

UNABANDONED

A Study in the Book of Micah

Week 3: Gathered in Hope

Introduction:

Micah was called to warn Israel of God's coming judgement, by means of exile, if they did not turn from their evil and follow God once again. Even the religious leaders, who were supposed to lead and serve Israel spiritually, were as corrupt and abusive as the rest of the people. God sent Micah to rebuke them, and yet even in his prophetic judgement, God stopped to remind Israel of his redemptive love for them. He was and always would be their good shepherd.

This week's Text: Micah 2:12-13

Sermon Points To Discuss:

1. *Hope is found in our faithful shepherd who gathers us*

- Read Luke 15:1-7

Shepherds care for their flock, and as a good shepherd, God declared that he would gather the remnant of Israel back to himself. For their ongoing rebellion, he would punish them by sending them into exile, but he would still call them back from there at some point, and re-establish them as his people. The remnant would never be the whole nation, but the faithful few who would walk by faith.

The scriptures are full of references to God being our 'good shepherd'. This means that he can be trusted to care for our needs, to lead us in the direction we should be going, and to rest in the knowledge that in all things, he knows best. Sheep don't understand all that the shepherd does to get them to green pastures. Sometimes a shepherd has to lead sheep through dry and dusty, barren places before they can reach a watered area. Some of the paths and decisions he makes are hard on the sheep in the short-term, but are for their wellbeing in the long-term. A shepherd knows what is needed to keep his sheep protected, nurtured and secure. Sheep just have to trust and follow.

Most of us are terrible "sheep". We look at the situations we are led into and we want to run the other way. We struggle to trust our good shepherd. We freak out because of the difficulties around us. Instead, we need to focus on the promises we find in the scriptures about God's faithfulness and love towards us. We have to trust that he will sustain us in the struggles and suffering that we face in this life, because he loves us.

2. *Hope is found in our king, who leads us to freedom*

- Read John 16:18-33

Despite the difficulties in our lives, God is committed to us as his people and will continue to lead us into victory. Hundreds of years prior to Micah's ministry, God had made significant promises of blessing to Abraham, and he would be faithful to keep his promises to all of Abraham's descendants.

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God mentioned Jacob (in verse 12), to remind the Israelite's of his covenant faithfulness throughout the generations, so that they could be sure that God would remain faithful to them. God was not going to be passive, but would continue to lead and protect the remnant of Israel. As a shepherd, he would always be in front of the sheep, leading and guiding them to safe pastures.

Though the two kingdoms (i.e. the nation of Israel had politically split into two) would be taken into slavery, God would still find them there, and he would bring them back to himself, and to the nation of Israel, to serve him there once again. The picture of a shepherd going after his sheep, and God going after the enslaved Israelites, are both pictures of humanities' even greater need. As sinners, our deepest need is to be rescued from sin. Jesus did just that. He came after humanity, in order to rescue her from sin and death, and through his death and resurrection, he has led us into 'green pastures' (spiritual rest and freedom).

Jesus died to give us victory. First, victory over sin and death, and then to live free from sin's hold in our everyday lives. This does not mean that we will be able to escape the suffering and sin that the world throws against us. It means that while we go through this life, God will give us everything that we need in order to endure, and to be able to love, obey and honour him in all things. With Jesus as the centre of our hearts and lives, we are able to face things from a totally different perspective, and experience peace in the middle of our trials.

Discussion Questions

- What comes to mind when you think of the role of a shepherd with his sheep?
- Which of those caring roles do you struggle to attribute to God, and why?
- Why is it important for us to consider the fact that some of the shepherd's role, in protecting and steering the sheep away from danger, would not feel pleasant for the sheep?
- Why is it so difficult for us to be good "sheep" (people who trust God's leading)?
- In what area of your life do you currently struggle to trust God. Why is this the case?
- Why is our ability to endure life's struggles, directly related to how close we are with our good shepherd?
- Why does tragedy and suffering either push people away from God or push them deeper into him? Think back to a time in your life where one of these two results were birthed from a time of suffering. Take 5 minutes to share your experience with the person next to you.
- Why is it important for us to realise that God is not soft on sin and won't allow us to continue in unrepentant sin?
- Why is it also important to know and believe that God wants us to be free from sin because he loves us? How should this motivate us to put our sin to death?
- Personal Reflection: Is there any sin in your life that you are struggling to let go of, and know that God is telling you to let it go, so that you can experience freedom? If you are not gaining any victory, you need to tell someone and get some help. Who can you share this with, and get to pray with you?