

Micah 7

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[0 : 00] And if you've got a copy of the Bible, you want to look it up on your phone, it's on Micah chapter 7. It's on the Black Church Bible, page 780. Music has great power, doesn't it?

Music can soothe a savage beast. Music can rouse a nation to war. Music can calm the fears, can't it, of a frightened child in the middle of the night when its mother sings to it.

August the 23rd and the 24th, 1572, it was on the transition from the one day to the next that the King of France authorized the state-sanctioned persecution of the French Huguenots.

In the middle of the night began this formal persecution, quite literally the execution of as many Reformed Christians as they could find. The King had been convinced that this was the best course of action to get rid of this theological blight.

And so some estimates say that 3,000 people may have been killed in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Some people put the slaughter as high as 30,000. They were killed on those two days.

[1 : 18] And in the face of that persecution, many of the Reformed Christians fled from France and they sought shelter in Geneva and Switzerland. And as they walked to Geneva, Switzerland, their voices choked with emotion and misery.

They sang famously, they sang the opening lines of Psalm 74. Oh God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?

Remember your congregation, which you've purchased of old, which you've redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion where you have dwelt.

Like singing songs to a small frightened child, a fear-stricken child in the middle of the night in order to reassure them. Those Christians were singing songs to themselves.

They were singing the songs of the people of God. Songs that had comforted the people of God for many ages. In the midst of a time when it felt like God had forgotten them, those songs, those psalms reminded them that God is present even in the midst of suffering.

[2 : 33] And so Micah chapter 7, at the end of his prophecy, he looks to the horizon. Because God has given him a view of the future. And in that view of the future, Micah sees suffering on the horizon.

He sees a path that leads to the people of God being kicked out of the land and judgment. And it would have been a cause of great alarm and fear.

But as he looks to the horizon and he sees this judgment, he sees the signs of the times. He soothes himself with a song. A song that reaches into Israel's past, which will give him hope in the present.

As well as the expectation of redemption in the future. And so it was in this way that in the midst, in the prospect of suffering, that Micah found hope.

And what I want to do tonight is really to reflect upon this song of the people of God. As how you and I, in the midst of difficult days and maybe trial, that it can be a means that we may receive comfort.

[3 : 43] And we know, if you know the story of the Bible, that ultimately comes to the Lord Jesus. So three headings, they're not very memorable. First of all, the wild vineyard that Micah looked at. Secondly, why it was and how it was that Micah looked to the Lord.

And then thirdly, to think through the victory song that Micah concludes the prophecy with. Verse 1 to 6, look at the wild vineyard. If you read the Old Testament, this picture of a vineyard is constantly used to describe God's relationship with his people.

He uses this image in Isaiah 5. God created a vineyard. He planted it. He put a wall around it to protect it. He built a tower in it. And inside there was to be grapes.

And God expected Israel to yield that fruit. The aim was that the vineyard would create wine for the owner.

It would be a source of great joy. The same parable appears in Psalm 80. And it's this imagery that Micah takes up when he looks at Israel. Look at verse 1.

[4 : 46] He says, Woe is me, for I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned, but there's no cluster to eat.

No first ripe fig that my soul desires. The prophet looks out into the land. He goes out into the field, the Lord's vineyard. But he couldn't see fruitfulness.

In fact, he only can see violence and bloodshed. And so ultimately the prophet didn't like what he saw. He says, can you see verse 2?

The godly have perished from the land. And it's marked by violence and bloodshed. Verse 3, he says, and the leaders, they didn't seek to lead the people in justice and righteousness.

But rather they were corrupt. They sought bribes. And those who were great in the eyes of the Lord uttered evil. And so in verse 4, even the very best of them are like a briar.

[5 : 47] The most upright of them are like a thorn hedge. And these observations confirm what Micah has shown us in the first six chapters. And Israel's sin has reached a tipping point.

And God will visit them in judgment. He would carry both kingdoms. Israel had been divided into two. The southern kingdom and the northern kingdom. And they'd be taken out of God's land.

And the situation in Micah's day has become so dire. That within Israel, evil has become like a plague. And Micah is saying, this is not something that's far off.

This is coming on the horizon. It's something that's near. The chickens have come home to roost. Look at verse 5. Even in the homes of the godly. Put no trust in the neighbor.

Have no confidence in a friend. Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms. For the son treats the father with contempt.

[6 : 47] The daughter rises up against her mother. The daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the man of his own household. We use the same thing, don't we? That blood is thicker than water.

But not so here. Micah says that evil has become so prevalent that family members are turning on one another. And here he recounts, doesn't he?

He says to the man, he says, the one who lies in your arms, presumably his wife, you can't trust her. So prevalent and widespread, the wickedness was throughout the land.

And so no longer did the people of Israel treat each other as they should have. As fellow recipients of God's grace and kindness. They looked on each other as competitors.

And the competition was cutthroat. They were ruthless with each other. And so as we know the Old Testament, as you look through the Old Testament, you see aspects where their relationships are ones of beauty and commitment and sacrifice.

[7 : 52] Think of the relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. And Ruth looks out for her mother-in-law. She says where you will go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay.

Your God will be my God. Your people will become my people. Where you die, I will die. Where you're buried, I'll be buried. She was willing to march into death for her mother-in-law.

But not so in Micah's day. God's judgment on Israel, the people of God, who have again and again spurned his love as he withdraws his grace.

The sun of God's love was setting. And so cold and darkness comes sweeping over the land like a torrent. And in the face of such evil, in the face of darkness, in the face of a dire situation, which you might be facing tonight as far as you know, what are we to do when the night of sin and judgment and darkness is upon us?

That brings us to our second point. It brings us to Micah's repeated refrain that we find again and again in the Psalms. When things are bleak and there's nowhere left to turn, the people of God always look to the Lord.

[9 : 17] They're only saving hope. So you look at verses 1 to 6, how bleak the situation is, how widespread the horrors of what is going on, and the fact of God's judgment that it will come soon.

But verse 7, it begins, as for me, we saw it, didn't we, this morning in Psalm 17. As for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation.

God will hear me. God will hear me. I think in life today, if you're anything like me, that when you're in a difficult situation, you somehow think that maybe technology will alleviate the problems.

Or maybe when you're ill, you think the medicine will heal me. Or you find yourself in a difficult circumstance and you think, well, my mates will never let me down. Or my family will come to my aid. And those things are good things, aren't they? But the truth is this, there will come a point in your life and in my life when all those things will fail us.

[10:24] And where do you look when you've reached the bottom of the pit of despair? Well, according to the Bible, according to the psalmist, there's only one place to look when you're at the bottom, and that is to look up.

And so Psalm 130 says, Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my pleas for mercy. And that's what Micah says.

He says, look to the Lord. There's nowhere else you can go. But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Such was the nature of Christ's own cry at the cross.

Think about it. The people rejected him. His disciples fled from him, even on the cross. And he cried out to the only one who could hear. He cried out to me, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In the depths of his despair, he knew that God was the only one who would hear. Reuben showed us, and he's so powerfully and so helpfully on Good Friday. If you weren't here, you need to watch that sermon on YouTube.

[11:29] And because what we were shown there is that in Psalm 22, he's quoting, Jesus is quoting Psalm 22. And in verse 24 of Psalm 22, and we're told this, He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted.

And he, God, has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him. And Jesus quotes those words of despair to give voice to the darkness that had fallen on him.

But to also signal to the people of God, like Micah does, that the Lord is the only one to whom we can go to. In times of trial and tribulation, he ultimately is the only one we can call out to in prayer. And it might even seem that he has abandoned us, as if no one listens, but he is there. And so the prophet's confidence in the Lord leads him to turn to the Lord, and like those persecuted saints walking from France to Geneva, they sang the songs of old to comfort their souls in the midst of trials.

So too the prophet starts singing. He sings a song from verse 8 to the end of the chapter, which brings us to our final point, which you might think, oh, he must be close to the end of his sermon, but that's not true.

[12:58] He sings a song of God's faithfulness in the past. In verses 8 to 10, he tells the surrounding nations that though they may rejoice in Israel's apparent fall, that the Lord will actually be a light to them.

In chapter 6 of Micah, you might remember, you probably told that, the ungodly were trying to blame God for their circumstances. But the prophet acknowledges his own role.

He acknowledges his own sin. And as he sings this song, in looking to the Lord, he sees the Lord in all his exaltation.

He sees the Lord as he is, that he's righteous, and he's holy, he's different to you and I, he's not like we are. And Micah immediately recognizes his own sinfulness.

So verse 9, can you look there? I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I've sinned against him. Until he pleads my cause, and executes judgment for me, he will bring me out to the light.

[14:08] I shall look upon his vindication. And so, the prophet owns his own sin. That's a very difficult thing to do, I think. He owns his own sin, and he knows that the Lord will deliver him. In other words, he falls upon the Lord, and he asks him for mercy.

And again, that's a very difficult thing to do. We read, for example, in verse 14, where he says, shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest, in the midst of a garden land.

Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead, as in days of old, as in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt. I will show them marvelous things. The nations shall see, and be ashamed of all their might.

They shall lay their hands on their mouths, and their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust of a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth. They shall come trembling out of their strongholds.

They shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall be in fear of you.

So we read that. We don't pick it up. But if I was to say to you, so many jokes, so many sneers, and all those oh so nears, what would I be singing?

[15:17] It's coming home, isn't it? Isn't it? Thirty years of hurt. Jewels remain still gleaming. We know it, don't we? Because it reminds us of a bygone age, hopefully an age that will never come again.

It never will come again. But those songs, they're singing songs of the past. And of course, this is a song of the past. Because Micah is singing about the Exodus.

He's singing about how God had led the people out of slavery, and how he judged Pharaoh and the armies. And Micah looks down the barrel of God's judgment. He knows it was coming, and he sings this song to remind himself that God, God is a God of judgment.

He will deal in judgment, but he is also a God that saves. He knew that the dark clouds of God's covenant curse would only conceal the sunlight of God's redemption for so long.

He looked and saw the judgment to come, but he knew behind that, salvation will come too. Assyria and Babylon, they'll come and they'll take God's people into exile, but in the end, they will receive God's judgment.

[16:31] They will lick dust like a serpent. And again, you're reminded of a song that you've sung before, of Genesis 3, of a serpent. That ancient serpent, Satan, who will lick dust, that God himself would descend to lead the people on a last and greater exodus.

And God would bring them to more than a return to the land. He will bring forgiveness and eternal life. He's singing the song of Exodus, isn't he?

But he's singing it at a higher octave. He's reflecting, there's more coming than what you had in the past. There's more than just coming back to the land, but eternal life is coming.

So verse 18, these amazing verses, who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, passing over transgression from the remnant of his inheritance. He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you've sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

[17:44] Just as God remembered his covenant, his promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and he delivered Israel from Egypt, so Micah knows that God will continue to be faithful. That part of God's people, that remnant, they would receive God's steadfast love.

And just notice what he's saying. Micah is not only going, God is not only going to forgive us our sins, but he's going to trample them underfoot. And he's going to take our sins into the depths, out into the sea, and he'll drop it into the bottom of the ocean.

What's he saying? He's saying, isn't he, that the curse of exile will be broken. It will come to an end. God himself will end it. He will do away with our rebellion. And so there's no more reason for exile. Because the sins will be gone because of the nature of his love. It's a love that pardons sin. That passes over transgression.

And the prophet recounts it in the strongest possible terms. Look at verse 19. He'll again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot.

[18:56] He'll cast our sins to the depths of the sea. And that again is a song we've sung before because that's exactly what happened to the Egyptians and Pharaoh, wasn't it? Except this time, it's not Pharaoh that's chucked into the bottom of the sea.

And it's not his armies that are plunged into the depths. It's my sin. My selfishness. My rebellion. It's taken from me and put into the bottom of the sea.

And God puts up a sign saying, no fishing. And what Micah saw from a distance, what he saw dimly on the horizon, we see clearly because of what the Lord Jesus came and did.

And all of these things come to us in him. And so Micah says, in verse 14, Micah says, shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance.

And that causes us to look to Christ who said, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. And when he casts our sins into the sea, when he tramples my rebellion underfoot, when he forgives and he pardons the things that I'm too ashamed even to name, it's as if he puts me on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd, who leads us and guides us.

[20:19] And what Micah is doing here, he's saying to you and I, Exodus is a pattern of the deliverance that was led by Moses. It's a pattern. And again, the New Testament sings this song,

but with a higher octave, doesn't it?

Because he says, there is one that is greater than Moses that is here. One greater than Moses that leads the final Exodus, the Lord Jesus, who takes my sins and my sorrows, he makes them his very own, and he takes them to the bottom of the sea.

And he drowns them so they can rise no more. It's not appealing. The skeletons in your cupboard, the guilt and the regrets, can be taken away tonight.

That you don't have to live with them anymore. You can be freed from the ghosts of your past. And so what Micah is saying is, look to the horizon.

Judgment is coming. Trials are coming. But look to Christ. Look to the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 27] Who is a pardoning God like you? Pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance. He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion upon us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of our world.

Let's draw stamps there. Let's pray. Thank you.