

The Prophecy of Micah: *A Ruler of a Remnant*

Micah 5:2-15

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 11, 2020

Introduction

- ❖ As November 3rd approaches, all of us are being inundated with news about the election. The headlines are nonstop – about what this or that candidate did or said, about who won this or that debate, about what’s at stake if this or that party wins. Some of you might be exhausted by all of that, and the last thing you want to hear is more election talk. But others might be wanting more – especially wanting to hear more from the church. That’s why some churches are doing a sermon series during this time of year, specifically focused on the election.
 - As you can see, we’re not doing that here. We’re staying in our Micah series. Not because we’re necessarily against a topical series or sermon on the election. We don’t think it’s wrong to do. But we don’t think it’s necessary either. **Because the Word of God itself is extremely relevant and has something to say to all the various contemporary issues we’re facing.** There’s no need to pause our practice of walking through Scripture, listening to the inspired Word, as God has arranged it into books. So it’s our conviction that when we preach through books of the Bible, there is a divine wisdom guiding us and giving us a timely word in the text.

- ❖ Friends, I think you’ll see this point prove true in today’s text. It includes the most well-known passage in Micah. **It’s about the origins of Israel’s Messiah – the Promised Ruler who will secure the throne of David and rule in righteousness now and forevermore.** Those of us familiar with the Christmas story know exactly how Jesus fulfills this prophecy through his birth in the little town of Bethlehem. That’s the Christmas story.
 - But before the Christmas story – the story of the Messiah’s coming – there was the story of Israel’s waiting. Waiting for the King. **The story of Israel’s waiting is the story of how things fall apart when a rightful ruler is not on the throne.** Up to Micah’s day, the people of God were suffering under a string of bad kings. **Which fueled everyone’s longing for the return of a good king who’s going to restore glory to the kingdom and put everything right.**

- ❖ **Now if that sounds oddly familiar, it’s because that’s the basic plot line of all the greatest stories.** In *Robin Hood*, the good king Richard is far away in a distant land fighting the Crusades. Back home, his treacherous brother John has crowned himself king. He’s a terror on the throne. The people long for the return of their rightful ruler.
 - In Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, the people long for the return of Isildur’s heir. With the shadow of Mordor stretching across Middle Earth, everyone waits for the rightful ruler of Gondor to reclaim his throne and resist the growing evil. Or in Lewis’ *Narnia* series, every time there was no son of Adam or daughter of Eve on the throne, Narnia would fall to ruin. Trufflehunter the badger reminds the reader. “*That Narnia was never right except when a son of Adam was King.*” And so they wait.

- ❖ **Now where do you think these beloved stories got their inspiration?** There’s a good reason these storylines resonates with us. They speak to a common truth about the human condition – that we all have a deep need for a good king to reign over us.

- ❖ **The book of Judges is a perfect illustration of what happens when that need is not met – when there is no king over us.** It’s a dark book filled with war, violence, and horrendous atrocities. The last verse of Judges summarizes it well, *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* (Judg 21:25)
 - That might sound like good advice to the ears of the world. But in Scripture, doing whatever is right in your own eyes is a recipe for disaster. It will bring ruin to you and to the world around you. **What we need instead is a good king to rule over us.**
 - Now in Micah’s day, they had a king. It was even a descendent of David. But these kings all failed in some way. Apparently just having a king doesn’t solve the problem. We need a rightful ruler to reign over us.

- ❖ Friends, this is the predicament we find ourselves in today. **We live in a society that’s all about doing whatever is right in your own eyes.** We’ve bought into this idea that we are self-autonomous creatures that have the freedom to define truth and reality for ourselves. We’re all living as our own kings and queens, ruling over the kingdom of me.
 - But where has that gotten us? **It looks to me like our society is unraveling into chaos.** There’s so much division and polarization. There’s so much distrust and suspicion of our leaders. So many are hoping that this upcoming election will bring us the right president or the right legislators. And then they’ll make everything right.

- ❖ **But our text reminds us that what we really need is the rightful ruler that God supplies.** We’ll see three things God will do to meet that deepest need of ours. (1) He will painfully purge away all competitors to his rightful ruler. (2) He will surprisingly raise up an ancient ruler to pastor his people. (3) His ruler will send out a faithful remnant among the nations.

God Painfully Purges Away

- ❖ Now our passage is comprised of three oracles – vv2-6 is one, then vv7-9, and lastly vv10-15. I’m actually going to start with this third oracle because, by doing so, I think it’ll help us understand what happens when a people lack a rightful ruler. People tend to turn to other sources, looking for the kind of security, guidance, and blessing that a good king would normally provide. This is what Micah’s third oracle is focused on. **What we’ll see is how God painfully purges away all competitors to his Rightful Ruler.**
 - Look with me at v10. As we’ve already noted in previous sermons, Micah was delivering these particular oracles during the reign of King Hezekiah. During a time when the Assyrian army was looming large. They had already destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah was largely devastated, with the sole holdout being the capital of Jerusalem.

- ❖ Starting in v10, the LORD has a warning for his people. He’s going to cut off access to the various sources that they’ve been turning to – these various competitors to his Rightful Ruler. **These sources were stealing the trust that his good king deserves.** God won’t abide that. Notice how four times over the LORD says, *“I will cut off”*. Whatever it is you’re relying on – I will cut off. In other words, it’s going to hurt. It’s going to be a painful purging

- ❖ **First, in vv10-11, the LORD will painfully purge us of dependence on worldly might.** *“¹⁰And in that day, declares the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; ¹¹and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds.”* **These verses are addressing our human tendency to trust in earthly powers for our sense of security.**
 - In this case, we’re talking about military might. Horses and chariots were offensive weapons of war for ancient civilizations. Fortified cities and strongholds were defensive structures that people would look to for refuge. **If they were scared, if they felt threatened, they would hide themselves in these earthly structures and trust in their military to rescue them from their enemies.**

- ❖ Now it would be reading too much into this to suggest that God was opposed to fortifying cities, or to have a standing military, or to spend significantly on a nation’s defense budget. **You can make a legitimate biblical case for having a strong military and also effective law enforcement.** Romans 13 teaches us that God gives the sword to governing authorities to carry out his wrath on wrongdoers (13:4).
 - **So v10 is not condemning us for having a strong military or a large defense budget. But it is condemning us for putting our trust in these things.** Psalm 20:7 says, *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”* That’s what’s at stake here.

- ❖ **Second, in v12, the LORD will painfully purge us of a dependence on magic.** Listen to v12, *“and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes.”* Now I realize that very few of us would even remotely consider ourselves as dependent on magic. You have no interest in the occult or astrology or consulting fortune tellers. This seems like an irrelevant point.
 - **But remember that, in those days, magic didn’t look like a man pulling a rabbit out of a hat or a lady looking into a crystal ball.** Sometimes ancient magic involved a potion or amulet, but it mainly had to do with invoking incantations aimed at manipulating spiritual forces to give guidance or to bring down a blessing or a curse.

- ❖ I know it sounds primitive. **But honestly, don't we do something similar? Don't we essentially practice a form of magic?** It’s where we treat prayer like some kind of magical incantation. Where we think we have to say the right formula and end with "in Jesus's name" or it won't work. It’s where we think doing devotions or other religious rites will somehow get God to bless us more or to give us an answer when faced with a perplexing decision.
 - So maybe it’s not that far-fetched to describe us as a people dependent on magic. **If we’re honest, sometimes our dealings with God can't compare with a personal relationship between friends – but seem more like a sorcerer or fortune-teller trying to conjure up divine wisdom or power to get more direction or blessings.** If that accurately characterizes your dealings with God, then you need to be purged of that mindset – or else you’ll never come to know God’s Rightful Ruler as a personal Sovereign and Friend.

- ❖ **Third, in vv13-14, the LORD will painfully purge us of dependence on idols.** Listen, *“¹³and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; ¹⁴and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities.”* Now again, I think many people today would balk at the charge of idolatry. They don’t have statues or shrines set up in their homes. They don’t bow down to carved images. They don’t think they rely on idols.
 - But we have to remember that idolatry is a matter of the heart. **Anything can become an idol if your heart begins to treat it that way.** Any person, any possession, any pursuit in life – no matter how noble in and of itself – can be treated as an idol in your heart. It’s when you assign ultimate significance to that object. It’s where your sense of joy, of purpose, of identity – is wrapped up in that person or possession or pursuit.

- ❖ **I can speak from personal experience that I needed God to conduct a deep purging in my life halfway through my college years – it was then, and only then, that I recognized my Rightful Ruler.** Up to that point in my life, Jesus was my ticket to heaven. He’s the one I was going to turn to when I die and God asks, “Why should I let you into heaven?” Besides that – I didn’t have much need for him as a ruler. I was my own ruler. I was doing what was right in my own eyes.
 - But God, in his grace, began to cut off things – to painfully purge me of idols. He mainly did it by allowing me to experience deep disappointment in the very sources where I sought for security, for guidance, for blessing. God exposed the futility of my idols, dethroning them in my heart, freeing me from their rule. **And that left me restless and ready to receive Jesus – not just as a ticket to heaven – but as my Rightful Ruler right now on earth.**

- ❖ **Friends, what we see in Micah’s day is God being gracious – to purge his people as a means to prepare his people to receive his Messiah.** I hope you see that he’s doing the same thing today. Maybe some of you have recently experienced loss and disappointment. You’ve had that sense of having precious things being cut off and purged away. It hurts.
 - **But could it be that God is purging you of these false sources of security, guidance, or blessing?** Could it be that he’s preparing the way for your heart to receive his Rightful Ruler – a true and better Ruler than you can ever be for yourself?

God Surprisingly Raises Up

- ❖ That’s brings us to the identity of this Rightful Ruler, which brings us back to v2. We’ve seen how he painfully purges away all competitors to his Rightful Ruler. **Second, here in vv2-6, we see how God surprisingly raises up an ancient ruler to pastor his people.** Speaking to a hopeless and defeated people, he promises that this king will have an unexpected origin.
 - Recall how back in chapter 1, we saw how the Assyrians – fresh off their defeat of the northern kingdom, began a campaign against Judah, capturing towns and fortified cities. Micah mentioned these events in chapter 1:10-16. All those cities mentioned there are found in a lowland region southwest of Jerusalem. What’s important to note is that that region included Bethlehem.

- ❖ **That means, by chapter 5, the people of Jerusalem had given up on Bethlehem and all those other towns in the region.** They were as good as gone. But then they hear Micah say in v2, *“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.”* So there is hope. But this hope comes from a surprising place – from Bethlehem Ephrathah.
- ❖ Ephrathah is the name of the Judean district where Bethlehem is located. It’s like saying Houston, Texas. **And it was necessary to mention the district, because otherwise Micah’s audience could’ve confused it with another Bethlehem in the northern region of Zebulun.** So it’s like someone saying they’re going to visit Paris. And you’re like, “Cool. Paris, France?” Paris, Texas. Northeast of Dallas, next to Oklahoma. Important distinction.
 - So that’s how obscure Bethlehem was in those days. **It was not a prominent city that could be identified by its name alone.** It’s not like New York or London or Houston. It needed further identification. And that’s because, as it says in v2, Bethlehem was *“too little to be among the clans of Judah”*. What is that referring to? It’s referring to how – when you read Joshua 15:20-63, where it lists out the 46 cities of the tribe of Judah, Bethlehem doesn’t even make the list. It’s that small.
- ❖ **It’s claim to fame is being the hometown of King David.** And that connection to David is probably what’s in view when it says his *“coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”* This Messiah is going to come from the ancient lineage of David.
 - Now you might argue that being the hometown of David is still a big deal. **But we usually associate famous people with the town they got famous in – not so much their hometown or birthplace.** When you think of Michael Jordan, you probably associate him with Chicago. Now basketball fans might now that he grew up in Wilmington, NC. But only avid fans will know that his birthplace was Brooklyn. So even a famous person’s birthplace or hometown can still be obscure or unknown.
- ❖ And that would be the case for the little town of Bethlehem. **Yet God chose this insignificant town to be the birthplace of his Messiah, the Rightful Ruler of his people.** He didn’t choose a town based on its prominence or popularity. No, he chose based on its meekness and smallness. Which is so fitting the more you learn about this Messiah.
 - Listen to vv3-5. *“³Therefore 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. ⁴And 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. ⁵And he shall be their peace.”*
- ❖ **Notice in v3 how Micah has to clarify that this king won’t immediately deliver you from the present threat of invading nations.** Those invasions will happen. And the Babylonians will eventually succeed. You’re going to be exiled as a consequence of your sins.

- ❖ But it's because of the promise in v2 that Micah can say – in v3 – “*therefore*” you can be sure that God will only give you up until the time when “*she who is in labor has given birth.*” So when this ruler arrives, the exile will end. There is an expiration date to this exile.
 - When the Messiah is birthed – when he comes – then, it says, “*the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.*” That’s referring to all the tribes of Israel who had been exiled by the Assyrians. These scattered sheep will return to God’s sheepfold.

- ❖ Notice the pastoral language used in v4. “*He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD.*” **It might sound strange for a king’s labor to be described as shepherding.** Shepherds are known for their caring demeanor. For their patience with stubborn sheep. For their willingness to put their lives at risk to protect their flock. But the truth is you’re not going to find too many kings or earthly leaders who fit that description.
 - **And notice how this Rightful Ruler is described as standing.** He’s not lounging around. He’s not a pompous king waiting for us to serve him. No, the Messiah is on his feet. He’s up and about shepherding the flock, pastoring God’s people.

- ❖ When we consider the meekness of the Messiah’s birthplace and the nature of his kingship defined in terms of pastoral, shepherding care – we are led to conclude one thing: **This Messiah, this ruler, will be different than all those who came before.** The kings of Jerusalem who were born in fancy palaces, clothed in purple robes, sitting on ornate thrones, were all royal failures. But now God is doing something different.
 - **This time born in a lowly cattle shed, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, we have the Rightful Ruler.** The right king. The king we all know we need to be reigning over us. One who came to serve and not to be served. To give his life as a ransom for many. All in order that he might be our peace.

- ❖ Look at v5, “*And he shall be there peace.*” Now that is talking about peace on earth. The Messiah will one day bring earthly peace, bringing to an end all wars, all conflicts, all violence and bloodshed. As it says in chapter 4:3, soldiers will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
 - That’ll be a glorious day. **But, of course, there’s a more glorious peace to be had. A more fundamental peace that first needs to happen before we can expect peace on earth.** And that’s having peace with God.

- ❖ As sinners, our greatest need is to have the righteous wrath of God removed against us. Hostility between God and man must be reconciled. **When the Rightful Ruler laid down his rights and gave his life as a ransom for many – all who trust in him will be saved, will be at peace with God.**

- ❖ Friends, if you don’t know if you have peace with God, don’t go another day without knowing – without experiencing his peace, his favor, his lovingkindness over you. **Unlike earthly authorities, with this King, you don’t have to earn it.** You don’t have to prove yourself worthy of it. You have to receive it by faith. That’s good news.

- ❖ **Compared to the kings and queens of history, to dictators and tyrants, to elected leaders of democratic societies – compared to them all, this Messiah stands in a category of his own.** In how he embodies meekness and humility, service and sacrifice. He can actually bring peace and bring a disparate people into one body unified by his Spirit of peace.

God's Ruler Sends Out

- ❖ This unified people is what Micah describes as the remnant. We looked at this idea of a remnant last week, and there we showed how the promise of God to preserve for himself a faithful remnant of Israel is ultimately fulfilled in his Church. So when we read these prophecies about the remnant here in Micah, they're not just referring to people of Jewish descent. These prophecies are relevant to all of us who are in Christ.
 - Let's see what God promises to do with this remnant. Look in vv7-9. **Here we see how God's Ruler sends out a faithful remnant among the nations.** There is a global, missional focus here. *"⁷Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man. ⁸And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which, when it goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver.*
 - Notice how there are two images being used. One is of the people of God (his remnant) refreshing the nations (unbelieving peoples of the world) like how morning dew or spring showers refresh a dry and parched land.
- ❖ But then there's the second image of the people of God like a young lion ravaging a flock of sheep, tearing them to pieces. **Which, in context, would suggest that the same remnant will, in one sense, bring refreshment but will, in another sense, bring ruin.**
 - Now I think what this second image – of a ravaging lion among the nations – what it ultimately refers to is the biblical teaching we find in places like Revelation 19 that describe what will take place at the final end of history. When the Church of God will accompany the Messiah (our Rightful Ruler) as he leads the charge to bring God's judgment and wrath upon the unbelieving opposition among the nations (19:14-15).
- ❖ Now I know that's a frightful image – for the nations (for the unbelieving peoples of the world). **But that's why we need to focus right now – before the final ends comes – on that first image; on being that source of refreshment; on showering God's blessings on others.** As he blesses us with peace, favor, and lovingkindness – all found within the message of the gospel – we, as the remnant, are sent to the nations to share those blessings.
 - Now that idea of being blessed to bless the nations goes all the way back to Abraham. **And when Abraham's son Isaac blessed Jacob in Genesis 27, he associated his blessing with the same imagery – the dew of heaven.** He tells Jacob that you will be a blessing to those who bless you (27:29). But as we saw last week in Micah 4, Jacob first had to be broken of his pride, broken over his sin. **He had to be crippled before he could be a blessing.** He was only the dew of heaven after he got his limp.

- ❖ **Church, in the same way, we must be a broken and crippled remnant before we can be a refreshing dew that blesses the nations.** Keep that in mind as the election approaches. In the coming weeks, I think we'll see a clearer contrast between earthly rulers and the Rightful Ruler. **Earthly rulers are primarily defined by might and power. While the Messiah is primarily defined by meekness and peace.**
 - It we are to be a faithful remnant, we cannot mix this up. **We won't be a refreshment to the nations – we will lose our Christian witness – if we conform to the pattern of this world and begin to value might and power over meekness and peace.**

- ❖ So be critical in your thinking and careful with your soul – as you engage the political process. Be in it but not of it. Be a good citizen of this kingdom, but don't forget that your real home is a kingdom that still to come, and your true King is not on the ballot because he's not up for election. His rule and reign will never end!