

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, WHAT WONDERS YOU MAKE KNOWN

Micah 5:2-5

Human beings are insatiable seekers of wonder. Anything that will amaze. Years ago someone came up with the first of numerous lists of the so-called Seven Wonders of the World. One of the lists contains man-made wonders. That list includes the Empire State Building. And it is no wonder that the Empire State Building is a wonder. Including its lightening rod it stands almost 1500 feet tall and was the tallest building in the world when it was built in 1931. But the list of man-made wonders must be continually updated to be creditable. Because now the ESB has been bumped down to number 21 on the tallest building list. Currently the number one building is the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, and it is over a half mile tall, 2717 feet. Now that's a wonder. But by next April the Chinese will have topped that wonder with a greater wonder when they open up Sky City, which tops the Burj Khalifa by 22 feet. And get this - the Chinese haven't even started building it yet. They plan to start next month and have it up in 90 days. That's another wonder.

But no matter how much wonder we humans can produce on our own, we still can't touch the wonders of Almighty God. The list of the seven natural wonders of the world, God's wonders, includes places like the Grand Canyon, Victoria Falls, the Great Barrier Reef, and Mt. Everett, and the pride and ingenuity of man is reduced to dust and ashes before them all.

But there is a wonder of God to which even the great wonders of nature can never compare. It is the wonder of the birth of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. But how fitting that the greatest wonder of the world is the entrance of the infinite God into His creation of time and space. And today we are going to explore that wonder as we continue our journey through the Minor Prophets. So get your Bibles, please, and turn to Micah 5:2.

In these short verses God is calling you and me and the entire world to do two things. The first thing God is saying is, "**Come and witness Jesus.** Come and see the wonder of just who He is". And God shows us **four things** about His Son that causes us to truly marvel. And the first thing that God would have us witness about Jesus is His **humility**. In verse 2 of our text we read that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. And the Holy Spirit was careful enough to inspire Micah to be specific to say Bethlehem Ephrathah, for you see, there were two Bethlehems in Palestine, one about six miles from Jerusalem and the other 75 miles north of Jerusalem, in the territory of Zebulon. And this Bethlehem was actually close to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. But God wanted no false Messiah to come out of Zebulon, so He said, "Micah, make sure you write that Bethlehem Ephrathah is the place that the Ruler of Israel will be born". And predicting Jesus' birthplace 700 years before He was born is a wonder in itself.

But notice the humility that Jesus displayed in being born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was a lot like Fosters, it was a bedroom community of Jerusalem. It was just a simple, country town. Bethlehem was mentioned as being the home of some of the repatriates from the Exile, but was not important enough to be listed with the major cities of Judah in Joshua 15 or Nehemiah 11. But the area around Bethlehem was very fertile, and that is perhaps how she got her name, for Bethlehem means "house of bread". And Ephrathah means, "fruitful". And what better name could there be for the town where the Bread of Life and the True Vine would be born? But you would think that God would choose a more cosmopolitan location for the birth of His Son, a place of more notoriety. Why not Jerusalem, where the temple was, where the priests and the rabbis ministered, a place where Jesus would surely receive more honor as the new-born Son of God? But no; God ordained that His Son be born in obscure Bethlehem.

But think now about the accommodations for Jesus' birth. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, born in a barn! You would think that if Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem, at least God would allow Him to be born in the nicest house in town. And just a few miles down the road was the magnificent palace of Herod the Great. Could not God allow Jesus to be born there, by turning the heart of that heathen king as He did other kings, and giving Mary and Joseph favor with him? Certainly; but God chose to allow His Son to be born in a barn. No privacy, no cleanliness, no medical personnel, no family support; just the animals and the smell. It is an incredible wonder!

But beloved, when Jesus was born in a barn God was making a statement to the world. He was saying, "Whoever you are, regardless of your position in life, come and witness Jesus! He will never turn you away! Come and see Him, come and encounter Him, come and be radically changed by Him". And think about it. It was the outcasts and the sinners who more than any other group accepted His invitation. The very first people to come and see Jesus were lowly shepherds, who were the scumbags of society. Shepherds smelled to high heaven. A missionary friend of mine who lived in Romania told me they were the smelliest people he had ever been around. Shepherds were looked down upon so much that they could not give witness in a court of law. But God gave them a personal invitation to see His Son and be His first witnesses to the world.

When Jesus began His ministry, who was it that He spent most of His time with? Jesus spent time with anybody who would spend time with Him, but Luke 15:1 says that it was the tax collectors and sinners who drew near to hear Him. And this is exactly one of the chief criticisms that the Pharisees leveled at Him, "Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:19). Who was one of Jesus' best friends? Simon the leper. And with whom did Jesus die? Two thieves.

There are many great men in this world, and most of them are untouchable except for family, colleagues, or a few close friends. But no one has ever been as great as Jesus. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest of them all is the humblest of them all, and He gladly receives all who come to Him. And He receives them all the same. He doesn't receive the Barak Obamas and the Nick Sabans of the world with anymore openness than you and me. What a wonder!!

But God tells us something else about Jesus in our text. Not only do we see His **humility**, but we also see His **majesty**. Verse 2 tells us that He would be the Ruler of Israel. From the earliest days of Israel's history they have been looking for a Messiah, a Deliverer from their enemies. Moses wrote in Genesis 49:10, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people". Isaiah writes, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be on His shoulder...of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7). I want you to especially listen to Isaiah 25:8-10:

He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day:
 "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." For on this mountain the hand of the Lord will rest, And Moab shall be trampled down under Him, As straw is trampled down for the refuse heap.

Did you catch the thrust of what Isaiah prophesies here? He says one day the Lord would take away the rebuke of His people, that they would wait for their God and that He would save them, and that Moab, their enemy, would be trampled down under Him. Well, has this happened? Not yet. The Jews were still looking for the Messiah in Jesus' day, and for a brief time some seemed to understand that He was the One. The week before He died they were waving palm branches as He rode into Jerusalem proclaiming, Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel" (John 12:13). But in a week their hopes were gone. Likewise, the Emmaus road disciples said that they had hoped Jesus would have been the one who was going to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21). At Jesus' ascension the eleven disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) They were still looking for a majestic kingdom with their Messiah as the Ruler.

May I say to you that Jesus **is** ruling today. This old world is steamrolling toward Hell. We all know that. Jesus is mocked and His Lordship is denied every day. And true Christians are mocked and persecuted just as our Lord was. But

beloved, be assured that the devil is on a leash! He can go no further than God allows. Jesus is still ruling and still saving sinners who will repent and trust in Him. And one day King Jesus will return on a day that the Mayans haven't predicted nor any other man has predicted, and He will reign in majesty forever more.

There is a third truth about Jesus that God calls us to come and witness today that goes one step past His majesty. There have been many majestic kings to rule on the earth. But God calls us in verse 2 to witness Jesus' **infinity** (verse 2c). Now, the word "everlasting" literally means, "the days of eternity". And what Micah is saying is simple, yet utterly profound – "This Ruler of Israel, this One Who one day will be born in Bethlehem, this Ruler never had a beginning". Now, beloved, what is the obvious, unmistakable conclusion we must draw from this statement about the nature of this baby born in Bethlehem? This baby is Divine. This baby is God, God in human flesh. For no one is eternal but God.

Now, beloved, this truth, that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh is the great watershed that separates Christianity from every other faith in the world. If you do not believe that Jesus Christ was and is God, you are not a Christian. You may say, "Brother Mike, how can you make such a statement?" Well, I didn't make it. God did. God said in 2 John 9, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God..." And the doctrine of Christ was the teaching about Christ, by Himself and others. And the New Testament is perfectly clear about the nature of Christ. John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word...." Phil. 2:6, referring to Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God". Heb. 1:8, speaking of Jesus said, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever". And there are plenty other scriptures besides these. Even the Jews understood the doctrine of Christ, even though they didn't believe it. At one point Jesus said, "I and My Father are one", and the Jews picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus asked them why, and they said, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." (John 10:33).

Now, I ask you, why do we make such a big deal about Jesus being God in the flesh? Why not just be satisfied calling Him the Son of God, which He Himself said that He was? Why must we say that He was God the Son? Let me give you two reasons. First of all, Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Would any human being dare to make such a statement? What would you think if you walked into the Foster's Supermarket this afternoon and someone came up to you and said for the truth, "Mr., when you see me, you've seen God"? Well, that's what Jesus said. Jesus said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). And the designation "I AM" are the same words that God used to describe Himself to Moses at the burning bush. And again, the Jews knew exactly what Jesus meant, for they took up stones to stone him again. And beloved, if Jesus was not Who He said that He was, God in human flesh, then

He was either the biggest lunatic or the biggest liar who ever lived. In his book Mere Christianity apologist C.S. Lewis said this concerning the nature of Jesus:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a good moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg-or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

So you see, beloved, if Jesus was not God in the flesh then you and I are trusting in a charlatan, a fraud, to get us to Heaven.

Now, that alone is good enough reason that Jesus must be God. But there is a second that is equally as good. And that is, if Jesus were not God, but only a man, then He would have had a sin nature just like yours and mine. And He would have not been a fit sacrifice to pay for our sins on the cross. He would have needed a Savior Himself. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him". Beloved, that is the Gospel message, plain and simple. Peter says that Christ died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18). And if Jesus Christ is not God in the flesh, then we have no Good News. The Christmas story is just sentimental mush and nothing more. Oh, but praise God that the birth in Bethlehem is more than sentimentality! It is our certain, glorious hope of eternal life! For Jesus was the everlasting God Who was born to set us free, free from sin, death, hell, and the grave.

Let's take a look at one more truth that we can learn from Micah this morning. God has said, "Come and witness Jesus' **humility**, His **majesty**, and His **infinity**. Now let us witness Jesus' **ministry**. Look at verse 3 again. God says that He will give His people up until some day when someone has a baby. What is He talking about? He is saying that He will set His people aside and not deal with them as a nation until Jesus is born. And that is exactly what God has done. The Jews rejected God for so long that He finally destroyed them. The ten northern tribes were conquered by Assyria and were scattered to the ends of the earth. Then about 135 years later the two southern tribes were conquered by the Babylonians and taken into bondage for 70 years. And even though they returned to their homeland afterward

they never trusted Jehovah as a nation again. Most of them fell into cold, dead, ritualistic religion with no trust at all. And when their Messiah came the first time, they rejected Him. And 40 years later the Roman general Titus came in and razed Jerusalem and the remaining Jews were scattered just like their brothers were. And they remained scattered for millenniums.

But fast-forward with me now about 2500 years. Look at verse 3 again. God says that one day a remnant of His brethren would return to the children of Israel. Whose brethren? Jesus' brethren! And to where would they return, to where some of them already were, to Israel. Liberal scholars looked at this passage and others (Ezekiel 37:25; Micah 4:7) and scoffed, "No way. No way, will the Jews who've been dispersed to the ends of the earth ever return to their homeland". But in 1948 the dry bones that Ezekiel talked about in Ezekiel 38 rose to life again, and Israel became a nation! Think about it. After 2500 years a race of people without a homeland was still intact, and they came back together again, in the same land they once occupied. It is unprecedented in world history. And the scoffers had to start scrambling to find a way to continue to scoff at what God said about His people in His Word.

But God has not finished dealing with His people now that they are returned to their homeland. There will come a day when the baby born in Bethlehem will no longer be "a Christian myth" to the Jews. For there will come a day when things get so bad on this earth for the Jews that their only hope of survival will be that their Messiah comes to deliver them from all of their enemies, from Iran and Iraq and Syria and Egypt and Russia and all of the confederate nations of Europe. And one day Israel will look up in the sky and see Messiah coming. And how glad they will be to see Him, but they can't believe it – because Messiah is Jesus, the One that they have rejected for more than 2000 years. But when He comes He will destroy all of their enemies. And look now at verse 4 "And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God..." Now, the words "feed His flock" means to shepherd His flock, to minister to His flock. Jesus will meet their every need, whatever it may be. Now look down at verse 4 again, "they shall abide". For the first time since 586 BC Israel will have no fear. God's chosen people, who've suffered more persecution than any other nation in history, will finally be at rest. And just like verse 2 said, the baby born in Bethlehem will be the Ruler of Israel forever more.

So God is calling all of us to come today and witness Jesus. To witness how humble, yet how mighty He is. But we must see that God calls us not only to witness Jesus, but to **worship Jesus**. Why should you worship Jesus today? Why should you make Him the absolute ruler of your life? Look at the end of verse 4 "For now He shall be great to the ends of the earth". We said earlier that despite the wretched condition of this world, Jesus is still on the throne, ordering the affairs of men according to His will. Let me give you just one example.

I have a missionary friend who told me that before He was called into missions he was on a business trip and his flight was cancelled for some reason. Now, the airlines have rules as to what type of cancellation allows a passenger to have layover expenses reimbursed. And this particular cancellation did not qualify. And my friend told me that he did not want to have to pay the expense for a hotel room that night. So when he knew his flight was cancelled he prayed, "Lord, I'm going to the desk and ask them to reimburse me for my expenses. Please let them do it". So he goes to the desk and makes his request. And immediately the clerk starts preparing a voucher for his expenses. And he told me that in the middle of her work she said to him, "I don't know why I'm doing this. You are not supposed to get anything". And he said, "I can tell you why". And then I suppose he told her. But that Christian got his money back because Jesus is Ruler!

And friend, He is ruling whether you allow Him to rule in your life or not. But I will tell you this. What a great thing it is to have the Ruler of the whole earth on your side! The One who will meet every need, the One Who will fight your battles for you, the One Who will be your closest Friend and Who will never leave you nor forsake you, no matter how you might stumble and fall in your walk with Him. Look at v. 5 (read 5a). Jesus is not only Ruler, Jesus is Peace! Tell me, can you think of one word in the English language that describes the deepest need of a man's soul any better? Brother, when you have peace you need nothing else! And Jesus is the Prince of Peace. And God calls to you and to me, "Come, **witness** Jesus. But don't stop there. Come and **worship** Jesus.

Now, I must point out one more thing before we close. We've seen today that Jesus came to do two things. He came to rule His people, and He came to shepherd His people, to save them from their sins and meet their every need. But the sad truth is, most people only want half of what Jesus came to do. They gladly say, "Yes, Jesus, shepherd me. Save me. Meet my every need. Give me peace". But they refuse to say, "Jesus, I bow before you as Lord. Please be the ruler of my life". May I say to you that if you've never bowed to Jesus Christ as your Lord, that He is not your Savior. When we come to Christ as a guilty sinner, crying out for forgiveness and salvation, we must turn from our sins and by faith give our lives to Him for total control. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved". Have you ever done that? Have you ever bowed before the Christ child in the manger and said, "Jesus, be the Lord of my life?" May I say to you that if you have not yet bowed before Jesus, one day you will. The Bible says that one day in eternity every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But for many, it will be too late, and they will spend their eternity in hell. Friend, don't wait until it's too late for you. If you've never trusted Jesus, come and bow to Him today.

And what about it, dear Christian friend? Is Jesus Christ, your Savior, the Lord of your life day by day? Oh, may God help you this Christmas season to worship Him and glorify Him for being born in Bethlehem just for you!