

KING OF PEACE

MICAH 5

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INTRO/REVIEW

Today is part 3 of a four part series exploring the book of the minor prophet Micah. If the only time you're reading Micah is when you're listening to it being read here in our worship service, you may think Micah is the prophet of bewilderment. If you read it during the week, meditate on it, and let it marinate, it will start to make more sense. It won't take too long - after all, it's only seven chapters.

The goal of Micah and other prophets: to invite people to repent.

You may think Micah bounces around and you're not wrong, but ask yourself if you've ever had a vision from God? :) They're not always well-organized and neat. Often the vision was appropriate for not only the time in which the prophecy was to be fulfilled, but also for the time in which the prophecy was first proclaimed. They were messy times. The visions weren't neatly outlined in a, b, c, etc. BUT the basic message of the prophecies was always clear: REPENT! STAY CLOSE TO GOD!

Micah spoke to an unjust people.

In Micah, we have seen God calling the people to repent from idolatry, oppressive mistreatment of each other, ignoring God's Word, turning the justice and religious systems into money-making schemes, and other injustice. Roots of this injustice include coveting, viewing people as transactions or labels instead of humans created in God's image, and walking away from love for God and faith in God. Viewing people solely on the basis of their politics, vaccination status, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background or any other label denies the uniqueness and sacredness of every life. Taking advantage of financial vulnerabilities of widows, single moms, the elderly, cash-strapped families of any class, and especially (as the Scriptures put it) fatherless children for the sake of one's own profit, is reprehensible in the eyes of God. One particular present-day form of oppression

that stems from devaluing people is human trafficking, but there are more. We've seen and are seeing a horrific regime of oppression unfolding in Afghanistan.

Through Micah, God promised consequences if the people did not repent.

God decrees that if they will not turn back to Him, He will strip them of their own wealth and power, and eventually send foreign armies to besiege both kingdoms of Israel and carry them away. Not only that, but Jerusalem itself, once thought to be invincible, would be plowed under and reduced to an overgrown thicket.

PROBLEMS IN MICAH'S DAY

Problem #1: Israel's Idolatry.

In Micah's day God's chosen people lived in two kingdoms... there was Israel in the North, with Samaria as its capital. Judah in the South, with its capital of Jerusalem, remained loyal to kings from David's line. In Jerusalem there stood the Temple of God, built by the great King Solomon. Solomon's son Rey, and his rival Jerry, were the two who split up the kingdom: Rey because he ignored his Dad's wisdom and acted heartlessly, and Jerry, because he saw an opportunity to seize his own power. King Jerry, his real name was Jeroboam, was the one who set up a counterfeit Temple system for the Northern Kingdom.

Problem #2: Passivity among God's People.

We say the Northern Kingdom had 10 tribes and the Southern Kingdom had 2 tribes, but there was one tribe that was spread out among the other tribes... they were the...? [Levites] The Levites were dedicated to the Temple service. They were to live among the rest of the people as examples and even teach the people to know and love the Lord. It reminds me of Jesus' words to His followers... that's us, isn't it? "You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world."

We know that all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. And guess what the Levites did? When King Jerry set up his counterfeit temple system complete with the golden calves, they apparently did nothing.

"Let's not make waves."

“The unity of the people is too important.”

“Maybe if we don’t say anything now we can preserve ourselves and we will be able to pick up the pieces once this is over.”

There was just one problem: it was never over in the Northern Kingdom. King after king encouraged the people to worship the god of the golden calf, and bow down to the Baals and offer sacrifices to other gods.

Problem #3: Taking God for granted.

It was only slightly better in the southern Kingdom of Judah because of the institution of the Temple itself. Like any institution, it took money and energy to keep the Temple going; the priests and Levites were heavily invested in this so one way or another, the people were reminded to love God and send in their tithes. That was all right but... they traded spiritual power for worldly power and had a high tolerance for the worship of false gods among the people of Judah. Samaria’s influence spread like influenza to her southern sister and she succumbed to the point that Ahaz, who was one of the kings of Judah while Micah was alive, set up idols in the Temple!

And yet, they still chanted that the presence of God was with them. Because of the existence of the Temple, they believed they would be saved from their enemies.

HEAR O ISRAEL! THE LORD YOUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. Deuteronomy 6:4-5

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME. Exodus 20:3.

It wasn’t the *existence* of the Temple, it was the *purity* of the Temple, and more importantly, the condition of the hearts of the people, that God cared about.

God had to punish His people for their sins. In His timing, and over generations, this would bring about repentance.

ISRAEL UNDER ATTACK

God used Assyria to carry out His plan since His people were unrepentant.

So, he sent the Assyrians (these are not the Babylonians; the people of Israel may have been unaware of the Babylonians at this point). Several Assyrian kings attacked Samaria and threatened Judah as well. In addition to that, there were random bands of marauders and guerrillas, if you will, who were descendants of the original Canaanite groups that Israel never had the will to eradicate as God commanded. But Assyria was the main threat. At one time, Samaria and Judah even teamed up to go against the Assyrians, but to no avail.

For a couple hundred years, Judah and Samaria maintained fortified cities that dotted their national maps. Under the leadership of the lesser Assyrian kings, most of the fortified cities were overtaken during two or three decades. When Sennacherib took over Assyria, he came back into Samaria with a vengeance. He controlled the countryside and highways of Samaria including highways that led to Jerusalem in Judah... Imagine your favorite adversarial superpower swarmed into the United States through Seattle and El Paso, and was able to control I-90 and I-40. About 40 years into Micah's 50 or 60 year ministry, Sennacherib took over Samaria and completely conquered the Northern Kingdom, decimating the population with warfare, starvation, and finally captivity. Sennacherib's armies even swept down into Judah, ruining most of the fortified cities and occupying Lachish, the next largest city to Jerusalem.

JUDAH'S RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S DEFEAT: business as usual.

You would think this would inspire Judah to repent. Sadly, the people of Judah did not heed Micah's warnings. Idolatry still continued in the Temple. Injustice still reigned on the streets.

GOD REVEALS HIS PLAN

God uses the enemy's maneuvers as part of His plan.

So God brought the enemy closer to Judah, and Assyria surrounded Jerusalem. Let's pick up at the end of chapter 4, beginning in verse 9. We read:

⁹ 'But why are you now screaming in terror? Have you no king to lead you? Have your wise people all died? Pain has gripped you like a woman in childbirth. ¹⁰ Writhe and groan like a woman in labor, you people of Jerusalem, for now you must leave this city to live in the open country. You will soon be sent in exile to distant Babylon. But the Lord will rescue you there; he will redeem you from the grip of your enemies. ¹¹ Now many nations have gathered against you. "Let her be desecrated," they say. "Let us see the destruction of Jerusalem."

The enemy was surrounding. Assyria was powerful. They tightened the already tight noose they had around Jerusalem's neck. The people began to feel the effects of the hold Assyria had on the supply chain.

God uses our desperation as part of His plan.

Sennacherib, with his usual swagger, wrote an open letter to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem meant to intimidate him and his people into surrender. Things went from bad to worse. The people were barely surviving. Judah's king, Hezekiah, began to pray.

Then the prophet Isaiah - we haven't talked about him much in this series, but he served shoulder to shoulder with Micah - the prophet Isaiah heard from God. You can read about it in 2 Kings 19.

Here's the Irvin paraphrase, "This year the people will barely have enough to eat, but they will survive. Next year it will be better and the year after that... everyone will plant their own crops and tend their own vines and eat their own harvest. Do you remember that imagery from Micah, chapter 4? They would be able to live their lives without interference! "As for Sennacherib, he doesn't realize that he was an agent of destruction in the hands of the God who builds and nurtures. I'll send him back humiliated the way he returned."

Shortly after that, the angel of the Lord went out against the Assyrian army and brought them to their knees, killing 185,000 troops as they slept. From the dawn's early light Sennacherib saw his defeat. Humiliated, he broke camp and headed back to Nineveh the way he came. A few months later, he was assassinated by his own sons as he worshiped his false god in its temple. This seems to correspond beautifully to Micah 4:12. Let's read that verse together:

¹² But they do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand his plan. These nations don't know that He is gathering them together to be beaten and trampled like sheaves of grain on a threshing floor.'

God has a plan. We do not know how He accounts for sin and the free will of humanity, but somehow He does. As we read "They do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan."

You may be facing something that seems senseless to you: maybe it's cancer or mental illness or even the death of a loved one. Maybe you feel like God has left you to deal with it on your own. "They do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan."

Maybe you're facing a financial challenge and you don't know how to deal with it. You've already run out of money and there's another nine days of month left. "They do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan."

God's perspective is different than ours. He stands outside of our time and space continuum. He has a different timetable than we do. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. We may devise a plan, but we "Do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan." But we can trust Him.

We can trust Him that even though this life doesn't have the answers, He does. We can trust Him that He holds the whole world in His hands.

We can trust that He not only sees the families fleeing the wildfires in California and digging out from flooding in North Carolina, but He is with the orphan in Haiti, and the mother entrusting her baby to a Western soldier in Afghanistan. We do not know the Lord's thoughts or understand His plan. But faith that's here in the good times and leaves in the bad times is no faith at all.

The God that gave us blessings in the good times is with us in the bad as well. He has a plan. Somehow, even though we cannot see it and do not feel it, He is working, even as He was for the people of Judah when Sennacherib was breathing down their necks.

God brings help from unexpected places.

Your present circumstances seem hopeless - as they do in the last verse of chapter 4 and the first verse of chapter 5. You may feel like your city is under siege.

'Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.'

'But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.'

Part of God's plan is that He keeps His promises.

Bethlehem ... Bethlehem is so insignificant that it never made itself onto a list of great cities and destinations (or even mediocre ones!)... until now. At the time that Micah spoke this prophecy, Bethlehem was likely trampled underfoot by the Assyrian army in its siege on Jerusalem. It seemed like the line of David, which God promised to be kept in perpetuity, was coming to an end.

But listen to this: even though it seemed like the line of David was coming to an end, from between the cracks of the sidewalk came a tiny green blade of grass.

You, Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, would give birth to One far greater than your great king.

It's hard to think about that verse about Bethlehem and not think of Christmas carols. I know it's August, but we are going to sing the carol you're thinking of anyway, at least just the first verse. (Rebecca begins intro) So, everyone on your feet for "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (sing it).

Now look at your neighbor and say, "That was different." Okay, please sit down.

God's plan includes the present and the future.

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." The last line of that hymn, even though it's not Scripture, is a great description of this prophecy. All the years - all time. Jesus was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy: "from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesse, and Jesse's son King David. Yet He said, "*Before* Abraham was I AM." He is the Ancient of Days coming from ancient days. In the book of Revelation He is spoken of as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the earth. Ancient of Days coming from ancient days. He would be called Immanuel, and He would save His people from their sin. He would be despised by His own people, rejected. His hands and feet would be pierced through. He was born of a virgin. And He was born in Bethlehem. These are only a few of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled.

Micah continues on in verse 4: 'And He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord , in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.'

Well when Jesus was here, He certainly shepherded His followers in the Lord's strength. He was validated by the voice of God on at least two occasions. But, as Isaiah 53 points out He had no beauty or majesty that would draw us to Him. He came to suffer for our deliverance, and not only ours but the whole world's. He taught His followers to love their enemies, not fight them. And, even though His

fame spread across Israel, you certainly could not say that His flock dwelt secure, or that He was great to the ends of the earth.

Let's look quickly at a pair of verses we also read often at Christmastime: Isaiah 9:6 & 7:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

Well, let's look at what Jesus fulfilled thus far:

1. He was born.
2. He was born a descendant of King David.
3. But the government on His shoulder, the global ascription of these Names to Jesus, and the actual Kingdom described here, these prophecies have yet to come.

As I was reading earlier this week I found a great analogy: reading these prophecies is like viewing a mountain range from a distance. You see all the peaks on the mountains. You don't see the valleys. You don't see the size of the valleys nor do you know how long the valleys will take to travel before you get to the next mountain.¹ After all, we live in a valley.

In Micah 5, we see two mountain peaks: Jesus' birth in v. 2; and Jesus standing in the strength and majesty of God, winning security for His people in v. 4. What happened in between? The valley of verse 3, which reads, 'Therefore He shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. '

¹ Curtis, Bill. "Christ-Centered Exposition," p. 113, para. 2. Holman Reference, c 2016

Context will explain a lot:

1. He, apparently is the ruler from ancient days, born in Bethlehem.
2. But who is “she who is in labor?” Is that Mary? Hardly seems to fit, and remember the context. If you zoom out, you find that the daughter of Zion is to writhe as one who is in labor, giving birth to something.
 - a. Daughter Zion’s nation was disintegrating... the Northern Kingdom had already fallen and Jerusalem in the South was under siege and about to be carried off.
 - b. It seems like she is giving birth to a reconstituted kingdom of Israel.
3. The Ruler from ancient times will have to give them up - that means He doesn’t establish His visible Kingdom during His life and ministry among us. It would indicate a reconstituted nation of Israel after the life of Christ. Many students of prophecy would say that that happened on May 14, 1948 when, following World War II, the allies, led by England and the US, established the nation of Israel again.

“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:8-11)

The same God who was active in the past, is working in the present to bring His promises to fulfillment in the future. And, His plan includes you, me, all of us together and as individuals.

God’s plan includes you.

Have you trusted in Christ as your Savior? He came to bring you to God... you can't earn it; it is grace activated in your life by faith, plus NOTHING.

2 Peter 3 asks us a great question: God's plan for the future includes the destruction of this world and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth that includes God's Kingdom of Justice for all, ruled by Jesus Christ, the King of Peace. In light of God's plan, what sort of people are we to be in holiness and godliness?

This King of Peace shall be the peace for all His people - that's what He died on the cross to do, that's what He sends His Spirit to give, and that is what He will bring when He returns. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Amen.