

**God Delivers**  
Micah 5: 2 – 5a  
December 20, 2009

I. Introduction

- A. “When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone
  - 1. When the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flock
- A. The work of Christmas begins: to find the lost, to heal the broken
  - 1. To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations
    - a. To bring peace among brothers, to make music in the heart.”
- A. This poem, written by theologian and civil rights leader Howard Thurman
  - 1. Reminds me that the true meaning of Christmas lies far beyond
    - a. The bright lights and beautifully wrapped presents under a tree
- A. What we celebrate is more than the birthday of the baby Jesus
  - 1. It is a celebration of Almighty God bursting into our world...bringing
    - a. Well, exactly what is it that Jesus came to bring?
      - (1) What gift is it that Jesus brought for the world – for you, and for me?
  - 2. It's peace and love and joy and hope for certain, but is it anything more?
    - a. That's what I would like for us to think about for these few moments this morning

II. The prophet, Micah, spoke his message from God to a nation that was in turmoil

- A. The people of Israel, once a wealthy and powerful kingdom
  - 1. Had endured years of political unrest, including a split into two separate nations
- A. Weakened by inner strife and conflict, the people and their rulers
  - 1. Had turned to alliances with foreign nations and concessions to their gods
    - a. As their main defense against the rising powers of their world
- A. Voices that spoke for trust in Yahweh, the one true God, were few and far between
  - 1. But there was still a collective memory of times past
    - a. When the God of their ancestors had seemed close at hand
- A. Every year the words of the Shemah were repeated around Passover tables –
  - 1. Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one God...
    - a. And the stories of God's powerful interventions on behalf of his people
      - (1) Were told and retold
- A. So now, when the future of the nation looks very dim and insecure
  - 1. The prophet's vision is of siege and warfare and destruction

- A. And the weakness of their nation is described in chilling fashion
  - 1. As rulers helpless to defend themselves from the indignity and disgrace
    - a. Of having their cheeks slapped by their enemies
  - 2. Where will the people turn for relief, for hope, for deliverance?
    - a. And what will that deliverance, or salvation, look like?
- A. The prophet has a remarkable answer to those questions –
  - 1. Don't look to the throne in Jerusalem for a new and more powerful leader
    - a. Don't even look to the temple with its institutional wealth and influence
      - (1) Forget about seeking help from the nations around you and their gods
- A. Look instead, Micah says, for what God is going to do among you
  - 1. Look to the insignificant little town of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah
    - a. From there will come forth a new ruler
- A. New, not only in the sense that it would be someone
  - 1. From outside of the usual circle of political families
    - a. But new in that this ruler would be called forth and sent by Yahweh
  - 2. And this "chosen one" would come from the lineage
    - a. Of rulers that had been chosen and anointed by God in the past
- A. This would be God's doing, and it was the only hope for true deliverance
  - 1. However, it would also be on God's schedule
    - a. And you notice that Micah doesn't include a timeline for these events to happen
- A. Instead, he likens it to a pregnant woman – when the time of the pregnancy is fulfilled
  - 1. Then the Savior, the deliverer, would come
    - a. There's an interesting word play on delivery and deliverance there
      - (1) Those of you that have had the experience of waiting for a baby to be born
        - (a) Will be able to appreciate the sense of anticipation and expectancy
- A. Before this new ruler is to be born, however, there will be the pains of labor
  - 1. And, in our understanding of Micah's prophecy today
    - a. That time of labor lasted for several centuries –
  - 2. Of invasion, destruction, captivity, and an ongoing cycle of rebellion and defeat
    - a. That culminated in the eventual occupation by the Roman Empire
      - (1) Before the birth of the baby that we see as the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy
- A. It's no wonder, then, that the people of Israel developed an intense longing
  - 1. For this birth that Micah described, this Savior that was to be born

- a. It's no wonder that they thought of deliverance in terms of national rescue
      - (1) And a restoration to political greatness in the world
  - 2. When the Messiah comes, they said to one another
    - a. Then the good fortune of Israel will be restored
      - (1) We will become great in the eyes of the world, and we can live in peace
- A. And so we find, in the words of Mary the mother of Jesus
  - 1. This expectation that her child would be a leader who would bring about great change
    - a. Through her son, God would bring down the proud and the powerful
      - (1) While those who were humble and lowly would be lifted up
      - b. The hungry would be filled, while the rich would be sent away empty-handed
  - 2. All this would be in fulfillment of the promise made by God to the people of Israel
- A. It is easy to see how, for these suffering people
  - 1. Justice would seem to be served when the nation of Israel is restored
- A. God's deliverance, as they viewed it, would result in a very tangible improvement
  - 1. In their lifestyle, in their security, and in their status in the world
- A. And it can be easy for us to say that they almost missed the boat
  - 1. That in their desire for physical deliverance from their enemies
    - a. Many of the people who were living when Jesus was born
      - (1) Never noticed, or else rejected, their Savior when he came
- A. Were they wrong in looking for God to deliver them from oppression?
  - 1. Were they mistaken about God's desire for justice and equality?
    - a. Was Mary's vision of the restoration of balance between the rich and poor?
      - (1) Totally out of line with the deliverance Jesus came to bring?
  - 2. What was this deliverance Micah prophesied about so many years before?
- A. If we are certain that Jesus came into our world and lived and died and rose again
  - 1. Only to make provision for the salvation of our souls, then we must say yes
    - a. All of those dreams about political and economic deliverance were wrong
- A. However, if we believe that God's kingdom is about shalom for all nations/peoples
  - 1. That righteousness and economic justice walk hand in hand under God's reign
    - a. And that salvation is for our world here and now
      - (1) As well as God's gracious plan for our eternal destiny
  - 2. Then I believe the only thing "wrong" with the expectations of the Israelite nation
    - a. Is that the focus of their vision of God's deliverance was too narrow

- 3. They wanted to appropriate all of God's blessing for themselves
  - a. Rather than looking for/hoping for the deliverance of all of God's creation
- A. And they were wrong if they were expecting God's deliverance to come
  - 1. In the form of military might and political victory
    - a. That seems to have been a primary reason for rejecting Jesus
  - 2. They believed the only way to escape oppression was to kill all the bad guys
    - a. Or at least drive them out of their land forever
  - 3. They believed the only way to achieve prosperity and economic reform
    - a. Was to see a new king seated on the throne of power and authority
- A. In all of that, they failed to see that deliverance starts
  - 1. Within the hearts and lives of individuals who are open to change
    - a. Not in the external manipulations of force and power and might
- A. They were looking for God to change their world, their circumstances
  - 1. Not noticing that what God had in mind was changing them
    - a. I'm not so sure that we are much different today
- A. How often, in our world, do we miss out on what God is doing
  - 1. Because we think we know what needs to be done
    - a. Rather than asking for God to reveal himself to us
- A. How often is our view of God, and God's plan for the salvation/deliverance of the world
  - 1. Limited by the boundaries of our circumstances or our experiences
    - a. Our expectation that change for the betterment of our world
      - (1) Depends on the use of force, either political or military power
  - 2. Or, perhaps closer to home for some of us at least
    - a. How often do we see the change that needs to happen in other people
      - (1) In our institutions, even in our church
    - b. And miss out on the change that God desires in my heart
- A. All those other changes might be necessary and good, too, don't get me wrong
  - 1. But if we are looking for a Messiah, a rescuer, a deliverer
    - a. We probably ought to start by looking at ourselves
      - (1) And what God wants/needs to deliver us from
  - 2. Then, perhaps God will choose to use us as the means
    - a. By which the prisoners are set free, the broken-hearted find healing
      - (1) The poor have their needs met, and the hungry are fed

- A. When we have seen God's deliverance in our own lives
    - 1. From whatever is oppressing us and keeping us in darkness
      - a. Then we can be released to see, and be a part of, what God is doing
        - (1) To bring deliverance to our neighbors, our community, our nation and the world
  - A. There is a very real note of grace in our scripture text today
    - 1. In the fullness of God's timing, Micah says
      - a. God will burst into the world in a whole new and different way
    - 2. And in that time, one shall come who will stand among his people
      - a. He will feed his flock like a shepherd in the strength of the Lord
    - 3. They will recognize the greatness and majesty of the name of the Lord, God
      - a. And they shall live secure, for his name will be great to the ends of the earth
        - (1) And he shall be the one who gives peace
  - A. There is a story that has been told about the Roman Catholic Pope some years ago
    - 1. As the story goes, this pope visited one of the worst prison in Rome
      - a. On the day after Christmas
    - 2. It was the first time in ninety years that a pope had gone to a prison, and in greeting the prisoners, the Pope said, "You could not come to me, so I have come to you."
      - a. That is what God has done for us, as well
- III. As we celebrate Christmas this year, we are all too aware of the uneasiness and unrest
- A. In our nation and in many places around the world
    - 1. Most of us are relatively well-off compared to the suffering experienced
      - a. By many people who are living in poverty and turmoil and oppression
    - 2. And yet, we often find ourselves lacking the peace that Micah prophesied
      - a. And we look for deliverance in all the wrong places
  - A. Perhaps what we need most of all is for God to come to us
    - 1. To deliver us from our fear and our lack of vision
      - a. Perhaps the gift we need most is the assurance that God is present
  - A. Deliverance takes many forms, but it doesn't mean our troubles will be over
    - 1. The peace that the prophet spoke of is not so much peace in the world around us
      - a. But a deep abiding peace within us
  - A. May God grant us that peace today, and give us the courage to be
    - 1. The messengers of God's peace to our world
      - a. It is God who bursts into our world, and God who delivers – new life in him