

THY KINGDOM COME

Micah 4:6-8

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The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore (Mic. 4:7).

Over the past century and more, a ferocious battle has raged between the worldviews of Darwinism and Christianity. This war is fought on many fronts. On the scientific front, evolutionists battle against creation science and, more recently, the evidence for intelligent design. On the political front, school boards and legislatures battle over the content of public school textbooks. Often overlooked is perhaps one of the most significant battlegrounds, that of ethics. Evolution's creed tells us that only the strong deserve to survive. In radical contrast is the ethic of the Bible, which says that God "has pity on the weak and the needy" (Ps. 72:13).

One high-profile example of this conflict is Princeton bio-ethics professor Peter Singer. In his book *Rethinking Life and Death*, Singer seeks to replace the Christian doctrine of the sanctity of life with a utilitarian approach. Ruthlessly following evolutionary logic, he advocates the killing of disabled children. "The fact that a being is a human being, in the sense of a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, is not relevant to the wrongness of killing it," Singer writes; "it is, rather, characteristics like rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness that make a difference." Infants, he asserts, lack these traits, so "Killing them, therefore, cannot be equated with killing normal human beings, or any other self-conscious beings."¹ The

¹ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 175-217.

same goes for non-infants with disabilities that reduce their utility for society and their capacity for Singer's definition of happiness. While such "ethics" may seem extreme, they are increasingly mainstream and are fully consistent with the logic of Darwinism.

The Bible's vision of a better world could not be more radically opposed to the evolutionary ethic. We see this in the prophet Micah's foretelling of the coming age in which God's rule will be finally established. "In that day," he asserts, "... I will gather the lame, and the scattered I will assemble... I will make the lame into a remnant, and those driven away into a powerful nation" (Mic. 4:6-7).

REMNANT OF THE LAME

Darwinists and Christians are agreed on one thing: the strong do survive. The Lord looks upon his weak and scattered people and declares, "I will make the remnant... a strong nation" (Mic. 4:6-7). The Bible constantly insists that God's people will be strong and victorious over history. Jesus said of his church: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

Evolutionary theory conceives of strength mainly in terms of the ability to survive the rigors of a hostile and changing world. The church's strength is its ability to endure assault from within and without. The church endures not through the power to dominate and destroy, but because of God's preserving grace. Speaking of a power the world does not know, Nehemiah declared, "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

Micah was preaching on this theme in the midst of a great devastation among God's people. In 701 B.C., the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judeah, conquering the region surrounding Jerusalem and taking hundreds of thousands of Jews into captivity. In this scene of despair, the prophet assures the people that in the providence of God they would yet be made strong. Peter Craigie states, "With the nation in ruins and the capital city hanging on grimly in its fight to survive, there must have been many honest souls in Jerusalem who thought that the reign of God in Judah had come to an end... but to such dispirited people, Micah offered a view of the future in which the

‘former dominion’ would return to Jerusalem.”² This would come in the “latter days” spoken of in Micah 4:1, that is, in the time of the coming Messiah.

Just to make sure God’s people know what kind of people are made strong, Micah says: “I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted” (Mic. 4:6). He returns to the imagery of a flock of sheep, and one that has been scattered and abused. Israel will become a strong nation not because of their own virtue, but through the path of judgment and conviction of sin that leads to the merciful extension of God’s grace.

Some commentators see the reference to the “lame” as an allusion to God’s striking Jacob on his thigh, when Israel’s patriarch wrestled with the Lord beside the River Jabbok. As a result of his wounding, Jacob had a limp for the rest of his life. David Prior writes:

The result of that wrestling-match was a different Jacob, someone who was teachable, humble, and able to be used by God. So now with ‘the house of Jacob’: as God... moved to bring his people low, he would turn them into a strong nation. They would limp for the rest of their lives, but they would genuinely lean on the LORD and walk in his name.³

This was, in fact, the effect of the trials of Micah’s day and the generations that followed. Through their devastation by Assyria, and their later conquest and enslavement by the Babylonians, they received a bitter wound. But, stripped of every other support, they put aside their idols and they learned to walk only in the strength of the Lord.

Micah’s prophecy of the weak made strong offers several insights for Christians. First, just as Micah promised that the strong nation would be composed of the lame and the weak, the Christian church is composed of those who are spiritually needy and poor. Paul wrote: “Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor. 1:26). The reason is that those who consider themselves wise, powerful, and noble find it hard to humble themselves before a Savior. They are

² Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1985), 2:35.

³ David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 153.

winners, so what salvation do they need! Likewise, many come to Jesus only when life has wilted their hopes and trials have brought them to despair. But there is another reason why the church consists of those lame and ignoble: God delights to glorify his grace in the salvation of the weak. Paul continues, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being may boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

Second, we should realize that the process of salvation described by Micah – the lame made strong, the scattered drawn in, and the afflicted blessed – is God’s way of saving all who believe. As Paul preached, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The first trial we must endure is conviction over sin. We must know ourselves cursed before God for our sin before we may be blessed through faith in the gospel of forgiveness. Notice that God promises to gather not only “those who have been driven away,” but also “those whom I have afflicted” (Mic. 4:6). It was God who afflicted them in judgment so that he might save them by grace.

This process continues after our conversion. Christian growth follows a path of discipline and trial. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb. 4:6). The purpose of this divine correction is our growth in godliness: “he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Heb. 4:10). Likewise the apostle Peter tells us that it is through the crucible of trials that our faith grows stronger: “You have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

Third, God reveals himself through Micah as a loving shepherd who cares for his weak and afflicted sheep. All the verbs in this passage tell of God’s merciful intervention for his needy people: I will assemble... I will gather... I will make” (Mic. 4:6-7). This is the source of our salvation: the sovereign compassion of God who fulfills his promises of grace to those who believe. Instead of simply

allowing his chastened people to wander off to their destruction, God made them to be a remnant. This means that God ordained that they would be the seed of a future salvation, lovingly preserving them until the coming of Christ. Centuries after Micah, Matthew recorded that “when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36). What an encouragement this is to trust and rely on the grace of Christ, who sympathizes with our weakness (Heb. 4:15).

Fourth, since God cares for the weak and the needy, we should do the same. Instead of the Darwinian logic that says progress simply requires the trampling of the weak, God’s example would have us show compassion on those in need, especially on God’s children who are afflicted by doubt, temptation, or trouble. Gary Smith writes: “Our Lord did not abandon the wounded and weak who could not help themselves, and neither should we. Nor did he give up on those who deserved to be punished or write them off as hopeless cases of no value, and neither should we.”⁴

This prophecy of the gathering and strengthening of lame sheep is part and parcel of the great prophecy that preceded it. “It shall come to pass in the latter days,” Micah said, “that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains... and peoples shall flow to it” (Mic. 4:1). But how will this marvelous situation come to pass? It will happen through the nation that had been wounded by God’s judgment, a lame and scattered flock, when God assembled them back secure in their ancient home. The evident fulfillment of this prophecy was the restoration of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity and the re-inhabiting of Jerusalem, which was the precursor to its greater fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

THE LORD WILL REIGN

The first step in Israel’s salvation would be their re-gathering in the land. But this was a prelude to a greater blessing: “The LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion” (Mic. 4:7). God promised not

⁴ Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 518.

only to bring the people back and give them a second chance. He further remedied their situation by personally coming to reign as their king.

One of the great tragic moments in Israel's history was their rejection of God as king and their insistence on having a human king like all other nations. The elders demanded of the prophet Samuel, "Give us a king to judge us" (1 Sam. 8:6). When Samuel lamented this before the Lord, God answered, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). Henceforth, Israel was ruled by human kings. First there was wicked King Saul, whom God mercifully replaced with King David, "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). Over the centuries, God's people were sometimes blessed with faithful kings who obeyed the Lord. But on the whole, the human kingship was an unmitigated disaster, finally resulting in the breaking of God's covenant and the destruction of Jerusalem.

All along, of course, God had retained his sovereignty over the people. A godly king thus was one who recognized the Lord's authority and obeyed his Word; ungodly kings went their own way, claiming an independent sovereignty. But there would be a difference in the latter days to come: God would openly rule as king over his people and his reign will last forever: "The LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore" (Mic. 4:7).

This is a prophecy of the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over his church, the new Mount Zion from which God's Word goes forth. John Calvin comments: "Now God himself will ascend the throne in a conspicuous manner, so that no one may doubt but that he is the king of his people. And this was really and actually fulfilled in the person of Christ. Though Christ was indeed the true seed of David, he was yet at the same time Jehovah, even God manifested in the flesh."⁵

This is the true glory of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ, the heir of the house of David and the Son of God Most High, reigns over the church as its king. After his atoning death for our sins and his resurrection from the grave, Jesus ascended into heaven and took his heavenly seat of royal authority. Paul explains that God the Father

⁵ John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1559, reprint 1986), 3:277.

“put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22). Christ reigns over his church by his Word, so that we honor his rule by teaching and obeying the Bible. Christ reigns in us by the Holy Spirit whom he sends. And Christ rules over us with the same authority that God exercised over Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus therefore was worthy of the hosannas the people sang when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the humble symbol of the Davidic kingship, and he is worthy of our praise today.

All glory, laud, and honor, to thee, Redeemer, King.

To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!

Thou art the King of Israel, thou David’s royal Son,

Who in the Lord’s name comest, the King and blessed One!⁶

Christ’s is the perfect kingdom, not only because of his righteousness and mercy, but also because his reign will have no end, fulfilling Micah’s prophecy. Hebrews 7:25 assures us, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

This was the hope that God gave his ancient people to sustain them in the long years of tribulation, exile, and anticipation. Isaiah foretold it: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Isa. 9:6-7). Micah’s prophecy went on to specify the birth of Christ the king: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old... And he shall be their peace” (Mic. 5:2, 5). After the return to Jerusalem, Zechariah foretold the coming of Christ to the royal city on Palm Sunday: “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9).

This was the hope of all those who waited on the promise of the Lord. This is the message Mary believed in the angel’s annunciation: “You

⁶ Theodulph of Orleans, trans. John Mason Neale, “All Glory, Laud, and Honor,” c. 820, 1854.

will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk. 1:31-33). And, finally, against the night sky of Bethlehem, the place prophesied by Micah, an angel heralded his birth: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11).

God’s people today look back upon the coming of our King, receiving him as Savior and honoring him as Lord. And yet it was Jesus who taught us to pray to the Father still to send his kingdom: “Our Father... Your kingdom come” (Mt. 6:9-10). We look not for the appearance of the King, but for the spread of his reign of grace and truth. We pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10): this is our hope, and it is the calling we pursue in obedient faith by the teaching and applying Christ’s Word to our lives.

FORMER DOMINION RESTORED

Micah concludes this brief salvation oracle with a word-picture of the restoration that will result from God’s reign amidst his people: “And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:8).

First, this depicts the restoring of security to the people of God. The “tower of the flock” probably refers to the watchtower near the sheep gate on the southeast side of the temple mount. From this high perch, the sentinels could oversee the flocks on their way to the city. The “hill of the daughter of Zion” literally refers to *Ophel*, the fortress mound where David’s old citadel guarded the temple mount. The progression of Micah’s sermon is thus that the Lord will gather his lame and scattered sheep, he will personally reign over them in the coming of the God-man Jesus Christ, and then God will establish secure fortresses around their salvation.

As a result of this all-sufficient salvation, the blessings attending to the former dominion will be abundantly restored. The highest ideals that God’s ancient people ever thought to attain will be manifested in

the Christian church, including the full forgiveness of our sins in Christ's blood, the inwardly transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the right of access to the Father as beloved children, the loving provision of all our needs, holy fellowship among the redeemed, and divine protection for our souls. Whenever Christians read of the spiritual achievements and blessings of ancient Israel, we should know that these are fully restored to the church over which Christ reigns forever as king, and they will be perfected eternally when he returns in glory. As Solomon was given wisdom, we have the Word of God to transform our minds to discern God's will (Rom. 12:2). As prophets prayed down the power of heaven, we have Christ's mediation and the interceding help of the Holy Spirit in our prayers (Rom. 8:26). And as God fed the tribes of Israel with manna in the desert, Paul assures us, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

Micah thus declares, "The former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic. 4:8). God never lapsed in his sovereignty. But it was by the reign of sin that the reign of God's blessing was interrupted among mankind. It was therefore by God's will, not merely by Pilate's hand, that the sign over Christ's cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (Jn. 19:19). For it was by his death for our sins that Jesus put an end to the reign of sin and death over us, and by his glorious resurrection that he ascended to his heavenly throne, from which the blessings of his redemption and the power of his salvation will come to his blood-bought people forever.

THE SAVING SHEPHERD-KING

How grateful we should be that our holy God, the High King of Heaven, does not subscribe to the ethics of Darwinian humanism.

For what hope would we have if God granted us the right to life only on the basis of our utility to him and others? Instead, he is the saving Shepherd-King. He says, "I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore" (Mic. 4:6-7). Let us, likewise, adhere to the ethics of his kingdom – the ethics of mercy, grace, and love – and let us declare them through the gospel to the world. For

the lessons of Micah's prophecy are the lessons of the gospel, the message our King Jesus brought into the world and now sends us to proclaim.

The first lesson is that the key to life is not in attaining a certain measure of human power and status, but in receiving this Shepherd-King in faith. This is what saves God's people: the grace of the king who reigns over them. James Boice summarizes: "Micah is telling his readers that even in times of judgment it is good to be in the gentle care of Israel's good shepherd."⁷ Is your soul under the care of Jesus Christ? Have you entered into his kingdom through faith in his saving reign? You can be saved simply by trusting him in your heart and calling on him with your mouth. The Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

The second lesson is that the strength of Christians flows from the promises of God's Word. Our hope is never in our own strength. But God says, "I will assemble the lame... I will gather those who have been driven away... I will make the remnant... a strong nation" (Mic. 4:6-7). God is able to keep his promises, and his own glory demands that he do so. Micah's original hearers could think back to numerous promises God had fulfilled, confirming his right to be trusted by them. But as we look back on the specific fulfillments of Micah's promises in the coming of Jesus Christ, how much greater hope ought we to have in the promises of God's Word. Paul taught, "All the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]" (2 Cor. 1:20). Therefore, through our faith in Jesus, we give our Amen to the promises of God for us, and rest our souls securely in the citadel of his sovereign faithfulness.

Lastly, we need to respond to Micah's prophecy in a manner similar to that which he intended for the Jews of old. Hard times were ahead. A storm of divine judgment was falling. But God promised light ahead for those who persevered in faith. How much more incentive have we, having seen the light of the coming of Christ, to press on in faith, in ministry to the church and the world, and in whole-hearted devotion to our Lord. As the writer of Hebrews wrote, in light of the coming of our saving Shepherd-King:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with

⁷ James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:342.

pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb. 10:22-25).