

Micah 4

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[0 : 00] I'll turn to you at Micah 4 and 5. I should have said next Saturday is the big church clean.! Doesn't it?

That God is about to turn the lights out. He's about to shut the door. Here it is pretty bleak. Israel's kind of lowest point.

And into that context you get this remarkable promise. This remarkable prophecy in chapter 5. Into this bleak scenario of judgment.

Down on the nation. God gives a promise. Sennacherib is going to come right up to the door of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is besieged. And in that very bleak and blackness.

God gives this promise of a royal ruler. A royal ruler who will bring in God's righteous rule. And not just in Israel and in Judah.

[1 : 22] But it will spread throughout the whole of the world. We get the leaders we deserve don't we? That's been our experience as a country the last kind of 10 years.

We get the leaders we deserve when we turn away from God. But what Micah 4 and 5 tell us is that God is going to send a leader in his grace that we don't deserve.

We know don't we? Standing this side of the New Testament. That person is Jesus. And I want to call him God's once and future king. God's once and future king.

Who is going to bring in God's now and not yet kingdom. Are the two things I want us to think about. He is God's once and future king.

Who will bring in God's now and not yet kingdom. He is the royal ruler. Who will bring in God's judgment throughout the whole world. And he is God's once and future king.

[2 : 24] Who is going to bring in God's now and not yet kingdom. Look what it says in verse 2 of chapter 5. You know this because you'll have heard it in Christmas carol service readings.

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 a ruler in Israel.

Whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. See that mention of Bethlehem? That little town that's hardly on the map.

There are two Bethlehems. That's why it differentiates. That's why it says there is Bethlehem Ephrathah. He's saying make sure you get the right Bethlehem. Make sure you go to the right place.

It's a tiny little township. Five or six miles outside of Jerusalem. And the mention of Bethlehem has a kind of ominous ring to it. Because the birth of the Messiah takes place in Bethlehem.

[3 : 29] A suburb outside of Jerusalem. Not in the heart of the city of David where you'd expect. It supposes, doesn't it? It gives you and I a hint.

Why is he born outside the city? Not right in the center of the city. It's supposing to us that the family of David, they'll no longer be in the position of power.

They'll no longer be on the throne in Jerusalem. They'll have fallen into poverty. It's as if the quest for the coming king which the world needs has got to go all the way back to the stump of Jesse.

It's no longer a great oak. It's no longer a great tree. It's just a stump. And so this little township of Bethlehem. There'll be no royal starter kit still available in Jerusalem.

The Davidic dynasty will have been cut off. But out of Bethlehem, this little place outside Jerusalem will come God's once and future king. Who will bring in God's now and not yet kingdom.

[4 : 35] And so let's look at the now and not yet kingdom first. That's the order in which these verses come in chapter 4. There are no chapters and verses in the original which make it a little bit difficult to kind of divide up.

And we're meant to see the contrast between the end of chapter 3 and the start of chapter 4. And so look at the end of chapter 3. Jerusalem, well Zion, God's city.

The kind of apple of God's eye is going to be ploughed like a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins. And the mountain of the house, it'll become like a wooded height.

Just think of that. The temple mound, it's overgrown with weeds. There's moss growing on the rubble. But in the last days, verse 4, it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord will be established.

The mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains. It's picture language, isn't it? It's saying to you, this mountain is going to grow.

[5 : 39] It's going to grow to the highest mountain there is. And so one minute, he says at the end of chapter 3, it'll be overgrown with brambles. It'll be a complete mess.

It'll be a heap of ruins. But the next minute, it's going to be raised. And so that not only the peoples of Israel, but all the nations of the world will stream to it.

And what is this all about? Well, notice that little phrase. Can you see it in verse 1 of chapter 4? It's in the latter days. This kingdom that is going to come, Micah is saying, it's not for now, it's for the future.

It sounds too good to be true. Out of the ruins, out of the ruins, God is actually going to build an international, universal, supernatural kingdom.

I mean it. Just look at what it sounds like. Look what it says, isn't it? It tells us, isn't it, in Micah 4, that swords will be beaten into plowshares.

[6 : 46] Spears into pruning hooks. They're not going to study war no more. Their famous verses, politicians often quote it without realizing.

Martin Luther King put them in a famous speech, didn't he? He used this imagery. Swords and spears. Farming imagery.

And so tanks will be turned into tractors, Micah's saying. Bombs will be turned into bailers. Missiles will be turned into milking parlors.

He's saying there's a beautiful picture coming of a new world. If you've seen Lord of the Rings, isn't it? The great battles.

And the battles of Middle Earth. And the end of the film, it ends with them in the shire and everything's beautiful. That's the picture. That's why Tolkien got it from him anyways. There'll be no more military academies, no more terrorist training camps.

[7 : 52] All will be shut down because it will be a world that we will all want to see. It's universal. It's international. But it's also individual. Can you look at verse 4? In verse 4, Because they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree.

And no one shall make them afraid. It's a picture of security where people will be unafraid. You'll leave the locks unlocked. The doors unlocked at night. And all the nations will be there and every man will sit under his own fig tree.

Not only that, but the peoples will come streaming up to this. You ever seen a river going up the mountain? Streams don't usually go up mountains, do they?

They don't. But here's a picture, isn't it? The mic is giving you of a temple mountain of Jerusalem.

And the temple mountain is being raised higher than all the mountains of the earth. And the nations are streaming towards it.

And so you can go to central London. You can go to New York. You can go to Sydney. You can go to Beijing. And you see this beginning to happen. You see it now, today, on the Lord's Day.

[9 : 03] There's a not yet about it, but it's not happening, isn't it? This morning, during the hymns, I tried to count how many nationalities are in the church.

I got to about 40 this morning. I think, when you include the people that aren't here, it's about 45 nationalities now. In this little congregation in West London.

This is what God is doing. Now, there's a not yet about it, but there is a now too, isn't there? You see it in the beginnings of John chapter 12.

And this kingdom, there were some Greeks that came to Jesus, and they came with a request.

They came to Philip of Bethsaida. They were up in Jerusalem for a visit, these Greeks. And they come to Philip, and they say, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

We would like to see Jesus. It's a great message for preachers, isn't it? John Stott, when he was given that weird lectern at all souls, engraved on it, is saying, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

[10:10] It should be the message of every serpent. And Philip goes to Andrew. Andrew then goes to Jesus. And it's interesting how Jesus responds to this request, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

And Jesus replies to this, to these Greeks. He says, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. And then Jesus goes on to speak about his death, and he says this. He says, Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the rule of this world be cast out. And I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

And he said this, John says, to show what kind of death he was going to die. Do you see the point? It's the beginning of it.

This is the beginning of the now and the not yet kingdom. That is the basis on which the kingdom of God is going to be established. The death on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I am lifted up, he says, with arms outstretched on the cross, and I will draw all men to myself.

[11:14] He's talking about people from every tribe and tongue and nation, isn't he? All peoples to him. And so, even as we sit in church this evening, we sit here tonight and the nations, they are streaming up the mountain.

All around the world, hundreds of thousands of people are becoming Christians in places like Africa, in Southern America, in China, places like that. It's not happening very much in the UK, but it is happening.

And who would have thought that from that little obscure little place that isn't even really on the map, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, and this son of a carpenter who grew up in Nazareth, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

But out of Nazareth has come God's ruler, this once and future king. And the nations are streaming to him. It's now and it's not yet.

Let me just give you another example of that in the Old Testament, Matthew 24. Listen to what Jesus says there when he talks very much about the kind of thing that you see in Micah in Matthew 24.

[12:23] Jesus says to him, he's warning his disciples and he says, see to it that no one leads you astray, no one takes you captive, for many will come in my name and they'll say, I am the Christ and they'll lead many people astray and you'll hear of wars and rumors of wars.

That's the not yet, isn't it? That is still the studying of war. That is nation rising against nation, Jesus says. Such things must happen before the end comes. And then he says, this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations.

It'll be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And then he says, the end will come. You see, they haven't beaten their swords into plowshares yet.

There's still, isn't there, today, nation rising up against nation. There are wars and there are rumors of wars. That is the world we live in on a micro and a macro level. But in this world right now, in the ruins of the fall, God is building his kingdom.

And God is bringing in his kingdom through Jesus. And that good news of the kingdom of God is to be preached throughout the world and it is preached as it is preached, as Jesus is lifted up, the nations gather to Jesus.

[13:47] And it is happening. It's not a fairy story. The kingdom of God is now that it is not yet.

See what I'm trying to say. But there's another side to this now and not yet kingdom. You see it in the second half of chapter 4 and chapter 5.

Let me read you from verse 10 of chapter 5. In that day, looking forward, declares the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you and I will destroy your chariots.

I'll cut off the cities of your land, I'll throw down all your strongholds and I will cut off sorceries from your hand and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes and I will cut off, do you see the cut off, cut off, cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands and I will root out your Asherah images from among you.

Destroy your cities and in anger and in wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey. Why is that? What is that?

[14:58] It's the other side of this kingdom. The utter destruction of God's enemies, everything that opposes him. And so you better make sure that that's not you.

Every entity, every ology, every institution, every individual that stands in opposition to God will ultimately be destroyed. Look at verses 11 to 13 of chapter 4.

Now many nations are assembled against you. Sing, let her be defiled and let our eyes gaze upon Zion but they 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.

Arise and thrash your daughter of Zion. For I will make your horn iron and I will make your hooves bronze and you shall beat in pieces many peoples and should devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

It's difficult, I found it difficult this week to get inside the language of Micah 4 and 5 and probably you're finding that like I am. But what it's saying to you is this, it's saying to you every pocket of resistance against the Lord will be removed.

[16:17] That chap wasn't there, he died in the late 90s and he lived in the jungle of Guam. He couldn't accept that the battle had been lost, he couldn't accept that the war had been lost so he stayed in the jungle of Guam.

He refused to accept it, eventually he was discovered and brought out. It wasn't just that he didn't know that the war was over, he did know that the war was over, he just wouldn't accept that the war was over.

He wouldn't accept that it was over, that it was game over. It's game over if you're opposed to Christ. And you say, well that's so Old Testament again, isn't it?

That's all very, very Old Testament but listen to Jesus, Jesus in Matthew 13, the parable of the weeds. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace and in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who is ears, let him hear. And so can you see God's righteous rule will not be established until everything that opposes him is rooted out and destroyed. When God puts out the rubbish, make sure you're not in the bin.

[17:44] Paul tells us, doesn't it, in Romans chapter 8 that the carnal heart, the sinful mind is enmity against God. Enmity, it is war against God. That is natural human nature.

It is hostile to God. And you don't go around dealing with a placard saying, I hate God. I hate God. You wouldn't do that, would you?

You're far, you're far too civilized to do that. But you can live, can't you? Like I can live in God's world like a sullen teenager under the roof of his parents taking everything for granted, living my own selfish little life pleasing myself.

I'm totally oblivious to the God who's created you and provided for you and given you a purpose. You're an enemy of his. And you might come to church but if you've got an unconverted heart and an unregenerate heart, you are at war with God.

And the day will come when it will be game over for you. Now how do we know that this is going to happen? Because of this great promise. Because of something in these chapters we just can't ignore.

[19:00] Something that we can't overlook, this marvelous prophecy about Jesus that God is going to actually send from Bethlehem out of Bethlehem, he's going to send his once and future king.

Look at how he's described in verse 2 of chapter 5. But you, O Bethlehem of Fratha, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth from me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

That is God's once and future king. It's the stuff, isn't it, that fairy tales are made of. Those are the words, aren't they, at the end of verse 21, that according to the legend are written on the tomb of King Arthur, the ancient king.

The legend is that he will come back, won't he? He'll come back and he'll free the Welsh from the English. That's another story. But on his tomb, supposedly lies, here lies Arthur, the once and future king.

It's really interesting with fairy stories, isn't it? Fairy stories don't go out of fashion. You would think they would. Fairy stories, they kind of make a comeback, don't they?

[20:26] They go through different generations. Now you've got beauty and the geek. But fairy stories don't die out. Why don't fairy stories die out? Why do fairy stories have such a powerful

resonance with us?

Why have they got a hold on us? C.S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien, the guy who wrote Lord of the Rings, they had a famous discussion on this before Lewis became a Christian.

Lewis believed very much in the myths and of legends, but there's a kind of famous conversation before he was converted where he explains to Tolkien that he felt the power of myths but ultimately they were untrue.

That's how he put it. Myths are lies even though they are lies breathed through silver. Tolkien said, no, you're wrong. You're wrong, they're not.

Tolkien argued that far from being lies, these myths and legends, they pointed to a deeper truth.

That's right. The fairy stories that we were taught, they point to an underlying reality.

[21 : 33] They've got something in common, isn't it? I think Glenn Scrivener did some work on this a few years ago. You can look at it on YouTube. The fairy stories, they point to an underlying reality that this world is under the sway of the devil.

The prince of this world, he keeps the minds of those who don't believe in Jesus. He keeps them in darkness. The whole world lies in darkness. That's the reality. And then along comes the dragon slayer to usher in the golden age.

That's the reality. And this is who the ruler is. And the myths are just shadows of that pointing forward to the greater story. Fairy stories point us to the true story.

The underlying reality, which is in our passage this morning, this evening, that he who is from of old, he who was in eternity, the one who was with God and the one who was God, the one who walked with Adam in the cool of the day, the one who spoke with Abraham, the one who wrestled with Jacob, the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the one who led the people through the wilderness into the promised land.

That one who is from of old, from ancient days, is God's once and future king. Out of you, Bethlehem of Fratha, will come a ruler who is going to usher in this incredible kingdom, this universal kingdom, this international kingdom.

[23 : 10] God's righteous reign. Look at verse 4. What's he going to be like? 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. No more wolves.

No more wars. No more predators, because God is going to raise up a shepherd king that is promised at the end of chapter 2. The shepherd king who will gather his people and protect them and usher in God's righteous rule.

Let me try and round this up. Let's go back to the slap. Let's go back to the slap of chapter 5 in verse 1. Can you hear the slap? Must be your troops.

O daughter of troops, the siege is laid against us. With a rod they strike. The judge of Israel on the cheek. Will they? Well actually it never happened.

[24 : 17] Never happened. It didn't happen in Micah's time. It did in Jesus' time, but never to Hezekiah, the king during Micah's reign, Micah's time.

They did slap Jesus across the face, didn't they? But they never slapped King Hezekiah. And Jeremiah tells us why. I showed you this a few weeks ago, but in Jeremiah 26, it's about 100 years after the event, and Jeremiah is telling what happened in the time of Micah.

This is what he says in Jeremiah 26, and verse 18, he says, tells us that this prophet, this preacher, Micah, he turned up.

A spirit anointed preacher. And he told all the people of Judah. He says, did Hezekiah king of Judah, and all Judah put him to death?

Did they kill Micah? Did he not fear the Lord, and entreat the favor of the Lord, and did not the Lord relent of the disaster that he pronounced against them? That's what happened. It wasn't actually king, it wasn't Sennacherib, who ransacked Jerusalem to disaster.

[25 : 31] It didn't happen at the time of Micah. It was Nebuchadnezzar who came hundreds of years ago, and wrecked Jerusalem. It wasn't the Assyrians, it was the Babylonians. Because when Micah preached, when Micah prophesied, Hezekiah, the king, heard the message of God.

He heard about God's once and future king. He heard about this now and not yet kingdom, and he broke his heart, and he repented. Micah chapter 3, verse 8.

I've not been able to escape this verse this week. Micah chapter 3, verse 8. I love this verse, but as for me, there's a picture there of the loneliness of the Old Testament preacher in an apostate nation.

He could have joined others, he could have preached a popular message, he could have gone on the conference circuit in America, but he says, as for me, as for me, listen to what he says. He says, I'm filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

He says, as for me, I can't preach what you want me to preach. I can't give you what you want to hear. I'm not free to do that. And so here is a man, the prophet Micah, who's controlled by the Spirit of God, by the Spirit of Jesus.

[26 : 43] The Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son. Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, when the Spirit comes, what will the Spirit do when the Spirit is poured out? What will he do?

He'll convict the world of sin and judgment and righteousness. That's what these chapters are about in Micah, aren't they? As Micah stood up, he must have been one of the most unpopular men of his day.

And when Micah stood up, as for me, and the Spirit of God took hold of him, and the Spirit of Jesus, God's righteous ruler, the Spirit of Jesus comes into King Hezekiah's court.

Because Hezekiah was one of those corrupt rulers that we heard about last week in chapter 3. And the Spirit of Jesus comes through the preaching of Micah into the very throne room of God, and Hezekiah repents.

He's convicted of sin. And the Holy Spirit, through this preacher, Micah, paints this beautiful picture of what God's righteous and loving rule looks like.

[27 : 51] And he says, the kingdom that all humanity longs for is found in God's once and forever King. And we think it'll never happen, but Micah gives us a vision of God's righteousness.

And through the Spirit-anointed preaching of Micah, Hezekiah gets a taste of judgment to come. And he's warned, isn't he, that if God's King is going to come, every kingdom opposed to it will be crushed.

And so Hezekiah repents. He repents. And revival. Revival comes to Judah. You can read about it in the historical books. Same thing that happened in Nineveh, isn't it?

Jonah's a much more popular, much more well-known story. And Jonah comes to Nineveh, and he calls on them to repent. And they did, and there was repentance. Right from the king's palace, down to the streets of Nineveh.

And God relented, and God saved a pagan nation. And I think that's what London needs, isn't it? God needs Spirit-anointed preaching about Jesus to convict the world of sin.

[29 : 03] To give a vision of this now and not yet king. To warn people that if you do not get into this kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, you will be utterly devastated.

And so let me ask you, who's your ruler? Who's your ruler? We get the rulers we deserve. But God is promising through Micah 4 and 5, a ruler that you don't deserve.

Is he your ruler? I read a lovely little story about Martin Luther. Martin Luther had a friend called Philip Melanthon. They were both reformers.

Luther was just full, boisterous, not particularly sensitive. Melanthon was gentle, timid. Luther didn't suffer from anxiety.

He probably could have done with suffering from a bit more anxiety. But Melanthon really suffered from anxiety, worried. He used to have panic attacks. Not that they were called that back then.

[30 : 06] He worried about everything. And the story goes that Luther came, and he would put his hands on Philip's shoulders and he would say to him, let Philip cease to rule the world. Let Philip cease to rule the world.

That's all I want to say to you tonight. Some of us are chronic worriers, aren't they? I am a worrier. I think I know how the universe has got to work. I think I know how history is going to play out.

I think I know how life has got to happen for me and for us. No, I don't. Stop pretending that I rule the world and hand it over to the Lord Jesus and let him rule.

Let him rule the universe. Let him rule your world. Let him rock your world. Because he will bring in his now and not yet kingdom. Who's going to make the nations study war no more?

Who's going to make the nations to beat their swords into plowshares? As politicians, we know that's not going to happen. Only Jesus can do that. And he will only do it through his spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel.
[31 : 17] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. pray.