

"The Humble King"

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[0 : 00] Advent is this season when we celebrate Jesus coming to earth in the birth of a baby.

! The second son of the Trinity came to earth for us. This is a season that leads up to Christmas when! We celebrate his birthday. It's a season of anticipation, of hope, of longing, and of light. For the next four Sundays, our sermon series will be from four Old Testament passages that were picked up by gospel writers when they described the birth of Jesus. So, today we'll look at Micah chapter 5. Next week we'll look at Jeremiah 23. The week after we'll look at Numbers 24, and the last will be Isaiah 9. You can see these passages on this card, so you don't have to remember what I just said. It's just... it's on there for you, so if you want to read ahead and look at those things. What we want to do is to look at how it is that the Scriptures display the glory of the coming of Jesus, right? And particularly how He comes as a King in various ways. We're going to look at it in the original context of the Old Testament. We're going to connect to how the New Testament writers understood how they pointed to Jesus, and then hopefully connect it to our lives today as well.

So, with that, I want to invite you to turn with me to Micah chapter 5. Micah is in the Minor Prophets. It's somewhere in the middle. It's past Ezekiel and before Matthew. So, that narrows it down just a little bit, and I'm having to find it myself too. So, and I do not have a page number. We want to apologize as we're looking for that because the Pew Bibles that we've recently gotten were repaginated without us knowing it. And so, some of you may be struggling to know. There's an index in the front that'll tell you what the page is, but some of you may have two different Bibles with two different pages. So, we're working on figuring out how to get that information to you more regularly. But for now, we just want Micah. Micah is between Jonah and what comes after it, Habakkuk, if that helps you find it in your... So, we're going to look at Micah chapter 5, verses 1 through 5a, 1 through the beginning of verse 5. So, let's go ahead and read that passage together, and then we'll look at God's Word together.

Micah chapter 5. Now, muster your troops, O daughter of troops. Siege is laid against us. With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days. Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel, and he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace. Let's pray together and ask for God's help. Lord, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that you have given it to us so that we might not have to imagine who you are, but that we might be able to read and understand so that we can know you and your ways. Thank you for your Holy Spirit that helps us to understand your Word. Lord, I pray for help this morning that I might speak the words that you would have me speak, and that together, Lord, we would sit under your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. In this prophecy, Micah gives us a hope of a better king, and we're going to look at it in three sections. We're going to look at the urgent need for a better king. We're going to look at the humble source of a better king and the glorious fulfillment of the promise for a better king. So, if you're taking your outline, there it is. The first part is in verse 1 of Micah 5, the urgent need for a better king. The call here in the text is to muster troops because siege is laid against us. With a rod, they strike the judge of

[5 : 07] Israel on the cheek. Now, Micah prophesied broadly in the late 8th and early 7th century BC. So, that's broadly 730 to 680 BC. His time straddled a time in the history of Israel when calamitous things were happening. In 722, the large nation of Assyria came down and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, and it was the end of that part of Israel politically forever. Ten tribes

were scattered, broken, and lost in many, many ways. And Micah, proclaiming God's Word during this time, was saying this has come because of the judgment because Israel did not follow God. Their kings consistently did not worship God, but turned aside to idols, the idols of the peoples around them, to worship instead of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they had failed fundamentally to trust in God to believe that God would be their protector and their provider. And instead, they turned to their armies and to political treaties and to other ways to try to save themselves rather than trusting in God to save them. And Micah puts a pin earlier on in the book about it was the kings in particular who had failed to lead them well. And so, you see in verse 1 where it says, with a rod, they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. That is, the Assyrians came and they dishonored the kings who were sitting in the throne because of their disobedience.

Now, it is likely given the reference to a siege that this... many commentators think this part of Micah's prophecy was written right around 701 because in 701 BC, the Assyrian army that had come down 20 years earlier and conquered the northern kingdom continued its push into the southern kingdom and in fact came to the doorstep of Jerusalem. And Sennacherib, the king of Assyria at that time, was ready to lay or laid siege to the nation or to the capital city of Jerusalem. And this was a terrible thing. You could read about this in 2 Kings 18 and 19, or if you remember, we read about this last spring in 2 Chronicles 32, or you can also read about it in Isaiah 36-37. It was during the kingship of Hezekiah, and Jerusalem was besieged by an army that they could not hope to defeat.

God's holy city was in danger of being overrun and lost. And this is what Micah 5-1 shows us. There was an urgent need. And though Hezekiah actually stepped up to the plate in that time and humbled himself and turned to the Lord, and God miraculously intervened to deliver Jerusalem from Sennacherib, yet the faults of the kings and the faults of the sin of the people of Israel continued. And so, approximately 120 years later, the Babylonians came and did lay siege and conquered Jerusalem. And they salted the fields, and they broke the walls, and they destroyed the temple and the palace.

God's judgment came upon God's people because of their sin. And there was a cry that came out in the midst of this, a cry for a better king. Now, if you fast forward 700 years or so to the time of the birth of Jesus, the people of Israel were in a similar circumstance, weren't they? They were under Roman occupation and rule. They had been a vassal state, in fact, basically ever since the fall of Jerusalem in 586. They had a king, King Herod, who was a puppet, a puppet ruler for Rome, who did not honor God, who did not worship Him, and did not trust Him to be the deliverer of God's people. And they cried out as well, God, will you send your better king?

[10:05] There was an urgent need for something more. And friends, as we think about our lives today, we aren't the nation of Israel, so our Savior won't be a political one.

But don't we also cry out for something better as we look at the brokenness of the world? Maybe we look at the brokenness of our own lives, and we think, God, can you deliver me in this? How much are we like the kings of Israel of old, where we seek for power and control to protect ourselves, where we worship other things, wealth or achievement, pleasure or status, to save us, to give our lives meaning?

How often do we have other kings, lesser kings ruling our lives? Micah moves from this dire situation of an urgent need of a greater king to the promise, the promise of a better king. But it comes in a surprising way.

As we look at verse 2, we see that there's... Micah proclaims a humble source for a better king. Now, this is a remarkable thing, right? God chose Bethlehem to be the place where this king would come from. Now, Bethlehem is not a completely insignificant place. If you did look in a concordance, you would see that Bethlehem was a place, it seemed, where Jacob buried his wife, Rachel. It is, in fact, the city of Boaz, where Ruth and Naomi relocated to when they came back from Moab. And all of the wonderful story of the book of Ruth happened in Bethlehem. And of course, it is the city of David. It is where David tended his father's sheep on the hillsides. It is where he came from. And so, there is this resonance of Bethlehem not being something, but in Micah's time, and I think throughout all of history, it's still been a small provincial rural town. Not big enough even to have enough to contribute to the army of Israel when it gathered for war. It's the equivalent of Podunk USA. Now, okay, I looked this up. Did you know that Podunk actually is a local word? Podunk was a region of Guilford. It is also, there's a Podunk River in East

Hartford. So, Podunk and Mark Twain was popularized, one of the people who popularized the idea of Podunk. There's also a Podunk in New York too, near Ulysses. Go figure. So, anyway, but Podunk is the middle of nowhere. Insignificant. Small town. Nothing important happens here. But Micah says, but you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah. That means you're so small. You can't even contribute to the army. From you shall come forth a ruler. It's remarkable, isn't it?

[13 : 46] As you look ahead to the birth of Jesus, in our human wisdom, where would we have put the birth of Jesus? Maybe it would have been in Jerusalem, the holy city of God, the place where the temple lies, the place where the king sat. That would be a good place for a king to come from, right? Or if not that, maybe, well, Rome. Because Rome was the center of the world at that time. Rome was the place of power and influence. Rome was where emperors lived. And if not that, well, at least you would choose something like Athens, which is the cultural center of the world at that time, influencing art and philosophy in deep ways. But God didn't choose any of those places, did he? God chose Bethlehem. Now, some of you were listening carefully when we read Matthew chapter 2 earlier, and you realize that when Matthew refers to Bethlehem, he actually changes the words a little bit. He says, you know, if Micah says, you who are too little to be among the clans of nation, to be among the clans of Judah, Matthew says, you who by no means are too little.

And it's an interesting thing, and some people get tripped up by this. So, I wanted to clarify this. Matthew was looking back at Bethlehem, knowing that it was the birthplace of Jesus. And he's saying, Bethlehem has always been a small place, but because of the birth of Jesus, it is no longer a small place.

So, he's not contradicting what Micah was saying, but he was saying, now that Jesus has come, now that this fulfillment has come, Bethlehem has become a far more important place. It is no longer the least place in Judah, but it's now been given a place of honor. But when Jesus was born, it was still an insignificant place. It was a place of humility. And we know this from the story of the Bible, that Jesus' birth was a humble birth in many ways. We tend to romanticize it, and we have great pictures of stables and stars and lights and kings and animals, and we mishmash all the stories of the Bible together in all sorts of not really historically, biblically clear ways. And we have this beautiful picture. But really, it was two teenagers who had relocated because of political contingency to a place where it wasn't their home. And they ended up having to have their child in uncomfortable and very common circumstances. A new baby was laid in a manger because there was no proper room for this birth to happen. This baby was worshiped by shepherds, not by kings, not by priests.

But by shepherds, the scoundrels, and the smelly ones who lived on the outskirts of town and slept among their sheep on the hillsides.

God's promise came from humble origins. You've probably heard this poem, but it's worth repeating again. James Alan Francis preached a sermon, and in it, he included this description of Jesus.

[17 : 30] He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. He never wrote a book. He never held office.

He never went to college. He never visited a big city. Well, eventually he went to Jerusalem, but he never visited a big city. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He was only 33. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves, and while dying. His executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property that he had on earth.

When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Jesus came from these humble origins, and indeed his humility has characterized him throughout all of his earthly life. And friends, this reminds us that the Advent season is one that reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. God delights to use the outcast, the weak ones, the least of these, in his plans for the world. If you feel like you are one of those, Jesus came to identify with you and to let you know that he sees you and that he knows you and that you have a king who understands and that in his love he has come to be your Savior.

And for those of us who may not feel that way, who in the eyes of the world have much, we are given a bit of a warning in the humility of Jesus. Do not trust in these other things.

[19 : 42] Do not trust in our status or in our wealth or in our opportunities or in our privilege, but recognize instead that humility is the way of Jesus and that we ought to take no pride in what God has done in our lives. To not boast in anything, but rather to see that Jesus came as a humble king for us. Now Micah goes on to describe this better king, this better king that will come in a time of urgent need, this better king who will come from humble origins, this better king who is a glorious fulfillment. I want you to look with me in chapter 5 again, verses 2 through 5, because it's a beautiful picture of a glorious ruler who will turn around the circumstances. Remember, in the first instance of Micah is proclaiming, this is coming when the Assyrians are on their doorstep, when they are threatened with destruction, and it seems that darkness and despair are inescapable. And Micah says, no, even though the day may be dark, and even though this circumstance may not go well, yet in the end,

I will bring forth a ruler in the right time who will bring something glorious instead. He will be, as he says, from ancient of days. That is, he will come from the great line of kings of David, at least, but perhaps I think this suggests even to a further lineage that this one who would come to be the ruler is the one who was with God before the world began. This was the one who lived as the triune second person before the creation of the world, and yet who came to be the king, to be the light of the world. He will be the one who will bring his brothers back and restore them after a time. And you see this happening as Jesus comes. He brings people not just from the nation of Israel, but from every tribe and tongue and nation. He will be a shepherd. We're calling the rulership of David, the one who shepherded sheep in his youth and shepherded a kingdom in his adulthood. This one who will come will stand in his court, not like Hezekiah falling on his knees in abject fear, but who will stand and will rule in the majesty of the name of the Lord. He will be a better king than the kings who failed Israel. And he will come and he will bring peace on earth so that his people will dwell securely once more, and his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. There will be no more Assyrians and Babylonians, no more Romans to threaten his people.

[23 : 07] But the kingdom he establishes will be a kingdom secure and everlasting. When this better king comes, he will establish a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And he will rule in such a way that no power will ultimately be able to stand against him. No political power will defeat him. No spiritual power will be able to defeat him. Not even sin and death itself.

Friends, this is the better ruler that Micah predicts. This is the better ruler that we see coming to the earth in Matthew chapter 2. This is what the kings from Persia, the magi, however, we'll talk about that some other time, as they come and worship him, as they come and honor him with gifts. Because God had given a sign that the fulfillment of what Micah had said so long ago was here. Remember the words that the angel spoke to Mary about this life that was growing in her womb. The angel said to her in Luke 1, verse 30, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. And listen to this description. This is the fulfillment.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. Friends, we know that Jesus has come. And we know that his kingdom has come and begun.

We also know that this glorious hope that we see, we still long for that, don't we? We have an anticipation that Jesus' kingdom will come when he returns and establishes his kingdom fully and finally forever. Then we know, then we know that we will have the better king forever. And now we can live in faith, in faith that the king that we believe in will do this one day. And we can live with hope that the kingdoms of this world and the principalities and the powers that seem to wage war against our souls, that in the end they will not stand. This is the hope of the glorious king, the glorious fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. But there's one more thing we need to see in this passage. And that is this, that the manner of the coming of this king is the manner in the way that he becomes our savior as well.

[26 : 30] There's no way for me to say this better than what Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2, starting in verse 6, describing Jesus. 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.

Do you see, friends, it's not just in the incarnation that we see Jesus' humility, humility, but it's in his work of redemption that we see Jesus' humility. He did not come riding on a white horse with an army at his back to overthrow Rome and establish a new glorious kingdom on earth. He came in humility, and he lived in humility, and he went to death in humility, offering himself up in the place of sinners.

As John says, he came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But to those who did, to those who believed in his name, he gave them the right to be called children of God. His humility was the key to his ultimate victory, and his humility established a kingdom that is more glorious and more beautiful and more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

This is our salvation, and this is the hope of our advent, that our better king is a humble king. He is the king that we most need. As we consider this Advent season, let us meditate on and adore Jesus, our humble king. Will you pray with me?

Lord, we thank you. Lord, we pray that as we come into this season of Advent, Lord, that our hearts would be rightly aligned.

[29 : 17] Lord, we confess how easy it is for us to build our own kingdoms or to long for other kings to be our saviors. Lord, even our culture can fill us with distraction.

Lord, we pray for your spirit to help us to with clarity see the greatness of this humble king. And that our hearts would worship him alone.

Help us in this, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.