

Looking For the Light
(Who Is This One Coming?)
Micah 5:2-5a

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Imagine with me, if you will, that we are walking together on a dark, cool night some 2,000 years ago with a man named Joshua. Joshua is a Jew by birth and was raised in a very strict, religious family. As far back as Joshua could remember, His parents had taught Him the Law and the Scriptures. Daily, He had heard the words of the prophets read by his father and explained over and over. But all of that was behind him now. Since leaving his mother and father's home, Joshua in a sense had also left their religion behind. He felt the Scriptures, especially the words of the prophets, were no longer relevant. After all, they didn't seem to apply to modern living under Roman rule. The prophecy that was going to be fulfilled had already been fulfilled long ago and none of it had any bearing on Joshua's life now.

The path we are walking with Joshua is a narrow street in the town of Bethlehem. Joshua wasn't a resident of Bethlehem but his family was originally from there and, because of census, Joshua had to return in order to comply with the law. Now, as the evening wore on and unable to sleep, Joshua had wandered out onto the street with its thinning crowd.

Unfamiliar with the streets of Bethlehem, Joshua happened to turn down a street between two buildings, leading us away from the noise of the city's visitors and toward the "out buildings" of a nearby inn. Just as Joshua was about to turn and head back into the crowded city, he noticed something strange going on at the inn's stable. While the stable would usually be dark at this time of night, there were lanterns burning brightly. Usually abandoned except for the animals kept there, the stable had several men and boys gathered around it, gazing at something inside. Joshua quickened his pace to find out what held their attention.

As he drew near, Joshua was surprised to find a young woman cradling a newborn baby. A man, apparently her husband, was helping her wrap the baby in loose cloth to help protect it from the chilly air.

Then, as Joshua's attention returned to the men gathered around the stable, he saw they were shepherds. Why, he asked one of the men, are you here at the stable instead of in the fields and what was so amazing about this newborn that has you so enraptured? The shepherd explained that as they were watching their sheep, a glorious figure – evidently an angel of the

Lord – had appeared to them and told them to come. He had said that the Savior, the Messiah, was born this night in Bethlehem, just like the prophet had promised. But the Savior would not be born in a palace. Rather, the angel had told them, he would be found in a stable. Then, the angel was joined by a whole host of angels who began singing the praises of the Savior! The other shepherds gathered around Joshua and began to recount the same events.

Joshua was dumbfounded. It was one thing to find a baby born in a stable, but the Messiah? Could this be true? He slowly approached the stable and was greeted by a man helping to care for the child. He led Joshua to the mother and child who were resting in sweet-smelling hay. As Joshua knelt down before the child, he felt something deep inside. A peace - no, a deep sense of happiness and joy – that seemed to sweep over him.

Then his mind went back many years to a time when his father read the scriptures to him. Joshua remembered the words of the prophet:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be counted among the clans of Judah, out of you shall come forth for Me, One to be Ruler in Israel; And His origin is before, from days of eternity. Therefore, He will give them until the time that the one bearing gives birth, and his remaining brothers will return to the children of Israel. He will stand and shepherd in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God, and they will remain for now He will be great as far as the ends of the Earth. This One will be our Peace. [Micah 5:2-5a]

That is what Joshua was experiencing in this baby’s presence – peace. Peace unlike anything he had felt before. Peace he did not want to lose. Peace which made everything else at that moment seem insignificant.

Joshua wasn’t sure he wanted to pick up the remnants of his childhood religion but he was sure he didn’t want to leave this baby’s presence. However, as it was getting quite late and the mother and child were both very tired, Joshua excused himself, but not before asking to hold the child. With the baby in his arms, Joshua found himself telling the newborn all about himself, as if this child would understand.

As he handed the baby back to His parents, Joshua also knew he needed to reconsider certain things in his life. If this truly was the Messiah that the prophets had foretold, then what Joshua’s father had taught him all those years *was* relevant today. Joshua could see how the scriptures could make a difference in his life. All that the prophets had promised *would* come

true. It dawned on Joshua that he scriptures were not about a dead religion but about living, day by day, and growing closer to the Lord.

As we return to our own time, we are reminded that many people today feel the way that Joshua once felt. They feel that the church and the Bible are no longer relevant. They do not see how they fit our modern situation. They wonder how something written thousands of years ago could have anything to do with us today.

Is the Bible relevant today? Peter, Andrew, James, Paul, Cornelius and many others found that it was in their time. They *lived* the fulfillment of prophecy. I have personally experienced the relevance of the Bible, too. In fact, the words that the prophet Micah wrote nearly 3,000 years ago are still relevant today because they remind us that God was already planning on sending us the Savior long before we would know we needed him!

Look at the big picture. Micah tells us that God chose Bethlehem as the location for the world's greatest event. Bethlehem – not exactly the New York, London, or Washington of biblical times! Bethlehem was small. It was overlooked by most people. It was thought of as an insignificant city by most, including the Jews. Yet, when it came to bringing His Son into the world, our Heavenly Father did not choose Rome or even Jerusalem. He chose Bethlehem and Micah told us about it 800 years before it happened!

What does that mean? It means God does not necessarily equate “big” with “better.” In fact, God often chooses the “lesser” to do great things. Who would have ever picked David, a scrawny shepherd boy, to battle the giant Goliath and to later become king? Who would have picked the mismatched twelve Jesus chose to carry the Gospel to the world? None of us would have ever thought to use a stable as the birthplace for the King of Kings, but God did. God chooses the “who” and the “where” to use and to bless.

What does that have to do with you and me? It means no matter how small we may feel in our own eyes, God is able and likely to use us in a mighty way. We may feel unworthy, insignificant, and incapable of doing anything for the Lord, but God knows what He can do through us. You are *not* insignificant in God's eyes. You are never worthless in His book. You, no matter how small you may be in your own eyes, are great in the hands of the Lord.

To ever realize our full potential, however, we must first know the one promised by the prophet Micah. In fact, to really know Him, we must first seek Him. The good news is that He is ready to be “found” by us. In fact, He has been seeking us all along.

The prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus' coming this way: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned* [Isaiah 9:2 – NIV]. He describes Jesus as a great light, a beacon shining in the darkness helping us find our way to Him.

Isaiah goes on to say: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* [Isaiah 9:6 – NIV]. These names have all been given to Jesus. He has fulfilled His “role” of being all of these and more.

Isaiah did not leave any doubts as to who his hearers as well as those who would read his prophecy in the future would be looking for. In Isaiah 7:14 we also read: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* This was fulfilled when Mary, a virgin engaged to a carpenter named Joseph, was told by an angel that she would carry the son of God and give birth to him – thus, the name *Immanuel*, which means *God with us*. In the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet foretold of one preparing the way for the Lord – a prophecy completely fulfilled by John the Baptist before Jesus began His earthly ministry.

Over and over, the prophets foretold Jesus' coming and how He would save us. They were preparing people to know the Savior when He came. God's hope is that we would not only recognize Jesus for who He is – God the Son come in the flesh – but also get to know him personally as our Savior and Lord. That is why He has given us His Word, the Bible. That is also why the writings of Micah and all of the scriptures are relevant today.

So, how does Micah describe the Promised One? Micah describes Him as God's “Ruler in Israel.” Many get so focused on this as meaning that Jesus would be a “political” ruler – which we know that one day He *will* return to establish His Kingdom on the earth – but there was a greater sense of ruling that He has offered. He came to rule *in* the people. He came to rule in our hearts and lives. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we are told: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.* When Jesus rules in our lives, we *change*. We find new purpose and direction, and the power to stay on that new path. When we find the Light of the World, we find new joy and peace that keeps us strong!

I began this message by asking you to imagine that you were walking with Joshua those many years ago. Remember how Joshua began walking the streets of Bethlehem that night

believing that the scriptures and God were irrelevant to him? But then, Joshua was drawn to the Light. Suddenly, he discovered how relevant both the Bible *and* the God of the Bible really were.

You or someone close to you may have felt that the Bible and Jesus are not very relevant today. Can you see now how that was not true? The Lord *is* relevant for you and for all of us. He is still all-powerful and able to do great and marvelous things in and through us. He *is* the Light that expels the darkness in our hearts and minds. He reminds us that we are significant in His eyes and that He wants to rule in our hearts. He wants to love and to shepherd us in a time when so many are looking for direction. He wants to be our Hope, not only in the “hereafter” but right now, daily as we walk with Him.

This Advent season, be reminded that Jesus is still relevant and share the good news with others. We not only celebrate His birth, but also His continuous presence and love. Don't forget to take time and “walk the streets of Bethlehem” in your heart this Christmas season, remembering the Shining Light of Christmas and sharing Him with those around you.