

The Promise of Restoration: Part 1

Micah 2:12; Micah 4:6-7

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We continue in this series on Micah. And as we do so, we are considering this theme verse of, "Who is a God like you?" Of course, the reality that the first two weeks of this series has been unpacking is what could arguably be a hard word, difficult sayings from the Lord through His prophet Micah as Micah was delivering the message to the people of Israel in the city of Jerusalem besieged by enemy nation of Assyria. Why was God allowing this to happen? And there comes in the hard word where we began in Micah 6. What does God require of you? To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Why would that be the central message that Micah would want to deliver to the nation of Israel? It's because they had failed to live by that which God had called them to live.

And so Micah reminds them through a series of oracles of doom and oracles of hope what He intends for His people. And we've spent the first two weeks unpacking, if you will, the oracles of doom. It's a hard word, and it forces us to hold in tension, something that the Bible has no problem holding, but we as human beings do. And that is how do we hold in tension a God of righteous holiness, and even wrath and discipline, but also a God of grace and mercy? The Bible holds these things in tension, but our hearts have a hard time. And we begin to ask the question, Lord, what are you doing? Why are these things happening? And we question His goodness much like the disciples did on the boat as they left Capernaum. Don't you care? That very question is not a question of asking whether God has that skill set. It's questioning, does God have the character of His goodness?

Last week, we looked at the hard word of God as He's giving to them the oracle of doom. This is what you've failed to do, and I am allowing these things to happen to you because you have failed in areas of justice and mercy and compassion. The good news of the gospel is that it does not end with an oracle of doom. It ends with the promise and the hope of restoration.

And I believe we need that hope of restoration because, as we look at the world around us, we ask, what is happening? And then not only what is happening visibly before our eyes with regard to COVID-19 or the upheaval of our culture, but we also experience the everyday struggles, the falls that happen to our parents, or the need to simply go to the doctor. All of these things become much more difficult. Going to the grocery store could be the place where we get a disease that could cost us our lives. Lord, what are you doing?

And depending on what generation you're in, a lot of the time, most generations think, well, surely things are much worse than they ever have been. But as Westerners, we generally have a short shelf-life for our understanding of history. Are things getting worse? Does God care? What is He doing? I think that's why we need the hope of the restoration.

This is part one, and then we'll finish the book next week in part two of the promise of restoration. But this morning, we're looking at Micah 2 and then Micah 4 as he is specifically looking at how will God restore a remnant of His people? This is the promise of restoration. Hear now God's word, Micah 2:12.

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. [ESV]

And then in Micah 4:6-7.

In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord

will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.
[ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Again, will you pray with me?

Now, Lord, we ask that you would give us eyes to see, hearts to receive, and a Spirit-empowered hope in the restoration that you give and the promised restoration that we can experience even today. Lord, help us to see your character, and the power of your grace, and the role you have for us in this restoration. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Perhaps the most expensive and extensive project of art restoration took place in the 20th century, and it happened in the famous Sistine Chapel. Years in the planning, millions of dollars in the spending, scaffolding, everything put in place for the restoration of the frescos and the beautiful ceilings and walls of the Sistine Chapel. It is considered a marvel of modern restoration, but there is also another part of the story. Not only is it one of the most expensive and extensive art restorations ever accomplished in the modern era, but it is also one of the greatest examples of failures of restoration.

You can go and Google the images or if you've ever visited the Sistine Chapel itself, you'll note that what happened during the process of restoration is they had to remove layers and layers of soot that had built up over the years. In the process of the painstaking and detailed work that they did, in the process of removing the soot, they also removed the very corrections that Michelangelo had actually put in place and some of the frescos that were painted there that, before the restoration, had eyes, but now, after the restoration, have no eyes. It's a long list of some funny and some very tragic pieces of art restoration. That's not the way it was supposed to be.

The question is what does God's restoration look like? When He removes and deals with the soot of sin in our lives, are we given sight? Are we truly restored? And what role do we play? What does God's restoration look like? We don't always see the scaffolding around. We don't always see the visible manifestations of it. And sometimes it feels like we're going backward and not forward. And it makes us question, is God restoring anything? Does He really care?

This morning as we look at these two passages, what we're going to see is a greater picture of what God is doing and promising the nation of Israel, but it's so much bigger than just what they are experiencing. It encompasses something much larger. And so to do this, we'll see first in chapter 2 and chapter 4 the steadfast and the scattered. But then we also see the end of days, the much bigger project about which God is doing the work. The steadfast and the scattered, and the end of days.

First, the steadfast and the scattered. What's interesting is in chapter 2, what he says is the following. "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men," meaning it's not going to be a small group of people. But God means to gather together a remnant that will begin first, of course, with those who remained in Jerusalem. You'll remember, as we covered in the last few weeks, this is precisely where Micah was ministering. He was ministering in the city of Jerusalem as it was being besieged by Assyria. And yet God is promising them in the midst of that that He is going to bring about a remnant. What is he referring to? What he's referring to is there was still a group of people inside Jerusalem that were seeking to walk in dependence of the Lord. Not all of Israel had turned against God. Not all of Israel was guilty of the problems of turning a blind eye to injustice or actually physically actively working out injustice. And yet, they were experiencing the same cancer of sin.

This is what I was referring to last week. As we consider the steadfast here that are brought into the remnant is when Carl Ellis in his book *Free at Last* says, "There are two kinds of unrighteousness." He says,

"There is the basic commitment to God. When people lack a basic commitment to God, unrighteousness follows. Scripture describes at least two types of unrighteousness: ungodliness and oppression. Ungodliness

happens when people rebel against God and his revelation. Disregarding their responsibility towards God and others, they themselves suffer the consequences of their wrongdoing."

So far so good. But then he says, "Oppression occurs, for example, when people impose their ungodliness on others causing them to suffer the consequences." And so what had happened even to this remnant who were within Juda who sought to walk faithfully with the Lord is that they were still experiencing the consequences of the oppression and sin of those who were called to be their leaders religiously and politically.

Now, for Western ears and Western individuals, that's hard for us to hear. We want to think that our sin and the sin of another doesn't impact me. Right? That's how it works. I'm an individual. But the problem is at the heart of the Christian gospel is the reality that sin is never merely individual. Even when I think it's private, even when I think it's something that I'm keeping in the confines or the corridors of my mind, and my heart, and my emotions, and my desires that it's not going to leak out and impact others. But, in fact, we understand that the very reality of sinful nature comes from the federal headship of Adam and Eve. You and I were not physically present at their disobedience, and yet our nature as humans is fallen as if we were. Their sin becomes ours. Their sin has polluted us. And we suffer the consequences of their sin, and other people suffer the consequences of ours.

That is a hard thing for Western individualists to grasp, but the scriptures do not seem to have a problem in reminding us that sin is never merely local or individual. It is always traveling, and it never travels alone. It travels in groups, and it impacts others. It impacts congregations. It impacts neighborhoods. It impacts cities. It impacts nations. It impacts the world.

And we would say, but Lord, why is this? That's what He's trying for us to see. He wants us to understand that the realities of sin are such that it impacted a whole nation. And yet, God says here, I will surely assemble you, O Jacob. I will bring out a remnant.

But then more than just the remnant of those who remained faithful and steadfast. It's also a message which is also hard for us when we are honest as Western individualists. Pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. You're having a problem because you're not working hard enough. You're suffering because of something you have failed to do. What we learn here is that God has a message even for those who are scattered.

In chapter 4, he says, "In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation." Now, hold on just a second. It's one thing to believe that God is going to bring about restoration for those who have suffered at the hands of other sinners. But is it possible of us to believe that God is actually also going to redeem the very ones who had also sinned? For that is what it says. He says, "Those whom I have afflicted," meaning he's referring to those generations throughout Israel whom God had sent forth and said, go into the city of Jerusalem and remove from it my enemies, your enemies, remove their false gods, and remove their idols.

And if you go back and read the opening chapters of Judges as an example or portions of Jeremiah, it seems as though they heard the message, went in, heard God's command, and they went to work. They started to remove God's enemies. They started to remove the idols. But then they seemed to grow satisfied. And they stopped removing the idols. They left the foundations. One man married a daughter of an enemy nation. Or they started allowing some of the practices of false religion in and mixed with the relationship and worship of a holy and righteous God.

You see, they stopped short. It reminded me of what C. S. Lewis once wrote when he said,

"It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on

making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

The realities are those who failed to follow God and sinned against the Lord, He sent them into exile because they became too half-hearted. They stopped short of what He had called them to do. But the message is He plans to redeem them, too. And that, I think when we're honest, is offensive. Yes, please, redeem those who have been oppressed and sinned against. But the sinner, too?

This is what I was referring to. And I want to read it again because it needs to ring in our hearts and our minds more and more. This is the reality of what Brennan Manning was referring to when he called it vulgar grace. Do we really believe the realities of vulgar grace? He says,

"The vulgar grace of God is indiscriminate compassion. It works without asking anything of us. It's not cheap. It's free, and as such will always be a banana peel for the orthodox foot and a fairytale for the grown-up sensibility. Grace is sufficient even though we huff and puff with all our might to try to find something or someone it cannot cover. Grace is enough. He is enough. Jesus is enough."

And the realities are that our God in His mercy shows the same mercy to the person who wakes up early and shows up on time, and He shows mercy to the drunk who shows up at ten minutes till 5:00. God in His mercy pours out His grace on the one who has been in church as well as the murderer who came to Him on death row. God is vulgar in His grace. The question is do we believe it? And Micah is announcing here that God means to make a remnant even of those who are disobedient to Him and draw them back to Himself.

And whether we consider ourselves oppressed or those we recognize are in need of grace, here's the beauty of God's grace. It does not take one more ounce of grace to redeem the faithful remnant than it does to the disobedient exile. The same grace is necessary. God is restoring and bringing together as a remnant the steadfast and those who are scattered.

And ladies and gentlemen, we sit here today as those who are the scattered. The church of Jesus Christ is made up of the Gentile nations. They have been added to the number who are part of the remnant of Israel. And we're all made the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ. We sit here as beneficiaries and examples of how God's grace can turn friends out of enemies. This is what He specializes in. This is the hope of His restoration. This is what God is doing.

So with what God is doing here in this portion of God's word in Micah and Israel at that time, we can't simply pluck it out of history and pluck it into the present and say, this means the modern day Israel. No, it doesn't mean that at all. It means this is what God was doing at that time, that He had begun to do. But we are a part of that same narrative, that same story that God has begun and will continue the work of restoration. And it is an announcement.

Why do we know that? Because of a very short phrase in Micah 4:6, three simple words, "In that day." And then if you add that phrase, "In that day," to the following, the way it ends, it says, "From this time forth and forevermore." What is he referring to? That is prophetic speech for the end of days, meaning the ultimate end of time/space continuum when Jesus will return and the new heavens and the new earth. But does that mean we must wait until then to begin to see the hope of God's restoration? No. The beginning and announcement of the remnant here are the roots of what would bring forth the ministry of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the end of days and the preparation for the end of days is announced here, and its work is continuing for which the church is the birth child of God's promised restoration working to the end of days. So to consider the end of days, we must consider the reality of the church.

Here's what I want you to think about for just a minute. We must have a much broader concept for what God is doing. Yes, the Lord works in individual hearts, but that is not the only kind of work that

God as Father, as the master painter, is about doing. You see, in sending forth His Son, God reveals through His Son what exactly that He is doing. And God is a painter. And He means to submerge us in the reality of His grace to repaint our hearts with the reality of His love so that we might be reflections of what He's doing.

But here's the beautiful thing. It's not just about individual hearts. He's actually painting on a much larger canvas. You see, if we merely think that all God is doing is painting on the canvas of our individual hearts, we miss just how great and large God's canvas is. Because when it says the end of days, "from this time forth, and forever more," what is he saying? He's talking about the cosmos. Not just individual hearts and not just the cosmos. It's both together.

So what does it look like? What does it look like? I believe it looks like this. And we see an example of it. Just recently, we lost Representative John Lewis. We also lost J. I. Packer who went to be with the Lord. And a colleague in the PCA said, "Imagine this, that on this day, J. I. Packer and John Lewis are kneeling together before the King." This is what God does in His church.

One of the stories about Representative John Lewis which has been told over the last few days is that in Rockhill, South Carolina, he was beaten badly by a Ku Klux Klansman. Years later, that man began to realize just what he had perpetrated on John Lewis. He made contact with him and he asked him for forgiveness. And John Lewis extended that forgiveness, and they would become longtime friends. This is what God does through and about His church. It is so much larger than you and I receiving the blessed power of forgiveness and freedom and redemption from sin. We actually become instruments in His hands to go about the work of undoing injustice, and going forth in forgiveness and love, and even doing that which feels uncomfortable to us, extending forgiveness, extending love to someone we might disagree with, or someone we find a hard time loving, or maybe we've just simply stopped praying for because we have lost an imagination for just how big our God is and the project of His restoration.

But more than just the church. God is doing something even greater than the church because that phrase, "In that day," is referring to something very specific which the scriptures reveal to us in Revelation 21. Hear Revelation 21 starting at verse 9,

"Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed — on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. [ESV]

And then in verse 22, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

You cannot read that with any semblance or thread of imagination and not understand that God is about restoring even more than just bringing about His church. He's redoing the whole cosmos because He is the center and source of its light. He is the sustenance of all that it is. We don't go to a building; we go to Him. This is what God is doing.

But does that mean we simply wait by and by for that to happen? Is there not work for us to do? Because the blessed power of this is we're not just to be bystanders. We're actually called to be workmen in the field not waiting for the restoration, but by God's grace and power, bringing about the restoration.

So let me put it down in street-level language. Those neighbors who we are now walking with and haven't seen or actually ever met could very well be a thread through which God is bringing restoration,

that He would use a time like COVID for us to do more walking in our neighborhoods, meet more people we've never met because God is doing something that we cannot perhaps have an imagination for. God is bringing about new relationships. He's bringing about opportunities for people to ask forgiveness and deal with layers of stuff that have been under business for so many years. But with all of that being stripped away, now we have to deal with the ulcer or the cancer in the middle of a relationship. God can bring about restoration if we have a vision and an imagination that He is rebuilding all things.

So why should we, in the words of John Lewis, if we see injustice say something and do something? Why should we? It's not about a particular policy or a particular incident. It's about the fact that God means for us to be the hands and feet of His restoration and not just waiting for Him to do it. Guess what? The disciples' names are written on the gates because they listened and heard and were empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring about the foundations of the church. We, as recipients of their ministry, believe in a gospel so victorious, so big that God perhaps needs to give us a deeper and broader vision and imagination for just what He wants to do in a city like Columbia, Howard County, Baltimore, D.C., and this region. It's in the hands and feet of our students who went into Baltimore. It's in the hands and feet of our missionaries around the world. It's in the hands and feet of you and wherever God has you in places of work. It is about a much greater vision for victory. While we may be tempted to ask, God, don't you care for us? Look at what is happening? The question is could the storm of the coronavirus, could the storm of the United States being in cultural upheaval, could that be the greatest time for the church to actually flourish and bring about renewal?

And I'll finish with this. Consider what one theologian Dr. Michael Bird says in his recent work *Evangelical Theology*. When he's considering the work of the gospel and God's restoration project, He considers the apostle Paul. And he says this.

"Jesus's death is not only a transaction of my sin being placed into Jesus's account. There's much more to it. Jesus lets the powers do their worst to him. He takes the full brunt of sin. He drinks the dregs of judgment. He allows death to hold him in its clutches. Then in the midst of a powerless death emerges a divine saving power to forgive, redeem, and renew. The festering cancer of sin has at last heard news of its cure. In the apex of death, life rises with healing in its wings. Satan's force is spent, and his worst was no match for the best of the Son of God. The fatal wound of Jesus deals a fatal blow to death. The powers of this present darkness shiver as the looming tsunami of the kingdom of God draws nearer, ever nearer. The despots of the world live in denial as much as they live on borrowed time."

This is the story of the cross. This is the victory of God. Jesus, on that Good Friday, caused the foundations of the temple to tremble. But His resurrection has sent the darkness shivering because the end of the story is that He is the light. And if that's what He has begun before we ever came to be, then why do we think He wants to do any less now? No matter how many we have gathered here, no matter how many are joining us on the livestream, no matter how big our buildings are or our budgets are, what does God want to do in us and through us that we might be a hospital for sinners? Because in this hospital, sinners are being healed. And so bring us the lame. Bring us the scattered because that's who we were, and we've been made new. And not a single bit more of grace is needed for them than for me.

What would the next 10 to 15 years look like for CPC? How can we reflect this community? How can we join arms with those in need and bring about care? May the Lord give us a vision that is the shape of His restoring power for the sake of His glory and for the flourishing of the gospel. May the Lord do this in us. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the power of the gospel. We thank you for the power of your Spirit. Lord, we don't know always what you are doing. And we become distracted by all the noises. And yet, your word draws us back together to say, Lord, you're

doing something. You're bringing about restoration. But, Lord, that's why we need you to begin to unpack that with us. And may your church flourish. And may restoration rise up with the healing of the word and power of Christ in the world around us, and our neighborhoods, and our workplaces for your glory. Do this, we pray. In Jesus's name. Amen.