

Wicked Rulers and the Ruler of Peace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 April 2001

Preacher: Rhys Bezzant

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 29th of April 2001. The preacher is Rhys Besant.

His sermon is entitled Wicked Rulers and the Ruler of Peace and is from Micah chapters 3 to 5. We thank you dear God that you've drawn us together this morning to be your people here. We thank you that in being your people we can praise your name, hear your word and live lives which reflect your glory.

How I pray you'd help us now to listen and to learn for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Australians, it seems to me, have mixed feelings about war.

On the one side, we're reminded of wars, destruction, loss, brutishness and evil. So this week we read in the paper this sentence from Jack Lockett, one of the final survivors of Gallipoli who said, What has war ever done?

[1 : 35] What the hell has it ever done? It's good for nobody. All those men who were killed, sitting them over like a hive of bees, what a thing to do.

It was bloody murder, he wrote in the age on the 21st. But on the other hand, there are those in our own communities who romanticise war and try and retrieve from it something, just something that's noble.

I suppose the first war helped galvanise us as a nation. So it was an important time.

It did have positive outcomes. But people speak of war almost in religious terms. Like the young fellow on the radio I heard this week who said, with almost evangelical piety, they died for us.

They died for us. We have mixed feelings about war. But after seeing the film Saving Private Ryan, some of the most sobering moments that I've ever seen at a movie, all the gloss was taken away and nothing much was left in my thinking of war other than the fear, the waste, the insecurity and the anguish which it brings.

[3 : 16] It's easy to think of ourselves as sophisticated dwellers of the 21st century. Some of us might still feel like we're living in the 20th century. We might think that we as a race have come a long way, but it doesn't take much to remind us that in the 20th century, more people were killed in war than in all the other centuries combined.

8 million military losses in the First World War, 14 million soldiers and 27 million civilians were killed in the Second War, 16 million of whom were killed in the Soviet Union.

On top of that, 6 million Jews and 54 million Soviets killed, not in wars but in purges. What a disgraceful record.

Can there be any hope for transformation in this world? Where would God start if he were to remake, rebuild and renew our world?

This morning in Micah chapter 4, we hear of or see a vision of a renewed world.

[4 : 40] And not just renewed community for those of Israel, a renewed world for all the nations. Up to now in the book of Micah, we've heard a lot about Israel, Judah, God's people.

But now all of a sudden the word nation and nations and peoples appears. In chapter 4 verse 2, many nations shall come and say.

Or in chapter 4 verse 3, he shall judge, that is God shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away. Or 4 verse 11, now many nations are assembled against you, it says.

Or 4 verse 13, you shall beat into pieces many nations and devote their gain to the Lord. All of a sudden the prophet's vision has expanded and no longer is he concerned merely for the well-being of God's people, but for the future of the whole world.

How will peace come? How will the nations enjoy peace? It starts with a seismic shift in chapter 4 verse 1.

[5 : 59] The mountain of the Lord's house, Zion, that mountain where the temple was, it says in 4.1, one day in the future shall be established as the highest of the mountains shall be raised up above the hills.

Zion itself is actually, it's a pimple on a pumpkin, it's hardly a mountain at all. But one day the prophet says, that mountain will seismically be raised and will be higher than all the mountains of the world.

Okay, but how will peace come? It continues in verse 2. People shall stream to this new mountain, 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.

Just like the Queen of Sheba had come to witness Solomon in all his splendour, so the nations will come to this new high mountain to see what God is doing there, what God has to offer there.

Yes, but how will peace come? Well, when the nations come to this new elevated mountain, they will find out that God will teach them his ways, verse 2, that we may walk in his paths.

[7 : 18] For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem. He will judge many people, shall arbitrate between nations far away.

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. But they will all sit under their own vines, under their own fig trees, and no one will make them afraid.

For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. How will peace come to the world? Peace will come through God's word, God's word taught, God's word heard, God's word understood.

The core ministry that brings peace to this world is God's own voice, God's own word explained, bringing people to repentance, helping them to turn their weapons of war into machinery to produce food.

Only one thing is powerful enough to defeat the warring of this world, and that it's God's own voice. For his voice created the world, his voice can certainly bring peace to the world.

[8 : 41] And not just an absence of war, but prosperity and abundance and satisfaction and tranquility. We will all live under our own vines and under our own fig trees.

What a glorious picture. There will be peace, and peoples will come to live in that new peaceful place.

And who will it be who comes? Have a look at verses 6 and 7 in chapter 4. In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble first of all the lame, gather those who have been driven away, those whom I have afflicted.

The lame I will make the remnant, those who were cast off, a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore. Can you remember watching the funeral of Princess Diana?

The quite sad scene of the princes walking along a grand boulevard, a bell tolling every minute as they're on their way to the abbey.

[9 : 52] When surprisingly, out of a side alley, a side street, comes a few hundred people wearing, or with crutches, wheelchairs, walking frames, who had been the recipients of Diana's charity work, joined together, thankful for what they benefited from.

A motley crew, the last kind of group of people you might expect to see in a royal funeral procession, but indeed, they were there.

On that day, when the nations come to inhabit peaceful Zion forever, there will be the lame, the afflicted, the remnant, those cast off, those who in one sense the world despised.

They will be the foundations of this new world, those who are undeserving and have nothing much to bring to it themselves. Friends, peace will come to this world.

For Micah's hearers, it would be on the other side of the exile. For us, it's on the other side of Judgment Day. But when Micah looked around him, he didn't actually see much prospects of hope.

[11 : 32] He didn't see great leaders in the land who were trying to help the faithful understand their future, the great inheritance that was theirs in God. In fact, when Micah looked around him, as we've read in chapter 3, he saw leaders who were not providing the people with the hope they needed.

He saw leaders who were ripping them off, eating them alive, those graphic words from chapter 3, verses 2 and 3. Should you not know just as he said of these, the rulers of the house of Israel, you who hate the good, love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, the flesh off their bones, who eat the flesh off my people, flay their skin, break their bones, chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a cauldron.

It's a disgusting picture of leaders who weren't serving their people but themselves.

It's a picture not of leaders helping others to dream, it's a picture of degenerate leaders in positions of authority just to serve their own financial appetites or sexual appetites or ego demands.

They weren't literally cannibalising their people but spiritually they were. Good leaders help us to dream.

[13:06] Martin Luther King could say, I have a dream that black and white would walk down main streets together. He says it a bit more passion than me. He could have a dream and help people to live with that dream but these leaders they're preaching peace to those who have nothing to eat.

Verse 5 They're asking a price for their teaching making sure that what they say is what the people want to hear. they're being bought off to keep powerful interests happy.

They're no leaders at all in the end. They're certainly not going to help people reach that peaceful city Zion like those pastors in our congregations who don't rebuke the wealthy in their own midst for fear that the wealthy will leave and go to another church.

those leaders in our churches who only say what they think the people need to hear concerned for their own comfort rather than helping people towards that great day.

In Micah's own generation that vision of peace seemed further away than we could ever imagine.

but though the earth gives way though the nations fight against each other though the leaders disguise their unbelief Micah is confident that there will come someone who can lead the people to that city that day.

[15:00] For in chapter 5 we learn that God sends his own ruler his own shepherd to lead the sheep and this shepherd won't maim the flock or kill the flock or horror of horrors eat the flock this shepherd will care for them and protect them and lead them forwards.

Look at chapter 5 verse 2 will you? but you O Bethlehem of Ephrathah who are one of the littlest the smallest the least significant clans of Judah from you shall come forth for me God says one who is to rule one who is to shepherd in Israel whose origin is from of old from ancient days from Bethlehem the way that God would bring peace to the world the way that God would transform the whole of the cosmos is bringing someone from Bethlehem who would have thought Bethlehem you'd never look for a leader in Bethlehem you'd perhaps expect a leader from Jerusalem or from New York or London and Tokyo but from Bethlehem that's like expecting a national leader to come from Nanagoon or Oyon or Marble

Bar it's unheard of but it's from Bethlehem of all places that God brings that man who will bring peace to the world from you shall come forth for me someone close to God's own heart one who's to rule in Israel whose origin is from of old David's line was from Bethlehem this ruler from Bethlehem would be of David's line and perhaps not just going back that far but further still from ancient of days perhaps even from the beginning of time Micah reminds the people in 5 verse 3 that the leader won't come at once therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour is brought forth then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel God's saying be patient the leader won't come immediately the nation first has to go into exile before God will rescue them with his chosen man but when he does come what will this shepherd leader do in verse 4 he will stand victoriously and feed his flock with the strength which the Lord provides in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God he will reflect something of God's character and purpose he will keep away the wolves and make sure the flock has enough to eat he'll have a powerful influence over all the earth look at that at the end of verse 4 they shall live secure for now he shall be great even to the ends of the earth and he shall be the one of peace he shall be the one who brings peace that man is Jesus Christ the world has begun to change because of Jesus Christ both at a micro level in my own personal experience but also in the experience of the nations at a macro level

Jesus makes a difference we haven't been left to our own devices because that great leader the good shepherd has come for his people praise God just as in Micah chapter 4 the mountain will be raised up the people will come to that mountain to receive instruction from God from his mouth from his word just as that mountain is raised up we know as we read on in the scriptures that Jesus

Christ is himself the one who is raised up for he says in John 12 I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself he said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die Jesus is the one who is raised up because Jesus himself said destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days through his death and through his resurrection

[20 : 02] Jesus is the one who is lifted up who is drawing all the nations to himself and in drawing the nations to himself he's providing peace as the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2 Jesus Christ is our peace he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us he has abolished the law that he might create himself one new humanity thus making peace and might reconcile both groups that means Gentiles and Jews to God in one body through the cross putting to death hostility through it he came and proclaimed peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near the world has begun to change because of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection the new world has begun this great vision of

Micah is just in part beginning and do you know where it's beginning here this morning we are the beginnings of the new renewed transformed world or in Jesus own language in Matthew 5 we're light on a hill because just as the temple in Micah's vision would be lifted up and just as Jesus Christ himself was lifted up so Jesus says of us that we'll be lifted up we're a light on a hill for all to see gathered together here safe and secure providing light to the world and a model of renewed living for the nations or if I can put it in short we have even here in our fellowship this morning so much to offer the world we ought to expect great things of going to church so what do you think to yourself each Sunday morning as you get ready are you thinking to yourself where's my wallet I'm hoping to catch up with Joe or Mary I hope we sing the songs I like I hate doing my roster jobs I hope the sermon doesn't go on too long now what are you thinking on a Sunday morning when you roll up because if you think those things you're a long way away from the attitude that this fellowship is the beginnings of a whole new world perhaps we ought to think as we prepare for church on Sunday mornings how great one more Sunday one more Sunday to help encourage each other get towards heaven perhaps we can ask ourselves whom can I invite to church this week perhaps we need to think well I don't feel like myself going to church today but I'm sure others would appreciate it if I made the effort perhaps we can look around and see of each other not people who are threats to us or nuisances but gifts from God to me to you to help us travel safely to that new world you see our fellowship and we often take it for granted our fellowship is a radical alternative to the communities around us we have so much to offer the world the resources here are enormous we can teach the world a lesson or two about multiculturalism we can teach the world lessons or two about forgiveness and love how to use persuasion not coercion to reach our ends we can teach the world about generosity and reconciliation sacrificial love loving people you don't like we can actually teach the world so much about what community is because we're a light on a hill and a small down payment a small vision of the new world which is yet to arrive we are a community indwelt by the spirit purchased by the blood of

Jesus Christ and chosen by God in which we're preparing ourselves for that great and glorious day when we'll be with him forever we have a security in our fellowship which only Christ can bring in his parting words to his own disciples he said my peace I bring to you my peace be with you amen