

Micah Part 2 - "He Will Be Our Peace"

This chapter contains some gracious promises concerning the Day of the Lord, the glory and happiness of the church of Christ in the last days, its stability, exaltation, and increase, and the spread of the Gospel. Not to mention the peace and security of the church. The constant profession and exercise of religion. The deliverance from affliction and distress. The ample and everlasting kingdom of Christ. Then follow some prophecies more particularly respecting the Jews; as that, though they should be in pain, and be carried captive into Babylon, they should be delivered from after that, and, though many people should be gathered against them, yet should not be able to prevail over them. Still, lastly, the attempts of nations to destroy would result in their own destruction. But before we dig deeper, let us take a moment to pray.

Lord, shine your light on the dark places and grant us peace. Teach us peace, guiding our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and hearts, giving us the courage to say: "Never again war!" With war, everything is lost. Instill our hearts with peace to overcome the battle of the mind. Peace within our homes so we can live joyful lives and peace within the world so the raging war ceases. Amen.

I grew up appreciating music and those who could write songs. Nothing has changed regarding my love of music. One of my favorite groups early in life was the Beatles, even following them upon their breakup as they battled for peace among themselves. I remember the day John Lennon was shot and killed, and I immediately went to the record store and purchased his final album. On that album, Lennon wrote and recorded a song titled "Imagine." The song's lyrics begin, "Imagine there's no heaven, no hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion, too. Imagine all the people living life in peace. Imagine no possessions; I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people sharing all the world. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one."

I would say that the lyrics represent a powerful dream, and the song is loved worldwide not only because of its tune but also because of the message striking a chord within the hearts of millions of people. A powerful dream imagines no greed or killing, no hunger, and all the people sharing the world. Perhaps Lennon believed it would best be achieved if there would be no hope of heaven and no fear of hell. Maybe Lennon thought it would be best achieved without religion and preserved without God.

As part of the Beatles, Paul McCartney and John Lennon wrote a song titled "All You Need is Love." I remember the PBS open-air concert series filmed at Buckingham Palace, and at the final concert, Paul McCartney joined Elton John and a galaxy of stars who sang this song, but unfortunately, John Lennon was not there. Perhaps he would have been there had it not been for a fan who gunned him down in brutal murder. I thank Pastor Colin Smith for reminding me that Lennon would have celebrated his 83rd birthday this past week. The problem is that we live in a world of violence, and nothing presents that more today than what we see happening in Israel. If

perhaps we were to read the prophecy from Ezekiel 37 and 38, Ezekiel predicted what we see happening.

Church, there is a problem around us and within us. Imagine all the people around us living life in peace. Imagine. How can that be possible? Imagine if the dream of true community, the end of war, hunger, and peace on earth be realized, then there has to be a solution to the problem around and within us. That is why we are in Chapter Four of Micah today, striking a familiar resemblance to Lennon's song "Imagine," finding a description of peace and love within the human heart. However, how it comes about is intensely different.

In verse 3 of today's text, Micah writes about a day when "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." Here, we see Micah describing total disarmament. History tells us the world has never witnessed a time of complete disarmament, which is what Micah describes. A time of no hostility, a time of security. Imagine all the nations of the earth with no arms or nuclear weapons. Instead, budgets are allocated to peace and prosperity. Imagine. Imagine no hostility or threat of attack. We cannot imagine a world in which there is no need for defense.

As you heard from last week's sermon, Micah's hearers would have embraced the thought of peace and tranquility where the land of the people would be secure, and no one would make them afraid. Imagine. Imagine walking down any street in any city or town without fear of stealing your wallet. Business conducted without the threat of a lawsuit. No reports of terror attacks. Imagine. No one will make them afraid. Not even Satan will be able to intimidate God's people. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid. Peace and security. Quite a dream. Imagine. It appears evident to me that these are beautiful words and thoughts but not the reality of the world in which we live. Is Micah a dreamer? In the words of Lennon, "You might say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one." But, at the end of verse four, we see the basis of Micah's writing. "For the mouth of the Lord Almighty has spoken" (ESV). The exact words are also spoken by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40:4.

Micah says you need to know these things, writing of a promise from the Almighty Lord. "One day, nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree." That's the promise of God. How will this ever happen, and when might we expect to see this happen? How and when? The Old Testament tells us that the temple has much to do with how and when. In Exodus 25, we read about the presence of God coming down and filling the temple. We are talking about the place where God would come: the temple. In verse 2, Micah sees the day when God would come to his temple. "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so we may walk in his ways." Imagine God coming to a physical place in visible form! A place in Jerusalem. But how? How do we go from imagining to reality? The answer: In verse 3, we read that God will judge between many peoples and settle disputes for nations far and wide. He will bring reconciliation. Christ will resolve them but also bring judgment against his enemies.

The enemies are the many nations that want to destroy Israel. In verses 11 and 12, we read, “But how many nations are gathered against you. They say, let her be defiled; let our eyes gloat over Zion! We must remember that in the context of Zion, Zion means Jerusalem or the land of Israel. We are witnesses to these events happening before our eyes. Reading on, “But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor.” This is saying that when the Lord comes, he will bring reconciliation to his people and bring judgment to his enemies. He will remove them from the face of the earth—those who persist in evil. People, such as those who believe in universalism, might say the God of love does not send people to hell. Furthermore, Universalism has difficulty believing there is a God. How naïve. What we need in this world is someone who can overcome evil’s power that spoils this world. Who could stop the terror cells and the bombers without a heavenly judge? Who can prevent those who take women and children as human shields? Who can break the self-interests while half the world struggles to survive while the other half indulges in the gluttony of materialism? Who can change that? Without a judge, the vision of Micah 4 would only be a dream. Imagine. There is no hope in Micah 4 without a judge.

In verse 6, we read, “In that day, declares the Lord, I will gather the lame, I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief.” Here, the Lord says I will gather those who are injured. Christ says I am coming to you in your wounds, gathering and taking you into my arms. The New Testament says God never turns anyone away, inviting you to take you where you need to go. Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The same God who judges and gathers.

Here is something extraordinary: when you come under the arms of Christ, you submit your life to his rule. Those he gathers, he also rules. He will buy back your resistance to God. We see this in verse ten when Micah refers to Babylon. “You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There, the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.” From the opening book of Genesis and the Tower of Babel to the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ will destroy the city of Babylon. Even Babylon finds its place in the plan of God, right in the middle of the anti-God pressure that surrounds you in life in this world that God will redeem you through his grace.

Micah says the fulfillment of God’s promise is to judge, gather, rule, and redeem—the God of the Bible. There is living hope for you in Jesus. The question remains: When should we look to see the fulfillment of God’s promise in Micah in the future? In the book of Revelation chapter 20, we see a description of the millennium—a period of One thousand years when Christ will reign physically on the earth. The nations of the earth will discover the blessings of the rule of Jesus Christ and the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Prophecy is like a range of mountains so that you can see one peak after another. Beyond the millennium is another peak, the last mountaintop of eternity. What Micah sees points us beyond into the new earth described in chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation—the ultimate destiny of peace, security, and freedom from sin and temptation in the presence of the Lord. A new life opened up forever and ever. Is there any place in which we should look to see any evidence of what Micah chapter 4 is talking about today? In Micah verse 1, he says these things shall happen

in the last days. But the New Testament clarifies that we now live in the last days. The last days have begun with the ascension of Jesus at Pentecost. If we are in the last days, where should we look at what Micah describes? Where should we look to see evidence of God's presence on the earth wanting to live under His rule? That's our calling, isn't it? It's about peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. God's people pursue peace and act in righteousness. That's our calling until God takes us home. To shine the light of Christ into a dark world through gathered communities of redeemed people who pursue peace and righteousness. That is a snapshot of His Kingdom when his will is done on earth.

In thinking about Lennon's song earlier this week, another song came to mind by the Christian group Mercy Me. "I can only Imagine." Allow me to read some of the words.

I can only imagine what it will be like.

When I walk by your side.

I can only imagine what my eyes would see when your face is before me.

Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel?

Will I dance for you, Jesus, or in awe of You be still?

Will I stand in your presence, or to my knees, will I fall?

Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

Two songs, one built on the heart of a struggling man and the other built on the unshakable promises of the living God.

In closing, you can embrace the promises of the Lord, come to Jesus Christ this morning, and say, "Gather me." Bring me under your rule so that my life might become a place of light and hope for others, and then, on the last day, gather me with all your people into the joy of your presence. Jesus Christ has come into the world so that his gift may be yours. Imagine that He will be our peace. Let's pray.

Father, we bow in your presence, the judge of all the earth, one who opens and closes all doors to eternal life. We bless you for opening a wide door for all who come to your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for leading us forward and focusing on a day yet to come. One day, we know face-to-face Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.