

The Prophecy of Micah: *A Hope of Restoration*

Micah 7:8-20

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 25, 2020

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're concluding our series through the book of Micah. Now we've been saying that this is a prophecy of judgment *and* restoration. **There's this constant juxtaposition between two seemingly different themes.** In Micah, we're constantly confronted by the sinfulness of God's people and his opposition to their acts of idolatry and injustice. Judgment is predicted or has already come. And yet woven throughout the book are threads of promise – promises to pardon, promises to deliver, promises to restore.
 - Now this juxtaposition could confuse. **It seems to suggest that God is conflicted – not knowing how he wants to deal with his people.** Sometimes he wants to judge them, to punish them, to scatter Israel to the ends of the earth. But then at other times, he wants to redeem them, to gather them back together, to restore them to their former glory. It seems like God doesn't know what he wants to do with his people.

- ❖ But perhaps our confusion stems – not in the nature or character of God – but in us. In our limited understanding of him. We can only compare him to what we know, to what we've experienced with others. So all the people we know either gravitate towards one or the other. Either towards **judgment**, coming down hard on you with high standards. Or towards **restoration**, showing leniency and giving you another chance. **It's rare to find both impulses, perfectly balanced, in the same person.**
 - But that's what God is like. A lot of people just don't know him well enough. At the end of Micah, we're still scratching our heads wondering who is this God. Did you notice that question posed at the end in v18? "*Who is a God like you?*" Interestingly enough, that's the meaning of Micah's name. His name means: *Who is like God?* It's meant to convey the incomparable nature of God. It implies that no one is like him.

- ❖ Now how does Micah describe the LORD? Listen to v18, "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?*" **So apparently he's the kind of God who will treat rebels far better than we deserve.** He will pardon us when we sin and restore us back into right relationship with him and back to being useful in service to him and to his kingdom. That's what God is like
 - But if we stop there, then we've tipped the scale. We're off balance. So we need to be careful. If we assume that that is all God does – that pardoning and restoring is the sum total of how he relates to people – **then it becomes real easy to cheapen God's grace.** To begin to treat grace as a common and readily accessible object that's there whenever you need it. "Don't worry." We tell ourselves when we sin. "God will forgive. That's what he does." But that's what cheap grace says.

- ❖ It was **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** who coined the term "cheap grace". This is how he defined it in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, "*Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.*"

- ❖ **He's saying that we cheapen grace when we quickly forgive ourselves and move on. But that attitude ignores repentance and disregards the costly sacrifice God paid to make a pardon possible.** That's treating grace and forgiveness as light, easy things – rather than the precious, priceless gifts that they are.
 - **This quick embrace of cheap grace stems from having already downplayed the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God.** If sin is not that big of a deal and if God is not that particular about holiness, then you can see how easy it is – after you've fallen into sin – to pick yourself back up, wipe yourself off, and do better next time.
- ❖ Do you see how all of this stems from an imbalanced view of God? We're missing that perfect juxtaposition of restoration *and* judgment, of pardon *and* punishment, of mercy *and* justice. **But as we're going to see in our text, anyone who hopes to walk and serve in the light of God's salvation – will have to sit and wait in the darkness of his discipline.**
 - Our passage can be divided into three sections – vv8-10, vv11-17, and vv18-20. For the sake of argument, I'm going to start with vv11-17 and show you three responses to the incomparable God of Micah. (1) You can hope in the promise of restoration to former glory and mission. But not until (2) you accept God's discipline and wait on his deliverance. And then (3) you trust in God's delight to love and pardon his people.

Hope in the Promise of Restoration to Former Glory and Mission

- ❖ The first response to God can be drawn from vv11-17. This section has an emphasis on restoration and this will be the Lord's doing. Notice in v15 that he speaks in the first person, declaring what he will do for this people, "*As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things.*" **So our response to his initiative is to hope that what he declares will come to pass.** This is our first point: *We are to hope in the promise of restoration to former glory and mission.*
- ❖ Recall with me the historical background of Micah. Before the days of the divided kingdom, Israel was at its peak of national glory. **Under Solomon's reign, the nations of the earth were drawn to Jerusalem.** To marvel – not just at the riches of the kingdom or the wisdom of their king – but ultimately to marvel at the glory of the God of Israel. In 1 Kings 10, the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba epitomizes this phenomenon (cf. 10:23-24). Jerusalem was functioning very much as a city of a hill, as a lamp on a stand – shining its light and drawing in and attracting the peoples of the earth for the sake of the glory of God. **That was her mission – to be a blessed people that serves to bless the nations.**
 - But after Solomon, after the nation divided into a northern and southern kingdom. After the invasion of the Assyrians that utterly wiped out the north and threatened to do the same to the south, to Judah. Its capital city of Jerusalem found herself in a very different position. Now she was a city under siege.
 - All around were world powers threatening her existence – the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians. **Jerusalem looked more like a fading lamp in an ever darkening world.** God's kingdom on earth had shrunk down to one remaining city about to be extinguished.

- ❖ But as we've seen throughout the book, there are these glimmers of hope. **These promises of restoration.** That's what we find in v11. Listen to these hopeful words, *"¹¹A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended. ¹²In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain."*
 - That hopeful day will usher in greater security and influence for Israel. Walls will be built and boundaries will be extended. I don't think that's referring to any imperialistic ambition. **It's just saying that Israel's reach and influence will expand further than ever before.**
 - Look at v12. That land mass it's describing is the region that covers the empires of the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians. The "River" is a reference to the Euphrates, which runs through the Babylonian empire.

- ❖ **What Micah is saying is that the remnant people of the Lord – though they may be small now – will grow in influence and all the nations will be drawn to them.** Some in shame and defeat. That's communicated in vv16-17. *"The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might."* They'll lay hands on their mouths, stop their ears, lick the dust, and come crawling and trembling in fear and dread. That's one outcome for the non-believing world.
 - **But others from among the nations will be drawn to God's people in godly fear and faith.** That's what I think v12 is emphasizing in particular. It's related to Israel's original mission – to be a light in this world to draw and attract the peoples of the earth to the Lord. And we're promised here, in v12, a restoration of that mission. From sea to sea and from mountain to mountain, people will come.

- ❖ **Now the big question is – when is this promise/prophecy fulfilled?** That's the interpretive challenge throughout Micah and other prophetic books. Have they already been fulfilled in the events of history or are they waiting to be fulfilled in a future day beyond us? Honestly, I think it's both. **These prophecies have been partially fulfilled. They're currently being fulfilled. And they await a future final fulfillment.**
 - So when it comes to vv11-17, I think it's safe to say that the prophecy of a day for rebuilding your walls and extending your boundaries was **fulfilled partially in the remnant's return from Babylonian exile** and the rebuilding of Jerusalem under the leadership of men like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel.

- ❖ And this drawing together of the nations is **fulfilled partially at the birth of Christ** when Gentile wise men (likely from Babylon) were drawn to Judah by a literal light. And again, it's **fulfilled partially on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:9-11**, where people from the very regions of the former empires of the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Babylonians are present in Jerusalem to witness another birth – the birth of the Church, the body of Christ. And over three thousand people were drawn to the Lord that day.
 - And even today, we can say that this drawing together of the nations is **being fulfilled currently in the mission of the Church** – to be that city on a hill, that lamp on a stand, that is now sent out to the nations.

- ❖ Now that the Church is an entity (unlike Jerusalem) without walls and without boundaries – we don't have to wait for the nations to be drawn to where we're located. **No, the mission of the Church is to take the same light of God but to bring it to the nations, to the darkest of darkness, wherever its found, to the ends of the earth.**
 - Church, this is God's grace to us – that he would redeem and restore sinners like us into an inheritance of glory and a position of honor to serve the world on a mission to bring gospel light to the darkest of darkness among the nations. We do not deserve the glory and honor of this calling. But that is God's promise and prophecy.
- ❖ It's a prophecy to be **fulfilled fully on the Day of the Lord**, a final future day, described for us in Revelation 19. Where the unbelieving peoples of the world will gather in shame and defeat. But then in Revelation 20 and 21, we're told of other peoples, other nations, who will gather and be drawn to the New Jerusalem bringing glory and honor to the Lord (Rev 21:24). **But before this prophecy can be fulfilled, before Jerusalem can possess and express this glorious light – she must learn to sit in darkness and accept God's discipline.**

Accept God's Discipline and Wait on His Deliverance

- ❖ As we said before, if God's people expect to walk in the light of God's salvation and serve on mission to shine that light – we first have to learn how to sit and patiently wait in the darkness of his discipline. This leads to the second response to God, which can be drawn from vv8-10. Before we can be of use to him: ***We must learn to accept God's discipline and wait on his deliverance.***
 - Let's look at vv8-9, *"⁸Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. ⁹I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication."*
- ❖ **Here Micah is speaking for the faithful remnant, and he's looking forward to God's deliverance.** He's confident that he will rise. That the LORD will be a light to him and bring him out to the light. But he knows not to presume. He knows to wait. He knows that until the Lord himself delivers, he will sit in darkness and bear the Lord's indignation (anger).
 - **In the same way, God's people must learn to accept his discipline. To sit in darkness and wait. And in the waiting, to bear the silence. The deafening silence of God.** I'm sure that all the defeat and destruction that Israel experienced looked like signs of God's absence. And their internal doubts were exasperated by the taunts of their enemies. Look at v10 and notice that question, *"Where is the LORD your God?"* Where is he in your suffering?
- ❖ **I'm sure that it felt like God had abandoned them.** But the whole point of vv8-9 is that all this suffering is occurring under the watchful eye of the Lord who wants his sinful people to sit in the darkness of discipline. **Israel was suffering – not because God was absent – but because he was present in all his holiness.** This is discipline taking place.

- And notice how Micah is careful not to move too quickly. To not try and deliver himself, to restore himself. **Micah has no concept of cheap grace.** He won't treat his sin lightly as something easy to pardon or something God would just overlook. So, he sits and waits. He is willing to sit in darkness and "*bear the indignation of the Lord*". He understands how his sin displeases the Lord.

- ❖ **People who have cheapened grace have no category in their view of God for holy indignation or displeasure.** They only see God as unconditionally benevolent. Always with a smile on his face. Always responding to your sin and rebellion with an, "Aw shucks, let's do better next time." **But those who understand the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God, know better than to rise up and try to shake off the darkness on their own.** Like Micah, they know the importance of waiting on the Lord to come and get you.

- ❖ I don't have a toddler in the home right now, so I haven't issued a time out in a while. **But I remember how it's so hard for a toddler to stay in time out.** She doesn't like it. It doesn't feel good. So she'll keep rising up, leaving the corner, and asking, "*Daddy, is it done?*"
 - And I have to remind her, "Honey, you're in trouble for what you did. You're being disciplined. So you have to stay in time out. And Daddy will come get you when you're done." But if the toddler just ends the time out whenever she feels like it – and if the parent turns a blind eye – then the discipline falls short. **For it to be effective, the child needs to feel her father's displeasure over her actions – as expressed in the act of discipline.** And she must learn to accept his discipline and wait on his deliverance, trusting that he will come and get you.

- ❖ You can tell in v9 that Micah is well-trained in this sense. He's been through God's discipline before. He must have sat in time out before. So he's willing to wait for the Lord. Notice he says, "*he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.*" **God is going to execute judgment – not against me – but for me.** That means it's for my good. So even while he's sitting in the darkness of discipline, bearing God's indignation, Micah still believes that God is for me. Not against me.
 - I've got enemies surrounding me and taunting me. Rejoicing over my fall. But God is not one of them. **Micah knows God – not as an enemy – but as his Good Father who is disciplining him (and his people Israel) for their good.** So Micah will sit and wait – accepting discipline, bearing displeasure – until God comes and gets him.

- ❖ **The prophet is teaching us the right way to respond in those all-too-frequent times when we fall into sin.** In those times, we must reject cheap grace. We must not be quick to forgive ourselves and simply move on.
 - **Now I'm not saying we need to beat ourselves up.** Many times, after I fall, I don't feel worthy to get up out of the darkness and to walk in the light. **I feel like I need to do something first to prove how sorry I feel.** Some of us are keenly aware that grace is not cheap. That it costs. But then we assume we're to pay the cost. So we inflict ourselves with physical pain or wrack ourselves with emotional guilt.

- ❖ **But we are mistaken to assume that God requires some sort of heroic sacrifice on our part before he's willing to restore us. No, the only thing he requires is repentance.** That's the goal of his discipline – to lead us to repentance.
 - **Now every act of genuine repentance includes a sense of remorse.** And that's where you acknowledge your guilt before the Lord. Where you feel the weight of his indignation, and you come to hate your own sin for how it displeases the God you love. **So what we see is Micah, in his repentance, expressing biblical remorse.**
 - It's those who have repented, who have experienced biblical remorse – they are the ones who truly understand that grace is not cheap but costly. It cost God his precious Son. It cost the Lord Jesus his own life.
- ❖ I know some of you are sitting in the darkness of discipline right now. **Because of the consequences of your sin, you're experiencing a temporary loss of peace and joy.** I know it's not fun. It doesn't feel good. And so you're tempted to get up and just be done with it.
 - But along with Micah, I plead with you to be patient. To accept the Lord's discipline and to wait on his deliverance. I don't know how long he'll make you wait. But I know like any Good Father, he'll come and get you when you're done.

Trust in God's Delight to Love and Pardon His People

- ❖ Now I think the only way you can endure darkness of discipline without devolving into a state of hopelessness and depression – is by remembering and resting in the incomparable nature of God highlighted in vv18-20. This is how Micah concludes his book, and here we see our third response to God. If you hope to endure the darkness of discipline, then: ***You must trust in God's delight to love and pardon his people.***
 - Let me read v18, *"¹⁸Who is a 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. ¹⁹He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."*
- ❖ **Notice the great contrast between what surprises modern people about God versus what surprised the ancients.** Nowadays people are aghast at the idea of a God who judges or punishes. What kind of God would be angry at us? What kind of God would send people to hell? People assume that God is quick to pardon and ready to pass over sins, especially theirs.
 - **But notice how the ancients like Micah were aghast at the idea of a God who pardons iniquity and passes over transgressions.** Who does not retain his anger forever but delights in steadfast love. That's why they're surprised. That's why they ask, "Who is a God like you, LORD?" No other God is like this.
- ❖ That's because the ancient like Micah knew that sin is serious. **It's an infinite offense against an infinitely holy God.** So they knew God could not simply pardon sin by sweeping it under the rug. He could not downplay or ignore sin and still remain God. **To be a holy God, a just God, a good God – he needs to be angry at sin. And he can never ease off on that anger or else he'll no longer be the righteous God of the Universe.**

- ❖ But this is the good news of the gospel: **God has made a way for his just anger to be fully satisfied and our wicked sins to be fully punished AND YET, at the same time, pardon sinners like us, passing over our transgressions.**
 - Ancient people could not see how this could be. This juxtaposition of justice and mercy was incomprehensible. It was incompatible. There's no way God can do both – he either punishes sin OR he pardons the sinner.

- ❖ **But Micah looked through eyes of faith and saw an incomparable God who can do far more than we can ask or imagine.** He knew God would somehow make a way to accomplish both, and one day he would vindicate himself before all doubters and scoffers.
 - Did you notice back in v9, how Micah says, "I'm waiting for God to bring me out to the light where I shall look upon *his* vindication." Now you would've thought Micah would say, "I will look upon *my* vindication." I'll be counted righteous. But it says he'll see the *Lord's* vindication. **The Lord needs to be proven righteous.**

- ❖ Think about those times when a president pardons a convicted criminal. It's usually a hotly contested and controversial decision. Objected to by many, especially the victim or the victim's family. **In many cases, those opposed to a presidential pardon will consider it a travesty of justice and will accuse the president of being unjust and partial.**
 - Now if that's how people react to the pardoning of convicted criminals – if they consider it a travesty – then how much worse would it be for God to pardon you or me? **Or did you think your sin or my sin is any bit less serious, in the eyes of God, than the crimes of convicted criminals?** If we understood the seriousness of sin and how God is perfectly just and impartial – **then we can understand why some would consider his pardon of sinners to be a travesty of justice on a cosmic scale.** That's why he needs to be vindicated.

- ❖ Now Micah didn't know how it was going to happen. **But he did believe that one day God will make a way to pardon the sins of his people without denying his justice.** He will find a way to satisfy the demands of his holy law without destroying his frequently sinful people. Somehow God will be vindicated. **Micah believed that one day we shall look upon the Lord and declare him to be just and the justifier of sinners.**

- ❖ Now from Micah's perspective, he still had to wait for this day to arrive. He looked forward to the day. But, for us, we now look back – to that day when (as it states in Romans 3:25), "*God put forward [his Son] as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*"
 - **That's another way of saying that Jesus's sacrifice on the cross fully satisfied the demands of God's holy justice.** And as the verse goes on to explain, "*This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*" He pardoned sinners like Micah. Which could've been a travesty of justice. But, "*It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*" (Rom 3:26)

- ❖ **Friends, what this means is that the cross of Christ is the place where this perfect juxtaposition of God’s justice and mercy are displayed in perfect harmony.** It’s where God pardoned our sins – not by overlooking them – but by putting them on his Son. Who bore our sins and took away our transgressions. By paying for them all and then casting them into the depths of the sea. Never to resurface to accuse us again.

- ❖ And why did God do this? **Why did he make this way of salvation? It’s not because we’re such lovely creatures.** It’s not because we’ve proven our love and loyalty. **No, it’s because God is committed to his steadfast love.** Listen to v20, *“You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.”*
 - Micah is reminding us of how committed the Lord is to the love he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **Remember that God only committed himself to one family out of all the families of the earth. That means God only had one plan of salvation. There is no Plan B.** It’s Israel and Israel’s Messiah or bust. There’s no other option. That’s why Micah is confident that God will see this plan through. He will bring us out of darkness and into the light. He will have compassion on us again.

- ❖ It’s because the Lord is committed to showing steadfast love to his people. But that’s not all we can say. Look back at the end of v18, *“He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.”*
 - Look at that. **God is not only committed to showing steadfast love to sinners like us. He actually enjoys it.** He delights in loving you. That’s our hope. Our only hope rests in God’s own joy in loving us.

- ❖ Some of you need to hear that today. **You know God loves you because you repent of your sins and trust in the gospel. But, in your mind, he does it begrudgingly.** He loves you because he has to. He swore he would. He’s committed to seeing it through. What I hope you see in v18 is the smile on God’s face when he pardons you. **Beloved, God loves you because – not because he had to – but because it’s his joy, his pleasure, his delight.**