

# Judgment, Doom and God

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Date: 22 April 2001

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 22nd of April 2001.

The preacher is Rhys Besant. His sermon is entitled Judgment, Doom and God and is from Micah chapters 1 and 2.

In an awful lot of scenes of Monty Python, you've probably come across that fifth-hand ending of the meaning of life. Where the fellow is in a restaurant, and he's in a family one, and he's given one more thin way further, and he takes the way back.

It's a fast store, and in a very graphic scene, he explores all over the restaurant. In short, we say the same ourselves all the time.

Just one meal we take, or this will be the last one, or tomorrow it will be all different, tomorrow I'll give up, tomorrow I'll come by the way. And it's easy to justify, on a small scale, personal fruit.

[ 1 : 22 ] But when we step back, and look at my life, and look at our lives, and look at the life of our needs, we have to acknowledge that wheat often goes unchecked, covered up, and all too often justify the fact.

It's not just that we might be getting fatter and more of a sign of heart disease, but in society as well we use carbon fuels without even checking on what they're doing during time.

environment. We use health resources in ways that the mental of the world just doesn't have access to. Our own fire aid in Australia has driven over it in the last 10 years.

Often we don't see it for how grief is so vicious. It affects not just me, but it affects our communities and our relationships. It affects our nations and our environments.

And it's so very subtle. Not only in its results, its results are very unsupply. But the way grief takes hold is often very, very...

[ 2 : 43 ] ...cruppy. Now, me thinking, it creates up on me. It creates up on us. And before we know it, we're a long way from living together.

Here's the last missionary friends who come home to Australia, this is so often. And they'll see the difference in our lives, in the one that actually we've not seen. We've become blinded to. Our grief creeps up on us, suffering. It's quite good. How can we predict ourselves from Greed Creek?

Greed Creek. Now, this morning, and next we're looking at the prophet's martyrs, and those two chapters, which have a lot to say about how we might think about our life in the world. For Michael's own day, it was a day of economic boom, economic expansion and prosperity, and rising greed.

And rising greed. From chapter 2, verse 1. ... ..

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[ 6 : 21 ] ... ..

... It's also clear that in Micah's own day those commandments were being ignored and broken and despised. It gets worse.

They were greedy and they were complacent about it. They were seizing land from those around them.

Chapter 2, verse 9 They were driving the women out from their pleasant homes, their young children, away from my glory forever, says God.

And they did it all because they thought they were safe from God's judgment. That God's judgment didn't reach them. They'd given up being concerned about how they'd be treated.

[ 7 : 30 ] They'd listen to people who encouraged that complacency. Chapter 2, verse 6 Don't preach, thus they preached, the false teachers in the land.

One should not preach of such things. Disgrace will not overtake us. God can't judge us. God won't judge us. We belong to his covenant people. They've grown complacent.

Chapter 2, verse 11 If someone wanted to go about offering empty falsehoods, saying, I will preach to you of wine and strong drink, such a one would be the preacher for this people.

From the pulpit, they were wanting to be encouraged in indulging themselves. Their own convenience, their own comfort. That's what they wanted affirmed from the pulpit, not God's covenant stipulations.

They were complacent. They were disobeying God's commandments and they were ignoring his covenant, presuming that if they were God's chosen people, they were saved from Job.

[ 8 : 36 ] There are false prophets in our own country as well who say that the only measure of success is economic success.

There are Christians in our churches who think that the only sign of God's blessing is wealth. While poverty, they argue, the sure sign of disobedience, the lack of God's blessing.

Well, they're actually not that such. God warns them if they persist, he'll kick them out.

Chapter 2, verse 10. Arise and go, for this is no place for you to rest because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction. They actually thought that belonging to God's covenant meant that they wouldn't face judgment.

But actually, of course, belonging to God's people increases our responsibility in the world because God has revealed to us how he wants us to live.

[ 9 : 50 ] There's less excuse for living in ways that God finds displeased. Welcome to the playground. You know when you're a kid and you're running around in the yard and you're playing chasing and you cross your fingers and I don't know, my store at least could say barley.

Which meant that as much as you keep me on the stage and you couldn't get me. That's effectively what these folk in Micah's day are saying. They're not saying barley but they're saying covenant.

You can't get me if you're unsafe because you've made me one of your people. Ignoring their responsibilities. And it's not just that they're greedy and it's not just that they're complacent.

That's not all. Micah gives a third reason for corruption in the land. And it's sinister. It's cancerous. It's life-threatening.

Chapter 1 Verse 3 The Lord is coming out of his place. We'll come down and tread upon the higher places of the earth.

[ 10 : 59 ] God is coming to bring judgment. The mountains will melt under him. The valleys will burst open. The wax are like wax near the fire like warmth poured down as deep place. All this for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.

And we ask ourselves what are the transgressions of Jacob and the sins of the house of Israel? What is it that they're doing wrong? Micah answers the question in the second half of verse 5.

What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Isn't it Jerusalem?

Jerusalem a high place? High places were where the pagans worshipped their gods. Jerusalem was the place where God the one true and living God was worshipped.

Can this be? Can Jerusalem be regarded as a high place? Corrupt? Diseased?

[ 12 : 05 ] Idolatrous? Yes. Corruption had reached the very heart of this people.

It had infected their worship. Ultimately their greed and their complacency was because of their idolatry.

Paul makes the same point about the link between greed and idolatry.

He says in Colossians 3 put to death whatever in you is earthly fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed which is idolatry.

and on account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. The fruit of their lives was bad because their roots were sick.

[ 13 : 12 ] Their deeds were evil because their desires were for something other than the one true and living God. They seized with their hands others land because their hearts were cold.

To put it quite bluntly their lifestyle was wrong because their worship, their theology was wrong. Bad worship, bad theology leads to bad living but good worship, good theology leads to good living.

There is a connection in God's universe between what happens in our hearts and minds and what happens with our hands and feet. And Jesus makes the same point.

Make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad for the tree is known by its fruit. You broodify this, how can you speak good things when you are evil?

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. When I was a kid I played a game called Mousetrap.

[ 14 : 22 ] I don't know if it still exists, it still might be about. A lot of people are not in. It's a game whereby in the course of the game you construct this very elaborate contraption.

The goal of course is to catch the mouse. The mouse is sitting down here on the board and you turn a crank up the top. Cogs whir, balls fall, any number of things happen until finally the track comes down and catches the mouse.

And when you're constructing it I used to think to myself, how would that even work? How could it ever catch the mouse in the game? But it did. There was a connection even though at first I didn't see the connection clearly.

And it's exactly the same with wrong worship, wrong theology. In the end, it catches us out.

We'll get trapped. And we'll see signs in our lives that not all is right in our hearts and in our minds. For more positively, there's nothing more practical than knowing the truth about God.

[ 15 : 34 ] Jesus said, if you continue in my words, you're truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. So the nation of Micah in the 8th century BC was sick.

And we've seen evidence in these chapters of its grief and complacency. Ultimately, it's idolatry.

The centre is sick, Jerusalem. And so, as it happens, are the outlying towns. The sickness is rampant. In chapter 1, 10 to 16, any number of small towns south of Jerusalem are described.

The point of listing them like this, first of all, is to show that the sickness was what it's fed. But if you know the original, there's also some puns involved here.

And the very names of the towns that Micah is accusing of being sin-sins, he makes a spoon for it to try and rub it in. So he says things like this, if we were to contemporise it.

[ 16 : 56 ] Sydney is sin-city. Melbourne will surely burn. Brunswick is sin-sick. Doncaster is a disaster. Kew, I will sue.

Or Carlton is a charlatan. He's using wordplay to try and rub home his point. You might think you can run. But you can't.

Oh. So destruction comes on the nation. God says in chapter 1, verse 6, I will make Samaria a heap in the open country.

A place where plants in vineyards, I will pour down their stones into the valley and uncover their foundations. Or in chapter 1, verse 9, Her wound is incurable.

It has come to Judah. It has reached the gate of my people. Even, even to Jerusalem. 1.16 Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children.

[ 18 : 01 ] Make yourselves as bald as the eagles, for they have gone from you into exile. Well, judgment is coming because of its sin-sick people.

The destruction which comes, we know, in hindsight, came at the hands of the Assyrians, who destroyed Judah, who got to the doors of Jerusalem.

God judges greed and complacency and idolatry, even when it's to be found amongst God's people.

Greed, friends, is a dead end. It gets us absolutely nowhere. But, despite God judging his own, he will save just some to serve him.

We'll survive the judgment. The nation will have a fresh start and will be purified. 32.12 I will surely gather all of you, Jacob.

[ 19 : 21 ] I will gather the survivors or the remnant of Israel. I will set them together like season of fog, like a flock in its pasture. It will resound with people. The one who breaks out will go up before them.

They will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. The king will pass on before them. The Lord at their head. You see, much as we might find it if you were to understand, God can judge and save at the same time.

God judges and saves at the same time through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The shepherd spoken of in Micah chapter 2 points to the great, the good shepherd, Jesus Christ himself, who lays down his life for the sheep, as John explains.

Jesus says in John 10, I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it up again. I have other sheep that don't belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock and one shepherd. Yes, there will be judgment and purification for God's people.

[ 20 : 48 ] The result of it will be a flock who does listen to Jesus Christ's voice. And friends, we are that remnant.

We are the renewed people of God when we place our trust in Jesus Christ. when these land barons took the land of their neighbours, they were doing it because of their greed and complacency and idolatry.

But no doubt they didn't say that to themselves getting up in the morning thinking to themselves, look, today I'm going to be greedy and complacent and idolatrous. I'm going to take my neighbour's land. I suspect actually they blanketed their sin with language of efficiency.

They've only got an acre. What are they going to do with their acre? I've got a hundred acres. If their one acre were part of my one hundred acres, we'd have a whole lot more productive land and besides which we've got the tools, we've got the equipment to plough it, to tend it, to keep it.

No doubt they justified their expansion by talking about how efficient it would be. The very reason God, in the first place in the law, asked that land be kept within families so that it wouldn't accrue in the hands of a small minority.

[ 22 : 25 ] They were working on the principle that bigger is better, pursuing economies of scale. And of course we hear things all the time. The banks say we'll close branches because it's more efficient for head office, more returns to the shareholders.

We hear companies saying, look we won't have lots of little factories scattered around Victoria, we'll just have one main production plant in South East Asia. We hear people saying, why should we support a fertiliser company in India and they can buy it more cheaply from a company overseas.

Now efficiency is important. Wasting things is not how God would want us to live. And an achievement like an economy of ours is that there is little waste compared with say a commander of communist economy.

I remember being in East Berlin when it was still under communist rule and we arrived with an enormous statue of a Roman soldier of a Russian soldier that was bathing his arms.

It was a grand and impressive monument and as we walked towards it we saw on the left and right a grove of trees that were being pruned by an army of gardeners using nail scissors.

[ 23 : 47 ] people's resources. When we got back in the bus the tour guide said of course we don't have any unemployment in East Germany. And one of the smarty hands at the back of the bus said that's because you get them to use mowers when they're pruning the trees.

Yes, there are economies where people's resources are wasted. But in our economy, in our desire for efficiency, let's not forget being equitable or fair or protecting people's rights and livelihood.

We live more than an economy, we live in a community, a society. We're capitalists be understood in more than just financial terms. I remember a school when football teams were picked, the two captains would line up on the oval and the other boys would gather around and each would take in turns to choose someone for their team.

Well, guess who was the last person never to be chosen? And probably in one sense they wanted a team to keep the ball and I wasn't able to do that. But perhaps it would have been more helpful to for our class if they thought more than just winning and efficiency and thought more about their community, participation, goodwill and compassion which might make up for what my skills left.

so how do we learn to balance the needs of efficiency in our own lives and community and equity, being fair, being generous?

[ 25 : 36 ] How do we relate these two things together? Yes, we want to worship the one true and living God as the better off of all else. yes, we all want to be in a place here to hear the hard words that God wants us to hear.

Yes, we want to put on Christ and be renewing God's image day by day, giving no room to glean. But more than that, I think basically fundamental every day, we have to say no to ourselves and yes to others.

No to ourselves and yes to others, even if the steps are little, even if the decisions are small, and learn to be generous.

Generosity is a powerful witness in a society of society as our own. I remember when I was working for the Christian Union at Melbourne University, friends would give money to me to support them.

A non-Christian friend of mine asked me once how I lived, and I said, oh, just friends give me money. Is it what, like enough to live on?

[ 26 : 50 ] I said, yes. And as a non-Christian, he was just blown away. He didn't know that generosity like that existed. generosity is a powerful witness, and it's something we need to practice.

In fact, there are statistics which say that churches have become in the last 10-20 years all around the Western world much less generous compared to our 19th century forefathers. people. We need to combat greed, saying no to ourselves.

Don't just look in glossy magazines when they roll up on the doorstep. Only look in them if there's actually something you know ahead of time you want to buy. Perhaps you can visit the [www.soulhunger.com](http://www.soulhunger.com) website because visiting that sends some money to those who are poor.

Perhaps you can ask your friends when you're making a big life decision what they think and whether greed is getting a foothold. Either buying a car or taking a new job.

Why not involve others in your decision? That would be one way of combating greed. But more positively, encouraging generosity.

[ 28 : 08 ] Why not have people into your home who you hardly know? Why don't we waste time on people who we don't particularly like? Why not think about using our skills, not just for our own sake, but for those in developing countries who need skills like we have in abundance, no matter what our age or stage.

We need to not only combat greed, but promote spontaneous and abundant and extravagant generosity in our churches, going against the flow for the sake of the kingdom of Christ.

For some generosity is puzzling, for others it will be infectious. I think it's a practical antidote to greed's short-sightedness and sickness and slavery.

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