

Promise, Deliverance & Purification

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[0 : 00] If you would take your Bible out and turn to page 820 to Micah chapter 5 or 819 and when you get there if you'd place one finger there and put another finger in page 525 Psalm 89 And I wish you could have seen the look on the children's faces during the skit.

There was a look of mild alarm until Braden was strangled and then they were all very delighted. I'm not sure what all that says but actually I think the time when the children come forward in the service and hear something from God's word much more important for us as a congregation than it is for the children not because we are tolerating a little moment for them but because if they can understand it probably we can.

And this is a difficulty for us because we speak a very high language in church and yet we know some of the realities are different. And we've just heard nine young people promise to serve Christ with all their heart.

It will be difficult for them. You've just sung we will maintain unflinching one church one faith one Lord. Good for you.

That's going to be difficult. But I think this sense of distance and gap is much more there in the Old Testament. And I want to show you some words from a song that the Israelites used to sing.

[1 : 44] If you go back to Psalm 89 for just a moment to verse 35. These are the words of God that they would sing. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness, I will not lie to David, his line shall endure forever.

His throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever. It shall stand firm while the skies endure. A promise of an eternal king and an eternal kingdom before God.

But king after king after king were cruel, self-centered and unbelieving. Completely disinterested in the people's welfare and disinterested in the glory of God.

And one response to that gap is to turn to idols. And that's what God's people did. They made gods that they could understand. Gods that were more in their image.

Gods that didn't make these outrageous promises. Gods that were frankly more manageable. And it is into these circumstances that God sends his prophet Micah with a word of warning of judgment and a word of promise of salvation from God yearning for his people to return to him.

[3 : 03] And as we come to chapter 5 we have reached the pinnacle of the book. And the question that is set before us is this.

How is God going to bridge the gap between his mighty promises and the everyday reality of the believer? What is God going to do to fulfill the promises?

And in this chapter we get three answers. God is going to do three things. And each of these three concern us deeply. The first in verses 1 to 6 tell us that God is going to send a shepherd king.

And if you just have a look at verse 1 it is a reminder of just how far the kings of Israel had sunk. Here is a nation that God had created for himself. He had redeemed them from Egypt with the power of his outstretched arm.

He had met with them in the desert. He had had dinner with them in the desert on the top of the mountain. He had given them his law. He had given them his promises. He said you are my precious possession of all the earth.

[4 : 14] He came to dwell with them and then he took them into a land and he bound himself to them by covenant and by promise. And they were meant to be a city set on a hill, a light to the nations.

They were meant to demonstrate their faith in God so that nations round about would flow into Jerusalem and say come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob that we might learn of his ways and that we might walk in his paths.

But as you know if you have been here through these sermons instead they closed their ears to God's word. They silenced the true prophets and they substituted preachers who entertained them. And instead of trusting in God's word they placed their trust in wealth and power, idols. And now in verse 1 the king cringes like a criminal which is what he did in the last days before the fall of Jerusalem.

Verse 2 But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel.

[5 : 24] His origin is from old, the ancient of days. Verse 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord and the majesty in the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. How is God going to build a bridge between his promises and the everyday reality of his people?

Answer number one He will send a shepherd king. A king who will embrace the smallest of the small and the whole earth. And it is from this little, unknown, irrelevant town of Bethlehem that God is going to launch this shepherd king to the whole world.

That the Messiah of God is going to be born in poverty and powerlessness to show that salvation is from God alone. The most important birth in history in the least important place.

And his birth and his life are going to be marked by all the signs of God. His origin is from old, from ancient of days because he is a king who comes from God and a king who rules for God.

[6 : 37] And if there is any doubt Jesus Christ is being spoken of. 700 years later in the town of Bethlehem Jesus was born and Matthew's gospel tells us this is the fulfillment of God's promise.

And Micah tells us that the ministry of this shepherd king is going to be a beautiful combination of the tenderness of God and the power of God.

Because he feeds his flock like a shepherd in the power of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord our God and they will dwell secure.

If you've been here over the weeks you'll know that again and again God puts himself forward in the book of Micah as the shepherd king. In chapter 2 verse 12 remember he says I'm going to gather to myself this noisy flock of sheep.

In chapter 4 verse 7 the lame sheep I will pull, gather and assemble. Some people say well the Old Testament is a God the Old Testament God is a God of warfare and wrath but the New Testament God is a loving God.

[7 : 49] It's nonsense. The Old Testament God is a shepherd. He leads us by still waters. He guides our feet into paths of righteousness. The astounding thing here in Micah chapter 5 is that God says I'm going to include in my shepherding this king.

He's not just going to be one of the other under shepherds in Israel but this one is going to be so closely identified with me that I will shepherd my flock through him. in verse 2 the two words of emphasis are the words for me.

From you shall come forth for me one who is to be a ruler. He will rule you for me. I will shepherd you through him.

I will pastor you my people through this king. And I don't need to remind you that Jesus said I am the good shepherd and I don't need to remind you that the book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the good shepherd of the sheep the eternal the great shepherd of the sheep and that the apostle Peter calls him the chief shepherd.

This is the first thing that God is going to do to bridge that gap. But there is a second in verses 5 to 7 and God is going to implement a special ministry through his remnant.

[9 : 09] Now just before we look at them this word remnant in verse 7 and 8 literally means leftovers. When you have a meal food you don't use it is the remnant.

And it is used of God's people who after God exercises judgment come through the judgment. So Noah and his family after the judgment of the flood are a remnant.

So are Lot and his family after judgment fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. And here we are in the middle of the 8th century BC and as the dark clouds of God's judgment appear on the horizon and gather together God's prophets speak to Israel and Judah about a remnant.

It was so important to Isaiah that he named one of his sons a remnant shall return which would have given him lots of trouble at school I guess. when the judgment of God does fall his purposes and his promises continue through this small group within the people of Israel.

And if we stand back from the Bible for just a moment the thinking about a remnant is in the shape of an hourglass because God's remnant becomes smaller and smaller the group of people who believe in God and trust in God faithfully becomes smaller and smaller until the remnant becomes one person Jesus Christ and all of God's promises rest on him.

[10 : 38] But that Messiah creates a new people who carry God's purposes forward. But here is the difference this is very important. In the Old Testament the remnant was part of the people of Israel but in the New Testament the remnant is part of humanity.

In other words nowhere in the New Testament is the idea that the Christian church is a large group and part of it is the remnant. No the whole of the Christian church is meant to be the remnant of humanity.

So let's go to verses 7 and 8 and now God speaks of the work that he's going to do through the remnant created by the shepherd king. The remnant is not just the group of saved but the group through whom the shepherd will work his saving work and there are two radically different sides of the ministry.

Verse 7 is one side verse 8 is the other and I just I need to say this to you as we read these verses this is God's description of us. Verse 7 Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord like showers upon the grass which tarry not for men nor wait for the sons of men and at the very same time the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations in the midst of many peoples like a lion among the beasts of the forest like a young lion among the flocks of sheep which when it goes through treads down and tears in pieces and there is none to deliver. Are you happy with verse 7? Are you happy with verse 8? This is the ministry of all those who belong to Jesus Christ.

[12 : 27] We have a ministry which brings salvation to some and judgment to others. Micah is speaking about the effect that we will have on other people to some we will be like the dew of heaven like the water of life bringing the blessing of God and to others we will be like a lion bringing destruction death and judgment.

Keep your finger in Micah 5 and turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 2 for a moment on page 169 if you are struggling with this stay with me 2 Corinthians 2 verse 14 but thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere for we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing to one a fragrance from death to death to the other a fragrance from life to life who is sufficient for these things.

The apostle is not giving us a choice here he is saying that those who follow Jesus Christ will affect those around us. Christians he says have a particular smell to some we will be a life-giving oxygen to others we will be a deadly anthrax and it is the aroma and fragrance of Jesus Christ which God is spreading through us to other people.

That is why it is an enormously serious thing for us to be a Christian. People cannot help being affected by us. it gives people the potential to know God through us God spreads the knowledge of Christ and it is not as though the more we are like Christ the less we are going to put people off.

The opposite is the case. The more we are like Christ and the more the aroma of Christ flows through us the more we are the fragrance of life to life to those who are being saved and the fragrance of death to death to those who are perishing.

[14 : 59] Is it not remarkable in the first chapter of the Gospel of John when Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God comes from heaven to earth full of grace and truth his people will not receive him they will not believe in him and by the time we come to chapter three and he has revealed himself as the light of the world we read men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

If you are a Christian and your primary concern is not to offend people you will never be able to reflect Jesus to others it is just not possible because the same loveliness and light that we see in Jesus Christ exposes darkness and turns people deeper into darkness who refuse him and until Jesus Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead there will always be something irreducibly offensive about the love of Christ and the cross of Christ and the salvation of Christ and this is what Micah is talking about it is not we who bring judgment any more than we who bring life but it is through us who God works both things and that is why I take it he calls us the remnant of Jacob do you remember Jacob last week the one who was lame the one who knew himself to be in debt to God so here

God bridges the gap between his promises and reality first by sending a shepherd king and secondly by giving the remnant a two-sided ministry let's go back to Micah chapter 5 so the third thing that he does is he now implements a ministry to the remnant not through the remnant in verses 10 to 15 and I need to remind you before we read these words that the people of God were substituting for God all sorts of other things they substituted some secular idols like horses and chariots and some spiritual idols and as you see through these words God is deeply committed to eradicating and destroying all our disobedience and all our idolatry and everything that is a barrier to communion with him he wants our ongoing transformation in holiness and his purpose is to strike away everything in our lives that keeps us from serving him he's doing it as I speak because if we hold on to our idols we will be swept away with them in the end look at how personally God speaks in verse 10 in that day says the

Lord I will cut off your horses from among you I will destroy your chariots I will cut off the cities of your land I will cut off sorceries I will cut off your images and the word cut off doesn't mean to punish it means to cleanse to purify now I think horses and chariots and strongholds are those things that we take security in that we can see God has nothing against horses horses he has nothing against marriage and money and mortgages except when they come between us and him when we begin to live for them and take security in them and when we read idolatry in the Bible I do hope we don't feel terribly superior because we've never literally bowed down to a piece of wood and prayed to it because the essence of idolatry is making God in your own image it is picking and choosing what you would like to believe about God it's refusing to accept what God says about himself and idols are most usually a reflection of what the culture is saying around about it was so in the 8th century

BC and it is so in the 21st century in BC let me read to you what Archbishop Temple says about idols it is as much idolatry to worship God according to a false mental image as by means of a false metal image the mental image misrepresents God has the same disastrous effect on character if your conception of faith is false and the more devout you are the worse you will be for it you are opening your souls to be moulded by something base you had much better be an atheist you see what we worship is what moulds us and if we begin to mould what we worship we worship ourselves and this is the third thing that God will do to bridge the gap the third thing that he is going to do to bring about the fulfilment of his promises he sends his son he sends his son as a shepherd king he exercises a two-sided ministry to reach the world through his remnant and he continues to cleanse us and transform us so that we might promote the glory of the Messiah in the world and I want to finish with just two things the first is this

[20 : 16] I want to point out our tremendous privilege because as we hear these words this morning we are in a much more privileged position than Micah's first hearers they look forward to the coming of this king we look back and we know that God has done exactly as he said he would do when the people of Israel turned away and continued to reject God first through the Assyrians and then the Babylonians God evicted his people from the land but there was a remnant that went into exile Daniel Ezekiel Jeremiah and more wonderful still we know that Bethlehem was the birthplace of the son of God we know the ministry of the good shepherd and we know the power of his resurrection that he has entrusted us with his mission and his spirit we are greatly privileged we are also put in a place of great responsibility because the three fold action of

God requires a three fold response from us because if God has sent Jesus Christ to be a shepherd king we need to look to Jesus as our shepherd king and that means much more than just recognizing that he is the one who fulfills God's promises it means saying to him in the quietness of your own heart yes Lord you are a shepherd I wish to be a sheep and part of your flock teach me to walk your ways and if God is committed to a two fold ministry through the remnant this is very important for the mission team and for us we need to embrace the fact that the more we are like Jesus Christ the more we will affect people around us both toward God and away from God and if God is committed to eradicating our idols we need to continually turn to him in repentance and faith and you need to examine yourself as I do this morning to see if there's anything in our hearts that we love more than him and if there is any sin and anything that clings tightly to us let us put it aside there's nothing cold and half-hearted and dispassionate about the God of the Bible he cares for you and for me and he cares for this world with a fierce and holy love and he will not tolerate an equal he will fight for us and he will fight all those things in our lives that demote him from the position of preeminence that deflect us from following him that seduce us into unbelief and

that whisper to us it's all right I encourage you today to ask him for fresh light and fresh grace and fresh strength because God will fulfill every promise he has made and that those who hope in him will never ever be disappointed so let's bow our heads in prayer our God and Father you are our shepherd king and we acknowledge you to be the Lord praise you this morning that you have fulfilled your promises and are continuing to do so we look to Jesus Christ as the good shepherd we place our faith in him we embrace the ministry and mission that you have given us to spread his knowledge elsewhere and we pray that you would indeed give us fresh light and grace and strength so that we might cling to you and to you only for the glory of your son we pray amen and we pray