

The Advent of Justice

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we are following after Jesus together, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one's so bad that they can't have it. That's why we come week after week to God's word, because we believe that he has something to say to everyone.

We are entering this Sunday into what's known in the church calendar as the season of Advent, and Advent comes from a Latin word, which means to come or to arrive, and so we're very simply celebrating the fact that Jesus came or arrived on earth.

That's what Advent's about. It's about Jesus coming. Now, we do two things when we think about Jesus coming. First of all, we celebrate what happened in the past. We celebrate the fact that he came, and so that's when we sing songs like, Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come, past tense. But we don't just celebrate what God's done in the past.

We also look forward to what he will do in the future, and so we sing other songs like, O come, O come, Emmanuel, because we know that we're still waiting and longing for Jesus' second coming, for him to return to the earth. And that's really, Advent is essentially what's happening at all times in the Christian life.

We are celebrating what God has done in the past, and we're looking forward to what he will do in the future so that we can live faithfully now in obedience and love in the present. We're going to be taking a special look at Advent this month, but this is not something that's different than other parts of the Christian life or other parts of the year. We're always celebrating Jesus' coming, even as we do it in a special way in December.

[1 : 5 2] Now, when I started my first job out of college, there was a tradition. We would have a white elephant party every year. If you're familiar with the white elephant party, you know it's where everyone brings a different gift, and then there's a gift exchange that happens and the gifts that are brought, and the goal is to get the gift that you want. So sometimes there can be steals that happen.

Hopefully there's a limit on the number of steals. You can maybe only steal two or three times a certain gift, and there's always one gift that shows up that everyone wants. Well, I was a little late to the game. I mean, I showed up every year, but I didn't have a good strategy coming in.

And you know there's different strategies if you show up at this. You could be the gag gift person. You know, you could bring a grow-your-own-boyfriend thing from the dollar store. That's one option. You could bring Christmas decor that was on sale on December 26th, the year before.

And I kind of fumbled around trying to find the right strategy until I settled on it. My third year, I finally had a clear goal. And my goal, of course, if you're going to one of these things, you hope that your gift gets traded at least once.

That's the sign that you brought something good. And I realized, okay, I don't have the gift of the gag gift. That's not my skill set. I'm not going to go out on December 26th and buy Christmas decor for the next year.

[3 : 05] But I do know something about everyone in this world, and everyone in this world loves food. And so I adopted the food sampler strategy. Well, no one's going to be sad about a food sampler, right?

You could get six different types of honey from different parts of the world, three different types of coffee. And I'll just say it's always a winner. So if you're taking notes, this would be something to write down. Next time you're at a white Christmas party, take a food sampler.

You don't have to be the creative person who brings the gag gift. You don't have to buy decor. You don't have to bring something random. That is a winning strategy every time. This month, in December, we are going to have a sampler pack from the book of Micah.

Micah is a prophet who lived in the 8th century, and the book of Micah is a collection of his prophecies. It is seven chapters. We're only going to have four weeks. So we're going to take a sample of what Micah has to say to us.

Now, Micah, living in this time in the 8th century, we're going to locate ourselves just for a second where we are in the history of the Bible. We are in the time that has come after the great kings of Israel. So Saul, David, Solomon, their past.

[4 : 15] We're before the time of the exile. So this is historically before where we were in the book of Nehemiah. Remember in the book of Nehemiah, which we covered the very beginning of this year, the exile had happened and people were now returning.

We're before that. The exile has not happened. People are going to soon go into exile. So that's where we are in terms of the history of the story. It's after the kings, before the exile. And Micah does what many prophets do.

He predicts what's about to happen. He predicts the fall of Israel and then Judah. And it's a book really about two things. It's a book about judgment and it's a book about salvation. It's a book about judgment.

It's a book about salvation. And I'm just going to tell you off the bat, since this is a sampler pack, one man has estimated that 70% of Micah is judgment and 30% is salvation. Now, I know this will disappoint many of you, but we're not going to follow that ratio here in Advent because our focus is on the expectation of Jesus as the coming king.

So we're actually going to be less on judgment and more on salvation. That's not to say that either one is more important than the other. And we're going to be looking at judgment today. But just to name the fact that we can't see everything that's in the book of Micah, we're not going to talk about, for example, the most famous verse in the book of Micah, Micah 6.8.

[5 : 25] So this will be a sample for you to whet your appetite to dig further and further into the book of Micah as we look at four different passages. And we start today with chapter one.

By the way, I told you that Micah is a book about judgment and salvation. There's also something that's little known, which is that Micah's name, which is also the title of this book, is a question. Micah's name means, who is like God?

Who is like God? That will also be a question that will be answered throughout the book of Micah. We will get to see that no one is like God. And that will be part of the hope that we'll see as we dig into this book.

And so without further ado, I'm going to turn with you all to Micah chapter one. I invite you to turn with me in your Bible. You can also turn at the end of your worship guide or open it up on your phone. And I mentioned just a few seconds ago that Micah is primarily a book about judgment and chapters one through three are almost entirely judgment.

We're going to look at chapter one today, this morning. And our question is simply this. What does judgment have to do with Christmas? What does judgment have to do with Christmas?

[6 : 35] You would think that if we're celebrating Christmas, we would only talk about things that are happy and fill us with joy, right? Things that we would celebrate. And judgment doesn't necessarily fit in that category. And yet in this book, we receive prophecies like the prophecy that's going to come in two weeks about the fact that Jesus is going to come to us from Bethlehem.

And so it seems that Micah believes that judgment has a lot to do with our understanding of Jesus coming. It's with that that we'll turn to Micah chapter one, starting at verse one. And let me remind you that this is God's word.

And God tells us that though the grass wither and the flowers fade, his word will stand forever. And so that's why we read it now. The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Hear, you peoples, all of you. Pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it. And let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will split open like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

[7 : 50] Verse five. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria?

And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? Therefore, I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards.

And I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations. Verse seven. All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces. All her wages shall be burned with fire.

And all her idols I will lay waste. For from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them. And to the fee of a prostitute they shall return. For this I will lament and wail.

I will go stripped and naked. I will make the lamentation like the jackals and mourning like the ostriches. For her wound is incurable and it has come to Judah. It has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem.

[8 : 50] Verse 10. Tell it not in Gath. Weep not at all in Beth Laaphra. Roll yourselves in the dust. Pass on your way inhabitants of Shaphir in nakedness and shame.

The inhabitants of Zanon do not come out. The lamentation of Beth Ezel shall take away from you its standing place. For the inhabitants of Meroth wait anxiously for good, because disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem.

Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish. It was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath, the houses of Axib shall be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel.

I will again bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mereshah. The glory of Israel shall come to Adalim. Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for the children of your delight.

Make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[10 : 00] Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for the chance to gather today, that you have called us to worship in this place. And we thank you for your word that you give to us, that you don't expect us to figure out life on our own.

But instead, you have provided instructions, that we would know what your will is and what is for our good. We ask that you'd send your Holy Spirit now to help us as we study your word, that we would truly hear from you.

We ask these things not because we deserve them or earned them, but we ask them because Jesus has. And so we ask them in his name. Amen. It will come to no surprise to you, if you're an American, if I tell you that we live in a society that's very litigious.

People are quick to sue each other and bring lawsuits. I met someone in Colorado Springs not too long ago who had moved here from another country. And in that other country, she'd been a nurse, and her hope was to be able to become a nurse here.

The only problem was she had to learn all over again because, as she explained to me, in America, there's so many more notes that need to be taken because unlike in the country she came from, it's much more likely for a hospital or a doctor to be sued.

[11 : 18] And so there was a whole different protocol for the ways to record these things. And ultimately, she did not transfer in, as far as I know, her ability to nurse into this country. And the last I knew, she had gone into real estate.

But it just highlights that there's something unique about America. Not every country in the world is as eager to go to law courts as we are. I still remember when I was a teacher, at one point there was a dispute between two elementary students, and one of them said to the other, I'll sue you.

And I thought, no, you won't. You're eight. As we begin, Micah chapter one, God has a lawsuit. And he is bringing it.

We find out in verse two that the Lord God is going to be a witness. It says, let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. And he is a witness here against the peoples, it says, and the earth.

And so God has some judgment to bring. And he's not just the witness here. It turns out he's also the punisher. So he fulfills multiple roles.

[12 : 23] He's a witness in the lawsuit. He's also coming, verses three and four, out of his high place. Verse three, we get an image here, poetic image of what it's going to look like for God to bring judgment on the people he's bringing a case against.

And it's dramatic and overwhelming. Verse four, mountains will melt under him and the valleys will split open like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. And so the image here is of a king coming down on a mountain.

We could imagine someone stepping on Pike's Peak, being so powerful that they would actually crush it. That's the image that's given here of God in his judgment. That is the kind of power he has at his disposal.

If he can crush the mountains, what do you think is going to happen to you? It's a dramatic display here of God's judgment, the wrath that he brings for those who have sinned against him.

Now, this language here would have been used, typically the people in Israel hearing this would be used to this language used as God deals with their enemies. And so at this point, they might be thinking, yes, this is what we want.

[13 : 30] We want God to come down and shatter the mountains and bring justice against the peoples in the earth. I want you to imagine for a second with me that you're at your home at night and you hear someone messing around on your roof.

And not only do you hear someone messing around on your roof, they're crawling around. It seems like they're up to no good. You then hear some of the latches on the outside of your door moving. And it becomes clear that there are multiple people who are trying to break into your house.

At that point, maybe you call the police, maybe someone else has called the police, maybe your neighbors, and let's say that you have a police scanner and you listen and you find out they're on their way. The police are coming.

There's been something bad happened that's reported. We'll say it's my house on Cool Crest Drive. And so as you're listening to this, you rejoice. You think the police are coming. This is only for a limited amount of time.

And before long, the man on the roof and the men at the doors are going to get their full justice. Police show up. They ignore the people trying to get in. And they knock on your door.

[14 : 37] You come out and they say, we're here to arrest you. Not the scenario you had in mind, right? The police were supposed to be coming to rescue you, not arrest you. They were supposed to bring justice for you in this particular situation.

And then after they take you away in their police car, they allow those people breaking into your house to then go on and pillage it. That's what's going on here in Micah chapter one.

There's an announcement of judgment. God's people would naturally expect that this judgment would be coming for their enemies. In fact, this is written at a time when Assyria, the nation of Assyria, is a threat to them.

And yet there's a quick switch in verse five. We've heard in verse two that it's the earth and the peoples. And God's coming in judgment. He's coming and gonna make things right. Who is he coming for?

Not Israel's enemies, but Israel itself. Verse five. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.

[15 : 38] God is bringing his judgment, but there's a nasty twist for Israel. He's not bringing his judgment on their enemies. He's bringing his judgment on them.

He's not bringing his judgment on their enemies. He's bringing his judgment on them. And so that raises another question. Why are we the ones whose God's judgment is coming for?

And we find out very quickly. Verse six. God's going to, well, actually we find out the end of verse five. It tells us, what is the transgression of Jacob?

Jacob was referring to Israel in the north. At this point, we have a divided kingdom. So Israel's no longer one nation, but two nations. If you're familiar with the history of Israel, you know this happened. God gave it as a punishment for the sins of Solomon.

And then under his son, Rehoboam, the kingdom split. So Jacob's the kingdom in the north. What's the transgression of Jacob? Israel in the north. Is it not Samaria? That's the capital city of Israel.

[16 : 37] And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? This is the capital city of Judah in the south. In other words, these capital cities, the place where the leaders are potentially is the center of sin, of God's judgment.

Other people might say, oh, this high place here is a reference to idolatry. Whether it is or not, we find out quickly that idolatry is the problem. Verse seven. All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces. Those are idols that Israel was worshiping instead of worshiping the one true God.

All her wages shall be burned with fire and all her idols I will lay waste. And then God compares the way that his people have been behaving to the way of a prostitute. In other words, instead of being faithful to God in their marriage with him, they have gone out to other gods who they saw as being better for them financially.

And so not on the people outside, but on the people inside. Judgment is coming not on the nations, but on Israel. And judgment is coming because of their idolatry.

The fact that they have chosen not to worship only God, but to add other gods instead. We might say that they had a spiritual affair.

[17 : 45] God meant for his relationship with his people to be like a marriage, that they would be loyal only to him, that they would worship only him. What God is saying is that his people have committed adultery against him.

They haven't just worshiped him, they've gone and worshiped other gods as well. And so God's wrath and his judgment is coming down on them. They have put their hope and trust in someone besides Yahweh, the personal name of their God.

They have gone to worship other gods. Now remember, we're just in a sampler pack of Micah, so we're not gonna look at chapters two and three, but I can tell you quickly some of what we find out in those chapters. Idolatry always has consequences.

And so their worship of other gods has also led to sinful behavior. They are doing things that are legal, technically, but unethical to steal from the poor. That's one of the sins that their idolatry has led them to.

They're growing rich at the expense of others. It's one of the things that God condemns his people for in the Old Testament over and over. There are also people claiming to speak for God.

[18 : 57] Prophets, priests, equivalents of pastors today, and these people that claim to speak for God will say whatever you want them to say as long as you pay the right price. So if you don't wanna hear about judgment, they won't preach about judgment as long as you pay enough money.

If you want them to prophesy about peace, they will prophesy about peace as long as the price is right. And finally, there's leaders who are using their positions of power and influence to profit themselves rather than other people.

They're using their power to push other people down rather than to lift them up. It's for all of those reasons that God's judgment is coming in a dramatic way upon his people.

This is a prediction of the exile that's going to one day occur to both Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Now, the word idolatry gets thrown around.

By the way, idolatry is what we're talking about here. They are literally worshiping literal idols. There are carved images that they are bowing down to. The word idolatry gets thrown around a lot in certain Christian circles today as sort of a way of explaining any and every sin.

[20 : 12] And we need to be careful about that because idolatry in the Old Testament had a very specific meaning. And idolatry in the Old Testament talked about sins that were especially bad.

To put it in another way, not every Israelite was an idolater. Every Israelite sinned and needed God's grace and forgiveness. So I'll give you an example.

King Josiah, one of the great kings of this period, was not an idolater. In fact, he was passionate about pure worship and he tore down idols as part of his kingship.

However, Josiah, like every other person who's lived in the world, apart from Jesus, was a sinner in need of grace. And so we need to be careful about throwing around the word idolatry too lightly.

And I'm not going to say that every Christian is an idolater, someone who worships idols. However, every Christian is someone who by their behavior deserves outside of Christ, God's judgment.

[21 : 21] And so we may not be stealing from the poor, but we may also be blind to the ways that consumerism has affected us.

Even as we critique it in the culture around us, we may use our resources in such a way that it shows no concern for people in need. We may not be a leader of a society accepting bribes.

That's one of the things that God charges the leaders with in chapter three. So we might not use our power in that way, but we might use age and experience to take advantage of our siblings that don't have quite as much age and experience.

Or if you're a youngest, you might use your wiles and your cunning to blame older siblings for things they didn't do. You might be a husband or a wife, and you might use the power that God's given you in each of those situations to manipulate and control rather than to bless and build up.

You might be a Matthew 7 kind of person, someone who's quick to see logs in other people's eyes or specks in other people's eyes, but slow to see logs in your own eyes. And you're probably not a priest or a prophet taking money to say things people want to hear.

[22 : 46] But you might be avoiding hard conversations and confrontations for the sake of your own comfort in a way that doesn't show love for others but shows protection for yourself.

Chris mentioned last week that God doesn't just save us from the evil outside of us, but he also saves us from the evil inside of us. And so we begin this season of Advent by talking about God's judgment.

Not his judgment on other people out there, but his judgment on us. God's people outside of Christ deserve God's judgment.

God's people in Micah chapter 1 deserved God's judgment. Now I listed some instances, but the broader question is, what is the evil inside of us, as Chris mentioned, that we need deliverance from?

The point of all this is that sin brings God's wrath and his judgment. His wrath and his judgment, not just for other people's sins, but for our sins as well. Now I asked at the beginning, I said our big question is, what does judgment have to do with Christmas?

[24 : 02] I'm going to ask it a different way. What would Christmas be like if there were no judgment? There's one option. Christmas would be merely sentimental. If Jesus came, but there's no judgment that he came to save us from, then we are simply celebrating a nice story about a man who lived a good life.

merely sentimental. Or, if judgment is not part of Christmas, if it's not sentimental, it's just another chance to be self-righteous.

It's another chance for Christians to be smug about the world around them and complain about the things that are wrong outside of us, outside of the church. So if judgment is not part of Advent, we will either be sentimental, merely sentimental, or we'll be self-righteous.

Isn't it great that Jesus came for people who are good like us? And those bad people out there, if only they were as smart as we were.

So we need judgment at Christmas. There's a reason that Micah chapter 1, this book that is filled with hope, starts with judgment. Because hope is meaningless without it.

[25 : 24] Second, so that's what happens if there's no judgment. If there is judgment at Christmas, if we take the message of Micah together, both judgment and salvation, it's judgment that actually makes us long for salvation.

If we know how much we need God's rescue, then it will not be challenging for us to be filled with joy at Advent.

If we know how much we need God's rescue, and we know how much we need God's rescue based on our knowledge of God's judgment, then it will not be challenging to be filled with joy at Advent, knowing that this is Jesus coming as the one to rescue us from judgment.

We're told in verse 16 of this chapter, excuse me, not verse 16, in verse 9, we're told, for her wound is incurable, that the problems of God's people that are in need of judgment, that are bringing judgment, have no cure.

And we're told earlier, in poetic language, that God is visiting the earth. Verses 3 and 4, the Lord is coming out of his holy place, and he's coming down to the earth.

[26 : 45] We're told in poetic language. We read, John read for us earlier in our service, not poetic language, but literal language, of God coming down to earth.

In other words, this passage speaks in poetic language about God visiting with judgment. God visited in an even more powerful and dramatic way that was not poetic, but literal, to bring salvation.

And so Advent is good news because of judgment, because God's visitation here to bring destruction and justice reminds us that we have hope because it's not God's only visit.

We also have, not a image of a visit, but an actual, real, literal visit in time and space where Jesus comes not to trample down, but to be trampled on.

And so that's the passages that we had from John. That's what we read earlier in our confession of faith about Jesus as our Redeemer. That he came and he visited, not with judgment, but salvation.

[28 : 04] Finally, we need judgment at Christmas, as I mentioned before, because judgment is what brings us true joy. It's the knowledge of judgment that allows us to rejoice in God's salvation.

Now, if you find that counterintuitive, I would suggest that you have never been exposed to A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

A Christmas Carol is a story about judgment and salvation. Well, I don't know if I go so strong and say salvation. It's a story about judgment and restoration. I'll talk about that in a minute.

Scrooge has to go through judgment. Remember, he's this miser. He's a man who represents some of the sins that I listed earlier in Israel. He's a man who uses his wealth and his power to profit himself and he tramples on the poor.

He's someone who's interested only in his own comfort and not the comfort of others. And what rescues him from that? Scrooge is rescued by judgment.

[29 : 10] He has the visitation of three visitors. He has the angel of Christmas past, one of Christmas present, and one of Christmas future. And they show him images of judgment.

They show him what will happen, the destruction that will come if he continues on the path that he's on. And what does that judgment do for him? It leads him, of course, to deep conviction, right?

He is struck to the heart. But it's also what allows him to finally have joy. It's that judgment that reminds him and shows him a different way of life.

That there is still hope for him. That he still has time to turn around. Now, his turnaround happens relatively quickly. It happens overnight.

The story does not discuss his need for forgiveness for his sins against God. There's no redemption. No one pays the price.

[30 : 11] He tries to pay his own price, right? He goes out and uses his money to redeem himself. And so there's a hole in the story, right? We can't redeem ourselves. No matter how much money Scrooge gives away, he's not going to be able to pay the price for his sins.

But he is a small picture for us of the way that joy can come from judgment. And so that is why we need judgment at Christmas. we need, first of all, to know, verse 9, that our wound is incurable.

But second of all, that Jesus has come and is coming. And he has come and is coming to cure our wounds. He's doing it to remove from us the penalty of judgment.

And he allows us to rejoice because we know that judgment is not his only visitation, but that his most important and powerful visitation was when Jesus came as a man and took judgment on himself.

And so that is why we need judgment at Christmas. I'll end with this. In his book, Hidden Christmas, Tim Keller says this, there has never been a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires us to do.

[31 : 38] Christmas means that we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of the Son of God himself could save us.

That means you are not somebody who can pull yourself together and live a moral and good life. To accept the true Christmas gift, you have to admit you're a sinner.

you need to be saved by grace. You need to give up control of your life. That is descending lower than any of us really wants to go.

And so what does judgment have to do with Christmas? God is coming in judgment for sin, but he also came. he came as a baby in real human flesh so that he could receive the judgment for our sins.

And so it's because of judgment, it's only when we understand both that we can have the true joy of Advent. It's only when we have both that we can truly sing joy to the world, the Lord has come.

[32 : 51] And so I invite you to pray with me now. Father in heaven, we thank you that you don't hide hard truths from us, but that you tell us what is right even when it hurts.

And we thank you that judgment is not the last word if we are Christians. We have true faith in Jesus Christ, but that the last word is that Jesus came to receive judgment for us.

We ask that you would use this knowledge in this season to build up and grow our joy as we celebrate what you have done to rescue us from judgment.

And we ask these things not because we have earned them or deserved them, but in the name of our Redeemer and our Rescuer, your Son, Jesus. It's in his name that we pray these things. Amen.

Amen.