

Humility and Majesty

December 19, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Micah 5:2-5a

*2 "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."*

*3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.*

*4 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.*

5 And he will be our peace.

And he will be our peace (Micah 5:5a). These are Micah's word of assurance to the war-torn people of the northern kingdom of Israel and to the southern kingdom of Judah

in the days of the Assyrian invasion of their homeland. Can you imagine what it would be like to have a foreign people come into your hometown and take over everything – your place of work, your place of worship, your sense of security and stability, your peace? I have a hard time even getting my mind around that. Everything you have known and everything you love would be in upheaval. We do know by reading the prophetic book of Micah that the people were in misery and despair.

And, as if that misery and despair were not enough, Micah tells the people that they brought that misery and despair on themselves. Micah had prophesied that the Lord had only three requirements of them: *“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8). Yet they had failed to do even that. Micah warned, *“The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains”* (Micah 7:2). The prophet lists their transgressions. They are guilty of fraud (2:2), theft (2:8), greed (2:9), excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures (2:11), oppression (3:3), hypocrisy (3:4), heresy (3:5), injustice (3:9), extortion and lying (6:12), and murder (7:2), among other offenses. They needed to repent of their sins and, because they refuse, there would come a day of reckoning. The people of Judah would be conquered and dispersed, just like their neighbors in the northern kingdom. God would judge them for their unrepentant sinfulness.

If Micah’s prophecy ended there, it would not be of much comfort to anyone, although all of what he had spoken through God eventually did come to pass. However, Micah did also give words of hope. Yes, they would go through a time of trial but there would be one who is coming, one who would be ruler over them, who would come to save them. This ruler would come out of an unlikely place: Bethlehem Ephrathah. An unlikely place because it was the smallest clan among all the tribes in Judah. The word “Ephrathah” means fruitful, and it was called Bethlehem Ephrathah to differentiate it from another town nearby also named Bethlehem. One could compare it to trying to tell the difference between similar town names by calling them Mifflin-town or Mifflin-ville or Mifflin-burg.

Bethlehem Ephrathah. A non-descript town in an out of the way place that did not appear as very remarkable to anyone. “O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.” Yet it was in that humble place that a king would arise who would **“stand and shepherd his flock/ in the strength of the Lord,/ in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.”** We know now that this prophecy pointed forward roughly 700 years into the future (Micah’s ministry ended around 687 BC) to the coming of Jesus Christ, born in that prophesied town of Bethlehem.

After being visited by the wise men searching for the promised Messiah, Herod called forth his own wise men and asked where this Messiah might be found. They quoted this passage from Micah (Matthew 2:6) and from that point on Herod plotted for the death of this supposed threat to his kingdom, which he would attempt to accomplish by his own act of terrorism: unleashing soldiers on that small town to kill all the infant boys two years old and younger.

1) *God is able to make the ordinary extraordinary.* One of the things this well-known prophecy shows us is that God is at one and the same time working in our lives through both humility and majesty. Out of a small, ordinary village like Bethlehem, God was able to do wondrous things. Out of the ordinary God created something extraordinary. Out of a small non-descript town God brought forth the one who would reign with glory and with power unlike anyone who has come before or since. God is able to do something marvelous out of something common and ordinary. This shows God's greatness and our limited sense of what or who is really valuable. We tend to evaluate people on their size, where they grew up, what their cultural background or race may be. All those barriers come down as far as God is concerned. We are all equal in his sight, and we are all in need of a Savior!

This passage also shows us how majestic God is. Just when the people of Judah might think all hope is lost, they are promised that one day the kingdom will be re-established, and the king who will reign will be one who is a bringer of peace. When Christ was born in Bethlehem:

“God chose a stable so no inn-keeper might boast, “He chose my inn!” God chose a manger so that no woodworker could boast, “He chose the craftsmanship of my bed!” He chose Bethlehem so no one could boast, “The greatness of our city constrained the divine choice!”¹

If you are a person who thinks that you are too common or ordinary for God to use, then you have come to the right place. God can and will use you, if you make yourself available to him, and God is able to make the ordinary extraordinary!

2) *God fulfills his promises.* God promised that a mighty ruler would come, and he did. It took 700 years in our time, but in God's time a thousand years is as one day (Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

The amazing thing about Micah is that he reasserts the certainty of this promise not at a time when Israel is rising to power but at a time when Israel is sinking toward oblivion. He witnesses the destruction of the northern kingdom, and he predicts the fall and exile of Judah. You can tell how firmly someone believes God's promise by whether it gives him strength and hope when life caves in around him. And Micah, it appears, never wavered. He knew God would keep his promise.²

God has promised us salvation through his Son Jesus Christ, if only we believe in him. God has promised us eternal life for those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God has promised us that he will be with us always, never leaving us or forsaking us, especially when we are going through our valleys of darkness. You can trust God's promises.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/from-bethlehem-in-the-majesty-of-the-name-of-the-lord>

² Ibid.

3) *God protects his people.* King Jesus will shepherd us as his very own flock.

He is the Shepherd to the church, and He is also the Shepherd to the nation Israel. The One who was born in Bethlehem, the One who was rejected, will feed His flock. I can't think of anything that sets Him forth more wonderfully than the figure of the shepherd. It speaks of His care, His protection, and His salvation. He is the *Good* Shepherd who will lay down His life for the sheep (see Ps. 22); He is the *Great* Shepherd who keeps His sheep even today (see Ps. 23); and He is the *Chief* Shepherd who is coming in glory (see Ps. 24). His entire ministry is set forth under the office of a shepherd.³

This is the kind of king we have. One who is able to make the ordinary extraordinary; one who fulfills his promises; one who protects his people. And through all the difficult times we may face in our life, King Jesus is the one who gives us the peace that surpasses all understanding.

³ McGee, J. V. (1991). [*Thru the Bible commentary: The Prophets \(Jonah/Micah\)*](#) (electronic ed., Vol. 29, p. 136). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.