

Micah 5:1-5a – Jesus, God’s Promised Ruler.

Intro

Fill in the gap of this sentence: “our current political leaders are doing a _____ job at ruling us.”

“Terrific?” “Reasonable?” “Awful?”

According to a major study of the most recent federal election in 2019, our opinion of and confidence in our political leaders is plummeting.

- Only 25% of Aussies are prepared to say that people in government can be trusted.
- 56% think the government is run for a few big interest groups.
- 75% think politicians primarily look after themselves.
- Only 15% think our leaders know how the ordinary Aussie thinks.

Lead researcher Ian McAllister said: *"I've been studying elections for 40 years, and never have I seen such poor returns for public trust in and satisfaction with democratic institutions... "Trust in our politicians has been on a steady downward trend since 2007, when it sat at 43 per cent."*

Now I could be wrong, but I’m not sure that Covid has bucked this trend over the past two years. I still get the sense that, generally speaking, Aussies are dissatisfied with our rulers.

And yet, what I discovered as I read the study was that the majority of us (close to two thirds) still believe that the right leader could make a difference. 63% still believe that who people vote for can make a big difference.

So while, we have this disappointment in our leaders, most of us still have a level of hope that the right person could make a real difference for the better. We long for that ruler who isn’t self-interested, who doesn’t get embroiled in scandal, who gets us and cares about us, and who actually follows through on big promises that address our big needs.

If you are someone who is tired of being disappointed by our rulers, and is longing to find a better alternative, there is good news in our passage today. In Micah 5:1-5a we read of a ruler that God promised to send to our world. Someone who is good, someone you can trust. Someone who will meet your greatest need of peace with God. Someone that has come and is ruling today - The Lord Jesus – God’s king, born at Christmas.

We are going to look at this promise of God’s good ruler in the prophecy of Micah 5 this evening. Now to help you understand this passage, it might be helpful for you to think about three P’s. The first P is the **Plight** of a people under judgment. The second P is the **Promise** of hope in God’s coming ruler. The third P is the **Person** of Jesus who fulfils Micah’s prophecy. **Plight, Promise, Person.** And then we’ll think about what it all means for us today.

Plight

So let’s consider the **Plight** of a people under judgment that verse 1 alludes to.

“Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”

Now to understand this verse some context is required. This prophecy from the OT prophet Micah that we are looking at today was written around about 700 years before Christ. It was given to a people (primarily SK of Judah) who were experiencing God’s just judgment for their sin against Him. Not only had God’s people given their worship to other gods by

following the corruption of evil kings(6:16), but the whole society was marked by corruption and injustice. Judges were taking bribes, prophets would prophesy good news for a price, people were cheated out of land and possessions. Injustice prevailed (7:2-4) *“The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled at doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire, they all conspire together.”* And because of all this God’s just judgment came... and it came in the form of a foreign invasion. You can read all about it in 2 Kings 18-20 and Micah 1 – but put briefly, in 701 BC, during the reign of King Hezekiah, the Assyrian Empire invaded Judah, sacking every city in the land. The invasion was so devastating and far reaching that the invaders even came up to the gates of Jerusalem (the capital) itself. Jerusalem was surrounded at this point. The people of God had experienced a terrible blow, their King and what remained of his army behind the city walls had been humiliated – ***and this terrible fact of judgment is what Micah speaks to in verse 1.*** *“March your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”* Jerusalem was under siege and that image of striking the ruler on his cheek with a rod is an ancient metaphor for the defeat and humiliation that had come to Judah’s king and people. ***Verse 1 depicts the plight of a people under judgment.***

And here’s the confronting truth for you and I at the outset of this passage. Their plight is our plight. Now, their circumstances differ to our current circumstances but the heart of the problem is the same. Just as their sin brought about God’s righteous judgment, so too our sin – our rejection of God and His rule in our lives brings His judgment. The NT is clear that God’s judgment on human sin is a reality for *every* person because all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). And it tells us that God’s ultimate judgment for sin is death (physically and spiritually – cut off from God and the life He gives – Rom 6:23).

But sometimes we don’t see sin (our ignoring of God) as a huge problem. In fact, often we see the opposite! Often, we think the *best* approach *in* life is to *live* life on our terms without any reference to God or his rule. We tend to like the freedom to live as we please.

This attitude pervades our whole society. The gym I go to has this slogan: “Work out on your terms”. We love the idea of doing life on our terms even at the gym! But let’s just think about the implications of that for a minute. What happens when my gym buddy and I ditch our personal trainer and simply “work out our terms”? We avoid the cardio exercises that actually makes me fit. We leave early. We lift weights in an incorrect manner and that are too heavy – Which is why my shoulder is currently sore. Although, the autonomy to do what we want sounds good, the truth is that without our trainer calling the shots, *we* suffer the consequences. Sometimes in life, living on our terms is a bad decision.

It’s certainly like that with God – the thought of living free of His rule might sound good, but when we live apart from Him, we suffer. Sometimes we suffer in this life as we live in ways that displease God. But ultimately we will suffer under the judgment of God beyond this life as we are held to account for our rejection of Him.

You can’t ignore and the Almighty God and think you’ll be okay. If God did not overlook the sin present among Micah’s generation: their selfishness, their rejection of his rule or their loveless attitude towards each other, why would you think that the just God would overlook those things in your life today?

We need to see that Israel’s plight is our plight.

Our political leaders will often speak of big problems in our world that they promise to fix. Sometimes they make bold statements about solving the problem of:

- Covid19
- Lack of education.

- The impenetrable housing market.
- Climate change.
- Geopolitical tension.

And these are all important things for our rulers to deal with, but God is telling us that we have a greater problem than all of these – the problem of our sin. What’s the good of being well-educated, owning your own home, living in a pollution free world where Covid is a thing of the past, if you are not at peace with the Holy God? Our political rulers might be able to do some things for you, but they cannot deal with your greatest need. That’s the bad news. But the good news of this passage is bound up in God’s promise to send you a ruler who can fix your greatest need. So let’s think about our second point.

Promise of hope found in God’s coming ruler.

This passage reminds us that the Just God is also the loving God – gracious towards people who reject Him. That’s what we see in our passage. Amidst their condemnation and judgment, God gives the distressed people of Micah’s day a message of hope. And as we see, this hope comes in the form of a ruler.

Verse 2, *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler of Israel, whose origins are from old from ancient times.”*

What God does here is turn Israel’s face from their present distress to a future hope. By speaking of Bethlehem, Micah does more than simply locate the place where God’s ruler will come from.

When people heard the name Bethlehem, it would have conjured up the idea of Kingship. Bethlehem was renowned as the birthplace of Israel’s greatest ruler – King David. Just like the name “Nashville” makes you think of cowboy hats country and western singers, Bethlehem made Israelites think of crowns and great kings.

It made them think about a seemingly insignificant shepherd boy from that a seemingly insignificant town who the prophet Samuel had anointed as God’s chosen King – the one who went on to rule in God’s strength, defeat all Israel’s enemies and bring peace and security to the land.

So in the midst of their despair, God gives his people hope, by promising them a great ruler in the line of David who will bring a great reversal to their circumstances – God is saying no longer will you guys be under my judgment, because of *this* ruler, you will come under my blessing once again.

God describes this ruler as one “whose origins are from old, from ancient times.” What does this mean? Well in one sense, these words point back to God’s covenant with King David (2 Samuel 7) when God first promised an everlasting Davidic kingdom for His people. But in another sense, these words point back further still, to the eternal royal line promised to Jacob’s son Judah: *“The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet”* (Gen. 49:10). But you can even go back further still, to the promise of God made in Gen. 3 that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The point is this: God’s longstanding plan to reverse the effects of judgment and save His people through a mighty ruler will come to pass even when they don’t deserve it. So although they suffer judgment and humiliation now, God is saying to them that it will not last forever. Because of His commitment to His promises they will not be completely swept away – there is hope. But until that time, God’s people are told they must endure the consequences of their sin.

Verse 3, “*Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.*”

Although the people of God would be scattered in judgment – the birth of the promised ruler will usher in a time when God’s people are brought back into God’s kingdom. And being in God’s kingdom and under the rulership of God’s promised king will be the best thing they can imagine.

Look at how verse 4 describes the rule of this King, “*He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace.*”

Unlike the dismal and self-interested reign of so many of Israel’s kings – this promised ruler will be different. This king is good and trustworthy. He won’t be defeated by His enemies – He will stand. He won’t be self-interested and greedy for wealth and power – he will *shepherd* His people, putting their needs before His own. He won’t be so foolish as to run to other powers and kings to give Him strength because He will rule in the strength *of the Lord*. The authority of God Himself will mark His reign because He will rule *in the majesty of the name* of the Lord His God. His dominion won’t be restricted to any particular geographical location – His greatness will reach the ends of the earth. And all those whose hope is in Him, who are part of His people will be kept secure in his care and under his rule.

This ruler is trustworthy. And this ruler meets the *greatest* need of sinful people who stand under God’s judgment for sin. For this promised ruler will himself become the means by which peace is made between a rebellious people and Holy God. You see that in verse 5: ***He will*** be our peace. The one thing we need, and the one thing no other ruler can deliver on, He will accomplish. Now, we’ll think more about that in just a moment, but it’s good to reflect on just how awesome this promised ruler actually is.

I know we tend to be a bit cynical toward our rulers and leaders in Australia (the expression. We even have an expression “crooked as a politician”. We’ve already seen that 75% of us do not trust our political rulers. But even we Aussies have to admit that the ruler promised here sounds good. Strong and yet shepherd like. Great and yet not self-interested. Able and willing to meet our greatest need of peace with God. Wouldn’t it be good to know him?

We’ve thought about the plight and the promise of this passage. Let’s think now about the person of Jesus who fulfils this prophecy.

Person

I think it’s easy for our society to overlook Jesus’ awesome role within the Christmas story. Sometimes Jesus is simply portrayed as a special baby who was born to give us some kind of vague sense of hope. Other times He’s portrayed as almost a supporting role to other aspects of the Christmas story that are perhaps deemed little more user-friendly and inclusive. I noticed this at our daughter’s kinder Christmas concert last week. They still had all the kids dress up and act out the nativity scene, but the main element in the Christmas story was not Jesus, but the Christmas star. They sang twinkle, twinkle Christmas star, and the narrator spoke about how the story of the Christmas star has given people hope throughout the ages. Somehow Jesus was made to be a supporting role in his own story...

Yet the NT make it crystal clear that Jesus is the main character at Christmas and that His arrival heralds the grand fulfilment on Micah’s prophecy of God’s coming ruler.

Jesus is identified as this ruler at his birth: In Matt 2:1-6 Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is given, as proof that He is the Messiah – God's promised King.

But Jesus is also *shown* to be this ruler during his life. Throughout the gospels Jesus is revealed as the one who operates in God's strength and authority (just as the prophecy said in v. 4). By the authority of God, Jesus heals the sick, casts out demons, controls the wind and the waves, raises the dead and forgives sins. But it's more than simply His birth and his life that shows Jesus to be the fulfilment of this prophecy. It is also His death. His death marks Him out as the ultimate shepherd ruler – the one who puts the care of his flock before his own welfare. In John 10: 14 Jesus says "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.*" So often we hear stories about our rulers and leaders being self-interested and self-serving. Not so with Jesus – He makes clear that he *did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many* (Mk. 10:45). And it's His death that establishes peace with God where there was no peace before. Because in that moment on the cross, the judgment of death that we deserved for our sin was placed on Him and removed from us. No longer are we God's enemies, but His friends. This message of peace Jesus preached during His life (Eph 2:17 "*Jesus came to preach peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.*") (hark the herald).

And in raising Jesus from the dead, God gave to Him all authority in Heaven and on Earth. He now rules the world and will come again as judge of the world. **So** to all who trust Him, peace with God is offered in place of judgment. Eternal life in place of eternal damnation. You are made God's child instead of His enemy. And just as the promise said that 'they shall live securely' – in Jesus you find that security. He cares for you, will never leave you or let you be snatched from His hand and in His care you will be brought through the sufferings and trials of this life into an eternity where tears and sufferings, the threats and hostilities of this life are no more.

What other ruler has ever made such an enormous promise and pulled it off?

Jesus is the wonderful fulfilment of Micah's prophecy.

So how do we apply all this?

Application

I. For the original readers, who were suffering under God's hand of judgement, this prophecy would have brought them great hope. They could look forward to a time of peace with God through his promised and victorious ruler. But you are in a different position to them. For the fulfilment of this prophecy has come on the very first Christmas.

How should you respond to the news that Jesus has come as the promised ruler to bring us peace with God?

Well, in Matthew 2:1-12 we see a few different responses to this promise and its fulfillment. We see King Herod, the religious rulers of Jerusalem and the wise men all respond in different ways to the news that a baby had been born in Bethlehem according to the prophecy of Micah. And there is actually a bit we can learn from the way each responded.

You see, you don't want to be like King Herod, who when he heard this prophecy saw Jesus' rule as a hostile threat to his own rule – that can be a common response today – we like the idea of Jesus being a cute baby or a wise teacher but not a ruler who has any real claim over our life - we love our autonomy so much that the idea of submitting to God's King is offensive to us. But God is clear that there will be no rival to Jesus' rule. Not from Herod. Not from us.

Nor do you want to be like the religious leaders who thought they were all good with God without having to seek out this new King. You see, they knew this prophecy, but when they heard that a baby king had been born they saw no need to act on it – as we see throughout the gospels, they continually make the mistake of thinking that they would be right with God by

their own good works without the need for Jesus to die for them. But you can never do enough good to make yourself right with God – you need His saviour King.. Who you actually want to be like, is the wise men – they heard this prophecy, believed it, and did not rest until they found Jesus. And when they find Him, they worship Him as King.

If you know Jesus is not the ruler of your life. If you're unsure whether you've got the forgiveness and peace with God that He offers, tonight is the night when you need to act on this prophesy and put your trust in Jesus, acknowledge your sin before Him, seek his forgiveness, and commit to living under His good rule. So the most important application of this passage is that you trust Jesus as God's promised ruler who gives you peace with God.

2. And for those of you who follow Jesus, there are three brief take aways I want to leave you with.

The first is to *live confidently under Jesus' rule*. Take heart in the fact that Jesus currently rules the world now as God's risen King. The fact that many people don't acknowledge his rule does not take away from the fact that He does rule.

You see, we live in a context where people might question whether Jesus actually reigns. Church attendance seems to be sliding. Hostility towards Christianity seems to be increasing. Those who are committed to Jesus' teaching particular social issues are sometimes branded as hateful and intolerant by colleagues and family. For many Christians this can all seem a bit scary and the cause of worry. But take heart. God has raised Jesus from the dead, and given him all authority (Matt 28:19-20). He remains today that good and victorious ruler of this prophecy. He will always stand. He will always be our good shepherd. He is the one to whom everyone will stand before on the last day. It's easy for us to shrink back as Christians in the culture we live in, but remembering that Jesus is God's ruler helps us with this. So, when you're in the lunchroom at work chatting with other colleagues, and you feel the temptation to keep quiet about your faith in Jesus, try to remember that it's actually Jesus who rules. Everyone in that lunchroom will find that out one day. So try not to shrink back from actively being Christian and speaking about the true King where you get an chance. Live confidently under Jesus' rule.

But second, *Be satisfied in by Jesus' rule*. Because lasting hope is found in Jesus' rule – you don't need to look for satisfaction or lasting hope in any other human rule.

Jesus tells you to pray for your leaders, not to put your hope in them. In fact, putting our hope in God's ruler, Jesus, actually free us up to love our leaders by not idolizing them, not crushing them with unrealistic expectations and not corrupting them by making them promise unreal things.

And finally, *give thanks for Jesus' rule*. For God has given you a *good* ruler in the Lord Jesus at Christmas. I remember a couple of years back when Ruth took our eldest daughter to the shops. Like most Christmas seasons, we were trying to down- play the whole Santa thing so that Cami would focus on the true meaning of Christmas. But while they were at the shops Santa was there and came and spoke with Cami. Now Cami was so impressed by the fact that Santa had spoken with her that on the way home she was said "Mummy, Santa is so kind." What do you do in moments like that? Well, you point out where real kindness is found this Christmas. As you and your family face the bombardment of Santa this Christmas just keep remembering and keep making it known that the message of Jesus is so much better than the message of Santa. Santa's message is 'you get what you deserve' - if you've been good you get some junky presents, if you've naughty you get a lump of coal. The message of Jesus is that you get what you don't deserve – Peace instead of judgment. Our good shepherd gives us life through His death. And his shepherd like love will never depart from us. Give thanks for Jesus' rule.

Conclusion

Statistics show that most of us are unsatisfied with our current political rulers. But they also show that most of us still believe the right ruler can make the right difference. God has told

us tonight where to find that ruler – and it's in Jesus – the great person, who came in fulfillment of a great promise to rescue you from your great plight.

Amen.