

The Prophecy of Micah: *A Promise for the Wounded*

Micah 4:6-5:1

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 4, 2020

Introduction

- ❖ For the past month, we've been walking through the prophecy of Micah and coming across themes of judgment and restoration woven throughout the book. **This was during a tumultuous time in Israel's history when they were dealing with internal corruption, ineffective leadership, and invading nations.** Now this book contains – not just one sustained prophecy – but multiple oracles coming from Micah, delivered at different times, under different kings of Judah. Sometime focused on judgment. Other times on restoration.
 - Now we're in chapter 4, and the prophecies here took place under the reign of King Hezekiah. That means by now, the northern kingdom of Israel has been annihilated by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah is now being targeted. And the Assyrians are getting closer to Jerusalem the capital. Prophecies of judgment and doom were issued earlier in chapter 3, but starting in chapter 4, Micah begins to offer prophecies of hope and restoration. Our section today is one of those hopeful sections. It's meant to encourage the people of God.
 - **And it will encourage – if they can recognize God's good design to first wound them before bringing about a greater healing.** He will break them first before assembling them back together, even stronger than before.

- ❖ **Friends, what we see in the pages of Scripture is that God has a preference to work with the wounded.** When carrying out his plans, he likes to use those who walk with a limp. Those who have gone through a figurative (or even literal) experience of brokenness.
 - Jacob would be the clearest example. He was a child of promise and potential, but his early life was filled with deception and greed. **He simply wasn't ready to fulfill God's preordained purposes for his life until he got a limp.** He had to be broken. And once he was – after wrestling with God and receiving a literal limp – Jacob became a new man. He was renamed Israel, the namesake of God's people.

- ❖ The same idea plays out in **Joseph's** story. He had to spend significant time in the pits and in the dungeon before he was ready to carry out God's plan. **Moses** had to go through 40 years of obscurity and humility in the wilderness before he was ready to serve the Lord. **Samson** had to lose this strength and his sight before he was prepared to fulfill God's purpose for his life. **Jonah** had to spend a timeout in the belly of a fish before he was to go to do God's will.
 - And even **Paul** could not have become the courageous and mighty Apostle that we all admire – if not for the constant thorn in the flesh that God purposely would not remove. God's grace was enough. His sufficient grace left that wound in Paul's side to keep him humble – to keep him walking with a figurative limp.

- ❖ Friends, that's the point: **When carrying out his sovereign purposes, God prefers to use those who walk with a limp.** Those who are lame in some way, shape, or form. **So that means, if we ever hope to be useful in God's service, then we must first be broken in his presence.** If we want to be effective for God, we must first be humbled by God. That's the lesson the people of God in Micah's day needed to learn and to learn quickly.

- ❖ **Because they were surrounded by an Assyrian army that posed a grave, existential threat.** Most of the towns, villages, and fortified cities throughout the Judaeen countryside had been captured. The last holdout was Jerusalem. So by now, hundred of thousands of their fellow countrymen had been captured and taken into exile. Those lucky enough to escape came flooding to Jerusalem looking for refuge behind its walls. And now a prolonged and bitter siege of the city appeared imminent. The Assyrians were coming to finish them off.
 - You can sense the despair in the air for Micah’s audience. **When the Word of the Lord came again to Micah to speak to God’s people – he was speaking to a people who felt very wounded, very defeated, and very hopeless.**
 - But what he had to say offers great hope to those who have ears to hear. Micah assures God’s wounded people of three promises: (1) the Lord promises to assemble the lame, (2) the Lord promises to redeem the defeated, and (3) he promises to surprise the hopeless.

The Lord Promises to Assemble the Lame

- ❖ Micah starts in v6 by assuring the inhabitants of Jerusalem that their kinsmen – who have been driven away – have not been forgotten. **The LORD, like a good shepherd, will seek them out and gather them back to the fold.** That’s the first promise we find in vv6-8 – the Lord promises to assemble the lame. *"⁶In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; ⁷and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore."*
- ❖ **Notice how it says the LORD will gather those who had been driven away and those whom he afflicted.** Don’t overlook that. Yes, the Assyrians are the ones who attacked and captured these people. But superintending all these events was the invisible, providential hand of the LORD. He was the one who afflicted them.
 - **That means their exile was ultimately a result of divine discipline.** But that should be no surprise for the people of God – for anyone who has read **Deuteronomy 28**. There the LORD said exactly what would happen if his covenant people were unfaithful to the covenant. *“The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.”* (28:25) *“The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away.”* (28:49) *“They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land.”* (28:52)
- ❖ **My point is that God is the one who gave his people their limp.** That’s how they became lame. We mentioned earlier how that’s exactly what happened in Jacob’s story. In fact, commentators think that Micah had **Genesis 32** in mind when he gave this prophecy.
 - That’s where Jacob spent all night wrestling with God. Recall how he too was exiled from home. Recall how far off track he was – so far from the land of promise. **But through his struggle with God, he came out of it alive – but with a limp.** A lifelong limp. But now that he was humbled and broken, he was a new man with a new name. And he was finally able to go home.

- ❖ The same narrative is playing out in our text. God's people were driven away from home, exiled in a foreign land. They were faithless to his covenant, and yet God remains faithful. **So though he disciplines his people – though he gives them a limp – he will not utterly destroy them.** Like a good shepherd, he will find them wherever they have been scattered and bring them home.
- ❖ He speaks of a remnant in v7. The Lord says he will preserve a faithful remnant so that **his promise to Abraham** – that through his family all the families of the earth will be blessed – and **his promise to David** – that a descendant of his would forever rule in Zion – through his remnant, these promises will stand. That's what is emphasized in v8. There it speaks of “*former dominion*” and “*kingship*” being restored. The LORD himself will be their one and only King. He “*will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.*”
- ❖ Now when will all of this occur? **When will the LORD assemble his scattered sheep into a faithful remnant that will form a strong nation under the rule of the LORD himself?** It says in v6, “*In that day.*” Which day is that? Well, we have to go back to chapter 4:1. There it says, regarding these prophecies, “*It shall come to pass in the latter days.*”
 - **The “*latter days*” is a term in prophetic literature that refers to an indeterminate period of time marking the end of history as we know it.** In other places it's called “*the last days*”. Now I know that makes us think of the end times – as if what Micah is describing will occur in the future immediately before the second coming of Christ.
 - But the way that *latter days* or *last days* is used in Scripture refers to a time period much longer, that commenced at the first coming of Christ, which means it's ongoing to this day. We are living in the latter days.
- ❖ **So when did the LORD gather his scattered sheep into a faithful remnant that became a strong nation?** When the Messiah arrived on the scene over two thousand years ago, identifying himself as the Good Shepherd. When he promised to gather together all the scattered children of God under one flock and one shepherd (Jn 11:52; 10:16). Micah actually points to that coming Shepherd King in next week's passage in chapter 5.
 - **Bottom line, this promise to preserve a holy remnant is ultimately fulfilled by the new covenant community we call the Church.** Brother and sisters, we are the remnant! We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9). A strong nation – not in political or military might – but strong in spirit and truth.
- ❖ **Now when you think about being part of a holy remnant – of being among the faithful few – that could easily puff up your pride.** It makes you think you're something special to be a part of a chosen remnant. That's a real temptation.
 - But what brings us down to size is to keep in mind what it says in v7, “*and the lame I will make the remnant.*” **This remnant of the LORD is comprised of the lame, the afflicted, the broken.** So there's no reason to boast in being part of God's remnant.

- ❖ That's the same point being made in **1 Corinthians 1:26-27** where we're reminded that when we were called to Christ, not many of us were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.
- ❖ **Like we've been saying, God prefers to work with those with a limp.** His choice is to gather – not the strong and able-bodied – but the lame and the limping. To make them his remnant, his Church. **Did you realize this kind of brokenness characterizes God's Church?** That it should characterize you if you're a part of the Church? Did you think being chosen by God was a compliment to you? **Did you assume becoming a Christian would privilege you with power or increase your stature in the eyes of the world?**
 - You would be sorely mistaken. It's a mistake too many make. One sad critique of American Christianity – that comes out on full display during an election season like this – **is that far too many Christians treat the Church as a special interest group or a political action committee.** They're relying on worldly forms of power and influence. They've aligned too closely with one political party or the other. And now they despair of losing power – of becoming lame. **And so to retain that power they're willing to compromise their values, to defend indefensible people or policies – and all the while obscuring their witness.**
- ❖ **Micah reminds us *not* to fear the loss of worldly power and influence.** We're supposed to be a people who walk with a limp. We're followers of a Crucified Savior who was despised and rejected by men. **That means our distinct witness as his disciples is at risk of being obscured if we despise our limp and desire worldly power.** Let's recover our identity as those who are weak in the world – as the lame and the limping remnant of the Lord.

The Lord Promises to Redeem the Defeated

- ❖ So the first promise in our text is a promise to assemble the lame – to not leave them scattered in exile. **The second is a promise not to leave them abandoned in defeat.** Look with me at vv9-10, and we'll see our second point – the Lord promises to redeem the defeated. *“⁹Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pain seized you like a woman in labor?”*
 - Earlier, Micah addressed the Jews who had been scattered afar. Here in vv9-10, he shifts attention to the inhabitants of Jerusalem who have, so far, escaped capture, and yet they find themselves under threat – under the shadow of the Assyrian Empire.
- ❖ Now v9 is comprised of a series of rhetorical questions. By asking, “Why are you crying? Is there no king among you?” – that could be construed as a criticism aimed directly at Hezekiah for his failed leadership. **Or it could be a more general criticism of the people for not turning to God as their true and rightful King.**
 - It could be for their failure to trust in the LORD – because they leaned on their own understanding, and trusted in their own counselors, in their chariots and horses – Micah explains that that's why great pain and anguish afflicts you.

- ❖ Let's not soft pedal the horrific atrocities they experienced. **The Neo-Assyrian Empire was notorious for its cruelty and ruthlessness against its enemies.** Historical records tell of how they would flay their victims alive, impale them on stakes, chop off their noses and ears, or simply decapitate them. And these forms of torture were not just reserved for men of war. They were inflicted even on women and children.
 - **It's no wonder that God's people were crying out and writhing and groaning like a woman in labor.** That's how they're described in v10, "*10Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon.*"

- ❖ **So the inhabitants of Jerusalem were under an excruciating degree of pain. And it was a pain that would not quickly subside.** Notice how Micah forewarns of a future Babylonian exile. At that time, the Babylonians weren't even a threat. But historical accounts in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles tell us that Jerusalem survives the Assyrian threat. And over a hundred years later in 586BC, the Babylonian army led by King Nebuchadnezzar finally overthrew Jerusalem, took captive the vast majority of the population, and exiled them to Babylon.
 - **Just think of this as an extremely long labor – over a hundred years of contractions.** For all of you mothers out there who have experienced birth pangs, I'm sure you can sympathize with the daughter of Zion – with the people of Jerusalem.

- ❖ Yet at the same time, anyone who is a mother can tell you that what sustained them through the labor, through the contractions, through the excruciating pain – was the hope of new life in the end. **The new life of that baby is what gets her through the pain.**
 - So what a fitting analogy! In vv9-10, Micah is not sugarcoating anything. Jerusalem's downfall won't be immediate, but it will be painful, all the way leading up to her eventual defeat. **Like in labor, the pain will be sharp. The pain will be great. But this kind of pain results in new life.** In place of your defeat – in the pits of Babylon – there you'll find rescue. Listen to the rest of v10, "*There you shall be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.*"

- ❖ **Micah's point is that God's people should yield to their Lord's hand of discipline.** To receive their due punishment. To humble themselves before the LORD. To accept the limp that he gives them. And then to wait. **To wait there – wherever he has you for however long it takes – until he comes to the rescue.** Until the LORD himself will redeem you.
 - I know it's hard to wait. I know when you're under the heavy hand of God's discipline, you feel defeated. It feels like he's done with you. Like he's abandoned you. **But what if he's waiting for your pride to break.** For you to renounce any reliance anymore on your own strength.

- ❖ **Andrew Bonar**, a 19th-century Scottish pastor, once explained how, in the highlands of Scotland, sheep would sometimes wander off among the rocky crags and get trapped on dangerous ledges. Looking for grass, they would leap down onto a thin precipice and get stuck, unable to climb back up. **He goes on to explain that a shepherd would typically allow the helpless sheep to remain there on that ledge for days until it becomes so weak it can't stand on its own.** Only then will he tie a rope around his waist and go over the edge, to go down and rescue the stray sheep.
 - Someone once asked Bonar, “Why does the shepherd wait and let the sheep suffer? Why doesn't he go down right away?” He replied that it's because sheep are so foolish and so easy startled that they would dash right over the edge, to their demise, if the shepherd didn't wait until their strength was nearly gone.

- ❖ That's what God was doing in Micah's day. He was letting his people writhe and groan in pain. Suffering under the consequences of their sin. It might seem cruel. It might appear that he had abandoned them. **But he was actually waiting for their strength to go and their pride to break.** Only then would they be ready to be redeemed.
 - Friends, God still operates in the same way. For those of you who feel defeated, who feel like God's abandoned you – we sympathize with the pain and anguish you're going through. **But could it be that God is waiting until your strength is sapped and your pride is broken?**
 - Perhaps you need a new perspective. To not see your pain as punishment or torture anymore. But instead, to see it as birth pangs – what inevitably comes before the arrival of new life. A new life that God will bring forth in you by the goodness of his grace.

The Lord Promises to Surprise the Hopeless

- ❖ So we've seen the Lord's promise to assemble the lame and to redeem the defeated. Lastly, we'll see how the Lord promises to surprise the hopeless. That's the third point we find our last section, in 4:11 to 5:1 (which in Hebrew Bibles would be marked as chapter 4:14).
 - This oracle is being addressed to the same audience as before – to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as they're being surrounded by the Assyrians who were experts in siege warfare. This is described for us in v11, “*Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, "Let her be defiled, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion."*”

- ❖ The Assyrians were set upon humiliating their foes. They didn't just want to beat you. They wanted to rub your face in the dirt and call you names. That's what chapter 5:1 alludes to. Let me read it, “*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.*”
 - **This a reference to King Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem that took place in 701BC.** There are ancient extra-biblical records of this event (see *Sennacherib's Annals*). But scripturally, we'd turn to 2 Kings 18 (or an identical account in Isaiah 36). There we find an account of when Sennacherib sent his Rabshakeh (an official emissary) with a message to Hezekiah demanding he surrender the city.

- ❖ When Micah says in 5:1 that the judge of Israel (the king) would be struck on the cheek with a rod – that's an idiom for humiliation. It's suggesting that you're so weak that you can't even defend a slap on the face.
 - But that's what happened to Hezekiah. We're told in 2 Kings 18 that the king of Judah tried to hold off Sennacherib's attack by sending him an apology and gifts of tribute. But it didn't work. And now this Rabshakeh is at the gate hurling insults and taunts.

- ❖ He says things like, "Let's make a wager. I'll give you two thousands horses if you can even find two thousands guys able to ride them into battle." He says, "Don't you realize that the LORD sent us to destroy this place? We're doing his bidding." (2 Kg 18:23-25)
 - It's so demoralizing! So humiliating. Hezekiah is getting his cheek slapped. A shoe thrown at him. His pants pulled down to his ankles. Choose your idiom. It just goes to show how bad the situation was. **The Assyrians clearly had the upper hand. There was no question in their minds that Jerusalem would fall.** It was highly improbable that the city could survive an Assyrian siege.

- ❖ But that makes what actually happened that much more surprising and inspiring. **Little did the Assyrians know that their siege of Jerusalem was the LORD's doing.** He was the one gathering them together, so that he might thresh them to pieces.
 - Listen to vv12-13, "*¹²But they (the Assyrians) do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor. ¹³Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples; and shall devote their gain to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.*"

- ❖ **It was probably hard to believe, but here is Jerusalem being described as a powerful ox that is set to trample the Assyrians like sheaves on a threshing floor.** Oxen were sometimes to tread all over sheaves of grain, to physically separate wheat from the chaff. Those horns of iron and hooves of bronze are images designed to convey great strength. But no one would've described Jerusalem that way. Not even its own inhabitants. They were helpless and hopeless, waiting for the inevitable.
 - But a surprising, unexpected turn of events took place, and it's recorded for in **2 Kings 19**. In v34, the LORD promises to personally defend the city to save it, "*for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.*" ³⁵*And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.*"

- ❖ Some have theorized that there was a deadly outbreak that hit their camp or some other natural explanation. But Scripture does not hesitate to attribute it to the LORD. Because that's what he does. **He takes what appears to be certain defeat – a situation where your enemies are gloating over you, where you're hopeless – and he'll totally surprise everyone with an unlikely victory.**

- ❖ God did that countless times back in Israel's wilderness years under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. During the time of the Judges and under the kingship of David. He outwitted his enemies. He outwitted the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians, then the Medes and Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans.
 - Each time, a seemingly greater power looks poised to inflict a certain defeat on the people of God. **But each time, those who were gloating suddenly find themselves trampled underfoot by a lame, limping remnant of God's people.**

- ❖ **These kinds of surprising, unlikely victories keep occurring in the pages of Scripture until they culminate on the cross.** That's where the LORD outwitted a boastful enemy in the devil and his demons. They gloated at the foot of the cross when it appeared that the Messiah had failed his mission. **The one man that God's people were pinning all their hopes on – hung dead on a Roman cross.** They thought they had won.
 - But by the third day, the devil and his demons found themselves trampled underfoot by a Resurrected Messiah. **Jesus surprised everyone with an unlikely victory. Who could have imagined that, through his death, he'd secure salvation and new life for those who trust in him?** That through a shameful death on a cross, Jesus would exalt God's people and put to shame his enemies.

- ❖ Friends, take comfort in that gospel truth. There will be times in life where it may appear that you're surrounded by enemies and abandoned by God. Things may appear utterly hopeless. Maybe for some of you that time is happening right now. **Just remember, my friends, that those are just the right kind of times – just the right kind of conditions – for God to bring about an unexpected victory.** Though you may be wounded, though you may be limping and lame, you are certainly not forgotten nor abandoned by our God,