12-23-18

Micah 7:1-7

Micah was a prophet to both Israel and Judah, both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. He begins this section of his prophecy with lamentation, “Woe is me” or perhaps, “What misery is mine”. He speaks as someone who has a vineyard and has come looking for the first fruits. If you are a gardener, think about how much you look forward to that first tomato or that first picking of beans from your garden. Think how disappointed you are if you find that the deer raided your garden the night before and there is nothing left.

Here the prophet comes to the vineyard and finds it striped of every good thing. Keep in mind that God sometimes refers to Israel as His vineyard. Micah is expressing God’s disappointment in His people. He has cared for them, yet they continue to turn their backs on Him and produce no fruit. Worse than simply producing no fruit, they have turned from God and commit evil.

Micah turns from his metaphor to those he is actually talking about; the people of Israel, especially those who are the rulers. He says “*the godly person has perished from the land. And there is no upright person among men*.” “Perished” is a strong word. It indicates more than that they have simply died off; it tells us that they have been gotten rid of; that they haven’t been able to survive in the land. They became the victims of the evil rulers. The people in power will kill them, they will actually hunt for them.

The princes and the judges have become so bold that they will ask for a bribe outright. Those who have money and power can ask for whatever they want and they will get it, even if it is completely unjust. Micah goes back to the garden saying “*The best of them is like a briar. The most upright like a thorn hedge*.” A briar growing in a garden is more than worthless it is an aggravation. Anyone who comes to the rulers and judges seeking justice comes up against a thorn hedge; they cannot get through and the experience is even painful.

The “*watchmen*” in verse 4 is partly an allusion to the prophets. The prophets have been warning them for a long time that judgement was coming. But they persecuted the prophets and ignored the warning sent to them by a merciful and longsuffering God. Micah is warning of the soon to come time when their own watchmen will see approaching armies and be thrown into confusion.

Within 20 years of this prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrian armies. Within another 20 years after that, most of Judah had fallen to the Assyrians and Jerusalem was surrounded. The only reason that Jerusalem was spared was because their current king, Hezekiah, had been following the LORD for the past 15 years. When Jerusalem was surrounded, Hezekiah and the people humbled themselves before the LORD and depended on Him for salvation from the Assyrians. It would be about another 100 years before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

But what about verses 5 and 6 of our reading in Micah? These words are a way of describing the horrors of a siege. When the armies attacked, some of the cities were too heavily guarded with high, thick walls to be invaded. So, the invading army would surround the city and allow no one to go in or out and there was no way to get food to the people inside. They would eventually starve. During this time of starvation, no one could be trusted. People would turn on their own families if that is what it took to survive. It takes this kind of evil to turn families into enemies.

Micah warns what is coming, he knows what is coming. It’s going to happen all around him. He knows what the people in power do to those who follow Yahweh; But in verse 7, he takes his stand. Micah “*will watch expectantly for the LORD*”. Not just watch, but watch expectantly. And he will wait. He has no doubt that God is the One who has salvation and he will wait for Him, even if he doesn’t see it in his lifetime. There is no doubt that God hears him and Micah knows that God will take care of him.

Now, why look at this passage that contains so much discord on the advent Sunday that is about peace? Because there is one time that Jesus quotes from this passage when He is talking about peace. Let’s turn to Matthew 10:34-36.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.”

This can be confusing; Isaiah himself refers to Jesus as “*The Prince of Peace*”. First, He says that He didn’t come to bring peace, but instead, to bring the opposite. Then, He quotes from Micah about even families being torn apart, just like under siege conditions. What we learn here, is that we must understand what kind of peace we are looking for in Jesus Christ. It is our natural tendency to look for peace in the natural; in our physical lives. But we as Christians must learn to look with spiritual eyes.

We can forget about having the world at peace. First off, the world is ruled by satan. From John 12:31, “*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*” Jesus defeated satan at the crucifixion, but he is still here. As the scripture says, “*he will be cast out*”. Satan is a liar and a murderer, as long as he is ruler in this world, there will be no peace. There are too many people who follow him. Secondly, people themselves are incapable of maintaining peace; they are too self-centered and rebellious. From Genesis 6:5, “*Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*.” As long as people are running around in the world with hearts that are evil, peace is an impossibility.

In this section of Matthew, Jesus is relating several things. On the surface, Jesus is trying to let His followers know that this is not the time that He will be overthrowing Rome; that the Messiah they have in mind is not who they are going to get now. Notice that Jesus said “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth”.* “Came” is past tense. Jesus is speaking of His first advent, He is already there and this is not the time that He is going to bring peace to the whole world. We find out later in the Bible that Jesus will come back again, His second advent, and that time He will bring peace.

Jesus has come the first time to bring a sword. A sword means “division”, and Jesus will divide people. Basically, He asks the questions, “Which side are you on?”; “Are you on God’s side or are you on the devil’s?” When Jesus came to the earth, He made it very clear that there is no middle ground. Either you accept Jesus, entirely and without reservation, or you don’t. To accept Him is to side with God. To reject Him is to side with satan.

Here we see the sword; the division. There are two, and only two, sides. You have to be on one side or the other. If one does not choose or if one tries to compromise, then that person has chosen the side against God. The two sides are absolutely opposed. When two sides have no agreement, there is division; there cannot be peace. Currently, on this earth, there are people who have humbled themselves and accepted Christ, and there are those who have not. We aren’t going to have peace, and Jesus is letting us know that.

When Jesus goes on to quote Micah, He is letting us know how great this divide really is. It is capable of what starvation under siege conditions can do: It actually can divide families. Jesus is letting us know that if we accept Him, it might cost us our families. We know from history and even from current happenings, that this is literally the case. People who become Christian are sometimes disowned by their families or even worse. But the whole context of the larger passage in Matthew is that we must be willing to pay that price. We are called to love our families and sacrifice for them and honor our mothers and fathers; but Jesus must come first and above all these.

Remember the stand that Micah took; he chose to wait on the LORD. He knew the LORD was his salvation, and he knew the LORD heard him. That is for each of us. The LORD is our salvation through Jesus Christ and it is for us to simply do His work and wait for Him. Jesus does hear us, He hears all our prayers, and He will take care of all things.

So, we know what peace Jesus did not bring, what are we to be looking for? Well, there are two kinds. First and most important to us is spiritual peace. This peace is a gift from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

The peace that Jesus gives is internal, it is a peace that exists in our spirit, in our heart; it is not dependent on what is happening in the world or in our lives. See that Jesus gives it; it is a gift. It is not something we earn or make ourselves do. We can ask for it, but we can’t generate it. This is a peace that can only belong to a Christian. It doesn’t mean that we don’t suffer, or grieve, or wish things were different. But even through these things there is a deep peace of mind that God has everything under control. Satan is the ruler of this world, but God is still in control.

This peace that Jesus gives is a true peace, not like the world gives. It is easy to see that any peace made in the world does not last; it is always temporary. This lack of trouble in our hearts and lack of fear in our lives is due to believing in truth, the truth of Jesus Christ. Really, even for Christians, we don’t understand how we can have this peace.

Philippians 4:7

 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now, the second kind of peace that we look for from Jesus is world peace. This is for the future, after Jesus comes back the second time and establishes His Kingdom here on earth. The book of Revelation tells us that satan will be bound and unable to influence mankind anymore. Additionally, Jesus will rule with a rod of iron. The sinfulness of peoples’ hearts will be kept in check.

There will be a brief moment, when satan will be released and the last of those who refuse Christ will be revealed. Once these have been removed, God the Father will create a new earth. Sin will be gone; division will be gone; eternal peace, in all its forms, will be established. Come, Lord Jesus!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are so grateful for that peace that only You can provide. It is a wonderful gift that You have for us. We pray now, Lord, and ask for this gift of peace. Both for ourselves and for those dear to us who are facing hardship.

In a few days, we will celebrate a time set aside to especially remember Your birth. To remember that You, God, became one of Your creations, in order to save us from destruction. We cannot know or understand what that cost you, but we know that we were bought with a price, a high price. We offer You abounding thanks; gratefully acknowledging that You brought us salvation.

We bless You LORD God, our Saviour Jesus; we bless Your holy name. There is no one like You and You have chosen to love us. Thank You for peace. Thank You for salvation.

Lord Jesus, it is in Your most holy name we pray

Amen