



A Prince of Peace

Sermon – Greg Holmes

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AIM

to humble the sinner
to exalt the Saviour
to promote holiness;

Deuteronomy 32

1 “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. 2 May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. 3 For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!

Micah 5:1-15 (NIV)

- ¹ 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.
- ² “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.”
- ³ Therefore Israel will 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.
- ⁴ 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.

- 5 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,
- 6 who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they invade our land and march across our borders.
- 7 The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man.
- 8 The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue.
- 9 Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed.
- 10 “In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots.
- 11 I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds.
- 12 I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells.
- 13 I will destroy your idols and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands.
- 14 I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles when I demolish your cities.
- 15 I will take vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations that have not obeyed me.”

Introduction

Insignificant Towns?

Helen and I travel frequently by car to Melbourne among other places; with the increase of expressways you no longer drive through those little towns like Coolac and Woomargama, with two shops AND a service station/motel and a few neat looking houses. They were insignificant slow downs and are even more so now.

You can probably think of plenty of significant people who come from these insignificant towns. I came up with Yvonne Goolagong Cawley who grew up in Barellan in our state's south west (sort of near Griffith and Leeton) and went on to become one of women's tennis greats, winning the Australian Open five times, Wimbledon twice and the French Open once - certainly a significant career.

However, today, as we delve into Micah 5, we look at another insignificant place from which came the world's most significant person.

Micah So Far

Micah began his book with dire prophecies about the impending judgment of God on the nations of Israel and Judah. In chapters 1–3, we saw that God was preparing to judge them for three specific failings:

- (1) they had rejected his covenant,*
- (2) they had rejected his commands, and*
- (3) they had rejected his counsel.*

Despite Micah's warnings, however, the people continued on in their rebellion, encouraged by the hope-filled messages of the false prophets around them.

In chapter 4, Micah's book made a sudden turn. Micah encouraged the righteous remnant in both Israel and Judah to hold on to hope because God has a future plan to rescue and restore them. One day the Messiah will reign on earth, and Israel will receive the complete fulfillment of Abraham's covenant promises. Micah continues to develop this important, hope-producing theme in chapter 5.

"The focus in chapter five is not primarily on the theme of restoration, but on the restorer"

The purpose of Prophecy

And, of course, like all the prophets Micah's task has been to both forth-tell - communicate the words of the LORD, and fore-tell - give glimpses into the future.

Prophecy can be *like looking at a mountain range off in the distance. From miles away the mountain peaks all look very close to one another. Stand on one of those peaks, however, and you will notice that deep canyons or vast valleys separate them—they're really not close together at all. When the prophets saw events in the future, they had no way of knowing the time gaps between them.*

We will concentrate on this fore-telling this morning.

Micah 5:

¹ *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.*

The Chapter opens with the reminder that this is a people under threat. And not merely from the Assyrians... also from the judgement of God.

Is there no hope?

With Israel's God there is always hope and mercy and grace; that is just the way he is.

The Coming Prince of Peace v1-3

² *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah...*

Of course, Bethlehem is a significant name and familiar to us. But in Biblical times it was a bit of a tiny town. It is not mentioned in the list of Judean Towns in the book of Judges. However, it is the town of Boaz (Ruth), Jesse and the shepherd boy, David. But it remains a small insignificant place in itself.

...out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel...

This is perhaps the second of the well known verses from Micah and is quoted in Matthew 2. But out of this town will come one who is first of all, one who is for God, coming to do God's will and who will be Israel's ruler – her King

This is *an expansion of 4:7, which reads,*

“Then the LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from this time on and forever.”

The promised King of Israel will be God himself!

Several things are said about this messianic ruler. From a human standpoint, he will come from one of the smallest families in the tribe of Judah; but from the divine standpoint, he will go out “for me”—that is, in order to do God's will and to be God's “ruler” over Israel.

The connection of Bethlehem with King David of course raises this expectation.

...whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

This one is from 'old' – ancient times; he is part of God's eternal plan.

Jesus' mother Mary had a child who was older than she was. His origins were of old, from ancient days. Mary and her husband Joseph had authority as his parents but he had authority as their eternal God.

³ *Therefore Israel will 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.*

But this is not for just now. This is for the future – this is hope based in God's eternal plan and he will bring it to pass but the people of Israel have to wait till a son is born and all Israel is gathered. (Probably a hint at the return from exile and re-establishment of the nation but also a reference to 'true' Israel - all those who commit to the one who comes from Bethlehem.)

The Shepherding Prince of Peace v4-9

⁴ *He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.*

This one from Bethlehem will be a 'shepherd' for the people of God. The idea of the LORD and the rulers of Israel being 'shepherds' is a constant theme in the scriptures.

The category God chooses to use to describe his coming ruler is "shepherd"—he is a shepherd who will rule in the name and majesty of God. He is a gentle shepherd who is going to provide for the needs of the flock, but at the same time he comes in the name and majesty of the great God.

And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

⁵ *And he will be our peace...*

He is the one who brings real peace.

That's not just peace from war, but a holistic peace—a form of human flourishing: shalom. Not only peace from war, but even from the warfare that is raging in people's hearts because of sin.

...when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders,

6 who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they invade our land and march across our borders.

This is the one who will defeat all the enemies of God's people. And, ultimately, (as we know this side of Jesus' incarnation, birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and rule) sin and death itself. He is God's King.

The Work of the People of the Prince of Peace v4-9

7 The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man.

The remnant of Jacob are those who live under the rule of this one from Bethlehem. They are to be, in New Testament terms, the salt and light in the world.

“God's people are called to be a blessing and a benefit to those who are around them—their neighbours, their society, and their community.”

8 The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue.

Also, the people of God will be a challenge to the prevailing society - to those who reject God, their presence is a threat. Dew and Lion – two contrasting pictures of what God's people are to be in the world.

⁹ *Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed.*

But the victory belongs to God / Jesus (the one from Bethlehem)

The Ruling Prince of Peace v10-15

But this Prince of Peace also has requirement for those who live under his rule and the primary one is that they keep their eyes focused on him.

Did you see the climax of the Women's Road Race in the World Cycling Championship last week? Towards the end of the race along Cliff Road in Wollongong, as the race came towards its finish line at the south end of City Beach, the leading pack of incredibly fit young ladies were in a bunch carefully watching each other in order to see which one would begin a sprint to the finish first when suddenly, from a hundred metres or so back, there was this pinkish orange streak which overtook all of them and held on to win the race. This Dutch woman, *Annemiek van Vleuten*, aged 49 who had been riding the 164 kms with a fractured elbow had kept her eye on the finish line and, with this mighty effort, finished first.

Jesus wants us to keep our eyes on him!

Hebrews 12:1 *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Keep the focus in the right place!

Here in the passage, we are to cast off the things which distract us and make us think we can do it ourselves

“Israel had developed all kinds of strategies to avoid the indignity of needing to be rescued. Horses, chariots, cities, and strongholds were all aimed at gaining strength and providing refuge (v 10-11); sorceries and fortune-tellers predicted and promised to affect the future (v 12); their idols would give them fulfillment (v 13). What is God’s response to their self-help strategies? He takes them away.”

Look at v10-15

- 10 *“In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots.*
- 11 *I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds.*
- 12 *I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells.*
- 13 *I will destroy your idols and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands.*
- 14 *I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles when I demolish your cities.*

Weaponry, strongholds, superstition, idolatry all go - the distractions these people rely on. We too must look not to other things (be they good in themselves or not). We must keep our focus on Jesus!

Like Israel and Judah, we are tempted to worship idols at the expense of the one true God. Of course, we wouldn’t call ourselves idolaters, nor would we believe that our activities rise to that level. However, we are just as likely to worship idols as

they were.

When we let people, activities, possessions, hobbies, or money compete with our allegiance to God, we are creating an idol in our hearts. If we put anything before God, it's an idol. And unless we tear down that idol ourselves, God will tear it down for us, just like he did for Israel and Judah.

Every one of us must make a decision about where we will find our identity—in Christ or culture. We cannot find our identity in both; we must choose. Culture says, “Indulge yourself, serve yourself, and save yourself.” Jesus says, “Deny [yourself], take up [your] cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it” (Luke 9:23–24). We must choose between these two identities.

In this case God says he will destroy them

¹⁵ *I will take vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations that have not obeyed me.”*

And a final reminder that, for those who wish to take their own way, the judgement of God awaits.

Conclusion

Judgment and Hope are the themes of Micah. God will come in judgement – it is delayed in Micah's time but, in the end, the Babylonians come and Israel is defeated, Jerusalem is destroyed and the Temple dismantled

So what should we do about what Micah 5 teaches us?

Expect the Prince

This is a seemingly hopeless world, with wars, disasters, humanitarian crises seemingly without number and yet, what Micah assures us of here, is that God is in control and he has a

‘perfect finished plan’ – nothing can thwart it! And it is all wrapped up in the one born in Bethlehem and crucified in Jerusalem - God’s King... who is coming again to consummate his victory and bring it to completion - salvation for those who love and serve Jesus; judgement for those who persist in rebellion against God’s King.

For heaven’s sake, make sure you are on the right side!

So...

Walk with the Prince

Our lives are to be lived in step with him... seeing his perfect example and living for him... being the Dew and the Lion in our society.

“But we don’t tend to think that we need to be rescued from ourselves. Yet the truth is that humanity doesn’t simply need assistance; we need rescue. We don’t need support; we need salvation. We don’t merely need help; we need wholesale redemption.”

Focus on the Prince

And remember to cast off those distractions. Keep your eyes on the prize!

Remember Peter! He stepped onto the waters of Lake Galilee to go to Jesus but he began to sink when he ‘saw’ the wind and turned his eyes from Jesus.

Matthew 14:30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Jesus is the only Saviour who, if you gain him, will satisfy you; but who, if you fail him, will forgive you. No other saviour will do that. No other system will do that. Jesus will.

His rescue is greater than we would ever think to ask for, it is deeper than we would ever think we needed, and it gives us a relationship with him that provides a satisfaction that will never run out throughout our eternity.”

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

