

“The Peace of Christmas”
Micah 5:1-5

Intro: Why did God send his Son to be born in a lowly manger? Why did God send his divine Son to take on our nature? Why did God send his one and only Son to redeem us through his life, death, and resurrection? Here’s the answer Octavius Winslow provided about 150 years ago, and I hope these words will ring in our hearts during this Christmas season.

If one perfection of God shines out in redemption with greater [brilliance] than any other, it is this. Love is the focus of all the rest, the golden thread which draws and binds them all together in holy and beautiful cohesion. *Love was the moving, controlling attribute in God’s great [means] of saving sinners. Justice may have demanded it, holiness may have required it, wisdom may have planned it, and power may have executed it, but love originated the whole, and was the moving cause in the heart of God;* so that the salvation of the sinner is not so much a manifestation of the justice, or holiness, or wisdom, or power of God, as it is a display of His love.

Love was the motivating force behind the Father sending Jesus into our dark and fallen world. This is what one of Jesus’ closest disciples wrote some time after his death. In 1 John 4:9, John tells us, “In this the love of God was made manifest [known] among us, that God sent his only Son into the world...” Why did God send Jesus into the world? Answer. To demonstrate his measureless love to the world!

FCF: And yet... so many today fail to experience the love of God in Christ. So many people, at great cost to themselves, reject a gift so free! The wild and reckless love of God is the driving force behind all the gifts he distributes by sending Jesus to the world. Over the past couple of weeks we have examined some of the gifts God gives us in the ultimate gift of his Son. We have seen how Christ provides the light of Christmas, a light that brings great joy. We have also seen how Christ provides the hope of Christmas, a hope that brings justice to the nations. And this morning I want us to focus on how Jesus brings the peace of Christmas.

[Title Slide] Please open your Bibles to Micah 5:1-5... Page _____ in the Bibles we have provided for you.

Context: Micah, like his contemporary Isaiah, was a pre-exilic prophet, which simply means he was prophesying before the Assyrians came in and drove God’s people into exile. But even in the midst of judgment and gloom, he declares a message of hope and salvation. Micah 5:1-5 teaches us that:

The Point: Jesus provides lasting peace to all who receive him by faith.

Look at **verses 1-3** with me... The first truth our text teaches us this morning is that we should...

I. Reflect the humility Jesus displayed to the world (5:1-3).

Verse one foretells the coming humiliation for the people of Israel. They will soon be under siege and their King will be struck in the face. And with these words, God sets forth a humiliating picture to the nation. Whether you’re a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or Whig, can you imagine seeing our nation under siege and our President struck in the face? It would be the most extreme of insults, but this was the reality for Israel due to their unfaithfulness to God. Spiritually speaking, they spiraled downward in two primary ways.

1. For starters, this spiritual decline was observed through their syncretistic worship of Canaanite gods. The people began to mix their true worship of God with the worship of false gods and idols their hands had made. Micah speaks of this in 1:5-7.

2. Beyond their idolatrous worship, Micah gives equal to greater attention to the social injustices that plagued Israel in his day. A growing upper class continually exploited the poor, and Micah was quick to call out these “social crimes” in his day.

Trans: The moral and spiritual landscape in Israel was egregious, but against this dark scene, Micah sends forth a ray of hope in verse 2... He tells us that a King will come, but he will come in the most unexpected way...

Verse 2 tells us that this King will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah. Ephrathah was the ancient name for the little town of Bethlehem, and it was not even a speck on the national map. Bethlehem, as the text says, was “too little to be among the clans of Judah.” In the sight of most Israelites, Bethlehem was virtually insignificant. In this we begin to catch a glimpse of the humility of Christ.

God became man, but even more than that, he became a man who was completely humble and self-sacrificing! It is so difficult for us to wrap our minds around what Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5-8 when he writes: **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV)**

App: Can you believe God would be so accommodating, so condescending? The eternal Son of God wrapped himself in human flesh and dwelt among us. Our God is both transcendent and imminent? Being fully God, he is above everything! And yet, being fully man, he understands us...and this is good news for us!

Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

This is part of the beauty of Christmas. His humble coming magnifies the glory of God... God loves to use the unexpected to accomplish his purposes, so that people might know his glory. But the text goes on to say... that is a place where kings are born. Israel’s greatest king, King David hailed from Bethlehem, and Micah says, that is where Israel’s forever King would come from as well. Look at verse 2 again... “from you shall come forth for me...”

Two quick observations: 1) “for me” The Messianic Son will rule for God the Father, completely in line with the will of the Father. And he will rule for God as God. 2) The end of verse 2 is up for debate: contextually, the phrase “whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days” may just refer to the ancient Davidic lineage of Jesus, but it’s hard not to side with others who see the eternity and deity of the Son in these words. As the eternal Son, Jesus’ coming is from ancient days. Jesus is the King, but his is the humble King.

App: In light of the humility of Christ, let’s put others before ourselves. IF Jesus would stoop so low to reach us, how could we not also count others more significant than ourselves. Let’s find ways to serve others this Christmas.

Verse 3 goes on to tell us that his humility in no way inhibits his ability to overturn the plight of God’s people in exile. **Verse 3:** The exile was temporary because Jesus brings restoration and renewal to God’s people, a promise fulfilled in part when Israel returned from exile, but a promise that awaits complete fulfillment when Jesus comes back again.

Trans: Not only should we reflect the humility that Christ displayed to the world, but #2, we must...

II. Receive the security and peace Jesus brings to his people (5:4-5).

Verses 4-5 provide some specifics about how he will effect lasting change for God's people... Check them out with me...

The emphasis here is on the security and peace the Messiah brings through his care and protection as a King who is like a Shepherd. A shepherd cares for, guides, feeds, leads, and protects his flock, and this is exactly what Jesus does for his people. Verse 4 teaches us that...

- a) He will bring security through the strength of his reign.
 - He stands and shepherds his people in the strength of the Lord. In other words, Jesus will always accomplish everything he sets out to accomplish. Unlike v. 1, Jesus will never be struck in the face by his enemy. He has, like the current Freshman Medford Mustangs, an undefeated record, and unlike my boys, will continue to have an undefeated record for all eternity.
- b) He will also bring security through his impeccable character.
 - Micah says that he will stand and shepherd "in the majesty of the name of the Lord."
 - I believe we could paraphrase that by saying that Jesus, as King, will lead his people in the greatness and dignity of the character of God.
- c) He will bring security through establishing lasting peace.
 - Notice that verse 4 says, "And they shall *dwell* secure..."
 - This lasting peace. Not temporal Peace. We will not enjoy this security for a passing season. We will dwell in it, live in it, remain in it.
 - What did the angels announce to the shepherds on the night Christ was born? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)
 - This peace is comprehensive. I want you to think about it in physical and spiritual terms.
 - Jesus will bring *physical peace*. How can we be confident of this? Look at the end of verse 4: "FOR, he shall be great [not just in Israel, but] to the ends of the earth"
 - There will be no fear of intrusion. No more nuclear threats. No more missals, machine guns, or murder. Jesus, as we saw in Isaiah 9, will cause all war to cease. The joy that we experienced this week with our troops coming home from Iraq is only the faintest taste of the lasting peace Jesus will bring to the world.
 - But what is even greater than this, Jesus will usher in complete *spiritual peace*.
 - No longer will we succumb to our idolatrous desires. He will completely eradicate them and bring us lasting spiritual renewal, completely removed from the presence of our sin.
 - Look at how this chapter closes in verses 10-15 (Read).
 - As we live under his reign now, we experience a taste of this. If that is going to be the case then, shouldn't we seek to live under his reign now and live out the instruction found in 1 John 5:21, where John writes, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
 - In effort to help us keep ourselves from idols, I want to address one idol of our day that I believe the spirit of Christmas should undercut in our hearts. That idol is the idol of Materialism.
 - The National Retail Federation forecasts that Americans will spend 469 billion this holiday season! What about you? How much have you spent on Christmas? How much will you receive for Christmas? Here's another question: how much will you spend on what really matters? People are hurting and hungry all around us. It would take an estimated 10-30 billion to provide clean water and sanitation for the one billion people scattered across the world that need it. That's physical needs. What about spiritual needs? (not that we can't address both simultaneously – we can and will...) More money given to missions agencies, puts more missionaries in places desperate for the gospel, and gives more people the opportunity to hear the gospel. That's why we, as a church, are putting on a Christmas Dinner at the Boys & Girls Club for 15 families and supplying them with a gift for their family. It's also why we are collecting our annual, above and beyond, Great Commission offering, which will help send out more missionaries all over the world!

- Two caveats: 1) We have nothing to boast about. We're a new church and we're taking baby steps, and any steps that we take are simply by the grace and mercy of God. 2) I'm not saying it's sinful to give and receive gifts. I'm not suggesting that you unwrap the presents under the tree and return them to the store. Giving gifts can certainly be a way we display our love for people, BUT during this time of the year especially, we need to guard ourselves against greed and excess.
- Christmas is about God giving the gift of his Son. In light of the generosity of God, surely we can say it is more blessed to give than receive.
- Let's put off greed and put off covetousness and put off excess and put off selfish desires that we might put on compassion, love, justice and generosity. Consider generosity this Christmas. You say, "Tanner, I've already maxed out our budget this Christmas." 2 suggestions: 1) Take something back and give it away. 2) Revamp your budget for next year so that you will be in a better position to give more and receive less.
- Trans: Jesus is a King who eradicates the idols of our hearts and replaces them with purer worship. How does he do it? Check the beginning of v. 5... "And he shall be their peace."

d) He will bring this lasting security and peace himself.

- Peace is found in a person.
- Jesus himself is the one who effects all of this change and distributes the peace of Christmas.
- There is a temptation with every gift we receive, and that is simply this: we are tempted to love the gifts we receive more than the one who gives the gift.
- But Micah wants to draw our attention back to the giver of these incredible gifts. The gifts would mean nothing to us apart from the Giver of these gifts.

We can't read Micah 5:4-5 without hearing the reverberations of this text in John 10. There Jesus says: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.* The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; *and I lay down my life for the sheep*" (John 10:10-15)

When God sent his Son to us, he did so to reveal his unspeakable love to the world. "In this the love of God was made manifest [known] among us, that God sent his only Son into the world..." Jesus is our Good Shepherd. If you are in Christ, Jesus cares for you, he knows you, he protects you, he will never leave you. He is intimately aware of every situation in your life, every challenge, every trial, and he will exercise his loving care and protection at all times. He stands ready to provide peace that surpasses understanding. Most of all, Jesus died for you. He said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

What does that mean? The answer to that question reveals the paradox of Christmas... God sent his Son to lay down his life for his sheep so that they might have life. Or to be more personal: he laid down his life for *us* so that *we* might have life.

Conclusion:

Why did God send Jesus into the world? We said earlier the answer to that question was: to demonstrate his measureless love to the world! But that's not all. Let's read that verse one more time, and this time let's read the whole verse: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." Why did God send Jesus into the world? To demonstrate his measureless love to us, *and* to give us life through him. To know Jesus is to have life. True, rich, meaningful, abundant life!

Do you know, in a personal, tangible, life-giving way, the gift of Jesus Christ? Jesus came to die, so that we might have life and be reconciled to God. If you have never received the gift of Jesus Christ, open your hands and receive him today. All you need to see is God's great love for you, your great sin before him, and

Christ's great sacrifice and salvation through the cross, and say, "God, I need you. I want you in my life. Change me and make me a follower of your Son." That is the greatest gift a person can ever know. Pray.