20/27 February Sunday Henham and Ugley

Micah ch 2. God must judge before He can save.

We recently we commenced our sermon series in this prophecy from Micah. Charles Wilbe gave us a very detailed picture of the background to Micah's times. The nations of Israel and Judah had ignored the word of God and as his covenant people they were under censure and judgement. When the sovereign God and his word are ignored, consequences happen in society. Exploitation and suffering takes place and this is an offence to the glory of God's holiness in his creation. As a consequence he will execute judgement. Pause Many of you have heard of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn suffered under communism because he refused to go along with the authoritarianism of an ideology that eliminated God from its thinking. As a consequence he ended up in a Gulag. He suffered greatly as did the estimated 50 million who died under the coercion of the State. The reason, he stated, was that 'Men had forgotten God: that is why all this happened'. Pause

Pray. *Sovereign Lord as we submit ourselves in worship this morning in a very disturbed world may the word of your prophet who spoke nearly 3000 years ago, through your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to see the guilt we share with your ancient people and understand that there is no other solution to the problem of urselves and our world apart from the breaking through of the ord and Jesus Christ King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.*

Would you turn in your Bibles to ch 1 v 2 . *Hear, O Peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the sovereign Lord may witness against you the Lord from his holy temple.* Did you notice what God is saying through Micah? He's not just talking to Israel and Judah he is talking to the whole planet, Earth. He is asking us to listen to what God says about his chosen people so that the whole earth they stand in awe because the Lord is coming from his holy temple. The Lord's Message is universal but to his covenant people in a particular. These vs tell us in no uncertain terms this is God's universal view, he is concerned about all the particulars that happen throughout the Earth. Nothing escapes his holy vision, no nation is exempt from the reach of his word, no culture, nor time. This is so relevant to us today in A.D. 2022. *pause*

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, chose to ignore the word of God to them. The result was personal alienation from God himself, from each other and from their environment. In grace God promised that he would send one who would crush ahead the devil who instigated this rebellion and redeem the broken creation and break the

power of the grave. In his purposes again, in grace, he chose to set apart the nation of Israel. As we have seen in ch1, they had totally failed. And now in chapter 2 we see the consequences in society and in human relationships of the forgetting God. Forgetting God and his universal will for the well-being of mankind and the creation, leads to tragedy for all. When we forget God, then the particulars of our world fall apart. The first area where we see this chaos is as we put **ourselves** in the forefront of our thinking in the nitty-gritty life. The commandment says you shall not covet.

Coveting means I am for myself. And so we read, ch2v1,2, of God's judgement is against those who while away the night hours, thinking *how they can covet fields and seize houses and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellow-man of his inheritance.* The whole law Lord Jesus said, *'is summed up in the words you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.* Did you know that God is against those who property grab and land grab. Did you know and many large international corporations are buying land from the poorer nations, displacing families from their lands and establishing agriculture to supply our green beans, palm oil and biofuels, excavating rear earth minerals to make our live more comfortable. Rapaciously coveting these resources is offensive to God the giver. In the USA big corporations are buying up domestic property and then reletting it. They pay cash at higher rates than would be available to the private buyer and this is excluding many from being able to secure their future. Yes, *they covet fields and seize them and houses and take them.* You may well not be the corporate boss working out how you can devise the highest gains for your shareholders, but God knows the thoughts and of all our hearts and he declares judgment will come. Perhaps what is happening in eastern Europe today is part of God's judgment on the west for its wilful defiance of God's laws. . Pause. The result of this economic skulduggery in Judah will lead to judgment on those who perpetrate it, vs 3 to 5, therefore the Lord says; *I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves.* God was prepared to bring a pagan nation against his people. God tells them, these corrupt business deals are going to lead you to loose everything. We may think this does not apply to our so called democracy, but I think we deceive ourselves. Estrangement from the Word of God and disobedience to it, leads to the fruit of sin such as social oppression and social injustice. Look at what has happened in Canada where the government ratified laws to sequestrate private bank accounts and put people in prison without trial or

representation. Both the Lord Jesus himself and the book of Revelation tell us that God is going to judge the economic corruption and tyranny in our world. Pause

God's people we read, in v 6 onwards, were deceived. The leaders were saying, *'Do not prophesy'. 'Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not over take us'.* These leaders want to cut out this message of judgment. They wouldn't dare preach about judgment. They were wise in their own eyes. They thought surely a good God, the Spirit of the Lord would not be angry with them, v7, *does he do such things?* How we dislike such bad news, they say we want to receive preaching of comfort and joy. Many today want a prosperity Gospel, about the love of God but not his justice. But God in his holy righteousness and mercy responds, '*Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright'.* God says in effect that following his will in our relationship to him will affect our concern for our neighbour. We will do what is upright. There will be peace in our relationships. This is challenging isn't it? But we haven't finished yet. Pause

God speaks again , in v8, *Lately my people have risen up like an enemy.* He accuses his people of treating each other as if they were enemies. How uppity we get about the situation of Russian invasion, the injustice of it; or of governments treating people with disdain and fleecing them of their natural rights. Such was the covetousness, of the elites in Judah, their fellow citizens looked as though they have been divested of everything, as if they have been pillage by an invading army. *Like men returning from battle.* Rich robes have been mugged without a care.

Now in v9 we are back to the consequences of property grabbing. Women, probably without a man in the house, widows, have not only lost the protection of their husband but also the home that they had made their own. As a result the next generation is impoverished. Our generation has taken away from the next generation so much. When we turn away from the will of God comcerning our domesticity as made us in his image, concerning especially our sexual identity and behaviour, *we take away God's blessing from our children forever.* And so God continues to speak, v 10. *Get up, go away! For this is not your resting-place, because it is defiled beyond all remedy.* This is a total dead-end. Pause.

God's will and purposes for his people was a resting place, where they could be secure in Him. But because they had refused God's universal sovereign rule over their lives in all the particulars and sought <u>themselves</u> to be sovereign overall the particulars of their lives, the result is a ruin,

beyond all remedy. What a message to our nation and even our western world which has been blessed through even just an outward acknowledgement of the will and commandments of God. *Pause*. The prophets Micah's day were, wine and beer' promisers. V11. If we do such, if we order our economy and lifestyles to our own and fancies and according to the so called science, then we can make ourselves secure and feel good. When we forget the providence of God in all that he is made and then seek to make your own brew in order to be saved we will find it, God says, total deception, it is a lie and judgment will follow. St Paul tells us that in the last days we will be overwhelmed with the deception and lies because mankind refuses to love true truth and be saved. *Pause*

So where then is salvation and redemption to be found in this tragic situation? It is here, in this last section. Many commentators have found this closing,v12,13, section too difficult to understand in view of what we have just explored. Some even suggest that an editor who found the preceding verses too negative, decided that some light relief was needed and so slotted these positive verses in at this point. As we enter chapter 3 we shall see we are back to the negative! In these two last versus we see the wonder of God's love and mercy towards those who diligently seek him; to those, who in spite of the prevailing consensus, set their hearts on trusting their Creator and Redeemer. And so the great I am, Jehovah, declares, '*I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.'* Sin scatters, yes, they would go into exile and judgment but ultimately God will gather his people and make a break for them. Yes, Jesus said, 'I am the good Shepherd'. He is the one who was to brake open the way and is going on before us. The Scriptures remind us again and again that we need someone to go before us and take away the load of our rebellion, to take the judgment we so justly deserve. In the knowledge of his love for us through the cross, we are to respond in love and seek to follow his commandments. Psalm 95, the Venite, which we seldom say any more, reminds us that we need *to kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Will you do that today? Pause*

This word 'Break' v13, is a very powerful word, it means that the Lord is bursting out, like a tsunami. As a result the people will be liberated and break through the gate that confines them. This reminds me so much of the Aslan the imagery in CS Lewis' Narnia novels. You may remember that in Narnia because of the influence of the

White Witch, it is always winter and never Christmas. This was to be the situation in Judah and Israel because they had forgotten God. But when Mr Beaver tells the children that Aslan is on the move, Spring is on the way, redemption is coming, Susan asks, who is Aslan? Mr Beaver replies:-

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"..."Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."Pause

Aslan breaks through and dispels the power of winter in Narnia. The Lord Jesus has broken into the chaos in our private lives which then spills out into the world around us. Our God is a consuming fire, he is not safe, but he is good. He is the king, who in the Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life to remove the dark stain of sin in the human heart and so restore us to the Father. He turns our lives round so that we might live to the praise and glory of our King. *Our communion with the Lord Jesus this morning is the very witness that our salvation, the removal of judgment, lies in His sacrifice for us.* It is only the transforming love of Christ in our hearts that is going to change us and change our relationships with each other. No amount of human therapy, no amount of economic manipulation, no amount of trying to make ourselves comfortable in an adverse climate, no amount of legislation to make people not hate one another is going to save the human race and bring peace. *Pause*

The message then of Micah, whose name means 'who is like God'? is to cast ourselves on the mercy and grace of God and make the Lord Jesus our king. This is an individual thing but it is also corporate (as we gather for the Lord's supper). May we allow him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to gather us, to pass ahead of us as we seek to be the sheep of his pasture. Amen.