

Little Package; Big Peace

Micah 5:2-5a (NIV)

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...

Small things have big impacts. From the tiny acorn comes the mighty oak tree. The giant seaworthy vessel is controlled by a tiny part called the rudder. One rumor can change everyone's perception of you. One tweet can end a career.

Israelite history bears out this truth. Their exodus from Egypt was meant to take them to the Promised Land of Canaan, settle them there, give them peace and rest. However, soon after they left, there is a little bit of grumbling that turns into a cacophony of accusations that the LORD had taken them from Egypt to kill them in the desert. 40 days of Moses being absent led to the crafting and worshiping of idols in the form of golden calves. Neglecting the mop up work following the conquest under Joshua led to a majority of the nation turning to false gods. King Saul didn't wait a couple of more hours for Samuel to arrive and instead went against God's Word and offered a sacrifice without him, which led to Saul to eventually no longer listen to God's Word at all and then lose his dynasty on the throne in Jerusalem. One sentence of unsympathetic and unkind words regarding labor disputes from King Rehoboam split the nation of Israel. These and so many other little things led up to the Assyrians coming, conquering, and exiling the 10 northern tribes of Israel during Micah's time as prophet. Micah, like Isaiah his contemporary, prophesied that more was to come from all these little sins, that the king in Jerusalem would be removed, Jerusalem destroyed along with the temple. Little things led the destruction of the nation of Israel and its exile.

You've seen little things have big effects in your life too. Skip running one day and then it turns into years of not exercising. Recount one negative interaction with someone and that person forever on sees them as a villain. On the flip side, someone said something negative about you and all of the sudden you've lost your friend group, your job, maybe your family. Break a promise once to your kid and then you are humbled when they don't believe you as you practically never keep your word. One swipe on the phone or one click of a mouse on that one site that one time with seemingly no consequences opened the floodgates to a never fulfilled pit of lust. Maybe you remember from your past that one time skipping church which turned into years before you came back.

Little things have big effects, but thankfully not always to the negative. David was just a little guy, considered unimportant by his own family, the least impressive physically before Samuel, but this was the LORD's chosen one to be king over Israel. This little guy became the greatest king of Israel.

Some 300 years later, the prophet Micah tells us that something, someone, even greater is coming from David's family line. "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." (verse 2) From the small town of Bethlehem, population maybe of 1,000 people, a town that a lot of people never paid attention to, maybe don't even know that it exists, will have a ruler come out of it.

And not just any ruler. He is one who is coming who is already around. He comes from David's line from David's hometown, but is older than King David, older than the nation of Israel, older than earth itself. In fact, he has no beginning. He just always has been. As John told us in our Gospel reading this morning, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,14) The ruler that Micah prophesied would come is the one whose birth we celebrated again last night. This ruler over Israel is Jesus, the one born in Bethlehem.

This means that this little package of a baby is the Almighty, present everywhere, knowing all things, God over everything. This tiny little infant actually does what the kids' song proclaims: "He's got the whole world in his hands." This same baby who needs his mom and dad to change his diapers and feed him, who communicates not in full words or sentences but with cries to convey his physical needs, is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Who could look at this little baby and say, "Yep, that's God all right"? For a deity to "depower," so to speak, is abhorrent. God shouldn't do that. And, honestly, that's not the kind of God we need. We don't need a little god; we need a big God! We need a strong and impressive God who will smite all our enemies who harm us, who spread rumors about us, who ruin our reputations, who

break promises to us, who let us down, who are unfaithful to us. We need a God who will make people do the right thing, behave morally, make people tell the truth, make people go to church. We need a God who will obliterate every enemy to bring peace on earth for us.

When we call out our thoughts like that, we sound similar to the people of Micah's day and the people of Jesus' day. They wanted that big powerful, political Messiah who would make big peace here on earth for them right now. In fact, people are still looking for Jesus to be that. Instead, we got a seemingly helpless little baby.

But this little package is a great big peace for us. Micah prophesied about this ruler, "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. And he will be our peace." (verses 4-5a)

This is not simply the potential of what the little baby Jesus could do; he was already doing it. Doing it by fulfilling this prophecy, arranging all things in the world so that he would be born at just the right time in the exact right place, the place prophesied by Micah. This little baby Jesus is not a "depowered" God. In his strength, in his majesty, he is setting aside his power, not making full use of it, to be this seemingly little helpless baby. He's doing this to be, as Paul wrote to the Galatians, "born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." (Galatians 4:4b-5)

Although he is the maker of all laws, God came as a baby to live under them for us, from his cradle to his grave. This is no small thing. None of us have done it. None of us can do it. Even as a baby, Jesus is keeping all God's laws perfectly for us. He actually defines what a perfect child is. For us, this means that there is no gap in the life of perfection that he lived for us. It included his time in the womb, time as an infant, time when we were especially helpless and could do nothing about the evil in this world. This brings us a huge peace that we have a total life of perfection lived for us, done for us, by this little baby.

This also means that everything was done for us so that we would have peace with God, that there was nothing left undone with him. He has accepted us into his family, adopted us. He made us his children through the perfect life of Jesus, lived even when he was a baby. So we are heirs of eternal life with him, heirs belonging to his kingdom.

As such, we live secure because of what this little baby did for us in his first coming. When he returns, he will not be a helpless baby in a manger. He returns as he is, what was hidden by that baby fat, as the powerful shepherd who stands up for us, defends us with his power and strength, so that we will live securely with him forever along with all the other believers, the brothers who returned with God's people.

Little things have big effects. We see that with the peace we have from this little baby Jesus. How will you extend that big peace with the little things you can do? Will it be looking up while you are out and about, looking people in their eyes, smiling at them? Will it be inviting someone at your door to come in? Will it be paying for someone's order? Will it be giving a few minutes of your time to hear what someone is going through? Will it be a little, "Hey, let's not talk that way about that person in that way but instead take their words and actions in the kindest possible way"? Will it be a simple invite to come and see here the big peace comes from such a small package of Jesus, of the big peace that a little church like ours in a state like ours offers?

With the little package of baby Jesus, we have a great big peace with God, the peace of knowing that a total life of perfection was lived for us at just the right time and at just the right place and that this will extend forever as that little child stands and shepherds us with his majesty and strength. With your little things, share this great big peace of Jesus with others because Christ is born. Alleluia! Amen!