

## **From Zion Shall Go the Law**

Part 4 of *Micah*

November 24, 2019

### I. Introduction (5")

#### A. Series

1. If you have a Bible, you can open to the book of Micah, chapter 4. We are in the middle of a series right now in which we are reading our way through the book of Micah. This series is going to take us seven weeks, which means we are doing a chapter a week. Although today we are not going to cover all of chapter 4. We are going to skip over some of the material in chapter 4 just for the sake of time.
2. So far we are starting to see how political Micah is. The prophets do not keep their noses out of politics; if they did they would have very little to say! In these poems we've been reading, Micah is accusing the wealthy and the powerful in his city (which is Jerusalem) of economic injustice against the poor, he's accusing them of greed and cowardice and violence.
3. It's been a heavy three chapters. But when we turn the page to chapter 4 and begin this new poem, the tone changes dramatically. Rather than assessing the world around him, Micah begins to look toward the future—God's future—and rather than a bleak and confrontational poem, we find one that is powerful and uplifting. And some of you I know are ready for that!

#### B. Dream Speech

1. Let me start just by reading the poem for us. Read [MICAH 4.1-5]. Whatdya think? It's good!
2. In some ways, this poem reminds me of Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. How many of you remember that speech? King builds this picture of racial integration and mutual respect and brotherhood. But he doesn't give any dates for exactly when that would happen. He doesn't give any instructions on how to make it happen. He just says, "I have a dream. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."
3. It's a beautiful speech. I went back and read it this week. But it's not a manual. It's not instructions. It has no ultimatums or deadlines. Rather, it is King giving his hearers a vision for the future, of what could be and what he believed would be.
4. It's similar with Micah here. He doesn't say how this is going to happen. He doesn't say when it is going to happen. He just says, "I have a dream! That one day the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be lifted up above the hills. And people will flow to it."

### II. Micah 4 (8.5")

#### A. Conflict

1. It's a vision of what he believes the world will one day be. And in that vision, Jerusalem will become the center of the world. All nations will gather there and God will settle their disputes. They will turn their weapons into tools. And there will be peace.
2. What's interesting to me is that he believes conflict will continue. When we picture what heaven is like or what the world will be like when Jesus returns, we have lots of images and words to describe our vision of that, but "conflict" probably isn't one.
3. Conflict is what happens when two finite human beings interact with each other. Conflict isn't evil, it's not shameful—it can get out of hand and become evil—but it's simply the result of finite human beings trying to live in community with each other. If I have my perspectives and my experiences and my values and you have your perspectives and experiences and values, at some point we are going to rub roughshod against one another, correct?
4. And listen, we never overcome that limited, finite subjectivity. It's not as though when we get to heaven we'll become infinite and see things as God sees them and stop having my perspective or all have the same perspective. That would mean we cease to be human and cease to be who we are. We will always be limited, always be finite, and if we are going to live in community forever, we are eventually going to have conflict.

5. Micah expects and anticipates that. In his vision for the future, as idyllic as it is, nations still have disputes with each other. Our personhood and even our people group don't dissolve into one big homogenous blob. In this vision we are still distinct, and so we have conflict.
- B. Mediation
1. Now when people today have conflict, how do we resolve it? We try to talk it out. Or we try to ignore it. But if it festers and festers and continues to stay in front of us and we can't find a solution, what is our bottom line? Our last resort? It's violence, isn't it?
  2. Whether we're talking about just you and me or this gang and that gang or this nation and that nation, when talking fails, we take up swords and spears to impose our will on each other. To make our perspective dominant.
  3. But in Micah's vision, the nations don't do that. They come to Jerusalem (I imagine this kind of like coming to Switzerland) and they each plead their case before God, and God judges and God decides the disputes. And God's verdict, God's arbitration is satisfying to them.
  4. Now why is it satisfying? It's because, Micah tells us, out of Zion shall go the law, the word of the Lord. All nations are operating by the same law, the same shared principles. And God is the authoritative interpreter of that law.
- C. Torah
1. Now what you need to know is that the word "law" at the end of verse 2 is the Hebrew word *torah*, instruction, teaching. Often this word refers to the first five books of the Bible. Probably even more often it refers to the book of Deuteronomy. (Deuteronomy is the quintessential expression of the law.)
  2. But Micah puts it in parallel with the word of the Lord. It's not the exact wording of Deuteronomy that the nations accept as a shared basis. It is the instruction, the wisdom, the teaching of God that he knows best governs human life.
  3. And so for Micah, when the nations all know and accept and live by *torah*, this will fix their greed problem. And when *torah* removes our greed, we won't need war anymore. We won't need violence anymore because we all live by *torah*. We all live by the word of the Lord.
- D. Summary: So Micah imagines for us a day to come in which human beings the world over have been so transformed by God's word that their greed and their self-interest have been removed, and their individual selves have become so submitted to God's teaching, that humankind not only lays down their weapons but actually transform them into tools of agriculture. Rather than powerful people extracting food from the poor farmer by force and coercion, each family has their own vine and fig tree and everyone lives in contentment with God's verdict and provision.
- III. Heart (7.75")
- A. Jeremiah
1. It's a beautiful vision, isn't it? Golly wouldn't that be nice. But a hundred years after Micah, there was another prophet in the same city. His name was Jeremiah. Jeremiah has himself a copy of Micah's poems, and he reads Micah's vision for the latter days, and he looks around at his city—the same city, mind you—and sees how messed up it still is.
  2. Jeremiah comes to the conclusion that the problem is not as simple as "people don't know *torah*." The solution to the world's ills is not that people need to go memorize Deuteronomy (though that probably wouldn't hurt). The problem is the human heart. Our hearts are like dry, unplowed fields that need to be broken up and softened. It's not a head problem where people just don't *know* Torah; it's a heart problem.
  3. So while Jeremiah believes in Micah's dream, he modifies it just a bit. Listen to this famous passage from the book of Jeremiah: [JER 31.31.33]. What is Jeremiah saying? There will be a new covenant. The first covenant happened at Sinai and it was written on tablets of stone and expressed quintessentially in Deuteronomy. But this new covenant will be different. God will write his *torah* on the hearts of men and women. Their hearts will be transformed by the teaching of God and wisdom of God.
- B. Hearts
1. There is a difference between knowing something in your head and knowing it in your heart.

- a) My kids know they are not allowed to hit each other, but they still do it. Why? Because they don't know it in their hearts. They have memorized the rule, but they have not internalized the rule.
  - b) I'm not talking about letting your heart be your guide, "I just know in my heart that..." I'm talking about a teaching being so engrained that you may not even remember the exact wording of the teaching but you have been formed by it to the point you don't need the exact wording.
  2. So even if you know the Bible in your heart, God wants humans—all humans—to know his *torah* in their heart. To have it inscribed on their hearts. To live by it and be formed by it.
  3. But our hearts are resistant to that, aren't they? Mine is. I know the right thing to do (even something as simple as an uncomfortable phone call I need to make), but my heart is screaming at me not to do it. Is your heart like this? Kicking against God's will for us?
    - a) God wants for us to be holy, loving, fair, merciful, gracious, generous, thankful, honest, wise. And we like those words, we want those words. Until push comes to shove. Until it costs us something, then all of a sudden we have this screaming impulse within us not to do those things but rather to sin. Am I talking about you, or am I just talking about me?
  4. That's what Jeremiah realized. Our hearts *have* to change if Micah's dream is ever to come true. All nations streaming to Jerusalem to learn God's torah and trust his judgment and learn to live peaceably with each other—that's all well and good. But in order for that to ever become a reality, God must first deal with the human heart.
  5. After all, greed is not a head problem, it's a heart problem. Self-interest isn't a result of not reading Deuteronomy enough; it's a result of the corruption in your own heart. Murder, falsehood, pride—those are all heart problems. You can't teach those things out of a person.
  6. Jesus put it this way: [MARK 7.20-23]. It's a heart issue.
  - C. Transition: So Micah leaves us looking forward to another day, a better day. I don't know when, I don't know how, but I have a dream. And Jeremiah says, "Yes, but first something radical will have to happen to the human heart for it to be receptive to God's teaching."
- IV. It's Here! (6.25")
- A. Jesus
    1. And friends, we are gathered here this morning because that thing has happened. We are gathered together like the nations in Micah 4 to learn God's teaching and to be transformed by it.
    2. See, we believe here at Poncha Springs Church of Christ that God has done what he promised in Jeremiah 31 and in Micah 4. He has made that new covenant, and he has begun his work on our hearts.
    3. You say, "What happened?" Jesus happened. Jesus purifies our hearts. Jesus became the target and victim of human greed and murder and theft and hatred when he was crucified on a Roman cross. And when he rose from the dead on the third day, he was making peace. And when he ascended to his throne in heaven, he sent God's Spirit to be in us and with us and on us, to lead us into all truth, to teach us his ways, and to purify us of our sins, and to enable us to lead new lives.
  - B. Paul
    1. This is why one of his messengers, Paul said: [COL 3.15-16]. Paul is writing to a community of Jesus' followers, and he implores them to let the peace of Christ rule where? In their hearts. Something has happened to the hearts of Jesus' followers.
    2. Or he says in another letter: [2 COR 1.21-22]. God has given us his Spirit. Where? In our hearts. Something has happened to the hearts of Jesus' followers.
    3. Or in Philippians he says: [PHIL 4.6-7]. If you are anxious and conflicted, and you stream to where God sits like the nations in Micah 4 and you make your case to God, what will happen? Peace. Peace where? In our hearts. Something has happened to the hearts of Jesus' followers.
  - C. Hebrews/Baptism
    1. One more. In one of the first sermons, an unnamed Christian put it this way: [HEB 10.19-22]. He says, "Because of what Jesus has done in offering himself on the cross for our sins, we

can come near to God with a true *heart*, with our hearts being sprinkled clean and our bodies having been washed.”

2. It's hard for me to imagine that the early church would have heard about the cleansing of the heart and the washing of the body and not thought about baptism. Baptism was and is the moment where God acts upon us to do his cleansing work.
3. Baptism is the moment where God first shares his Spirit with me, where the work of writing his torah on my heart begins, where I begin to be transformed by his wisdom, his will, his instruction. It is the moment where I am filled with his grace.
4. So when I finish here in half an hour or so, I am going to stay up here. And if you have never been baptized as an expression of your own faith and allegiance to Jesus, I want you to invite you to come meet me up here so we can talk about that step for you.

V. How then shall we live? (10.5”)

A. Non-Violence

1. But before we get to that, let me try and land the plane. Micah 4. How is Micah's vision God's word for you today? How is this text calling on you to live in the truth of Christ and his resurrection?
2. I think one of the most obvious has to do with violence. This picture of nations handing their weapons over to blacksmiths to have them repurposed as gardening tools is supposed to be a picture of the church.
3. I realize that there is a lot of debate about Christians and violence and whether it's ever appropriate and under what circumstances and what would you do if... I get that. But at the very least, may this picture be for us a picture of how we treat one another within the church.
4. That we do not seek to impose our will on one another by force, by coercion. May we be the kind of people who seek peace with each other.
5. So maybe there is someone here with whom you need to seek peace and reconciliation. Someone who has wronged you or someone you have wronged, and it is incumbent on you to clear the air. That's what it will mean for you to live in the Spirit this morning.

B. God's Word

1. Now that takes for granted a second idea. That is this vision in Micah 4 of all people submitting themselves to God's word. Now I don't expect for unbelievers to submit to God's word. But for those who follow Christ, it is for us to place ourselves under the Word isn't it?
2. This week I learned a story from my childhood that I never knew took place. When I was four years old, my grandfather was made to resign as an elder of his church in Texas after almost thirty years. The other elders forced him out because of something my dad wrote; they claimed that he now had "unbelieving children". So my dad flew down to talk with his parents about this position he had taken in this article, which was not very conservative, traditional, church of Christ-like. And my grandfather with tears in his eyes says, "But son, that's not what we've always said." And my dad answered, "Dad, I wasn't called by the Lord Jesus Christ to say what we've always said. I was called to preach the word."
3. It is easy and seductive for us to place ourselves not under Scripture, but under tradition, under our own desires, under what we are comfortable with—and to call it Scripture.
4. So maybe where this text finds you this morning is that you have come to consider a previous Sunday school teacher the authority rather than the words of the Bible itself.
5. So maybe what Micah 4 needs to do for you is to call you back into a practice of reading and meditating on the Scriptures, on the story and person of Jesus, and to let that shape you.

C. Gratitude

1. And then one more thing. If we are going to be people who are filled with the Spirit, then we should ask, what kinds of things do Spirit-filled people do? And one important answer I think is found in [EPH 5.18-20]. Don't be filled with alcoholic spirits—be filled with the Holy Spirit. And what do people who are filled with the Holy Spirit do? They give thanks.
2. Greedy people don't say thanks. Entitled people don't say thanks. Self-interested people and violent people don't say thanks. A society that is driven by greed and fueled by cowardice has no room for gratitude. But that is not the world that you and I are called to live in.

3. So if we are going to be filled with the Spirit, perhaps a good place to begin is by learning to say thank you.
- D. Lord's Supper
1. In Greek, the word "thanks" is the word *eucharist*. Some of you know that eucharist is the name that some churches use for communion, the Lord's Supper. How appropriate it is that we have a ritual, sacramental meal together that is called "thanks."
  2. Every time we gather together, we share this bread and this cup in a meal called "thank you." What happens when we eat and drink together?
    - a) Perhaps the most important thing is that the Holy Spirit who transforms our hearts joins the bread and the cup so that these simple elements become the vehicle for receiving his grace anew. Every week we receive his grace anew as we eat and drink the Spirit.
    - b) When we eat and drink, we are practicing community. Like the nations of Micah 4, we are gathering together and submitting to the one Lord, acknowledging one another, setting aside our differences and putting down our swords. This is not a private moment between me and Jesus; this is a moment that we share with one another as an expression of our common unity. That's why it's called communion.
    - c) Jesus himself said the bread was his body and that the cup was the cup of the new covenant. That is, when we eat and drink, we are reaffirming the new covenant anticipated by Jeremiah. We are affirming that God is working on our hearts to purge us of our greed and hatred and transform us into the image of his son. And for that we say, "Eucharist. Thank you."