

Condemnation and Restoration

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everybody. Thank you to Archie and to the band for leading us so far. If you do grab a pew Bible, we're going to continue our reading in Micah in chapter 5.

Just to say as we start, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here and the joy of leading us through this wonderful passage this evening.

So continuing in the book of Micah chapter 5, if you're in the pew Bibles, that's on page 933. Just the first six verses.

Micah 5, 1-6. Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod.

But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

[1 : 04] Therefore, Israel will not be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son. And the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

We will stand and shepherd his, he will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God. And they will live securely.

For then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses.

We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders. Let us pray as we think about these verses together. Father, as we come to a long passage in a book that often we, isn't our go-to, one that we wouldn't necessarily read of our own self.

Lord, we ask that you would give us strength by your spirit. Lord, by your spirit, would you help us to understand what you would have us learn from this passage. And Father, we ask that you would be glorified.

[2 : 15] That we would leave here with a greater picture of the hope that you give us in Christ. And it is in his name that we pray. Amen. I recently read the story of Kerry McIntosh.

Maybe some of you read this story in September as well. A mom from Livingston who for 18 years refused to leave her home, which was condemned by the council.

Dean South is a housing scheme in Livingston that was earmarked for demolition in 2004 due to some of the building materials that were used in construction.

The whole neighborhood was told to leave. But a handful of the homeowners stuck it out, refusing to leave because they said they weren't offered enough money for their property or they weren't offered an equivalent one.

Now, Kerry said that it felt daunting being surrounded by derelict buildings. She felt unsafe. There were fires. And to quote her, there were weirdos walking around, checking the area.

[3 : 22] She lived in a condemned neighborhood. Now, come with me from Livingston in 2022 to the city of Jerusalem, approximately 600 BC.

Now, whilst those two places are vastly different in climate, in culture and in language, they're both condemned. One was condemned by a council for unsafe building materials, whilst the other has been condemned by the almighty God for the sin of its people.

See, in these chapters, we hear the voice of God's prophet, God's spokesperson, Micah. We step back into a time where the nation of Israel, once called the people of God, saved mightily by his hand from slavery and given the law so that they can live the way they were created to live, is left in a state of ruin that should bring a tear to our eye.

The once united nation has been split in two for a while into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Both kingdoms marked by rebellion and idolatry, by injustice and a

complete disregard for God's word.

Now, looking at the state of affairs during Micah's time, we can say that these two cities, these two countries rather, were condemned. But not because of faulty building materials, but because of pride and idolatry.

[4 : 59] Because of self-centeredness and disobedience. Because of bribery and rebellion. Last week with Jonathan in chapters 1 and 2, we saw Micah predict the coming judgment of God against the northern kingdom.

That would ultimately happen in 722 BC as the Assyrian army would sweep through the land and conquer the nation of Israel. But we saw hope too, didn't we?

Because God's judgment is not rash. It isn't off-the-cuff anger or hatred, but it is measured. God's judgment does not come without warning.

There was a promise of hope. If you look in chapters 2, verses 12 to 13, that God, like a shepherd, would gather up a faithful remnant and the Lord would be their head.

And now in chapters 3 to 5, again, we see the prediction of judgment and we're reminded of wonderful hope. We see the hard news and hope. In these chapters we see condemnation of a corrupt city and restoration of a redeemed city.

[6 : 08] So let's turn to chapter 3 and see condemnation of a corrupt city. Now who are the culprits? Who are the people responsible for bringing about this declaration from God that Jerusalem, that all of Judah, is condemned and corrupt?

In these 12 verses we see three different indictments, three different accusations against different people who are responsible for creating a corrupt city.

And then we see the sentences that God brings against them. Now it may not look like it at first, but these verses are very structured as Hebrew poetry often is. It's a bit like a courtroom.

The accused is standing in the dock. In this case, it's the city of Jerusalem. But when an accused person normally stands in a dock, they show humility or regret.

They realize the severity of the situation and hope and pray for an innocent verdict. But Jerusalem isn't like that at all. This city has been proud from the get-go, expecting that because they are the people of God, they'll get away with anything under the sun and still be under the protection of God.

[7 : 26] But through Micah, God brings three indictments or accusations and three sentences against this corrupt city. We see them in verses 1 to 4, 5 to 8 and 9 to 12.

Now read verse 1 with me. Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, should you not embrace justice? God is calling out the leaders and rulers of the people.

And normally when we hear those words, we think of kings or city governors or counsellors, princes. But in this context, God is speaking about judicial leaders.

Those who are given the role of ensuring justice would be served in the land. They're a bit like the high court or the parliament today. These leaders are judges who should be governing the people of Judah well.

But they weren't doing their job. God had made provisions in his law so that all people in the nation of Israel would be cared for properly. That justice would rule.

[8 : 30] That nobody should take advantage of others. But what does verse 2 say? Instead of these people leading with justice and integrity, they are people who hate good and love evil.

In fact, the imagery is much more brutal than that. Verses 2 to 3 elaborate on how the leaders treated the people. God says that they tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones in verse 2.

Though these rulers in verse 3 chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot. Now this is graphic imagery of how a farmer would treat a cattle in his day and age, preparing them for human consumption.

God is saying, you corrupt leaders are treating my covenant people like cattle going to be taken for slaughter. These judicial leaders should be taking for justice. These judicial leaders should be offering help to people, standing for justice, but instead they're treating them like animals.

And so God gives them a sentence in verse 4, basically saying, On the day you cry out to me for help, I will remember how you treated my people. And no help will come to you.

[9 : 53] As the end of verse 4 says, At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done. And the second indictment is in verses 5 to 8.

This time it's against the so-called prophets. Read what God says in verse 5. As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim peace if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them.

See, the problem is here that these so-called prophets have become religious mercenaries. They're prophesying for personal gain rather than truth.

Speaking whatever people want to hear in order to line their own pockets and fill their own bellies. Speaking words of peace and comfort to the highest bidder when in reality there's an army on the horizon who are coming to destroy this city.

These charlatans have no regard for the truth and are misrepresenting God. They only preach hope and never hard news.

[11:07] They preach wealth and prosperity as long as you pay the right price. They look for the approval of man rather than the approval of God. Now it's easy for us, isn't it, to read things like this and think of false teachers today, to make that direct line application.

It's easy to see these religious mercenaries and think of modern day prosperity preachers who live in mansions, who fly all over the world in private jets whilst asking their listeners to sow a seed, to donate to their ministry and receive a blessing.

Now that certainly is true, but let's bring it a bit closer to home. How would those around us describe the God that we believe in?

What would they say he is like based on how we live and how we talk about our God? I think we're more in danger of being like the religious mercenaries than we like to think we are.

Because it's more comfortable, isn't it, to talk about love and forgiveness than it is about sin and judgment. People like to hear about heaven, but hell is a no-go topic for many people, even many Christians today.

[12:25] But there can be no true love without justice and discipline. There can be no forgiveness without true repentance of sin and without the death of Jesus.

And there can be no perfection in heaven unless the Lord punishes sin and wrongdoing in hell.

Brothers and sisters, we need to stay true to the whole message of God.

Do not bend the gospel to suit those listening. Do not be ashamed to hold the good news and the hard news of Jesus high and boldly for all to hear.

We need to give people the whole gospel. And these religious mercenaries were not doing that.

And so the second sentence is in verses 6 to 7.

Read those with me. Read verse 6 with me. Therefore, God says, night will come over you without visions and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets and the day will go dark for them.

[13:30] God says the sun will go down on them. Their time will come to an end. They will be eclipsed. They will cover their faces, verse 7 says, which is a sign of disgrace or humiliation.

Because the Lord does not answer when they call. And then contrasted with these false prophets is Micah in verse 8 where it says this. But as for me, I am filled with power and with the spirit of the Lord and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.

Micah is an example of what a true prophet should be like. And he can be that example because he is filled with power and justice. He can be that prophet not by his own strength, but because the spirit of the Lord is with him.

Micah boldly proclaims the message of God by the spirit of God. And his message isn't always a comforting one. This book has more verses about judgment than it does about hope.

Micah's message wasn't one of comfort, but it was, as verse 8 says, a message that revealed transgressions and sin. People need to know the hard news in order to understand the hope.

[14:50] He declared this message because that was what God wanted him to say, but also because people need to know the hard news to see the beauty of hope.

And then the final set of indictment and sentence comes in verses 9 to 12. And this indictment or accusation goes out to all the leaders of the people.

It starts with the leaders who have, as verse 10 says, built Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness. Then it goes a little bit wider in verse 11, which is basically a summary sentence of this whole indictment.

Read it with me. Her leaders judge for a bribe. Her priests teach for a price. And her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the Lord's support and say, is not the Lord among us?

No disaster will come upon us. The prophets, priests, and rulers are supposed to be leading the Lord's people with justice.

[15 : 56] They are to have a love for the Lord's people, but they don't. This whole city is seeing this corruption going on and they're partaking in it. Building a city, a livelihood and the foundation of bloodshed.

Now we're not exactly sure what that means or that looks like, but the words used here to describe the city being built on blood seem to ring of the city being built at the great cost of human life. Which makes me think that this city was built or expanded through oppression, maybe even forced labor. This city was supposed to be a holy place where the Lord was worshipped, where justice was served, where people were free from oppression and free to serve the Lord as he commanded. But instead it has become a place of death. A city condemned and built on blood, a pit of corruption. And a place of great pride.

As the end of verse 11 says, they have a deep-seated pride and self-righteousness. They can't even tell how evil they are and they assume that God's mercy and favor is in their lives because they're the people of God.

[17 : 15] It's as if they think that we're so great, God chose us because of how great we are. It's got nothing to do with his love or his mercy. It's because of us. They are blind to their own sin.

But a day is coming, Micah says. A day is coming when he, the perfect prophet, the perfect priest, the perfect king, Jesus, the true Israel who stands between God and his people, who loves and will govern over his people rightly.

The day is coming where he will come in judgment. Jesus fulfills all of these offices that these leaders could not. And so the Lord delivers the sentence in verse 12.

Read that with me. Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble. The temple hill, a mound overgrown with thickets.

God says, this prestigious city where you all sit and think you're untouchable, where you all think that nothing will harm you, ruin will come. Disaster will before you.

[18 : 28] You and this whole city will be destroyed. This is the condemnation of a corrupt city. Brothers and sisters, is this the God that you know and proclaim?

It's easy to hide the uncomfortable truths of the gospel from people. It's easy to stop talking about sin, to stop talking about hell, to mention only grace and peace, love and heaven.

And they are wonderful things that we do need to mention. But we need to stay true to the entire message of God. Don't bend the gospel to suit the audience.

And ask yourself the question, how would your friends describe the God you believe in? Are we portraying the whole picture? Because we're called to be mouthpieces of God in the places that he has put us.

We're not to determine the message, but we simply proclaim it as the word of God says. There's also a warning here that having a close relationship with the people of God is not the same as having a close relationship with God himself.

[19 : 37] These people thought that they were safe because they lived in Jerusalem. They thought that they had the temple and so they were safe.

But judgment was coming because their hearts were not right before the Lord. The warning here is that just because people sit in a church doesn't mean that they know Jesus.

There are people who sit in churches week in and week out all over the world who do not know the Lord for themselves. They assume they're fine because of their proximity to the Lord's people.

If we do not know and love the Lord Jesus, when he comes, we will find him as judge, not as savior. But there is still time to repent and put our trust in him.

The second thing that we see in this passage is restoration of a redeemed city in chapters four and five. Please do have those open in front of you.

[20 : 41] We're just going to kind of skip through some of the verses as we go through this. Restoration of a redeemed city. Now these two chapters paint for us a glorious picture of the future.

This is the hope element of these chapters. Micah was looking beyond his day, beyond the judgment that would befall this condemned city, to a day of wonderful restoration.

A day where peace reigns, where war is but a distant memory, where hunger is no more, where oppression is no longer happening, and where the Lord is reigning and ruling over his people.

Now it's important to say when we come to passages that discuss the end times and the future that awaits the Lord's people, there will be differences of opinions.

I know for a fact that there are different opinions in this room about how exactly the end will come about and what it will look like. And I can see a few people laughing so they know who they are.

[21 : 45] But the main thing is that we stick close to the text, that we look at the imagery God has given us through Micah and instead of getting caught up in all the disagreements of it all, we stand in awe of the future that God has prepared for us and we praise him more because of it.

See, the truth that this passage teaches us is that after a time of judgment, after difficulties, a wonderful restoration awaits. There's both an element where this restoration happened in part at the rebuilding of the temple, but ultimately this is still to come about as we look forward to the eternal future that awaits all of the Lord's people.

God says through Micah, he has given the hard news of judgment, now comes hope. Read chapter 4 verse 1 with me. In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

It will be exalted above the hills and peoples will stream to it. The term in these last days refer to the time when God's kingdom will break into our time and into this world.

It refers to a time where God's kingdom will be established and continue to grow, but ultimately, it refers to the fullness of time in the end, in the new creation that we read about in Revelation.

[23 : 14] Chapter 4 verses 1 to 5 talk about the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, a place where nations from all over the world will be drawn to see the splendor of God and worship Him as the one and only God.

Verse 2 says that many nations will come and be taught God's ways. Read verse 3 with me. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Is that not a day we all long for? It will be a time of peace where God will rule over the people and there will be no more need for weapons because peace rules.

It will be a time of security. Look at verse 4. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree and no one will make them afraid for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

Now imagine hearing this for the first time. Sitting in an oppressive Jerusalem where leaders rob and steal left, right, and center from the poor. Where the weak and marginalized are taken advantage of and you hear this news that one day God is going to bring you peace and security.

[24 : 31] each person will have what rightly belongs to them and God will rule. What a comfort that is. And then verses 5 to 13 of chapter 4 give us multiple illustrations of that one truth that on that day in the kingdom of God the weak will be made strong, the neglected will be restored, the ruins will be rebuilt, the condemned city will be redeemed.

Now how is all of that possible? Verse 7 Because the Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.

Because the Lord will be with his people, he will restore a faithful remnant. He will gather his people to himself and there will be joy and celebration as God's kingdom is ultimately established.

How exactly will this happen? After their time of judgment and exile, restoration will come through the eternal king. Read chapter 5 verse 2 with me.

But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are a small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be a ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.

[25 : 54] This is all about Jesus and the fact that he is the promised Messiah who would come, that Jesus is the eternal king who will bring true restoration for the Lord's faithful people.

How is that possible? Because Jesus has always been, as the end of verse 2 says. And it was in the beginning of time that he set to obey the Father's plan that Jesus would pay blood for blood, that he would pay wound for wound, that he would make our suffering his suffering, that he would make our death his death in order that we might have life.

That is why Jesus can be the eternal king who will restore the Lord's people. And this is both now and not yet. Friends, be encouraged.

If you're struggling in this life, if you're oppressed, if you're downcast, if you're at your wit's end, look to this eternal king because he has secured your restoration through his death and resurrection.

And as verse 4 says, he will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God. And they will live securely for then his greatness will

reach to the ends of the earth.

[27 : 15] If you're a Christian here this evening, this is your future. No matter how discouraged you may be, no matter how hard life may seem, no matter how overwhelming everything is, Jesus is the eternal king.

He is the great shepherd of his sheep and he will restore you to God. Ultimately, in the end, the day is coming when that restoration will be complete.

As Revelation 21 says this about that great future that awaits the Lord's people, I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

[28 : 25] Brothers and sisters, is this the future that you have your hope in? Is this the kingdom of God that you are serving with your everyday?

Look at this glorious future. Please do go home and read these chapters again and see the glorious future that awaits you. Focus on the goodness of this King who despite our sin and our failings, he promised us his presence and he promises restoration for those who are faithful to him.

All won by the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross for us. And therefore, when the labor pains of this world sting as hard as they ever do, when our world groans and longs for restoration in the new creation as Romans 8 says, the whole of creation groans in eager anticipation of that day.

As we look out on the difficulties of war, death, illness, the cost of living crisis, and so many other troubles that plague us every day, know that these signs are pointing us to the truth that our bodies, that our whole planet, that every single thing in creation longs to be restored, longs to be redeemed, and be encouraged that because we have, be encouraged because we have been promised that this world will be restored, and we will become a redeemed city.

Look at the character of God and the glorious future we have in him and look to Christ, the eternal king who loves his people. Micah says, a corrupt city that was once condemned will be redeemed because the Lord is good and faithful, and the eternal king has already paid the price.

[30 : 21] Think back with me to the story of Kerry McIntosh. She lived in a condemned house and neighborhood for 18 years that was earmarked for demolition. She waited and waited through trials and insecurities, but in the end it all paid off.

In September the developer who bought the land offered her a new property in the neighborhood of new builds that would suit her needs. She waited through the difficulties and the result was far better than what she started off with.

Friends, that is a silly illustration, but the future that awaits every single Christian is so good, is so glorious that we cannot even begin to comprehend it.

the hard news is the judgment is coming, but the glorious news is the hope is there for all who would humble themselves and put their trust in Jesus.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we come to passages like this and we thank you that you have laid it out so clear to us your message of deliverance, the realities that you warn people of judgment, that you want the whole world to hear that warning and yet the glorious future for all those who put their trust in you.

[31 : 44] Jesus, would you give us a greater picture of that eternity spent in the presence of God? Holy Spirit, every single day we ask that you would help us understand it more and more and would we never, ever tire of the thought of that wonderful sacrifice that Jesus was and the wonderful hope that we have in him.

We pray this in his name and for his glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.