

The Promise of Restoration: Part 2

Micah 7:14-20

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Today, we turn to the book of Micah for the final sermon in this series, who is a God like you? This sermon is part two of this section of the promise of restoration. And so I want to tell you that it's hard when I'm looking out at a group of folks who have masks on because I don't have to wear a mask right now since I'm far enough away from you. But I wake up on a day like today when I see a text like this text, and as I've prepared for this Sunday, I say, this is one of the joys of pastoral ministry when you get to preach a text like this. And it's not that all the texts aren't great, but this one particularly for me maybe is what God is teaching me. But it's very exciting because I have very good news for you this morning.

And it is good news for us to remember during this time particularly and for us to be guided and anchored in the word of God. Otherwise, our anchors will be in something else that oftentimes is not good news. And it causes our minds to drift, our hearts to shift, and for us to be in fear. But this word calls us to great promise and the comfort of the restoration. And we get to see where we are in the storyline of what God is doing in restoring all things.

Hear now God's word, Micah 7:14-20.

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds; they shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall be in fear of you.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Lord, we ask now that you would expand your glory by opening our eyes and expanding our hearts to see and experience the promise of your restoration. May it invigorate us. May it encourage us. May it give us a place of peace and rest. But may it also give us the way forward to be instruments in the hands of our God who's bringing about restoration. Lord, help us to see that. And may we rejoice in it. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

This morning as we look together at this passage, I want you to see there are three questions which I believe need to be asked. First, who is this shepherd referred to there in verse 14? Number two, what is the victory that is being spoken of at the end of verse 14 through verse 17? And then beginning in verse 18 through the following, who is a God like you? Who is the shepherd? What is his victory? Who is a God like you?

So who is this shepherd? If we look at chapter 7 of Micah, we will see this is part of the cycle of oracles that Micah was giving. And they were oracles of doom and oracles of hope. And it was coming, as you remember, as he prophesied in the city of Jerusalem besieged by an enemy nation. He now ends his prophecy with an oracle of hope. Thanks be to God.

But what happens in chapter 7 as you're reading through it as he's talking about what God is going to do in response to those who want to come against the people of God, he then launches in verse 14 into something which he has not mentioned in this chapter. And he says, "Shepherd your people with your staff." Now, this is Micah speaking to God and announcing to the people what God is going to do. So God is the shepherd. Now, this is not a new theme for Micah, but it is new to this chapter. But it's bound up in the oracles of hope.

Now, a chapter which we did not go into in depth helps fill in the answer to who this shepherd is. If we look in chapter 5, what we will find is Christmas in July. In Micah 5 beginning in verse 2, he says,

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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 coming forth is from of old, from ancient 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 the people of Israel. 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. [ESV]

Micah is saying as a prophet two things. One, as a prophet, the restoration must have signs of what he is prophesying of their validity within his life span because he would be in violation then of Deuteronomy which says if what you prophesy fails to come true, then you would lose your life. So there's always this dual nature in prophesy as we read it in scripture. There is a near-time fulfillment, and there is a much longer fulfillment.

Now, scripturally speaking, as the church of Jesus Christ, we interpret the Old Testament through the New Testament. But we almost also always remember that we must read it within context. This is to say that when he talks about a ruler in Israel, Micah is referring to the fact that God will bring about a leader in a near-time fulfillment of bringing about restoration for the remnant. But there is also the ultimate fulfillment, the ultimate prophet, the ultimate shepherd, the ultimate king that finds its fulfillment only in Jesus Christ. Now, we must get this correctly because to miss it would make confusion and chaos of why the leaders of Israel were so angry with Jesus. And I would argue it is precisely at this point. Micah is referring to what God is doing then and now and within the near future of Israel, but he's also pointing to the ministry of the ultimate shepherd.

If you're familiar at all with John 10, it is a part of Jesus's great teaching in depth and John giving us the most theological reflection of what Jesus understood about His ministry to the nation of Israel and to the world. In John 10, the lips of Jesus say this. "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." Then in verse 14, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." Then in verse 18, "No one takes it from me," meaning His life, "but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." And then in verse 27, He says,

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." [ESV]

And guess what the next verse says? "The Jews picked up stones again to stone him." Why such a violent reaction? It is because they knew what Jesus is claiming to be. He is the long-prophesied shepherd.

Now, back to Micah. Micah says, "Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance." Remember what Jesus said? They are mine. In other words, the church of Jesus Christ,

those who trust in the Lord Jesus, His children are His inheritance. That's what Micah's referring to. "The flock of your inheritance who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead," that were once populated by enemies, but no longer. They will graze there as when you came out of the land. Do you remember when you were freed from Egyptian slavery? I have set you free. I will show them marvelous things. And what does Jesus say? Nothing can snatch you from my hand.

What is being talked about is this, that the shepherd will lead the people. Although they might be surrounded by enemies, they will graze in a forest without fear of attack. They will graze in the open lands of God's promise in peace because the shepherd is overseeing them. He is also the gate.

Now, clearly Jesus refers to the fact that there were other shepherds who tried to come in, but they were false shepherds. Jesus says, I have come. "I and the Father are one." I am that shepherd. They knew what Jesus knew and what Micah knew. God will bring about a shepherd, and He will be the Lord, and He will be the King. Think on that.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you we need this good news because, I tell you, nothing, absolutely nothing will come against the church of Jesus Christ and ever cause her to close the doors. It doesn't mean individual churches might not close, but the church of Jesus Christ will go forward. What it also means is nothing will snatch the people of God from His hand. Nothing. No pandemic, no uprising, no downfall of nations or uprising of others. Nothing.

Think about this. In the opening chapters of Acts, what we hear of the early church is this. Door to door in persecution of the early church, men and women were snatched from their homes because of the testimony that they held to regarding Jesus. Now, can you imagine what it must have been like to live in those homes and have your mother or your father snatched from your own home because you claimed faith in Jesus Christ? And yet, what does it say? They counted it as a blessing to be persecuted for the name.

Was the church diminished? No, it flourished. Why? Because the great shepherd of the sheep shepherds His people. And although calamity, and difficulty, and challenge, and pandemic, and uprising, and division, and all of these things will happen, crisis media will be there, the dumpster fire of social media will multiply, but that is not our anchor. It is not our main news point. The news is already given. We've already sung it. We sing it in the church. We've been singing it for hundreds of years.

"Through many toils, dangers, and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home. The Lord has promised good to me. His word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. When this flesh and heart shall fail and mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil a life of joy and peace."

Amazing grace indeed of a shepherd who watches over the flock. This is the good news that Micah was announcing.

But what is his victory? He tells us here at the end of verse 14 and towards the end of verse 17. As he's talking about the nature of what they will do dwelling and grazing, watch what happens in the nations that surround, "The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds."

What is being talked about here is what's already been echoed in Micah's announcement of look what happened to Egypt. Those who raised themselves up against the people of God, and this is the truth, every nation in the history of man is over against the kingship of the Lord. All governments want to be king. They want to be the rulers. But God is the ruler. That's why our anchor is in Him and His victory and not in the victory of any nation's state. It's not that we shouldn't be wanting it. It's not that we should be sad about living in a nation like the United States. I am grateful for it. But my hope is not

secured by the power and might of the American military or any other military because God has us in His hands. He has given the victory. Ultimately, the nations are merely a symbol of the warfare against the sin and death which Satan seeks to bring.

Satan is the ultimate enemy. He is the one who has set himself up against God. And what's being announced here is that the nations, it says, "shall see and be ashamed." All their weaponry, no matter how powerful, not a single weapon can ever forgive us of any sin. Not a single weapon ever devised by man could ever bring anyone back from the dead. Not a single weapon anywhere that has ever been devised can guarantee eternal victory. And so they will see the power and might of the king, the shepherd. And they shall cover their mouths in awe, and their ears will not be able to stand it. And they will grovel on the ground because their strongholds are not enough for a mighty God like this. And it says, "They shall be in fear of you," meaning there is no enemy too great for the Lord. And no enemy will ever snatch us from His hand.

And so we get all riled up, and we get all concerned. And, yes, we ought to be involved in the place where God has us. We ought to care about what's happening in the country in which we live. But it is not our ultimate anchor. It's not our ultimate victory. In fact, what is being given here is a greater victory that actually frees us to go out and be the instruments in the hands of the shepherd to bring peace, to bring love, and mercy, and grace, and justice because we've been freed by a much greater victory.

Consider for just a moment this victory which is being symbolized here in strength and victory over nations. The victory which is being talked about is nothing other than the victory of the shepherd, and the ultimate enemy was sin and death itself. Jesus took an instrument that is worthy of reviling and turned it into a chariot of victory which is the cross.

Consider just a quick summary. And I want you to marinate in these truths. What has the shepherd accomplished in the victory in the cross? A ransom for sins, protection from tribulation and judgment in the future, a new covenant, a new relationship, a restoring of Israel into the body of Christ, which is the church which is made up of every tongue and tribe from all kinds of backgrounds. God will make a nation, a family of Abraham unto His own. He rescues because of the cross. He rescues us from the kingdom of darkness and this present evil age. He brings to us reconciliation, redemption, justification, forgiveness of sins, peace, healing, cleansing, and an example to follow.

If Jesus laid down His life for us and has secured for us this great victory, which is pictured as a victory over nations but ultimately is pointing to the one who is the ultimate enemy, Satan himself, and what he holds in his hand is sin and death, he has been vanquished. Jesus is victorious because the church of Jesus Christ, as you and I sit here in the line of this narrative on the other side of the resurrection, we believe, as we will sing at the end of this service, in the resurrection of the Son of God over sin and death. Therefore, we have someone who has freed us who then enables us, empowers us to move out in that freedom to give ourselves to others.

So when we give water to someone who is thirsty, we're doing it as unto Jesus. When we're providing a meal or going grocery shopping for someone who cannot do for themselves, we're doing it as unto Jesus. When we care for the poor and the downtrodden, when we care for the orphan and the widow, we're doing so as unto Jesus because we've been freed by the victory to humbly serve and give ourselves and our times and our talents to what God has called us to do, to love our neighbor as ourselves. And when you go to work tomorrow, whether you are working in medicine or you're working in security, whatever you do, you do as unto the Lord because it all matters, all of it, because God is bringing about a restoration of ethics, restoration of work, restoration of life, restoration of relationships because it all flows from the victory of Christ, and the reconciliation through His blood, and the power of the resurrection. This is what our God is doing as a result of this victory.

But it isn't just His victory. Through this marvelous shepherd, it is also, "Who is a God like you?" Micah cries out. Even in asking the question before he says the first phrase, "pardoning iniquity," he's asking us to imagine, who is a God like this? What is being demonstrated? That God is actively doing this

restoration over against what looks like, in the present, utter chaos. Things are falling down around us. Things are not as they should be. And yet, God is announcing to a remnant in Jerusalem.

Ladies and gentlemen, imagine for just a moment that our three greatest enemies at present, state enemies of the United States, just as an example, Russia, China, Iran. Imagine that all had battleships and nuclear weapons at the ready off the coast of the United States coming at us. That is the environment that Micah was preaching to the people of God. So church of Jesus Christ, wherever she worships, whether in communist China, or in Islamic Iran, or in France, or here, or in Canada, wherever it is, there is no enemy. Although the barbarians would be at the gates, God is saying in the midst of that, my lordship is independent of all of that. It is not thwarted by it. It is not dependent on your strength or my strength. It's dependent on Himself. To ask, "Who is a God like you," is to suggest no one. Why? First, He is sovereign.

God is not surprised by pandemics. He's not surprised by a downturn in the economy. He's not surprised by the loss of jobs. He's not surprised by cultural chaos. The Lord is sovereign and knows the beginning to the end and the end to the beginning. And He says none of it changes His purposes.

Number two, He is not only sovereign, but He is independent. What do I mean? What I mean is this. I'm quoting the great theologian John Frame when he writes,

"God is not worshipped by men's hands as though God needed anything. God is worshiped by men's hands, but the hands are raised in praise and thanksgiving, not to supply God the needs we think he needs. Rather, he is the one who has given us everything, life, breath, times, and places. It is in him that we live and move and have our being. We depend utterly on him. He does not depend at all on us to accomplish his purposes."

Thanks be to God. He calls us again to imagine, "Who is a God like you?" That is worthy to be praised. A god whose purposes are thwarted by the works of men or nations is not worthy of worship. A god whose purposes can be stopped because of the weakness of humanity is not a god that is worthy to be worshiped. Those are gods of our own making. We have to put them up on the pedestal. We have to keep them from falling. We have to keep them polished. But God is not that way. He is independent. He is ruling. He is sovereign because He's victorious. This is the promise to God's people.

And to say, as Frame says as he quotes Romans 11, "From him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." To proclaim what Paul says, Frame suggests, is to say, "He created and provided all things. Nothing happens without his power. He receives everything back to himself. And he has no needs. He is completely sufficient." Our God is an awesome God.

But remember in all of His awesomeness, in all of His self-sufficiency, in all of His independence, in all of His knowledge, He chooses to come close. He chooses to reveal Himself to us. And what does He reveal Himself to be? As Micah says, "Pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever," not because He isn't righteous to do so, for God is righteous, and holy, and independent. He is worthy. And so He is righteous in His holiness and righteous in His anger. Yet, it says, "Because he delights in steadfast love." Now, that's good news. A God who is righteous in His anger, holy in His perfection, yet He delights in steadfast love.

As Dick was saying earlier today, God's song over us is love. He sings, you see. He is not a God who is threatening us. He is not a God of saying, you better get it right or I'm coming back. No. I have already come. Emmanuel, God with us. And I delight in steadfast love. And He again will have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot, and He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. He chooses not to remember them but to drown them in the majesty and power of His love. Thanks be to God.

This is a God of restoration. This is a God of victory. This is not so we can sit back and say, well, that's good for me. But rather we are then set free to work that out, to give it, and to have compassion,

and to seek long-suffering and patience and humility even with those with whom we greatly disagree. All of our arguments, all of our divisions, it's not to suggest that they're not important. But they're not ultimate. If the Lord is ultimate in His victory, and He is the shepherd, and He's done so by His loving kindness, that means that we can contend and love one another in humility even when we disagree. And a gentle answer turns away wrath. The Lord has given us the gentle beauty of His grace and love. And we can move towards one another and those around us in just that way so that He might be glorified, and the glory of His restoration might work itself out because God doesn't need us, but He chooses to use us. God doesn't need us, but He chooses to use us.

"Who is a God like you?" For the Lord does this in us, for us, and through us for the glory of His name. For indeed, "Who is a God like you?" Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for this great message of victory that we have in Jesus Christ and the power of your resurrection. And until you return, you are still restoring all things that will ultimately find their terminus in the glory of your Son, the revealing of the Son of the living God in victory, and a new heavens and a new earth. But you are working even now in this place in us and in this world. You are everywhere present. You are working and active. And you choose to work in us and through us. Lord, help us to rest in this victory to find our peace and joy, but also to be used of you to move out into the world to love as you love. Lord, help us to do this, we pray, to find an anchor in the victory but strength for the journey. For it is your grace that has brought us safe thus far, and it is grace that will lead us home. In Jesus's name. Amen.