Looking forward to the coming of Christ

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Date: 11 December 2022

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles with you, would you turn to Micah, Micah chapter 5.

So Micah chapter 5, 8, 7, after Jonah.
You think, well, hang on, where's Jonah? Well, there is a very simple way of finding books in your Bible, and that is turn to the middle, keep turning left, and you'll get to a page called Contents.
And as you go down into the Contents, you'll be able to find all the books that you want. Listen, pastors are under extreme pressure because they have to get to the book before anyone in the congregation does.
You know, it's unbelievable pressure. You know, lamentations. It's a sign of holiness, you know, that if you get to the book before I do, that's a worrying sign.
[1:32] No, that's not true, by the way. So Micah chapter 5, we'll read the entire chapter, then we'll pray. And if you can remember, if you can remember the psalm that we read of how the servants cry out to God for mercy this morning and how the maid servant looks to her mistress and the servant looks to his master and we look to the hand of God for mercy, then Micah chapter 5 is going to be that much easier to understand.

So Micah chapter 5, 15 verses. Now must your troops, O daughter of troops, siege is the land against us. With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the neck.
But you, O Bethlehem, Epaphras, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient of days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to his people Israel, and he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord and 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 places, then we will rise against seven shepherds and eight princes of men.
[3:14] They shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod and its entrances. And he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, that showers like showers on the grass, which delay not from a man, nor wait for the children of man.
And a 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 the 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 your enemies shall be cut off. And in that day declares the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you, and you will destroy your chariots.
And I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down your strongholds. And I will cut off sorcerers, sorceries from your land, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes.
[4:24] 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. A striking passage, and one which at least we're familiar with the first part.
Let's pray, and then we can come to God's word together. Gracious God and Father, we are a people in need of mercy, though we recognize that we have received great mercy in the person of Jesus Christ.

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We also recognize, Father, that in him we dwell secure, and that in him our peace is known. We ask, Father God, this morning that we would recognize that we dwell secure, but we only dwell secure in Christ.
We recognize, Father God, that we live in a world that is still corrupt. And the second advent, the second coming of Christ, will take care of all of it. But we recognize that the wheat and the tares grow together, and they will continue until the harvest.
[5:48] So we would ask, Father God, that as we listen to this message from Micah, and what it means concerning Christ and his coming, that we would recognize that because of Christ, we belong to him and have his peace and dwell secure.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know how much of the Bible you have been reading lately, or how much of the Bible you read on a daily basis, or a weekly basis, or whatever it may be.
But it is common for us to read some books more than others, and therefore we forget the meaning of the message of what these other books are actually teaching.
Here in Micah, we have the backdrop of the nation of Israel. We're to demonstrate to the world what it looks like to be ruled by God. And the church is to do exactly the same.
We are to demonstrate to the world what it means to be ruled by God. Now, the whole world is ruled by God. But those who demonstrate and understand the authoritative rule of Christ over us now are the church and the nation of Israel to do the same.
[7:09] And therefore, the sort of corruption and the distress and the destruction and the societal breakdown that you see in the land should not be present in the church, but unfortunately it is.

And this is a sad reflection because how are we supposed to demonstrate to the world what life under God looks like if the church is as broken as the world?
It shouldn't be. Now, we hold to such things as the definitive sanctification that we have in Romans 6. In other words, now you're a Christian. It really does make a big difference to your life.
You are a transformed person. You're no longer like what you were. You are a new creation. But too often we tend to forget that because there's just so much brokenness in the church like there is in the world.
And so how can we demonstrate to the world when our reflection is very similar to the world's? And we may have hope, and we certainly have hope, but it's got to make a difference.
[8:16] Now, of course, when Micah speaks this message, he's speaking exactly into the same type of context. Many people in Israel suffer under, as it were, following the wrong sort of things, fortune tellers.

You know, there is a great desire, or there used to be a great desire of people growing up, what is the will of the Lord? As though I need to know what the future is so that I can make the best decisions going forward.
You're not meant to know the future. In fact, fortune tellers, those who actually go out of their way to tell the future, and the Christians who read their horoscopes, for instance, I mean, that level of wickedness is awful.
But this is the type of thing where the Christian, not being as well-educated as he should be, falls into the same errors that they did in the past.
And so as we come to the incarnation of Christ and what it means for Christ to come, we really have to understand what it means for Christ to have come. What difference does it actually make?
[9:22] Because the church is the witness to the fact that Christ has come, that we have a king, that the Messiah has come, that we are saved, and therefore we have a savior, and we have a ruler.

But how many of us live as though we live under a ruler? As though we are doing as we are told every single day. How many of us live that way?
As though we are doing as we are told. Or how many of us have got the wrong idea of freedom and think, well, now that I'm free in Christ, I can do whatever I please.
And so what we have here is primarily the true definition of freedom, but also what it means for Christ to have come. Secondly, we also understand that when the disciples ask Jesus, show me the Father, show us the Father, they are echoing the conviction of every heart that seeks after God.
The one thing that any person who has an ounce of conviction about God wants, more than anything else, is the conviction that Christ is present.

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[10:36] And too many Christians live with the feeling of a distant Jesus. Jesus is there when I go to church, but throughout the week, I'm not so sure.

And this feeling of living with a distant Jesus begs the question, well, what is causing that distance? What's causing that sense of distance between you and Christ?
And of course, many Christians just don't have an answer for it. They know that there is a distance. They feel that there is a distance. But they cannot really give an answer to why that distance exists. That's sad, but it's true. And of course, these things must be addressed. Jesus said, of course, that if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.
In other words, that if you really understand who I am, then your search for God the Father ceases because I am exactly like the Father. In fact, the letter of Hebrews says that there's no need for a final, any more revelation.
[11:47] God doesn't need to continue speaking because everything that needs to be said and revealed is said and revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the perfect revelation of God on earth, the exact imprint.

And so it really is a case of like father, like son. If you want to know what the father is like, look at the son. Now, that's true on a human level to a degree. It's not true in all cases because on an earthly level, you can have an ungodly father that gives birth to a son who then becomes a Christian.
And therefore, the likeness may be limited to perhaps certain physical features, certain personality traits, but there's going to be a whole load of transformation because the Christian is a new person. And that's probably the very illustration that I want you to hold on to because the like father, like son now means that we should be like God our father rather than an unconverted earthly father, so to speak.
Even if your father is a godly father, yes, it's good to reflect his godliness, but we are ultimately to reflect the godliness of God himself.
[13:03] And so Micah's message is to a people who perhaps are not too far away from where we are when it comes to living with a feeling of a distant God, with a distant Jesus, in the sense that the very people that they are surrounded by who should be promoting and witnessing what it means to live under the rule of God have actually gone astray.

And of course, we all know that mimetic rivalry, the 10th commandment, none of us actually do our own will. We cannot help but imitate. And there, of course, who we imitate leads to either prosperity, spiritual prosperity, or it leads to corruption.
And so what Micah is saying is, look, when Christ comes, all of these issues are going to be addressed by him. Everything will be addressed by Christ.
And so as we think of the incarnation this morning, I want you to recognize that the person who comes is a ruler. He is the Messiah. He is the Savior. He is the King. He is a ruler.
And therefore, what defines the people of God and a ruler is that we look as though we are ruled. Not oppressively, but in love and in mercy and in grace.
[14:27] But we are ruled. We live under a ruler. We follow the leader. We do as we are told, or put it biblically, we live obediently to God.

In other words, there is a marked difference between us and the world. There's a clear difference between us and the world. And the clear difference is that we live under a ruler obeying his rule. And the world doesn't. And so the church then becomes a very powerful witness to what it looks like, to what the world would look like if it was ruled by God and everyone obeyed.
Now, the world is ruled by God entirely. But what the church offers or what the church brings to the world is the witness of what it looks like when people obey. The trouble is the church isn't even there.
And that's a sign of great sadness. But again, the wheat and the tares grow together in the same way that not all Israel were Israel. Not everyone in the church is Christian.
[15:30] You know, Bishop J.C. Rowell said, you'll never have a pure church. The wheat grows along with the tares. They grow side by side. And so it's not a case that the visible church is the true church.

Everyone who is in the visible church will be in the true church. But not everyone in the visible church is the true church. Because the wheat and the tares grow side by side.

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And so what Mike has given to these people is clarity and a sense of hope of that separation, that distinction of Christ coming and sorting out the corruption, the spiritual corruption, the social corruption.
And he will come and he will rule his people. He will be the one who brings peace. And so if you're asking the question, what does it mean for us to celebrate the incarnation of Christ?
Well, it means that you are promoting to the world or proclaiming to the world, I acknowledge, I acknowledge with my whole life the ruler of all.
[16:39] That's what you're saying, I acknowledge with my whole life the ruler of all. And of course, it would be then quite contradictory for you to hold worldly views in your speech because the person would then immediately be able to tell, well, no, you don't.

You don't. You do in words, but you don't in anything that follows. So it really does matter that there is a life consistent with the words that we actually speak.
And so in verse 2, when we hear that famous verse, the verse that we know so well, that the ruler of Israel, whose origin is from old, from the ancient of days, we sing it, but not too many of us understand what it means.
And what it essentially means is that when the ruler comes, he will be, his rule will be as consistent as his character. Or rather, he will rule and his rulership will be shaped by his character.
In other words, if you want to know how he's going to rule, look at what his character is like. God is a God of love. He's a God of mercy. He's a God of justice. He's a God of judgment.
[17:49] He's a God of all of these things. And so when we look at his character and we look at what he's like, we're then able to know how God will rule. And if I can put it in perhaps a more pithy way or a slightly simple way so that you can understand, it would be this, that when Christ turns up, you have no idea who you're dealing with.

You have no idea who you're up against if you turn against him. He is the ruler of all. He is able to deal with all. And therefore, understand that this is one who comes to make peace, not who comes to wage war.
And therefore, make sure that you make peace with God. Or you receive the peace that God is making with you in the person of Christ. You cannot afford to meet God without belonging to Christ. You cannot afford to meet God without belonging to Christ. God will not allow you to reject his son and then receive you at a later date. That's not how God operates.
And so it's really important that as we think about the Christmas period and we think about sharing the message, I don't know when the last time was that you actually shared the gospel.
[19:07] And I don't mean your testimony. Your testimony is not the gospel. But I don't know when the last time was that you had a very clear and definitive witness of what Christianity is where the person can go away saying, right, I don't misunderstand.

They may not understand everything but they don't misunderstand the very things that you have said. To actually say that Christ rules my whole life doesn't sound like freedom.
It doesn't sound like the oppression has ended. It doesn't sound like I'm free to do as I please. But there is incredible freedom. Incredible is the wrong word.
There is believable freedom. Tangible freedom. A freedom that makes a real difference. And so Micah is saying to us here this morning that the one who comes will address everyone who is the promoter of corruption or social injustice or whatever else that is going on in the land.
Then in verse 5, he shall be our peace. So the ruler deals with the corruption and then brings peace which is the very thing that we see in 2 Corinthians 5 that God has made peace with the world through Christ Jesus.
[20:36] And making your peace with God as it was by repenting and believing is in Jesus' words to recognize who you're going up against. Jesus gave the illustration, two illustrations, one of a man building a tower, don't begin unless you've counted the cost and you're able to finish.

And the second one is how can a man with a small army go up against a man with a large army? It's better to surrender before you lose everything. It's better to surrender than before you lose everything.
Well that's an illustration of what it means for every single person to stand before God today. You have no idea who you're up against if you're not repenting. The person who repents, the person who comes under the rule of God recognizes the greatness of God and the smallness of themselves.

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God is the ruler of all. And of course therefore those who receive the peace of God are those who will dwell secure.
In fact, in other words, they're the ones who are kept securely or they are kept secure by the ruler. Now of course there is a big difference and I think I've said this before between being a peacekeeper and being a peacemaker.
[22:01] You know, there are some men and women fall into either category. Peacekeepers are not the biblical kind of people that actually promote peace.

They are often highly compromised people. They are people who are trying to please everyone and they have no sense of direction other than making sure that the fences remain intact and that everyone gets a reasonable portion and that everyone can do as they please and that's it.
But a peacekeeper recognizes that sometimes in order to make peace it's going to happen in a very unpeaceful way. Moses, for instance, was not a peacekeeper.
He was a peacemaker and you look at the trouble that he went through to get to the peace. And so when Christ comes and he brings peace we tend to think well this is going to be a peaceful this is going to happen peacefully.
But actually the peacemaking is not necessarily peaceful but the result is peace. the peacemaker may have to go through a tremendous amount of rejection and suffering which he did which Christ did but at the end of which we have peace with God.
[23:25] And those in the church biblically speaking have peace with each other. The church should not be at odds or separated or divided but rather united in love in Christ.

Now of course the church doesn't reflect that and that could be more to do with the fact that the weed and the tares grow together. You're trying to create a unity out of two unequal parts and that can never happen.
You know that can I don't really want to stress this too much this morning but I'll just say it clearly so that you understand. you can never create a union out of two unequal parts.
It is not possible. There's always a breakdown further down the line at some point. Either the breaks are internal and don't show up on the surface or they are external and everyone knows there's a split there.
But if you ever look at something that really that really cracks apart from the inside is is that you begin to realize that like most relationships they the it's the internal cracks appear before the external ones and then when the break happens it just appears.
[24:49] You know the idea of Jesus teaching us to look at the weather and to say look you're able to tell what the weather's going to be you should be able to discern these other things in wisdom. You know storm clouds are coming nothing happens all of a sudden.

Okay nothing happens all of a sudden. Everything is seed and fruit bearing. Nothing happens all of a sudden. So something may come to you as a surprise but in in in the hands of God and in the minds and hearts of people it's been years in the making.
Nothing happens all of a sudden. And that's the product of sometimes people just not being short sighted. Just not looking far enough ahead.
So concerned on themselves in the present they don't look too far ahead and then suddenly you know you've become your own grave digger. You don't don't even realize that all these years you've been handling a shovel and you don't realize that the very thing that you've been digging is your own grave.
or all those years you've been climbing the ladder when you get to the top only then do you realize that it's leaning against the wrong wall. You know these images of not having the type of wisdom that we need is essential.
[26:10] And so when Christ comes there is that wisdom there is that peace there is that understanding he is the one who will separate right from wrong. He is the one who will make clear what is true and what is good and what is beautiful.

He is the one who will bring to us the very clarity that we need and address the social and spiritual corruption that there is in the land.
And so the question is what does that rule look like? Well here's the first thing that it looks like. Everyone even in the church is going to be subjected to things in the world that they'd rather not be. Even the bad weather. It's something that happens to you. It's something that you have no control over or very limited control over.

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You can alter your way because of what's coming your way but there's not much more than you can do. Those who are weak will always be oppressed by those who are stronger.
[27:12] Those who are poor will be oppressed by those who are rich. There's always a master-servant relationship within societies. The one in debt is always at the mercy of the one who is owed the money.

These relationships of oppression or one being greater one being lesser exist in the world. And of course therefore comparisons can be made between the small and the weak and the strong and the big and therefore how do you overcome those that you cannot physically or mentally or spiritually or financially overcome.
You're in a desperate situation. How do you address the issues of the day when you don't have the power to address the issues of the day? I'll give you one example because we're all sort of pretty familiar with it.
If you think of the cost of living crisis now and you think well what what causes that? You know what causes us to suffer at the hands of those who have mismanaged the money to the point where inflation is at 11.4% or whatever it is on food and gas and electric and all these other what actually causes that that to happen?
And the answer though I'm not a banker but fairly easy to understand if you read the book of Proverbs is a mismanagement of funds that you have there's a difference between real wealth and fake wealth and the difference between real wealth and financial wealth is what we call inflation.
[28:45] So that's what it is. Or to put it a slightly different way there is an alchemy that exists within the world that convinces you to believe certain things to be true when they are not.

You know what alchemy is don't you? You take a cheap metal and you perform chemical imbalances on the metal to make it appear like gold but it's not gold it could be copper underneath but to the eye the alchemist has convinced you that it's genuine gold and so what has happened in the world that we live in is that we live in a spiritual and practical material alchemy that what you actually look and see with your eyes and feel and touch is not the real thing.
The world is pulling a fast one and hundreds and thousands of people are convinced that copper is gold and they're investing in the wrong things and so that's how this type of corruption happens and so when the ruler comes that is Christ the ruler he will address it all and so you are subject to all of these conditions but you will escape them only in the person of Christ and of course we now live in a time where people are still being destroyed buildings are still being demolished people are still suffering oppression at the hands of others and the temptation is then to believe well what difference is Christ made what difference has Christ actually made if Micah is promising a day when all the oppressors are dealt with and when all the oppression is gone and the spiritual and practical alchemy has just disappeared and people are now living in peace where is it and of course this is where we have the reality that people looking to
Christ expected everything to come at once everything to come at once now there are some things that are important to come at the same time I mean most parents will understand that there is absolutely nothing worse than buying a toy for your child and they open it on Christmas day and it only needs four AA batteries and you haven't got any right what parent hasn't been there every year batteries now are the first Christmas present on the list because there's nothing worse than the toy turning up and then you can't play with it because there's no batteries the trouble is that we tend to think of Christ coming in his first coming in that same way and everyone was expecting it all to happen at first and they get to the top of the hill and they think this is great and the trouble is when you're at the top of the hill you see the one behind it and the one behind it is the second advent and everything in between is grace mercy and peace the time for men and women boys and girls to turn to Christ and in that time we still have oppression in that time we still have destruction but in that time
Christ has come the ruler is established and now we get to live under his role and demonstrate to the world like Israel should have done what it means to live under the rule of God because when the second advent comes that's it time no more that is it so God has given people in this world time to turn to him so whatever stronghold there is is broken and can be broken in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and today in Micah's day you've got witchcraft you've got idolatry you've got idolatry today you've got all of these issues that have to be dealt with and God is going to come and take vengeance and his anger and his judgment will be upon them and those who practice them you know to put it in the words of revelation liars go to hell that finality the final judgment will come and

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so the first coming of
[33:24] Christ is like people ascending to the first hill thinking that they've got to the end and you know what it's like if you go hill walking and I don't I've only ever seen pictures but when you get to the top of one hill and then you see there's another one behind it now you know I can remember walking home once and thinking and mistaking the road that I was on to be the road adjacent to where I lived and it wasn't it was miles away but I was just a little boy that I had no idea and so I'm just walking and walking and walking the feeling of thinking that you're there and then you're not there yet well Christ has come and he does make a difference but Christ's second coming is where we have the finality of it all so let me conclude Micah promises a ruler that will come and a ruler that will rule and if you interpret this wrong what you end up with is expecting everything in one go when God is spreaded out throughout time because he gives a time of grace for people to come to the Lord

Jesus Christ Jesus said himself that my kingdom is not of this world it's coming and God's will on earth will be done as it is in heaven but the kingdom is not of this world that means it doesn't operate in the same way that a worldly kingdom does and so this time between if I can put it this way between the first hill and the second hill is a time where we proclaim the coming of the ruler of all and that's what the incarnation the birth of Christ means Christ rules Christ is the king he rules over all and now our struggles and our oppressions are going to be dealt within Christ but they're never going to overtake us they're never going to take us under because we overcome everything in the person of Christ but too often Christians just like young Christians become very short sighted they only think in terms of days or weeks or months rather than hundreds and decades and thousands of years ahead
I mean what will the world be like in another 5,000 years now if you've already thought well Christ will come back by then that's the point that I'm making why why will Christ come back now who why is Christ going to come back in the next hundred years what if it's not for another 5,000 years and if it's not for a five how does that change your attitude and outlook to the promises that have been made well this is how God would have us think so we just like the people in Micah's day live within this tension of like the now and not yet we have all the promises are complete in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ yes and amen but not all of them have yet been fulfilled and so as we consider the incarnation this morning and as we think of the communion as we come to this table what are we proclaiming what are we proclaiming we're proclaiming that the one who made peace through suffering and death is the ruler of all until he comes he's still the ruler when he comes but that's what we're proclaiming
Christ's death until he comes we like those in the days of Micah are still looking forward to the coming of Christ amen Lou Certains Thank you.

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