

Sermon: God blesses us even now

Micah 5:1-5a

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Today we meet with Micah, one of the prophets of Israel. He prophesied about 2700 years ago and we do not know very much about him. Now why would such a person, living so far always from us in time if not in culture, have any message for us today? Can someone and his message from so long ago really mean something for us?

In our day and age we think that we are so special, that we often assume that people from the past have nothing to tell us. We view time as a long line, and we have progressed so far on this timeline that people who lived long before us seem to have lost their relevance.

Is only today with its people and its problems truly important?

If only today has importance for us, then how depressed must we be. So much is not in order. So much in our present life is wrong. Today can be so dark. It is so hard to only have today.

1. Misery of now

Micah does have a message. He also begins with the misery of today, the problems of the *now*.

Micah 5:1 begins with the word *now*. '*Now gather your troops.*'

Israel, the people of God, lived in dark days because the armies of Assyria were at the gates of Jerusalem. Darkness seemed to be winning.

The people of God were scared. The enemies were everywhere, the economy was a mess, people tried to emigrate from Israel to safer places like Egypt, Cyprus, Greece...

In that situation of darkness of the hearts, Micah tells Israel to gather its troops, *now*, but he also makes clear that it is rather useless, because now the rulers of Israel are being struck on the cheek.

The leaders of the nation were being humiliated, that is what the strike on the cheek means. They could not do anything against the powerful enemies. So the gathering of the troops was mainly a symbolic act because now all was lost.

Micah said, let us by all means defend ourselves, but in the *now*, the case is hopeless. In Micah 5:3 the prophet says that God will give the people up. He will allow disaster to come over the land.

So why gather the troops for defending the city, if its loss was already clear? Is that not a sign of desperation? I do not think so; it is above all a sign of hope. Hope that what happens today is not the final thing. God will one day make all things good, and that is why we act as we do today. In accordance with our future hope. Like building an ark even when it did not rain at all yet. That was an act of faith in God, and it spoke of hope.

If Micah would only focus on his own time, the situation of Israel would have been hopeless. Just as we, with all our pride in who we are today, and in our achievements, are devastated if we only look at today when it comes to the disasters in our families, our countries, the problem in our work, friends who die, family members who fight, jobs we lose.

Micah was not a sweet prophet. He told the people that Jerusalem would fall and Israel would be scattered. Just as in our lives, things could go worse rather than better.

But Micah also offers hope. He does this by looking back to Israel's past and he looks at the future. For people with problems in the now, today, it is often hard to have this broader perspective. It is so easy to become focused completely on today's problems that we drown in them. But looking at the past and the future may help us to see today's problems in a totally different light.

The rulers in the city of Jerusalem were overwhelmed by worries and problems, and Micah shifts the focus away to a tiny, irrelevant village not far away. To Bethlehem. And he promises a future ruler who will come from Bethlehem.

2. Future hope lies in past

That was future tense. But the listeners to the words of Micah immediately thought of the past. Micah reminded them of king David who came from Bethlehem, and of the promises of God that one day salvation would come to Israel through a son of David.

The promise of salvation in the future was clear: *from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.*

In order to give weight to that promise for future salvation, Micah looks at the past. God had made great promises to David and his house, yes to all of Israel.

There is hope for Gods people, because the origin of this ruler to come in the future, is from of old, he is from the royal house of David. That is why Israel was able to have hope, even in the midst of their problems in the now. Now all things were gloom and doom, but look in the past at what God did and promised! And based on those past promises and how God acted toward us in the past, with our families, with our land, we may hope for a better future as well.

The rulers of the people of God are struck on the cheek, humiliated in the time of Micah, in our days as well, in the *now*, but one day there will be a true ruler for the people of God.

The fact that this future ruler is from of old, refers to his belonging to the royal bloodline of king David, but it seems to refer to much more. It seems to also refer to eternity. That is how the church has understood these words as well. The ruler in Israel that Micah promised to his people, originates from eternity. He is not just a man. He is God himself who comes to act on behalf of his people.

Your *now* is too dark? God will act! He can be trusted! Look at his history with Israel and with his church!

God can be trusted, He will do it. Let us carefully listen to the line from Micah 5:2

O Bethlehem, from you shall come forth **for me** a ruler...

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The prophet speaks on behalf of God and says that the ruler that will stand up, will not come in the first place for the people of God, but for God himself. God has bound himself with beautiful covenantal promises to be with his people. It is for his own sake, for the honour of his name and fame, that he will act as a saviour for us.

It is for the honour of God that the one who existed in eternity, God the Son, would come to our world and save us.

Micah describes for those people who are stuck in the darkness of the now, what this ruler of God will be like. Let me repeat Micah 5:4

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

What a difference with the bad rulers of Israel and with those Assyrian armies. Their only goal was to devour the people for their own benefit. Many leaders misuse their position for their one benefit. But the ruler of

God is a shepherd who cares for the people in need.

We are people in need. We have many needs. Both personally and as families, as countries. And the Lord our God has sent Jesus Christ, to be our true Shepherd. He has come to take care of us.

3. Shepherd for now

He **stands** as a shepherd. This standing means that he is not asleep, he does not sit relaxed. He stands to defend his sheep. And the standing suggests that it will always last. That is how the expression is often used in the Old Testament.

You know the story in acts 7 where we read of how the deacon Stephen is stoned by an outraged crowd. Stephen looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus **...standing at the right hand of God.**

In the New Testament we usually read of Jesus sitting with God in the throne. Speaking of his power and position. Here we and of Jesus **standing as his people are in need. Ready to act.**

For the sheep, this means hope and security.

They shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth and he shall be their peace.

That is our future: peace. Because our Lord is victorious over the powers of chaos and darkness and sin. He ensures safety from our enemies, peace with ourselves, reconciliation with God. Let me repeat this verse.

They shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth and he shall be their peace.

The sentence sounds a bit strange, especially because of that word *now*. If we would write it we would have said, they shall dwell secure for *then* he shall be great. Some bible translations have actually done that - did they assume someone made an error and used *now* instead of *then*?

The *now* that is used here is the exact same *now* of the first verse where Micah said, *now* gather your troops, Jerusalem.

Even though this total victory is a future matter, it can be celebrated in the *now*, in our present time. Even today in the midst of our imperfection, problems, chaos, we dwell secure because even today we enjoy that great victory of our Lord who shall rule the earth.

Our now, our past and our future tumble over one another when God becomes involved.

A Christian gets his or her comfort in the troubled now, by looking back and by looking forward.

This is especially visible in the heart of the Christian worship, in holy communion. With all of our sins and problems and worries we *now* come to God, *today*, in our present state. And we come with faith in the victorious lamb of God who died for us in the past to make us a people for God now and to bring full salvation one day.

Our faith, at holy communion, links us to that great historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.. And it links us to the future meal in the kingdom of God when he descends to rule this world.

Conclusion

In this one moment, in the *now*, in the present, we enter into Gods timeline where all things happen instantaneously. He holds the past, the present and the future in the hollow of his hand.

And when we, through our faith, are kept in that same hand, we learn to enjoy - even in the dark moments of today, his love for us in the past and his blessings for us in the future.

We do not deny that life can be rather miserable at times, and we understand that sometimes people sink in desperation as all hope seems lost. But if in our dark moments of the *now* we are able to meet with God, look at what he did in the past, look forward to what he will do in the future, then even our miserable *now* can light up like a Christmas tree.

Today is important. It's the only time we live in. But we only truly live today, if we hold on to our past and to our future. God promised in the past, God will save us in the future, and that is our hope for today. AMEN