**A Ruler Shall Come Forth**

**Micah 5 (ESV)**

December 19, 2021

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Today we’re going to be looking at Micah chapter 5. Micah is also in the white pages of your Bible, as we recognized from Zechariah. But you probably have at least some idea of the proximity because you’re been studying Zechariah. We’re in a very short sermon series we’ve entitled *Christmas Cards from the Old Testament*. These are verses that you would typically see on Christmas cards. We’re going to look at Micah 5:2, today. Then on Christmas Eve, we’re going to look at Isaiah 7:14. Then next week, on the 26th, we’ll look at Isaiah 9:6. But today, we’re in Micah. What a great prophecy that God gives to us of the Messiah here. *A Ruler Shall Come Forth* is the title of the message. I’m just going to read Micah 5:2 this morning and we’re going to take big broader pieces of Micah in the message.

***2*** *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.*

Amen! I can’t wait for Him to come again! Let’s pray and ask that God would speak to us. We believe that God loves to speak to His people. He loves to speak to His people as we gather together so that we can hear Him together and encourage one another with the message that He would give. What a joy is ours to be here on this Sunday morning, thinking about the Messiah. He came the first time to put an end to the penalty of sin and He will come again, a second time, to rule and reign in righteousness and peace on earth.

Jesus gives a very specific warning to religious people. That warning is against externalism.The fact that we are here on a Sunday morning singing songs, reading Scriptures, listening to a message, puts us in that category of religious people, and thus, it puts us in the path of this soul-killing danger called spiritual externalism. Perhaps as I use that word, some may be asking, what exactly is spiritual externalism? I’m so glad you asked. Let me give you a definition today. Spiritual externalism is contentment with external displays of worship without possessing internal passion for God.

It’s easy to begin to get into this sort of form of life and form of relating to God in a community where we sing songs and we pray prayers. We go through all these and it’s not as though we don’t mean them. It’s just that our heart is not ignited by these things. We become content with just participating in these forms as expressions of our praise to God. Spiritual externalism values reputation over reality and it values self-affirmation over God’s affirmation. In other words, as long as I think that my heart is right with God, that’s what matters. As a result of externalism, we’re not really reflecting on what God is thinking regarding the condition of our souls.

Externalism avoids all those messy internal heart questions. It avoids questions like, “Do I truly treasure Jesus above anything else? Do my acts of worship flow from a white hot zeal for God or am I merely engaged in a religious discipline?” Jesus cautions us often against externalism, but He gives particular warning to the religious leaders of His day. In Matthew 23, He says these sharp and striking words to them to kind of awaken them out of religious externalism. He says

**Matthew 23:25-26** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

When we hear Jesus say these sharp words to the Pharisees, we often can draw an unfair caricature of the Pharisees. We think of them as so superficial that if they were in our neighborhood, we could point them out. “Yes, that’s the Pharisee. That’s superficial. They’re just totally external kind of people.” Yet, I don’t believe that’s true of them. In fact, I believe that if you asked a Pharisee if he loves God, I think he would sincerely say, “Of course I do!” He would be a little offended or maybe quite offended by the question. He might even say, “Look at how much of my life revolves around God. Look at how attentive I am to God’s Law in obeying it and attentive to all these acts of worship that I engage in every week.” I believe that we would be convinced of this person’s sincerity. On the outside, they acted like worshipers and they looked like worshipers. But it is Jesus, God’s Messiah, in His omniscience, who sees through the external façade and speaks to their need to attend to their true internal condition. He speaks with great conviction and boldness because He wants to awaken them out of that external kind of relationship with the living God.

Christmas time makes externalism a double danger for us. It makes it so because there are so many external acts of worship that we engage in at Christmas time. We sing Christmas carols together. Perhaps we gather the family around and we read the Nativity story. We have a meal that we say is a celebration of Jesus’ birth. We have special Christmas services and we gather together with our own church family. We set Nativity scenes in our homes or maybe even on our lawns to remind us of what the season is to be all about. We send out Christmas cards with verses on them. We receive those Christmas cards as well, from friends and relatives. As much as the Christmas season allows us to think about Jesus, it’s still right for us to ask the question, what’s the condition of the inside of my cup? Where is my heart in relationship to the value that I place upon Jesus? Am I engaging in these acts of worship, which are sweet in themselves, but am I engaging with them with a heart of love for my Lord? In our recent series in Zechariah, God confronts Israel with this very problem of externalism. You may remember what He says in Zechariah 7.

**Zechariah 7:4-5** Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me: “Say to all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?

For seventy years they engaged in this spiritual discipline that was meant to bring contemplation regarding their sin, regarding God’s righteousness. God asks the question, when you engaged in fasting for these seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?

**Zechariah 7:6** And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?

Through Zechariah we are right to hear God ask us and apply this very same conviction to our soul. “When you sing Christmas carols, is it for Me that you sing? When you eat Christmas dinner, do you really celebrate My birth for yourselves or for Me?” Our short series this week and through the next is entitled *Christmas Cards from the Old Testament*. We’re going to look and consider the value of Jesus’ Messiah in each of these passages. Today we look and turn to Micah 5:2. Let’s read that again together.

***2*** *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.*

The main idea we want to trace through our study in Micah is that our Messiah is fully God and fully man who brings God’s salvation to us. We have a decision then set before us as the Messiah comes into this world and indeed, comes to us. That decision is whether we will receive Him as our King or whether we will reject Him as our King. In the Christmas story God calls attention to a number of really important truths that drive us to having a heart of worship. The first truth, if you’re taking notes this morning, is that the Christmas story brings to our attention the truth regarding

**1. Our sin.**

We often don’t think of Christmas as a time of conviction, yet I believe God intends it to be. Before God has Micah announce the coming of this future ruler in Israel who would be born in Bethlehem, God has Micah first confront the people for their sin against Him. This is almost universally the pattern throughout Scripture. The message of the Messiah’s salvation is always preceded by the message of man’s sinful state. Isn’t that important that it be so? Before we think about the Messiah, who is a Savior and who is a King, we ought to think about our need for the Messiah and our need for a King to rule over us. So if you turn to Micah chapter 1, right out of the box, here’s the message Micah is given to share.

**Micah 1:2** Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention,

When God tells us to pay attention, what do we do? If God says this is really important, it’s a message easy to bypass and easy to slide over, when God says to pay attention, it’s right for us to say, “Okay, Lord. I’m listening.” He says

**Micah 1:2** …all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you,

Now, that’s not a very encouraging way to start a prophecy. That doesn’t engage someone to say, “I can’t wait to hear about this Messiah who is going to speak against me.”

**Micah 1:2-4** …the Lord from his holy temple. For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open,

He’s speaking of His power regarding His justice and righteousness and sovereignty. Why does He come with this power and might?

**Micah 1:5** All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.

So right away, God has Micah tell the people the reason why I have Micah, my servant bring a message is to first talk to you about your sins, about your transgressions, about your disobedience. Turn to Micah chapter 2.

**Micah 2:1** Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand.

So they go to bed at night and they have all these selfish thoughts about what their life is to be about. Those selfish thoughts have no God at the center, no consideration of what God wants. “This is what I want to do tomorrow.” It’s all going their own way. Then in the morning, they carry out the plans that they’ve been thinking about all night long. “Woe to those,” God says.

**Micah 2:3** Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster,

Why is that? It’s because of their sin. He goes on to say

**Micah 2:3** …from which you cannot remove your necks,

It’s an unavoidable kind of judgment.

**Micah 2:3** …and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster.

In other words, you think you’re so strong in your self-will. There is going to be a day when you’re not going to walk haughtily anymore. You’ll be brought to your knees. This is a solemn message.

The context in which God announces the birth of His Messiah King is the failure of man to worship God, the resistance of man to submit to God and to obey Him. You see, God is telling us that we need the message of the Messiah. Indeed, we need Christmas not because we need more presents or more family meals or more joyful, heart-warming stories to tell. Now, all those things are wonderful aspects of Christmas. I love every one of those aspects. They’re good in themselves. But we need Christmas not because of those things. We need Christmas because we need God to rescue us from our sin. When we hear the message of Christmas, we seldom hear the call of God for us to repent.

Thankfully, in Christian tradition, we often think of Good Friday with a message of repentance. We think of the fact that there is a cross. It is usually solemn and somber. Some even celebrate Lent, a removal of certain things of life in view of sin. Easter is oftentimes incorporated in that sense of a need to take some time to consider our own soul and repent. But at Christmas, when do we do that? Yet, what Micah is telling us here before he gets to the announcement of the Messiah is the need for the Messiah.God the Son did not come out of heaven to take on human flesh in order to try something new. He didn’t leave heaven and all the glories that were there and that he experienced, because He was being bored with the place. God the Son took on flesh and was born as a baby in Bethlehem because if He did not, we would know nothing of God except His judgment. There would be nothing that we would experience of God except disaster.

This past week Kimberly and I were FaceTiming with our daughter in Colorado, Lizzy, and little Asher, our grandson who just turned two. He communicates well with gestures and sounds. Not so much with words yet, but he communicates. We asked about Christmas and as soon as he heard the word “Christmas” he got this big smile on his face and he ran out of the FaceTime picture. Lizzy kind of followed him and he ran over to the tree. He was pointing to the tree. He wanted us to see the Christmas tree. That word ignited his heart with joy. Then as he pointed at the tree, he got down and he picked up a package. Lizzy, his mom, interpreted. She said, “Oh Asher, you know that present is for you.” He was just enjoying that. Lizzy doesn’t want Asher to only relate Christmas to presents and a tree, so she said, “Well, Asher, you know what Christmas is about, don’t you? You know it’s about Jesus coming into the world.” At that, he dropped the present and he ran to another part of the room where there is a little nativity. He picks up baby Jesus and he is holding it and showing us little baby Jesus. He is making these joyful sounds as we talked about Jesus coming into the world. Then Lizzy said, “Jesus had to come into the world because we disobeyed God.” At that, Asher looks at the camera and he points at his bottom. (Laughter!) He understands disobedience and he understands consequences. Lizzy wanted him to connect Christmas with disobedience and consequence. It’s important for us all to learn what Asher was learning in that short little conversation.

We begin to walk the path toward a healthy soul when we connect our own disobedience to God’s righteousness. So by way of application, I want to encourage us all toallow Christmas to be a season when we take some time for humble reflection upon our own sin. Allow it to be a time when we seek the Lord and we call out to Him to help us, because we have such a problem seeing our sin. Our own pride resists it. We’ve gotten used to so many of the sins that have invaded our hearts and our hands. Take some time and ask the Lord, “Lord, search me and know me and see if there is any wicked way in me. Then when I discover my own sinfulness, that you would lead me to the way everlasting, all through the Messiah that you offer in Christ.” So let us take time to seek the Lord’s help in our pursuit of personal repentance for the sins that have attached themselves to our soul.

Martin Luther wrote the 95 Theses and he nailed them to the Wittenberg door because he understood that the church was in such need of a Reformation. The first line that he wrote on those 95 Theses is this. “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” He wanted us to know that repentance is not something we did at some point in our past and then we moved on from. Repentance is a constant need. Why is that? Because sin continues to come at us and sin finds a little foothold. If we don’t engage in constant repentance, that little foothold of sin will deepen into a root and then spring into a plant that destroys everything. So in the Christmas story, God reveals to us so much about our sin. But secondly, in the Christmas story God reveals much about

**2. His Messiah’s justice.**

When the Messiah comes again, He will establish righteousness and justice on the earth. Micah is filled with prophecies, some related to His first coming like here in Micah 5:2. But many are also related to His second coming. He saw them as one big event, yet we know them to be divided into two segments; the first advent of the Messiah in Bethlehem and then the second advent of the Messiah that we’re yet awaiting. Look at Micah chapter 4 as we learn more about the Messiah’s justice, His righteousness. Micah says prior to announcing the Messiah’s coming,

**Micah 4:1-2** It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

Has this ever happened yet? Have all the nations of the earth come to Jerusalem and said, “Let’s all follow the LORD, the God of Abraham, the true and living God.” Have the nations done that yet? The answer is no. Of course they have not yet, not in all of human history. But there will be a future day when that happens because the Messiah will make it so. He goes on to say

**Micah 4:2** …For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

So people will hear the Word.

**Micah 4:3** He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away;

Over the whole world, He’ll be the judge and bring justice. That judgment, His judgment then is the final word. It’s a word that in His power and His sovereignty brings peace. What’s the effect? I love this picture! I believe it’s a picture that is real.

**Micah 4:3-4** …and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,

There is going to be a flourishing and a peace, where people will work and they’ll find fruitfulness in their labors.

**Micah 4:4-5** …and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

So the Messiah is going to bring that kind of righteousness. That righteousness then over all the world will bring that kind of peace, that kind of flourishing. But how will this Messiah to come accomplish this righteousness and peace among the nations? The answer is through His kingly power, through His sovereignty.

**Micah 4:11** Now many nations are assembled against you,

So on that last day, they’re going to assemble against Israel and against this Messiah, against the King.

**Micah 4:11-12** …saying, “Let her be defiled, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion.” But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan,

God is working a plan in human history and these nations that rise up against the Messiah and against God’s people, Israel, they don’t understand His plan.

**Micah 4:12** …that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.

On that future day, God has a purpose for gathering the nations against His people, and that’s to gather them as sheaves for the threshing floor. In other words, it is to be discarded.

**Micah 4:13** Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples; and shall devote their gain to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

We now know that this is a reference to the Messiah’s second coming in glory to put an end once and for all to rebellion among the people of the world against the true and living God. The first coming of the Messiah is referenced in Micah 5:2, where the Messiah is born as a helpless baby in Bethlehem. But descriptions of His second coming are all through Micah’s prophecy. Let’s continue on.

**Micah 5:4** 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,

His people don’t have to fear of being overrun by hostile enemies.

**Micah 5:4-5** …for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

Let’s not mess with God’s people. Why? Because the king is sitting on the throne and we dare not stand against Him.

**Micah 5:10-11** And in that day, declares the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds;

What He is saying there is, “I’m going to cast away your own resources for your own protection and defense because the King is going to be the power and not the armies, not the instruments of war.” He goes on to say

**Micah 5:12-13** and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes; and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands;

You see, Micah is speaking to a people who literally set up idols, idols that they had gleaned from Gentile nations. He says there is going to be a day when the King comes and He’s going to come in justice and righteousness and there is not going to be any of that false worship when He comes. He’s going to remove them.

**Micah 5:14-15** and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities. And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

This is the revelation of the Messiah’s justice and righteousness and sovereign rule. People who love sin read these accounts of the Messiah’s triumph over evil and they think, “That’s a cruel King!” But people who love the righteousness of God read these accounts of the Messiah’s triumph over evil and end to the world’s rebellion against the living God, and we sing. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; let ev’ry heart prepare him room and heav’n and nature sing. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ! No more let sins and sorrows grow.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have a world in which we don’t wake up in the morning and read in the paper of another account of murder, another account of assault, another account of these conflicts that bring so much pain and destruction? All of these sorrows that this world is filled with, another account of a tornado that wipes out little kids. Wouldn’t it be great to never have that? “No more let sins and sorrows grow.” The only way that will ever come to the earth is if God reigns in righteousness. Because as long as sin and rebellion is ruling, as it is now, we’ll have these sins that are destructive and these sorrows that just are multiplied one after the other.

Then that song we sing says “nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.” In order to bring blessings that flow all through the earth and the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the seas, the only way to have that happen is to make an end of sin. The Messiah’s justice will make that so. “He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love.”

So when the nations bow before the King, what do they experience? They prove that His righteousness is absolutely beautiful and glorious. They’re thinking, “Why did we resist His rule? We could have had the beauty of His righteousness exist on the earth all along.” What’s true of the nations is true of your life. Anyone who bows to the righteousness of the King experiences the beauty of His blessing. That’s not to say that we’re free of the sorrows that this world brings. It just means that His blessings flow. In that day, it will flow with a force, though, because sin will finally be dealt with. Also, we will experience not only the glories of His righteousness, but also the wonders of His love. Joy to the whole world!

Jesus invites everyone to come to Him and to bow before Him and to submit our lives to Him. He offers every person the blessing of the kingdom. It doesn’t matter what our past has been. Every person has access to the blessings of the Kingdom of God. But Jesus will not allow sin and evil to flow and blessing to flow at the same time. He won’t allow the sin and evil to flow through streets and cities and nations while He is on the throne. He will put an end to evil and all things will be made wonderfully new. He will restore the world to the condition that God purposed in Genesis 1 and 2, this amazing garden. He will see that the garden will return back into this place.

We make note at Christmas time that the second coming of Jesus will be wholly different from the first. It will be the same Messiah King, but a completely different display of His Person. In His first coming, He came humbly. He came without glory. He came in lowliness and humiliation. He came in the form of a servant. He was despised and rejected by men. He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men. He was condemned to suffer the ignominy of the cross. He was mocked and scourged and crowned with thorns. Ultimately He bled and died through crucifixion. But at His second coming, He will come to rule and reign as King over all the earth with royal majesty, with immense power, with absolutely righteous judgment. Every mouth will be stopped and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen? J. C. Ryle in his commentary on Matthew writes, “May we all remember this! Whatever ungodly men may do now, there will be no scoffing, no jesting at Christ, no infidelity at the last day. The servants of Jesus may well wait patiently: their Master shall one day be acknowledged as King of kings by all the world.” I love that!

Friends, at Christmas let us remember that the baby born in Bethlehem is the King of kings who will return to the earth in great glory and reign on this earth. This story, this Christmas story is not so much a story of a cute, cuddly baby, so much as it is a story of a sin-conquering king. I think it is best summarized at the end of the Scriptures in Revelation 19. Let me read this section of the glory of the coming of this Messiah in righteousness and justice.” John sees this vision of the coming of this sin-conquering king and he says

**Revelation 19:11-14** Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

Imagine that!

**Revelation 19:15-16** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let me ask you, does Christmas elicit that picture? It’s beautiful to see the humble coming at His first advent. We ought to rejoice in that humility of Christ and Him coming to bring about the destruction of the penalty of sin for us. But at the same time, let’s also at Christmas time consider the glory of this King who has come. He really is King. He’s a real king in a real place with a real rule and a real kingdom.

Before we leave this idea that Christmas reveals the justice of the Messiah, we would remark that there is so much confusion in the mind of modern man about the justice and righteousness of God. Now, there is no lack of clarity regarding God’s justice or righteousness in God’s Word. God speaks really thoroughly and really clearly on this matter. It is our unease with God’s justice that makes us confused, not God’s failure to tell us clearly. Oftentimes, churches and pastors are not helping. Many pastors add to this confusion because of a desire to please people. They think, “If I talk about God’s righteousness and God’s justice too much, maybe people won’t come. Maybe people won’t be part of our church anymore.”

One of my favorite pastors, S. Lewis Johnson, tells of a country school teacher who was applying for a job as a school teacher. He was asked, “Do you teach that the world is round or do you teach that it is flat?” The applicant said, “Which way do you want it taught? I can do either one.” Let me ask you, oftentimes, is that who we are when people ask us about the righteousness of God? What do you believe about the eternal condemnation of God against all who would stand against Him, against all those who would refuse to receive Jesus Christ as king? When we begin to look at what other people want to hear, we move away from the truth of Christmas. In Christmas, God reveals truth about our sin, about the Messiah’s justice, but also about

**3. His Messiah’s humanity.**

Look at now the Christmas card verse, Micah 5:2.

***2*** *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,*

The plain meaning of this prophecy is that from the clans of Judah there will be a literal baby who will be born in a specific city, Bethlehem Ephrathah. This person born in Bethlehem will “come forth” to be the ruler of Israel. So He is born a King and His life will give evidence of His majesty. Matthew observes that this is the interpretation that Bible teachers of his day held onto. In other words, this is not confusing, that the Messiah will be a real human being born to a person in the clan of Judah. So Matthew actually quotes Micah 5:2 in this section where Matthew talks about wise men from the east who are coming from the east to Jerusalem.

**Matthew 2:1-2** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Well, there is a king in that story, King Herod, who is full of vainglory and He is also very paranoid. So when he hears about another king to rival his authority, he gets rather stirred up. He is disturbed.

**Matthew 2:3-4** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

He thinks, “I need to find out where this king is born, by people who know the Bible. Surely God talked about the coming of this king.” So he goes to the chief priests. He goes to the scribes and says, “Is there any Scripture that tells us where the king is to be born, where the Messiah is to be introduced to the world?” Why, yes, there is! Right away, they answer Herod.

**Matthew 2:5-6** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Isn’t it ironic that the people who saw Scripture so clearly were blind to the reality of the Messiah? It’s possible to be able to do amazing Bible study and be blind to the majesty of God. God purposed from eternity past that God the Son would enter this world in human form, born in a specific city, Bethlehem, to a specific family, the tribe of Judah. Why is it so important that the Messiah would be born as a baby, a real human being, fully human? Well, God tells us in the letter to the Hebrews.

**Hebrews 2:14-17** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers

The Messiah had to become fully human

**Hebrews 2:17** …in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Now, if we were to ask any one of us, “Why were you born?” the answer would be that I was born to live. God wanted me to live a life, a life that connects to Him and a life that worships Him. That’s why I was born. If I wasn’t born, I wouldn’t have any life and I wouldn’t be able to live a life for God. If you ask the Messiah, “Why were you born?” His answer is, “I was born to die.” He is the only person on earth that was born to die. He already had a life from eternity past, we’re going to discover. But He was born as a human in order to die. Why did He have to die? It’s because there had to be an atoning sacrifice for sin. The wage for sin is death. Somehow the penalty for this people had to be fully paid, fully met. The only way for that to happen is if God the Son took on real human flesh, real humanity. The main reason Jesus took on the robes of humanity is so that He could die as a sacrifice for our sin. As God the Son, He could not die at all. But as a man, He could bear the penalty that our sins deserved and thus die in our place and free us from the fear of death, free us from condemnation and separation from God. So the Christmas story tells us about the Messiah’s full humanity, but it also tells us about

**4. His Messiah’s deity.**

Look at the end of Micah 5:2. After talking about His birth in a specific village, God adds that He is not just a mere man. He goes on to describe this Messiah.

***2*** *…whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

His coming forth speaks of the Messiah’s origin and of His victorious workings throughout human history. In other words, God wants us to know this is not an inactive ruler. He is not a ruler who just simply begins when He is born in Bethlehem. But He has been active as a ruler from of old, from the beginning of creation. Indeed, from before the beginning of creation, from eternity past.

What has the LORD revealed about this powerful Messiah’s workings through sacred Scripture? Well, this Messiah King was active at creation. He was part of the triune God who speaks and through His Word, the worlds came into being. This second person of the Godhead is the one who stopped Abraham from bringing His knife down upon His son, Isaac, thus ending the line from which the Messiah would come. This Son of God was the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush and said, “I Am that I Am.” That’s who He is. In Daniel’s day, the Son of God stands with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire to keep them from being touched by the flames. In Hezekiah’s day, the Son of God is the one who goes out and strikes down 185,000 Assyrians who had gathered against Israel. So when Micah writes, God says this one whose coming forth, whose action, whose origin and action is from of old, he’s not just speaking metaphorically, He’s speaking very literally.

Then he adds the phrase “from ancient days.” That little phrase simply means “days of immeasurable time.” The New American Standard I believe rightly translates it as “from the days of eternity.” John, in opening up his account of the Messiah’s life would say

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He is God of very God.

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

This is the Messiah, Jesus. Why is the Messiah’s full deity so vital to this Christmas story? The answer is only God can truly take away man’s sin. Only God can rule in complete righteousness and power and establish a kingdom on the earth in the midst of the rule and reign of sin and darkness. Only God is worthy of worship. All of these are vital aspects of the Christmas story. If the Messiah were not fully God, we would still be left in our sins, without hope, without connection of God. We would not have hope for a future kingdom of righteousness and peace and we would not bow down to worship Jesus.

So it’s the kings from the east, these Gentiles who through just a little tiny bit of revelation that God gave them responded to that revelation and followed a star. They knew that there was a king that was born in Israel and they traveled hundreds of miles. When they arrived at the house where the child was, it says these grown men who were powerful, wealthy, influential men, they just got giddy. They rejoiced greatly. What does it mean to rejoice greatly? Well, for some people their personality is that they don’t get that excited. I think they’re Middle Eastern. People that I know from the Middle East are more expressive. When you describe them as rejoicing greatly, I think they got off their camels or whatever they were riding and they just jumped up and down. “We’re here! We’re here! We’re here!” They entered the house and immediately what happened when they see the baby? They don’t see Jesus displayed in all of His glory and majesty. They see Him cloaked in human flesh. He is weak as a little infant. What do they do? They bow down. They fall prostrate and they worship Him.

The little glimpse of the majesty, the glory of God in the face of Jesus promoted these men by faith to give everything. It’s worth leaving home. It’s worth the long journey. It’s worth all the dangers. It’s worth risking our life so that in this one moment of time, we might be in the presence of this king and gain a glimpse of the glory of God in His face. In the Christmas story, God reveals the Messiah to be God of very God. Christmas is a time to see the worth of Jesus as God of very God and to worship Him. Let’s not miss that this year. Let’s make that what Christmas really is about. Finally, God reveals

**5. His Messiah’s salvation.**

Jump forward to Micah 7

**Micah 7:18-19** Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

I love the description of the salvation that the Messiah brings, so that God treads our iniquities underfoot.

**Micah 7:19** …You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Isn’t that an amazing picture? You take all our sins, every one of them, and they are cast into the depths of the sea. Can I get down to where those sins are? No. Can anyone else get down to where those sins are? Can Satan bring those sins up once God casts them there? No. They are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. I love this because here in describing the Messiah’s salvation, God places His reputation on the offer of complete salvation for His people. How does He do that?

**Micah 7:20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham,

The nation of Israel and all those who connect to this Messiah by faith will receive this salvation.

**Micah 7:20** …as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

You might underline that. Some of you may remember the old Men’s Wearhouse commercials. Do you remember George Zimmer? He started the company. He would speak through the whole commercial and he would talk about how great his suits are. Then at the end, George Zimmer would say, “You’re going to like the way you look. I guarantee it!” Why did the founder of the company, the president of the company get on television and say that? Because he’s saying, “I’m putting my reputation on this. If you don’t like the way you look, you’re going to talk bad about George Zimmer the rest of your life. I’m here to say I’m putting my name on the line. I guarantee it.”

That’s what God does. Why would God say, “as I have sworn”? Why did He remind us? He’s God. He didn’t have to remind us. But He says, “I want you to know I’m placing my reputation on the line in reference to this salvation. You’re going to love the salvation that I bring to you when you place your faith in Jesus. I’ve sworn it. I’m putting my life on it.” No one who receives this, at the end of the age, will stand before God and say, “I wish I had never known the King. I wish I hadn’t received the Messiah.” I know there is a lot of temptation in this present world to think that, but at the end of the age, when all our life is said and done and we stand before God, everyone who has this salvation will say, “This salvation is great! It’s far beyond anything I could possibly imagine.” I believe that what is true of that future day, we can taste even now as we walk with Christ by His Spirit. Why would the Messiah die to bring us salvation? Because He loves you. Jesus loves you.

So what is our response to God’s Messiah? At Christmastime, God reveals all these amazing things about the Messiah, amazing qualities. What is our response? There are three responses in the Matthew 2 story. Do you remember the story of the scribes and Pharisees who quoted Micah 5? There was the response of Herod, whose only real interest in the Messiah was so that he could kill the Messiah, because he wanted to rule and reign over people himself. Then there is the response of the wise men. Those three responses are really three responses that are options for us today. The first response is

**Response # 1 Intellectual affirmation with no internal heart of worship.**

J. C. Ryle comments of the scribes and the chief priests, “Their heads were better than their hearts.” They understood what Micah 5:2 said about the birthplace of the Messiah, about the family origin of the Messiah. But they had no interest in the Messiah for themselves. They wouldn’t walk 5.5 miles from where they were in Jerusalem up to Bethlehem to discover and see the Messiah for themselves. So they had intellectual affirmation. “There is a Messiah. He’s going to be born here and this is what He’s going to be like. This is the family He is going to be in.” But they had no personal affection for the Messiah or passions for the working of God in bringing the Messiah to the world.

It’s a solemn thing that it’s possible to have intellectual affirmation and say, “Yes, I believe that, that, that, that, that,” and yet, have no heart affection, no real worship. Here’s the truth. We can understand the Scriptures about Jesus without treasuring Jesus. A person may have much head knowledge of God and the Bible and of Jesus, but still remain outside of God’s saving grace. A person may participate in manyexternals ofworship without experiencing the internal reality of new life in Christ. The second response is that of Herod.

**Response #2 Intellectual affirmation with internal hostility.**

When Jesus comes, we know that He doesn’t come to co-reign with us. Herod knew that. A king is born. One of us is going to be king and one of us is not. What Herod is saying is, “No, I want to run my life the way I want to run it. I don’t want anyone telling me what to do. I don’t want to submit to anyone. In fact, I want everyone to submit to me.” That’s why he is so hostile against Jesus that he killed all the little children who were two and under in that vicinity.

Perhaps you’re here today and maybe that’s where you are. You’re here in church. Maybe you’re with your parents. Maybe you’re with somebody else. You would say, “I really, frankly, just want to be the king of my own life. I want to do what I want to do and I’m not interested in someone coming and messing up what I want to do.” That’s a possible response. I can only tell you that this king is the only king that can lead you to true peace and life and righteousness. Consider Him. Consider the direction you’re taking your own life. Is that really where you want to go? How has it worked out for you so far?

Finally, the last response is the only response where we gain the blessing of the Messiah and that is

**Response #3 Joyful worship.**

**Matthew 2:10-11** And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

They see in Jesus something that only the eyes of faith can show us, and that is that Jesus is worthy to be our King and our God. He possesses all the necessary qualities to worship Him. He is perfect as man. He is infinitely holy and righteous as God. These men were most assuredly Gentiles and not Jews. Yet, God chose to reveal the birth of His Messiah, that He is said to be a king over Israel and from Israel, to Gentiles. God wants us to know that this king is not just sort of a local tribal king, but He is king over all. He is universal. God made a path for all to come and be part of this King’s kingdom and this King’s blessing.

We began this message by talking about the danger of externalism. How do we counter it? How do we keep ourselves from it? The danger of externalism is countered only by the grace of heart transformation. That’s the only way to keep ourselves from it, and then feeding that heart transformation. I just want to close with two encouragements. First, if you haven’t had an internal heart transformation because you haven’t submitted to the king and the king hasn’t established His kingdom in you, He hasn’t given you the life of God in your own soul, I want you to consider the quality of this King, that He is worthy as King, and then reach out to Him and receive life from Him. He offers that life to you. He says

**Matthew 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That invitation is open to you. It’s open right now, today. Just call out, “God, I need Jesus to be my King, my Messiah, my Savior, my Lord.” Secondly, if you have received spiritual life from this King, feed the life of God in your soul. Let’s allow this Christmas season to be a time when we draw near to God through Jesus. Let it be a time when we open up God’s Word and we say, “God, I need to know more of your Messiah so that I would treasure Him. He is worth treasuring infinitely and completely. I want to know more of Him and I need your Spirit to show me more of your glory in the face of Jesus. Please God.” Make that your daily pursuit.

God has given us a church family with which to encourage one another so that when God begins to show us more of His glory in the face of Jesus, that we would share it with our spouse and our brothers and our sisters and our neighbors and other people, whether they’re saved or unsaved. We will begin to talk about it. I know that’s a high bar. At the end of the sermon you might say, “Okay, let’s get going and I’ll think about that very briefly.” But it’s a huge obstacle to the church and our worship together when we are unwilling to challenge that obstacle, that little bent that says, “I don’t know if I want to step over that bar and start talking, actually verbalizing about my spiritual life with God and who I see God to be.”

There are many men and women, I think in our own church, who have never really had a personal conversation with another believer about God. They get together for lunch. We’re Christians, right? Then they move on to all the stuff in the world. But they never say, “Let’s talk about God. Let’s talk about the challenges. Let’s talk about worship. Let’s talk about who He is.” We can learn about God individually, by God’s Spirit. I know that. But God places us in the church so that the life that we have, we would stir one another up. I need that. I need that from you and I trust that you need that from me. We need it from one another. So let’s make it a point to say this Christmas, whether it’s before the Christmas meal, during the Christmas meal, after the Christmas meal, I’m going to talk about Jesus’ worth and how I’ve experienced Him with other people who I know already love Him, but I want to stir them up to love Him more and I want them to stir me up. I want to listen to them, too. It’s all for the glory of God!