
“Rebuke, Remnant, and Rule”
(Micah 4:1-13):
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

Historical Background

Micah was speaking to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos. These two countries had many prophets come to them before the exile because things had gotten so bad. What was the nation like when Micah arrived on the scene? It was during the 8th century BC that Israel and Judah had risen to economic prosperity, but along with this came a spiritual depravity that was quite unparalleled.

It was something that was true then, and it appears that it has been true throughout history. Much of Europe's nations used to be spiritual powerhouses producing some of the greatest spiritual giants in all of history. Martin Luther in Germany, Jean Calvin from France, John Wycliffe, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Spurgeon, and Wilberforce from England, John Knox in Scotland. And then we move over to America and we have the likes of Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney and D.L. Moody. You may have recognized perhaps only one or two of these names, but they were all incredibly influential Christians, that changed the course of history in their countries.

But as each of these countries began to experience wealth and prosperity, spiritual decadence also came over them a short time later. When we look at Canada we too have lost our spiritual bearings, our sense of right and wrong. We're a country that accepts gay marriage. One of the nation's greatest and most respected, one who's received the Order of Canada, has now been found guilty in a score of crimes. Canada also prides herself in her secularism, pluralism, relativism, and liberalism (and you can define that politically or morally). We love to brag about how our passport is accepted everywhere. We pat ourselves on the back when Toronto is high up on the list of the greatest cities to live in...but where are we spiritually? What kind of impact have we made spiritually at the local, national or global level?

And I think that's what often times happens with many countries as a result of prosperity. The economy goes up, but at the same time, the morality goes down. We've seen it in happen in Europe, in North America, and even in Korea.

And that's what was happening in Israel and Judah. They were prospering economically, but they had forgotten God and were worshiping Canaanite deities. Swept under their rug was poverty. In the back of their closets was corruption. Hidden in their alleys was injustice. This was not what God had envisioned and instructed his people to be.

They were to be a city on a hill. They were to be a light that illuminates the world. They were to be salt that seasons and preserves the earth. But they were everything but those things.

And that is where we find the message of Micah.

The Prophet Micah

One of the things that was unique about Micah is that perhaps more than any other prophet, you see his own personal and emotional connection with what was going on with Israel and Judah and how God is going to deal with them. He was very sensitive to the spiritual climate of the day.

In this book Micah utters three oracles. And all of the oracles begin with some sort of indictment, judgment and rebuke. And the rebuke is basically for three things.

Idolatry. Sure, as part of our multicultural, free and democratic society, a plurality of religions must be accepted and celebrated. But we definitely can't accept the doctrine that says, all religions lead to God, all that matters is your sincerity. No way. And we can't just say, well, who am I to impose my beliefs on someone else. Christianity was, is and always will be a proselytizing, evangelizing, confrontational, dialogical, converting religion. It presents itself as the only way among man ways, as the only truth among competing worldviews. It confronts idolatry head on.

Immorality. There is a lot of immorality happening in our country. For example in Canada abortion up to a certain point is legal. But as the rock group POD so 'eloquently' says in one of their songs, abortion is murder. I wouldn't doubt that there would be a fair number of people in this room that would say that abortion is okay. From a Christian biblical theological perspective there is no way to say that abortion is okay, even in the worst scenario involving rape or an early detected birth defect.

I also know that some of us have lost our moral compass because when the whole gay marriage thing was happening, a petition was brought into church for evangelical bible believing Christians and churches to sign, that was to say in a united voice, "marriage is between a man and woman, period." But I remember walking around and a few folks looked at it and walked away. And when someone does that you know that their morality is not founded on God and his word, but upon society's influence and their opinion.

Those are just a couple of examples, but we don't have to dig too deep to unearth a ton of immorality in our lives and in our society.

Injustice.

In Micah's day it was the rich who were exploiting the poor so that the rich could get richer and the poor poorer. Not much has changed. Injustice is most always committed by the one with power, the ones with position, and the ones with wealth.

Sometimes we Asians and probably all people have this problem with injustice. In the Asian culture we learn from way back, I mean, it is engrained in our psyches that we take care of our own. First it's me, then it's my family and well...that's about it. I think that's true for the vast majority of Asians and all people. It's just part of our natural self-centeredness. When you look at the homes of your Chinese neighbors, why do you think they have 6 cars in their driveways? Because they're exceedingly wealthy? Maybe, but most likely because there are 3 families living there. Mom and dad, the kids, grandpa and grandma, and two uncles. They're taking care of their own. And just look at us Koreans and I'm sure it's true for other ethnic groups, but as a Korean diaspora in Canada, we flock together, and we tend to reach our own without much care for the city or country we live in. And this indifference, in not caring for others is injustice.

This is something that God is addressing to our generation as 2nd generation Asians all across North America. More and more people are becoming disillusioned with the immigrant church and

are going multi-cultural. Multi-cultural church plants are popping up all over North America. Why do you think that is? They're growing tired of their own ethnocentrism.

And so when the word of God is preached and sins are addressed and harsh rebukes are given-- what's our response to be? Well, there are two. 1) Shut up the preacher, which is what Israel and Judah did and Micah points that out in 2:6ff. Even Jesus condemned Israel for being a people who murdered their own prophets. And so you all can do that to me. You can say, Peter, what's with all the doom and gloom? How about a positive message? How about a message that will make me feel good about myself? Or 2) We can say, preach on! Preach the word of God, unadulterated and unaltered. Because sometimes we need a swift kick in the pants. Because often we do get off course and we need a reminder. Because the word of God is the word of God and you have no right as a pastor to withhold certain parts of it from us. And then we individually and collectively repent.

And those who respond that way, in repentance, are called the Remnant.

You know folks, when you hear the word remnant, I don't think for anyone that it draws up excitement and gets your heart racing, does it? It's not one of those power words like "saint" or "army" or "lion". Those are power words. Remnant...it's such a negatively connoted word. It's like, hey you gonna eat your steak? Yeah, but don't worry, I'll save you a remnant. You go to Fabricland (yes, I've shopped there) and they have the remnant section. The leftovers, the pieces that are not really large enough for big projects. It's just the bits and pieces. It's the discount rack.

But today, I'd like to change your whole perspective on that word, so that the next time you hear the word remnant and read about the remnant in the scriptures, incredible visions of grandeur and the awesome grace and perfect plan of God will rush into your minds.

Sometimes the bible really makes it hard to think that way though. For example in the book of Isaiah, the image that he uses for God's remnant people...you ready?...**the stump**. I know, you could hardly hold in your excitement. And you're probably thinking, "God, could it be? That I could be the tree stump?" But that's how Isaiah describes the remnant.

You know in one sense, the remnant in the bible is the leftover. But it depends on what's leftover. If you're eating a t-bone and the remnant is the bone, then that's pretty cruddy. But perhaps the best way to understand God's remnant is from metallurgy. When these precious metals are mined its not found in a pure form, but intermixed with rock and other minerals and after refining and removal of all the junk, you have left the precious metal. That's the remnant.

In Micah, he refers to the remnant as the sheep who will be shepherded and led by the king, the Lord himself. (2:12-13). This shepherd/sheep motif is found throughout the bible and the best known example is Jesus himself as the great shepherd.

It is the remnant through which God will make a strong and mighty nation and God will rule as their king forever. (4:7) Everyone else will be looked over and set aside. But through the remnant, God will make a strong and mighty nation.

It is the remnant of God through which God will accomplish his plans for the world and to whom He will give wealth and prosperity (4:13).

And to the remnant God gives this incredible promise (5:2ff).

*2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."*

*3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.*

*4 He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.*

5 And he will be their peace.

Then Micah goes on to say (ch.5)

*7 The remnant of Jacob will be
in the midst of many peoples
like dew from the LORD,
like showers on the grass,
which do not wait for man
or linger for mankind.*

*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,
like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
which mauls and mangles as it goes,
and no one can rescue.*

And then later in chapter 5, it says the remnant will be purified. God will purge them of their sin and he will purify and cleanse us. Folks, that's a good thing. For God to come and clean house, that's a good thing. We should yearn and long and await for that to happen in all of us.

That's the remnant. Hardly a description for leftovers.

Who is the remnant of God today? It consists of those who consider as their leader, the one who came out of Bethlehem. It's those of us who accept or have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior of their lives that are the remnant. Those who live to serve and obey Jesus are his remnant. And it's through that remnant God will accomplish his purposes.

And it will be in and through this remnant that God, the Lord will rule.

Israel used to be a theocracy. God was their ruler. In the times of Moses and Joshua and the Judges this was the case, until the people began to compare themselves with the other nations

who all had kings, fallible, sinful, corrupt human kings and the Israelites wanted a king for themselves. And God warned them of the hardships that would come from having a human king but the people insisted and God gave them a king. And the vast majority of these kings were wicked and corrupt and didn't care for God or the people. And eventually led them into exile. And it's in this context, prior to their exile that God speaks to them about his rule.

NIV Micah 4:1 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 will stream to it. ² Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁴ 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. ⁵ All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. ⁶ "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. ⁷ I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. ⁸ As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem." ⁹ Why do you now cry aloud-- have you no king? Has your counselor perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor? ¹⁰ Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies. ¹¹ But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, "Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!" ¹² But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, he who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor. ¹³ "Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations." You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.

What are some of the distinctives of God's rule through the remnant?

--nations will come to the mountain of the Lord, to seek God, learn his ways, and walk in his paths (4:2)

--God will be the perfect judge. There will be no more hung juries or tossed out cases, or wrong verdicts or any other sort of injustice. The rich and the poor will be treated fairly. God will be the perfect judge.

--wars will cease. War instruments will be turned into farming implements. In other words there will be peace. And in chapter 5, which we already mentioned, the person who will bring peace is none other than the one from Bethlehem, the prince of peace himself.

--God will rule over the remnant. In other words, the ruler will be none other than Jesus himself. All those who suffered in this lifetime will be gathered together and God will justly and lovingly rule them.

--God will forgive and remove the sins of his people (7:18-20)

When will this happen? When will this rule of God begin? The answer is twofold.

1) It's happening and has been happening for 2000 years. Since the moment Jesus left heaven and became man, the rule of God, the Kingdom of God was ushered in and has been growing steadily more and more as time goes on. But we know for certain that it hasn't happened in all its fullness. There are still wars. There is still no peace in our world. The people of God are still at times defiant to God's rule. The world is not yet flocking to the mountain of God. And of course we see every day people rejecting the just rule of God in their lives.

2) So ultimately, this will happen when Jesus comes again. He will reign fully. His kingdom will be fully established. And everything that Micah says about the remnant people and the rule of God will occur when Jesus returns to judge the earth.

Conclusion:

What are we to do in the meantime? What is the church and God's people to do until Jesus comes again?

- 1) establish the kingdom of God here on earth. We not only pray, Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we live it out daily. We practice justice and fight against injustice. We live out Micah 6:8.
*8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*
- 2) We go to the nations with the gospel and tell people about this King from Bethlehem, who came, lived and loved, and died and rose again to turn rebels into the remnant.
- 3) And finally we wait, eagerly for the King to return and make all wrongs right, establish his rule fully and completely, and reward his remnant.

Friends as the church, as the people of God, let's heed the message of Micah, turn from our indifference and disobedience and live as the true remnant, under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ.