

# THE RESURRECTION CHURCH

## Micah 5:7-15

Rev. Richard D. Phillips  
Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC, April 6, 2008

---

Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of men (Mic. 5:7).

**A**ccording to the Bible, the event in history that has most defined our present age is not Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, nor the establishment of the Western democracies, nor the Second World War. Rather, it was a gathering for prayer of 120 disciples of Jesus Christ in a room in Jerusalem almost two millennia ago. As Jesus had promised (Acts 1:8), and as the Old Testament had prophesied (Jo. 2:28), the Holy Spirit fell upon that primeval church. It was the culminating act of God's Son in his first coming to our world. Jesus came to live a perfect life, die an atoning death, rise from the grave, ascend to heavenly authority, and then to pour out his Spirit on the church. Thus Pentecost, the final event in this sequence, is the historical event that defines this age of grace. Jesus having died for our sins, poured out his Spirit on the church. Henceforth, the Christian life is life in the Spirit of God.

The Pentecost outpouring has two great implications for the church of the resurrection age, the age of the Holy Spirit, as well as for all believers who are called to resurrection life. First, it means the church is endued with power from on high for ministry in the world. John writes, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4). But this brings a corresponding responsibility for holiness among God's people. Paul explains: "By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin [God] condemned sin in the flesh,

in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:3-4).

As he ministers to his generation in darkness, the prophet Micah looks forward to our present age, the resurrection age of the Spirit. The prophecy of chapter 5 begins with a focus on the coming of Christ, who would be born in Bethlehem. But now Micah’s vision extends beyond Christ’s first advent and into the age of the gospel. John Mackay writes: “Its position in this chapter places it after the appearance of the Messiah, and it is therefore a consequence of his rule.”<sup>1</sup> Micah’s prophecies of strength for God’s people look into the new covenant, in which the aims of the old covenant are fulfilled. He foresees an age of power for the church in the world, but also a divine mandate for holiness which exceeds even that of the old covenant.

#### THE CHURCH AS GOD’S BLESSING FOR THE WORLD

**A**t the very beginning of the history of God’s ancient people, it was made clear that God intended them to be a blessing to the world.

We see this as far back as the calling of Abraham, the father of the Old Testament people: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3). This is especially fulfilled as the bud of Israel has bloomed in the church, just as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

Yet it would never be because of his size or strength in worldly terms that the church would wield God’s power. Micah begins his prophecy by saying, “the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations” (Mic. 5:7). Just as in his own time, when the small nation of Israel was beset by greater worldly powers, the church of God’s people is always a remnant in the world. In fact, whenever the church has tried to seize earthly power it has lost its spiritual influence in the world. Bruce Waltke writes, “Like the Messiah, [God’s people] step forth small and

---

<sup>1</sup> John L. Mackay, *Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 1998), 109.

lowly among the nations and become great by the divine initiative.”<sup>2</sup> Although it is comparatively small in numbers and lacking in earthly power, God intends for his true church to play a decisive role in the world.

But what is the nature of the church’s influence in the world? Micah provides two answers. First, he writes: “Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man” (Mic. 5:7).

This is a lovely expression of the blessing God’s remnant is to bring to the world. Leslie Allen writes, “Men’s heavy hearts must have been lightened by the very mention of the dew and rain falling on thirsty grass.”<sup>3</sup> The reason for the blessedness of dew was the lack of rainfall in Palestine during the important summer months. The heavy dews resulting from the condensation of air laden with moisture from the Mediterranean Sea, were of vital agricultural importance. Thus the patriarch Isaac blessed his son Jacob: “May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine” (Gen. 27:28). In a parched land like theirs, dew was often the only refreshment and was considered a literal godsend.

Similarly, Micah continues, God’s people are to be “like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man” (Mic. 5:7). Summer showers gave hope for a good harvest, and the church likewise brings life to the world and gives hope for eternity. David spoke this way about those who rule in godly fear and thus spread a heavenly influence: “he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.” (2 Sam. 23:4).

This is to be the effect of Christians living in our world today, bringing life and renewal. Ours has become a wilderness world, despite our material abundance. Consider the state of morality in our society and the sheer misery induced by godless living. Christians are to be like dew that falls from heaven, a breathe of morally pure fresh air. Consider the craven attitude towards sexuality today: the sexual purity of Christians is not only to be a stirring reminder of moral truth

---

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 315.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 353.

but also to invoke aspirations of nobility our society has completely lost. Or consider the state of our communities. Real communities where people know and care for one another are increasingly rare. But when a Christian family moves into the neighborhood, the effect should be blessing for all, as God's people take a delighted interest in their neighbors, as children are treated with delight, and as a loving concern is shown to those in need.

Of course the greatest refreshment Christians bring is the light of the gospel. What will our neighbors do when sickness and death knock on their door? Who will give an answer to the great questions that keep so many lying awake at night: about the meaning of life, the judgment of God, and life after death. "You are the light of the world," Jesus said. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:14, 16).

But the presence of God's people in the world has a second effect, one that at first seems antithetical to the first: "And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which, when it goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver" (Mic. 5:8). The lion is not a domesticated animal, and the church is not to be domesticated by the world. The lion rules his domain and is utterly able to defend his prerogatives.

This, too, is to be the relationship of the church to the world. Leslie Allen explains: "The imagery of Israel as a lion is an ancient one, which stands for the irresistible conquest of all opposition. The prophet is recalling a traditional role associated with holy war... Here there is an application to Israel as the earthly representative of the divine Victor. God's cause, with which Israel is identified, must triumph."<sup>4</sup>

The triumph of God's cause in the world is also, of course, for the benefit of the world, though many in opposition will be crushed. God places his church in the world in order to bless the world. But the world is not permitted to overcome the church and for those who try

---

<sup>4</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 354.

the results will be disastrous. Paul spoke of this with the frank statement: “We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

If it is a shame when Christians fail to bring refreshment and blessing to the world, it is equally a rejection of our calling when we are intimidated by worldly powers. We see this today as many churches adopt a worldly message, worldly priorities, and worldly methods. The apparent logic is that since the world cannot be beaten, it must be joined. But this is false. Jesus said that he would build his church on the rock of the gospel, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16:18). Notice that it is hell’s gate that is under assault, not the church’s gates; hell’s gates cannot prevail against the church. This means that the presence of God’s people is designed to inhibit sin and to force back worldliness by the presence of godliness, all for the ultimate blessing of the world. So it has been in history, as Christian values and ideas have pushed back the darkness of barbarism, bringing light in the realms of government, education, science, culture and the arts.

Micah concludes this description of God’s blessing to the nations, saying, “Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off” (Mic. 5:9). What a promise this is of power for the church in the world. Opposition to Christianity is growing in the West today, as seen in the success of best-selling books not merely opposing Christian truth but appealing for society no longer to tolerate God’s people. What will happen? Micah gives the answer. I think it likely that the atheistic best-sellers will merely spur Christian thinkers to speak more boldly and effectively to the culture. In any case, despite whatever temporary success God’s enemies may enjoy, they will in time be cut off, and the hands of God’s people will be lifted up over their foes.

In our generation, this prophecy has been especially fulfilled in the developing world. In China, for instance, it is widely acknowledged that the gravest threat to the tyranny of communism is the growing Christian church. Journalist David Aikman, for many years the TIME magazine bureau chief in Beijing, argues that it is more than feasible that Christianity will become the dominant worldview of the emerging

China. He writes of meeting highly educated Chinese “who were not satisfied that either the Marxist interpretation of religion or the standard Western Darwinian understanding of life adequately explained the human condition in general and the Chinese condition in particular,” so that they are open-minded to the gospel. He records a Beijing dinner party attended by the president and leader of China’s Communist Party, Jiang Zemin. “Comrade Jiang,” a guest asked, “if, before leaving office, you could make one decree that you know would be obeyed in China, what would it be?” Jiang quietly reflected, then answered, “I would make Christianity the official religion of China.”<sup>5</sup>

This calls Western Christians to a far greater boldness in our secular context. James Boice cites a column in the *New York Daily News* by William Reel, decrying the deplorable condition of New York City. He recounted the barbaric statistics regarding murder, rape, alcoholism, and pornography. But was his chief concern the failure of civic government? Reel wrote: “Of course, you gave up on New York politicians long ago. They are pathetic and embarrassing. But what is worse than the abdication of political leadership in New York is the abdication of spiritual leadership. There is no one willing to speak the truth, to call the Neros to account, to warn of the wrath of God.” Then he asks, “When was the last time a Catholic leader said anything more forceful than ‘God bless you’? New York needs a John the Baptist and Catholicism gives us Caspar Milquetoasts. The Protestant leadership is effete and insipid, debating Holy Orders for lesbians at a time when grandmothers are regularly and brutally assaulted by muggers and rapists.”<sup>6</sup> How remarkable it is when secular columnists lament the influence of true Christianity, even though they personally have not embraced it. God has called us to be dew on the grass, a lion among the beasts, and he has promised to lift our hands against all those who oppose his reign in the church.

## GOD’S DEMAND FOR HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH

**T**he resurrection church, blessed with the power of God’s Holy Spirit, is made mighty by God to be a blessing in the world. But

---

<sup>5</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2003), 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:347-348.

that same church, by virtue of the presence of the same Holy Spirit, receives a high obligation to holiness. So it always is when God dwells amidst his people: the people must be made a fitting home for God and a holy vessel for his sacred service.

With this in mind, Micah casts his eye forward to that day to come, and he sees God acting as vigorously in the church as God does in the world through the church: “And in that day, declares the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds; and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes; and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you” (Mic. 5:10-13). Here, God promises to “cut off” – that is, effectively remove – four kinds of worldliness and sin that will keep his people from bearing his resurrection power. James Boice comments: “Micah writes of a day when the nation would be purified of its sin and maintained in an attitude of pure and intense devotion to God.”<sup>7</sup>

The first of these pertains to the displacement of reliance on God’s defense of his people to faith in the weapons of worldly warfare: “I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots” (Mic. 5:10). In Micah’s day, these were the ultimate in military technology. God’s design was not to render Israel defenseless but rather to defend Israel himself. The attitude he desired is that expressed by David in Psalm 20:7, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” Instead of trusting in false means, and giving glory to false champions, God desires his people to rely on his might alone. So it is today. However foolish it is for any nation to rely on military technology instead of trusting in God alone, it is utterly lamentable in the church. And how vulnerable the church becomes when the wisdom of marketing and worldly entertainment is taken up as the way of success, instead of humble reliance on prayer and the Word of God.

In a related statement, Micah adds, “I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds” (Mic. 5:11). We remember earlier in Micah how easily Sennacherib was able to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2:349.

overthrow the Judean stronghold of Lachish. God says of fortress-cities like this: “it was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion” (Mic. 1:13). So it always is when the church no longer sings “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” but becomes proud in its fortress stockpiles of numbers, money, and worldly influence.

Thirdly, the Lord declares, “And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes” (Mic. 5:12). In the pagan nations of Micah’s day, rulers eased their anxiety for the future by appeal to occult diviners of all kinds; it seems that this sin had made its way into the counsels of Jerusalem. How easily this same vanity makes its way into the council chambers of churches today. Walter Kaiser insightfully observes, “whenever the word of God is scarcely heard because of a widespread disregard for it, or boredom with it, then [people] will have to seek out the netherworld.”<sup>8</sup> Thus the rapid spread of fortune tellers and similar occultists in Western society today can only reflect the lost confidence in God’s Word in the church. Isaiah diagnosed this very problem in the Jerusalem of Micah’s time: “When they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God?” (Isa. 8:19). So it is today that our anxiety over the future is to be relieved in prayer and through the study of God’s Word, the very means of grace so greatly in neglect in today’s churches. Isaiah’s remedy then is of the greatest relevance now: “To the teaching and to the testimony!” (Isa. 8:20).

Lastly, God promises to eradicate the presence of idolatry among his people: “I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities” (Mic. 5:13-14). The religion of idols addressed mankind’s need of divine power. Worship of an image was a way of gaining that god’s favor and intercession. The Baal pillars and the Asherah poles pertain most directly to the issue of fertility, which explains why they were the greatest temptation to a society dependent on dews and rain for their agricultural survival.

This is cited by the Old Testament as the chief cause of Jerusalem’s fall when God gave the city over to the Babylonian invaders (Jer. 3:2-

---

<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Micah-Malachi*, *The Communicator’s Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 66.

3). Not only did God punish idolatry but he also delivered his people from the worship of idols by forcing them to live in the heart of pagan Babylonia. The fact that the Bible makes no mention of the problem of idolatry after the exile indicates the success of God's resolution: "You shall bow down no more to the work of your hands" (Mic. 5:13).

God is equally earnest in demanding that Christians repudiate the prevailing idolatries of materialism, sensualism, and egoism today. One defining characteristic of idolatry is always licentiousness, since the point of serving pagan gods was the fact that they made no moral demands on their servants. So it is that in America today those who achieve success, wealth, and political power are seldom expected to conduct themselves with moral uprightness. This entire logic of idolatry and licentiousness is to be alien to the people of God, who turn to him for their needs and live in the midst of his holy presence.

If we take these four mandates, these four sinful tendencies that God promises to cut off, we can arrive at a good understanding of holiness, cast primarily in terms of the believers' devotion to and reliance on God. What does God want removed from his people? God hates a reliance on worldly means instead of the holy weapons of prayer and the Word. God hates the pride and self-reliance signified by Israel's fortress cities; instead, God's people are to seek their only shelter in the name of the Lord. Moreover, God's people are to take their guidance from God's Word, relying neither on social prognosticators or occult fortune-tellers. Lastly, God's people are to repudiate the idols of their age – idols who repay allegiance with an open door to sinful pleasure – but who instead worship only the Lord their God and pursue the holiness he requires.

If any Christian doubts the zeal of God's insistence on this approach to holiness, he need only consider the last verse of Micah's oracle: "In anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey" (Mic. 5:15). God has settled his wrath upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness (cf. Rom. 1:18). In his patient working in history, God declares that he gives over unbelieving idolaters to wallow deeper in their sin. "Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done" (Rom. 1:28). So it was in the Roman Empire of Paul's time, and so it is today in the rapid decay of the decadent West. How insistent is

God's calling that his people are to be different! Indeed, only in the pursuit of Christ-like holiness, can anyone and any church seriously claim the name of Christian or hope to have the influence for blessing and salvation that God desires us to have in the world. In the end, the Day of Judgment will come and the righteous wrath of God will be revealed: "In anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey," says the Lord (Mic. 5:15).

#### A CALL TO REFORMATION, A PROMISE OF REVIVAL

**M**icah's prophecy applies to our situation today with compelling force. In the two halves of this prophecy we may discern God's mandate for the church. God calls the church to reformation, and he promises power and life to the church that renounces worldliness and turns whole-heartedly to God. The church must pursue reformation according to the Word of God, and God promises revival power in response so that church may fulfill her calling in the world.

Reformation begins with repentance for our sins and disobedience. This is how Hezekiah, Jerusalem's king in the time of Micah responded to the preaching of the messages we are studying. A century later, Jeremiah exhorted the people with Hezekiah's example: "Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them?" (Jer. 26:19). 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles records that Hezekiah restored the priesthood and true worship in the temple and sent Bible teachers throughout the country to restore the people to the truth and way of the Lord (cf. 2 Chron. 29:1-36). This is the second step in reformation: having repented of sin and worldliness, to return to the ways of the Lord as taught in his Word. The result of Hezekiah's reformation was the blessing of God through the renewal of national spiritual life. People began to humble themselves and to come before God in his temple. 2 Chronicles 30:12 summarizes, "The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD."

Reformation will take on a similar form today. We must return to the ways of the Lord as taught in Scripture. We must reform ourselves and our church by the Word of God. This will mean a reformation of our worship, a reformation of our approach to ministry, a reformation

of our teaching, and, indeed, a reformation of our lives. Is such a reformation possible today? And if we reform according to God's Word will it make a difference?

The entire record of the history of the church says that reformation is possible and that it makes a decisive difference. One of the great examples is the reformation of the city of Geneva under the ministry of John Calvin. In 1535 the Geneva city council elected to break with Roman Catholicism and align with the Protestant Reformation, hoping to help curb the city's social ills. But this political move brought no real change. In the next year, John Calvin was persuaded to take up a pulpit ministry in Geneva. At first, Calvin was ignored. By 1538, his preaching was so unpopular that he was dismissed and departed to live in Strasbourg. But as conditions deteriorated in Geneva, Calvin was summoned to return, and driven by his sense of duty he resumed his ministry on September 13, 1541. James Boice tells what happened:

Calvin had no weapon but the Bible. From the very first, his emphasis had been on Bible teaching, and he returned to it now, picking up precisely where he had left off three and half years earlier. Calvin preached from the Bible every day, and under the power of that preaching the city began to be transformed. As the people of Geneva acquired knowledge of God's Word and were changed by it, the city became, as John Knox called it later, a New Jerusalem from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, England, and the New World.<sup>9</sup>

The effects of this spiritual revival, brought on by the reforming effects of God's Word, reached into every area of Geneva's life. Efforts were made to improve cleanliness in order to combat disease. Markets were supervised for fairness and beggars were provided for in safe poorhouses. Hospitals were built and for the first time in Geneva provision was made for the education of all classes. Realizing that good jobs were needed, the cloth and silk industry was imported. The spread of biblical religion even improved government. Historian Marcellus Kik observed, "It is no mere coincidence that religious and political liberty arose in those countries where Calvinism had penetrated most deeply."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 83-84.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* 84.

The lesson is that resurrection life comes to churches, Christians, and even cities that reform out of sincere devotion to God's Word. But reformation is not merely God's advice: it is his demand. So it was revealed in the seven letters the risen and exalted Jesus directed to the churches in the Book of Revelation. In the first of these letters, to the church in Ephesus, the last of the seven letters, Jesus wrote:

I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

Do we see how important is the godliness of the church? Do you see how important is your personal devotion to Christ? If we will repent, reforming ourselves by God's Word, Christ will revive us with life. Then we will be the blessing to the world we are meant to be, like dew on the summer grass. And we will have nothing in the world to fear, for God will make us like a lion in the midst of beasts. He will raise up our hands so that the gospel of his salvation may have its victory in the world.