

Wednesday, December 16, 2009 Micah 5:1-5 Christ is our Peace

All I want is some peace and quiet! Slam! Have you ever shouted that – perhaps when the children were getting on each other's nerves; perhaps as a teacher when the students were in a pre-Christmas frenzy; kids, perhaps when your brother or sister was bugging you; perhaps when the phone rang one too many times; perhaps when you were in the middle of a traffic jam; and perhaps when you listened to the nightly news!

I wonder if God ever looks down on this world and wants to shout – “Hey you people, all I want is a little peace and quiet!” Slam! Well? He prophesied wars and rumors of wars until the end of time, and if we think there will ever be a truly lasting peace and quiet in this world we most certainly will be disappointed. Sin and evil always move new aggressors to break whatever fragile peace prevails after a time of war. Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, conflict has wracked this world. Adam and Eve had the first marital argument. Cain murdered his brother, Abel. Jacob ran for his life after deceiving his brother. Example after example, from the pages of Scripture, from the pages of history, and from the pages of our own lives demonstrate the inability of humans to live in peace.

Something is wrong in our hearts, you see. We are at war with God in heaven. We fired the first volley, rebelling against His will and ruining the peace He had created in Paradise in the beginning.

What would you have done with this warring race if you were its Creator? The Lord God Almighty could have reestablished peace and quiet for Himself by slamming heaven's door to get some peace and quiet and leaving us to destroy ourselves. Instead, He opened heaven's door and sent His Son into our warring world. He chose to reestablish peace between Himself and humanity. So tonight in our mid-week Advent devotion we think about the third Word of Christmas, peace – Christ Jesus is Our Peace!

Micah prophesied during a time of war in the mid 700's B.C. The future was grim since Israel had abandoned the peace of the Lord He promised in His covenant relation with them. So God pronounced judgment on their spiritual rebellion. Jerusalem would be besieged, and her kings seized and taken to Babylon. **“Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod.”** Then just when you would expect Micah to offer nothing but gloom and doom, the Holy Spirit inspired Him to abruptly change the tune of His message: **“But you, Bethlehem Ephratha, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”** Don't give up hope! A ruler is coming who can give you peace!

Micah was precise about this coming ruler's city of origin so the people could identify him as the fulfillment of this prophecy. The tribal territory of Zebulun also had a Bethlehem. But the prophet identifies this Bethlehem as the one also called Ephratha, where 1,000 years earlier Jacob's beloved wife Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Bethlehem was also King David's birthplace. Yet it never grew beyond the size of a village. It remained “small among the clans of Judah.”

Funny, isn't it, how the Lord uses what seems insignificant, puny and powerless by human standards to display His gracious power. The lowly virgin, a lowly town, a lowly birth – for the one who is God! Yes Micah describes this coming ruler's **“origins are from of old, from ancient times.”** He would trace his human ancestry back to David, Abraham, and Adam. Yet he existed before Adam, before time. He is the ruler who is Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14), the Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6), and the one who would claim, “Before Abraham was born, I am (John 8:58). Christ is our peace, true God who became man, born at Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy!

For whom would this coming ruler make peace? **“Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth, and the rest of this brothers return to join the Israelites.”**

Israel would not regain any national prominence until this divine Ruler is born, and His kingdom would include not only Israelites, but the “rest of his brothers,” the spiritual children of Abraham, all who believe in Him. The King of kings was born into the world of men to draw all people, young and old, prince and pauper, rich and poor, black, yellow, brown, and white, into His kingdom of peace.

How would this ruler make the peace? **“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”** God called upon his ancient kings to protect his people like a shepherd guards his sheep. The Ruler Micah prophesied would shepherd His people with the infinite power of God. He would satisfy his sheep with everything they need - leading them beside the still waters of His love and grace, feeding them with the green pastures of His Holy Word. He would be the Good Shepherd, who would see the hungry lion prowling and not run away. In fact, He would lay down His life for the sheep – only to take it up again on the third day. He would give his sheep eternal life and guarantee that they shall never perish, for no one can snatch them out of his hand.

And that’s how Christ became our peace.

To win a war and make peace, someone has to be willing to offer the ultimate sacrifice. Any general planning his battle strategy knows some soldiers will not come home. But the general carefully calculates the loss of life, knowing that’s what it takes to win the victory. What loss of life did God calculate in order to win the battle over sin, death, and hell? He knew no mortal man could win the battle. So He sent His perfect Son to bleed, suffer, and die! A wise woman once remarked, “Christmas is such a joyful time for us, but it must have been also sad for God.” At Christmas we not only look to the manger, but to the blood-soaked cross where we view God’s only-begotten Son breathing His last. There He absorbed God’s eternal anger by paying the punishment of hell’s curse for all the world’s sins. There He opened the way for us to come to God, not in rebellion, but repentance, no longer resisting or resenting, but resting our soul in the forgiveness of sins Christ won for us! Christ is our peace – in dying to win our peace.

How do we benefit from this peace? **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1). Since our sins are all forgiven by faith in Jesus, we have peace with God right now and the promise of everlasting peace in heaven. No wonder we thrill to hear the angels sing, “Peace on earth, good-will to men!”

This peace sounds so good and sentimental at Christmas time, but really, how can we have lasting peace in this troubled world? How can we have peace during stressful and hectic moments in our lives; especially when our own sinful weaknesses confront us, when recurring thoughts of sin and guilt threaten to re-ignite war in our hearts, or when we are feeling low, depressed, or worried? How can we sense God’s peace when wicked people still threaten us harm? **“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:7).

No, God hasn’t taken us out of the world. Our human sin shattered the perfect peace which man originally enjoyed in Paradise. As a consequence every child born into this world is by nature born an enemy of God. Hatred, strife, and warfare still erupt to destroy relationships between nations and between people. But through Jesus, God established peace with us. He offers and gives us this peace freely, by grace through faith. Through faith in Jesus we know God will never stop loving us, forgiving us, and blessing us. Through Jesus nothing can keep us from the eternal peace God has prepared for us in heaven. Until then, may Christ’s peace produce blessed results of peace in our lives – inner peace as we continue to hear and believe the gospel; and peace with others in our families and in our church as we strive to live at peace with everyone. And while men and women still must fight wars to restrain evil and to establish some measure of external peace on earth, may we all re-commit ourselves to the only thing that will bring God’s peace to this earth to change hearts, change lives, and change eternal

destinies – the news Christ is our peace! Amen.