

In That Day

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[0 : 0 0] Well, often in life, there's light at the end of a tunnel. Have you heard that expression before, light at the end of the tunnel? And the light at the end of the tunnel helps you to get through the tunnel, whatever that tunnel may be.

So, for example, my son recently, as many of you know, went through his VCE exams. And for his belated 18th birthday present, we actually bought him a really good computer, which he chipped in towards and on which he can play games with his friends online and that sort of thing and do university work next year.

But the thing is, it arrived really quickly, more quickly than we were expecting. So it just sat in the box in my study because he still had to go through his study and VCE exams.

And every now and again, when I was in my study, I kind of turned around and I'd catch him at the doorway just staring at the box. That was his light that helped him persevere through his tunnel of study and VCE exams.

And I think that's kind of like the big idea for our chapters in Micah today. But for Micah, though, it's the light of the God's future kingdom that will help him persevere through his present and persevere not in studying but in following God.

[1 : 2 1] Or as he puts it in chapter 4, verse 5, just have a look at your Bibles there, down the bottom. It'll be really helpful if you follow it along and it'll help you pay attention and so on. But chapter 4, verse 5, it says, All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

And that's what he wants to resolve to do, even despite difficult times he was facing. And to walk in the name of the Lord means to walk in a manner that reflects his character because name and character go together, don't they?

Have you heard that expression, to drag someone's name through the mud? Have you heard that before? It really means to drag their character through the mud because name and character are connected.

And so to walk in the name of the Lord is to walk in light of his character. To walk in a way that reflects his character in our behaviour, for example, with our words and actions.

But also to walk with him as God over our lives, where his character as God shapes our priorities and choices.

[2 : 3 2] Though it's not always easy. Though there are lots of things that can help us, like help from one another to encourage us or God's spirit to strengthen us.

But again, today, Micah gives us a glimpse of God's glorious future kingdom. That light at the end of their tunnel, which will help them keep persevering in the present, walking in the name of the Lord.

But before we start, let me also point out that these chapters are connected by a phrase that says, in the last days or in that day.

It's a phrase that kind of points forward in time to when God's kingdom will come. That's why I've titled point one of God's future kingdom. Of course, for us, those last days refer to the time between Jesus' first advent and his second advent or coming into the world, as you can hopefully see on the diagram there.

And in the Old Testament, that day, singular, is actually stretched out in the New Testament to span that whole period. And so the morning of that day is like when Jesus first comes into the world to save.

[3 : 52] And the evening of that day is like when Jesus comes again to put things right and to judge. And so that means we are actually in the last days now.

We are in the middle of that day now. And so as we look at Micah's future, some of it will already be fulfilled in our present.

Though I'll show you as we go along. Also, just to reorientate you to the book of Micah, it's made up of three sermons, three words of the Lord, which cause us to consider who is like our God.

That's what Micah names means. And we're in the middle of the second sermon. Last week, we did chapter three, where Micah highlighted Judah's lousy leaders, both civil and spiritual.

I remember they were like sheep who ate their own sheep. And it was quite graphic last week. And then here this week, he looks to the future kingdom. But as I read, I want to read from the end of chapter three, where it talks about the bad news for God's city, people and temple.

[5 : 03] And notice the reversal in chapter four, as we look forward to that day. So end of chapter three. Therefore, because of you lousy leaders, Zion will be plowed like a field.

Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble. The temple hill, a mound overgrown with thickets. But in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

It will be exalted above the hills and peoples will stream to it. Did you notice the reversal for the temple at this point?

Before the temple was on a hill, but in the last days, it will be exalted to the highest mountain. Before it was overgrown with thickets, which means it's deserted by people. But in the last days, people will be flooded with people.

People will stream to it. There's this reversal in the last days. But the people will actually come from the nations. Verse two, many nations will come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.

[6 : 10] That is to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. For the law will go out from Zion.

That is the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. You see, many nations will come to God and the place to go to meet God was the temple. So they'd go to the temple to meet God and to learn God's ways, to walk in them.

How will this happen? Well, the word for is missing towards the end of verse two. It's literally for or because the law will go out from Zion, which is the same as saying the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

That the word will go out and bring people from the nations back in and teach them how to live God's way. But actually, it'll do even more than that.

It will also settle disputes and bring peace. Verse three, it says, he will judge between many peoples and he will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.

[7 : 19] And because they'll be peace, then they'll beat their swords into plowshares, into gardening tools and their spears into pruning hooks. And because nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Everyone instead will sit under their own vine, under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid. For the Lord Almighty has spoken.

I don't know if you've ever seen those beauty pageant things that they have in movies and in real life too, I think, from time to time. And they often interview the contestants. What do you wish to see in the world?

And they always answer, world peace. They always say invariably, world peace. Well, here it is in Micah chapter 4. God's future kingdom means world peace between people.

No more war. Can you imagine that? Turn on the news and it's only good news. Each person can enjoy their own vine and fig tree without the fear of being invaded by Putin or someone else.

[8 : 35] Plus, everyone walks in God's way too. Can you imagine that? You know, our politicians, our colleagues, our extended family and friends, all living God's way.

No more selfishness or corruption, only genuine love and compassion. This is not wishful thinking because we're at the end of verse 4.

It's guaranteed by God. Did you see? God has spoken. That is, he signed the contract, as it were. Plus, he has the muscle to follow through.

The words Lord Almighty are literally the Lord of hosts or armies. He has the military might to make this happen, you see. It's not wishful thinking.

In fact, it's already begun to happen, has it not? Because, has not Christ replaced the temple as the place to go to meet God? We don't have to go to Israel to the temple because it's not really there anymore.

[9 : 39] There's a mosque instead. We come to Jesus to meet God, don't we? And has not Christ been raised and exalted to the highest place, the highest mountain, as it were? And has not the word of the gospel gone out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth to Melbourne, Australia?

Not quite the ends of the earth, but that's what we see in the book of Acts, the word going out and it's bringing people from the nations, that's us in this room, back to God to learn his ways as Christians.

And has this word also not already began to bring peace between people such that a Ukrainian and a Russian Christian despite their country's conflict can still enjoy peace and fellowship with one another because of Christ.

Now, of course, this future is not fully fulfilled, is it? Sadly, there's still plenty of conflict and war, but in Christ, God's future kingdom with its temple and nations has begun.

But what about Jerusalem and the Jews? Well, that's verses 6 and 7. In that day, in the last days, declares the Lord, I will gather the lame, I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief, those who he had to judge for sin, and I will make the lame my remnant, those driven away into a strong nation.

[11 : 09] The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. Here is the next reversal. At the end of chapter 3, do you remember?

Zion, that's Jerusalem, was ploughed like a field and as I said last week, a plough kind of uproots the soil and clears the field. Well, that's what happened to the people. They were uprooted and cleared from Jerusalem and sent into exile.

But here, God will regather his exiles and notice he will make the lame strong, a strong nation and God will rule over them forever.

Here are his exiled people. And the city of Jerusalem, well, verse 8, as for you at watchtower of the flock, that is the city who watches over the people, stronghold of daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you.

Kingship will come to daughter Jerusalem. End of chapter 3, Jerusalem was turned into rubble. But in that day, God will restore its dominion.

[12 : 12] It will again be a watchtower or stronghold for its people, its flock. Because kingship will return. A king better than those lousy leaders from last week.

And God will rule them through his king forever. Here is God's future kingdom. The light at the end of the tunnel with a restored city, a temple, a people, both Jews and nations and their king through whom God's rule and word will go out and bring world peace.

It will be heaven on earth. And if you're anything like me, it's hard to grasp how good this will be, this heaven on earth. And so I do what most people do these days, I googled it.

I googled heaven and earth and this place came up. That's pretty close, isn't it? It's a real place in Austria. It looks pretty good.

It even comes with a cafe under, it's not quite a fig tree, but under a tree. How's that? Can you imagine enjoying a coffee under the tree with that view? That's pretty good, isn't it?

[13 : 21] Perhaps for families of whom we have quite a number here with young kids, perhaps this is heaven on earth. Kids playing together, no fighting, just smiling, sharing. But for Micah, this kingdom is completely in the future.

And for now, instead, there's the pain of judgment, point two. And so what follows are three paragraphs where in the original Hebrew, they all start with the word now, but we can still see it in our English translations as well.

So as I read this first paragraph, verses 9 to 10, look out for the word now and see what God will do later. Okay? So verse 9. Why do you now cry aloud?

Have you no king? Has your ruler perished that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor? Writhe in agony, daughter Zion, like a woman in labor. For now, you must leave the city to camp in the open field.

You will go to Babylon. There, though, you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies. Some years ago, I pinched a nerve in my lower back and it was excruciating.

[14 : 32] I know some people here have had that experience. It's really painful. But I made the very foolish mistake of saying to my wife, Michelle, I reckon I now know what labor is like. She just stared at me and shook her head as if to say I had no idea and she was right.

I have no idea of labor and no idea that you never say that. All I know is labor is pain, lots of pain and Micah says for now there will be pain like labor.

The pain of judgment. Actually, in verse 9, I think Micah is mocking the people who follow their human king instead of God, their true king. In the face of attacking armies, I think it's as though Micah is saying, why do you now cry out?

Have you no king to save you? Why don't you go and follow your human ruler that you've been following instead of God? Has he perished? Of course, because of their sin, their human king cannot save them.

And so Micah says in verse 10, actually, you're right to writhe in pain like labor. For now is the time of judgment and exile to Babylon.

[15 : 47] Judgment that Micah and the faithful will be caught up in. But just as from the pain of labor comes new life later, so from the pain of judgment will come new life later.

And so the end of verse 10, from Babylon they will be rescued and redeemed. Do you see that? God will give them new life. And we see this same now and later pattern in the next paragraph, verses 11 to 13.

Have a look there in your Bibles. In verse 11, but now the nations will cheer and gloat over your demise. Yet, verse 12, little do they know that they are being gathered for judgment themselves like sheaves on a threshing floor.

For those who don't know, a threshing floor in ancient times looked a bit like this on the screen. It was a circle with stones around the edges and you'd either get farmers bashing the sheaves down to loosen the grain out of the stalks or you'd get animals treading out the grain, which is where the expression comes from.

And so later in verse 13 in your Bibles, God will raise his people and kind of make them like those animals, give them iron horns and hooves of bronze to tread out the nations who have been gathered for judgment.

[17 : 14] Or the third paragraph, see that now and later pattern again. Verse 1, I take it that means that they will not win against the siege, that their leader will be captured and carried off into exile, which is exactly what happened to Zedekiah when Babylon laid siege against Jerusalem.

But later, chapter 5, verse 2, from insignificant Bethlehem will come one who will be ruler over Israel, a king whose origins are from old, from ancient times like the times of King David.

For David himself was from Bethlehem and God promised David a king from his family would always rule in God's kingdom. This now and later pattern, I think, helps Micah and his faithful to persevere in the present, to keep walking in the name of the Lord in two ways.

Firstly, it helps them to have right expectations of now. I remember visiting someone and the kids were complaining about the homework they had to do and the mother said, well, God never promised an easy life, off you go.

That was a little bit unsympathetic, but she was right. God has not promised that this life would always be easy. Sometimes our frustration in life comes because we've got wrong expectations.

[18 : 50] We expect life to always be smooth sailing, but God doesn't promise that. We live in a fallen world that is a world under judgment because of sin and sometimes we get caught up in that, don't we?

Whether it's suffering from people's selfishness, I was saying to the morning church that after I voted yesterday afternoon at Doncaster Secondary College across the road, I was walking just across Donny Road with the green light, the green man, so I was doing the right thing and I was almost on the other side and a car came tearing around a corner.

My life didn't flash before my eyes, it was still about a metre away, but boy, it was close. I could have got caught up in that selfishness. All in, of course, there's natural disasters that people like in Indonesia are being caught up in, or ageing bodies and the like.

Now, we can still lament those things, we can still seek to work against those things, that's right to do, but if we have right expectations of life now, then we'll remember that this world is not our true home.

we can brace ourselves for these things, we can help one another through these things, and we can make sure we are not going to be knocked over off our faith from or by these things.

[20 : 12] God hates, of course, suffering and injustice even more than we do, and so not only does Micah's now help them have right expectations, he later gives them hope of future, doesn't it?

light at the end of the tunnel, as we've said, that from the pain of labor will come new life, that God will rescue and redeem, give them a king, and one day even raise them to judge those who've persecuted them.

This later hope, this future light, helps them to keep walking in the present, doesn't it? In the name of the Lord. But it all revolves around an actual woman giving birth to an actual son, verse 3.

Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

You see, this is when God's future kingdom begins, when the pain of judgment stops, when this child is born. God will start to redeem and rescue.

[21 : 26] Then the rest of his brothers from Judah will return or repent, it can mean the same thing, and join the rest of God's people, the Israelites. You see, God's future kingdom all revolves around the birth of this child.

God's future all their hope. God's future hang on him. And the great news for us is he's already been born, hasn't he? I mean, it's Christmas, isn't it?

As we heard in our second reading, the chief priests tell Herod when they're looking for the birth of the Messiah, the king, they actually quote the prophet Micah, not word for word, but they quote chapter 5, verse 2.

And as we'll sing in a moment, O little town of Bethlehem, there has this line, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you, Bethlehem, tonight.

Why? Because the birth of the Son has come. And since Jesus has already been born, then it means God has already begun to rescue and redeem.

[22 : 32] Like Paul says in Colossians 1, rescued us from sin and judgment and brought us into his kingdom spiritually. And by repenting or returning to Jesus, we become his spiritual brothers and sisters.

We join the rest of true Israel, God's people. And one day, he will even raise us to judge the world with him, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

Don't you know that the Lord's people will judge the world? Perhaps not with bronze hooves, though. That the point is some of this later has already been fulfilled now in Christ, which makes the rest of God's future kingdom even more certain for us.

Gives us even more reason to keep persevering walking in the name of the Lord now, doesn't it? Especially when we realize what life under this shepherd looks like. Point three.

We're not going to have time to go through all of this, but let's have a look at verse 4 at least. Verse 4, he says, he that is the shepherd 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 the ends of the earth.

[23 : 55] Since Jesus has already born, then this security has already begun spiritually. As Jesus says, where he talks about being the good shepherd, he says his sheep listen to him, and notice no one will snatch them out of his hand.

Why? Because his father who gave them is greater than all. His greatness reaches the ends of the earth, and Jesus rules in the strength of his father.

One of our church members loves these verses on the screen, actually. He used to go to a church where they never spoke of assurance or security, spiritual security, and so he was never sure if he was going to heaven, even though he genuinely believed, trusted in Jesus.

And then he read these verses that no one can snatch him from Christ's hand, that under this shepherd he does have security, and it was such a relief for him, particularly now, since he's only been given weeks to live.

Life under this shepherd is good. It comes with spiritual security, it comes with peace through victory, even purpose in ministry that we don't have time to unpack now.

[25 : 16] This is part of the kingdom that Christ has already begun. As I said, for Micah, God's future kingdom, this heaven on earth, this light at the end of the tunnel, it was all in the future.

But for us in Christ, it has already begun. And so we have even more reason to persevere walking in the name of the Lord than Micah had. Let me finish.

my son Tim is enjoying his new computer and loving it. His perseverance has paid off. His glorious future was worth it until his parents force him to get a job.

Is that next week or the week after, Michelle? Knowing God's glorious kingdom to come will be worth it. Knowing that it actually has already begun in Christ, does that not encourage us all the more to keep walking in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ?

So will you? Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this picture of your glorious kingdom in Micah.

[26 : 29] Thank you that it helped Micah to keep walking in your name through the dark tunnel of judgment and pain. Father, we pray and give thanks that because this kingdom has already begun in Christ, that we have even more reason to keep walking in his name.

And so help us, we pray, to do that. By the way, we live our lives in what we say and do. And by the way we choose our priorities, help us to reflect your character, to keep walking in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We ask it in his name. Amen.