

On Anzac Day we pause as a nation and remember the terrible cost of war. This morning right across New Zealand, and in Australia, people have dragged themselves out of their warm beds in the pre-dawn chill of Autumn to gather at obelisks and memorials to honour the fallen soldiers who spilled their blood far from home. The number is staggering; 30,210 known and recorded dead across all our offshore conflicts. Young men and women from this parish, some of their names remembered in brass, were cut down in their prime by the ravages of war.

Many more returned home changed. Some of you may have had siblings, parents, uncles or aunts who served the interests of our Nation and bore deep scars. Some below the surface, scars on the heart and mind. For some of us those scars have resulted in deep hurt in our own lives; the unseen cost of war.

Today, we count the cost of war; and it should stir our hearts to long for peace. But peace is so fleeting isn't it? The world around us is still ravaged by conflict. Lives across the globe are ripped apart by shell and bullet. People are displaced in homelands which are no longer safe. Warfare and terrorism continue to rage resulting in death and destruction. We live in a time of war, and of rumours of war.

As New Zealanders; on Anzac Day we look back to the past and remember, but as Christians we can look forward to the future and hope. As we open the two passages we've heard read today, from Micah 4 and Matthew 10 we'll think about two main points: the amazing peace we hope for, and the conflict, or discord we live through while we wait for that peace.

Before we launch in, let's pray and ask God to guide us.

Heavenly Father we long to see your peace across the world. Today of all days we see the futility of war, and a glimpse of the misery it causes. As we open the Scriptures today help us to hear your voice, transform us by your Holy Spirit to be people who work and hope for peace; while we live in discord. We ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.

{Point 1: We Hope for Peace}

The surviving Israelite people in the nation of Judah lived under the constant fear of war during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah: the time Micah's

prophecies span. Judah is a weak nation fearful of her warmongering neighbours who threaten to over-run her and swallow her up as a vassal state. Externally things don't look good for Judah with war on the doorstep, and internally things are even worse. The judges who are meant to govern God's people, and the prophets who should shape their worshipping life have turned their backs on the law of God.

Just flicking over chapter 3 we get a deeply disturbing overview.

The heads and rulers of Judah have abandoned justice v.1, hate those who are good v.2, and are in league with the evil.

Their oppression of the people they are meant to govern is so harsh they are likened to butchers who strip the flesh and break bones v.3.

Instead of caring for God's people, their leaders sell them out for profit and close their ears to the plight of those they oppress.

The prophets, the spiritual leaders aren't any better. Instead of teaching the people the Word of God, instead of bringing that to bear on the corrupt practices of the judges, they lead God's people astray v.5. They suit their message to how deep the pockets are of the one asking for guidance, those who can benefit the prophets receive messages of peace, the poor and needy are sent away with nothing from the Lord and they make 'war against them' v.5.

It's a reprehensible state of affairs summarised in v.11 'Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.

It's not God's design for his people is it? This rejection of God's way is going to come with costly consequences. Exile is coming, and when it does God will close his ears to those who refused to hear the cries of the oppressed, and he will give nothing to those who prophesy, they will be disgraced. Jerusalem will fall, and their self-assurance and self-sufficiency will melt like wax.

It's against this backdrop that we come to Micah 4. When we consider the darkness in Judah, it helps us to see the shining glory of the future hope God places before his people, a hope for peace. What a glorious hope it is for a people

ripped apart by their own corrupt leaders, and fearful of invasion at the hand of bloodthirsty enemies.

Look at the vision of their future, the shalom peace they long for is described Micah 4:1 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.

The vision Micah places before people is one where God's reign is being worked out, where his temple is at the centre, it's built up, and people throng to it, people ascend and enter. They seek out God and his way for their lives.

It's a radical vision, because it's a vision which is much broader than the worshipping life of Judah; look at v.2 who will come? Many nations. Not just the chosen people of God, but through them there will be a widening of who is welcome. People from different ethnic and cultural identities, different languages, and colours, and status will seek God, not just the Hebrew people.

As they do so, he will supply what the judges and prophets failed to: v.2 He will teach them his ways, his Law will be heard, his Word will go out.

The wonderful ways that God wants people to live will be proclaimed. He will ensure that even though the prophets failed, his word never will.

He will judge impartially, v.3 and settle the disputes, and not just at a personal level, but between nations. God's justice will be made known.

The nations will hear, and people will be changed. In the power of God's Spirit at work through his powerful word there will be a total transformation of humanity; look at this outcome, it is staggering:

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. (Micah 4:3-4)

On Anzac Day, is there anything more we could long for than people experiencing the life changing love of God, obeying His Law and seeking ways of justice and

peace? Of living without fear, and with plenty of good things to enjoy. It's the kiwi dream isn't it?

Micah's vision was for his people, he expected it to be fully realised in this life. Sadly, this vision has still not come to pass. Through the ongoing failures of Judah to hold fast to the Word of God this shalom has not yet come to pass, but for us, what a joy it is to know that it will! That in the Lord Jesus this will be fulfilled when he fully establishes his Kingdom.

We hope for this peace. A Peace where we live in close relationship with our God, where we are no longer afraid, not of judgement because our sin is forgiven, not of others, because they follow the Law of God. That is the peace we hope for, and it is a sure outcome, in the Lord Jesus.

{2 We live in discord}

But we don't experience it fully yet do we? We long for it, we pray for it, we weep and seek God for it, but we are waiting for God's Shalom, that peace Jesus promised his followers which we considered a couple of weeks ago. As we wait, we wait with patient endurance which we saw in Romans 8 last week. We are waiting for this peace, and as we wait we live in discord. It's an odd tension to hold, but it comes from the hope we hold of that eternal peace in Jesus.

If our faith is in the Lord Jesus, that will cause conflict, our reading from Matthew 10 was a stark reminder. These are surprising words from Jesus 'I did not come to bring peace, but a sword' v.34.

How is it that Jesus, the Prince of Peace will cause division, to the point where family relationships will be strained?

Jesus throws his followers into a state of discord, of conflict, because if we love him and obey his commands we will point people to that future Micah described. A future where God sets the agenda for human flourishing. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus it is going to cause conflict. The Truth of the gospel is divisive.

We mustn't be lulled into thinking our message is one which will be warmly received, that our status might increase, that our popularity might grow. Jesus warns us of something quite different. His Kingship, his claim to decide what is right and wrong, is deeply offensive to the ego. It goes to the very heart of who we are, and if I'm honest, I still find it hard. There are times when I rebel against the claim of ownership on me, when I choose to do it my own way. When I wrest control and tell God I know best, because the last thing we want it to acknowledge another as king!

And so JC Ryle reminds us:

We are not to think it strange, if the Gospel rends asunder families, and causes estrangement between the nearest relations. It is sure to do so in many cases, because of the deep corruption of man's heart. So long as one man believes, and another remains unbelieving—so long as one is resolved to keep his sins, and another desirous to give them up, the result of the preaching of the Gospel must needs be division. For this the Gospel is not to blame, but the heart of man.¹

I'm sure there are people you know who seem allergic to the gospel. Who write you off, just because you follow Jesus. As William and Amelia left the vicarage this week a boy, about ten years old who was playing nearby yelled out "God Sucks." Later he told them he ripped up his Bible. Something about their faith in Jesus was agitating for him. It chaffed.

And so Christian people, we hold a tension. We are people who hope for peace. We are absolutely certain of it. If we have found peace with God through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, if we know that our sin is forgiven, we have peace with our heavenly Father and will one day love in the future peace outlined so clearly in Micah 4. Warfare will not be part of that future. Praise God!

But, as we seek to share that future with others, the very nature of that message, the call to set aside our worship of self, and to submit to the Lordship of Jesus, that will cause deep offence. As we lovingly seek the best for others, by warning them of sin and a coming judgement, we may be called many things. Intolerant. Bigoted. Old Fashioned... but that is a cross to bear, a burden to carry. To sacrifice our reputation for the reputation of the lord Jesus. To set aside the love of the

¹ Ryle, J. C. (1860). *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (pp. 105–106). New York: Robert Carter & Brothers.

world, that many might know the love of God, and in that glorious love, some might be saved, it will cause conflict. In some cases even conflict in our closest relationships, but we hold fast to sharing the Good News so that others might know the peace we hope for.

Let's pray;

Lord Jesus while we hope for peace, we live in discord. It's an uncomfortable tension. In all of us somewhere we long to be well thought of, to be likeable, but we know that following you comes with a real cost - discord. Help us to live well among others, and to seek their ultimate good through peace with you, so that they might enjoy the peace we've explored today where there will be no more warfare or strife and a wonderfully close relationship with you, as we stand forgiven in the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen.