

Micah 3&4

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[0 : 00] I don't know about you, but if you look around you at the world we live in, it's very easy to ask the question, is God not concerned for his own glory?

! Where exactly is God in the world that we live in? I mean, it's wars and rumors of wars and climate change and political upheaval and all kinds of things.

And as Paul prayed just now, the most horrific atrocities that we see in the world. And I think it's a quite legitimate question to ask ourselves, is God not concerned for his glory that these things are happening in the world?

Sometimes we joke about it. One of the other things that make me wonder about that is Arsenal's form over the last couple of years. But, you know, sometimes humor is all we've got.

But these things we do to each other are bad enough, aren't they? What's fundamentally even worse than that, I think, is that the world seems to be turning its back on God.

[1 : 22] And that was true for Israel in their days and it's true for us today. We see it in the UK that we live in now, don't we? Just a couple of things that happened over the last couple of weeks and months that made me wonder, is God concerned for his glory in our time, in our country?

Last year, the Church of England said regular Sunday attendance fell 3% to 756,000.

Now that might sound a lot, but that's about 1% of the population. People's lives are too busy, they said. That's why that number fell.

There's a vicar of a church in Blackpool who spends her Sunday mornings at a prayer tent at a nearby car boot sale to address worshippers there.

I wonder what they're worshipping exactly. And she also holds her Sunday service at 4.30 in the afternoon, so people can attend after taking their children to sports or doing their shopping.

[2 : 31] That's more like the Lord's half day, it sounds. Norwich Cathedral recently put in a helter-skelter, so people can see the roof more clearly.

And Rochester Cathedral put in a mini-golf course. The Reverend Cannon there said, We hope while playing adventure golf, visitors will reflect on the bridges that need to be built in their own lives and in our world today.

Because, of course, that's what happens when you play mini-golf. The Daily Mail was a bit more tongue-in-cheek about that. They said, Holy in one, worshippers at a medieval cathedral are being asked to put their faith in God on a crazy golf course in the nave.

And, I mean, we laugh, but it's actually quite sad. Now, just in case you get the wrong idea, this isn't to bash the Church of England. Less than 5% of the whole nation goes to church regularly.

And many churches do much worse than that. I mean, don't get me started on the prosperity gospel and what people get told there. And what it comes down to for those priests, vicars, ministers, is, Are people going to come?

[3 : 51] Are our numbers up? How does it look? Are they looking at our beautiful roof? People are more concerned about their own glory than about God's glory, it seems.

And Micah warns us about this, and he tells us about a time in Israel's history when it was basically just the same, isn't it? Now, he's the last of the first six of these minor or shorter prophets at the end of the Old Testament.

And the first half of them is just all about the sin of Israel and the nations. And it's piled up, and this is the height of it.

And he brings together all those themes, and he says, you know, Israel's sin is like prostitution.

Turning away from God after something else, after other gods. And they're spiritually lethargic.

They can't be bothered. And they're weak. And it's about wealth and amassing wealth. And they're mistreating refugees and committing social injustice all over the place.

[4 : 54] And they're cold towards nations who need to hear about the Lord. But the priests cry peace when they've got something to eat, and declare war against people who put nothing in their mouths.

That's what they're concerned about. And we read there, don't we, at the end of chapter 3, about how corrupt these leaders are. How they actually tell people what they want to hear.

They give them the message they want to hear, and the price is right. Basically telling them their horoscopes. Making up the kind of prophecies that it sells. And they're super, super confident they've got God on their side.

Because look at verse 11. Yet they lean on the Lord and say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us. But God doesn't let things stand.

I mean, basically they think God needs them more than they need Him. But God doesn't depend on us, and that's really what they were counting on.

[6 : 00] They were counting on the fact that if His temple is with them, if His temple is among them, if they were going through the motions of serving God, then He wouldn't desert them because He needs their worship.

And because they've earned His favor that way. Now, it's, you know, again, easy, you know, we can read that and think, well, that sounds ridiculous.

But, you know, do we sometimes hear people say things like, I think I've done enough, that God won't be too cross with me? Or something along those lines?

I think if we're brutally honest, we've probably all thought along those lines to some extent at some point. And God is telling us here, and Israel is telling us, no, He doesn't need us to be God.

To be utterly perfect and utterly holy and utterly complete in Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Glory be to Him forever and ever. And that's a sobering thought to realize that, that God doesn't need us.

[7 : 10] That He can't be manipulated. And especially not by people who should be leading God's people spiritually. These priests and prophets who were telling people what they wanted to hear.

That is such a warning in our time as well. And God sent other nations to destroy this temple they relied on. This temple, it was their security blanket, wasn't it?

The end of chapter 3 there, verse 12. Because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooden height. God sent other nations to come and destroy the temple in Jerusalem.

Now, if you're an Israelite, and you hear that this is going to happen, that is like the gut punch that makes you want to curl up in a fetal position under the table and cry for your mommy.

Because the temple is what made them. It's what made them different to all the other nations.

Where God was meant to be with them. But they've gone from being more in awe of God's glory, to being more concerned with their own glory.

[8 : 29] And this is the turning point that we come to in this chapter here, at the end of chapter 3 and chapter 4. That is God's judgment on them. And for an Israelite, that is the worst thing that could possibly happen.

The worst message you could probably hear. And then, here at the beginning of chapter 4, we see that you don't have to be in a car crash to get whiplash. Because if you read Micah, and you read through chapters 1 and 2 and 3, and you go into these depths, and you get to this height of God's judgment on them, your temple will be destroyed, and the symbol of me living with you won't be there anymore.

Then chapter 4 starts, doesn't it? It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established, as the highest of the mountains. And it shall be lifted up above the hills, and people shall float to it.

And you hear that, and you think, well, wait, wait just a minute. Didn't we just, like, literally in the previous verse, hear how the mountain Zion shall be like a field, and Jerusalem ruins, and the mountain of the house, nothing more than a wooded hike?

And now suddenly, it shall be established as the highest of the mountains. And lift it up above the hills, and people shall float to it. Now that is just phenomenal.

[9 : 55] That reversal in those, from verse 12 to verse 1 there, it is an incredible, complete about turn, isn't it? It's really quite breathtaking.

It is an earthly Jerusalem that meant everything to Israel will be destroyed, and yet somehow, a new Jerusalem, the mountain of the house of the Lord, will be established.

What's going on? Well, today I want us to see one thing, really. It's a bank holiday, and it's hot. It's one thing, about God's desire for his own glory, and it's this.

What God was showing Israel through this vision that Micah has right here. And it is this. God's desire for his own glory is greater than the problem of our sin.

And it means he's more gracious than our sin deserves. God's desire for his glory is greater than the problem of our sin. And it means he's more gracious than our sin deserves.

[10:59] No three points, no alliteration. Just this one thing. And God's glory is greater than we think, because God is greater than we can imagine. I think it's the one thing we see here, isn't it?

See, when the temple was destroyed, it seemed like God's glory had been lost. Israel's not a people anymore. They're going into exile. The temple's no more. The temple that was the symbol of God being with them, of them being special, God's chosen people.

But here's what God tells to these people who are about to go into exile. It's not a logistical message of, this is how it's going to work, and this is how long it's going to be, and you're going to return, and this is how it's going to be, a functional message of, I will restore you to this land of something.

God gives this incredible vision of this total about turn of what he's done, and even more, isn't it? He tells them, my glory is heavenly.

My glory is not earthly. You have it all wrong. My glory is not limited to this temple that's here with you, to these things that you do, the worship that you give me here at this temple.

[12:13] My glory is so much greater than that. And they're symbols of much, much greater things. And I think, with it unplanned, I think it ties in with something that Paul said this morning as well.

We can think things through so much to the nth degree that we lose the feeling of what it is meant to give us when we read a vision like this in the Bible. So I'm not going to go through each of the little images and dig into them, but I want us to feel this weight of this glory that God gives them in this vision.

And he tells the people who are about to go into exile, the people who look at the world around them and say, where is God and what is happening? He tells them, look at what I am doing for my glory.

Not what you can see in front of your own eyes now. And he does what is impossible. I don't know if you've noticed, but Micah describes something that actually sounds like it's impossible, isn't it?

Things flow downhill, generally speaking. And since we've worked out gravity, we understand why that is. Things flow downhill, not up a mountain.

[13:26] So when they tried to determine the origin of the River Nile, and with David Livingston, and John Hannity Spake, and Richard Burton, and those guys, the whole point was, they tried to work out the highest point at which water flows into that system must be where the system starts.

That's how they thought about it. Because they know things flow downhill, not uphill. You know, it's a fascinating story, that if you've never kind of looked into it, about all the adventure and misadventure, and human drama, and all the jealousy, and survival, and tribes that want to kill them, and malaria, and all kinds of things.

But they had this right. Things flow downhill, not uphill. Water doesn't flow uphill. And just like water doesn't flow uphill, people don't naturally come to God.

It's impossible for us to just do that on our own. People don't naturally come to God saying, yeah, let's learn from His Word.

Let's learn from God how He wants us to live. How He wants us to direct our lives. In fact, from the Garden of Eden, isn't it, we've done the exact opposite.

[14:48] But God's glory is greater than our sin, because He does the impossible. people who rejected Him. Peter says in Acts 2, he says, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.

And just for the avoidance of doubt, that's you and me too included in there before we were saved.

And our sin wasn't to break down a physical building where God had dwelled with His people.

We killed God dwelling with His people. And despite that, because God's concern for His glory is greater than our sin, He turns our hearts back to Him.

We forget when we read about the nations in the Bible, we are those nations. Flowing uphill to this heaven is I.

And that started at Pentecost, when this vision of Micah started to come true, isn't it? And we don't see all the wars ended yet, and we don't see a world where everyone has enough from their own labour, and enough to eat, and enough to, a place to sleep, and all these things that Micah describes here.

[16:09] And we don't see those swords and spears having become flowershares, and pruning hooks, and the peace that He looks forward to. But the real peace we need, peace with God, is available now when we come to Him, when we come to this heavenly Zion that Micah describes.

When we have that, the rest starts to follow. But here's the question, how is God doing this? How is God making the nations flow to Him, to this heavenly Zion that He describes, to come and ask to be instructed by the Lord?

And we have this strange reason given, at the end of verse 2, don't we? For out of Zion shall go forth the Lord, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Because God's word is going out to these nations. God's law, God's instruction, God's word. And when God's word goes out to the world, the miraculous happens.

We shouldn't lose confidence in God's word going out into the world and doing the impossible.

Nations coming to God in the most spectacular way.

[17:41] And the effect is astounding. The gospel has gone out to places that were unimaginable when Micah gave these prophecies.

Places they didn't even know existed. And it continues to go out to them. And the nations continue to come to God after his heavenly Zion. You might know, you might have heard the kind of statistic that more Muslims have converted to Christianity in the last, say, 20 years than in 4,200 years before that.

since the start of Islam. Astounding. China may already be the most Christian nation in the world in terms of the number of believers.

We don't think about it that way. Whole communities in places like the Middle East are coming to God. And turning to God and repenting of their sins and putting their trust in Jesus because the word of the God is going out in incredible ways to these corners of the world that Micah didn't even know about.

And it's incredible. But, I want to tell you a story about the nations coming to God where it looks like exactly the opposite. some of you might know that I spent some time this summer in China and North Korea.

[19:08] Pyongyang was called the Jerusalem of the East kind of early 20th century. There was revival. Welsh missionaries had gone there and others.

And, there were so many churches there that it was called the Jerusalem of the East. And now the government has been stamping out any trace of Christianity there for 70 years.

It is, it is really incredible to see how totally they've imposed this ideology on a country in just 70 years. You'd think that kind of thing would take 300 years but 70 years.

Indoctrinating people and forcing people to report on each other and inform on each other. You don't know who you can trust. You can't trust your neighbor. Limiting people's access to anything outside of North Korea.

I kid you not, when you go in, your bags are searched, every piece of printed material you have is catalogued and it's got to go out again. Every electronic device is searched and catalogued and it's got to go out again.

[20:13] You can take the Bible in English but it's got to go out again. They go to the most extreme lengths you can imagine to stop anybody from finding out about Christianity.

But here's the thing. Despite that total control that they're exerting over people's thinking from the moment they can put two words together and despite the fact that people can go to prison camps if they're caught out if they're fortunate there are Christians in North Korea and people are coming to faith as we speak.

Christians who go there have to find other reasons to go in. You can't go in as a missionary. I'm not going to get a missionary visa to go to North Korea. So, some places in the country allow foreign investment like in the north there's a zone where people can invest.

So, that's what missionaries do. You find yourself running a factory. you know, you go to seminary and you end up running a shoe factory or something like that.

But that's how you get in long term and have sustained contact with North Korean people. And if they get to know you well enough and you can build up and have trust with them that they know you're not going to report them and they're not going to report you if you have a gospel conversation, those conversations happen.

[21 : 45] And people are coming to faith. Even though it looks like this is a country, this is the country where God's glory is nowhere to be seen. And someone I spoke to who works there finally managed to speak to one of their employees alone after many years outside because the buildings are bugged and the government listens in to everything.

And it's an employee who was terminally ill and she told him well it's important now, you have to make a decision. Jesus is the only way to get to heaven.

You have to make a choice and there is no other way. And he looked at her and he smiled and he said, don't worry, Jane or whatever her name is, I'm already on that train.

Now that sounds odd but it turns out there's an old Korean hymn about being on the train to heaven. And where did he hear the gospel?

I don't know. Some people have reports from Muslim countries about people seeing visions of Jesus, the word coming to them.

[23 : 00] They could be having dreams or visions. but I think in many cases more likely it is that people are literally risking their lives to tell their children about God.

To tell their children about Jesus. Anybody who knows children, you don't have to have your own, even though children can say unfortunate things at unfortunate times.

It is a risk to tell your child about Jesus there. And it's just incredible to me that here people don't want to take their children to church because they don't want to risk them being upset and they want them to discover it for themselves.

Psalms 48 that we read at the beginning talks about how we tell our children about the faith. And these people are risking their lives to do that. And I dare say there might be more glory given to God on that last day for people from places like North Korea who have come to that heavenly Zion with us than we can think.

Here's the point. God is never going to allow His glory to be limited or diminished or destroyed by our human sin or even just our inability to see past our limited circumstances.

[24 : 20] Not Israel's sin. Not the North Korean regime's sin. Not your sin or my sin. The Westminster Shorter Catechism starts with what's the chief end of man?

And the answer is glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Isn't it? The world we live in don't think so. You ask someone on the street what's our main reason for existing.

You might get some strange looks first. And if you get an answer it might be something like make money enjoy yourself or even be a good person. But it's not going to be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

But God's concern for His glory means He's so gracious that He involves you and me and calls us His people so we can bring glory to Him. It's certainly incredible.

It really is. But God is asking you and me tonight, do you believe that? How often have you and I this week thought to give glory to God?

[25 : 32] From the most mundane things in our life everything we have is from Him to praying that He's glorified by doing the impossible that He's glorified by the nations coming to faith and streaming to Him like we have.

Tonight after the service when we pray for Holiday Bible Club we can pray that God's glorified by bringing people to us next week who otherwise might never have come to Him.

Do we realize that we need nothing more than for God to be glorified? I think we can be so easily complacent. We can be so focused on the state of affairs in the here and now that we settle for less than we could.

God, it's good and right to be praying for the world we live in and for big things like peace and the people we love and for our daily needs and everything that is happening in our week to come.

But we can become so used, I think, to God having done this incredible miracle in our own lives and what He's doing all over the world right now, even in places like North Korea, but we think it's all about us and not all about Him.

[26 : 50] And in some ways it's a bit like C.S. Lewis who said about us being satisfied with building mud pies because we can't imagine what a holiday by the sea looks like. And I think we should all be more permanently like deer caught in the headlights, astonished at God's glory and what He's doing in the world to glorify Himself.

God's answer to Israel at this absolute low point in their history, when the temple is about to be destroyed and they're about to go into exile is when I am glorified by doing more than you're asking for and more than you can imagine and more than you can conceive of, then you will be strong and restored.

Just look up and see what I'm doing. God's glory is greater than the predicament of our sin and it means He's more gracious than our sin deserves.

For Israel it was hard to take this message on board in some ways. They had the exile to look forward to and hope was a distant promise.

But here's what we have. We've seen that glory of God lifted up. We've seen that glory of God lifted up on the cross, haven't we? And Hebrews 12 tells us how this vision that Micah has was fulfilled even more in these latter days in our time.

[28 : 14] Hebrews 12 22 says But you've come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous, made perfect.

You have come to Mount Zion. That's where we are when we come to God in worship. And it gets even better than that.

We won't say that way, that the Mount Zion is a heavenly place while we're on earth, the heavenly Jerusalem. See, just like heaven came to earth when Jesus was born, this heavenly Jerusalem will come to earth again.

Revelation 21 tells us there will be a new heaven and a new earth and the holy city, the new Jerusalem, and it will come down out of heaven from God, and God's dwelling place will be with his people, and he'll be with us himself, and we, all these nations, will be his people.

I think Micah 4 calls us to pray for what Paul prays for the Ephesians in his letter. I'll end with that in Ephesians 1.

[29 : 38] See, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you. Christ from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

Amen. Thank you.