

We Still Need a Good Ruler

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Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] corrupt leadership, justice not for the poor, but only for the wealthy. The culture had left its origins in God's word.

Those who were supposed to be teaching God's word had sold out. Whatever you wanted to hear, you could hear, and you could buy it as long as you had enough money.

The middle class, the poor, are being squeezed out. They were being ripped off. Their houses, their properties were being stolen. There was war.

There was fighting from outside and inside, leaving some to ask, why won't the leaders do something to help the people that they are in charge to help?

I'm not talking about anything happening in Australia. I'm not talking about anything happening in the last hundred years. I'm talking about Micah the prophet's time. He was around hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

[1 : 01] There was a leadership crisis in Judah. Those in leadership were failing God's people, and there were devastating consequences. People were yearning for a good leader.

Someone that wasn't corrupt to lead them. A leader to stand up in God's strength. Because leadership always faces corruption because we are sinful people.

It's not just the cry of Micah's generation. It's actually every period in history, including our own, that we are people who are heavily influenced by those who lead us.

The reality is Micah's time is not that different to our time. New South Wales is on fire. Our interest rates are hurting many people. People question whether our education system is failing our children.

Housing is hard for the next generation to buy into. And Sydney is divided into ethnic backgrounds and social preferences. So sometimes when we look at the leaders around us, it can lead us to question, why won't the leaders do something for the people?

[2 : 17] People in all levels of leadership are susceptible to accusations of corruption, infighting, bribery, and being influenced by outside parties.

It makes us yearn for good leadership. Someone to lead us out of this mess for a leader who can't be bought and corrupted.

Now, in one sense, it can be easy to blame those in leadership at higher levels. But the reality is that many of us are leaders too, whether we are parents or older siblings, a boss at work, even if we are just influential in our friendship group.

Many of us are leaders. And we can desire to influence and lead in the right way. Now, you might be thinking, didn't James just get up after a little Christmas video asking, why do we still need Christmas?

Isn't this supposed to be a Christmas talk? But we will see that Jesus is, of course, the leader that we are longing for. Even though we don't often see Jesus as a leader, far more often we consider him, at this time of year, Jesus is the cute little baby.

[3 : 27] He's a person. He's a saviour. But Christmas is going to help us understand what kind of leader Jesus is and how important he is.

And we're going to see that as we go through this prophecy from Micah. So Micah, he was a prophet to God's southern kingdom, the southern kingdom of Judah.

This is after the time of King David and King Solomon. In King David and King Solomon's time, Israel was united, but then it was divided into the north and into the south, the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah.

And the northern kingdom was attacked and enslaved by the Assyrians. We just saw reference to the Assyrians in the Bible reading. And during this time, the Assyrians have come down. They've

attacked and enslaved the northern kingdom.

And the southern kingdom is there shaking in their boots. The king, Hezekiah, at the time, he is worried. He is not trusting God. Instead, he decides to find some allies.

[4 : 30] He's going to go and find the Egyptians, find some other armies to bolster, because Hezekiah, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, wasn't trusting that God would protect them.

It wasn't just that the king was fearful and not trusting God, but the whole fabric of society was being torn apart. The land of Judah was the promised land. This is where God's people would be blessed when they followed God, and when they obeyed him, when they cared for the widow, when they looked after the orphan and the oppressed.

And Judah had been richly blessed. They had grown rich. And as they grew rich, it led to a callousness of heart, to theft and a disregard for God's law.

And so they start to rip each other off. As the leaders become corrupt, so too the people. Instead of working against a commercializing of culture, they give in, and they, just like today, become all about material possessions.

So the fabric of society was being destroyed. Society that was built on the care and protection of God's people, people just like them, it's being destroyed.

[5 : 44] They're eating one another. Compassionate generosity because of God's generosity to this people who He's saved out of Egypt, brought into this land, built them up. Instead of responding out of compassion and generosity to that, it just becomes, I'm the most important.

I've got to build up my little kingdom. And so the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. It starts with those in leadership, the prophets, the priests, and the rulers.

Let me read from a little earlier in Micah, from chapter 3, verse 11. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.

How could a weak or poor person ever get justice, if justice can be bought? Priests were teaching people whatever the people wanted to be taught, whatever they could be bought.

Instead of bringing God's word to people's lives, and calling them to repent and follow God, they were taking money, saying, don't worry, everything's fine. You just carry on with the way you're going, as long as you keep giving me money.

[6 : 54] Everything is all right. And the prophets, who were there to call kings to account, to warn people about their actions, well, they've become fortune tellers, reading crystal balls for dollars.

Can you imagine that if Steve, our senior minister's absence, that we, the staff team, became just a little corrupt? Just a little corrupt.

Can you imagine, who can I pick on? I'll pick on Soren. Thank you, Soren. Imagine if Soren wanted to come up and confess a sin to me, and he wanted to be encouraged that God forgives him, and he wanted some assistance and help to change his action, and I said, don't worry, brother, the only change you need is a \$50 note.

Pop it in there, and you know what, God will deal with it. Don't worry about that. Just a little bit of corruption. Don't do that, by the way. We'll confess your sin.

That part's okay. And maybe with Nick, maybe let's just say Nick, just became a little, just a little bit corrupt. Instead of choosing songs that enable us as a congregation to praise God that are connected with where we're going in the service and as a church, glorifying God, Nick instead started taking donations to the Buy Nick a New Guitar scheme.

[8 : 21] And you know, do you know what, you know, if you want to choose a song next week, you can just donate to that scheme. If you want to choose all four of the songs next week, well, there's a bumper donation price for that.

I don't see Nick shaking his head. Imagine if we just became a little bit corrupt. That would have devastating consequences.

Those in leadership of the church who were supposed to know the law and God became corrupt. And so it's no wonder that the people of Israel, of Judah, become corrupted by riches too.

From chapter 2, verse 1. Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds. At morning's light, they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

They covet fields and they seize them and houses and take them. They defraud people of their homes. They rob them of their inheritance. This is a picture of the rich getting richer. They're stealing the middle class and the poor's things.

[9 : 25] They're stealing their houses, their properties, their fields, their inheritance. Those who have something to survive on, it is all being taken by the rich. Those who have power.

This whole nation is yearning for good leadership. All those who should be leading, the prophets, the priests, the rulers, they have all become corrupt.

This is a desperate and terrible situation. It needs something drastic to happen. It's not going to be fixed with an election, the king dying, a new king coming in, or just a protest.

This needs divine intervention. As I've read about these leaders who became corrupt in Micah's time and seeing the justice system which favours those who have money, to see the rich who are stealing from the middle class and the poor, I can't help but think of the situation in many parts of this world, including Sydney.

Just like in Judah's time, we too have a heritage following the Lord. But I wonder if our culture has chased commercial and material gain and we have fled the Lord.

[10 : 46] Into this context, Micah prophesies. He calls on the people to repent with one of the most famous verses from Micah, from chapter 6, verse 8. He calls on people to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

And against those abuses of leadership, the kings who have been born into the riches who have failed, he prophesies about a ruler who would come.

He prophesies about a promised leader. From chapter 5, verse 2. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Okay, now it starts sounding like a Christmas talk. We get a word of Bethlehem. That sounds familiar. The new leader would come from Bethlehem. It's obviously Jesus.

Many people have heard of Bethlehem. What do we think when we think of the town of Bethlehem? Give me some words. Little, thank you. Oh, little town of Bethlehem. What else do we think about the town of Bethlehem?

[11 : 58] Manger. Sorry, what was the other one? Manger? Did three people just say manger at the same time? Manger. Okay, manger is the food trough of the animal that Jesus was placed in.

What else do we think about Bethlehem? Yeah, Jesus' birth, sorry. Shepherds. Busy. Busy. Yep, yeah, it's very busy. So when the census was taken, Bethlehem is full of people.

And so we have a picture of what Bethlehem is. You know, next week we'll see a bit more about Bethlehem. Come up four o'clock for our Christmas carols to find out more about what happens in Bethlehem.

But we know the story of Bethlehem. We know the nativity scene. We drive past it. It's on people's houses if you've been Christmas-like looking. But the people of Micah's time didn't really know anything about Bethlehem.

This is not a picture that Micah is presenting. Bethlehem was a little-known town. It's not even mentioned in the book of Joshua where he lists all of the towns.

[13 : 01] It's not even in the list of the towns. This is an unimportant backwater town that had little significance. Even Micah says that they are small among the clans of Judah.

But out of this insignificant, know-nothing town would come a ruler. Not born into riches like the rest of Israel's rulers.

He would come in humility. And we get this really interesting phrase. Whose origins are from of old. From ancient times.

This is a really interesting phrase. It has connections with the historic kings. So it has connections with King David who was from Bethlehem. But it's also used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God himself as God who was from ancient times as in from everlasting.

And so Micah could be alluding to the fact that this expected ruler is going to be a supernatural leader. That that is what is needed into this corrupt and desperate time.

[14 : 08] God himself to come and lead. Micah continues to describe what this ruler looks like in verse 4. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

Again, like King David he would come and be a shepherd for the people. Strong and fit unflinching in leadership against all of those who would come and attack him.

He would stand under every pressure and peril. He will be resolute making sure that God's people aren't fleeced again but fed. Cared for not caged.

And he is fully devoted to following the Lord. Verse 4 again the second half. And they will live securely for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

Under this leader God's people will live securely. Security is not found in money or technology or status. It's found trusting in the shepherd who guides his sheep.

[15:15] And his territory is not just going to be Israel. It's not going to be just the Middle East. It is going to go to the ends of the earth. Again, this is lifting people's eyes to a ruler not just being the ruler of Israel but a supernatural leader of the whole world.

And Micah describes this ruler as that he would be our peace. It's not that he would bring peace but that he embodies peace.

He is peace himself. Micah has complete confidence for the future that when this ruler comes all will be well.

When this leader is in charge God's people will find a new unity. They will go from infighting and corruption and theft and bribery to peace and security.

Micah builds up such an awesome picture of this coming king. He would be Davidic as in he would be like King David. He would care and protect and lead and rule in purity in God's majesty with God.

[16:26] This is a very different picture of the leaders that they had. A different humble king. People are yearning for that.

I think this is one of the main reasons why Donald Trump was elected president. Now I'm sure that there are many people here who are far more into politics than me and know far more about this topic than me but it seems to me that one of the reasons why Trump was elected president because he was so different and he certainly is a different person but he appealed to the working class who felt downtrodden.

He saw that the leadership of the United States was corrupt and so when he came Trump was promising that he would get rid of corruption and that he would make America great again.

No wonder this was appealing to so many people. People who see corruption in leadership somebody comes along and says you're going to get rid of the corruption yes I'm for that you're going to make this country great well I've always wanted this country yes let's do that.

But Trump is only a man a very sinful man whether or not he makes America great time will tell but even if he does it's only for a short period of time.

[17:49] In Micah's time and in our time we need more than just a strong leader we need a good leader. And this is who Jesus is.

He is the leader who came to not just make one country great he came to make the world right again. This is why we need Christmas because it shows us what kind of leader Jesus is.

Three things three characteristics that this part of Micah helps us to understand who Jesus is.

Three things that he is humble that he works from God's strength and that he knows our situation. Firstly he is humble. He doesn't come like these expected kings. He doesn't come to riches he comes humbly. He's born in that backwater little town of Bethlehem.

He's born yes from the line of kings but he is from ancient times. He is from God's line. He who is eternal has been made temporary.

[18:54] He is in a physical body bound by time. And so Jesus comes in humility. He didn't come to take, to rule, to rule and then fleece his own pockets.

He came, he didn't come to steal and take, he came to obey God. And to become the king of the world but only by obeying God through his death and resurrection.

Jesus knows who he is, he knows his place and unlike many other leaders he's not grasping for more and more power. He knows that God will give him power at the right time.

So Jesus comes in humility. Second, the second person of the Trinity doesn't come with all the pomp and ceremony of any other ruler.

You know whenever a foreign dignitary comes to a country, how much security and effort there is that goes into making sure their arrival is just right. I really, for some reason, really enjoy the royals at the moment.

[20:02] Prince Harry, the whole, his marriage, I really enjoy that. But that is so much pomp and ceremony. Jesus doesn't come like that. He comes to a place that he would rule as a weak little baby whose parents were a tradie and an unmarried teenager.

He is dependent upon God's power and as Micah prophesied, he would lead and shepherd us in God's strength and not his own. And because he is trusting in somebody else's strength, not his

own, Jesus is totally incorruptible.

He never sinned, he couldn't be bought, he couldn't be bribed, he didn't give in to sexual temptation when offered. Jesus doesn't lead to get rich and to give in to those who could bribe him.

Jesus leads in God's strength and it just gives him this wonderful ability to be incorruptible and be the leader who we need. And finally, Jesus knows what our situation is like.

He actually came and dwelt as a person. He knows our situation. He came as a human to save, to redeem and lead us.

[21 : 17] He can empathise with us with our pain and our problems. He is not a leader who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was not sent to the best schools. He was not on a fast track to political high places.

He was born in humility and he was lifted high in his death on the cross. Have you ever seen the television show Undercover Boss?

This is a series of TV shows where they take someone very high in an organisation and they put them down working at KFC, working drive through, and it's often eye opening for the boss because they go, oh, I didn't really know the plight of my people, I didn't really know how hard it was to do this job, I didn't realise what a terrible boss I was, you know, I really like this show, often the bosses become better and they get to help their people.

Christmas reminds us that Jesus is not a distant leader who is ruling in some CEO of some high tower off in some business park.

Jesus is not a ruler who is ruling from far away who does not know what it's like. He knows our issues intimately. Unlike Trump, Jesus has fulfilled the promise to make the world great again, to make it right again.

[22 : 44] Not by making himself look great, but by his death and resurrection. He has ascended to the throne above all thrones. He has brought us back into relationship with God.

Jesus is the only one that can be trusted to rule. He's not able to be bought, bribed, or beaten. He has triumphed and in his victory he leads us and he feeds us.

And he is now in control of the world. So how do we respond to those in leadership? Much like Micah, we can call them to account for their behavior and call them to model their leadership on something greater.

for Micah himself, he called the leaders to repent and to turn back. And for Hezekiah, the king of Judah, Hezekiah did repent.

He did not go with those armies that he initially decided to go with. He trusted in God. And Judah was saved. Assyria did not get through the gates into Jerusalem.

[23 : 56] But it was only temporary. Other leaders would come and they failed. But we can be calling our leaders to account. We should be following Paul's advice to his protegee, Timothy.

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, he calls Timothy to do this very thing. He says, I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people.

for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. So just like Micah, we should be praying for those in leadership.

Because leaders do have a great influence on us and on the direction of our country. Be praying for Australia. Be praying for what is happening more broadly in the world and for our leaders here at church.

For me, I find it very easy to ignore what is happening in politics in Australia. I'm not sure if you enjoy Australian politics, but I find it easy to just ignore it.

[25 : 05] But let me encourage you not to do that. Let me encourage you to contact your local member, to contact your ministers of parliament, to implore them to see justice done, and to get rid of corruption.

Scott Morrison, our Prime Minister, came out this week and said that he wanted Australia to be leaders in technology and security.

And I think that's great. I think that's a wonderful thing. I think it's a good thing to want to be leaders in the world like that. But I would love if Scott Morrison came out and said, we want to be leaders in the world of compassion.

we want to figure out how to care for our refugees in a loving and generous way. Wouldn't it be great if our leaders were doing that?

Let me encourage you to be praying for them. Contact them and tell them that you're praying for them. Scott Morrison is a Christian and I believe he would be very encouraged to find out that you were praying for him.

[26 : 09] Looking more broadly across the world, we see the situation in Hong Kong. It is a terrible situation at the moment. I'm not sure if you're across it but there are large protests going on and it seems to be at a deadlock.

Regardless of whether you are for those who are protesting or whether you are against those who are protesting, this is a painful situation that is not going to be fixed very easily.

Every day it goes on, it seems to be deteriorating further. I don't know what the leaders of either side are like, I don't know whether they're corrupt, I have no knowledge of it, but I also don't have any idea how it can be reconciled.

As Paul reminds us in his letter to Timothy, we should be praying that God would intercede on behalf of these leaders. So pray for the government in Hong Kong and in China.

Pray for those who are leading the protests. even what's happening in Europe at the moment, I'm not sure if you're across the Brexit deal, it seems there is just instability in large parts of our world at the moment.

[27 : 25] Be praying for them. For us locally here as a church, Steve, our senior minister, is on a sabbatical at the moment. He has taken some time out of his normal work to work on his spiritual, mental, and physical health.

And for us as a church, it is so important that he is a leader who is spiritually well, so that he does not become like the leaders in Micah's time, so that he is not trusting in his strength but in God's strength.

When situations are desperate, when political leaders fail, it is a painful reminder of why Jesus is so necessary. He is the leader who is incorruptible, who can't be bribed, bought, or beaten.

And he is powerful. So we shouldn't put an unnecessary amount of trust in the leaders of this world.

They will come and go, they will do good things and bad, our political leaders will put in new taxes and they will cut taxes, but Jesus is the only one who has climbed to the top of the leadership ladder by obeying God perfectly and dying for us.

He paid the cost of our sin and our shame and he now sits above every throne and he will return in glory. Christmas reminds us of the kind of leader that Israel is desperate for.

[28 : 54] It reminds us of the leader that we are still yearning for. No one is able to care and to lead and to guide us like Jesus is. So when we put our trust in him, we will not be let down.

Let me pray for us. We will Thank you.