

**Message:**

In one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith, God the Son-the Second Person of the Godhead-takes on flesh and becomes a man. Jesus, who was conceived in the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, enters into this world as a baby. Our passage this morning, from Micah 5, predicts the arrival of Christ by describing the city of His birth.

Micah 5:2 informs us that Christ would be born in the town of Bethlehem: *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”* However, in prophesying about the birthplace of Jesus Christ, some 700 years prior to the actual birth, Micah’s original context gives us some vital insights to help us understand the nature of Christ’s work.

Micah was a prophet to the southern Kingdom of Judah. He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Hosea. We are told in Micah 1:1 concerning Micah, *“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.”* It seems most plausible that Micah’s words found in chapter five, find their historical context during the reign of Hezekiah. More specifically, Micah’s words are spoken during a time when there is a siege around Jerusalem.

If the siege is, in fact, during Hezekiah’s time, it is most likely Sennacherib, the Assyrian King’s siege of Jerusalem in about 701 B.C. Sennacherib does not merely lay siege around Jerusalem, he taunts them: *“Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, “The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria?” (2 Chronicles 32:10-11).* The opening words of chapter 5 describe the humiliation of the siege: *“Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.”*

It is with the backdrop of Judah and Hezekiah being humiliated as Assyrian forces lay siege around Jerusalem that Micah begins describing that a child will come from Bethlehem to throw off Judah’s oppressors, restore Judah to a nation of prominence from

their state of humiliation, and do a mighty work in their midst that would deal with the root cause of their oppression: the waywardness of their hearts toward God.

Bethlehem, while the birthplace of King David, is not a significant place. It would be the least likely of places for the Lord to begin His greatest work. However, when the time comes for His mother to give Him birth-and not until then-Israel would languish. But notice what unfolds in conjunction with the child: *“Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace”* (Micah 5:3-5).

The child to be born will shepherd the Lord’s people. As a result, peace and security-not their present shame and humiliation-will characterize their lives. But the child will do more than shepherd His people with peace and security. He will do a profound work for them, by ruling over them; He will do a profound work in them. We must remember why Judah was in their present predicament of humiliation. Judah had consistently disregarded God’s covenant. Judah neither trusted in the Lord nor obeyed His Laws. As a result, and in harmony with the curses prescribed in their covenant with God, Judah found themselves being tormented and threatened by the nations that surrounded them.

When the child that Micah announces comes, He will rule over them by causing them to be a people who can be ruled over. Micah 5:10-14 states: *“And in that day, declares the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds; and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes; and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities.”*

The Lord will not only rescue His people from the external threats that oppress, He will rescue them from the interior impulses that lead them to their oppression. The Lord will not merely save them from their oppressors, He will save them from themselves. This child will cause the people He gathers to become impervious to their former idolatries.

Matthew 2 utilizes Micah's prophecy in a mighty way. As men from the east, who arrive in Jerusalem, inquire about the location of Christ's birth, the Jewish leaders display a great confidence that they know of the whereabouts of Christ's birth. They reference Micah's prophecy and point the men to Bethlehem.

What we find next in Matthew's account is the starkest of contrasts that Christ invokes-even as a baby. First, the men from the East proceed to Bethlehem where, in finding Christ, they worship Him and present Him gifts. Even as a child, Christ arouses worship. However, we also see that while the Christ child arouses worship, He also invokes hatred. Shortly after the men from the east come and go, Herod exterminates all the children, two and under, in the region. Herod will not tolerate a rival to his lust to rule. While baby Jesus escapes this murder attempt, it does serve as a preview to not only the hostility with which some will have toward Jesus, but also a hint that God, who has come in the flesh, has come to die at the hands of hostile men.

**Implications:**

Christ's arrival is a humble arrival to rescue a humiliated people. Christ rescues us from our defeat so as to bring us under His rule.

Apart from Christ, we are a humiliated people. We stand before a Holy God in our shame and guilt. We are cut off from the blessings of God due to our sin and disobedience. Life does not work apart from reliance upon God for God created us and designed His universe to properly work only in dependence upon God.

In Micah's time, the people of Judah had turned from loving God-that is, trusting and obeying His Word-and sought to make life work on their own. Creatures are made to be dependent upon their Creator. The result of Judah's disobedience was not freedom, but bondage. The consequence of Judah's self-reliance was not fulfillment but disgrace.

Micah announces that Christ would humbly arrive for such a humiliated people. Bethlehem, the most insignificant of places, would be the earthly starting point of God's glorious rescue mission. Not to mention the very arrival into this world as a lowly baby, the lowly birthplace of the Lord Jesus Christ signifies something of the gentle and humble nature of God's character.

In an age of marketing and branding where image is everything, the start of God's central movement in history is not splashy and glitzy but modest and unpretentious. What does this tell us about the heart of God? God's heart is most displayed in how He humbly rescues a humiliated people. Christ is to be glorified, not in how He self-exultingly gloats over, but in fact, how He lovingly stoops to rescue a humiliated people.

*"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).*

Christ's arrival is a gathering arrival to bring together a scattered people. Christ draws us into peace with Him so as to join us to His other people.

Micah announces that Christ would faithfully shepherd His people. He will gather up His people and protect them. They will dwell safely under His rule. We should not take this to mean that our lives will be trouble free, but that whatever troubles assail us, the Lord is with us. The Apostle Paul reminds us: *"As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:36-39).*

The peace and security does not just pertain to us as individuals; it is a reminder that we are now a part of something grander than our individuality. We are now brought together as His people, who come under His rule and experience His peace and security as a family. The Apostle Paul explains: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both*

*one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:13-19).*

Christ's arrival is a purifying arrival to change an idolatrous people. Christ transforms us inwardly so as to bring about our unrivaled loyalty to Him alone.

*"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).*

Christ redirects our idolatries and brings us to Him by becoming everything for us: hope, joy, peace, strength, life...