

The Rule of the Son of Man

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Preacher: Rev Dave Brown

[0:00] Do turn with me to Micah chapter 4, page 932 of your Bibles. We're in the third week of our Advent series on the coming of the Son of Man and what that will mean.

Over the last two weeks we've thought a little about the triumphant coming of the Son of Man, His appearing in the clouds with all power and authority, and last week we thought about the judgment of the Son of Man, when everyone, everywhere, will be called to account before Him.

But today we're going to think about the rule of the Son of Man, what His coming will mean, what the world will be like when Jesus' kingdom finally comes in all its entirety.

So Micah chapter 4, I'm going to read verses 1 to 8. In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

It will be exalted above the hills and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

[1:05] He will teach us His ways so we may walk in His paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples.

He will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own victory. And no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord, our God, forever and ever.

In that day, declares the Lord, I will gather the lame. I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame my remnants.

Those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day on and forever. As for you, watch Tower of the Flock. Stronghold of daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you.

[2:19] Kingship will come to daughter Jerusalem. Well, let's pray. Fathers, we come to your word now.

We pray that the Holy Spirit who inspired it to be written would be at work in us as we consider these words now. Please reveal your mysteries to us, increase our faith and increase our hope.

We might live as your children looking ahead to the kingdom to come. In Jesus name. Amen. Earlier this week, I went to one of our local primary schools to take a Christmas assembly.

And I was chatting about the number of children on roll. And when he told me the answer, he said, well, we've got this many, but we've actually got three empty classrooms. At the moment. I said, why is that?

Well, people are just not having children. Now, that's a serious, hugely serious issue for some nations in the Far East. Korea, Japan particularly. And it will be in this nation too if things don't change.

[3 : 24] And as for the cause of that low birth rate, well, there's plenty of evidence that couples are not having children. Because they don't see a positive future for the country or the planet. And they're worried about bringing children into a world which is in such a mess.

Now, if we're honest, it's not hard to see why they might come to that conclusion, is it? 20 minutes watching national news or searching through any newspaper will give you a clear idea of the mess the world is in.

And 10 minutes listening to Prime Minister's Question Times or, frankly, any press conference with any collection of world leaders will leave you sceptical about humanity's ability to deal with any of these issues.

The world's in a mess. And there's very little evidence that humanity has the collective will or ability to do anything about it. But this is nothing new.

History of the world has been like that. And actually, the history of God's Old Testament people was like that too. And even when they knew, as they did the right thing to do, and they could look back at their history and see the joys and blessings that obedience brought, time and time again, Israel's leaders and people would turn away from God and try and sort out their problems their own way.

[4 : 42] That was the case in the time of Micah. Micah was a prophet during the reigns of three kings, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Three kings of Judah who, for all their good that they did, and actually, compared to many of the others, they were largely good kings.

They regularly still turned away from God, ignored the advice of his faithful prophets. And when there was a problem, they sought alliances with difficult and wicked nations instead.

And so in his short book, Micah highlights the people's sins. There's a lack of devotion to God, which leads to God's people ignoring his commands, leading to increased wickedness in the nation, corruption in the powerful, oppression of the poor, and ungodly alliances with other nations.

Time and time again, God's people let their devotion to God grow cold and had fallen into sin and trouble. Now God in his grace had sent them prophets and teachers to bring them back to himself.

And when they repented, well, blessings followed. But as that cycle repeated time after time, century after century, the ears of God's people became increasingly deaf, excuse me, to the warnings that they were given.

[6 : 01] And some of those warnings became increasingly stark and dark. Micah chapter 3 is one chapter like that. Micah tells them that God has seen the corruption and wickedness of the leaders and the people, a corruption that was so deep, if you just look back to the end of verse, chapter 3, Micah says this, Because of you, Zion will be a ploughed like a field.

Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble. The temple hill overgrown with thickets. Nothing less than total destruction was coming. You think things are bad today.

The future for God's people then was far, far worse. But into that gloom and darkness, Micah speaks words of great light and hope. Words that point to a different future.

A future that could come in part if God's people would truly repent. That's the partial fulfilment of words like in passages like this we see throughout the Old Testament. But also pointing to a future that would come in totality when the Son of Man comes in his glory.

And it's this glorious hope we're going to focus on today. And my hope is that as we look at what Micah looks ahead towards, we too can find real hope in our times of our own struggles and darkness.

[7 : 23] See, I think as Christians we should be very realistic people. People who are able to see the world in all its mess as it is without trying to cover it up. But who are nevertheless able to be remarkably and firmly optimistic.

Because we can see where history is heading. Realistic optimism. That should be our kind of overriding attitude to life, I think.

The way Micah begins this section puts us into the realm of apocalyptic writing. He speaks of in the last days. Jesus uses that phrase several times.

Always speaking about that period leading up to his final return. Biblically speaking, the last days actually are all the times from Jesus' ascension to heaven. To his return from heaven.

So Micah is giving words for the future here. A future that we are still in. Right now. These are the last days. But verse 6 speaks about the Lord declaring these things will happen in that day.

[8 : 30] Not the time in between the two great moments of history. The ascension and Jesus' return. But rather that final day. When Jesus will come back.

I said a few moments ago. Looking at biblical prophecy like this. There's always a sense where we're trying to work out where it fits in history's timeline.

And there is always that sense that as a nation or as people come to God. Some of these things are apparent in our lives. Individually and collectively. But they're also looking forward to that great and final day.

When everything will be put right. And more than anything I think we need to keep our eyes looking to that great and final fulfillment.

And that's where we're going to begin. We'll look at some of the signs of the kingdom breaking in now a little later on. But we're going to cast our eyes right into the future to start with. Think about the day when Jesus comes back.

[9 : 33] And what that kingdom will look like. And according to Micah when the rule of Christ is established three things will be in place. Verse 1 tells us the start of that. In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

Exalted above the hills. And people will stream to it. Already we're speaking figurative aren't we. This isn't some weird plate tectonics. That's suddenly going to lift up the mountain on which Jerusalem is based.

And put it higher than Mount Everest. It's not something like that going on. It's figurative language denoting power and importance and rule. So when Jesus comes back his rule will be incomparable.

Unchallengeable. And verse 8 it will be eternal. Right now there are religions and philosophies and world views each competing for supremacy.

Some are doing it via the ballot box. Others are through armed struggle or economic domination. Sometimes rather by subterfuge underhand tactics.

[10 : 38] But when Jesus returns he will have no rivals. No rivals at all. His enemies will all be defeated. And his perfect rule will be supreme, certain and clear.

Meaning that Jesus will get the glory he finally deserves. As a result obedience to his commands will be a natural thing to want to do and to do.

There's an eagerness in verse 2 isn't there? You can imagine the people gathering together and say, come on, let's go together. Let's go to the Lord. He's going to teach us his ways. We're going to learn from him.

And we will obey. It's a wonderful sense there. Oh, to be able to do that fully. Don't know whether you find that frustration in life now. You know the right thing to do and you want to do it.

But so often, so often you don't live up to what you want. Well, one day we will. The Psalms are full of lines about the perfection of God's law, the goodness and beauty of it.

[11:40] The joy that flows out of obedience to it. And we know that. We know that the obedient life is the blessed life. Following God's commandments now leads to the greatest joy, even though we do it partially.

How much more one day when all people are obeying him completely? And then in verse 3 we see the fair and righteous judgments of God being given.

Think back to the headlines I've seen over the past week or so here in the UK. Some rather controversial judgments handed down. And that's before we get to the disputes that are going on between different nations.

Sometimes nations who won't accept rulings even when fair judgments are handed down against them. But one day, under the rule of King Jesus, strong nations from far and wide will hear his words and acknowledge the rightness of God's judgments and those disputes will be over forever.

Even the best peace processes now leave loose ends that get picked at over time. Even the best judges can make mistakes. Sometimes the wicked are acquitted.

[12:52] Sometimes the innocent are found guilty. And sometimes the wicked evade even being brought to justice. Facing up to any charges. But not when Jesus comes again. No, when he comes again, his judgments will be perfect.

We have the supreme rule of Christ over everything. We have perfect obedience to his commands, transforming the world. And his righteous judgments, settling disputes.

And verses 3 and 4 show us the results of those things. You see, when our glorious king rules, when his commands are obeyed, when his judgments are issued, everything changes.

First, there is peace between nations. So much so that all the weapons are decommissioned and used for tools for agriculture. Training colleges for the armed forces permanently disbanded.

Can you imagine that? During the Second World War, all the iron railings and gates from around Abbotsbury Church were taken down and melted down and used for weaponry.

[14:21] This is the reverse of that. Tanks being melted down. Bombs being defused. This isn't unilateral disarmament, just one nation.

This is omnilateral disarmament. Every nation is doing it. I struggle to imagine a world like that. But it's coming. It's coming when Jesus rules.

What a glorious thing to look forward to. And the course of coming of peace means an absence of fear and worry. Growing up in the 1970s, I can remember a real palpable fear of nuclear war.

If anything, the Russians were far more unpredictable then, even than they are now. Films like Threads portrayed some of the devastation that a nuclear attack would bring.

And my friends and I used to talk about what would happen if it happened. We were living in Steenwiche, just a few miles from London. It was a real danger. A real threat.

[15:25] But with no more armies. With no more disarmaments. With the perfect rule of the perfect king over the nations, who has settled disputes between them.

What will we have left to be afraid of? Nothing. Nothing to make us afraid. Perfect peace leads to an absence of fear. And without tensions between nations, because all are ruled by the same perfect king, there is no more hunger or want.

Verse 4 again. Everyone will sit under their own vine and their own fig tree. It's perfect. It's a wonderful poetic language. But it means that everyone, every family, every village, every town, every nation, will be well provided for.

There will be no hunger anymore. No need for world aid food programs. No need for food banks. No worrying about failing harvest.

Everyone will have enough. If there's one word to describe a situation like that, it's the Hebrew word shalom. We often think that it means peace, which it does.

[16:33] But it's a deeper peace. It goes deeper than an absence of suffering and war and need. To describe an overall sense of fullness and completeness in body, mind and estates.

In the biblical storyline, it is Eden restored. An absence of sin and the effects of sin. And in its place, the presence of God in all his goodness and glory and light.

That's what Micah's describing here. That's what the rule of Jesus will bring. Can you see now why Christians should be optimists? This is where things are heading.

This is the kingdom of which we're invited to be a part. The world will not end with a people-induced global warming disaster or nuclear holocaust or a new mutated virus, a meteorite collision or an alien invasion.

Instead, in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of mountains. And peace, justice, contentment, true, perfect shalom will result.

[17:39] That's where history is going, brothers and sisters. That's what the rule of the Son of Man will bring. So be encouraged this morning. Don't give in to fear and pessimism.

Know that God is in full control of history and remember where history is heading. So when people speak fear and are bowed down by the worries of the world, be purveyors of hope amongst your friends.

And if you are moved to be actively involved in social action or environmental campaigns or even party politics, do it with a confident hope that whatever good you do in this world, whatever positive change you help bring about, are going to be made permanent and far more glorious in the kingdom to come.

The rule of the Son of Man will mean perfect shalom. Be optimistic about the future. But as well as looking ahead and seeing the glorious ending that will come at some point, you and I can also look around us and see the signs of God's perfect kingdom creeping in even now.

That was the theme of Jesus' answer to John the Baptist in our Gospel reading. John had been imprisoned by this point by King Herod.

[18:56] And I think he was sensing that his public ministry was over and perhaps that the day of his death was drawing near. So he sent some of his friends with a message to Jesus to ask if Jesus really was the one the nation had been waiting for.

John was looking for a way to know if he had run his race well, if he really could die in peace knowing that he'd got it right. And what was Jesus' response?

Jesus replied, What does Jesus tell John to do?

He says, look at the signs. Look at the evidence of what's going on now and see in those signs the proof that God's Son and Saviour had indeed come and that his kingdom was well on the way.

See, every time Jesus healed a sick person, it was a foretaste of the day when sickness will be no more. Every time Jesus raised someone from the dead, it was a pointer towards the day when death itself will be defeated and there will be no more mourning or crying.

[20:23] Every time Jesus calmed a storm or fed hungry crowds, it was a reminder that one day all of the created order will be put right. Every time Jesus cast out an unclean spirit, it was a reminder that one day evil will be done away with forever.

And every time Jesus opened his arms to welcome in the outcast, the broken, the lonely, it was a little taster of the shalom that will mark out his eternal kingdom. Now, in our day, the signs of God's kingdom breaking out may not be quite so dramatic, but the signs are still there if we have eyes to see them.

See, every time you and I hear God's word and obey it, God's kingdom rule is growing in our own lives. Peace by peace. Every time we act with kindness and gentleness in Jesus' name, every time we are generous with what God has given, every time we forgive those who sin against us, because that's how God has treated us, well, God's rule is being established.

His kingdom is being lived out. In those times, we're demonstrating the goodness of God, our allegiance to his rule, and showing signs of that peace that will one day come.

And of course, every time the gospel is preached and lost sinners repent and come to Christ, well, the span of God's rule increases in this world. And of course, God does still hear and answer prayers.

[22:00] Miracles still happen. Sick people are still made well. Chaotic situations are resolved as we bring them to God. Disputes are resolved. Enemies become friends.

Addictions get broken. And churches, despite all the negativity of things in the press and in the Church of England, do still grow. And if you're not sure of that, then look around yourself today and see the people God is bringing to himself here.

It may be in some small ways, but God's kingdom is breaking through. We just need to have eyes to see it. And one day, all those small little signs that we see now, that encourage us now, where those small little drops of God's kingdom will become a flood, and that flood, a steady stream that washes all the sin and stain of this world away as the Son of Man returns in glory.

You see why we should be optimistic? Not only is God's kingdom coming in fullness in the years to come, when Jesus returns, but it is already breaking through now.

Let me give you a word of warning, though. Please don't expect today what God has promised for later. Sometimes we can get caught up in that. And imagine that all these blessings are going to come on us now.

[23:26] There's a reminder in that gospel passage, isn't there, that John was in prison when he wrote that message to Jesus. He would die in prison. There were many sick people at the time of Jesus who weren't healed, just as there are many of us sick today.

And not everyone who is sick is made well in this life either. Jesus himself said that as long as this world lasts, there will always be the poor and needy among us. And as his disciples, we should expect pain and suffering and persecution on top of all the other things that go on as we live in a broken world.

We can be honest about those things, but they should never defeat us. Because God is at work in those times as well and one day all those things will be put right.

One little phrase I want to mention before I close. And it's there in verse four.

For the Lord Almighty has spoken. I think we'd all agree that promises by politicians at election times are not often worth the paper they're printed on.

[24:37] Not because they don't want to do the things that they say that they are going to do, but because when they get into power, they realise they don't have the power or means to actually make good on those promises.

See, Donald Trump, for all his power and influence, cannot make a lasting peace between Russia and UK. It's not in his gift to do it. Until hearts are changed, there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East, nor for that matter in conflicts across the world, no matter how many bribes or threats or encouragements are given.

The UN or whoever is involved doesn't have the power to insist on that, to make it a reality, but there is one who does. He is the Lord Almighty.

Older versions of the Bible translate that name as the Lord of Hosts, or as one commentator translated that, the supreme commander of angelic forces in heaven and earth.

Sounds like someone with great strength, doesn't it? Just let that, just settle into your minds for a moment, that name. The God who makes this promise is the Lord Almighty himself, the God who brought the world into being, the supreme commander of angelic forces in heaven and on earth.

[26:00] He is our God, and he does have the power to bring his promises to pass. And if you want more evidence of that, then look at the work and person of Jesus.

See how all those Old Testament prophecies come true in him. Look at his interactions with his Old Testament people. Think back at his work in your life too. See how God's word has done its work.

So be encouraged, my brothers and sisters. Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, the Son of Man, will come again. And when he does, his rule will be perfect and glorious.

So be optimistic about tomorrow and the years to come. Be confident in God's promises. As you wait for that great day, be active in his kingdom.

And keep your eyes open for the ways in which the kingdom and the rule of the Son of Man is breaking through right now. Because it is.

[27:03] And one day, it will come in all its fullness. May God keep us ready for that day. Amen.