

Micah 4:6-13

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[0 : 00] You were here last week, if you remember we looked at the first few verses of this chapter. The first few verses, I just want to glance down at them now. They are a wonderful picture of the future the might of the prophet is bringing to the people of God.

It is a picture of perfect peace. It is a picture of wonderful contentment. It is a picture of the rule of God. As people gather round the word of the Lord and listen and respond perfectly to the word of the Lord.

It is a wonderful picture of the future. We unpacked that a little bit last week and saw how much it shines into our hopes and our dreams. We saw a little bit about how that was going to come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the question that might be in the back of your mind is, it just sounds a little bit unrealistic. It sounds a little bit like pie in the sky when you die. It seems a little bit disconnected from the reality and the pain of everyday life.

And that would have been especially true, especially a thought that would have been going through the mind of the original listeners. So Michael was speaking to the people of God when actually they were in a horrendous situation.

[1 : 15] They were just about to be taken actually away out of their lands into exile. That the Babylonians were going to come in. That the temple, the physical temple in Jerusalem was going to become a bubble.

That's what we're told at the end of chapter 3. But that might be a sat prophecy from the Lord. And the Lord tells his people that is what's going to happen. Then in chapter 4 there's a change of gear into this wonderful great future.

But they were going to ask the question, well, it just doesn't seem to be realistic. So as we then move on into the second part of this chapter, we see some more about what is going to happen in this great, great day to come.

What the great end of all things is going to look like. And as Michael continues hearing this vision of the future, actually we see that some of the imagery of what the Lord is going to do actually helps answer that kind of question and that kind of concern.

Because what the Lord is going to do is not just bring in a great future which looks wonderful and looks perfect. He's also going to deal with the suffering and the difficulties that the people are facing as Michael speaks to them.

[2 : 30] And he's going to deal with the issues and the problems that we face. So there are a few images that I want to start to notice today. Three things that the Lord is going to do in this great future day that we see from these verses.

We're going to just look very briefly. The first thing we see is that the Lord is going to shepherd the needy. The Lord is going to shepherd the needy. So look down at verses 6 and 7.

The Lord says he will assemble, he will gather. It's kind of shepherding language of gathering together people. But notice who he's gathering together. He's going to assemble the lay, gather those who have been driven away.

So remember Michael has said that the people are going to be driven away from the land. The Lord is going to come on and gather them back. Those who the Lord has afflicted.

He's going to gather. He's going to shepherd these people who are in great need. Kind of powerful words that he used, aren't they? Lame. There's nothing more pathetic is there of seeing an animal that is lame that can't walk.

[3 : 39] Exiles are those people who are away from a land which is their very own. But the Lord says actually when this great day is going to come, I'm going to draw my people who are very

needy.

It's a wonderful picture of who the Lord is in these verses. Picture them, the shepherd who cares and assembles and protects and looks after those who are in great need.

It's a picture of the Lord, of God, who goes out and searches after those who are lost. Who finds wounded and abused sheep and fields miles from home, picks them up, takes them into a pen where they are together and saved and saved and guarded by the shepherd.

It assumes that the people that might come speaking God's word to aren't going through it. They're going to go through a time of great hardship. But Paul says at the end of that, there will be a time of protection and care that they really need.

Then you might think, well the metaphor gets a little bit mixed when you get to verse 8. This shepherd who's going to shepherd the needy is also going to call. That's what, the picture of verse 8, the picture of dominion, a picture of a kind of tower of the flock and kingship.

[5 : 02] The Lord is both a shepherd but one who's powerful enough to look after and protect those who he has brought back from predators.

He's going to be like a watchtower overlooking his sheep. There's a hint, isn't there, that the shepherd who brings a flock back is going to be a king who is going to rule.

I actually think there's a place to mix that metaphor, a shepherd and a king. So often we divide those two things, don't we? We expect those people in our world who rule to be strong.

Yet we expect those who care to be personable. So often we don't think those two things can be combined in one person. You'd be surprised, wouldn't you, if David Cameron came to England and suddenly he knew everyone.

He knew everyone personally, he knew everyone's names, he knew everyone's problems. Yet if we go to our doctor and our doctor doesn't want to treat us as an individual, we are rightly very offended. It is rare to find someone with both power and authority but who is also warm and loving and personal.

[6 : 12] But we're told that the Lord on that day is going to be both. Shepherd and a king. And those two things do come together, don't they, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one with great power and authority, the one who is the good shepherds.

How soon does the Lord do all these things for the shepherd who cares, the shepherd who gathers his people? Well, this is going to take place in that day and it is the day that we thought about.

Last week, a person wants a fight. It is the day when he comes to rescue all his people. In that day, the lame, those who have been driven away, those who are afflicted, are Christ's people.

And they're Christ's people today. If you are the Lord of Jesus Christ, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Lord, it is because Jesus, as your shepherd, has gathered you, because he has searched for you, because he has assembled you, as he will do that on this great day as we look forward to the future.

And if that's true, then an individual Christian here at this time, but these descriptions of you must also be true of you as well. I look at whether you think of yourself as lame or helpless or in grief or afflicted.

[7 : 39] It might be that you do. It's a particularly encouraging this lifestyle. You hear those words and you think, actually, that really does sum up how I think of myself. You know you're weak.

You know you're physically and emotionally weary by life, particularly by going on as a believer. Perhaps you're particularly burdened by the knowledge of your sin and sometimes your distance from God.

Perhaps you remember things about your past and you're shamed by them. You know situations that have come about in your life that have been hard. And you know that so often they've been your faults.

And in a way, you know God has brought you to grief as a consequence of some of your actions. And to comfort you. But the Lord cares and he protects and he assembles and he gathers.

Precisely. You. Precisely. These kind of people. But back to you this last time, it's difficult to face up to this kind of description of yourself.

[8 : 43] You're intelligent. You get through life by yourself. You think of yourself. You don't mean yourself to play. You go out for jobs. You run. And she thinks it's hard to see this as a realistic description of who I am, even if I do say I trust you twice.

A while ago, I had quite a fantastic experience in my life. I had to go and get a new passport. So I got a whole new passport photo taken. And stupidly, never, never do this, okay? Stupidly, out of curiosity, what I did was I compared the two photos. Now in my mind, because I've been carrying around the same passport piece, I presume that was what I still looked like. But then I got the other passport photo and looked it together, and it looked like I've spent the last ten years in the fridge. But often the reality of who we are is it actually comes to terms with us. But actually what this passage tells us, that if we, to come to know Christ, to come to be gathered by Christ, we need to face up to the fact we are lame, and actually we are weak.

[9 : 53] Christianity is not a crutch for those who need one, but in his resurrection for those who are spiritually dead. One more uses the Lord as a shepherd for those who need him.

Well, we all do. We are all spiritually dead. We are all lame, unable to come to God. Ourselves. We've all been driven away from God because of our sin, because of our turning away from him. We've all been afflicted by the Lord because we have said no to him. Yet the wonderful truth is, he finds us. He comes and he gives his salvation to us. He says, come and trust me and cast yourself on Christ. And if you know him, then we know him now. And on that day, he will shepherd and protect us.

So the Lord shepherds the need. Secondly, we also see that the Lord redeems the prisoners. That's what we see in verses 9 and 10. Micah was given those people, as we saw last week, a great picture of the future, a picture of great hope, a picture of peace, of safety.

[11 : 00] But as you go to the mind of these first years, it will be something like Micah. You're prophesying a complete contradiction. On the one hand, you're saying there's a peaceful future ahead of us. But on the other hand, you're saying the Assyrians and the Babylonians are going to come and send us out of the land into exile.

Which is it, Micah? Well, God speaks to you, Micah, because there's no contradiction between these two things. It's exile, but then this great redemption as well.

He both shows how terrible what is going to happen to these people will be, but also how great their future is. And the way he does that is by expressing the pain they are about to go through in terms of pregnancy and labor.

So you look down here in verse 9, it talks about pain seizing you as a woman in labor, and you groan like women in labor. But now you'll go out from the city and dwell in the open country. You'll go to Babylon. There you'll be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies. Real reality there, isn't there, in our verses.

[12 : 11] Suffering is coming for the Lord's people. It's going to be hard, don't forget it, like the said. The Babylonians are going to come and invade. But it's there that the Lord is going to rescue them.

They're going to need to go through this trial so that they can be rescued, so that the Lord will be shown to be glorious, and so that we'll come into this great rescue. The image of pregnancy and labor is really vivid for that.

I've obviously never been through that, but the pain of childbirth but also the wonder of a child at the other end, pain for a purpose. And it's a bit of a bit of a comfort if you put yourself in the shoes of my business.

My business is suffering God has got plans for his people that he's not without purposes. It's through that that God is going to deliver. It doesn't downplay the difficulty but shows the greatness of God.

And again, I mean, so often the way the Lord works, you read through the Bible, it is amazing how much that kind of pattern of the way the Lord works goes through. So often we think the way the Lord works is like a kind of straight line going up, things are bad and then things get better because God is involved.

[13 : 27] But so often it's a kind of tip shape, isn't he? He brings his people down to bring them up far higher. And it's true here.

It's true that you look through the skip of Biblical history. Think of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came as he suffers and then he has raised up.

The Lord is one who specializes in redeeming and rescuing through difficulty. The Lord is saying to his people, hold on, I guess you're going to be prisoners but I'm going to redeem you.

I'm going to work through your hardship. I'm going to give purpose to your struggles. So the Lord shepherds the needy. He redeems the prisoners.

And thirdly, he says he's going to give victory to the oppressed. Verse 11. Michael throws his attention to the present, doesn't he? He can look into the future. But then he says, now, now, I am talking very realistically, Michael says, look around you.

[14:30] And what's happening now to the people that he's writing to? Well, the nations are gathering. Outside, Judah, God's people, Syria, that great power that want to sweep in and destroy them.

Syria, come in Babylon and to sweep through the ancient worlds. They want to destroy God's people. They want to get rid of God himself. This is what they're saying at the end of verse 11. Let her, and Israel, be fired. Let our eyes, gaze upon them, gloat over Zion, God's people, God's glory.

Yes, God is going to use these nations in some way to bring exile to his people to their sin. But actually, they themselves are doing it out of their forgiveness, out of the hatred of God. There's a deliberate, determined effort to get rid of God. They hate God. They hate God's people. And that's not simply true for them, this hatred, this determination to silence God and discourage as people continues through history, doesn't it?

[15:36] To read through every page of the Bible that continues around the world today. Yet this hatred, this opposition, isn't that out of God's control either? It's God who stands behind every action of every nation.

So look at verse 12, they don't understand the thoughts of the Lord. They don't understand the plan. He who gathers them like sheaths from the threshing floor. The Syrians, the Babylonians, they think they're in control.

But behind it all is God working out his plan. He's using them to achieve their purposes. And actually, he is gathering them too. He's gathering them to judge them.

The last two verses of the chapter are very unsettling verses, aren't they? They paint a picture of God giving victory to his people over their enemies. Pictures of it of their enemies being broken to pieces, being looted, being threshed like grain of agricultural languages, language.

verse 12. It sounds very violent, it sounds very intolerant, it sounds very not in the 21st century. It's not Samoe'l's imagery has been used.

[16:55] The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is actually built on a mountain which was originally a threshing floor for gathering and sorting grain. And what are these enemies doing right now?

If you look back at the end of chapter 3, we see actually they are coming to destroy the temple. But what Michael is saying in these final verses is they won't succeed in their final aid of getting rid of God's presence with mankind on earth.

God himself will be victorious even though it may seem for a while that they have won. what the Lord is saying by the end of this chapter is keep your eye on what is to come.

There is going to be safety, there is going to be salvation for those who trust in Christ. There is going to be judgment on enemies. I have a friend who won't see the first of the Lord of the Rings films.

And you won't see it without realising that there were two more films still to come. So they got to the end of the film and if you've seen the polish of the ring you'll know it kind of ends with Frodo and Sam going off on a boat and one character dies and it's a bit of a downbeat ending and the values seem to be winning and the ring must have been destroyed.

[18:14] And they came out of the film thinking well that was a terrible ending to that story. The other time, it's about three hours and that's a terrible ending. But the problem was that they actually they haven't seen the end of the story.

There was still at least about seven more hours to come. Two more books? What Michael is doing now is he speaks to people in the midst of their difficulty and he speaks to us here in August time in 2013 is saying look at the end of the story.

There are moments when it might look like God is defeated, God is dead as people would like to say. It's not the end of the story. It seems like that for people here.

It seems like that on a Friday, two thousand years or so ago when the son of God was taken down from the cross there. But actually God is still in charge.

Those who hate God are only doing what God has planned our purpose all along and there is victory still to come. I can't like victory is judgment verse 12.

[19 : 24] And looting it. It's interesting to the end of verse 13. These people will devote their gains to the Lord their wealth for the Lord of the whole earth.

I wonder if when you examine this kind of language and compare it with bits of Hebrews and where the New Testament picks up on this language. Just think about it. What is the most precious resource any nation around the world has?

Surely it's their people. Not their money. They're people. And I think verse 13 for all this darkness and we don't want to hide from the fact that there will be judgment for those who are opposed on the last day.

But I think verse 13 is going back to where this chapter began. Where this great picture of the future began. Actually when we saw the picture of this mantle of the Lord last week what did we see?

We saw people from all nations of that land streaming up. The mountain of the Lord. You see that in verse 2? And I think what the English chapter is saying is the nations are going to give up some of their people to be part of God's people.

[20 : 35] As the gospel goes out as nice trials God brings people from all nations to him to turn to him in this life. Now yes if you refuse to come to Jesus Christ you are in dangerous trouble and these verses make that hope for you.

But there was also wonderful hope at the end of verse 13 that this message, this hope for the future is open to you, is open to all who turn and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's coming to be like a lot of the at the end yes, yes, Jesus is all, yes, people are turning to him, yes, we're further on than the people that listen to Michael's great prophecy were. Yes, we're in the last days.

But to get to his coverage now about the smallness of the victory is like giving up and certain victory because the only moment of a football match coming on. God is glorious, he's a shepherd, he's a redeemer, he's victorious, he specializes in difficult circumstances.

If you're a Christian here this time, can I just keep trusting him? Keep remembering who God is, keep focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, keep looking to the future. And if you don't, don't want to think, come to know Christ, trust him.

[22 : 01] Because though you might think you're strong, you're strong, actually you're lame, you're afflicted, you are spiritually dead, you're not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, thanks. And close Lord God, every time we thank you. For this great future there is for those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that he is king, he is a shepherd, thank you that he is saving people from all backgrounds, and make us very good, trusting, wherever we are, whatever we are doing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.