**Micah: Who is Like Yahweh?**

**February 11, 2018**

**Sermon #5: “The Promised Messiah” (Micah 5:1-6)**

**1. Introduction: *Christmas in February***

This morning’s lesson from Micah 5 is quite familiar to us because every Christmas it is read as an important part of the Christmas story. Its connection to Christmas comes through Matthew’s Gospel as a snippet of the passage is quoted in chapter 2, verse 6. In Matthew’s story of the birth of Jesus, Magi from the east observe the appearance of a star in the sky and journey to Jerusalem looking for the “one who has been born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Greatly troubled, but wanting to find out more, King Herod assembled a group of religious experts and inquired about the location of the Messiah’s birthplace. Herod asked them, “Where is the Messiah or Christ to be born?” and they replied, “In Bethlehem,” citing two Old Testament passages from Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2.

“And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
    are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,  
for a ruler will come from you  
    who will be the shepherd for my people Israel” (2:6).

The Micah text speaks of a ruler of Israel who would be born in Bethlehem and the 2 Samuel passage refers to a Davidic king who would shepherd the people of Israel. Micah’s words stress that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and, therefore, would be a king in the line of David. The Messiah’s identity as a Davidic king is made explicit with the addition of 2 Samuel 5:2, which reads, “You will shepherd my people Israel.” These words were spoken to David, King of Judah, when the elders of Israel asked him to be their king as well. Joined together, these two Old Testament passages emphasize that the promised Messiah would be a Davidic king, be born in Bethlehem, and shepherd the God’s people.

Jesus’ story, then, didn’t emerge in a vacuum. It was the culmination of a much larger story, one that reached way back to ancient times to the grand narrative of God’s relationship with his people. So when the Gospel writers told the story of Jesus they sought to locate his story within the Jewish Scriptures or the Old Testament. Within its pages they discovered prophetic snapshots of Jesus the Messiah, which demonstrated that he was truly God’s promised Messiah. Matthew was especially interested in stressing the connections between the Jewish Scriptures and Jesus, stressing in several places that events in his life *fulfilled* passages from the Old Testament. For instance, Matthew’s narrative of the birth of Jesus is bursting with these *fulfillment citations* (1:22-23; 2:15; 2:18; 2:23). In Matthew 2:6, Micah’s words, which were uttered long before Jesus’ birth, are presented as clear proof that Jesus was indeed God’s promised Messiah. Yet a closer look at Micah 5:1-6 reveals so much more about God’s promised Messiah than just his birthplace.

**2. God’s Good News in Distressing Times**

The opening words of the chapter are Micah’s call for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to gather their troops because the enemy has laid siege of their city. I have mentioned in previous sermons that Micah the prophet lived and ministered during the eighth century B.C., a time period that witnessed the rise the Assyrian Empire and its subsequent military victories in Israel and Judah. This was a tumultuous time when the Assyrian Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.) and subdued most of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (701 B.C.). The Assyrian Empire dominated the Near East from 745-609 B.C. During this period every nation east of the Euphrates River lived in mortal fear of the Assyrians. Over the course of twenty years the Assyrians engaged in constant military activity in the Northern Kingdom, forcibly capturing and resettling many of its inhabitants in Assyria. In 722 B.C. the Assyrian armies took Samaria, the capital city, and the Northern Kingdom was completely subdued. In 701 B.C. the Assyrian King, Sennacherib, conducted a military campaign against the Southern Kingdom of Judah and captured many of its fortified cities.

When Sennacherib’s armies captured Lachish, Hezekiah, the King of Judah, offered to pay Sennacherib a tribute to ensure an end to his conquest of Judah (2 Kings 18:13-16). But the money didn’t placate the Assyrian king’s hunger for victory and he continued on to Jerusalem with a large armies. Engaging in psychological warfare, he sent his field commander to the city walls to deliver a message, “Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, “The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 18:29-30). He then listed off all the gods of the conquered nations and posed the question, “Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me?” (2 Kings 18:35).

The Assyrian armies then laid siege around the city. The commander’s haughty words uttered outside the city walls were like the strike of a sceptre on Hezekiah’s cheek (Micah 5:1). Yet, in the midst of this turmoil, the prophet Isaiah gave the word of the Lord to the king, telling him not to fear for he will deliver Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:6-7). So, Hezekiah went to the Temple to pray, putting his complete trust in the Lord (2 Kings 19:15-19). The story ends on a triumphant note as God intervened and the angel of the Lord swept through the enemy camp, killing several thousand men. This convinced Sennacherib to withdraw his armies and return to Nineveh (2 Kings 19:35-36).

Micah lived through all this. He experienced the hardships of the Assyrian conquest of several Judean cities, including his hometown. And now their armies were at the very gates of Jerusalem, threatening to capture the holy city. Yet, In the midst of these distressing events, Micah predicted the advent of a great ruler, a Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem. This teaches us a valuable lesson - God gives us good news in the darkest of times. While invading armies are not laying siege around our city, we may feel a little bit discouraged as people of faith in this world. We continue to put our trust in the Lord while others think that this is a ridiculous thing to do. We earnestly seek to do God’s Kingdom work in our neighbourhoods in the face of the overwhelming obstacles. We desire to witness to others that God exists and that he cares for people, yet the response is either polite indifference or harsh hostility. We are fearful that the world has moved on and that Christ’s church is on life-support. Yet this is an exciting place to be because when we are humbled like this, God can teach us the important lesson depending on him. And when we have true faith in God, he can do awesome things in our midst. In the darkest of times, God shows us the light at the end of the tunnel.

**2. The Portrait of the Promised Messiah**

Micah contrasts the distressing defeat of the present time with the future, glorious triumph of God’s Messiah. While the present ruler is struck on the cheek with an Assyrian sceptre, a future ruler will shepherd God’s people in the strength of the Lord (5:4). As the Assyrians humble the once proud Jerusalem, Micah turns his attention to the already humbled village of *Bethlehem* as a source of hope for the nation. Micah directly addresses “Bethlehem,” adding “Ephrathah,” another name for this small Judean village (5:2). Bethlehem means “house of bread” and Ephrathah means “fruitful,” pointing to Jesus the Messiah, who would be the Bread of Life (John 6:35) and whose life and work would bear much fruit for God (John 15:1-17).

God bypassed mighty Zion and selected the little town of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. This not only established Jesus the Messiah as a king in the line of David, fulfilling God’s covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:8-16), but its lowly nature made it a fitting place for the humble Messiah to be born. Bethlehem, “only a small village among all the people of Judah” (5:2) was an appropriate birthplace for the one who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus, the Servant-King, did not enter this world in a blaze of glory, but was born in an unpretentious village, placed in a manger and was adored by poor shepherds. How apt for one who “made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness,” and who “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:7-8).

Out of Bethlehem “will come *for me* one who will be ruler over Israel” (5:2). While it is an easily missed phrase, “*for me,*” makes an important point. It establishes that the promised Messiah’s ministry was *for* the Lord. He would truly be the Lord’s servant. Reflecting on this phrase, Kaiser explains, “the Messiah was to be first of all for the Lord’s benefit and His plans, and only secondarily in response to Israel and her distress” (Kaiser, *The Communicator’s Commentary,* p. 64). Throughout his life Jesus demonstrated that his ultimate priority was to do the will of God the Father. He declared in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” At the most difficult time in his life, when he faced the terror of the cross and the end of his life, he prayed in the Garden, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

Yet Israel would have to wait for its Deliverer, “whose origins are from old, from eternity” (5:2). The pre-existent Son of God will not arrive “until the woman in labour gives birth” (5:3). But when the Messiah finally arrived, he would reassemble God’s people into a new Israel (5:3) and “stand and shepherd God’s flock” (5:4). True to Micah’s words, Jesus the Messiah shepherded God’s flock “with the Lord’s strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God” (5:4). In John 10:11 Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” When the wolves attack the flock, the Good Shepherd does not run away like the hired workers, but remains to protect his sheep from the enemy, even risking his life for them (John 10:12-13). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, not only protects the flock, but he actively seeks the stray sheep. In John 10:16 he declares, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” The Messiah’s arrival marked the end of Israel’s long exile as he reassembled God’s people into a new body, one flock comprised of all those who put their trust in him. The Good Shepherd’s flock is a diverse, intergenerational, and multi-cultural group, filled with people from around the world. Truly, “he shall be great to the ends of the earth” (Micah 5:4).

Finally, the promised Messiah “will be our *peace*” (5:5). Jesus, the Prince of Peace, brings the Lord’s *shalom* to humanity. He restores our broken relationship with God and with one another. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14-18:

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

This is the wonderful *shalom* that Jesus the Messiah brings to the world.

**3. The Legacy of the Messiah**

So what is the legacy of the Messiah in the world? How should we live as followers of the one born in lowly Bethlehem? Graham Kendrick wrote a beautiful song entitled, *The Servant King.* Its final verse is challenge to all God’s people:

“So let us learn how to serve,

And in our lives enthrone Him;

Each other’s needs to prefer,

For it is Christ we’re serving”

The challenge for us as followers of Jesus the Promised Messiah is to live lives that reflect his character. Let’s be humble before God and others. Let’s desire to live *for* Godand seek his will for our lives. Let’s have the heart of a shepherd and with care and compassion guide the hurting, the exiles and the lost to the arms of the Good Shepherd. Let’s spread the *shalom* of Jesus throughout the world as we live at peace with God and with others. And remember, we serve in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the Lord our God (5:4).