

The Peace of Christmas  
Micah 5:1-5  
December 16, 2015

*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 coming forth is from of 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. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.*

In tonight's reading from the prophet Micah, you hear a description of perfect peace. If you were to survey the entire world asking what people would want more than anything, I imagine peace would be very high on the list. In the ESV translation of the Bible, the word peace appears 345 times. That says that peace isn't something that just today's world is looking for, peace has been a prized possession ever since Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden.

So, the natural question is, can there really be peace on earth? Since the beginning of recorded history the world has been at peace only 8% of the time. To put that in more meaningful terms; in over 3100 years of recorded history, there have been only 286 years of peace. Shocking isn't it? And this fact must be added, during that 3100 years, 8,000 treaties have been written and broken.

That's just looking at peace as it applies to war. What about personal peace? What about peace at home? What about financial peace? What about peace of mind? I don't think there is any aspect of life where peace wouldn't be a welcome addition.

At this moment in our nation's history, peace is a rare commodity. We are missing peace in several areas. There are rogue third world nations working hard to develop nuclear weapons. America's financial future is as bleak as it has ever been. Our nation's moral climate is degenerating. Christianity is becoming increasingly unpopular. Can the hope of Christmas still bring us peace?

Micah, along with his contemporary Isaiah, lived and prophesied during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. God sent Micah to warn the Israelites that their sins had not escaped his attention. Micah's message was two-fold. There would be punishment and, after the punishment, God would send peace.

God was going to use the Assyrians and the Babylonians as his arm of

punishment. The Assyrians would be sent into the Northern Kingdom, and the Babylonians to the Southern Kingdom. However, even though these enemies would rain down havoc on Israel, the people were not to lose hope.

Following the time of God's discipline, God promised to send a time of great blessings; blessings connected with the coming Messiah. At some time in the future, a woman would give birth to a very special child in the tiny city of Bethlehem Ephrathah. Verse five of our reading tells us just how special this child would be: *And he shall be their peace* (Mic 5:5 ESV).

This baby boy wasn't going to bring peace, he was going to be peace. Isaiah called him the *Prince of Peace* (Is 9:6 ESV). Then, about 700 years later, on the outskirts of Bethlehem, in a cave or a stable, a virgin named Mary gave birth to God's promised Messiah – and true peace entered our sinful world.

With Jesus came peace. But what kind of peace was this to be? Was it political peace? Not hardly, we still have wars. Was it family peace? Today the family unit is all but non-existent. Was it financial peace? Ask the people who are fed and clothed through the outreach ministries of various churches. So, what kind of peace is Jesus?

Jerome was an early church father who lived around 400 A.D. One night he dreamt that Jesus came to visit him. Jerome was awe-struck. He wanted to do something special for his Savior. In that dream, Jerome collected all his money and offered it to Jesus as a gift. Jesus said, "I don't want your money."

Somewhat perplexed, Jerome proceeded to gather up all of his possessions. When he tried to give them to Jesus, Jesus said, "I don't want your possessions."

Not knowing what to do next, Jerome asked, "If you don't want my money and you don't want my possessions, what do you want from me? What can I give you?"

"Give me your sins," Jesus said. "That's what I came for; I came to take away your sins."

Forgiveness of sins is the peace that the Messiah brings. That's why Jesus is our peace. People experience fear, anxiety, depression, and things of that nature as a reaction to the knowledge that we are sinful. Sin destroys all forms of peace. Without forgiveness, we cannot experience true peace. Once we confess, repent of our sins, and accept Christ's forgiveness we experience peace; peace that manifests itself in three ways.

**The peace that Christ gives is above circumstances.** Happiness is dependent on circumstances. Happiness is an emotion and, like all emotions, happiness is subject to peaks and valleys.

Peace, on the other hand, is the result of Christ living in my heart. Peace is the absolute assurance that I am safe in my Savior's hands, no matter what is going on around me. True peace is trust in the midst of turmoil. The peace of Jesus makes it possible to say with Paul: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Ro 8:28, 38-39 ESV).

A statement like that can only come from a heart that is completely at peace. That kind of peace is only found in the Messiah of God.

**The peace that Christ gives is beyond understanding.** How can a Christian lose his or her job and not worry? How can a believer look cancer in the eye and not flinch? How can a child of God stand next to the casket of a loved one and say, "This is not the end?" How can one of God's people surrender his or her life rather than deny their Lord?

These things are possible because of the peace that Jesus gives when you put your complete faith in him. The Christians of the early church experienced financial loss, pain and suffering, the deaths of loved ones, and even died for what they believed. Things like that are still happening in some places around the world. And to answer the question of how these people carry on, Paul says: *The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Php 4:7 ESV).

**The peace Christ gives is always available.** To have a peace that is above all circumstances is one thing; to have a peace that transcends all understanding is another thing; but, to have this peace always available is good news of the grandest nature.

When Jesus ascended back to heaven, he told his disciples: *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Mt 28:20 ESV). Jesus kept that promise through the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus left his disciples, he promised to send the Holy Spirit to comfort, teach, and encourage them. In Acts 2, we see that the Holy Spirit did come. To us Christians today, the Holy Spirit is still available to comfort, teach, and encourage.

There is never one moment when we are away from the peace of the Babe of Bethlehem. There is never one second when we need to worry, or need to be afraid. The peace of Christ is ours today and forever.

As we move toward Christmas, as the days become more stressful, don't let this world or anyone in it rob you of the peace that Jesus is for you. As an old hymn says: "I've got peace like a river," and you do. Peace comes to you through the river of salvation that flows from a manger in Bethlehem, from a cross on Calvary, and from an empty tomb.