

Bethlehem: A Town of Rejection

Micah 5:1-5a

(preached Pine Grove 12/23/18; Sunday PM)

Introduction

One of my pet peeves about being from Whitmire is that we were often overlooked for various reasons..

You see, Whitmire is too far north to be considered the Midlands but too far south to be considered the Upstate.

WE are simply in no man's land as far as recognition..

The upstate media would occasionally come down to us, but most often WIS covered events of our town.

We also struggled to get on the map.

Very few weather maps in my day even created a dot for us.

If we wanted to know if a storm was headed our way, we simply had to know that we were tucked into the northern corner of Newberry County on the map.

And then there was the issue of correctly spelling Whitmire, which usually appeared at Whitemire or Whitmore..

But this is all too common for small towns where few people live..

They simply become victims of their own size and insignificance.

Well, Bethlehem was that kind of town.

In fact, Bethlehem was not even listed among the towns of Israel in the book of Joshua or the book of Nehemiah..

Bethlehem was a rejected town.

Being only 6 miles south of Jerusalem, it was really in the shadow of that great city..

Yet this rejected town would be home to the greatest news that the world has ever known.

And Micah the prophet predicted this fame of Bethlehem 600 years before it actually took place..

So take your Bibles and turn to this little book on the OT that was written by a relatively unknown prophet named Micah.

In fact, we have very little information about him at all.

We do know that he was from the southernmost part of Israel from a town named Moresheth.

Since this region was highly agricultural, it is likely that Micah was a farmer preacher called by God to deliver a message of judgment to his fellow countrymen of Israel.

And that is exactly what he did..

In fact, the first 3 chapters of this book are promises of judgment on Israel, on the who oppress others, on then on false prophets and leaders in Israel..

But then in chapter 4, Micah begins to offer a little hope as he previews a day when Israel will be blessed...

And the main source of blessing will be a leader that Micah begins to described in the first 5 verses of chapter 5..

And one of the main characteristics of this leader is that he will come from a town that is just about as obscure as Micah's hometown..

So, let's look at the first 5 verses of Micah 5 tonight and be reminded how a town of rejection gave birth to a baby of salvation..

The first thing we note about this baby is this...

I. Bethlehem Brought Forth a Necessary Baby (1)

Verse 1 of Micah 5..

***“[a]Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of
troops;
[b]They have laid siege against us;
With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the
cheek.***

The context for the birth of Christ in Bethlehem is a world of trouble for Israel..

In verse 1, Micah calls Israel to muster her troops since the nation is under seige.

Now if we think about the history of Israel as a nation, it is history of hostility and persecution..

Ever since Israel became a nation, Satan has set his sights on wiping it off the map..

So it no surprise that the prediction of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem is set in the context of trouble in Israel.

In this case, Israel is under a threat as the King prepares to come into the world..

And look that was certainly the case when Jesus was born.

The Romans were in charge of Israel as God brought salvation to the world..

Now Micah had no idea what the future held or when the events of this prophecy would come to pass, but we know that Christ came at exactly the right time...

Not only was Israel under oppression from the Romans, the whole world was under oppression from the the power of sin..

And isn't this how God often works..

Just when things look the worst, God sends his best..

Bethlehem is a town that delivered a necessary baby into the world..

But not only did Bethlehem send a necessary baby, verse 2 tells us that...

II. Bethlehem Brought Forth an Ironic Baby (2a)

Verse 2..

2

***“[c]But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,***

The incredible irony of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is that a town too small to be remembered became a town too famous to forget...

Micah tells us in verse 2 that Bethlehem was nothing special among the cities of Israel.

In fact, it was too little of a city to even be counted in the census of cities...

So why would God choose such a small town to host such a world changing event?

Well, its the same reason he chooses to save nobodies like me and you..

So that no one can boast about being deserving of his grace..

God used a nothing town like Bethlehem so that He can get all the glory.

You see, no one would choose to give birth to the greatest king in the most insignificant of places.

And that is really the point.

When you are moved to say that only God would do something like that, then you understand why Bethlehem would be the city that God chooses..

You see, God uses nothing places and nothing people so that he can get all the praise...

When you see yourself as too little to be used by God, you are exactly the kind of person that God uses..

Bethlehem was too little of town to be counted among the towns of Israel but today everyone knows where Bethlehem is....

Though it is ironic for God to use a forgotten town to do an unforgettable thing, that is exactly how God works...

1 Corinthians 1:26-29...

26 For [r]consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to [s]the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the

***world and the despised God has chosen, the things that
are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,
29 so that no [t]man may boast before God.***

So far, Bethlehem gives birth to a necessary baby and an
ironic baby..

But we also see in verse 2 that...

III. Bethlehem Brings Forth a Sovereign Baby (2b)

2

***“[c]But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.***

The baby born in Bethlehem will be no normal baby.

He will be a ruler in Israel, and Christ is certainly that..

In fact, the sign over his head at his crucifixion read,
“The King of the Jews,” and he was certainly that..

Though his kingship was rejected by the world in his
first advent, it will not be rejected when He comes again.

The baby that Bethlehem brought forth was a king, but
just any king..

Look at the end of verse 2..

***“[c]But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
[d]His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”***

You see, a 4th truth of Micah 5 is this..

IV. Bethlehem Brings an Eternal Baby (2c)

Look, kings are born in all sorts of places...

Just a few weeks ago, we saw the one room log cabin where Abraham Lincoln grew up..

But no town but Bethlehem has ever given birth to a king who has no beginning or no end..

You see, the baby of Bethlehem is eternal..

As we saw in John's gospel, Jesus is the great I AM..

Christ predates all the kings of Israel before His arrival...

He predates Abraham..

HE predates Noah and Adam and Eve...

Christ predates creation because Christ has always been.

He is person of the triune God..

The Baby of Bethlehem may have arrived in the world at a moment in time, but He has always existed...

A fifth characteristic of this baby of Bethlehem is found in verse 3..

V. Bethlehem Brings Forth a Unifying Baby (3)

Though Israel has survived as a nation against all odds, Israel hasn't been united under a single king since Solomon in the 900s BC..

Yet, the baby of Bethlehem will be a baby to restore Israel to its former glory..

Look at verse 3..

3

***Therefore He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.***

Now to be clear, Micah is writing this in the 700s BC.

And Israel is a mess.

The nation split in 930 BC.

The nation engaged in a civil war after the split..

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was overthrown and many of the Jews were carried off to Assyria..

And though the southern region of Israel was still around as Micah writes this prophecy, things are bleak..

Yet the promise of verse 3 is that God would let them suffer for a while until the birth of this child in Bethlehem...

However, the restoration of Israel didnt occur at the birth of Christ..

If anything, Jesus united the nation in their hatred of Him which led to his crucifixion...

But that hatred and murder of Christ only furthered the judgment of Israel since God would send the Romans to destroy Israel in 70 AD...

And even today, the effects of that judgment are still felt..

Though Israel is now back in the land and recognized as a nation beginning in 1948, Israel is not untied under this baby..

But there will be a day when Israel recognizes its rejection of the baby of Bethlehem, repents of their sin, and put their faith in Him..

The book of Revelation describes this restoration of Israel during the 7 year tribulation period..

It will a time of great revival among the Jews, and as Micah writes, the sons of Israel will return and unite under their Messiah in a day that is still future to us in 2018..

Now Micah doesn't mention the church here, because he is writing to the Jewish people...

But clearly, the church is united and unified under Christ as well..

And we will one day be united with Israel by our common faith in their Messiah..

The Baby in Bethlehem is a unifying child..

But let's get a 6th characteristic of this child in verse 4..

VI. Bethlehem Brings Forth a Powerful Baby (4)

4

***And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of the Lord,
In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.
And they will [e]remain,
Because [f]at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.***

Verse 4 also looks to a day beyond our day as this baby will arise and shepherd his flock.

This is clearly a picture of what the world will be like at the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation period..

He will arise and return to earth to be crowned and reign over this earth for 1000 years..

In that literal reign of Christ, the world will be as it should have been from the beginning.

Christ will be accepted rather than rejected.

Christ will be honored rather than hated.

Christ's people will be comforted rather than confronted.

Christ's people will be blessed rather than persecuted..

And the reason this will be true is because the baby of Bethlehem is a baby with incredible power to set the world back in order at the proper time..

And then a final characteristic of the baby of Bethlehem is found in the first line of verse 5..

VII. Bethlehem Brought Forth a Peaceful Baby (5a)

Micah simply writes..

5

This One will be our peace.

In context, this is prediction of national peace that Christ will provide for Israel..

Micah and the rest of his fellow Jews had not seen peace in their lifetimes..

The last peace in Jerusalem came during the reign of David.

And sadly, that has been the last peace that Israel has ever enjoyed.

Even today, rockets are fired into Israel.

Skirmishes break out in Israel routinely.

The current government of Iran wants Israel off the map.

If anything has been true for Israel, it is a constant state of conflict and trouble.

Yet, Micah tells Israel in verse 5 that Bethlehem will produce a eternal ruler who will be honored among the nations and bring peace to their people forever..

But we also know that this baby of Bethlehem will also bring personal peace as well...

The One who will bring peace to Israel will first come to die to bring peace between God and man.

This baby in the manger will be the criminal on the cross..

But through his death, he will secure peace for his people through the forgiveness of sin...

Christ will bring peace to Israel but more than that, Christ will bring peace to any individual who repents and trusts in Him..

Conclusion

And all of these predictions began to find their fulfillment in this little town of Bethlehem...

The tiny town that was the first home of the tiny baby that brought hope to an enormous world.

Tonight, we are going to remember that tiny baby.

But we are not going to celebrate his birth.

Instead, we are going to remember his death as we come to the Lord's Table.

All the joy that Mary had on that first Christmas night tureen to an equal amount of anguish as her son went to the cross..

As she knelt beside the manger, she would also kneel near the cross as her baby became her Savior.

This is why Christmas isn't Christmas unless we proclaim the death of Christ as well..

Yes, his birth was miraculous and sweet but his death is equally sweet for the believer..

Because his death gave us life, and not just life but life eternal for all who believe in Him.

So tonight we gather around the Lord's Table to eat the bread which is a symbol of Christ's body that was broken for us as believers.

And we drink the juice which is a symbol of the bloodshot Christ shed for us as believers.

None of this is mystical or magical.

None of this is required for salvation.

This table is simply a response to Christ's command to the church to proclaim his death until He returns..

This table is open to anyone who has repented and put their faith in Christ alone to save them.

If you are not a believer, it is best to not take part in the Lord's Table.

If you are a believer living in a state of sin, it is best to not take part in the Lord's Table.

The Bible says that those who take part in this Supper in a unworthy manner actually eat and drink judgment upon themselves..

So please examine yourself if you an unbeliever and repent and believe in Christ.

And please examine yourself if you claim to know Christ but are living in a state of sin and refusing to repent of that sin..

If that is you, turn from that sin now and come join the Lord's people at his table tonight...

Let me pray for us and our deacons will make their way down here to serve us.

Let us pray.