

Restoration for the Remnant Nation

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Preacher: Stephen Ballingall

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to the Scriptures now, to our Bibles, and read together. And Stephen Balagol is leading us these few Sunday evenings in the prophet Micah.

And we're going to read together in Micah chapter 2. You'll find that if you have one of the church Bibles in page 776. And otherwise, you'll find it near the end of the Old Testament after the prophet Jonah.

Now we're going to read the whole of Micah chapter 2. Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds.

When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away.

They oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks.

[1 : 20] And you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster. And that day they shall take up a taunt song against you, and moan bitterly, and say, We are utterly ruined.

He changes the portion of my people. How he removes it from me. To my apostate, he allots our fields. Therefore, you will have none to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

Do not preach as they preach. One should not preach of such things. Disgrace will not overtake us. Should this be said, O house of Jacob?

Has the Lord grown impatient? Are these his deeds? Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly? But lately, my people have risen up as an enemy.

You strip the rich road from those who pass by, trustingly, with no thought of war. The women of my people, you drive out from their delightful houses, from their young children.

[2 : 34] You take away my splendor forever. Arise and go, for this is no place to rest, because of the uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction.

If a man goes about and utters wind, lies, saying, I will preach to you of wine and strong drink, he would be the perfect preacher for this people.

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 flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He opens the breach, goes up before them.

They break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them. The Lord at their head.

[3 : 35] Amen. May God bless us. His word, which is indeed a word both of judgment and of hope, because that is the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Good evening all. Lovely to see you here. Please do have your Bibles open at Micah chapter 2 on page 776 of your church Bibles.

But before we get stuck into this text, I'd like us to think about YouTube. It's a weird place. It's the home of videos on the internet.

On there, I've learned some useful skills. I've learned how to bleed a radiator. I've learned how to tie a bow tie. I've even watched lots of other videos on the more useless end of the spectrum.

In fact, one of my friends, in the middle of his busy schedule, and I feel it's important to say that he's an intelligent, respectable guy, has spent countless hours learning how to properly twirl a pen.

[4 : 45] In his hand. He's researched more than just the technique, though. He's even started buying specific pens that are the right weight and balance for a good twirl.

YouTube is the home for weird people. One of the things that keeps on popping up on YouTube's most-watched videos are surprise videos of soldiers coming home from being on duty in the war.

There are thousands of these, and they're all the exact same heart-wrenching recipe. They're usually titled something like 10 Most Emotional Coming Home Videos. Number 9 Will Make Your Heart Bleed.

And they often start with a classroom, usually in the US, a room of unsuspecting kids, when at some point during their day, a soldier walks in. Some of the kids are frightened.

Some are just confused. But for one child, it is the best day of the year. Because they don't see a soldier coming into the room.

[5 : 45] They see their dad. So they rush up to the front of the classroom, jump up into his arms, and everyone cries. They know it's their dad.

So they are just delighted to see him. However, if the setting was changed, if it wasn't a classroom he was walking into, but, say, the barracks of the Iranian army, might be quite a different story, don't you think?

I don't think they'd be rushing to jump in his arms to give him a hug, do you? How they react all depends on their relationship with him. Seeing a soldier standing in front of you can bring out a whole spectrum of reactions.

The same person, while not changing in themselves at all, can be both a comfort and a threat. And Micah was preaching to people who were being given a crash course on what their relationship with God is like.

They'd just been given a terrifying warning of what his coming is going to be. That he's coming as a man of war to destroy those who stand against him. And they don't stand a chance.

[6 : 55] Last week we saw that devastation take shape. As some of God's people in the northern kingdom, Israel, were going to be exiled, carted off from their own country, taken away from their own homes, into another, a foreign land.

And while that was happening, Judah, the southern kingdom, were given front row seats to watch God himself use the wicked, a Syrian army to devastate their neighbors.

Knowing that they would be facing the same fate if they didn't repent. So Micah was desperately pleading with his people to do that. To repent.

To have real anguish over their sin. Over their betrayal of God as they'd taken him for granted. To repent of that. Micah's big question is, how will the covenant God deal with his covenant-breaking people?

And through his prophecy, he says that the Lord is a God who will judge the sin of his people, but will provide means of salvation. Judgment first, then salvation.

[8 : 06] Because God has made his covenant with Israel, he will protect and guard a remnant of his people despite their sin. This week in chapter 2, we're all invited to a courtroom scene as Micah expands God's case against his people.

God's people are standing in the dock hearing the case being put against them. They, as the covenant community, stand accused. So let's hear what this trial looks like. The Lord has two accusations against his people.

So let's look at accusation number 1 in verses 1 to 5. You hurt God's people. What do you think about when you go to bed at night?

You know that moment when you're finally done with all the work of the day? Everything you've done, everything you need done is done. The lights are off. Your phone's off. You're in your pajamas. There's finally no distractions and nothing left to do and your head just hits the pillow. What do you think about in the empty space? Well, these Israelites are consumed with the thought of evil.

[9 : 15] As soon as their head hits the pillow, they are, verse 1, devising wickedness and working evil. They're scheming as they go to sleep, thinking about all the ways they can take advantage of people the next day.

So as soon as the morning dawns, as soon as the sun is in the sky, they're doing evil. And their reason for doing it is because they can.

It's in the power of my hand. I've got everything I need to do this and I can get away with this. So what's stopping me? Here's what they do in verse 2. They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away.

They're taking a look around at the land, seeing what they fancy and then getting their hands on it as much as they can. In an agricultural society, your land was your life, your way of providing for

yourself and your family.

You really did depend on this. Without it, you and your kids were out on the streets. You were looking for scraps. But this isn't just a call to social justice. This is more serious than that.

[10:25] The thieves are grabbing something more than just land. Continuing in verse 2. They oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

This was about their inheritance, their place in the land. The land was originally divided up and given to the 12 tribes of Israel who allotted it to their own people. This land was their place in the promised land.

It was their way of belonging visibly to God's covenant community. So to take that away from them was to take away their place in God's people as well.

This is seriously wrong. And God's own people are doing it. So how will he respond? Verse 3.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, against this family I am devising disaster.

Which is the same phrase as is used in verse 1 for the people devising disaster on their neighbours.

God's treating them as they have treated others.

[11:35] It's proportional judgment. God's a God of justice. This disaster God's bringing to them will take them from their position of lofty arrogance and presumption and completely humble them.

They will be brought low by his judgment. When God acts, their enemies, the Assyrians, that wicked military superpower will taunt them in their victory and the land grabbers will moan bitterly for their loss.

The land, the precious inheritance they were exchanging like it meant nothing was going to be occupied by rebels, by the enemy. Israel are not who they think they are.

They're not the good guys here. They're the wicked covenant breakers. So because of all this, they will, verse 5, have none to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

The land will be handed over to the Assyrians at some point as the people are exiled. But in the future, as Israel gathers together to portion out the land once more, these people will have no part in it.

[12:48] They will have no inheritance in the land, meaning that they are going to be cut off from God's people. This is a serious and frightening thing.

What is God like? He's the judge and he will judge his people fairly. It's easy for us to look at this and think, great, God's judging the bad people, the rich, the land grabbers, the elite.

I can really get on board with that. It's very 21st century. Micah's woke. But he's judging people who covet and have the means to do what they want. These people sinned very simply because, well, they thought they could get away with it.

He is the Lord who sees what you think when you're in your bed on your own, lights off, and no one is giving you a question at all. He knows the desires of your heart.

He knows what you covet. We may want to read this and point the finger at these land grabbers, but once you peel back the layer, you realize that the ugliness of their sin is alive and kicking in your own heart today.

[14:01] That's what I find anyway. Next we see this sin spiral as God's covenant breakers receive accusation number two.

You hate God's preacher in verses six to eleven. The people's covenant breaking rears its head once more, but with a new target, Micah himself.

He's just preached judgment upon the people, saying that God will punish those who break his law. Yes, even those who are living inside the covenant community, because he's the perfect and holy judge of all, and you're not going to get off because of your postcode.

How do they react to Micah's message of judgment? Their reaction is in verse six and seven. The commentators all seem to agree that those verses go together as the people's response, which I think makes sense as you read through it.

Here's what they say, verse six. Do not preach, thus they preach. One shouldn't preach of such things. Disgrace will not overtake us. Should this be said, O house of Jacob, has the Lord grown impatient?

[15:09] Are these his deeds? Did all my words do good to him who walks uprightly? Do you see what they're saying there? Don't go talking like that, Micah.

That's crazy talk, and it's just plain wrong. God's not going to judge us like that. We're not going to be punished. We're his people. We belong to him. God's not like that.

We're the house of Jacob. He's on our side. Remember all those promises he's made to us over the generations. Micah, now we, we must be mistaken here because it sounds like you're saying God is impatient.

And you wouldn't be saying that now, would you? This doesn't sound like God to us. He's slow to anger. He's abounding in steadfast love. Haven't you read the scriptures, Micah?

Doesn't God do good for his people? I thought he was for us. Come on, Micah. God's a God of love. The God you're speaking about, that's not the God we know.

[16:18] Do you see what they're doing? They're taking part of God's character and treating it like the whole thing. They're taking who God is and molding him into someone they like.

They're treating God like an idol. Their idolatrous hearts have even seeped into their thinking about God as they're not worshipping him but a warped, lesser version of him.

And they don't want to listen to Micah because he's telling them truth. He's preaching about God as he is. And they don't want that. They can't have that. They want Micah Silas. They want someone who's going to preach nice things to them, an encouraging message every week that will always lift them up.

They want judgment too but only for the bad guys. Only for people like those Assyrians. Only the murderers. Only the pedophiles. Not for Israel.

Not for his covenant people. Not for us. Verse 8. In verse 8 we see that God has given them a preacher who preaches judgment against his enemies.

[17:26] It's just that the enemies are not who the people think they are. But lately my people have risen up as an enemy. The people are not who they think they are.

They are his enemies. The covenant people themselves have risen up as God's enemies. They seem to forget that being God's people isn't only about blood and heritage but it's about living as one of God's people.

Living as people of the covenant. That's one of the drums Micah keeps on beating in his prophecy. Just being a Jew being part of the visible covenant community isn't what saves you from the devastation coming in the Lord's judgment.

He gives us an example of how his people have become his enemies. And this is a picture of what happens if you avoid preaching judgment in this life. This is the product of not preaching God as he is.

Look at verses 8 and 9 with me. You strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war. The women of my people you drive out from their delightful houses.

[18:37] From their young children you take away my splendor forever. God's special holy covenant people are taking advantage of the vulnerable.

When outsiders are passing through with no bad intentions instead of seeing a person to love and show kindness and grace to well they see an opportunity. That person doesn't really know their way around here.

They've not got many friends around here. This is low hanging fruit. So they take advantage.

They're evicting women and children from their homes.

It's likely that these women and children weren't poor. Their homes are delightful it says. But they were being told to get up and get out thrown out of their homes thrown out of their inheritance in the promised land that God had given them.

Instead of protecting them they were seeing these people as targets to make a quick buck from without so much as a thought of the consequences. In a world where anyone who preaches judgment is told to shut their mouth this is normal.

[19:45] There's no consequences. You shut up the guy who was talking about it so well why not get away with it. You can. It's open season. The Lord responds to this and he does so with absolute fairness as he turns their actions on their head.

Verse 10 Arise and go for this is no place to rest because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction. The Lord tells his rebellious people to arise and go.

He's going to exile them with the same words they said to these families they were chucking out of their homes get up and get out. These land grabbers are going to be exiled thrown out of the land vomited out because they've made it unclean.

They've defiled God's land. And yet again this judgment is just very fair isn't it? God's not flying off the handle at them.

He's not like a parent who's been worn down by an irritating toddler and then suddenly snaps. His judgment is carefully measured. Micah then presents the people with the preacher they would love to have every week.

[21 : 00] Verse 11 Israel want a preacher who will get the next round in.

A windbag who will just tell them what they want to hear. Someone who will just tell you everything's going to be fine before getting the beers out to have a good time. Drinks are on me. Our world would love that preacher.

It's very Glasgow in the year 2020. There are so many pressures from the world we live in. Big pressures that would love that preacher that tell us not to preach.

Do not preach like in verse 6. Our world says we don't want to know what you think about abortion. We don't want to know what you think about sex. We don't care that you think judgment is coming. We're good people. How dare you say that we'll be judged? That's really not loving. Your God's not a God of love if he's like that. People have to be affirmed for who they really are.

[22 : 11] That's real love. And there are people within the visible wider church who want to silence God too. Here's what one prominent Scottish minister said in a sermon last year.

In my time I have heard some awful portrayals of God. So grim and fearful. So angry and forbidding.

No wonder Richard Dawkins can scare people off the life of faith. But our God is not like that. He is creative and our God is pure love to whom souls are drawn like moths to a flame.

That sounds appealing doesn't it? He's saying that God isn't the fearful judge we're presented with in Micah. He's a God of love and love alone so we can follow our hearts and live happily.

Get the next drink in. I'll get the next round. It sounds attractive and convincing because he's presenting you with a true part of the picture while ignoring the rest.

[23 : 17] But we need to remain lovingly strong against those arguments. We need to keep on preaching to not be silenced because he is the God we heard about last week in chapter 1.

He is the God who melts mountains who when he comes the valleys are going to split right open. He is coming in judgment and it will be devastating. If we stop talking about judgment then where is people's need for a saviour?

If God is just a lovely big guy in the sky who wants you to have a good time to have another drink then why would we need to be saved? If he's not the God of justice then why would he want to punish me?

What right would he have to do that? I'm alright. If we take away God's judgment then we stop people looking for a saviour and we lead them towards their own devastation blindly quite happily walking towards their own destruction without a clue of what's coming.

It's kindness on our part to be honest about God's judgment. Well Micah has accused the people and they have come up guilty.

[24 : 38] God is the judge and he will judge them righteously. How is he going to respond to his people? His covenant breaking people? Let's look at verse 12 and 13 where the judge gives his verdict.

The Lord delivers his remnant. And these verses seem to come out of nowhere. It's oppression in the chapter exile denial oppression exile more judgment and then we're given this ray of hope.

I spent a fair amount of my week scratching my head trying to work out why all of this changes so quickly. It just comes out of nowhere. It doesn't seem to follow on from what's just been said. But that's the point.

God's salvation isn't something predictable or obvious or something that we can presume upon. His loving covenant kindness to us is completely undeserved.

When you've been a Christian for more than a few years you see that coming don't you in the passage. You may not have been surprised as we read it together. You think yeah yeah I know that's coming.

[25 : 47] yeah yeah the remnant I get that I get that. And it doesn't shock you. Because we all do have hearts that take it for granted. And this is how our covenant God will deal with his repentant covenant breaking people.

The remnant. Verse 12. I will surely assemble all of you oh 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. The Lord will gather his people. He's gathering them together as he is their great shepherd.

And this hope is certain. Look at what he says. I will surely. I will gather. I will set them together. There's no doubt about this in God's mind. It's happening. He's saving his people. He's saving the remnant.

And it will be selective. A remnant saved from judgment. This remnant doesn't include everyone from the nation of Israel. It doesn't include all of Micah's hearers but the people of faith who trust in the Lord's covenant.

[27 : 02] Those who have repented towards him and love him as their father. The Lord's not just suddenly changing character here. He's not saying it's all fine.

I was never really that angry anyway. It was just a show. He's still the judge of all. And the fact that he has to gather them suggests that they've been scattered in the first place.

That they as a people have been exiled, judged for their sin, just like Micah said they would be. So God is gathering them together as one, as a remnant, after judgment.

There is hope for the people. A selective hope is only the remnant will be saved, only the people of faith. And those people will have real safety in their salvation.

They'll be grazing on the grass like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men, I love that phrase, without a care in the world. This verse is beautiful.

[28 : 01] And it has an eternal perspective. It's not just talking about being saved from exile, from a city. But it's about being saved from the ultimate judgment, the final judgment of eternal exile that we deserve for our sin.

In verse 13, once the Lord has gathered his people, he will be their king and their leader. He who opens up the breach goes up before them. They break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head. The Lord will break them out of captivity. He is the breaker and he is the only way of salvation for his rebellious people.

He liberates them from the fate they deserve. The people are pictured as being captive in a city, within the city walls, and the Lord breaks them out.

He liberates them in his strength as he is the breaker. He's the one who breaks through the gates to march his people out of there towards safety. And he leads them as their king.

[29 : 11] Once he has liberated them, like a good shepherd, he stays with his sheep to lead them and care for them. So they are at peace.

The Lord is their king. They have been liberated and he is the one there to have hope in. He is where their salvation lies. As we close, let's ask again.

What is God like? Who God is, is both a warning and a comfort for us. He's a far greater version of those YouTube videos of the soldiers coming home to surprise their kids.

He is the warrior, the terrifying warrior who will fight against and defeat his enemies. But he's our father, our shepherd king, lovingly caring for his flock.

We've seen those two truths today, that he is the judge and he is the saviour. They're not different people. God is both judge and saviour at the same time. And we, standing on this side of the cross, know that these find their conclusions in Christ.

[30 : 22] That in the cross, God's hatred of sin met his loving kindness as his son took the devastation we deserve, securing for us the eternal peace that verse 12 and verse 13 promise the remnant.

That is a comfort to us, isn't it? That our sin is fully and finally dealt with and we won't face the devastation we deserve. But we don't stand on this side of the cross and say that since Jesus has come, that we don't need to worry about it.

We don't need to worry about the message of Micah. We're to read this and take great notice of the warnings given to God's covenant community. We need to see how God will judge his people if they continue in their sin and fail to acknowledge him for who he is.

It should warn us from becoming complacent as we go on in our faith. If we're ever in a position of sin and we tell ourselves that, well, it's all fine because we're Christians. We don't need to worry about that.

We're in the church. We're okay. Then we have gross seriously misunderstood who God is and what he is like. He's the God of judgment who is serious about dealing with sin.

[31 : 40] So we are to be serious about dealing with sin in our own lives. He saved us at the cost of his own son's life and that salvation is not to be taken for granted. We can't be presumptuous like Israel, constantly sinning against God but saying, we're the people of Jacob.

Disaster's not going to come our way. We're fine. We're in the clear. And you might be thinking right now, well, we're not going to fall for that.

Not us. We're committed to God and his word. We're a good church. We teach the Bible and we've been faithful for generations, even at great personal cost.

We're not going to fall for that. But that kind of thinking is exactly where complacency and presumption can seep into our lives. We may be a faithful church today, but what kind of church will we be in 10 years or 50 years?

We can't take that faithfulness for granted. One act of faithfulness a few years ago doesn't mean we can take our foot off the gas and relax. We've done our time. We've served it.

[32 : 49] We're okay. We need passages like these to stop us from becoming complacent in our faith. They remind us of just how much we need God.

How much we need his kindness and his grace in our life. So we need to be committed to knowing who he is and consistently pursuing that.

We need to be teaching our young people the truth about God, unashamedly preaching to them of the judgment that is coming. Not just the happy, not just the nice encouraging stories. Because as we've seen this evening, if we are airbrushing, editing out parts of his character, then it's going to have eternal consequences.

God being the judge seems like a truly terrifying thing. And that's because, well, it is. But it's also part of his great glory. Sadly, not everyone gets that.

They want to make the Christian life as attractive as possible. So they edit out parts of God's character that they don't like. The Old Testament God? Yeah, he was a different guy back then.

[34 : 01] He's changed now. He's better now. He's a God of love now. Not of judgment. But the irony is that people like that think they're making God better.

They're making him more appealing by doing that. By chopping off some of his character, they think they're making him more attractive to the world. But they could not be more wrong. And they are missing out.

Because God's greatest love is found right at the heart of his judgment. In the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Our Lord and Father, who is a God like you?

We thank and praise you for who you are. That you are both judge and saviour. And that you do so in perfect holiness.

[35 : 07] Please help us to see you as you are. To know you. Help us not to be taken in by lies about you. But to be people who always seek to know you better.

We thank you that you will act in judgment to end all wrong one day. And we thank you for your son. That we have life in his name. Amen.