



Merry Christmas! You've probably already unwrapped the gifts under your tree or maybe you're waiting for the last family member to fly in this afternoon. Christmas is a time of giving. I did some research this week on the gifts people don't want to receive. The top things that women **don't** want to get this year for Christmas are: a gym membership, anything with a plug attached to it (think vacuum, blender or iron), anything for the kitchen. The list isn't the same for men. They have their own list of gifts they are hoping not to open this year: a nose hair trimmer, a tie, a book or new cufflinks. If you got one of these, I'm sorry. My guess is that at least nine of the ten of your gifts were great!

But not all gifts come in a box. Your best gift may be time with a family member. It might be the fact that you will be sitting around the table with those you love this evening. It might be a phone call with a loved one who you've had a strained relationship with in the past. Maybe your spouse lets you sleep in and you feel the most rested you've felt in a long time. For some of you it could be the fact that your company is closed for the next week and you're excited for the break.

There is something special about Christmas. For many people it's a time to forget about the problems you have. It's a time to open gifts, laugh, be with family and enjoy those around you. Christmas is a time when hope is high for many. It can also be a lonely time for people. Christmas is a time when some people realize the depth of a broken relationship in their lives. It's a time when people are stressed about the credit card bill. When people wake up to an empty house and the reality that they are alone this year. People are concerned about the political situation in our nation. Students are stressed about finals and nervous about their grades. People with addictions are fighting hard not to relapse during this time of year.

Do any of these circumstances resonate with you? Are you stressed about something this morning? Do you lack peace in your life? Are you concerned with the leadership in our country? Do you feel hopeless? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions then you can relate to the people of Israel. They were going through a rough time. Grab your Bible and turn to the book of Micah chapter 4.

**Why do you now cry aloud—
have you no king?
Has your ruler perished,**

that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?

Writhe in agony, Daughter Zion,

like a woman in labor,

for now you must leave the city

to camp in the open field.

You will go to Babylon;

there you will be rescued.

There the Lord will redeem you

out of the hand of your enemies (verses 9-10).

This Child Comes When Times are Difficult and Painful

For us to really understand the weight of what Micah is writing here we have to understand what was happening in Jerusalem. It's approximately 700 BC and the people of Jerusalem are surrounded by the army of the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib. God's people are in a desperate situation. The other ten tribes of Israel have already been conquered and it appears this will be the same fate for Jerusalem. God's people are in a difficult and painful situation. Surrounded on every side and running out of supplies, they are feeling abandoned by God and hopeless.

Micah tells us that the people are crying out loud. They are feeling hopeless. There is a threat that their city will be conquered. Their homes will be ransacked. They will be homeless. They will have to leave the city they know and love. They will need to camp in the open fields. Finally, they will end up as exiles in Babylon. When we read these few verses, it can seem like God has given up on His people. Think about their plight. Sennacherib is an aggressive ruler who has surrounded the city. He has already conquered other nations and is bent on destruction. When you add up what we know about the situation, it almost sounds like God has turned His back on His people.

Let me just assure you that God has not given up on His people. In fact, God loves His children. This isn't their final fate; God will come to their rescue. There is an immediate solution and there is also a long term solution. The immediate solution is found here in Micah.

But now many nations

are gathered against you.

They say, "Let her be defiled,

let our eyes gloat over Zion!"

**But they do not know
the thoughts of the Lord;
they do not understand his plan,
that he has gathered them like sheaves to the
threshing floor (verses 11-12).**

God has a plan for the Assyrian troops. God has actually gathered the Assyrian troops because they are against Him, and He will come to the aid of His children.

There is also a long term solution. The Israelites had the hope that a Messiah would come and save them.

**“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times” (Micah 5:2).**

We know that the Messiah was eventually born in Bethlehem. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah. This is God fulfilling His promise to His people. This is evidence that God doesn't give up on His children. This baby is the hope that the Israelites in 700 BC longed to see. He was born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. He came with a purpose—to save people from their sins.

Being that it's Christmas morning let's turn to the Gospel and look at the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. *“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him’”* (Matt. 2:1-2).

He was also worshipped by the Magi. The Magi came to Him with one purpose—to worship Him. This is what you're doing this morning. You might have come here this morning with a heavy heart. You walk through the doors of church and need hope for your hurting heart. Worship changes things. You can worship Him if you're having a tough morning, a tough week, or a tough year because He is the hope you're longing for. Just as the Magi searched Him out, you've searched Him out. Maybe it wasn't as intentional as them, but you're here. When you worship God it changes your life.

This Child Comes From an Unexpected Place

Let's flip back to Micah 5 and keep in mind the painful situation God's people are in. This time let's specifically talk about the location where Christ was prophesied to be born.

**“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,**

**whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times” (v. 2).**

Bethlehem is an unlikely location for Jesus to come from. It's one of the smallest clans in Judah. It's not a big city by any stretch. For the Israelites, they would rather have Jesus be born in Judah, their capital. But He was born in Bethlehem, which would have been more like being born in Stockton than San Francisco.

Did you know that Bethlehem means “house of bread” in Hebrew? It was located to the south of Jerusalem where the siege was taking place in 700 BC. The word that follows Bethlehem is *Ephrathah* and it means “fruitful.” This small city in Judah is going to be a fruitful place. We have hindsight on this passage. We know Micah is prophesying about Jesus. We just read in Matthew chapter 2 that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Jesus isn't the only great leader to be born in an unexpected place. Not all leaders are born in Washington, attend fantastic schools, and have the right letters after their name. Think about Abraham Lincoln for example. He was born in a log cabin in Hodgenville, Kentucky. He grew up on the western frontier in Kentucky and Indiana. He was largely self-educated. He became a lawyer and was later elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. In 1860 Lincoln was elected as the President of the United States.

For the people in Israel it probably seemed insignificant that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. It might have felt like a letdown. It's a completely unexpected place. Have you seen this work in the small things in your life? You have a quick conversation with a person at work and think nothing of it. Next thing you know, they move to a new company and recruit you to your dream job. Another scenario: at college you attend a study session and meet a smart person. Over the next year you fall in love and now you're sitting next to him or her as your spouse. One more: you walk into a new school and the kid sitting next to you on the first day becomes your BFF.

I've found in my life that I can pass over the small things, the things that seem insignificant, and focus too much on the big stuff. Jesus comes from this unexpected, seemingly insignificant, place, a small town where no one would even consider vacationing in. But it's a town that God has picked out for His Son to be born. What happened in that town 2000 years ago changed the known world. What happened there can change your life. What I'm saying is, “don't ignore the small things in your life because these could be the root of the greatest blessings.”

This Child Reaches Out to Meet Us with Hope

The story of Christmas isn't over yet. We talked about Jesus coming to deliver us from painful situations. We just looked at the significance of Bethlehem and Jesus coming from this unexpected place. Micah continues by explaining the relief this new ruler will bring to Israel.

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be our peace
when the Assyrians invade our land
and march through our fortresses.
We will raise against them seven shepherds,
even eight commanders,
who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword,
the land of Nimrod with drawn sword.
He will deliver us from the Assyrians
when they invade our land
and march across our borders (verses 4-6).

This new ruler will bring peace to God's people who are anxious and worried. He will shepherd them and care for them. He will give them security. And this will extend to the end of the earth. I wonder if Micah knew the full extent of what his words would mean. Micah had a hope in God that this promise would be fulfilled. The Bible scholar Gary V. Smith said: "Hope involves the removal of the fear and a subjective attitude of strong expectation for what has not yet happened. Trust in God's promises produces hope."

All of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. The Bible tells a story about the disciples who were riding in a boat with Jesus. The waves were crazy and splashing over the boat. There was a storm raging. They were distraught and fearful. They cried out to Jesus and He calmed the sea. He brought peace to their anxious souls. Jesus is also the Good Shepherd. In John 10 Jesus talks about what a good shepherd does. A good shepherd cares about the sheep. A shepherd recognizes that sheep are vulnerable and need protection. Sheep cannot care for themselves. They need someone to guide them. Sheep need a shepherd to protect them. Sheep need a shepherd to lead them to good food and clean water. This is what Jesus does for you.

If you turn to Matthew 2, you read a condensed version of what Micah said. *"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is*

what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (verses 5-6).

Both Micah and Matthew call Jesus a "ruler." Jesus did not come in the way Israel expected Him to come. They expected Jesus to come as a conquering king, not as a baby in a manger. They expected Jesus to come as a conquering king and not as a humble servant. By Jesus' coming you can find security in trusting in Him. You can find security that gives you a lasting hope.

When we look at the extent of this child it becomes evident that this child is the hope of the world. This child that Micah spoke of was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. This child was sought after by Magi. Shepherds came to worship him and angels rejoiced at His birth. This baby grew into a man. This man had a mission. It was to point God's people back to God. It was to help the oppressed, save the lost, and heal the broken-hearted. This child became the greatest leader the world has ever known. This child is the one we worship this morning because He loves us. This child came to show us the hope that is found in following Him.

Jesus is the best gift that we can ever receive. People love Christmas for the holiday we've created it to be. Just the other day I was driving with my daughter and she said, "Daddy, I wish it was always Christmas." She loves the lights on the houses. She loves the gifts. She also loves the hope this time of year brings to others. We all know that it can't always be Christmas. If it was always Christmas, then Christmas would lose its wonder.

But we can all keep the hope that Christ brings us and live in that hope all year long. We can apply the truth of God's word to our lives. We can trust fully in this humble leader. We can worship Christ. We can find peace in Him when our lives seem hectic. We can spread this hope to the ends of the world because this child is the hope of the world!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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