

The sovereign LORD

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[0:00] So please have that passage open in front of you. Now Micah is a pretty sort of obscure book in the Old Testament and probably the only verse that you recognize when we read it was chapter 5 verse 2 which is the bit which usually quote about at Christmas which tells us where Jesus was born.

But the big message of our passage is the sovereignty of God. That his good purposes, God's good purposes are unstoppable. They can't be thwarted. So if you're a Christian it's something to be really encouraged by, it encourages our faith, this sovereignty of God.

Now there are not many situations in which we could see ourselves as totally sovereign. Perhaps the nearest is, perhaps if you were a novelist. I don't know if there are any novelists here. They say we all have one novel in us.

But suppose you were writing your novel. Well all the twists and turns of the plots, the climax of the drama, where it ends, everything is in your hands, isn't it? If you are the writer, if you're the author, you are in total control.

But the Bible tells us that this is true of God. Not just on paper, but in reality. He writes history. You know the old thing about history is his story. He writes it. Here is our confidence if we know the Lord.

[1:35] Now Micah is a contemporary of the big prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament. They kind of live at the same time in Jerusalem, 8th century BC Jerusalem.

And Micah has been castigating the leaders of the people there in Judah for their failure. The judges had failed to give justice. The prophets had failed to tell the truth.

The rulers had ruled for their own ends. The rulers had ruled for their own ends. And that basically had left the country rather in chaos. However, if you just look back at chapter 3, verse 8, you'll see that although there are false teachers, Micah is a true teacher.

In chapter 3, verse 8, the Spirit of God has come upon Micah to speak the truth, to speak God's word into this chaotic situation.

And he has warned that judgment is coming. Mighty Assyria dominated the Middle East and had invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and was now threatening the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital Jerusalem.

[2:45] That's the situation, probably, as Micah writes. But a threat of judgment now is not the final word from Micah. Micah tells us of a glorious future.

A future not just for Judah or for the Jews, but actually a future for the whole world. He tells us about that future and he tells us about how it will come.

So this passage speaks to us of the future. Our future. So let's look first of all at verses 1 to 5 of chapter 4, which we'll call God's happy ending.

We like to have a happy ending, don't we, to our stories? Well, there is a happy ending to the story. We look at the news, perhaps on the TV or whatever, and we sigh, don't we?

And that's because we know that something deep inside us tells us that the world could be so much better than it is. But amid his bad and despairing times, Micah is sent, as I say, to make a promise.

[4:00] A better world will come. At the end of verse 3 there, the nations will beat their swords into plowshares. Verse 4, every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree.

These are wonderful, so it's a wonderful vision of the future. Future for Micah, and as we shall see, future for us. Now there are four brief things to see at this point.

First look at verse 1. In the last days, it says. Now you may not know this, but God has a timetable for the world, and he revealed the bones of that timetable to Moses.

Read about it in Deuteronomy 4, Deuteronomy 28. God rescued his people, Israel, from Egypt, slavery there. Blessed them in the Promised Land, and Moses says, this is what's going to happen. He tells them they would be blessed, King David, but they would become proud and think they knew better than God. And hence the nation split that northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom after Solomon.

[5:17] That was a judgment. And eventually they would be defeated, scattered, and exiled from the land. And as Micah preaches, they're kind of in the balance, they're kind of on the brink in Jerusalem of this happening.

But after that, this plan of God says, as they repented, God would gather them. Gather them again. Rebuild his people and usher in, verse 1, the last days.

Leading not just to the restoration of Israel, but eventually to the remaking of the world. Almost like a recreation of Eden. So that's the first thing to notice.

Now look at verse 2. Many nations will come and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. This is the last days. He will teach us his way so that we will walk in his paths.

The law will go out from Zion. So this describes something of God's ultimate world of peace. People from all nations will freely come to worship God, the God of the Bible, and learn his ways.

[6:40] What's wrong with our own world is, of course, that people have turned away from God. If you like, we've been trying to write our own story without God.

And that story destroys us, actually. We don't realise it, but it destroys us. We see that in the terrible effects today of the secular world.

Not least, for example, in children being treated like commodities. Abortion on demand for fertility treatment on demand. Children even being trafficked.

Destroys our humanity. That's us as we try to write our own story without God. But the sovereign God is overwriting our selfish story with his own.

And his story will prevail. The nations will come. People from every nation. The unstoppable purposes of God.

[7:48] Now look at verses 3 and 4. He will judge between many people, settle disputes for strong nations. They will beat their swords into plowshares. Nation will not take up sword against nation.

Nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his vine and fig tree. This vision, this happy ending, looks impossible as Micah preaches.

As he speaks about the nations coming to Jerusalem and beating their swords into plowshares. Actually, the nations have already come to Jerusalem, but for war.

They're besieging Jerusalem. The Assyrian army and its foreign mercenaries are probably encamped around Jerusalem. And you can hear the sound of the enemy's blacksmiths hammering and sharpening the weapons.

It looks impossible. It looks impossible. Yet, what is out of the question, Micah says will happen.

[8:56] Micah is adamant. End of verse 4. For the Lord Almighty has spoken. He's sovereign. He's unstoppable.

He's writing the story. So, punchline for this section, verse 5. Micah challenges his people. The future.

They've been wayward. That's why all this trouble has come. Micah challenges his people. The future is with the Lord, so stick with him. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods.

We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. And the great point to notice at this juncture is to notice here the goodness of God.

He writes the story, yes for his own glory, but not just for his own glory. But for our good. Every man will sit under his vine and fig tree and no one will make them afraid.

[9:59] It's a lovely picture, isn't it? It's like your holiday in France, underneath the vine and fig tree and it's forever. You see? So that's

God's happy ending, which he has.

It looks impossible, but this is what Micah says, the Lord Almighty has said this. And what's Phil been doing these last 30, 45 years? He's been saying, come on.

This is where we belong. This is where we're to head. Through Jesus Christ. Well, how will this new world come? This is all very well, but how is that going to happen?

It looks impossible. Micah tells us four things. It comes through the work of God. It comes despite the failure of God's people.

It comes despite the fierce opposition of the world. And in particular, it comes through the good shepherd, Jesus Christ. That's what the passage says here.

[10:59] First of all, it comes through the work of God. Verses six to eight. World peace and prosperity will not be brought about by men or by the United Nations, but by God.

Notice the Lord declares three times, I will, in verses six and seven. I will gather the lame. I will assemble the exiles.

I will make the lame a remnant. I will gather. So thinking back to Moses' timetable, after the scattering of God's people in the Old Testament because of their sins, Moses predicted that, but God says, I will gather them.

After Jerusalem has been destroyed, verse eight, nevertheless, it will be raised again. It will be the tower of the flock again. I will do this, the Lord says.

I will do it. It's the work of God. Second, it comes despite the failure of God's people. Look at verse nine here.

[12:14] God is actually mocking his people here at this point. Why do you cry aloud? Have you no king? Has your counsellor perished? Sometimes we need a bit of mockery, don't we, to bring us up short.

You thought you knew better than me, God is saying. You went after your idols. You said, we've got our own king. We don't need God as king. We've got our own wise men. Then you have only brought disaster on yourselves.

And there's that word there in verse nine, now. That's an important word which is repeated in the passage and is actually missing from the NIV, but it's in chapter five, verse one as well.

So it's now. This is what's happening now. The Assyrians are now, verse nine, at the gates.

Where's your king now? You're in trouble, aren't you?

But strangely, it's not Assyria who will eventually destroy Jerusalem and exile the Jews. But a nation that hasn't really come onto the scene yet, verse 10, it's going to be Babylon.

[13:30] What's happening here? Well, Micah is a very rare species. He's a prophet that people actually listen to.

And as Micah had warned them of judgment, they had actually taken this to heart and begun to repent.

And judgment is delayed. It could have happened through the Assyrians, as it were, but it's delayed a hundred years. And God, in his grace, even says that the pain of that exile, which will come, will give birth to a new future.

End of verse 10. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hands of your enemies. You will come back from that Babylonian exile. God's people had failed.

God was having to judge them. Sometimes we despair, don't we, at the failure of the church. Even scandals.

[14:38] Read Evangelicals Now for last month. Terrible things in churches like ours. And I visit many churches and Christians hurt Christians and people fall out.

And the world looks at us and says, you know, what are you inviting me to? And there's so little zeal sometimes. But God will do it, despite the failure of his people.

He's a gracious, sovereign God. He's in control. And that new world will come, despite the fierce opposition of the world.

Look at verses 13 through to 5, verse 1 there. Sorry, from verse 11.

That's right, verse 11 through to 5, verse 1. But now many nations are gathered. This is now. This is the Assyrians, all right? Against you.

[15:40] They say, let her be defiled, Jerusalem. Let our eyes gloat. So these verses keep us in the current crisis of Micah's time.

Under siege from Assyria. The word now, in verse 9, is repeated in verse 11. And as I say in verse 1 of chapter 5. And the Assyrian commanders around Jerusalem are mocking, gloating.

Jerusalem has no chance. And we're going to rub your face in the dirt. They're saying, defile you. Great aggression of the world against God and his people.

But God steps in. You remember the story. Isaiah 36 and 37. Of how the Assyrians wrote a derisive letter to King Hezekiah.

And he takes that letter to the temple in Jerusalem. And spreads it out before the Lord as Jerusalem is besieged. And he prays. And God sent an angel.

[16:53] And the plague struck down the Assyrians overnight. It's interesting. I think the ancient historian Herodotus records the same thing.

He attributes it to a plague of mice. I don't know whether they brought some sort of disease with them. I don't know. But he seems to be speaking about the same thing. And that's what happened. And verse 13. Israel was able to go out and collect the Assyrian spoils from their other campaigns. And devote them to the Lord. The world opposes God and his plans vehemently. Aggressively. But he is sovereign.

I will do it. So this new world comes through the work of God. Despite the failure of God's people. It's encouraging. We know our failures, don't we?

[17:50] And despite the fierce opposition of the world. But most of all it comes via God's good shepherd. Jesus Christ. Chapter 5 verses 2 through to beginning of verse 5.

You see, this church is caught up in this. This church is part of this. That God is doing. But it comes via the good shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Now we know these verses are referring to Jesus. Because the Christmas story makes it plain. You remember when the wise men come to Jerusalem saying, Where is he that's born the king of the Jews? As they turn up this verse.

And they say Bethlehem. Yes? Let's note some important things here. Again. First, as opposed to the false shepherds.

The false leaders of Judah. That Mike has been castigated in chapter 3. We're introduced to God's good shepherd. Look at verse 4. He will stand and shepherd his flock.

[18:56] In the strength of the Lord. Jesus said, All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers. But the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. My sheep listen to my voice.

I know them. And they follow me. And I give them eternal life. So he's the good shepherd. And second, he comes from Bethlehem.

There it is. But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me, the one who will be ruler over Israel.

Christmas. Bethlehem is small, insignificant. I love small, insignificant churches. The Lord loves to use them. Right? But it's where the little shepherd David came from.

[19:59] Bethlehem. Who felled Goliath. And became the great king. Who is a forerunner of the great king. The Lord Jesus Christ.

God promised that his people, that the true king, would come of David's line. Here it is, being worked out. Third, notice that though born in Bethlehem, his origins or his goings forth have been from ancient times.

That can be legitimately translated from eternity. Well, only God is eternal. So here he is.

He's from Bethlehem. So he's human. But he's God. He is the God-man. Remember Jesus said, not just I am the good shepherd.

He said, I am the good shepherd. The name of God. You see? Herod, of course, was an interloper.

[21:06] He wasn't the real king. He wasn't even a Jew. All right? So, look at verse 3 there. Kingship will disappear, it seems, from Israel.

With the Babylonian captivity. Until this one comes. Herod, as I say, was just an interloper. But what has the Lord said via Isaiah?

He says, a shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse. Here's Jesse. It's the family of David's line. It's cut off at the Babylonian captivity.

But that's not the end of it. Here comes this shoot and it's the Lord Jesus. So, it will disappear until this one comes, says verse 3.

And, of course, he does come. The wise men come looking. Where is he who is born? King of the Jews. And over the cross, this is Jesus of Nazareth. The King of the Jews.

[22:09] And fifth, that great vision of God's happy ending, of course, is a vision of peace. And notice what verse 5 says. And he will be their peace.

This great good shepherd makes peace with God for our sins. So the world of peace can be brought in. And it will be brought in when Jesus comes again.

Because he is the God-man who lays down his life. And he stands and he says to us, My sheep, listen to my voice.

I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. So here's God's happy ending.

Secure. Definite. Permanent. For his people. The world as it should be comes via him. God will do it.

[23:07] So here are God's unstoppable purposes. But how does that apply to us? Let me quickly just try and say a few things.

The unstoppable God. God is sovereign, we say. Well, the first application is this. God's sovereignty is true. God's sovereignty is true. Micah is writing over 700 years before Christ.

And all he says on God's behalf has come true. The Assyrian invasion which swept away the northern kingdom of Israel, but not Jerusalem.

It happened. The Babylonian siege 100 years later or so, which took the Jews into exile. It happened. The restoration to the land.

I'll gather them. 70 years. It happened. The disappearance of the kings until Jesus is born at Bethlehem. And the nation's coming.

[24:19] And it's a wonderful time to be alive now, you know, because we're seeing this happen before our very eyes. In our own lifetimes. The church has just exploded in China.

Millions of people. In India. The church. It's happening. These things are happening before our very eyes.

Mongolia. Ridiculous. It's a wonderful church. Three quarters of a million people. When we were students here all those years ago, the land of France was a spiritual desert.

But now, many, many, many more Bible Christians across that land. What God says is all coming true.

That's the best plain evidence. So, the first thing is to believe. And to worship. To worship. People might be hurriedly trying to write their own stories.

[25:24] But God's story is what's coming true. That's the first thing. Secondly, God's sovereignty is personal. For you personally.

We talked about writing a novel. I picked up a book some time ago. It's titled, Structuring Your Novel. Essential Keys for Writing an Extending Story.

You know, perhaps we all want to get around to writing it sometime. But what joyfully surprised me was, this is the kind of secular book. It looked like that anyway. And it is. It's just about that thing.

But what surprised me was the dedication. In the front. Which says, This is dedicated to my beloved saviour. Who has structured my everyday, every day of my life.

Isn't that great? You see? Isn't that great? The writer turns out to be a Christian who has grasped the beautiful truth that as we come to Christ the Good Shepherd, sins are forgiven, and God writes us into his unstoppable good story.

[26:29] With a happy ending. Guides us there. So if you're not a Christian here, honestly, I'd plead with you to give up writing your own futile story.

It will break you. It will disappoint you. But God is saying, Look, come to me, the Good Shepherd. Come to me. Be saved.

Submit to God's personal love. In his personal sovereignty. Thirdly, we have to say, we've seen God's sovereignty in this passage.

God's sovereignty is gracious. He is the God of mission. Calling all nations. People from every tribe and tongue. And church, you can be confident they will come.

Now I know there are difficult times at the moment in our own country. We're under God's judgment for various reasons. But across the world, we're seeing God completing this plan.

[27:35] And they will come. I love this quote from Spurgeon. Our verse 2 of chapter 4 says, the nations will come. And God says, I will do it, doesn't he?

That we saw that. And Spurgeon says this, he says will, and it will be. Many shall come. The devil says, they shall not. But they will come.

You yourselves might say, we won't come. God says, you shall come. And there are some of you who may be laughing at salvation and mock the gospel. But I tell you, even some of you will yet come.

What you say? Can God make me become a Christian? I tell you, yes. For herein rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask your consent, but it gets it.

It knocks the enmity out of your heart. It does not say, will you have it? But it makes you willing in the day of God's power. You say, I do not want to be saved.

[28:34] Christ says, you shall be. He makes your heart churn round. And you know, it has to be a little bit like that. Time has gone, but let me just say this.

You see, the Bible describes us without Christ as blind and deaf and dead spiritually. Infirm.

Some people want to think of the gospel as being, here's the medicine. Right? And it's up to you if you want it. There it is. You go and get it. Right? That's how, now it's not completely wrong, but that's how people like to see it.

But imagine that you said that to a patient who was blind and deaf and had dementia. Medicate yourself. Complete disaster.

No, they need to be treated. And in God's gracious sovereignty, that's what he does. That's what he does. Praise God for that.

[29:35] Lastly, God's sovereignty is inspiring. We can take risks for God. Phil and Maria took risks putting their lives, it seemed, you know, for this little church.

We can take risks for God. You see, the end is certain, it's secure. So therefore, Christian, you can say, okay, it's in God's hands.

The world says, oh, you've only got this life, you know, if you mess this up, there's no up. No, no, no, no. We have a life to come which is secure. So therefore, being eternally secure and no one can snatch us away, we can afford to take risks for God.

I love the little motto of the little missionary Gladys Aylward who went to China. Remember, she wanted to go to the Mission Society and said, no, no, you're not good enough.

She said, I'm going anyway. Bought the ticket. And this was her thing, her prayer. Oh God, here's my Bible. Here's my money.

[30:50] Here's me. Use me. Because God is sovereign, we can afford to do that. Amen.

Amen.