

The Message of Christmas

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The Lord is so good and Christmas is a wonderful time to worship the Lord, to celebrate the beauty of the coming of Christ, and this morning I'm going to be preaching from Micah 5 which we've already read this morning so you've already been able to contemplate some of it and sing the song "O Little Town of Bethlehem." I want us to look at that passage this morning and under the title "The Message of Christmas" the wonder of this message and the great need of this message. As we were thinking about earlier when Jess was sharing about his brother, the realities of life in a fallen world and then Ted was sharing about the hymnwriter's experience that so much wrong with this world and we see evidence of it. Sometimes we forget, we get distracted, we get too comfortable when things are going well and we can forget that eternity is just right in front of us and that the pain and the difficulties that come sometimes are God's gracious, or they are God's gracious gift to remind us of what really matters, to help us to run to Christ. And we see this really in this passage, Micah 5, that's exactly what is happening here.

Micah is a contemporary of Isaiah and so we looked at Isaiah 9 a couple weeks ago and so they ministered at roughly the same time. Micah's ministry, he tells us in his opening words, was during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Well, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah reigned from 740 BC to 685 BC, and so most scholars think Micah's reign was somewhere around 730-700. It was during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah but not completely through those three kings' reign, and so he was ministering in the same time Isaiah was and at a very difficult time for the people of God, and yet in the midst of this difficult time, it's quite extraordinary that the most beautiful Old Testament prophecies that we have in the Old Testament of Christ with the greatest clarity, the prophet seeing the coming of Jesus happened in moments and in times and in seasons of great difficulty and darkness. There's something about adversity that provides an opportunity for clarity and the Lord just demonstrates that over and over and over again. If you really look at Scripture and you look at the moments where God's glory is set on display in its greatest vividness, so often it is at times where just the people of God are struggling and the Lord comforts them with revealing his glory. And that's what we need, we need the comfort that comes from seeing the glory of Christ and that's what the message of Christmas is, the message of Christmas is Jesus Christ. Jesus is King and his kingship is a glorious and wonderful kingship, and everyone needs to submit to King Jesus. That's where life is found.

So the message of Christmas, Micah 5:1-5.

1 "Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us; With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek. 2 But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." 3 Therefore He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel. 4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth. 5 This One will be our peace.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we come this morning, we come mindful of our great need of Your grace, our great, Lord, sinfulness, our preoccupation with the things of this world, our distractedness from what really matters. We come, Lord, in need of Your Spirit and Your word to work in our hearts that You might turn our eyes away from the things that are passing away and You might turn our eyes and our hearts to the one thing that matters, even Jesus who is, in reality, everything that we need for in Him we find redemption, through His blood the forgiveness of sins, in Him we have peace with God, He is our peace. So Lord, open our eyes that we might see Jesus. Open our ears that we might hear Your word and obey it. We pray this for His glory and in His name. Amen.

So the message of Christmas, this all-important message that the world so desperately needs to hear is given through the prophet Micah more than 700 years before the birth of Christ. It's quite extraordinary that we have such great clarity about Jesus this many centuries before his birth, and what we're going to see this morning is the incredible blessing it was to his people at the moment in history that God gave it. So often we focus on as prophets, we think about the prophet is one who foretells the future. That's how we tend to think about prophecy, but in reality the prophet was primarily not, I mean, he did foretell the future but it was not his primary role. His primary role was to speak for God, not to foretell, someone said to forth-tell, that is, to speak for God to a particular group of people at a particular time in history. And so Micah does just that, he's sent by God, the word of the Lord is put in his mouth to deliver it to God's people, and as a part of this word that God has for his people, part of what he has for them is this glorious picture of the Lord Jesus, including his birthplace and his character, the character of his reign which we're going to look at in a moment.

Bethlehem Ephrathah, as Ted mentioned, this was remembered by the Jews when the wise men came searching for Jesus. They came to Herod in Jerusalem, they assumed that the King of the Jews would be in Jerusalem, be born in Jerusalem and everybody in Jerusalem would know about that but, of course, no one did, but when they told them about the vision of a star that they had seen and they inquire where is he, the scribes

quickly realize, well, there's only one place he can be, if he's been born, he had to have been born in Bethlehem because the word of the Lord cannot fail and Micah 5:2 it prophesied that he would be born in Bethlehem, and of course, he was born in Bethlehem. But the prophet is speaking this word at a point in time in history to a people with specific needs, specific challenges, and so I want us to consider this, the message of Christmas under three main points and we'll spend the most time on the third point, but three points and the first is the recipients of the message, the recipients of the message of Christmas. It's so important for us to really understand the circumstances in which God gave this message because that then shows us how we are to apply it to our own lives, the way that we can connect to the recipients of the message helps us see what the emphasis of the message really is.

So the recipients of the message of Christmas. Well, who are they? Well, we see this in chapter, let's turn back over to chapter 1 of Micah and we see, "The word of the LORD which came to Micah," verse 1, "of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." So these are prophetic oracles God has given to Micah to deliver to the inhabitants of Samaria and Jerusalem, in other words, Samaria is the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. Remember, Israel has divided into two parts now, the 10 tribes of the north are Israel, and the two tribes of the south are Judah. Samaria is the capital city of the kingdom of the north. It's the capital city of what is called Israel at this point in history. Jerusalem is the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah. And Micah comes with a word for both but we're going to see as we go through the rest of Micah, as you read through it you'll see that the focus quickly becomes Judah, that the main focus of God is the southern kingdom, the people of the southern kingdom, and God's covenant people need to hear from the Lord because they are not living as they ought to live as God's covenant people. The people of God in the southern kingdom are plagued with idolatry, immorality, greed. They are living lives that are unworthy of the Lord and so those are the people to whom God sends this message of Christmas.

Who are they? There are three subpoints under this first point, the recipients of the message. First of the recipients, who are they? They're the people of the southern kingdom, and we see this come into focus even as you read verses 2 to 9. We're going to read chapter 1, verses 2 to 9. This is the beginning of the oracle of Micah. He says,

2 Hear, O peoples, all of you; Listen, O earth and all it contains, And let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, The Lord from His holy temple. 3 For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. 4 The mountains will melt under Him And the valleys will be split, Like wax before the fire, Like water poured down a steep place. 5 All this is for the rebellion of Jacob And for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? 6 For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, Planting places for a vineyard. I will pour her stones down into the valley And will lay bare her foundations. 7 All of her idols will be smashed, All of her earnings will be

burned with fire And all of her images I will make desolate, For she collected them from a harlot's earnings, And to the earnings of a harlot they will return. 8 Because of this I must lament and wail, I must go barefoot and naked; I must make a lament like the jackals And a mourning like the ostriches. 9 For her wound is incurable, For it has come to Judah; It has reached the gate of my people, Even to Jerusalem.

So basically the Lord is coming. The message of Micah is prepare to meet your God, like also Amos, but to meet your God is to meet him first in judgment. He's coming in judgment. He's going to judge the world, he's going to judge the kingdom of the north, and he's going to judge the kingdom of the south. His judgment is coming to the gates of Jerusalem, even to Jerusalem.

Now so the recipients of the message are the people primarily of Jerusalem. What are their circumstances? We're talking about the recipients of the message, 1B would be, what are their circumstances? Well, they've had a long period of political stability that has come to an end. I mentioned he's a contemporary of Isaiah and when we talked about Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 9, what we saw is that at the end of the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, the father of Jotham, the first king mentioned of Micah's ministry, when Uzziah died, it ended a long period of political stability in both the northern and southern kingdom, and what has happened is this time of political stability has been completely basically turned into a time of upheaval. The Assyrian nation is threatening invasion and for decades now as Micah's now ministering, that has been a real existential threat, a clear and present danger. The Assyrians at any moment could come flooding in and destroy the people of God.

So think about what it is to go from times of political stability to times of political instability. They had formerly been with political stability and peace, they had been experiencing a long period of financial prosperity, social tranquility, it was a good place to live, to be a citizen of the southern kingdom of Judah during the time of Uzziah, but when Uzziah dies, all of that changes and under Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah there will be intensifying danger. They will see things go from bad to worse. They now are in political turmoil, financial ruin, social upheaval. People are afraid. People are really anxious about their futures. That's the circumstances in which the message of Christmas is given. It is given as a beacon of hope to people who are grasping for hope and what the message actually when you put this message of Christmas in its larger context because, remember, Micah, all seven chapters are God's word to the people of Judah at that moment in history, what is his overall message? His overall message is this: God is coming in judgment upon his people, that the political turmoil, the financial insecurity, the social upheaval, the threat of invasion is actually sent by God. In fact, we just read in Micah 1 that the Lord is coming forth from his place, God is coming, and what you're going to see as you read through the rest of this and you see this again and again in the prophets, is that when God comes, he comes in judgment and the amazing thing is when God comes, he comes through the Assyrian army. He comes through the Babylonians as they invade. He says, "I am coming. I am sending them."

That's a hard message. The Assyrians are a wicked and evil people, far more ungodly than the nation of Judah or Israel on the scale of ungodliness, far more depraved, far more bereft of God's common grace, and yet the Lord is coming and he's coming through these people to bring judgment upon his people. In fact, they're going to experience in 701 BC the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah is going to experience an invasion by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, where he's going to basically surround Jerusalem. He, Sennacherib, we don't have this detail in the Scriptures, we have it in the accounts that are found in Nineveh found buried, archaeological finds where Sennacherib chronicles his conquest of Judah when he conquers 46, he says he conquered 46 fortified cities in Judah, basically defeating all of the cities in the southern kingdom that were fortified except for Jerusalem, and he comes to the gates of Jerusalem and he taunts the people of God through his servant that he sends basically who speaks in Hebrew and basically taunts so that the people on the wall could understand what he's saying, doesn't speak, you know, through a translator, and he taunts them and taunts their God. Well, the Lord is going to deliver them in an amazing way just from that particular calamity, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died in one night and Sennacherib limped back to Nineveh.

But it still didn't change the fact that God had ordained all of that pressure to come upon his people and why had he done it? We mentioned who are they? What are their circumstances? The recipients of the message. The third question is: why are they in the dilemma they are in? Well, I said the Lord is doing it, the Lord is coming in judgment but the message of the prophet, though it is solemn and at first glance distressing, there is wonderful hope in it and part of the hope is seen in chapter 5 not in the section we're reading, I mean, that's certainly, that's the most glorious part of the hope, there's even hope in addition to this in verses 10 to 15 where basically what Micah tells them is that, "Listen, the Lord is going to bring this judgment, He's going to bring the Assyrian invasion." You see this, remember verse 1 Ted read earlier when he read Micah 5, he started at verse 2 because that's where the hope begins, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah." But look at verse 1, "Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us." This is Micah prophesying of the siege that will happen when the city is surrounded. Siege ramps are being built. The armies have surrounded them. They're trying to starve out the people in Jerusalem. "With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek." They're humiliating Hezekiah, smiting him on the cheek, the judge of Israel.

Then you have the wonderful hope of the Messiah to come, but then skip on down to verse 5 right after he says, "This One will be our peace. When the Assyrian invades our land, When he tramples on our citadels." Verse 6, then "They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, The land of Nimrod at its entrances; And He will deliver us from the Assyrian When he attacks our land And when he tramples our territory." So Micah is prophesying this time of great, this invasion that will have the people trembling in terror inside the walls of Jerusalem. That's the circumstances of the people. The people of God feel that the world is closing in around them, that the darkness that all around them there is no light and the darkness is pressing in upon them with great increasing force. Their circumstances lead them to the verge of despair, to hopelessness.

That's the understanding that we have from the recipients of this message but in verse 10 to 15, the Lord tells him that the reason I'm doing this, it's not just to bring judgment for judgment's sake, God is going to judge all of those who will not be faithful to him. He's going to bring a separation among those covenant people of God in the old covenant, the Old Testament. We'll see who really belongs to him. The key word in Micah is the word "remnant." There's going to be a remnant that will be saved and many will be lost. But even that is for God's people, it is a good thing when he comes in judgment. It's counterintuitive but it is true and this is what Micah 5:10 says. Look at what Micah 5:10-15. Chapter 5, verse 10, "It will be in that day," declares the LORD," now he's just talked about the time when the Assyrians come in and now how he's gathering a remnant, verse 7 and verse 8, the remnant of Jacob. But then in verse 10 he says,

10 "It will be in that day," declares the LORD, "That I will cut off your horses from among you And destroy your chariots. 11 I will also cut off the cities of your land And tear down all your fortifications. 12 I will cut off sorceries from your hand, And you will have fortune-tellers no more. 13 I will cut off your carved images And your sacred pillars from among you, So that you will no longer bow down To the work of your hands. 14 I will root out your Asherim from among you And destroy your cities.

Do you see why the Lord is doing that? Why is he destroying the cities? Why is he bringing them, surrounding them with the enemy? So that he can deliver them from their sins. God is more interested in our holiness than he is in our happiness, and so he brings whatever is necessary to his people because he knows that what's important is not our temporal well-being but our eternal well-being, and so that's what we see in the ways of God in Micah. This is what's happening, these are the circumstances of the people. They feel like the world is closing in around them but if they will look to the Lord, he will purge them from their sins, he will purify their faith, he will bless them, and in the midst of that as difficult a circumstance that none of us would choose and none of us, I mean, we should never seek the wrath of God to come, we don't invite that, we're right to pray for the well-being of our society but when it comes, the Lord has a purpose in it.

So that's the recipients of the message. The second point this morning is the relevance of the message of Christmas. The relevance of the message of Christmas and we'll look at the same three questions or three subpoints, we looked at who, what and why under that first point, the recipients of the message. We said who are they? What are their circumstances? And why were they in those circumstances? The relevance of the message. Who are we? What are our circumstances? Why has God done this? Why is God doing this?

Who are we? We're the people of God. The church, now the right application of what's happening in Israel is to the church today, not to America as a country. No, America is our environment, the people of God are those who are in covenant with God. In the Old Testament, that was the covenant nation, in the New Testament, it is the covenant people who are in relationship with God through faith in Christ. 1 Peter 2:9 we're told Jew and Gentile, "you are a chosen race, A holy nation, A royal priesthood, A people for God's

own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God: once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." You see, we were not a people but now we are the people of God. We are the people of God, the church and so the relevance of this message is for us to see that in the same way in Micah's day, he was sent by God to give a message to the people of God in his day, we stand connected to them in the sense that we are the people of God.

If you name the name of Jesus Christ, if you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in him, you are no longer what you were. You have come from darkness into light. You're a part of his chosen race, his holy nation, his royal priesthood. You belong to him and he is committed because he is good to our holiness. Because we belong to him and he is holy, he says, "Be ye holy for I am holy," and the reality is there is nothing more blessed to be than to be holy. Sin is a lie. Worldliness is a deception. The best thing that can happen to you and me is that we stop sinning and we become more like Jesus. That is the most wonderful and delightful thing and God loves you and me enough if you are in Christ, he loves you so much that he is committed to your holiness because he loves you. He's the same yesterday, today and forever and the God who brooded over his people Judah and Israel in the 8th century BC is brooding over his people today and he is good.

We're the people of God. What are our circumstances? Well, isn't it amazing, we can think about, those of us who are older, we remember, you know, decades of peace and prosperity, political stability, financial security, social tranquility. In America as American Christians, we have lived arguably the most peaceful and prosperous, and I don't think there's really an argument but some might argue it, the most peaceful and prosperous lives of any people in world history. And as the church, we have enjoyed the freedom to worship. We're free to worship now. The freedom to speak the gospel without fear of being arrested. The freedom to proclaim the glorious gospel including the reality of sin, that people need to turn from sin, that the way of life is to turn from sin, to turn to Jesus, and as we look around us, we see how rapidly the culture is departing from any semblance of morality. I mean, the sexual revolution that started in the '60s was advocated at first free sex and immorality, became homosexual in focus in the '80s and '90s, and now it's really astonishing that what this desire for autonomy because that's essentially what the culture desires is autonomy. The word "autonomy" means "to be a law unto yourself." A law unto yourself, that you're not under law, you basically define everything for yourself. So there was a sense in which that was involved in the sexual revolution. We're no longer going to go by the old morays of, you know, getting married and living in a covenant union for life. No, we're going to...free sex became living together and stuff like that. Then we're no longer going to continue to go by the old standard of man and woman. No, woman and woman, man and man, homosexuality. And now it's gone to a whole other level that not only is the autonomy seen to determine my morality, the autonomy is seen to determined my sexuality, not in the sense of what I want to choose but who I am, my sexual identity. The culture believes you can do that and to say that you can't is the height, to say like we say that God from the beginning made them male and female, God makes you man, God makes you woman, it doesn't matter what you or I think about it. I mean, I know it can be challenging, it can be hard,

we can be sympathetic but there is no freedom found in autonomy. There is freedom, true freedom is found in submission to Jesus Christ and his word.

So when we articulate that now, though, we are now voicing hate speech the culture says, and if the culture continues going the way it is, if the elections continue going the way they are, the left is opposed to the freedom of speech. Political correctness. I mean, both sides are wrong, you know, when you look at politics. No side is right but it doesn't mean they're equally wrong. You look at the worldview and the biblical worldview and you look at it, how does it relate to what's going on, and when you see that, the movement of America is sliding toward more and more godless ways of thinking. Personal autonomy is the highest value and that means that we are heading for difficult times as Christians. There's no other way to see it. Unless God sends revival, we will see it become commonplace to common efforts to silence the voices that are speaking truth. I mean, we see it already, censorship all over the place.

So now you see that, you look at that, how are we to interpret that? Well, we're not to try to bring it on, in a free society we can do what we can to slow it down, but the reality of the issue is this: no matter what happens in this election or the next election, whatever happens we know that God is on the throne and what Micah tells us, the relevance of this, I mean, what are our circumstances, why has God done this, why is God doing this to us today, that's the question, and what you and I need to do is do some serious self-examination because there's such a temptation to be preoccupied with what's wrong out there. Micah is not calling us to do that, he's calling us to be preoccupied with what's wrong in here, what's wrong in here in my life, my heart, my family, how am I not living for the honor of Jesus. And then in the church, how can I help my brothers and sisters to live for the honor of Jesus? The relevance of this message is that God has done this.

1 Peter 4:17, the author Peter who's talking about suffering, that's one of his key themes in his book. Suffering is coming. Suffering is coming. Suffering is coming. He basically says in 1 Peter 4:17, "it is time that judgment begins at the household of God." It is time for judgment to begin and it begins at the household of God; that when God comes in judgment, he starts with his people and that's a fearful thing in the sense that he's a holy God and we need to have a sense of awe and respect but, listen, when he comes with his rod, when he comes with his rod and he brings whatever he brings, what you and I need to do is trust him and run to him and give ourselves more completely to him. Don't be embittered against him. He knows what's best. This must be the best thing for us. That's the wonder of it. No matter what happens, we know that God is fulfilling his purposes and we should worship him. We should worship him that Romans 1 is being lived out before us. Romans 1:18-32, the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. How is that wrath revealed? God gives them over to their desires. As people won't honor God or give thanks, he gives them over to lustful passions so that they have inordinate lust. Then if they won't repent then, if they keep that way, then he gives them over to homosexual sin. And if they continue on that path, he gives them over to a depraved mind where they call evil good and good evil, and you and I see that happening before our eyes. And we can lament for the pain that people are going through and we can try to do

what we can do to stop the avalanche of evil. In a free society we have the opportunity to vote, we have the opportunity to talk with people, but in the final analysis those things are secondary because whatever happens is going to happen. You and I have a responsibility to what God would have us do and you should take that seriously down to voting.

But the bigger issue is when the Lord decides what's going to happen, we worship him. If evil comes in like a flood, what are you to do? You worship the Lord. He lets his hand back and he lets evil come in, he's giving over society, praise him that his word is true. "That's exactly what You said in Romans 1, Lord. You are good and Your wrath being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is a holy wrath and it is right that we worship You for that. Even as we worship You, Lord, we ask You to be merciful. Help us. Help us be faithful. Deliver many from the evils of sin. Deliver many into Your kingdom, Lord. Do it." We pray, we don't become passive spectators, we become active participants in advancing his kingdom and in the midst of deepening darkness.

But the relevance of this message, this Christmas message is for us. We are in times like they were and so then that brings us, we've seen the recipients of the message, the relevance of the message, thirdly, the radiance of this message. The radiance of this message. The message itself in Micah 5, three subpoints under this third point, the radiance of the message. The first is the reality of the King's reign. We could say the reality of the Messiah's reign, the reality of Jesus' reign. That's what he calls the people to look to. That's the vision he gives them. In the words of the prophet in their hearing as they hear what they heard, God's inviting them to see the coming Messiah and if we hear what they heard and see what they see, then the Lord will comfort us in this.

The first thing he says about this person that is coming, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel." He is a ruler. He's a ruler for me. He has heavenly authority. He comes on behalf of God to rule. He possesses ultimate authority. You know, Jesus after he had been resurrected when he was about to be taken up into heaven, he said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. Our King is a ruler, the ruler of all. Not just a ruler of a part of the world, no, he is the ruler for God. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Is he your King? Micah is calling us to submit, gladly submit to his reign. He reigns. Be comforted in the fact that he reigns. He reigns over all the molecules in the universe. He reigns over every determining decision made by any foreign power. He reigns. But are you gladly submitting to his reign? The urgency of the moment is you need to immediately bow and give your heart to Christ. Submit to his Lordship. And then for those of you who already are his, rejoice in the fact that he does reign. He really is sovereign. Meditate on that. Whatever is happening he is governing. The Lord Jesus Christ himself, now the God-man, in the Old Testament, the Father reigned, I mean, God reigned but now the God-man, Christ, God the Son taking humanity to himself, the God-man, a man reigns over all the affairs of mankind, the God-man Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

Hebrews 2:8, the author of Hebrews tells us that all things have been put in subjection under his feet. That's a past tense reality. That's what happened when he was resurrected from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God. All things are under his feet now. The author of Hebrews goes on to say in that verse, chapter 2, verse 8, "yet we do not now see all things in subjection to Him." It's clear when we look around us that though he is in authority, there's still much evil going on and it doesn't appear that he is, but take comfort from the fact that he is. The reality of his reign.

The radiance of the message of Christmas is the reality, first of all, of Christ's reign. That's 3A. Then the second subpoint is seeing in the next few words here: the eternity of his reign. The eternity of his reign. The one who reigns is eternal himself. The ruler in Israel, his goings forth are from long ago from the days of eternity. The prophet is telling us that the baby that will be born he's going to talk about in verse 3, "When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return." He's going to gather his children, there's going to be a baby born but that baby who is born, that's going to be born in Bethlehem, his goings forth are from eternity. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." As we saw in Revelation 1, remember what Jesus said to John, "I am the One who was and is and is to come, the Alpha and the Omega." The one who is in authority in your life is God himself. The eternity of his reign.

This next thing we see in the text is the personality of his reign. That's our third subpoint. The reality of his reign. The eternity of his reign. The personality of his reign. And it's seen in verse 4 in the key word "shepherd." "He will arise and shepherd His flock." The personality of his reign, or the character, you might say, of his reign. This King who reigns over all, this King who is eternal comes to reign as a shepherd. I love that. I mean, that's why people one of the favorite passages in all of the Old Testament is Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." There's something about God and who he is, and it's interesting, the name Micah, do you know what the name Micah means in Hebrew? Who is like the Lord? That's what Micah means. Who is like the Lord? Who is like the Lord our God? A God who is God over all, who is eternal, who reigns and rules, and yet who chooses sinners to bring to himself and then reigns over them not as a despot but as a shepherd. Think about the reign of a shepherd. There's such tenderness in that term, kindness in his kingship. The shepherd cares for his sheep. Jesus calls himself in John 10 the good shepherd, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." What kind of reign is it that the king lays down his life for his subjects? It's a shepherdly reign.

Affection, intimate relationship, that what a shepherd has with his sheep. I love the stories you read about sheep and shepherds, the way God has made sheep. They follow. They know, as Jesus also says in John 10, "My sheep know My voice and another they will not follow." I remember hearing an account, reading an account in one of the books on shepherding, I've got several books about shepherding in my library and one of them talks about two Palestinian shepherds meeting, you know, guys that live in Israel meeting and they have their flocks with them. Their flocks are following them, they come together

and it's like two or three guys, they kind of meet near the watering hole and they're sitting there talking, and all around them are these sheep. So like, you know, one guy's got 50, another guy's got 100, another guy's got 125, and all the sheep just come together and you're like, "Oh, my goodness. What's going to happen now? All three flocks, how are they going to tell whose flock is whose flock?" And what happens is they spend 20 or 30 minutes together hanging out talking, you know, asking, "What happened at the ball game yesterday between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem," or whatever. So they finish up talking, they go their separate ways and they call their sheep and you see the sheep just, that mass of sheep and you've got three, the same three flocks that were there before are the same three flocks after because there's an intimacy. The sheep know the sound of their shepherd's voice. There's a relationship. That's how God reigns over his people. There's tenderness and affection. Not only that, there's care.

A shepherd has to tend his sheep. He has to, a good shepherd will from time to time his care will extend even down to feeling of the sheep because you can't tell when a sheep's got wool coming off its body, is it eating right, and they'll have to like feel the sheep. Sometimes they're not eating and you've got to make the sheep eat. You've got to discern what's going on. You've got to be the veterinarian for your sheep. You've got to protect the sheep. Sheep are defenseless animals and so wolves, predators need to be kept away, and so the shepherd protects his sheep. He cares for his sheep. He loves his sheep and that's the kind of God that calls you to submit to his Kingship, a God who will love you and care for you, tend you, and lead you, and never leave you. You can't leave the sheep and Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age."

That's the kind of shepherd, that's the personality of his reign, his shepherding reign, but he goes on to say that this shepherd who shepherds us, he shepherds in the strength of the Lord. This shepherd who's affectionate and tender is also mighty. He's able to do everything that needs to be done. There is no deficiency in him. He is, as Isaiah saw about the Lord Jesus, remember the names that Isaiah said, "His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God." Jesus is the mighty God. He comes in the strength of the Lord. He comes in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. There is holiness about him. There is exalted character. He is absolutely righteous in all that he does. He always does what is right. You submit to his Kingship, you submit to a King who always has your best interest at heart but, listen, it's not your best interest as you define it, it's your best interest as he defines it which is connected intimately with his glory. He is holy and your best interest is to be holy, and so he will make you holy.

This, the character of this shepherd who shepherds his sheep with his compassion and this might and this majesty, look at the result of that, "And they will remain." The other translations say, "They will abide in safety." That when you are submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ, when he is your shepherd, when he is your King, that he will govern your life and no matter what happens around you, you will abide in safety. But again, it's not safety necessarily as you and I define it. We would like pleasant circumstances, ease and comfort in this world but the Lord Jesus is more concerned about our ease and comfort eternally, the well-being of our souls, and he's saying that you can know this, he will care

for your soul. You will abide in safety. You will never be in a place where you are not safe if you submit to Jesus.

So no matter what happens in the world, his people resting in his loving shepherding care, submitted to his holy and righteous rule, living under his mighty and majestic reign are themselves able to be completely content and completely safe and at peace. That is the reality of what God wants for us. He says this one will be our peace, the end of that, well, first of all, his name will be great to the ends of the earth, that Jesus is determined to make his name great to the ends of the earth, the Father has determined to do that, our purpose is to make his name great, and as you and I dwell in submission to Christ in the midst of a dark world where the world is running away from God as fast as they can and you and I cling to Jesus, what happens is his greatness becomes visible, more and more visible. We shine his light with more and more clarity. As the world gets darker, the light shines brighter. Just think about how powerful the light of a small candle is if you are in a room that is absolutely dark, black dark, pitch dark. That light seems so bright and as the world gets darker, you and I can shine brighter and brighter, and we will shine brighter and brighter as we submit to Jesus, as we exult and rejoice in his reign.

The King has come. He was born in Bethlehem. What Micah saw as a future event 700 years off we see as a present reality. He is reigning at the right hand of the majesty on high. He is ruling and he is shepherding, that means he's shepherding, he's here with us. That was another thing about that picture in Revelation 1, Jesus moving among the lampstands. He's always here among his people. We don't see him. We don't see that everything is in subjection to him. We see the world falling apart in many ways, but his kingdom is not falling apart. His kingdom is advancing. His glory is becoming more clear and more obvious and if we will submit to his kingship and praise him and trust him, we will see that glory with more and more clarity in the same way that the people of God have always seen that clarity in times of darkness because God loves to fill his people's hearts with joy in the midst of a world that is hopeless.

So the message of Christmas, the message of Christmas is who is like the Lord? Who is like the Lord our God who loves his people so much that he entered time and space, that he lived a life in this world under in the effects of sin all around him, he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, he did that so that he might save those who would believe in him, that he might pay for our sins on the cross, and that he might become our King and our Master, and our message is simply this: the best news in the world, the message of Christmas is Jesus is King and he is a wonderful and delightful King, and the best thing that anyone can do this holiday season is to give their hearts to him. We have a wonderful message and that message can't be taken away, that joy can't be taken away, and if we keep our eyes on Christ, it will only grow. We will be more joyful even as the world may become less. We will become more content and we will see his sufficiency.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the wonder of who Jesus is. We thank You for the glory of Christmas, the glory of the reality that You loved us enough to send Your Son, that Your

Son loved us enough to come to make Himself a servant and to offer Himself as a sacrifice. Lord Jesus, we ask that You would help our hearts to be no longer distracted. We pray that You would use whatever circumstances You need to use in each of our lives whether it's external realities in society or it's internal realities in our own bodies, illness, or it's difficulties in our families, whatever it is, or in jobs, whatever it is that You need to do to make us like You. Lord, even though we don't want the bad things to happen, yet if it makes us more like You, help us, Lord, to long for likeness to You more than anything else. Help us to rejoice in that more than anything else, and help us to know that that's all that matters. Lord, we love You and we praise You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.