

# Micah 5:5-15

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     What can we say about the citizens of Bethlehem? This morning, we were able to consider something of the wonderful portrait that Micah paints of the king from Bethlehem. We discovered something of his origins from ancient days, of the line and lineage of King David. We were also able to learn something of his appearing, the time of his appearing, the time when she who is in labor gives birth. We also were able, with the help of Matthew's gospel, to establish the identity of this king from Bethlehem, our own Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And then also something of his mission as the king who has come to establish his kingdom, but a king who is a shepherd king, who comes to shepherd and to provide for and protect his people. And then finally, we also notice what Micah shares with us or declares to us in the prophecy concerning the extent of this kingdom, a kingdom that would extend to the ends of the earth. But what of the citizens of this kingdom? What of the subjects of this king from Bethlehem? Micah goes on in chapter 5 to paint an intriguing and challenging portrait of the subjects of the king. And if we are Christians, if we're trusting in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we are those subjects that are described by Micah.

Now, the portrait that Micah paints of the subjects of the king, without any doubt, was relevant to and descriptive of God's people in Micah's day, those to whom Micah was speaking. It was relevant also to subsequent generations, very especially as God would bring His people into exile in Babylon and then facilitate their return. But it's also a portrait that is relevant for us today as citizens of the kingdom of the king from Bethlehem. And this evening, as we think about this portrait that Micah paints, my primary concern, my primary concern is to note what the description has to say to us, while at the same time and probably very fleetingly recognizing or making passing reference to the significance of the description that is given of God's people, the relevance of it to those to whom Micah was originally speaking, and indeed subsequently during the exile in Babylon. Well, I think we can find in this chapter four elements of Micah's portrait of the subjects of the king from Bethlehem. And the four aspects of this description that we're going to consider this evening are as follows. First of all, we want to notice the blessings that we enjoy. We who are citizens of this kingdom, Micah speaks of and presents to us the blessings that we enjoy as citizens, as subjects of the king. We'll notice that especially in verses four and five, and also as we take a backward glance to chapter four, where there's also relevant material in that regard. So, first of all, the blessings we enjoy, but then also we'll notice the opposition that we face. For Micah speaks of opposition that the citizens of this kingdom will face. Then we will move on, and notice how Micah presents to us the mission that we are called to.

That's very especially in verses seven to nine. The opposition that we face is dealt with in the second half of verse five through to verse six. And then Micah continues to describe for us, in language that perhaps at first sight isn't very evident as to what is being said or what is meant, but I think we'll be able to discover that what we have in these verses is a description of our mission as citizens.

What are our responsibilities and duties as citizens of this kingdom? And then finally, the final verses of the chapter, in many ways the most challenging and the most solemn, but I think we can describe them under the title of the purifying that we are subject to as citizens of the kingdom. And as we bring it to our own day, we could describe that as the church of Jesus Christ, the purifying that we are subject to by God in order, we'll notice, that we might fulfill our mission. So, these are the four elements, the blessings we enjoy, the opposition we face, the mission we are called to, and the purifying that we are subject to. First of all, then, the blessings that we enjoy. In many ways, this really mirrors what we noticed this morning concerning the mission of the king from Bethlehem. He was a king, or is a king, coming to establish a kingdom, and he is a shepherd, a shepherd king. And as I say, as we just think of those truths concerning the king, we can draw from that what are some of the blessings that we enjoy as citizens of the king. The very fact that we are citizens, citizenship, that in itself is a tremendous blessing that we enjoy, that we have been made and brought into this kingdom. We are subjects of this king from Bethlehem, of this shepherd king. We enjoy the rights and privileges of the citizens of his kingdom.

We can declare in the words of Paul as he addressed the Christians in Philippi, our citizenship is in heaven. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, of the kingdom of heaven, of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 21 ] That is a tremendous blessing that speaks of our status and of the privileges that come with that status. As we think of being citizens, and as we think of ourselves particularly as being subjects of a king, another blessing that we enjoy is the privilege of being under the authority of a just and benevolent king. Now, many would find that a strange thing to describe as a blessing, that we are under authority, because many of us don't particularly enjoy being under authority. We imagine that the best place to be is the place of freedom, where we're not under the authority of anyone, where we can do as we please.

And many of us foolishly think that that's the best place to be, but that is not what we have been created for. From the very beginning, from the very time that God created us, the purpose of God was that we would be under authority. And that is where we can flourish as human beings, when we recognize that we are under authority. Now, there are circumstances where we will exercise authority, but even those of us who in certain stations in life who in certain stations in life will exercise authority must always acknowledge that ultimately we are under authority. And that is not a bad thing, that is a good thing, and very especially when the one under whose authority we are is a just and benevolent king.

This is a blessing that we enjoy as citizens of the kingdom as subjects of King Jesus. We notice also that the mission of the king from Bethlehem was to be a shepherd, and of course, there too we can draw from that blessings that we enjoy, the tender care that we are subject to. The language that Micah uses there in verse 4, he will shepherd his flock. And we are privileged to enjoy shepherding by the great shepherd. And though we read the verse this morning, it is such a beautiful verse that I'm going to read it again, the language that Isaiah uses to describe the one who is our shepherd in Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 11. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

He gently leads those that have young. What a beautiful picture of the blessings that we enjoy being shepherded by our God.

Citizenship, tender care, security. That obviously follows, it really follows from both of the things we've already said. The fact that we have King Jesus as our king is a source of great security.

[ 9 : 27 ] The fact that he is our shepherd provides us security. But explicitly, we have Micah speaking blessing of God's blessing of God's people that they will live securely there in the second half of verse 4.

And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. This picture or this description of the security we enjoy is painted in very vivid terms in chapter 4.

When in verse 4 of chapter 4, the same truth really is put across, but in this very pictorial language. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

For how many would this not be such an attractive picture? And is it not a challenge for us to take this message to those for whom this would surely be such an attractive prospect?

No one will make them afraid. No one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. Security is one of the great blessings that we enjoy as citizens of the King from Bethlehem.

[ 10 : 44 ] But then we also read that in verse 5, at the beginning of verse 5, The one born in Bethlehem, the ruler over Israel who is being prophesied, Micah declares, he will be their peace.

And this is a peace that goes beyond the peace that is secured by protection from or even victory over our physical enemies. That's one aspect of it.

But rather it is a peace that Paul speaks of, as he consciously, it would appear, alludes to these words of Micah in Ephesians chapter 2.

We've already read the chapter, but we're going to focus for a moment, if only in the reading of the verses, on verses 13 to 16 of Ephesians chapter 2.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace.

[ 11 : 43 ] The language there does seem to be directly taken from the prophet Micah. He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

This peace that Micah speaks of, but that Paul presents in much richer terms, a peace secured by Jesus at Calvary, peace with God, but also Paul's focus so much on peace with one another.

So, this is a blessing also that we enjoy as citizens of Bethlehem. But we can move on and also recognize that Micah here speaks of the opposition that we face.

There in the second half of verse 5 and through to verse 6, we read of opposition when the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, and it continues.

[ 13 : 06 ] And in these verses, Micah returns to his own day as he speaks of the Assyrians. They were the threat. They were the ones who were surrounding Jerusalem and laying it under siege.

And so, he speaks of them. And of course, this was particularly appropriate and relevant for those who were first hearing the prophecy. And he recognizes that there are these enemies, powerful enemies.

And that was true for the people in Micah's day. But I think it's also true, and it's also entirely legitimate to recognize that Assyria, as it is spoken of here by Micah, represents.

They were a real, genuine, historical enemy, but they also represent the enemies of God in every generation, in subsequent generations to the generation that Micah lived in, but also to the present day.

Assyria representing all those who would oppose the king from Bethlehem, all those who would stand up against the one born in Bethlehem.

[ 14 : 19 ] And they are powerful enemies. They are violent enemies intent on destruction. The language of verses 5 and 6 is of invasion, of marching through the land. And that is what we find even today, that there are enemies of God's people who persecute with violence and oppression, enemies who would do all in their powers to silence and intimidate and mock the church of Jesus Christ, enemies that would proudly and foolishly claim possession and authority over God-given institutions like marriage, as we are seeing in our day.

And we could go on. There is opposition. There are enemies of God and of God's people. And we ought not to be so naive as to imagine that that is not so.

But in these verses where Micah speaks of the Assyrians, and we're not going to think about all that he says, but just to draw out the big truths of what he's saying, what ultimately is their end?

The end of the enemies of God's people. Well, the verses here in chapter 5 speak not only of God's people being protected, though they are, but they also speak of God's people in due course exercising authority over their enemies.

Then in verse 6, they will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. The tables are turned. Those who at the present time or at the time of Micah had the ascendancy, well, it will not always be so.

[ 15 : 57 ] God will turn the tables in favor of his own people. And of course, that is true today. As we look at those who oppose the church of Jesus Christ, they may appear to have the ascendancy.

And in some ways of measuring, we might say they do. But it will not always be so. There will come a time when it will be God's people who exercise authority over all.

And some might look around and say, well, that sounds fine and dandy, but as I look at the world today, that's not what I see. It's not what's happening today. What I can say to you is this.

Not as some empty, vague hope, but as a firm and secure hope. It will be in the end. All will be well in the end. And if all is not well, it's because it's not the end.

All will be well in the end. And if all is not well, it's because it is not yet the end. So, there is opposition, and we have to be realistic about that.

[ 17 : 01 ] But we have to be realistic about it also in the confidence that the time will come when all opposition will be quashed. But then thirdly, as we think of this description of God's people, we can also notice the mission that we are called to.

And that is something that Micah deals with in verses 7 to 9, the mission we are called to. And it's a twofold mission described by Micah that can be summarized in two words that we find in these verses.

First of all, the word Jew, and then that's further enriched by the word showers, and then the word lion. And these two words, really in summary, describe a twofold mission for God's people.

There in verse 7 we read, The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples, like Jew from the Lord, like showers on the grass. And it goes on. Now, what does this mean?

Well, it means that God's people, that would be you and me, we are to be of blessing to others. This is the picture. The picture is of Jew and showers that are of blessing to all, not only to God's people, but to all.

[ 18 : 11 ] God's people here are pictured as a gift from God to the nations. That's what we are. We, as we think of this in its application to us today, we as the church of Jesus Christ are a gift from God to the nations.

As Jew in a dry parched land, as refreshing showers in the desert. That is our mission. That is our calling. We sang this morning in Psalm 72, and in verse 6, where God Himself is compared to showers watering the earth.

But here in Micah, it is God's people, the subjects of the king from Bethlehem, who are to refresh the world. This is our mission, to bring refreshment to the world.

Our mission is not first and foremost to point the accusing finger at the world, though there is an aspect of that that we are called to. But here the mission is described in these wonderfully positive terms, that we are to refresh the world as dew, as morning showers on the grass.

Why is this so? Why is this our mission? Well, this is nothing new. This is no novel truth that Micah is bringing. This is at the heart of our covenant responsibility and privilege.

[ 19 : 30 ] We remember the words with which God establishes His covenant with Abraham. And the promise of that covenant, not only that Abraham and his descendants would be blessed, but that they in turn would be the means of blessing to the nations.

And here Micah picks up on that theme. The people of God in the midst of the nations, as dew and as showers. Where are we to exercise this mission?

Well, as we've just read, in the midst of the nations. This was the challenge for God's people, as they were to find themselves in Babylonian exile, just a hundred years or so, following on from Micah's prophecy.

We remember the words of Jeremiah addressed to the exiles. In chapter 29 of Jeremiah, Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you into exile.

I say the words of Jeremiah, the words of God through Jeremiah. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

[ 20 : 40 ] What a strange message that must have seen to those in exile. Pray for Babylon. Seek the prosperity of Babylon. And God says, Yes, for you are due.

You are showers. You are to be a blessing to others, even to your enemies, even to those who have dragged you into exile. Even to such, you are to be a blessing.

Well, if that was so, for the Israelites in exile in Babylon, it is most certainly true, and it is most certainly the challenge that is presented to the church today, as we exist in the midst of the nations, that we would be due, that we would be refreshing showers.

And how will that be so? Well, we will be that Jew. We will be those showers in the measure that we announce our message of hope and new life to be discovered and experienced in Jesus Christ, and in the measure that our lives are characterized by mercy and justice.

In Micah chapter 6, maybe the most familiar words of Micah are together with or competing with the words that speak of Bethlehem Ephrata, but in chapter 6 and verse 8, we have in summary form the lives that we are to live if we are to be due and refreshing showers.

[ 22 : 00 ] He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? And so, the question for us to ask ourselves as Christians, where God has placed us, and also to ask ourselves as a congregation, are we, are you, a refreshing shower in a dry, parched land?

Are we, Jew, a refreshing shower in this city? What is the outcome when we fulfill this mission that God has given us?

Well, in chapter 4, Micah also uses the imagery of the picture of water. It's a very intriguing picture that he uses in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4. Here, the picture of water is of a stream, but that of a stream that miraculously flows upwards.

There in chapter 4, in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and peoples, evidently from what follows, the peoples of the world will stream to it.

It's the picture of a stream of a river, but flowing upwards to Zion. And that will be so in God's purposes as God's people exercise this mission to be Jew, to be refreshing showers in the midst of the nations.

[ 23 : 27 ] But I said it was a twofold mission that Micah speaks of here, not only to be Jew, but also to be a lion. In verse 8, the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest.

We are to bless. We are to be of blessing to the nations, regardless of whether they receive or recognize or accept the gospel or the message that we bring.

We are to be of blessing to them. But we are also to conquer. And the conquest that we are to be engaged in will bring blessing to those who submit to the rule of King Jesus, but it will also solemnly bring eternal judgment to those who refuse to submit.

The words of the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 2, verses 15 and 16, capture this idea of the double-edged sword that is gospel conquest, as we would, like a lion, conquer in this world.

What does Paul say on that occasion? For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one, we are the smell of death.

[ 24 : 45 ] To the other, the fragrance of life. We are to be like Jew. We are also to be like a lion among the beasts of the forest, conquering territory for King Jesus.

And finally, the fourth aspect of this description of God's people in verses 10 to 14 of Micah chapter 5, the purifying, sorry, that we must be subject to.

I think we would all, if we were honest with ourselves and with one another, we would recognize that we are not always Jew, and we are seldom lions. Why is that?

Well, the reason why so seldom are we, those who perform the mission that we are called to, certainly in the manner and in the measure that God would have us do so, is that we are a corrupted church.

We fall short in so many ways. We are often simply not up to the task. And we need God to deal severely with us, to purify us as gold refined in the fire.

[ 25 : 52 ] And verses 10 to 14 are very solemn verses, but they speak of God's refining and purifying work with His people that they might be made effective and made useful and made suitable for the mission that they are called to.

And in these verses, Micah highlights particular areas where God needed to deal severely with His people in Micah's day, that they might become a holy and refreshing and conquering people of God.

Now, the issues today may be the same, or they may differ, but God must and will purify by the means, often painful, that He chooses, for that is the work that He does.

In the case of the matters that Micah highlights there in these verses, we can just notice them very fleetingly. Verses 10 and 11, the self-confidence of God's people, thinking that they could trust in their weaponry and in their fortified cities and in all that they owned and possessed.

And what does God say? I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. Those things that you trust in, those things in which you find security, I'll tear them down.

[ 27 : 15 ] Why? That you might trust in Me, that you would recognize that these things are not to be your security. And so, it is a somber work that God is doing, but He does it that they might trust in Him.

He then goes on to speak of their witchcraft and idolatry in verses 12 to 14. And as we read these verses, it sounds very alien to us and to our day. But really, the root of the problem with God's people in Micah's day was that they wanted to look like and behave and be molded by the pagan societies that surrounded them and indeed that had become part of them.

And when we think of it in those terms, it's not so different today that we as Christians and as the church of Jesus Christ so often try to be like the world, to allow ourselves to be molded by the world.

We too, guilty of idolatry of one kind or another. And time doesn't allow us to explore the different ways in which we are guilty of this particular sin.

It's something that's been dealt with, no doubt, on many occasions. But God says, if My people are to be that Jew, if they're to be that lion conquering for Me, then I must work with them.

[ 28 : 28 ] I must purify them. I must remove from them that which is unholy and that which is defiling. And that is true today. That is true for us as Christians and as the Christian church.

We live in difficult days for the church of Jesus Christ, but perhaps we need to ask that God would help us to discern what He is doing.

Might it be that He is purifying His church in order that we might become that refreshing and conquering church that He would have us be.

And so, picking up on the manner in which we closed the sermon this morning, I close in a similar fashion this evening, this Christmas, when you hear and sing of the little town of Bethlehem.

Certainly, fix your thoughts and direct your worship on the King from Bethlehem, Jesus, the Shepherd King. But also take the opportunity to examine yourself, to see how you match up to Micah's description of the subjects of the King from Bethlehem.

[ 29 : 38 ] Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.