

Living for the Future

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[0 : 00] Well, you know what fascinates me about great builders of the great structures in history, like the ones behind me, is that many of them, many of the builders of these structures never actually saw the completed result of their work.

I wonder if you've ever thought about that. Often they never saw the end product in their lifetimes. It often took decades to build these buildings beyond the time that the original builder, the guy who started it, was expected to live.

But this didn't stop. This is what's interesting. It didn't stop the builder from giving their all, giving everything they had, pouring all their skill, and in those days, pouring their entire life. It would be an entire life project for an architect, for a builder, to construct one of these.

You know, pouring themselves into constructing something that they would never actually see.

They were people, you see, who lived beyond their own time horizon.

Now, we don't see much of that today, do we? You know, in a world of instant results, in a world of the here and now, we're not used to this idea of living for something beyond our own lives, living beyond our time horizon.

[1 : 13] We don't want to work towards something we won't see this month, let alone something we won't see in our lifetimes. But you see, the thing about being a Christian is that's exactly what God calls His people to do.

To not live for the here and now, but to set our attention on and put our energies into and put our life into something way beyond our own time horizon.

You see, God calls us to live for the future, which is not easy. But there's a good reason why He does that, which we begin to see when we unpack Micah's prophecy in Micah chapter 5, when we begin to understand what's going on here.

Because this was a prophecy to God's people in Israel around 700 BC. And what we see from what Micah tells Israel is that their immediate future wasn't rosy at all.

In fact, they were about to enter a time of great distress. We see that in verse 1. Have a look. He says, So basically, what Micah is saying is that Israel is going to be attacked and defeated, which we know happened not long after he wrote this.

[2 : 32] And they went into a time of exile for decades and decades. A time when they seriously wondered if God had abandoned them. You know, they seriously wondered whether God was even there at all.

Because it seemed like He had just disappeared to Israel. I wonder if you've ever felt that. I wonder if you can relate to Israel. Because you see, Israel in the Bible is really a representation of us. It's a foreshadow of all of us. And the journey we have to go through and the trials that we'll face. I wonder if you've ever felt like Israel felt in exile. Maybe you've been going through a time of distress.

A health problem. Or loss of a loved one. Or a job. A career failure. Whatever it is. And you wonder. You genuinely wonder in that time. Where is God? Have you ever felt that? You wonder whether He's abandoned you. You wonder whether He's even there at all. You don't tell anyone.

[3 : 32] Because you're a Christian. You go to church. How can you possibly doubt whether God is there? But in the back of your mind, you wonder. Have you been in that situation? Well, that's the situation God's people were in.

In Israel. That's the situation they were about to head into on a national scale. As they faced certain invasion from a foreign power.

And that's the first verse of this prophecy. It's not good news. But I want you to see what else God told them. Before they headed into this time of distress.

From verse 2. Very interesting. Have a look. He says, But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathra. It actually means place of Judah, nation of Judah. That's why Matthew quotes the easier to pronounce version in Matthew chapter 2.

But you, but look what it says. Okay, remember. This is a time when Israel were about to head into great distress. But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah. Though you are small among the clans of Judah. [4 : 36] Out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel. Whose origins are from old. From ancient times. 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. 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 the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace. And so you see what God is saying here to Israel.

At the same time as God is giving them the bad news of this invasion to come. In the present. He also gives them an awesome promise for the future.

A promise of a coming ruler who would solve all of their problems. Who would unite people to the ends of the earth. And who would bring a time of peace like has never been experienced before.

[5 : 36] It's interesting this word peace. Here in Micah's prophecy. It's the Hebrew word shalom. You've probably heard that word before. But it's the interesting thing about the Hebrew word shalom.

Is that it doesn't just mean peace like we use the word today. It doesn't just mean a ceasing of conflict. Or national political peace. No it's much deeper. The word shalom is more like when we talk about inner peace.

A person really being at peace inside. It means really having no anxiety about anything. It means knowing that everything is right in the world.

And not longing for anything. Not wanting anything. Not needing anything else. It's that sense of deep well-being.

That you maybe experience for a moment here or there in life. You know that moment when just everything is right. Have you experienced that moment?

[6 : 38] Everything is right. You don't have to worry about anything. But of course it only ever lasts a moment in this world doesn't it? And before you can enjoy it it's gone. Because some other worry pops up.

And maybe you haven't felt that for a long time. Maybe you haven't felt peace for a long time. Maybe you've forgotten what it feels like. Well a time is coming. Promises God to his people. When that kind of peace will be established permanently in the hearts of everyone. Everywhere. Not just national peace.

But complete shalom for all his people. Now what a promise is that? And that's actually at the end of the day. That's what we all long for.

That's what we all chase after. We don't chase after money and pleasure and holidays and career. We actually chase after shalom. All of those things are means to an end for us to get shalom.

[7 : 34] That's what we really all want. But we don't have. Because none of us are really at peace here and now. But God promises that his ruler that he sends will bring that peace like we've never seen before.

But notice. I want you to notice. It's a promise to Israel that will only be fulfilled much later in the future. Way after the current generation had died off. And that's the first thing I want us to see about this prophecy this morning.

God's promise for his people here is not for their own lifetimes. Instead he's calling his people to look way beyond their own time horizon.

Now why would he do that? Why would they actually care about God telling them something that's not going to happen in their lifetimes? Well it's because God has a future for his people beyond this life.

And that's what he wants his people to set their eyes on. Not what he can do for them in the here and now. But what he promises to do for his people in the future.

[8 : 42] And his people are the ones who believe those promises and trust and follow him now. Even if there's no immediate benefit to that. That's who God's people are.

But this is a very difficult concept for us who live in such an instant age, isn't it? God's people are the ones who live in such an instant age, isn't it?

There's these things called stamps. You can Google them. They're amazing. The little thing you lick. Anyway, you put a stamp on it. You write the address. You put it in a post box. It takes one or two weeks to find its destination.

And then you wait another one or two weeks, up to a month, for a reply. And you're quite happy to wait a month to get a reply to your message to your relative overseas. That was the world not too long ago.

But today? No. Today, not only can we send instant messages to someone on the other side of the world in less than a second on our phones, but we get irritated if we have to put our phones back in our pocket without getting a reply, don't we?

[10:09] I mean, let's be honest. I mean, if you use WhatsApp. Anybody use WhatsApp? Yeah? If you use WhatsApp, you know you get those little ticks. And you get the ticks that tell you, two ticks that tell you if the message has been received.

And then you get the blue ticks that tell you if the message has been read. And let's be honest. How irritating is it when you get the blue ticks and the person doesn't reply right away? And you go, I know you've read it.

Why are you ignoring me? You know? We all do that, don't we? We live in an instant age. We live in an age where we want results right now. We can't wait.

We can't wait. We can't wait in our culture. But you see, God calls his people to wait. And sadly, because of our culture, so many preachers today entice people to come to God based on what he can do for them in the here and now rather than his promises for the future.

They preach that God will give them happiness and prosperity now. But then, when that doesn't happen, and they enter a time of distress or pain, you know what they do? They abandon God because they think he's failed them.

[11:16] And I think too often, even in our own prayers, I think our own prayers are often blue tick prayers. You know what I mean? You're not satisfied to just pray and wait, but you want a response now.

But the true people of God, the true people of God trust in him, not for what he can do for them in the present, but for what he promises to do in the future. And that's what he expected of Israel here in Micah.

And you know what? How much more should that be true of us? Because we are much closer to the fulfillment of his promise than they were then.

You see this prophecy? Have a look at it in Micah again. It's very interesting. First, verse 1, there's this time of distress for the people of God, which happened very soon after the prophecy was given. But then, verse 2 and 3, there's the arrival of this new ruler. And then, verse 3 to 4, there's this ruler gathering his people, his brothers. And then, at the end of verse 4, in the beginning of verse 5, we find this new kingdom of peace being established.

[12:19] Well, it's when we turn to Matthew that we see this prophecy unfolding in those very stages, which Micah said it would.

Because 700 years after this prophecy was written, a baby is born in Bethlehem, just like the prophecy said. But you know what?

Lots of babies were born in Bethlehem. It was a normal town. And for 700 years, lots of babies were born. The thing about this particular baby, though, is that he was no ordinary child.

Okay, I don't know about you, but when a baby is born, you don't see a star in the heavens indicating his birth. Otherwise, there would be lots of stars moving around and leading you to Constantinburg and Vincent Pellotti and things.

But no, it only happened for this baby, a supernatural sign in the heavens, a special star that was no ordinary star. It was a star that moved. It was a star that directed people to the very place that Jesus was born.

[13:23] Because this is no ordinary child. He was marked with the supernatural sign so that the world pays attention. And not just Israel, but the world. Because these were pagan astrologers.

These were pagans who recognized the star. They were astrologers, which means they were misguidedly looking for signs in the heavens their whole life.

They spent trying to work out life by looking at the stars. And then God suddenly sends them the supernatural sign that they can't ignore. And leads them to Jerusalem. And then leads them all the way to Bethlehem.

To a baby that is born whose origins are from old. From ancient times. You see, Micah's prophecy is starting to unfold.

Because this baby is the one who will bring about that true kingdom of peace. That kingdom of shalom. Something that no human ruler has ever yet been able to achieve.

[14:23] In all of the world's history. And not that they haven't tried. I mean, in every age, if you look at history. In every age, human leaders have tried to establish kingdoms of peace. That's really what, even through wars, they've been trying to establish true peace for their people.

Where their people are safe and secure and provided for. I mean, take the Roman Empire, for example. The Roman Empire existed to spread what was called the Pax Romana. It's the Latin for the Roman peace.

The word pax means peace. Now, I know the Romans had a very strange way of going about establishing peace. By invading countries and starting wars. But that was their goal at the end of the day.

It was peace. Communist Russia was the same. You know, we often see Communist Russia as the bad guys. In movies and things. But Communist Russia, they started with good intentions.

They were striving for a society where everyone had everything that they needed. And there was no need and no poverty so that people would be at peace. History is full of examples of leaders trying to build kingdoms of peace.

[15:32] But, you know, even the best of them. Even the best leaders the world has ever seen have only ever been able to establish political peace. And only for a time. I mean, think of the world's great leaders.

I know Nelson Mandela is someone who's heralded as a great leader. Okay? And he came and he brought about and he avoided civil war. And he brought about peace. But look at our country today. Are we at peace?

Maybe political peace. Maybe we don't have any enemies. Maybe we're kind of getting along. But we've got crime. We've got all sorts of political problems and conflict. And you know what? We don't have peace down here, do we?

No leader, human leader, can bring about true peace. None of them can bring about shalom. None of them can bring about the peace that we all really need and we all really long for.

And do you know why? You know why no human leader can bring shalom? It's because true shalom, true peace, only comes when we are first at peace with God, our creator.

[16:35] And this world is not at peace with God. And we are born not at peace with God. You see, human leaders may bring us to peace with other humans for a time, other nations.

But there's only one leader who can bring us peace with God. And that's the baby who was born in Bethlehem, whose origins are from old. Because he's the son of God.

Born as a human being, deliberately to substitute himself and to die in the place of other human beings. To die for their sins.

To bring them the long-awaited peace with God that we all need and we all long for, even if we don't know. Let me ask you, do you long for shalom, true peace in your heart?

Well, let me ask you another question. Are you at peace with God? Are you at peace with your creator? Or are your sins still separating you from him?

[17:43] Because unless they are paid for, unless your sins are removed and washed clean, you'll always be separated from God in this life and the life to come. And you will never have peace.

Let Jesus take your sins away. And let him bring you into a real relationship with God.

Not just coming to church on Sunday, but an active, living, daily, intimate relationship with your creator. Where you know you are at peace with him. Jesus can do that.

That's why he came to earth. Because it's there in a relationship with God. A true relationship with God. It's there that you will find shalom.

The peace and fulfillment that you've been longing for all your life. Even if you are a Christian here this morning, maybe you're still struggling to be at peace.

[18:38] And we do, don't we? We struggle to find peace. Or perhaps, you know, this is something that I've found in my own life. When I'm not at peace.

Perhaps there's some unconfessed sin in your life. That you've been denying. That you haven't taken to Jesus. That you still want to cling to. That you pretend is not there.

But you know deep down inside that it is. That you're guilty of it. And you keep doing it. Well, you know what? Jesus is waiting for you to bring that to him.

To stop clinging to it. To give it up. To take it to the cross where he died for it. Where his blood was spilt so that it could be washed away. If only you would bring it to him and trust in him.

You know, he died for you. He went through all that. He became a human. And he went through life. And he suffered in this life. In this world. And he died. And he sent himself to the cross.

[19 : 38] To give you peace with God. Don't deny yourself that peace. That Jesus did everything to bring you. Just because of some stupid sin. That you want to cling to. It's not worth it.

And more than that. Jesus didn't only come to give you peace with God now. But he came to give you a certainty of a kingdom of peace. To come. A secure future for you. That you can know is coming.

A real kingdom. Not this pie in the sky. Spiritual stuff. A real physical kingdom. A new world. The kind of world that God has always intended. Where there is true peace.

Between people. And between people and God. And a world that will never end. Because there is no sin. No suffering. No death. No tears. No crying. No pain. No lanterns.

That is what Jesus came to give you. Don't ignore him. Don't deny him. but you might be wondering well what's the weight you know if if Jesus is truly this prophesied ruler who's come to bring about this kingdom of peace then where is it ah but then you've missed out a part of the prophecy have a look again at micah 5 very important verse 1 his people are in a world of distress but verse 4 and 5 his people are living at peace in a kingdom that stretches to the ends of the earth but what has to happen in between have a look what has to happen in between to move his people from a world of distress to a world of peace well we see it at the end of verse 3 the rest of his brothers must first return in other words this ruler must gather or shepherd his people from the ends of the earth before he establishes this new kingdom the shepherd must gather his people but how will he do that well the prophecy goes on to elaborate from verse 5 and what we see is that after this ruler comes notice that his people go on facing distress from their enemies which is represented by the assurians but really these verses are talking about the opposition that god's people face in every age which the assurians here are used to symbolize the enemies of god in every age but look what will happen the ruler will raise up at the end of verse 5 he will raise up leaders or shepherds under him and by the way the numbers 6 and 7 6 leaders 7 7 and 8 rather 7 leaders 8 shepherds they're actually that's a biblical formula to represent a growing great number not just literally 7 or 8 and so a great number of leaders and shepherds will be raised up to do his work and then verse 7 the remnant of jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the lord like showers on the grass which do not wait for anyone or depend on man the remnant of jacob will be among the nations in the midst of many peoples like a lion among the beasts of the forest in other words before establishing the eternal kingdom of peace the king will raise up people all over the world a new israel to fight his enemies in his power to expand his rule and no one will be able to stop them and you know what that's describing it's describing the church of this age this age that we are living in today the church is being described here those are the people who will be raised up to fight the enemies of god to raise up a sword the sword of the spirit to fight in all nations all over the world you know it's no mistake that the apostle peter writing to the leaders of the early church says be shepherds of god's flock until the chief shepherd appears exactly the words of micah the shepherd who will shepherd his people and raise up shepherds under him that describes the church the church and its leaders are the shepherds that jesus is raising up right now all over the world to declare the gospel of peace to defeat the enemy of sin to bring his rule into the lives of people right now that is the way that jesus is gathering his brothers and sisters his people together and we are living right in the middle of this prophecy okay this prophecy isn't a dusty old prophecy that happened hundreds of years ago micah who wrote 2 700 years ago is describing a time that is unfolding right now in our world and we're in the

[24 : 26] very last stage of this prophecy and we're in the most exciting stage the gathering of god's people from all the corners of the world which is happening right now in millions of different places as missionaries and preachers declare the gospel and people hear about jesus and submit to him and we as god's church every single one of us are called to be part of that as alan reminded us earlier as members of the body of christ on earth and so stop wasting your time and money and

energy on things of this world that are ever only temporary rather devoted to the service of your king who is right now gathering together his kingdom how devoted are you to that mission how devoted are you to the gathering that is happening right now in our world how much do you give to your king how much do you give to his church and his mission how much do you pray for the gathering of his people from the nations how much do you pray and work towards the gathering of his people in plumstead the lost sheep that are still out there right now who are living in their houses who are probably sleeping late who are who are lost they don't know jesus they don't know what he did for them they're not yet part of his kingdom they're waiting for us to go and tell them how much do you give towards that mission how much do you work towards that mission because that will show where your focus is that will show whether your focus is on this world or on the world to come whether it's on the present or whether it's on the future you see we've been given this prophecy in micah and others like it to see the bigger picture to see where we fit into the big picture you know it just imagine a giant giant picture with full of detail of of a whole lot of different scenes but but you're so close to this picture you can only see a little bit you can only see your life you can you know just represented by a tiny little bit of the picture but you know what a prophecy does these prophecies in the old testament they allow us to stand back allow us to stand back and see the big picture of our lives of what's happening in our world and where we're going and that's what keeps us going through this life even through the hard times you know what's going to keep you going is knowing the big picture knowing where you fit in you know those builders i spoke about earlier who built all those ancient structures who started work on the buildings that they would never see complete you know what kept them going what kept them working away at the building was the vision of what was going to be one day they had they had that in their mind that's what kept them building even though they weren't going to see it in their lifetimes they they had this vision of what it was going to be and you and i need a vision of the kingdom to come what this world is going to be every day we need that vision we need we need to keep our minds there in the future so that we can work for the kingdom here in the present so that we can have our priorities right so we can have our focus right every day bishop stephen bradley was a great man of god who did awesome work for the growth of our denomination reach south africa he was truly one of the shepherds that jesus raises up to lead his people like micah was talking about you know what he used to say every morning when he when he woke up and he opened the curtains he used to say maybe today maybe jesus is coming today that's what kept him going his knowledge of what was coming kept him going every day is that what gets you up in the morning let's pray heavenly father give us a vision for the future we pray help us to take this prophecy of

micah seriously this kingdom of peace that you have come to earth to establish and lord help us to remember that right now you are gathering you are shepherding your people together help us to be part of that help us to put our lives and our energies and our money and our resources and everything that you've given us help us to put it into this great gathering that is going on that we and many others here in plumstead will one day experience the true shalom that you've come to bring help us in jesus name amen