

Who is like the Lord? Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Micah chapter 3 to chapter 4 verse 5. So page 940, Micah chapter 3.

And I said, hear you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off them and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron.

Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because they have made their deeds evil. Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry peace when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. Therefore it shall be night to you without vision and darkness to you without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets and the day shall be black over them. The seers shall be disgraced and the diviners put to shame. They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.

Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets practice divination for money. Yet they lean on the Lord and say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us. Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

[2 : 37] It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and it shall be lifted up above the hills and peoples shall flow to it and many nations shall come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide for strong nations afar off.

And they shall beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But they shall sit, every man, under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid. For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

For all the peoples walk each in the name of its God, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

[4 : 02] Micah chapter 5, verses 1 to 5. Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops. Siege is laid against us. With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

But you, O Bethlehem of Fratha, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure. For now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace. Why don't I pray as we begin.

From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient of days. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

[5 : 24] Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you he is our King. Amen. I think it's safe to say that we live in a world where leaders consume, destroy, and obliterate the people that follow them.

At one glance at North Korea with King Jong-un, and then his people in utter famine would be enough, I think, to make that point clear. But it's the same here for us also, if we pause and reflect for a second, that metaphorical cannibalism by our leaders is rampant.

The media presents women's bodies to be consumed to sell goods. Pornography is the largest entertainment industry to exist, which obviously consumes and objectifies its women for its content. The unborn are seen as disposable objects to be consumed at the hands of secular ease. And we consume and destroy the celebrities we watch.

But they, in turn, obviously, consume us for our likes, purchases, and attention. A recent famous philosopher of the 21st century questioned even the use of the term human resources, as though human beings could be a resource.

[6 : 50] In the established church, though, it is the same. It's very easy to point the finger outwards. Prosperity preachers get rich off their congregations. Church leaders are embroiled constantly, it seems, in the use of women and children for their own sexual appetites.

In our own church and denomination recently, the Bishop of Oxford said this about so-called same-sex marriage, that it needs to be passed because there is a radical dislocation between the Church of England and the culture and society we serve.

In other words, he just wants to consume the praise and the pandering of secular society. I was recently at a Church of England ordination selection day, which was as interesting as it sounds. And one of the women who had been put forward by the Bishop for ordination, in our discussion group we had to have ten minutes discussing the ways in which God has been calling us to lead a church.

Her answer was that since her trip to India, she had discovered that all religions say the same thing and that she wants to lead a church where we can present that message clearly.

[8 : 05] She is hoping to consume the same praise as our friend, the Bishop of Oxford. And we, we who hold to the Bible and long for heaven, we can look at the world around us and we can see the adultery of Boris Johnson, the untold misery of millions under despots like Putin and Kim Jong-un, the God-knowers in their silly robes and hats, and church leaders denying the Gospel of Jesus, leading their congregations to hell.

And we can beg the question, where is God? Where is he? In a world where it seems like leaders get away with so much, where are you? Or perhaps we might even be left asking a more fundamental question, God, what are you like?

What are you like, God, if you allow leaders to do this to your people? What are you like? As Andy mentioned, that's the key question that we've been looking at in Micah.

Micah wants to answer that question for us this morning. The main application or idea of the book, if you turn to chapter 7, verse 18, is found there, chapter 7, verse 18.

Micah finishes his book, and Micah, coincidentally, his name means, who is like you, God? And that's exactly where he finishes his book, chapter 7, verse 18. Who is a God like you?

[9 : 24] That's the question he wants us to finish with. But the reason that Micah wants to present us with this vision is for one firm point of application. Micah wants one main thing from his listeners, which is found in 7, verse 7.

Have a look with me. But as for me, this is Micah speaking, In other words, Micah wants to give us and give his readers such an enormous view of God, that in the midst of exile that is coming, where leaders pillage and destroy, where the church knowers, the God knowers, tell the true preachers of God, Micah in this case, and us and ours, to shut up, and where death and misery for God's people seem to go on and on, Micah wants to give his initial readers such an enormous picture of God that they keep going.

That's the goal of Micah's book. And what's striking is that Micah does that in a way that might surprise us. He focuses in on the judgment of God, that God is a judging God.

And I know immediately as Westerners we're probably feeling uncomfortable at that. But that is the image that Micah wants to leave us with. God is a judging God. And we're going to see two aspects of that this morning.

And that leads me on to my first point. Please, it will be on the handout. This is chapter 3, verses 1 to 12. The judgment of the Lord is coming in justice. The judgment of the Lord is coming in justice. [11:03] Turn back with me to chapter 3. Here Micah begins to paint his picture of God for us. And he does it in three cycles throughout chapter 3. Three cycles of judgment and punishment or charge and consequence.

Three cycles. The first cycle is found in chapter 3, verses 1 to 4. And we begin with the judgment. Three, verse 1. And I said, here you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know justice?

You who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, who eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron.

Visceral. Imagine writing that to your MP. And that's the charge. And what is the punishment in verse 4? Then they, that's these rulers, will cry to the Lord, but he, that is the Lord, will not answer them.

He will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. One day, the Lord will punish. We go on to the next charge. This is verse 5. This is to the prophets.

[12:16] Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry peace when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.

There's the charge. Punishment, verse 6. Therefore it shall be night to you without vision, and darkness to you without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them.

The seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame. They shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. Punishment.

God will one day not answer. Verse 8 operates as a kind of turning point and an escalation. It's a very interesting verse. But as for me, Micah says, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

Interesting, isn't it, that the lady who was in my Church of England group, who's about to be put forward to lead a church, she thinks her job as being a spirit-filled person is declaring that all religions say the same thing.

[13:22] Micah, who's a spirit-filled person, very interesting that he says his role is to declare sin. Quite a contrast. And then we come to the final and fundamental and cataclysmic charge and judgment in 9 to 12, where we have a summary.

Verse 9, here's the charge. Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.

Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets practice divination for money, yet they lean on the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord in the midst of us?

No disaster shall come upon us. And here the harrowing judgment, which is pithy and terrifying in equal proportions. Verse 12, Therefore, because of you leaders, Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

In other words, God's judgment on these leaders will be so final, so visceral, so complete, that the city of God will be completely eviscerated.

[14:41] From the place of God's presence, to a heap of ruins. From the mountain of the temple of the Lord, raised above every hill, to nothing more than a wood.

And it is because of you, leaders, that this will happen. And I hope, though, that we see, that when we see the charge and judgment, charge and judgment, charge and judgment, we think, Yes, Lord, thank you, of course that is the appropriate response.

When we see leaders who behave like this, we cry out, Yes, Lord, justice will be done. That is very, very good news. Very good news. That God is a God of justice.

That God's judgment brings justice. That is good news. That is good news. But there is an obvious problem, isn't there? There is an obvious problem.

Because if God's judgment only brings justice, if God's judgment only brings, verse 12, well, that's where the story ends. That's where Micah should end.

[15:46] There is no hope, it seems, beyond the punishment in verse 12. If God's judgment, in other words, only, only brings justice, well, what of God's plan to save?

What of his desire for a city, to the praise of his name, that we've been hearing about in Isaiah? Does God's judgment only bring justice? And that leads me on to my second and final point. The judgment of the Lord is coming in salvation. The judgment of the Lord is coming in salvation. And we dive into what is a jarring, yet beautiful contradiction, in 4 verses 1 to 5. I wonder if we noticed that, when the reading was happening. 4 verse 1, it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established, as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths. 3 verse 12, the city will be rubble, and plowed like a field.

[16:59] 4 verse 1 and 2, the image is the complete opposite, is it not? From rubble, to exalted highest place. From empty and desolate, 3 verse 12, to the nations flowing to it, 4 verse 1.

From war, to eternal human peace. I wonder if we noticed that. These, I've been told, these are verses, that are on the UN building, apparently, not the bit about God judging, but the ones we're about to read.

Verse 3, he shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes, for strong nations far away, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. It's a beautiful image, isn't it? It's only that second part of verse 3, that's on the UN building. I was told, apparently, that when the USSR collapsed, there was this general amnesty, on weapons and bullets, and they wanted to kind of, they wanted to use this metal, for something useful, so apparently, there's a process, where you can beat bullets, I think they don't have gunpowder, in them anymore, beat bullets, and form crockery.

So I'm told, that in Eastern Europe, there's a whole load of crockery, cups and plates, and the like, made out of Russian bullets, which is a beautiful picture, of what we're seeing here, that one day, there will be a time, where there is no need, for weapons, or self-defense, but there will be perfect, unity and peace, which in the context of Micah, with Babylon, with Assyria breathing down their necks, would have felt very pertinent.

[18:39] So somehow though, we've got these two jarring pictures, where are we? We've got God bringing justice, rubble, and God bringing salvation, lifted higher, than any other temple, any other name, and we're left with the question, aren't we, of how?

How? And because let's be clear, this is a picture, that all of us long for. If there was a way, for us to have perfect justice, on the one hand, Sarah Everard, Me Too, Ukraine, King Jong Un, the list goes on, for us to have, perfect justice on the one hand, and perfect salvation, on the other, we would want that solution, wouldn't we?

And there are so many ways, in which humanity seeks, to find that solution, so many ways, and here we have a stark contrast, rubble on one hand, salvation on the other, how?

How? How? Well the answer comes, from our second reading, in chapter 5, verses 1 to 5, and these are verses, hopefully that will be familiar to us, perhaps the only verses, in Micah, that are familiar to us, from Christmas, and why don't I read these, for us.

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops, siege dislaid against us, with a rod, they strike the judge of Israel, on the cheek, but you, O Bethlehem of Etrathra, who are too little, to be among the clans of Judah, from you, shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth, is from of old, from ancient days, therefore he shall give them up, until the time, when she who is in labor, has given birth, then the rest of his brothers, shall return to the people of Israel, and he shall stand, and shepherd his flock, in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name, of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great, to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace.

[20:40] The answer, of how can you have rubble, on one hand, and salvation on the other, is that God will provide, a leader, God will provide, a leader, a leader who will shepherd, and protect, how will God bring about, perfect justice, and yet perfect salvation, it is in his shepherd leader, now Micah doesn't give us, the specifics of how this is possible, but wonderfully, because of the benefit, of being New Testament Christians, we know, that this is achieved, by the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross, that is how this is possible, and I was thinking about, all these kind of clever illustrations, about how I might illustrate, how justice and salvation, come together, and when I realised, that the best illustration, is probably the real thing, the cross itself, because on the cross, that is, and I

wonder if you've ever thought, about the cross this way, that is the moment, where perfect justice, and perfect salvation, met, you know,

I've kind of been naughty here, and said that I have two points, God's judgment will bring, perfect justice, and perfect salvation, I actually only have one point, which is God's judgment brings, justice, and salvation, because, it is there, on the cross, God poured out his anger, on the sin of the world, and brought perfect justice, the son of God, on the tree, is the one time demonstration, by the one true God, of what will happen, to every man, and woman, who does not repent, and as I said, and I hope we grasp this, as we read chapter three, that is good news, that justice is coming, the head of Pornhub, who is a billionaire, off the back of his exploits, will receive justice, the prosperity preacher, who bastardizes the gospel, and imperishes, and consumes his people, will be brought to justice, the God knowing gospel haters, in the church of England, who lead people to hell, will be brought to justice, the cross, guarantees it,

God will not, let his people, be led by wolves, forever, and if God, in other words, a way of kind of giving us, confidence, that this is true, if God did not spare, his one and only son, to bring about justice, you can be certain, that he won't spare, anybody else, the cross, is the sign, of God's perfect justice, but the cross though, is also, the ultimate act, of salvation, for there is, our death, our punishment, paid, and spent, there the shepherd king, and there was a moment, and I think this is very useful, for our devotional times, to think about this, and pray about this, there was a moment, when the shepherd of heaven, contemplated your sin, and my sin, if we're in Jesus, and declared it paid, by his blood, on the cross, that is where, perfect salvation, comes, at the cross of Jesus, us, now as I said,

Micah has presented us, with one main application, keep going, keep going, we, just like Micah's people, are in exile, surrounded by leaders, who will consume, and I would imagine, because it is for me, and so I imagine, it is for you too, that the temptation, to conform, and give up, and grow cold, to the Christian faith, is immense, but Micah wants, to give us a picture, that God's shepherd king, is coming to judge, and when he does, his perfect justice, and salvation, will meet, the cross, guarantees it, so when we look, at the world, and we're tempted, to ask that question, which I'm sure, we are tempted to ask, because I ask it, perhaps too frequently, God, what are you really like, why would you really, let this happen, Micah wants, to give us a picture, of that ancient, of days king, who will bring justice, and salvation, now I have a couple, of points of application, for us, I don't have questions, as you'll notice, but I would love us, to choose one of these, afterwards, and talk with each other, about which one of these, we find most, encouraging, or challenging, I'd love us, to talk about that, before the world cup, or anything else, the first thing, to say from this, is that I hope, we see that this is, incredibly good news, for persecuted Christians, now it's wonderful, that we get to partner, with mission partners, all over the world, both in prayer, and financially, but I think, these verses, would have far more, pertinence, in many ways, for the Christian, persecuted in China, or Romania, or Afghanistan, or North Korea, or Qatar, I could go on, knowing that one day, one day, the Lord will not, let leaders like this, go on, second point of application, for us to be thinking about, I think that this probably, gives us a very different view, of Christmas, and Advent, and the coming of the Lord,

[26 : 12] Jesus Christ, I am sadly, my wife doesn't buy me, an Advent calendar anymore, it's very upsetting, but I wonder when we hold, that Advent calendar, that flimsy piece of cardboard, and we think, this is a bit twee, isn't it, it's a bit nice, stockings, fire, nutmeg, or whatever, nice warm, fuzzy feeling, and when we're counting, down those days, to when the Lord Jesus Christ, burst into human history, when heaven, penetrated earth, we might, be tempted to think, that it's just a very twee, little holiday, nice little time, to ourselves, and to our family, but part of the answer, of what is happening, at Christmas, is that the shepherd king, is coming to bring justice, that 2022 years ago, when the Lord Jesus Christ, burst into history, that was partly answering, what is the Lord going to do, about the injustice, in the world, I hope this gives us, a much bigger view, of what's happening, at Christmas, I wonder also, and I hope, and my prayer is, that this gives us, a better view, of the fact, that we follow a God, who judges,

I think because I am, I am very slow, to talk about the judgment, of God, very, very slow indeed, it's uncomfortable, to put it mildly, to talk about the fact, that yeah, God's a God of love, and a God of justice, I hope that this, gives us confidence, to talk about, the judgment of God, because it is, in the judgment of God, that both salvation, and justice meet, I would hate for us, to be a church family, and for myself personally, to be ashamed, of one of the characteristics, of our God, that we should

be rejoicing in, final thought of application, to my Christian sisters, in the room, isn't it wonderful, isn't it wonderful, that we have a leader, who will not consume you, in an age, where me too, and Harvey Weinstein, and all the rest, has thrown horrendous light, on the evil, that men commit to women, in powers of authority, to consume them, for their own means, isn't it stunning, to know that the Lord,

Jesus Christ, will never, ever, do that to you, that we have a shepherd king, who loves us, forever, and to Christian men, fathers, husbands and the like, in the room, isn't it wonderful, to know that we have, a perfect example, of what it means, to lead, and be godly, and loving, and sacrificial, in the Lord, Jesus Christ, certainly we are not, going to find, very good role models, in the world, isn't it wonderful, that we have this, shepherd king, I would commend, talking about those things, with one another afterwards, please do ask me about that, before anything else, but why don't I close us, in a final prayer, and he shall stand, and shepherd his flock, in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty, of the name of the Lord, his God, and they shall dwell secure, for now, he shall be great, to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace, come Lord Jesus, come, Amen.