. It is more than the GDP of Sweden. What is it? Rust. In his book called, *Rust: The Longest War*, Jonathan Waldman chronicles the long and costly history of fighting the corrosive effects of rust that causes bridges to collapse, ships to sink, car parts to fail, and pipelines to leak. Rust has been the cause not only of economic loss but also loss of human life. No wonder this menace has been called "the great destroyer" and "the evil."

The prophet Micah was addressing a kind of corrosion in the second chapter of his prophecy. It isn't the corrosion that makes bolts fail causing bridges to collapse. It is an inward corrosion in the human heart that weakens moral resolve, eats away at relationships, and can cause societies to collapse. The corrosion that Micah exposes is covetousness. Micah 2 presents coveting as an evil destroyer.

In our passage today, we will notice two symptoms and one solution for the corrosion of coveting.

I. The corrosion of coveting produces social oppression resulting in God's judgment (vv. 1-5).

A. What is covetousness?

1. Exodus 20:17 gives us the tenth commandment – you shall not covet.
2. This term means to desire or to crave. In this context, it is speaking of an "inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire" (BDB).
 - a. A craving for something you should not crave or to crave it to a degree that you should not.
 - b. A craving that becomes a controlling desire. It is so strong it begins to determine the way you think, feel, and act.
 - c. A craving that is totally focused on self. It is a self-serving desire.
3. Paul makes the interesting statement that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5).
 - a. This gives clarity to what we mean by coveting. It is a desire that is so strong and controlling that we cease trusting in God and that thing we desire takes its place on the throne of our lives.
 - b. Thus, the desire causes us in essence to worship and serve the thing desired and it becomes like God to us.
 - c. This is in essence what happened to Eve in the garden. She saw that tree was pleasant and desirable and she wanted it more than she wanted to trust and obey God.

It is easy for us to read a passage like this and say to ourselves, "I don't covet land and houses. This doesn't apply to me." Not so fast. Covetousness takes many different forms. Some people have a controlling desire for the latest tech gadgets. Some people have a controlling desire for clothes and shoes. For others it may be golf clubs or fishing gear. Some people have a

controlling desire to have the nicest yard on the street. Others crave academic notoriety and degrees.

Covetousness can express itself in a desire to always have more of something. It can also express itself in the desire to always have what is considered the best of something. Covetousness is a restless dissatisfaction with what you have coupled with a desire for more and better.

All of us battle covetousness.

B. What does covetousness produce?

1. Micah says that these people were scheming at night in their beds to get the things they desired. In their hearts and minds, they plotted to get what they desired.
2. This overnight plotting led to actions of oppression.
 - a. In the morning, they carried out their covetous schemes.
 - b. They seized fields and houses. They oppressed people by taking their inheritance. Family land was inherited generationally according to the law. These wealthy land barons were taking advantage of people to seize their family inheritance.
 - c. Vv. 8-9 also describe the effects of this oppression. People's robes were being taken from them. Women (likely widows) were driven from their homes along with their fatherless children.
 - d. You may remember how Ahab schemed to take the field of Naboth in 1 Kings 21. Ahab offered to buy or trade for Naboth's vineyard. Naboth refused saying it wasn't right for him to give up the inheritance of his fathers. Ahab schemed to have Naboth accused of blasphemy and then had him stoned so he could take possession of the vineyard.

One of the indicators of covetousness is our willingness to sin to possess what we desire. We can be like the people of Micah's day. We lie awake at night thinking and scheming about how to get what we desire. That desire can be so strong that we are willing to sin to get something.

- You want that promotion badly enough you will undermine your coworker to get it.
- You want that grade badly enough you are willing to cheat to get it.
- You want that position so much you lie on your resume to get it.
- You want to be perceived as successful in your field so badly that you will manipulate situations and people always in your favor.

So often, as in Micah's day, people become casualties of covetous desires. We are willing to hurt them, defraud them, abuse them, manipulate them, and run over them to get what we want. Covetousness tightens our grip on things and weakens our love for people.

John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, said this about covetousness: *I consider covetousness as the most generally prevailing and ensnaring sin, by which professors of the gospel, in our materialistic society, are hindered in their spiritual progress. A disposition deeply rooted in our fallen nature, strengthened by the custom of all around us, the power of habit, and the fascinating charm of wealth—is not easily counteracted.*

Do you recognize the presence of covetousness in your heart today?

C. Coveting results in God's judgment.

1. Do you see the ironic reversal that God's judgment brings in vv. 4-6?
 - a. They devised evil against their neighbors, God now devised judgment against them (v. 3). It is inescapable judgment that will humble them.
 - b. They ruined others by their greed. Now they will be ruined by an invading enemy. Their portion/inheritance will be lost. Their fields will be allotted to others. They will go into exile.
2. This judgment was the result of their covetous wickedness and oppression. Deuteronomy 28:49-68 details the very thing God threatens here. An enemy would come, take their land and possessions, and send them off to exile.

Coveting corrodes our lives both horizontally and vertically. It corrodes our relationship with God and brings his disciplinary judgment into our lives. It corrodes our relationships with those around us so that we use and abuse them rather than loving them as we love ourselves.

Is it possible that some of the difficulties you find yourself facing today are God's way of trying to expose a coveting heart that has abandoned him as top priority in your life? If so, remember the purpose of God's discipline. It is to bring you to repentance. If you have identified a covetous heart in some connection in your life, repentance is the antidote. Confess your sin, experience God's forgiveness, and realign your life with God at the center.

The corrosion of coveting produces oppression resulting in God's judgment. But notice in vv. 6-10, a second symptom.

II. The corrosion of coveting produces theological distortion denying God's judgment (vv. 6-11).

- A. The people did not want to hear Micah's preaching.
 1. Stop preaching about God's judgment. It is not going to happen to us.
 - a. They distorted the truth to suit their situation.
 - 1) They fixed their message on the idea that they were God's covenant people, under God's protection and blessing.
 - 2) They ignored the truth that God's protection and blessing were conditioned on their covenant obedience. In fact, God had promised to discipline them if they failed to obey him.
 2. Their kind of preacher only talked about abundance and luxury. Wine and strong drink for everyone! It was an 8th century BC prosperity gospel.
 - a. In reality, it was "wind and lies." It was not the truth.

Micah's contemporary, Isaiah, wrote about what kind of preaching the people of that time wanted.

For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instructions of the Lord; who say to the seers "Do not see" and to the prophets "Do not prophesy to us what is

right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 30:10-11).

Similarly, Jeremiah said to the people of Judah, *An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule at their direction, my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes? (Jer. 5:30-31).*

b. The covetous were taking refuge in lies and did not want to hear truth.

One writer put it this way, “False theology did not so much pervert the truth of God as reduce and restrict the truth to an ideology.” What they were saying was true. They were God’s people. God did promise his protection and blessing to them. But they didn’t speak all of the truth. They did not go on to say that God’s blessing and protection were conditional upon their obedience to his covenant. They grabbed on to part of the truth as if it were all of the truth.

J.I. Packer once said, “A half-truth masquerading as a whole truth becomes a complete untruth.”

We are prone to do the same thing when we are convicted of our sin. We gravitate to the verses about grace and mercy and forgiveness. And these are precious truths to sinners. God is merciful. He is unfathomably gracious. He forgives sin. But if we leave out the conditions of confession of sin and repentance, we are consoling ourselves with realities that we will never experience because we have distorted the whole truth with half-truth.

How would you feel about a doctor who put your Xray up on the viewer and says, “You have one really excellent lung.” Or what about a mechanic who looks at your V8 and says, “Wow, these seven cylinders are really firing great.” In the end, that is not helpful. It is harmful. We need the whole picture. We need the whole truth. Even when we don’t want to hear it – we need to hear it.

Proverbs 28:13 tells us, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

It is painful when the truth exposes your sin. But God exposes our sin for our good. He wants us to see it for what it is and repent. When we do, we receive mercy and restoration. When you feel that conviction, maybe today in relation to the sin of coveting, don’t retreat into half-truths. Repent in response to the whole truth and experience God’s mercy.

Micah has shined the blinding light of truth on the sin of covetousness. He has predicted judgment. But is there any hope? Yes.

III. Covetous people find hope in a faithful Shepherd who rescues his sheep (vv. 12-13).

A. Micah sees a time when the Good Shepherd will gather his sheep.

1. God will assemble and gather his people after their exile. They will be his flock under his protection (fold) and care (pasture).

2. He will break through the gates of exile and lead them home as their king.

B. Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd-King who rescues his sheep and brings them home.

1. The promise of a Shepherd-King in the OT.
 - a. Micah 5:2-5
 - b. Ezek. 34:23-24
2. Jesus is the Shepherd-King who rescues his people.
 - a. Matthew 2:6 connects Micah 5:2 to Jesus as the Shepherd-King.
 - b. John 10:11-16 shows Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Conclusion

We have seen how our text presents two symptoms and one solution to the corrosion of coveting. The symptoms of this corrosion are social oppression and theological distortion. Covetousness ruins our relationships and distorts our understanding of God. The result is judgment.

But what is the solution? Or better, who is the solution? It is Jesus, the Shepherd-King who rescues people from their exile and brings them home.

To my non-Christian friends, you are living through a kind of exile because your hearts are in bondage to coveting. Your desire to possess things has exiled you from God. That same covetous heart has exiled you from those around you. Your controlling desires have damaged relationships, made you insufferable and hard to live with. Rather than loving others, you have become a manipulator of others. Sin has separated you from God and from others around you.

Jesus can bring you home from that exile. But you must repent of your coveting and turn to him. He died on the cross and rose from the dead to free us from sin – including the sin of coveting. Rather than holding on to his own life, he willingly gave it in the place of sinners. By his blood, you can be cleansed of your sin. You can be restored to fellowship with God. You can be brought home from exile. Will you repent and turn to Jesus Christ and trust in him to forgive you?

Maybe you are a believer already. You know you are forgiven. You have received salvation from the Shepherd-King. But you are struggling with coveting. The idolatry of covetousness has crowded God out of the center of your life and you have lost the joy of fellowship with God. What can you do? The process is the same. I want you to **recognize** covetousness in your life, **repent** of covetousness, and **rest** in the Good Shepherd and his provision for you.