

RECLAIMING EXPECTANT HOPE

Micah 5:2-5a

Israel is on the verge of collapsing. Her leaders are corrupt and are preying on God's people. The judges, priests and prophets, have completely abandoned their responsibilities and are solely focusing on themselves...with everything swirling around this need for power. And so Micah is trying to bring all of this to the forefront – to let them know of their errors. Of the destructive path they are heading down – that they need to start acting and living correctly TODAY...because the future that lies ahead of them is not good. And as usual, they just don't get it. Which is why Israel *will* be abandoned as read in verse 3. And not only abandoned but also over-run. Nebuchadnezzar's armies are going to come in and take siege of them. They will be defeated and taken into captivity.

But...this won't last forever – that's the hope of this text. Since those in "power" are not leading and living in a Godly manner - a new ruler will come out and will be greater than any other leaders ever before or ever will be. And he will come from the very last place you'd ever think anything strong would emerge from...Bethlehem. A town so small and considered insignificant that when the clans of Judah are listed in scripture...this town is actually not even mentioned! Hope...for the people – was coming from the least thought of place and in the most insignificant way possible.

These words from Micah had to be a slap in the face and the complete opposite of everything they had ever thought of. Leaders come from specific clans, specific groups – and specific family lines! This...this Judah? This is NOT what the people had *hoped* for – and yet it was something they were living into and still hoping FOR every single day.

It may not be what they expected...but surely was their hope

Now "hope" is an interesting word – or at least I think it is. It can be a feeling of expectation like a desire for something specific to happen. During this time of the year, as a kid, hope for me was wrapped up in presents. I remember opening up the Sears catalog and dog-eared pages and circling items that I hoped I would get. HOPING for a specific present that suited my desires at that time – and they were usually pretty big and overly expensive gifts.

And when presents start showing up...you start imagining it. *"What's in it? Does this box size match any present I circled? It feels heavy....could it be? It's not socks – better not be socks."* And then...we start asking. Can we open now? And I would do this...every day. Presents consumed me. What was in it – consumed me.

But hope then evolved and changed as I grew older. Hope, as expectation, was not in presents any longer – and I honestly don't know what it became or what it is now – and that was my struggle this week. **What is “hope” leading up to Christmas?** And I think that it probably has become confusing, at least for me, because so much of the season of Advent, the season of “hope” has become Christmas itself. Hopeful expectation has been replaced with the birth now already. There simply is no feeling of expectation in the days from Thanksgiving to Christmas. There is no season of hope that we experience and work through. We say there is...but do we really allow that space? Because we just rush right in to Christmas music and it's all about gifts and getting them and getting the best deals on them and then living into Christmas day...today. Now. So the “hope” of that time, that space, becomes the presents themselves that you unwrap come December 25th.

And if there IS any space – it simply gets washed and spun together WITH Christmas. There is no difference between the two. It's all simply there ... together.

I think we have “hope” in the birth of Christ because he is who he is – but more often than not I think the hope that is found, and wrapped up in Christmas, is in the work he does AFTER his birth. His words, his teachings, and his eventual death and resurrection. It's like we jump to Christmas and then that day after Christmas we then jump to Good Friday or Easter. We're missing all that good stuff and time and work in-between. Maybe it's because we don't have a lot of biblical texts to work through that lead up to birth. We have some – but not a lot.

So what about that expectant hope to come? Where is that? Where is that space, that conversation, that retrospective time? Why are we so quick to push through Advent to get *to* Christmas? And I think we rush because we've already been given that which Micah prophesies and the people longed for. We know Christ has come already...so the hope in that coming has already passed...so what do we do? **What does hope look like when we've already been given hope?**

Maybe the question we need to ask is what if Christmas didn't come with gifts? What would Christmas look like if we truly lived into the expectant hope of the birth and preparing for THAT time...instead of presents time?

For Micah, hopeful feeling of expectations to this ruler who would come out of nothing to rule over Israel – to be the grand ruler of them all was a hopeful expectation that felt like it took forever – because it did! These words from Micah come to us around 740-680 BC... and while we cannot really pinpoint when the birth of Christ was most scholars agree that it was anywhere from 7-2 BC. Which means that there is over 670 to almost 732 YEARS from Micah till that prophesied promise comes... where they waited! And not simply waited – but lived into this expectant moment of hope...in time EVERY day! Over 700 years of waiting for this hope to

come out of Bethlehem. A hopeful expectation of this shepherd who would and was strengthened in the Lord and would lead the flock in the majesty of the name of the Lord! All those years of hopeful anticipation that peace would come and securely reach to all ends of the earth!

Hope...for a nation of peace, rest, and goodness.

But this isn't something that just happened with Micah's prophecy! This was a "hope" that was given even BEFORE Micah. We can go back to **Genesis 22:18** when Abraham is told of his line being blessed and the offspring to all the nations. We read in **Numbers 24:17** that a star will come out of Jacob and a scepter out of Israel. Again, while we don't have exact dates as to when Abraham lived...we're still at 2,000 years or more for this strength in the Lord to appear – 2,000 years from Abraham to Jesus. This shepherd of majestic greatness who will be known to the ends of the earth...who will be our peace.

For me...that really puts things into perspective! We can't even wait 24 days in December to get to Christmas. And let's be honest...depending on when Black Friday hits we're probably closer to 30 days to the celebration of the birth of Christ! Can you imagine the expectant hope the Israelites had to live into!? Our 24-30 days are pathetic in comparison!

But this *was* their expectant hope. They longed for the day when there would simply be peace. When there would be no more fighting between people and nations and lands. When there would be no more war and death and starvation and oppression. When rebellion and spiritual death would cease to exist because peace and joy would be all there is. The "hope" of Micah during this time is one of promised restoration, glory, and peace. It's a hope from an oppressed and downtrodden people that were tired of what they continuously encountered.

And so they lived...each day...in anticipation and expectation of that moment in time. They couldn't jump right to it, they couldn't skip over 670 years or even 2,000 years – they had to live, and wait, and proceed IN that hope...each day.

And there lies my challenge for you and I during this season of Advent as we look at "hope". **What does expectant hope mean for you when you think about Christ – specifically in his birth and not everything that we've made it?** And then on top of that...how are you living INTO that hope?

Because we must do something – right? We don't just sit here as Christians living into that hope by absorbing the work of Christ while sipping eggnog and eating fruitcake (*nobody eats fruitcake*). Right? Just as we don't skip from the day after Thanksgiving to the day of Christmas – we also don't skip from the moment we proclaim Jesus as the Messiah and our Lord and Savior to all the sudden dying and being with him. There is a space in-between all of those – and a

space we need to recognize and live into – because all of that is really good and rich “hope.” I think that’s the beauty of where we are now that puts us into a different situation than Micah and those who came after him like Isaiah and Hosea – as well as all the people who heard *their* messages of hope. We get to live INTO that hope and yet still live into the *expectedness* of it as well. So maybe that’s our looking forward to Christ’s second coming. Maybe that’s living, loving, serving, today knowing that at some point in our lives we are going to die and then be raised to new life and new hope in the presence of God – but we’re not there yet so we live like it today. We live with that *hope*...we live *in* to that hope to come tomorrow.

So maybe we are tethered to the people Micah prophesied to – as we are both expectantly hoping Christ to come. While theirs is the initial coming – ours is the second and final coming.

The beauty of living into hope today is that we can live into that reality of *hope to come*. Our hope is grounded not only in the promises of God, not only into the reality of the birth of Christ and how that saves and redeems us by working up to his death and resurrection...but we get to live into the reality of hope to come...today. We get to proclaim his name to all the ends of the earth. We get to share in his majestic name *now*. We get to LIVE hope to other people and SHARE hope with other people right now – during what we’ve called “the holidays.”

I think living into hope today is living into the promises given *BECAUSE OF* our hope. And this is done by serving and loving others...because when we do that we are living into a slice of hope...today. Yes it’s not the same, yes it’s only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the goodness that is to come – but as people redeemed by Christ we are to live each day because of the hope we have in what it means for Christ to leave his throne and come to us – not once...but twice.

We live in a world where we are so rushed to get to the end that we miss the whole walk or journey and even process of *getting to* the “good stuff” in the end. We treat so much of life like the old Tootsie Pop commercial where they ask the owl how many licks it takes to get to the tootsie roll center of a tootsie pop. It takes more than 3! But we want the good stuff now! We want Christmas now, we want presents planned and then opened now – and yet there is all this middle space that we are missing out on – and I think that middle space is not only good...but it’s needed. When we jump to the end we miss the reality of the need *FOR* that end. If we simply jump to the birth without the expectation, without the hope, without the preparation, without the active movement that leads up to it...then I think we actually miss the whole need FOR the birth. And then we get to Christmas and the day after we’ve found ourselves living into Lent...already!

When we live into this hope we live into the reality of the necessity of Christ, the necessity of his birth, the necessity of grace come down. When we live into the hope and expectation we, ourselves, start acting and living the way we should because we see what is coming and we

prepare for it now. Even when it's something that has already passed, something that was over 2,000 years ago we somehow, in some weird and cool Quantum-Leap kind of way, we *live* into the past and also the future...today. And we do that because our hope is placed in the expected holy living of life to come *BECAUSE* CHRIST CAME...and because he came he redeemed us.

So my challenge for you, and for me, is to simply live into the expectant hope of Christ's birth for the next 22 days. Allow the challenge of that joy to lead you, and equip you, send you, and help you love, serve, watch, and simply *be* in hope.