

A People Purified

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Micah chapter 5. That's page 730 in the Pew Bible. We will have Micah 5 on the screen above when I read it in just a minute, but let me encourage you to have it open before you as we walk through it together. Micah chapter 5, we're going to pick up in verse 4. If you're joining us for the first time this morning, let me welcome you. We're glad you're here. Our practice at Trinity is to take a book of the Bible or to take a section of a book and just teach through it section by section, week by week. So if you're here celebrating graduation or commencement, this won't necessarily be a graduation-themed sermon, but we trust it will be spiritually edifying for you nonetheless. So let me pray, and then I'll read our text for us.

Lord, what a powerful prayer we have just sung that you would speak to us. God, we confess that as Christians we often take it for granted that you are a speaking God, that you have spoken many times and in many ways through the prophets and through the apostles, and you have spoken in these last days through your Son, and you've given us your word, inspired and preserved to continue to speak to us. So Holy Spirit, we pray that you would come as we read and as we consider this text, that it would be your voice that we hear and your word that we heed, and God, your image into which we are conformed, that we might display your glory and praise your name as a church and as a people. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

All right, Micah chapter 5, we're going to pick up in verse 4 and read through the end of the chapter. 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. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.

And they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with a sword and the land of Nimrod at its entrances, and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

[2 : 3 4] Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man.

And 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.

Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off. And in that day, declares the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you, and will destroy your chariots, and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds.

And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes. And I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands.

And I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities. And in anger and wrath, I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey. So if you were here last week, you'll remember that the context of the passage that I just read is this.

[3 : 48] The context is this. God's people are in crisis. They're on the verge of defeat. But God promises that his long-awaited king will come, the shepherd king from the line of David, who, as verse 4 says, will come and will make his people secure, and who will himself be their peace.

So the context is this message of great good news that God is going to come, that the shepherd king is going to come and rescue and preserve and be peace for his people.

And we saw last week how this Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem in David's royal line, and who came and who won a security and a peace for his people that was far beyond anything that we could have imagined.

Because Christ came and triumphed over humanity's greatest enemies, sin and death and judgment. In the light of those great crises, those great distresses, our greatest enemies, Christ has come, and he is indeed our peace, eternally and forever for all who believe in him.

Our sins are forgiven. We are reconciled to God. We who were enemies have been made adopted children in God's family. But then what?

[5 : 12] Is that where the story ends? What happens after we believe? What happens after we come to receive this peace that is Jesus himself?

Do we just sort of wait around, hoping God will come again and just wait? You know, there have been times in the history of the church where we haven't really painted that picture very well.

There has been a lot of focus on becoming a Christian, on conversion, on belief, and that's been good. But at times there's been a lack of focus on being a Christian. What does life look like after I come to believe?

What should I expect the Christian life to be like? And this lack of focus or clarity has often been unfortunate. Because when we look at the New Testament, we see that the call to follow Christ, the call to follow this shepherd king that Micah foresaw, this call to follow Christ, is a great adventure.

It's the rediscovery of our true humanity, of our purpose as God's image bearers, and our purpose as God's kingdom people. And I think that our passage from Micah today is about this very thing.

[6 : 35] Now, Micah is using the language of his day. He's using descriptions and images that his audience in the 8th century B.C. would understand under the Old Covenant.

But Micah is describing what will happen after the king comes. When the king comes and wins his victory and becomes our peace, then what?

Well, in our passage, Micah describes two things. First, he tells us that the reign of the Messiah extends through us. And second, that the reign of the Messiah extends in us.

In other words, Christ advances his kingdom through us, and Christ advances his kingdom in us. So let's look at how Micah describes the first in verses 5 through 9, the first half of our passage.

Christ extending his kingdom through us. Now, notice in verses 5 and 6 that it is the people themselves who participate in the pushing back of the enemy.

[7 : 41] When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, Micah says, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men. That phrase, seven shepherds and eight princes, it's a figure of speech.

It's a figure of speech as if to say, in that time there will be more than enough. There will be more than ample leadership. There will be more than ample participation from God's people to meet the call and to join their king on the field of battle.

The picture is that the Messiah, the king, he won't sort of leave his people behind. They won't be forgotten. They won't be relegated to the sidelines.

But they will be caught up to participate in his reign. He will make them his fellow regents. And they will join him in the advance of his liberating reign of peace.

Now, as we come to the New Testament, as this passage finds its fulfillment in the New Testament and in the New Testament, new covenant people of God, we know from reading the New Testament that the real enemies of God's people are not flesh and blood.

[8 : 48] You know, the Assyrian in Micah 5 is sort of this picture of the ultimate enemy coming against us. But we know as we come to the New Testament that our real enemies are not flesh and blood. We aren't engaged in a geopolitical struggle.

Our battle is against sin and death, against principalities and powers, as the Apostle Paul will say. And our warfare is not waged with swords or with guns, but by the Spirit of God, through the Word of God and prayer.

It's a movement of liberation, setting people free from sin and death, setting people free from the things that have bound them and captured them and enslaved them so that they might be free to live for God as God's people.

That's what the New Testament pictures as our great spiritual battle. But this advance of Christ's new covenant kingdom through his Spirit to all nations is still happening through the people of Christ, just as Micah saw it.

When we believe in Jesus the Messiah, we're swept up into his story, where each of us has a part to play. When the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again through the preaching of the gospel and through faith, he not only unites us to Christ and floods our hearts with his peace, as Micah says, he will be our peace, but the Spirit also equips us with gifts, gifts to build up the church and to participate in the advance of Christ's kingdom in the world.

[10 : 22] And as this kingdom goes forth through the people, what is it we should expect? Well, in Micah 7 through 9, Micah gives us two images in verses 7 through 9, two images of what it will be like when the people of the king, this redeemed remnant, are spread throughout the nations in the midst of many peoples.

Which, by the way, is exactly what the church is today, right? Spread throughout all nations and all peoples. Micah says, at that time, God's people, on the one hand, will be like dew, like showers on the grass.

Imagine living in the arid, dry climate of Israel, of the Middle East, but then waking up early in the morning, and there's dew on the ground.

There's showers on the grass. We felt some of those showers yesterday, didn't we? Because it just downpoured all day, right? But man, in the midst of a dry and weary land, Micah's saying there's going to be cool, even refreshing water to be found.

And that dew, that shower, it's going to be God's people, spread throughout the nations. It's going to be you and me, spread throughout the nations.

[11 : 46] Micah says that's what the remnant's going to be like. They're going to be a blessing. Jesus, of course, will say something very similar. He will look at his disciples and say, you're the light of the world.

You're the salt of the earth. You are meant to be a blessing. The Father sends his rain on the just and the unjust. So it's going to be with you. You will love your neighbor as yourself.

In fact, you will even love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. So on the one hand, the people will be like dew. They'll be like a blessing. But on the other hand, Micah says, they'll be like a young lion.

Amidst the unbelieving nations, the scattered people of God will often be perceived as a threat, as a danger, as a curse.

And indeed, there have been times when the growth of Christianity has led to social upheaval. You remember the book of Acts when the gospel was spreading in the city of Ephesus?

[13 : 02] So many believers were leaving their pagan lifestyles to become followers of Jesus that the local economy was being upended. Because the Ephesian economy revolved around temple worship and shrines, and there were silversmiths who made little trinkets that they would sell and make a lot of money, and it sort of made the wheels of the city turn.

But as the number of Christians grew, and they forsook their pagan practices and became followers of the one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, suddenly it was a threat to business as usual.

It disrupted the local economy so much so that some of the silversmiths in town instigated a riot to try to get the Christian leaders thrown out of town. In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul described the experience of Christians in this way.

He says, Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession. What a wonderful picture. Being led by the king in a procession of celebration.

And Paul says, And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

[14 : 26] And then Paul says this, To one, a fragrance from death to death. To the other, a fragrance from life to life.

Paul was experiencing and his fellow Christians were experiencing what Micah foresaw, that the people of the Messiah would be both a blessing and a curse.

They'd be the aroma of life and at times the aroma of death. They would be loved and they would be hated. Now at the end of this section in verse 9 and at the end of the chapter in verse 15, Micah assures the people that they need not ultimately fear.

That the enemies of God's people would not have the last word. That God would be their perfect protector and the ultimate judge. But in the meantime, as they participate in the advance of God's kingdom, they must expect to be both a blessing and a curse.

To be like dew and like a young lion. So how might we apply all of this to us today? Well first, if it is true that God has a role for each of us in this kingdom work, and if it is true that this new covenant kingdom advances not through earthly weapons or earthly strategies but through the word of God, then all of us as followers of Jesus must be eager to immerse ourselves in that word of God.

[15 : 58] We must become more ardent students of scripture. Reading it, meditating on it, memorizing it. We must make a practice of saturating our minds and hearts with good biblical teaching.

How else, as we are scattered among the nations, how else are we going to recognize God's ways and discern God's will and really inhabit this story into which he's called us each to play such an integral role?

How else are we going to do that if not through a deep and constant engagement with God's word? Imagine being called into a theater troupe, right? Being called to play a part in a play.

And the director hands you the script and you say, thanks, but I got this. And you walk out onto the stage and you have no idea what your part is. You have no idea what the story is, right?

Instead, God hands us the script and says, this is the play. This is how you're to live this out in the midst of the nations. So soak yourself in it, immerse yourself in it.

[17 : 08] And then when there come those times when you have to maybe improvise because there isn't an exact verse that you can quote, you'll be so saturated in the story and the ways and the word of God that you'll be able to do it faithfully.

So as we face the kingdom task of our own day, we must recommit ourselves to a deep and joyful saturation in the Bible. But second, as we face the kingdom task of our own day, we have to be, we have to be humble enough to bless and at the same time bold enough to offend.

We have to be due and we have to be lions at the same time. And of course, humanly speaking, that sounds impossible, right?

Most people are either one or the other, you know? You have, you probably have friends, you probably have friends who are very gentle and very humble and they'll always agree with you and they'll always do something good for you even if you've treated them poorly, right?

Then you have other friends who are just like, they're always telling you the truth and they're always stepping on your toes and you like them for it but you kind of don't like them for it, you know? And then you realize like, oh my goodness, I'm probably one of those.

[18 : 18] I'm probably one of those too. You know, I wonder which one I am, you know? Most people kind of humanly are one or the other and the truth is most churches and most communities usually kind of tip one way or the other.

Right? We're either really good at boldness or really good at humility. We're really good in a willingness to bless or we're really good at a willingness to offend. But Micah says, you'll need to be both.

You'll need to be both. And that's going to be the sign, one of the signs, that you're really the people of the Messiah, of the shepherd king. So how do we get to that human impossibility of being humble enough to bless and yet bold enough to offend?

Well, the reality is we get there through a constant engagement and an ongoing internalization of the grace and peace that Jesus is for us.

Because the humility comes when we grasp deeper and deeper and deeper that we are sinners saved by sheer grace. That Christ's love and mercy extended to us when we did nothing to deserve it.

[19 : 35] In fact, just the opposite. We defended God and lived as if we wanted nothing to do with Him. God supports our life with every second, every moment we're awake and alive and in being is because of God's sheer goodness and power and mercy.

And yet we live 99.99% of our days completely ignoring that fact. And yet God sends His Son in mercy to love us and to die for us and to forgive us and to welcome us home when we've done nothing to deserve it.

And so that makes us incredibly humble because we know that it's only by God's grace that we're saved. We can't work our way out of that debt.

But at the same time the grace of Christ also makes us bold. It humbles us but it also makes us bold like lions. Why? Because as we come to know God's love and acceptance and His favor suddenly when we come to know God's acceptance and rest in it and relish it that frees us from the fear of losing the world's acceptance.

We have the most important acceptance and favor in the universe. If the King has made me His own and given me His favor what difference does it make if I happen to lose the world's favor?

[21 : 16] It may be costly but I have riches that cannot compare. And so we mustn't ever lose sight of the grace of the gospel where this whole passage starts He will be our peace.

That's the only thing that's going to make us humble enough to bless and at the same time bold enough to be willing to offend. So this is Micah's first answer to what happens after we believe.

when we come to participate in the Messiah's peace through faith we also become participants in the advance of His kingdom. The kingdom of the Messiah advances through us.

But the second part is this the kingdom of the Messiah advances in us. This is verses 10 through 15. Now before we look at the main point of those verses it's good to see again how verse 15 the last verse of our chapter like verse 9 is a reminder that God will ultimately protect His people and God will ultimately be the perfect judge of all.

And you know even though that strikes our cultural sensibilities pretty harshly God being the perfect judge it's actually good news because if God is the perfect judge if God is the judge and that means I don't have to be I don't have to be the one who's trying to right every wrong.

[22 : 47] I can follow Christ faithfully and actually forgive and actually be merciful knowing that God will one day put everything to right. But this is also sobering news for those who are outside of Christ.

And verse 15 is an urgent call to flee to Christ and find forgiveness and peace with God. If that's you today if you're outside of Christ then don't delay.

There is full forgiveness and mercy for everyone who turns and trusts in Christ no matter what your background no matter what your long list of failures and guilt or shame is.

There's full forgiveness and mercy for everyone who turns and trusts in Christ. The judgment for sin fell on Him at the cross so that all who trust in Him need never face the judgment their sins deserve.

And God offers this forgiveness free of charge to you today. So believe in Christ and be saved. That's where our passage ends.

[23 : 55] But the bulk of this second half of verses 10 through 14 the second half of our text the bulk of it is about what God is going to do in His redeemed people.

In other words the second half of our passage is largely about how God plans to purify His redeemed people to make them increasingly holy to increasingly transform them into His image and likeness.

And this happens Micah says as God cuts off or casts away the things that the people depend on instead of Him. In verses 10 and 11 God says He's going to cut off their dependence on military might on chariots on strongholds on citadels I'm going to cut those things away.

And then in verse 12 God says He's going to cut off their dependence on fortune tellers and sorcerers and trying to control or manipulate their surroundings through their human machinations. He says I'm going to remove that and cut that off from you.

And then in verses 13 through 14 God says He'll cut off their dependence on idols and carved images. He says I'm going to remove those things from your midst. And you know as you look at the Old Testament these were the constant pitfalls for the Old Testament people of God.

[25 : 12] They were constantly tempted to run to military power or to run to false gods to protect them and keep them safe. But God wants His people to rely on Him alone and He wants them to be set apart from the other nations to be different from how they operate.

All the other nations operated along those lines. Let's build a big military and let's build a bunch of statues to God's and then we're going to be safe and then we're going to be victorious. But God says that's not what my people are going to be like.

God wants them to be set apart from the other nations to be distinct which is what the word holy means. It means set apart distinct. Other nations depend on chariots and citadels not God's people.

Other nations depend on idol worship engraving images not God's people. They would be different. They would be set apart. They would be holy like God is holy.

You see when we become Christians when we enter into a saving relationship with Jesus the Messiah it is true that all of our sins are forgiven. The penalty for our sins is taken away because of Christ's death on the cross.

[26 : 28] But the truth is is that many of our sinful tendencies and patterns and habits still remain. And God's plan is to remake us and refashion us over time through his Holy Spirit to make us ultimately more like Christ.

Our sins are forgiven but now he's actually going to work that out in us and through us by his Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ in how we think and how we act and how we speak and how ultimately what we love and what we depend on.

Jesus Christ lived his life in complete dependence on nothing but the love of his heavenly Father. He lived in complete dependence on the love of his heavenly Father.

The love of the Father was completely and utterly sufficient for him. So much so that even in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was faced with the terrible prospect of the cross Christ was willing to say but not my will Father your will be done.

And this is where God wants to bring us to the place of utter freedom and utter liberty in God's love dependent on nothing else so that we might be able to say from the depths of our being God thy will be done.

[27 : 52] I'm depending on nothing else but you. So brothers and sisters how has God recently been at work in your life to make you holy?

And how are you pursuing this holiness? Are there obvious sins that you need to confess and get rid of to cut off? Do you need the help of fellow Christians or a support group to fight a sinful addiction or habit?

If you have sins you need to confess confess them friends. If you have sins where you need help reach out for help. Come talk to me or any of the elders and we can point you in the right direction so that you can pursue this path of becoming more liberated more free more holy like Christ.

Perhaps you've been in a season of change or of loss. perhaps it feels like there are things that God has been cutting off or cutting away from your life.

No doubt those things have been painful. But you know God will often use these painful seasons of cutting away to produce a deeper spiritual growth in us.

[29 : 16] Remember Jesus' words in John 15? John 15 Jesus says I'm the true vine you're the branches if we abide in him we bear much fruit and Jesus says as we bear that fruit God is going to continue to prune us.

He's going to continue to prune us why? So that we might become even more fruitful and that pruning that cutting away is never easy or joyful at the time.

Sometimes it feels like a piece of us is literally being taken out. But the result is a deeper dependence on God and a deeper intimacy with him.

And as our roots push deeper and deeper into God and God alone we find ourselves from the inside out being more and more like Jesus more and more who God created us to be.

You see friends this is how much the Father loves us. He gives his son for us to reconcile us to himself to be our peace and then he continues to pursue us never resting in that pursuit until we begin to reflect more and more of his character of his wisdom of his grace of his glory of his joy.

[30 : 41] And so here is Micah's vision for the people for the people who've come to know the Messiah and his peace. What's the story?

What's the journey that God has for us? God doesn't just want to advance his kingdom through us. He wants his kingdom to be embodied in us. He wants to purify us and make us holy. He wants to make us like his son.

And isn't this the greatest privilege and joy that we could imagine? not just to be used by God but to become living images of God's own character to become like God.

To have everything false and everything destructive cut away and to have our true self emerge. We live in a time when we all want to find that authentic self don't we?

And God says I'm going to help you find that. It's not going to be the path you think. It's going to be the path through the grace of Christ for you. Cutting away the things that are false and destructive.

[31 : 50] So that the self that's created by God in Christ Jesus that self that fully known fully loved fully free self can begin to emerge.

Where you'll be free not just from sin but you'll be free for God. free for God as Michael will say in the chapter to come free to do justice free to love kindness and free to walk humbly with our God.

Let's pray together. Father we ask that you would do this work through us and in us that you've portrayed and pictured through Micah's prophecy.

Lord help us to take joy in the work that you're doing through us. Help us to find deep joy in the work that you're doing in us.

Lord and help us as a church to be doing these things together in the fellowship of this family that you've brought us into with Christ as our head as our good shepherd.

[33 : 04] Help us to open up our hands to you God and say thy will be done and then to find our place in this great and this thrilling story of redemption that you've made us a part of.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.