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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson 8. May 21st
MICAH'S PLEA FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING
Golden Text.—He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Micah 6:8.

The Lesson as a Whole
By H. A. Ironside, Litt.D.
Approach to the Lesson

Micah's prophecy, while simple in structure and clear in the main, yet contains a number of seemingly involved and obscure passages. In taking up its study one feels more than ever the need of divine illumination to understand aright the dark sayings so frequently occurring. The theme of the Book is plain, however. It is the wretched estate of all Israel because of their sin, and the wonderful deliverance to be brought in by Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," but Micah insisted strongly upon present righteousness in view of future blessing, therefore he called upon Israel and Judah to face their sins in the presence of God; to judge their evil ways and to put away all unrighteousness. Only as they sought to walk in obedience to the Word of God had they the right to count upon His protecting care. Thus the Book is throughout an earnest call to repentance and a plea for righteous living. Micah's prophecy may have been all delivered at one time, as there are no clear breaks in its continuity; but it seems more likely that it consists of three discourses and a prayer, each of the former commencing with a summons to hear. In that case, the first division would embrace chapters 1 and 2; the second, chapter 3 to 5; the third, chapter 6; while chapter 7 would be the fourth and last. It will be noticed that in chapter 3, from which the major portion of our lesson is taken, Micah addresses himself particularly to the princes, or judges, and the prophets, the priests also being included as "heads of the house of Jacob." It is a solemn thing when the leaders of God's people cause them to err; when those who should be a bulwark for the truth turn away therefrom, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:30).

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eyes opened to see that they are lost and ruined forever; and though they cry out in the anguish of their despair, there will be no answer of God!

Verse 8.—"I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord." How different from these false prophets was the case of Jehovah's true servant! Undismayed by the fear of man that bringeth a snare, he could faithfully proclaim the mind of God, as revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. He was the servant, not of men, but of Jehovah of hosts; and his ministry was in the energy of faith; hence in the mighty power of God.

Verse 9.—"Ye.... that abhor judgment." Those who were supposed to observe and enforce the Law of God used their power and influence in the opposite direction.

Verse 10.—"They build up Zion with blood." Using their power to their own advantage, they ruthlessly condemned the innocent and condoned the acts of the guilty, even to the shedding of blood, in order to enhance their own security and increase their wealth.

Verse 11.—"The heads thereof judge for reward." Instead of being concerned about maintaining righteousness, these unworthy leaders—princes, prophets, and priests together—were all given to covetousness, and yet with the most barefaced effrontery they declared the Lord was in their midst and ratified their doings. Thus they made Him the minister of unrighteousness and made His holy name their answer to any who sought to reach their consciences. Saints of God are called to "follow righteousness." If this be overlooked, it is the veriest presumption to talk of having the Lord's presence, and declaring themselves in the line of His testimony. (This eleventh verse may profitably be weighed in connection with Jeremiah 6:13, where the condition, a few years later, is found not to have improved, but deteriorated, as is ever the case where evil is left unjudged.)

Verse 12.—"Shall Zion.... be plowed as a field." Because of all this corruption and iniquity, judgment was soon to fall on Mount Zion and Jerusalem and its glorious Temple, where God had been pleased to dwell, but which He now abhorred, so that the mountain of Jehovah's house would be given over to the heathen and treated as the idolatrous high places of the groves. If righteousness be not maintained by His people, God will annul their pretensions and refuse to be identified with them. He who is the Holy and the True will not go on with iniquity.

Chap. 6: 6, 7.—"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord....?" All His chastening was with a view to their blessing. The humbled soul might well ask, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" Did He demand sacrifices and offerings? Was it these that were lacking? Would He be pleased with thousands of rams and myriads of rivers of oil? Even though one gave upon the altar his dearest and best, his first-born, would that avail for the sin of the soul? Was it by means of such as these that the interrupted communion was to be restored? It was righteousness that was lacking. Righteousness, then, must be maintained.

Verse 8.—"What doth the Lord require of thee....?" Only when they bowed before Him, to own the sin of the past, and sought strength to walk as here outlined, could there be that happy sense of the Lord's favor which lifts the soul above all circumstances and enables it to joy in God Himself. It is important to note that we do not here have the ground of salvation. No man can merit eternal life by good behavior, but the Lord is here emphasizing that which should characterize those who have already come to know Him as Saviour and Redeemer.

The Heart of the Lesson
Nothing is more obnoxious to God than the use of the forms and the profession of religion as a cover for unrighteous living and a cloak for covetousness. In unmistakable terms He has expressed His disapproval of all such hypocritical behavior, and wherever men have ignored His commands and refused to repent of their wickedness, judgment has fallen upon them in one way or another. While His patience is great and His long-suffering is marvelous, as He waits in grace for any evidence of repentance, the holiness of His nature demands that persistent, willful sinning shall bring severe and terrible retribution. This is the universal testimony of the Old Testament prophets and is confirmed by the teachings of our Lord and His apostles.

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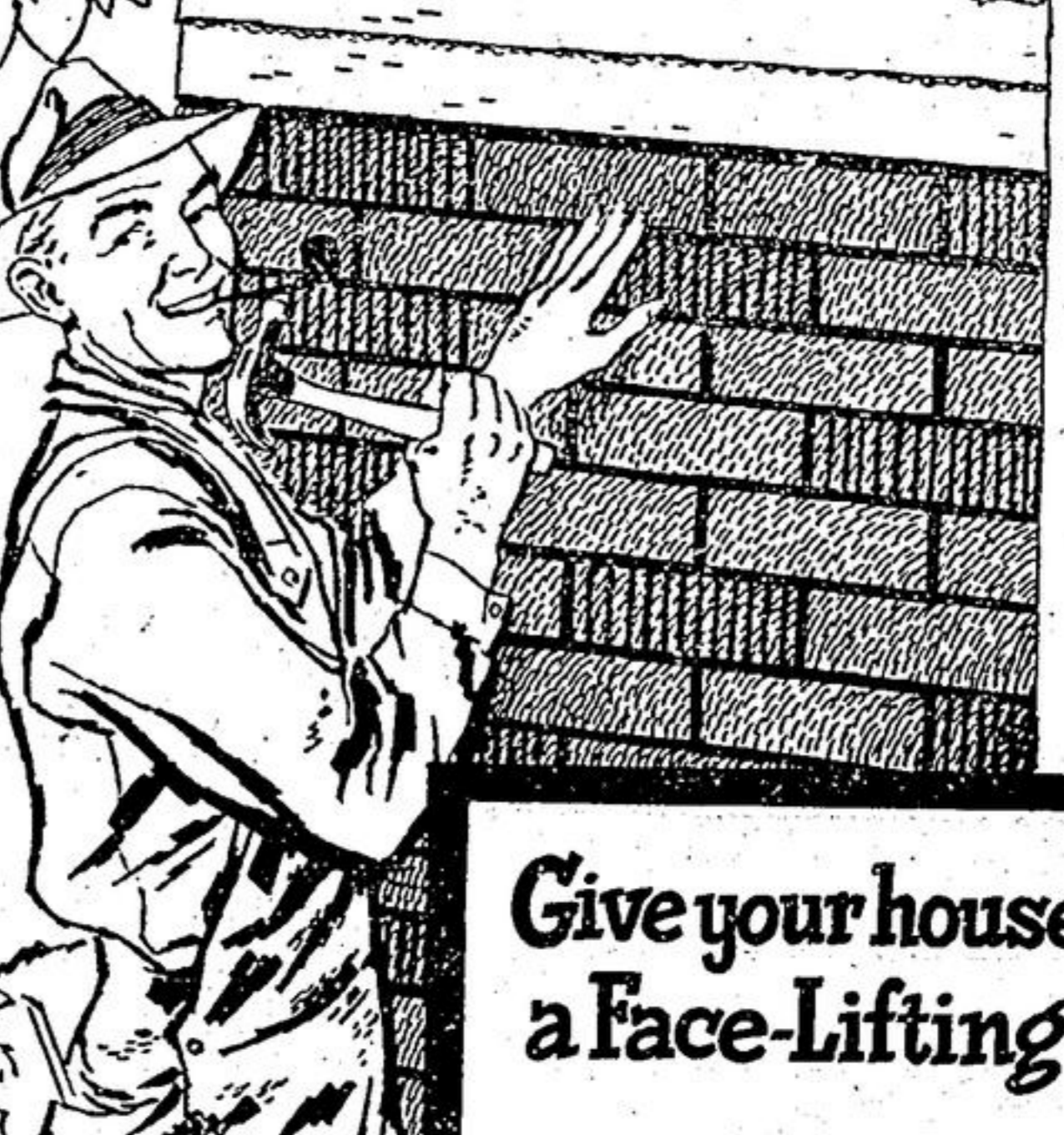
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