

Self-Confidence Rebuked

Micah 5:7-15; Proverbs 28:26

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Self-confidence, self-esteem, and a good self-image are religious virtues in the eyes of the world. There is nothing higher to shoot for in the psychological realm of those who are without Christ than self-esteem. Feeling good about oneself in this secular religious system is the equivalent of heaven on earth to the non-Christian. In the religious seminaries of secular humanism (those institutions commonly called public schools), self-esteem is the primary doctrine being promoted in nearly every subject. This false doctrine teaches that the individual person is worthy and deserving of all honor, praise, and acceptance. The individual is taught to think well of himself regardless of his/her many faults and mistakes. The student is taught to trust his/her own judgment implicitly—that no one has a right to make a judgment about his/her conduct, speech, belief system, music, heart, literature, clothing, or hair. Churches today throughout the world will hear sermons that are more intended to make a person feel good about himself (and to keep him coming back to get another injection of this false gospel) than to make a person see himself as a sinner who is in desperate need of Jesus Christ.

Dear ones, such a theology is poison to the mind and soul of millions of children and adults. It will quicker turn a soul from trusting Christ than any doctrine. For it is not self-love that a man desperately needs (he is born with a hefty dose of self-love), but rather love for Christ. It is not esteem for self that we should be heaping upon our own heads, but rather grief and sorrow for our many sins and shortcomings in the sight of God. The most foundational principle of a right understanding of knowledge is this: Don't trust yourself—don't implicitly trust your own knowledge of truth, for your thinking has been perverted by sin (Proverbs 3:5; Proverbs 28:26). Dear ones, the beginning of knowledge and wisdom is to fear the Lord our God (Proverbs 1:9; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 14:26).

This Lord's Day we turn our attention to Micah 5:7-15 where we shall see that one of the Lord's promises to His people is that He will remove from them all those things in which they have put their trust so that they may with all their heart trust in the Lord. There are four promises that the Lord makes to His small remnant in our text this Lord's Day: (1) He will cause His remnant to bring the blessings of heaven to the nations (Micah 5:7); (2) He will cause His remnant to be bold and courageous before the nations (Micah 5:8-9); (3) He will cause His remnant to cast off all confidence in man's resources (Micah 5:10-14); (4) He will execute His vengeance on all nations that do not hear the truth proclaimed by His remnant (Micah 5:15). Let us turn to Micah 5 and consider that first promise made to the remnant of Israel.

I. He will cause His remnant to bring the blessings of heaven to the nations (Micah 5:7).

A. Micah 5 began with the holy chastening that God was to bring upon His people wherein they were to be besieged and led into captivity for their idolatry against God and their oppression of the weak and helpless in their midst. Then in Micah 5:2-6, God promises to Israel an invincible king (who being fully God and fully man) would bring forth victory to His people even unto the ends of the earth.

B. Now in Micah 5:7-15, the Lord issues more promises to the faithful among His people so as to lift their faith beyond His severe chastening. A person without hope is a most miserable person indeed. Without hope, there is no desire to live. Without a conscious embracing and renewing of the hope that is in Christ, a Christian will be brought to such discouragement that he will prove to be fruitless and ineffective in Christ's kingdom. That is why one of the most important truths to communicate to those you would help and encourage is that of hope (whether it is financial hardship, marital problems, a besetting sin, rebellious

children, chronic illness, or persecution for the faith). People must not only see their sin and their need of Christ, but they must also see Christ as their only hope of deliverance. One of the greatest mental miseries of hell will no doubt be the utter hopelessness that overwhelms the understanding of the condemned. The suffering and torment of hell will never end—there is no hope of deliverance—ever. Dear ones, this is the end of all who do not turn to Christ and take Him as their only hope of eternal salvation. But for the Christian, there is always hope, for Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, is our hope of salvation both now and for all eternity (Colossians 1:27).

C. In Micah 5:7, the Lord promises His blessing upon “the remnant of Jacob” (and in Micah 5:8). The promises made in Micah 5:7-15 are not made to Israel as a whole, but to the remnant of Israel. A remnant is a smaller portion of the whole (as a remnant of the carpet or remnant of the fabric). Who is the remnant of Israel? The remnant of Israel refers not to those who are simply of Israel as to the flesh, but rather to those who are Israel as to the heart as well (Romans 9:6). They are those who are not only circumcised in the flesh, but those who are circumcised in the heart (Romans 2:28-29). They are “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). They are a faithful gathering of God’s people who worship the Lord in spirit and in truth and put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3). The fulfillment of these promises made to the remnant of Jacob seems to look forward to the time of Christ and thereafter until the time that “all Israel” is saved (Romans 11:25-26). This remnant of Israel is a part of the Church of Jesus Christ, so the promises made to the remnant of Israel also apply to the faithful Church of Jesus Christ as well.

D. It is to this small remnant that the Lord addresses these words of hope and encouragement. For the Lord delights in taking that which is small, insignificant, despised, without human resources, and strength, and by His grace making that small remnant overcome all their greater and mightier enemies (Noah, a preacher of righteousness, is victorious over the world, David slays Goliath, Jonathan overcomes the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14:6; Elisha leads the whole Syrian army to the king of Israel). Dear ones, never forget the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6,10.

E. This remnant of Israel is first promised that even though they are very small, even though they are scattered among many nations, and even though they are surrounded by those stronger than themselves, yet they are not to fear their enemies, for God will use them to bring His heavenly kingdom upon the nations so that they would be like a life-giving dew that falls upon the grass of the field (Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon and Persia, Esther and Mordecai in Persia). As we noted in an earlier sermon, Christ reigns among His enemies so as to convert many of those who are His enemies and so as to demonstrate as conspicuously as possible His power to deliver His people and to judge His enemies. This promise speaks more to the blessing the remnant of Christ would be to those around them. As God’s remnant was scattered and spread throughout the world, God poured forth His heavenly dew upon the nations (1 Peter 1:1; Colossians 1:5-6). Dear ones, the Lord has scattered you in your job, in your neighborhood, in your family so as to bring heavenly blessings to the nations. Instead of looking at the non-Christians at work, in the extended family, and in the neighborhood as those with whom you should not talk, the Lord calls you to be as leaven in their midst (separation from the world does not imply that we should have no contact with the world otherwise how can we be the salt of the earth—Christ spoke with and met with sinners who were foes in order to make them friends by His pardoning grace). The power of God’s grace (rather than man’s ability) is indicated in Micah 5:7 wherein it says that this heavenly dew that would fall upon the Gentile nations would not depend upon man, but would fall freely from Jehovah alone (the meteorologists wait for and expect rain, but it doesn’t fall according to their expectations, but according to God’s free mercy). So little flock, do not fear when you are cast among the enemy that is greater and mightier than you, for the Lord will use you to bring His salvation to those who even appear to be hostile enemies (did not the Lord draw you unto Himself).

II. He will cause His remnant to be bold and courageous before the nations (Micah 5:8-9).

A. Just as a lion is not afraid of sheep, but rather boldly goes in amongst the sheep to devour its prey, so the Lord here likens the remnant of Israel to lions who would be given God's courage to devour their enemies with the gospel of salvation (Isaiah 65:25).

B. Note how this was fulfilled in the life of the apostles who went from fleeing for their lives and denying Christ to confounding the leaders of the people by their wisdom (Acts 4:13; Acts 5:41; Acts 6:10).

C. Such courage comes not from man, but from the Lord alone. It is a grace given whereby the Christian fears God more than he fears any man (Matthew 10:28). This boldness is not rude or arrogant or obnoxious, for this boldness (if it comes from the Lord) cannot be inconsistent with the grace of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. If any lacks wisdom are they not to ask of the Lord in faith (James 1:5)? Then why not ask and plead for the Lord to give you His courage so that your mouth is not silenced when a testimony is needed? Courage before men comes from much prayer before God (even as the Queen Regent of Scotland once said concerning John Knox, "I am more afraid of the prayers of Knox than of an army of ten thousand men."). The Lord promises here in Micah 5:8-9 to make His faithful remnant as bold as a lion.

D. What are the fears you face in your life? Persecution for the truth, rejection by others, looking like a fool before others, loss of children or loved ones, poverty, loneliness, a besetting sin, renouncing Christ, or your own death? Courage will never come by running from your fears, for they always meet you when you are alone. Courage is promised to you by Christ. It's your inheritance in Christ which He died to give to you. Take His promise by faith and cling to it and fervently pray for it to be manifested in your life in the specific situations you fear.

III. He will cause His remnant to cast off all confidence in man's resources (Micah 5:10-14).

A. Not only will the Lord graciously overcome the cowardice of His remnant and give them the courage they need to speak forth a faithful testimony to the nations, but He will also destroy their confidence in man and give them a confidence in Christ.

B. All of the sins of man flow from a confidence in the creature rather than a confidence in the Creator (from the first sin of man to the last sin of man). This is simply to say that all of our sins originate from our failure to keep the First Commandment ("Thou shalt have no other gods before me") and the Greatest Commandment ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"). From where does unbelief arise? From our believing man more than we believe God. From where does the love of the world come? From our looking for happiness and joy in the things of this life rather than finding our joy in Christ. From where does our pride come? From believing that our gifts, abilities, knowledge, appearance, or wealth come from our own work rather than from God. From where does our bitterness and resentment come? From trusting in our "rights." The whole work of salvation and sanctification is the power and grace of God in action whereby He turns us from trusting and loving the creature more than we trust and love the Lord. Again in counseling yourself and in counseling others, one of the key questions to ask if there is a besetting sin involved is this: In whom or what is one presently trusting for his/her happiness or joy? If it is in anyone or in anything other than Christ, there will be a continual struggle with that sin. The Christian who cannot seem to let go of a loved one is trusting in that loved one for his/her happiness. The Christian who lies and gossips about others is trusting in the approval of man for his/her happiness. The Christian who commits idolatry in worship is trusting in the work of man to bring God closer. The Christian who is not content with God's providence when it brings illness is trusting in His health to make him/her happy. God promises here in Micah 5:10-14 to destroy all the vain things in which His remnant put their trust.

C. Notice the specific things in which Israel trusted: horses and chariots (Micah 5:10), i.e. physical strength and military might; fortified cities (Micah 5:11), i.e. earthly security and comfort. Let me stop there for a moment and note that all things we trust in are not necessarily sinful in themselves, but they have become sinful because we have used them as a god in which we trust for our joy or happiness. Now we come to more conspicuous gods in the next three verses. Where does less conspicuous idolatry lead? To more conspicuous idolatry. Diviners about the future (Micah 5:12) i.e. the various forms of the occult; and will-worship (Micah 5:13-14), i.e. worshipping the Lord in a way not authorized in His Word. Naaman the leper, a great Syrian commander, trusted in his own wisdom and was not healed until he trusted in the Word of the Lord and was cleansed in the dirty River Jordan. King Uzziah trusted in his own royal authority and offered the incense on the altar and was smitten with leprosy. Solomon trusted in his wealth and his pleasure and he was led into rebellion and unfaithfulness of every kind. Peter trusted in his own faithfulness and obedience to Christ, and he was brought to deny Christ.

D. God is in the process of destroying all the creatures in which we trust and turning us from the creature to find our hope and trust in all circumstances in Christ alone. The woman with an issue of blood turned from trusting her doctors to Christ. Zacchaeus turned from trusting his wealth to finding the riches of Christ to be his satisfaction. We are commanded to turn from trusting mother or father and trust the Lord. Dear ones, we may also trust more in the Puritan Reformed Church, in the Solemn League and Covenant, or in our baptism than we trust in Christ. We must continually take inventory as to who or what we are trusting. Husbands and wives, if you are trusting in your spouse to make you happy, you are in for a rude awakening. It won't happen. It cannot happen. Our source of joy must be in Christ alone and then we will be able to enjoy whatever He gives us. What has the Lord taken from you? Perhaps it was taken from you in love that you might learn to turn your trust from the things of the world to fully trust the Lord.

IV. He will execute His vengeance on all nations that do not hear the truth proclaimed by His remnant (Micah 5:15).

A. The Lord will avenge His truth and His people. We must remember that when it seems as though God is overly patient with flagrant scorn of the gospel and habitual violations of His commandments that He is leaving the wicked no excuse for their unbelief and disobedience. It is not our cause, but rather the Cause of Christ.

B. Let us be a lamb in our own cause, and a lion in the Cause of Christ. He is sitting the nations in a chair of comfort for all to see, so that their fall might be a lesson to us all.

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