

Half Full or Half Empty?

Text: Micah 7:1-8

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

What do you see? It's a glass of water, but how much is here? It is half empty? Or is it half full? The way that you answer depends on whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. Pessimists tend to dwell on the negative, looking at the problems, considering what's missing. "It's only a half empty glass, what a bummer!" Optimists, on the other hand, look on the bright side and see the good, noticing what they do have. "Hey, the glass is still half full, what a blessing!"

What do you see when you look around at this world? ...or when you think about the circumstances of your life? Do you dwell on what has gone wrong, the troubles, the mess, and all the negative stuff? Or do you focus on the positive, realizing that no matter what, God is still good, and He still loves us?

I was reading an article a few weeks ago that I found encouraging. John Piper is a pastor and a Christian author, who has written a number of books, and he has a website where he blogs. A man had sent him an e-mail asking, "Pastor John, what do you do when your minister is preoccupied with the negative state of affairs of our society. In the church where I attend, the sermon is the same every Sunday. It's about how corrupt our world is becoming, and how close the end we must be because things couldn't get much worse, and the only thing left for us to do is wait for the Lord's return. Do you have any thoughts?" I want to share part of the response. John Piper answered:

"I have lots of thoughts like, we don't know when Jesus is coming back and there have been [many] cultural collapses in history [some] worse than the one we are in... By all means, let's always, always, always be vigilant and watchful and mindful of the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus who is going to arrive. He is going to arrive suddenly when the Father has appointed it and nobody is going to be able to nail that with their prediction.

But that is not my main thought in responding to this. And I don't think that is really the questioner's main concern. My main concern is how do we maintain the right balance between weeping for sin and the misery of the world around us on the one hand and [rejoicing] because of what Christ has done for us and who he is and what he has promised now and forever and what is going to happen to this world ultimately? How do we put those together? That is the great challenge for the pastor and really for all Christians... Whatever measure of pessimism... I may feel about our own society, as Christians we should be long-term optimists. ... Sooner or later Christ is, in fact, going to break into this world and ... cast the weeds into outer darkness, and he is going to establish his kingdom, and the world will be full of the glory of the Lord... That is coming and we should be deeply, deeply confident and optimistic about it. (<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/gospel-hope-for-cultural-pessimists>)

I found that response very encouraging because it easy for us to lose sight of this. It is so easy for us to become overwhelmed by all of the negative things going on in the world today. If you read the newspaper or watch the evening news, there is so much that could get us down. And all

of us go through difficult circumstances in the course of our lives that might discourage us, if we let them. But God doesn't want His people to be preoccupied with the negative, He wants us to keep our eyes fixed on Him. -----That's what the prophet Micah did, and he was able to find hope in the Lord.

Micah began his ministry around 742 B.C., and was a contemporary of Isaiah. He saw the land of Judah plunge into moral decay during the reign of the King Ahaz. He would see the Assyrian army obliterate the northern tribes of Israel, and the invaders would try to do the same to the southern kingdom. These were difficult days, to say the least.

In the first six verses, of the chapter, the prophet grieves over how corrupt the society in which he lived had become. He uses a couple of metaphors to describe how sinful the people had become. He says: I'm like the farmer who goes into the vineyard to gather grapes at the time of the harvest, but there is nothing left, all the branches have been picked bare. - He goes on to explain that this was the condition of Judah. If he looked around to find someone who shared his faith, he would come up empty, there just weren't many people left who remained loyal to the Lord. Verse 2 says *"The godly have been swept from the land, not one upright man remains."* He goes on, in verse 4, to say that even best among them, most upright people he could find, were like thorns and briars. He didn't dare get too close, lest he get hurt. He sums up how dark things had gotten: It was a culture filled with violence, where powerful people could get their way, the leaders accepted bribes, you couldn't even trust your best friend or even your wife.

We think our world is falling to pieces, imagine living at this period of history, and consider how difficult and depressing things would be. Micah's example shows us that it is right for God's people to grieve over the evils of our world. When we look around and see corruption, and violence, and injustice, it should break our hearts. It certainly breaks the heart of God. If we are able to remain unfazed and unaffected then there is something wrong with us. But we don't dwell there, obsessing over these things. In the midst of our grief, we must be people of hope. How? The same way the prophet did.

Micah could have stopped writing in verse 6 and said "I'm getting out of here, I'm giving up, I'm just going to hide in a cave somewhere, there's no use in living for God in a culture that has become so saturated with evil." He could have given in to pessimism and despair, but he didn't. He goes on and expresses his confidence in the Lord.

1. We can remain optimistic because **God is still on the throne.**

Look at verse 7. The prophet goes on to declare: *"But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD; I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."* Micah hasn't lost his confidence in God. He realizes that the Lord is still working, even if he could not see it. The forces of darkness have not prevailed. The powers of evil have not claimed the victory. God is still sovereign; He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and that will never change no matter how desperate things might appear. And so the prophet can say "I will wait upon God my Savior." He would watch with eager expectation for the power of the Almighty to be revealed. That phrase "to wait upon the Lord" is used all over the place throughout Scripture and it signifies an attitude of trust, placing one's faith in God, relying on the Lord to deliver. When we find ourselves in a position

of helplessness (which is most of the time) we can wait upon the Lord, trusting that we're not alone. He is with us. He is right by our side. He hears the prayers of His people, and He will respond when we cry out to Him.

Even when we are not able to understand what He is doing, we can remain confident that God is active and involved in the affairs of this world. The fact that the sun came up this morning is evidence that God is still on the throne, because without His sustaining presence, the universe would fly apart. When it feels like the world is spinning out of control, God is still in control.

We lose control of our circumstances all the time. I think of a babysitter, who is watching a bunch of kids. And she's having a particularly rough day. At one point, one child is running through the house, screaming. Two boys are in living room fighting over a toy. A little girl has found the markers and is coloring on the wall. A little boy is standing on the kitchen counter going through the cupboards, tossing food everywhere. The dog is barking. The phone is ringing. And she yells at the top of her lungs: "STOP!" And for a split second, everyone freezes, and then go right back to what they were doing – and it's total anarchy. It's out of control. (That's what it would be like if I did daycare, I'd probably end up locking myself in the bathroom.)

We might not be in control, but we know who is. If God were to yell "STOP!" everything in the universe would have no choice but to listen. He hasn't let go, He is still guiding the universe towards the goal that He has established.

F. Scripture never lets us forget that God is in control.

- **Psalm 47:7–8** (NASB95)

*For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.
God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.*

- **Psalm 93:1–2** (NASB95)

*The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.
Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.*

Many people have wondered: "If God is in control, why is the world in such a mess?" The Bible shows us that it's because of sin – the sin that was introduced when humanity rebelled against God in the beginning. But even before we rebelled, God had a plan to restore the universe to His design, and He has been patiently unfolding that plan throughout history.

We don't understand why things happen, but God understands. For the moment, He allows the world to go its way, but not forever. In that article, I mentioned earlier, John Piper goes on to write:

...we must believe in the sovereignty of God as the Bible teaches it. How easy it is to put the sovereignty of God to the side while lamenting the miseries and wickedness of this world. God is in charge of the world. This is one of the great benefits of reading the whole Bible cover to cover... You watch the terrible sweep of evil in the world — and the Bible portrays it better than anybody, the sweep of evil from century to century in the world — and you have this rugged, unwavering, biblical perspective that God is on his throne and is in charge over the world and evil will not triumph.

2. We can remain optimistic because God is the source of joy for His people even in times of sorrow.

Joy doesn't come from the absence of trials. Joy isn't dependent on our circumstances. We don't have to discover a perfect world to experience it. It comes from the Lord, whatever our present circumstances.

Look at the second part of verse 8. Micah declares, *“Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.”* What a wonderful perspective. He knew that God is still good. God is still faithful. God still loves us. God still cares about His people. Because of this, he could rejoice. As dark as his circumstances were, the light of the Lord was still shining.

It's like sitting in your home, at night, during a thunderstorm. There is a loud crack of the thunder, knocking out the power for the entire block. It's dark, but not completely, because a candle is still burning on the table. Its warm glow fills the room. And no matter how hard the rain falls outside, no matter how fiercely the wind blows, no matter how intense the storm becomes, you still have your candle, and it still radiates with light. Even the storms, the light of God shines in the lives of His people. No matter what we're going through, no matter how bleak things might appear, no matter how desperate our circumstances, He is with you, and becomes our source of peace, and comfort, and strength. There is nothing that can take that away from us. Because of this, we can praise Him.

There are so many examples, in the Bible, of people who were able to praise God through terrible trials, and extreme difficulties:

- I think of Paul and Silas singing hymns of praise, while they sitting a prison cell (Acts 16:25)
- Or there was Jonah who came to his senses, and prayed to God, giving thanks, even when he was still in the belly of the whale (Jonah 2:9)
- Or young David, who wrote psalms of praise while hiding in a cave from King Saul who was trying to kill him (Ps. 57:9-11)

They didn't allow their circumstances to break their spirits, the difficulties of life hadn't crushed their soul, because the light of the Lord was shining within them.

Our passage, in Micah 7, reminds me of the psalms. There is a certain type of psalm that has been called a “psalm of lament.” It begins with an expression of sorrow, as the writer pours out his heart before God. He lays out his burdens, and describes the struggles that he is facing. And he wrestles with these things, but in the process, God changes his perspective. By the end of the psalm, he is able to rejoice in the Lord, not because his circumstances have changed, but because his outlook has changed. He knows that God is with Him, and that makes all the difference.

Isn't that the way that our prayers often work? We go to the Lord with heavy hearts, we pour out to Him the things that are weighing on us, but the time we finish, God has worked in our heart and refreshed our perspective and we want to praise Him.

A person doesn't become an optimist by ignoring the heartache and struggles of this world. Even optimists go through trials that are too heavy for them to carry on their own. But the difference between an optimist and a pessimist is that one takes their burdens before the Lord and looks to Him for joy.

Psalm 27:1–3 says,

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident.*

If you're having trouble finding joy, start thinking about God's character: who He is and the things that He's done. Don't let your circumstances extinguish the light of the gospel.

3. We can remain optimistic, because God will one day return and set things right.

Look at the first part of verse 8. Micah 7:8 says, “*Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise.*” Micah is speaking here on behalf of Israel. Though the nation was crumbling, and the cities would fall, the people would be carried away into exile...despite all of this there was still hope. God still had plans for His people. There were still promises yet to be fulfilled. The nation would, the walls would be rebuilt, the people would return to their Lord. How could Micah be so certain? Because that's what the Lord said He was going to do.

We're not going to read the rest of the chapter, but it goes on to describe a future day when the Lord will restore the land of Israel, both physically and spiritually. The Lord will come to judge the nations, and He will shepherd His people, establishing a kingdom of peace and righteousness over all the earth. Scan down to last two verses of the book (v.19-20), “*You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.*” That was something that the prophet could get excited about, and

down through the centuries, when God's people found themselves facing similar circumstances, they could cling to these promises and find hope, knowing that the Lord is coming and one day He will make all things new.

One commentator writes,

Like a day that begins with a dark, foreboding sky but ends in golden sunlight, this chapter begins in an atmosphere of gloom and ends in one of the greatest statements of hope in all the OT. Clouds...have rolled in on the horizon of the prophet's life because of the disobedience of the people and the somber fate that awaited his nation. But rays of hope...shine through the gloom. ...One may wonder why the prophet did not succumb to utter pessimism in view of the conditions of his day. The answer is in this chapter. It was because of the triumph of faith. ...In the midst of a crumbling society, Micah could look beyond to a hope secure in the promises of God. (McComiskey, T. E. (1986). *Micah, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: (Vol. 7, p. 440)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.)

The promises laid out in the chapter pertain especially to God's future plans for the nation of Israel. They will again become His covenant people, and finally fulfill their role as a kingdom of priests among the nations. But God has made promises to us, as well, in Scripture. He gives us a glimpse into the future holds for the Church, the Body of Christ.

- One day Christ will appear in the clouds to call us home.
- We will stand in His presence and behold His glory.
- He will clothe us in resurrection bodies.
- God will wipe away every tear, and we will dwell with Him for all eternity.

How can we be certain? Because this is what God says He will do. Revelation 21:5 tells us: "*He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'*"

Our present world may seem scary, and chaotic, today. There are times when it seems as if the wrong side is winning, but God isn't done yet.

Somewhere at the house, I have a video tape of the 2002 College Football championship game, when Ohio State played Miami, and the Buckeyes won the trophy. I'm not sure where it is, but I could find it, and we could put it in the VCR, and watch it again. Partway through the fourth quarter, things look pretty bleak for Ohio State. There is a series where Ohio State is driving, but they lose the ball, and the Miami player is running down the field and looks like he is going to score... I could allow myself, watching this, to get upset, and I could yell at the TV, and turn the game off at that point. But that would be silly, because I know how it ends. Before the Miami player can score, the ball gets stripped away, and the Buckeyes end up with it. The game goes into overtime, and in the end Ohio State prevails.

God isn't finished yet. It may look like evil has the upper hand in this world, but there is another quarter to go. And we have no reason to be afraid, because we already know how it ends. Christ will prevail. God will judge evil, and destroy the forces of darkness forever. He will restore the universe according to His perfect design. The decisive battle has already been won.

If God has given us a glimpse into the future, and we know how things will end, shouldn't we live today with a sense of confidence and hope? Out of all the people in the world, shouldn't we be the most optimistic?

Conclusion –

The passage this morning shows us that:

(1) It's okay to grieve over the evils in the world. But be careful not to be consumed with sorrow.

(2) Keep your eyes fixed on God. Remember His character: goodness, faithfulness, love. Remember that He is with us, and will never leave us alone. Remember His promises: that He will come again to judge evil, right every wrong, and make all things new. Remember that the final battle has already been won, and the victory is secure. Dwell on these things.

(3) We need to immerse ourselves in God's Word in order to keep the right perspective. When we read chapters like this one, we discover that we are not the only ones to live through difficult times. Others have faced even greater challenges, but found confidence in God. The same God who stood beside Micah, is standing with us.

(4) And like Micah, may the optimism we find in God shine forth from our lives, so that others might experience the hope of the gospel. Are there people in your life who are discouraged? Who need hope? Who need to know that the Lord is faithful? Tell them. Carry the light into their lives. Point them to the God of hope.