

Bethlehem

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Date: 08 December 2024

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, please turn to Micah chapter 5.

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We had this actor come in. He was a Christian. He was an actor. And he was telling us just about how to read the emotion of the text and the drama of the text.

And really how if some of you were there at the I Am Mark event, you would know that just by doing that, you can suddenly understand something in a way that you didn't before. And so these accounts and stories are full of emotion, full of drama, full of context.

[1 : 45] And if you read them with the right tone and pace and all that kind of stuff, it can really bring it to life. And so this actor at Bible College gave us all a verse that we were to go away and have a think about throughout the day.

And we were all to come back and do the verse with drama. You know? And this verse was given to me. And so I was like going away and I was reading it and reading it.

And I'm like, right, I know how I'm going to do it. And I'm really going to give it, you know, give it my all. And every one of my classmates were getting called up and called up. And I'm like, when am I going to get my turn?

And the pressure was building. And I think I wasn't last, but I was second to last. And I went up and I'm like, this is the moment. And I just went for it and I totally messed up.

And everyone laughed and I felt like a wee schoolboy again. But it was so funny. It was so funny. And it was a moment that really greatly humbled me. And it was because of that, if you look at the verse there, it doesn't just say Bethlehem.

[2 : 45] It says Bethlehem Ephrathah. And I totally messed that word up. So I'm not going to do that today, okay? I was just thinking there as well.

In terms of humility, you know, I probably should have been a little bit gentler and patient with Ezra there. But hey-ho, you live and learn. Now, Micah 5.2.

You'll be glad we're not doing a whole chapter of Exodus. Micah 5.2 says this. Prophet was, again, around the time of Isaiah and some of the other prophets, hundreds of years before Jesus.

And Micah says this. Bethlehem was a kind of nowhere place, just a small village south of Jerusalem, small among the clans of Judah.

But from Judah and King David was going to come the Messiah. And this prophecy is saying that the Messiah is going to be born in this little town, Bethlehem Ephrathah.

[4 : 16] The reason why the double name there is because there was another Bethlehem further north. And so this is signaling that this is the Bethlehem that is the city of David.

Now, in a little countryside village town, perhaps not too dissimilar to Bethlehem, I used to spend a lot of time in a little countryside village town called Straven.

And some of you are from there. I used to spend a lot of time because I became a Christian in Straven. And I spent almost every day there.

And Straven's not the best place for public transport. And in order to maximize my time in Straven, I used to wait until the very last bus, which was 10 to midnight.

This was a gamble. And as if it wasn't bad enough, I didn't wait in the Common Green, the center of town. I used to wait up at the golf course, which is the exit to East Kilbride, because the view is much nicer up there.

[5 : 23] Anyway, yeah, you get all the down and outs down in the Common Green. I'm kidding. I'm joking. But I used to go up to the golf course and wait up there. But the thing is, there's not many stops between Straven and East Kilbride.

And so sometimes, occasionally, the driver would come into the Common Green on his very last run. And the depot that he's going to return the bus to is in Hamilton. And he'd come in the Common Green, and if nobody was there, he would think, nobody's going to East Kilbride.

And he would just turn around and go back to Hamilton. And I'd be sitting up at the golf course like, when is this bus going to come? Instead of finishing its last route, he would just go back to Hamilton.

And it did happen to me a couple of times. I was up at the golf course, waiting and waiting, until the point where you're like, okay, a bus is not coming. It's not coming. And a couple of times I walked home.

Not a good idea. There's no paths going from Straven to East Kilbride. How long do you wait until you're sure that the bus is not coming?

[6 : 33] Are there any other things that can help you know if the bus has already been? Or is there any good reason to even expect that a bus is coming in the first place?

And so, when we think about Micah, or some of the other prophets, I think there's only three possibilities when it comes to the Messiah. Okay, number one, the prophecies are not real.

Therefore, we shouldn't expect a Messiah to come. Number two, the prophecies are real. And it's right to expect that a Messiah is going to come. Number three, the prophecies are real.

The Messiah has already come. Okay, so either they're not real and we shouldn't expect any Messiah to come. Like me up at the golf course, maybe buses are not real and there's not a bus coming.

Number two, the prophecies are real and we should expect a Messiah. Okay, buses are real and I'm right to wait at the bus stop. Or number three, which I experienced personally, prophecies are real and the Messiah has already come.

[7 : 35] The buses are real and the bus has already come and I've missed it. So, think of that bus in Straven, the last bus. Is there any good reason to expect a bus to come in the first place?

Yes. Yes. For one thing, there is a sign saying the bus is coming and here it is and it's you. And there are many other factors and information indicating the coming of a bus.

There have been others like it who have come before. Ones that give you an idea that there's going to be something like that coming later. Now, I'm standing there and the bus doesn't show up and I can think, well, this was all just a cruel joke.

Someone told me that a big metal thing called a bus exists and I've been waiting here for it and they don't exist. I've been waiting for a fool for something that doesn't exist. Or, I can think, it seems very late but I believe there is a bus to come so I will wait.

Or, I can think, it is late. I believe that a bus was due. The information said it was coming at this particular time.

[8 : 50] Granted, I'm not at the main bus stop. Perhaps the bus has already come and I've missed it. Now, do you see the connection with prophecies in the Messiah? There are many indications that people like Micah along with the other prophets honored in the Old Testament were indeed true prophets.

The things that they predicted could not be predicted or happened by chance hundreds of years before they happened such as the exile and the destruction that came upon Israel and Judah.

There's many indications that these prophecies are real and so there's this expectation. I would encourage you to go look for yourself and find confidence in this. But this morning, I'm not going to focus on whether they are true or not but whether they've been fulfilled or not.

whether the bus has already come or it's still to come. And so last week, we looked at the virgin birth in Isaiah 7.14 and we saw how Matthew used this as his first quote.

It's showing that Jesus is of the line of David, King David. And Matthew recorded a real event in history in his day that Mary, this woman, conceived Jesus even though she'd never been with a man and he explains that event by quoting this prophecy in Isaiah 7.14.

[10 : 11] Now the next event in Matthew's gospel, he records where Jesus is born. And this time, he shows the chief priests and scribes are the ones that actually quote this prophecy from Micah 5.2.

There's another piece of the messianic puzzle. Little by little, God is revealing little details of the coming Christ. And when these wise men turn up at Herod's palace asking for the one who is born King of the Jews, Herod puts two and two together and asks for the one who would be Christ.

Herod actually says, this sounds like the Christ. And so he asks the chief priests and the scribes, where is it the Christ is to be born? Because that's probably what they're talking about.

So we know by Herod's day, the Christ hadn't yet come. So whatever happened in those 700 years, the Christ hadn't yet come. Enough for Herod and the chief priests and scribes to think, no, he's still to come.

And this is where it says that he's going to be born. Firstly, Herod, a little bit of, some of you might know this. I know some of you are into history. Herod is sitting as the acting King of the Jews.

[11 : 30] Herod was given the title King of the Jews. And so when these wise men come and say, where's the one born to be King of the Jews? That's an offense to Herod. Secondly, the Jewish Bible experts tell him that the Christ will be born in Bethlehem, indicating that it's not yet been fulfilled.

They were all expecting this thing to happen. And Herod's like, oh, not on my watch. Not someone who's going to usurp my throne. An interesting side note about Herod.

Herod, although he was given the title of King of the Jews, was not a Jew. Herod himself was not a Jew. He was an Edomite. Now, if you know your Bible, you know where the Edomites come from.

And this is, this is, you couldn't make this up, right? This is really, a really cool piece of convergence of prophecy, right? Now, they say that perhaps the star of Bethlehem was a convergence of planetary bodies or stars.

Well, on the ground, there's a convergence of prophecies as well, because the wise men go because of this star, and there's a prophecy in Numbers, out of Jacob, a star shall arise, out of Israel, a scepter, right?

[12 : 50] So, out of Jacob, a star shall arise, and they think, that's the Christ, that's the king of the Jews. The wise men follow the star and find Herod, who's called king of the Jews, and he comes from Esau, Jacob's brother.

Get that. What are the chances of that? A star will come out of Jacob, and the one sitting on the throne is Jacob's brother's descendant. A false king. Really, really interesting.

And, I was talking to someone the other day, that says, why do you think they went to the palace? Did they not know about Bethlehem? They didn't know, the wise men didn't know the prophecy about Bethlehem.

It was likely that they heard some prophecies because Israel were in Babylon during the exile, and they heard something, and they came, but where do you think a prince is going to be born but in the palace?

So, one reason, probably because they thought a prince would be born in the palace. A second reason is, Matthew says, these things need to fulfill prophecy, so Herod needs to know about this, so that the other thing, the really bad thing that happened in Bethlehem that Herod did, should be fulfilled.

[14 : 03] However, moving on. So, he calls the chief priests and the scribes the ones who would be most likely to know where the Christ would be born, and they say, oh yeah, there's a prophecy in Micah 5 that he would be born in Bethlehem.

Now, in Matthew, it says Bethlehem of Judea, which is Bethlehem Ephrathah. And so, up to this point, no one has been born in Bethlehem that has fit the profile of the Messiah.

And then Matthew explicitly connects Jesus' birth in Bethlehem to this prophecy that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, and Matthew is saying, well, I told you about Isaiah, I told you about the virgin birth, and look at this, Jesus fits the profile of the Messiah.

Now, has anyone who has been born in Bethlehem since Jesus, we've had 2,000 years, has anyone since Jesus been born in Bethlehem and fit the profile of the Christ?

Basically, has the Messiah bus already come, or should we keep on waiting? So, let me illustrate this. Right? If I were to say something like this, if I were to prophesy, right, and say, a man will be born in Scotland, what are the chances of that happening?

[15 : 23] Pretty likely. It happens every day. Right? What if I were to say, right, a man is going to win Wimbledon next year? What are the chances of that happening?

It's going to happen. A man has to win. A man and a woman win Wimbledon every year. What if I was to say, a man, right before, right at the start, when Wimbledon first started, if I were to say, a man who is born in Scotland is going to win Wimbledon?

Who fits that profile? Now, I don't know if you know this, but two men fit that profile. Did you know that? Two Scotland-born men have won Wimbledon ever since it began.

Out of the millions of boys born in Scotland, two have won Wimbledon. In 1896, a Scotland-born Harold Mahoney won Wimbledon.

And then 117 years later, Andy Murray was the next and only other Scottish person to win Wimbledon. And he won twice, 2013, 2016.

[16 : 31] So, two candidates that are fitting the profile. What if I was to say, right at the beginning of Wimbledon, if I was to say, a man will be born in Glasgow and will win Wimbledon?

What are the chances? Please, has that happened or are we still waiting on the bus? So, we know that Harold Mahoney was Scotland-born and won Wimbledon.

We know that Andy Murray was Scotland-born and won Wimbledon. The only two guys, has the bus already come or are we still waiting? What do you think? Do you think either of them were born in Glasgow?

Yes, yes, we've got some saying no. Has the Messiah come or are we still waiting? Harold Mahoney was born in Edinburgh.

Where does Andy Murray come from? Dublin. Interestingly, later on in Jesus' life, they said about Jesus, he cannot be the Christ because we know the Christ comes from Bethlehem and this chap is from Galilee.

[17 : 46] But what did they not know about Jesus? He was born in Bethlehem Maternity Ward. What do we perhaps not know about Andy Murray? He was born in Glasgow.

So, there you have it. So, I could say a man will be born in Scotland happens every day. I could say a man will win Wimbledon happens every day. I could say that a man born in Scotland will win Wimbledon and two men have fulfilled that.

But if I were to say back when Wimbledon first began, a man born in Glasgow would win Wimbledon, it has now happened and the only one who fits the profile is Andy Murray.

And do you see my point? So, with these prophecies, ever since Micah uttered these words, all the way up to King Herod's day, no one fit that profile.

And in 2,000 years since then, no one else has fit that profile. But one man, 2,000 years ago, fit this profile. The only one. The only one. So, what does that tell us?

[18 : 46] Are we still waiting? Or has it already happened? It's already happened. That man, Jesus, fits the profile like no one else ever has. Never turned out to be anyone else in 700 years before him.

Hasn't turned out to be anyone else in 2,000 years since. And it's not like it's the only credentials that Jesus has that he was born in Bethlehem. He went on to fill many other prophecies about this ruler.

And we have a rich variety of historical evidence for that. And so, they said of Jesus in his day, how can the Christ come from Galilee? The scriptures say that he'll be of David's line and from Bethlehem.

Yet, little did they know that Jesus was from the family of David's line and was born in Bethlehem. Now, what does this mean for us if Jesus is the guy in Micah 5, 2?

Well, for them, for them, it meant that in the midst of dust and darkness and devastation, a man will come and he will rule and establish a kingdom that lasts forever.

[19 : 52] That he will bring justice, he will rule with power, and he will bring security and establish peace forever. Now, many of the Jews struggle with this presently because to them, there isn't this worldwide peace that they were expecting.

The kingdom has not yet fully been restored, but many times Jesus says, this is not going to happen like you expect it to happen. It's not on your time scale. It's not in the way that you think it will happen.

And so, they didn't expect, for instance, the Messiah to have to suffer at first. Yet, Isaiah 53 predicts that the Messiah should suffer first. Another expectation is that the Messiah would bring a recognition of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the whole world.

Yet, people are coming to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Jesus all over the world. And see, some of these expectations that the Jewish people had and have, and they think, well, it can't be him because this hasn't happened.

It's actually happening. This is happening. There are a bunch of people at Bells Hill this morning who are looking to the true God because of Jesus. It's happening.

[21 : 12] And so, all the families, this is another expectation, in Genesis 12, all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's offspring.

People from all over the world are being blessed by Jesus. who is Abraham's offspring? Peter says, in Acts 3, that Jesus is Abraham's offspring and that a big part of the blessing, what does it mean that all the families will be blessed?

Well, Peter says, in Acts 3, that he will bless us by turning us from our wickedness back to God, that we would have forgiveness and eternal life in his name. This is happening, folks, all across the world.

Here's the point. If you are looking for this Messiah, but you have rejected Jesus of Nazareth, who fits the profile like no one else, then, like me at the golf course, you are waiting for a bus that's never going to come because it already has come.

Like me, the bus came and left and I missed it. And there's many people in the world who are still expecting this to happen and we're trying to say, it happened. Get on the bus.

[22 : 25] You were at the wrong stop. You're either on the bus or you're waiting for the bus at a stop and the bus has already come and you've missed it.

Now, I had to walk home. I didn't have to. I could have phoned a taxi or knocked in Alan's door before I ever knew him. It took me three hours to walk home and there was no path, so, you know, and if I ever tried to hitchhike, people are like, in the dark of the countryside, surely he's a murderer.

Walk home three hours in my own strength, but where the Messiah is going to take us, we can never get there on our own strength. We can never walk there. We can never get there. We need to be on that bus.

Only he can take us there. Only he can take us out of death. This is a problem that every human being, regardless of what you believe, has to face. Do you know where you're going? When you're on that bus, oh, you know where you're going.

You know where you're going. And Micah 5 goes on to say, and they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace.

[23 : 39] Folks, this is the bus that we're on. This is where this bus is going. This is where Jesus has taken us. And if you're on that bus, you know that to be true. His name is Jesus.

What a thing. And if God did not fail to bring about His promise, if God did not fail to send His Son and fulfill these promises, God will not fail to bring Him back.

Jesus will not fail to return. He is coming back, and He's taking us to be with Him in a kingdom that is secure forever, in a kingdom that is ruled with justice and peace, where He is our good and gracious King.

What an amazing thing. What a hope we have, because these things have already been fulfilled. What confidence we have, not only in who Jesus is, but in where He has taken us.

What a great thing it is. Let me pray. God, some of these things are just hard to understand, but you have not hidden these things, and you do not ever ask us to take a leap of blind faith.

[24 : 51] You have shown yourself time and again to be trustworthy. Please help us to have confidence in you, because time and again you have proven yourself to be true and trustworthy.

Help us to see in the Scriptures the ways in which you are fulfilling these things. Help us to see in the world the ways in which you are fulfilling these things, and help us to see Jesus, to see that He is the Messiah, that He is your Son, that He came for us, and that He wants to take us with Him into eternal life, into His kingdom forevermore.

Lord, we give you thanks for your word in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.