

Long Expected Jesus

Sunday, Dec 19, 2021

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I. Introduction

Let's pray. [pray]

Greeting

Good morning! Merry Christmas! If your bibles aren't already open to Micah 5, I'd love for you to grab them and turn there. If you don't have a bible, you can grab one from the connect station and if you don't own a Bible we would love for you to take that one home! The book of Micah is on page 779 in those bibles. My name is Ethan, I'm one of the pastors of Union Church. If we haven't met yet, I just want you to know that I'm grateful you're here and humbled by the task in front of me - to open up the Word of God and preach from it in the gathering of God's people.

Where We've Been

In these few weeks leading up to Christmas we as a church have been observing the season of Advent together in a sermon series we've called, "Long Expected Jesus." We've been acknowledging the reality that the whole course of human history has been colored with longing; that our sin has ripped a gaping hole in the fabric of creation and in the depths of the human heart. And the longing that fills that hole can only be satisfied by God, who has answered our longing with a promise of redemption. And so in Advent we celebrate that God has been merciful and Jesus Christ has come *and* we give voice to our longing for him to come again fully and finally to make all things new. We embrace the tension and the waiting in that in between space.

The ache of the human heart manifests itself in so many ways. There are so many deep longings that we could speak to in this season, but as we thought through this series, we decided to hone in on two ways that we see our world crying out right now. The longing for justice and the longing for peace.

Last week Pastor Kyle talked about our longing for Justice. It was such a helpful sermon. Worth going back and relistening to. If you were here you heard him talk about how our longing for justice is born out of the sense that something wrong must be made right, but that we are unable to make it right because we are too weak, we aren't wise enough, we are too wicked. But the good news of Christmas is that Christ has come to fulfill God's promise to bring justice. The justice of God has been satisfied in the cross of Christ and his blood shed for us seals the promise that one day every injustice will be wiped away. So Jesus is the answer to our longing for justice. And today we're going to see that Jesus Christ is the answer to our longing for peace. In fact we'll see that **God meets the ache of the world with the promise of peace in Jesus.**

II. The Ache for Peace

These two longings - for justice and peace - hold hands. They go together.

I think about the times my kids come to me upset with one of their siblings. "So and so ruined my project"... They come to me crying out for justice and if I punish the project-ruiner justice has been served, right? And there's a certain satisfaction in that. There's a need for justice met in that. But at the same time kid number 1 still has an ache inside them because their project has been ruined. It's not what they had intended it to be. Even if justice is served, they still long for whatever it was to be restored and whole, right? This is the relationship between justice and peace. We long for justice... and we long for peace.

When the Bible talks about peace it means more than what we usually mean. When the world talks about peace there is a sense of putting conflict to an end. Like, if you've seen footage of the aftermath of the tornadoes that tore through multiple states recently, you've seen just terrible carnage. And that footage from after the storm passed through is a picture of the world's definition of peace. The storm is over, the sky is quiet, and now there is peace. Neighborhoods are flattened, but there is an absence of tornadoes. But the Bible's vision for peace is so much better than that! When The scriptures talk about peace they use the Hebrew word "Shalom." And shalom means wholeness. Shalom in those states affected by the tornado would not only look like the absence of tornados, but the homes that were destroyed built back perfectly. And this, I think, is the kind of peace that the world is really longing for. I think it's the kind of peace you long for. I know that's the kind of peace I long for.

I listened to a podcast recently that analyzed the movements of Russia and China in the world and the global ramifications of it all and it kinda shook me. Now, I don't know if the predictions this person was making were overblown, but one thing I know for sure is that

the nations are groaning right now. The kingdoms of the earth are tottering. They are far less secure than we want them to be.

This week I'm going to attend the funeral of someone who passed away far too early. We've been praying for her since Thanksgiving and she passed away on Monday. Another family member passed away just two days ago. Right now there are two other people connected to my family who are fighting for their next breath. Our health, our families, our relationships are far less secure than we let ourselves believe.

My job - pastoring Union Church - is a gift to me. A deep privilege. And... also... in this last season of church planting and figuring out how to be faithful in it and balance work on urgent tasks with the things that aren't so urgent, but will build for the future. Work & ministry are crazy. Family is awesome and also crazy busy. Life is stressful. Anyone else feel that? And to be honest with you, I have not handled the stress well at times. In the past couple months I've had anxiety attacks for the first time in my life. I'm not sharing that for your pity. I'm just telling you, my work, my ministry, my family... the rhythms of my life are far less peaceful than I wish they were. From the movement of the nations, to the people around me, to the rhythms of my life, to depths of my inner being, I am aching for biblical peace. And I'm guessing you could take out the pieces of my story and insert your story and have the same bottom line. We are far less secure than we think we are. We ache for peace.

Do you know what I've noticed in my life over the past few weeks as these reminders of the anxiety and insecurity of the world have pressed harder into my life? Getting lost in a mindless tv show is so appealing. Pulling out my phone in every quiet moment is so easy for me. And I'm so prone to playing music, or audiobooks, or podcasts to avoid quiet. And Extra snacks are more and more frequent... because these are the ways that I distract myself from discomfort.

How do you run from your discomfort? Any of those things I mentioned sound familiar? Or do you throw yourself into new tasks? Do you drink too much alcohol? Do you withdraw from people? Do you fill up your schedule?

Pay attention to those things. Those habits of avoidance are like when you go ice fishing... I don't know if you've been ice fishing, but when you ice fish, you can't see under the surface of the ice. You just drop a line and often you drill lots of holes and drop lots of lines and attach them to these devices that throw up a flag when a fish is hooked. You can't see the fish, but you know it's there because the flag is up. Those habits of avoidance are like ice fishing flags. Even if you can't see it, you haven't thought about it, you can't articulate it, those habits are flags letting you know, under the

surface you are groaning for wholeness. You are aching for what's been lost. You are longing for peace.

And the good news, friends, is that **God meets the ache of the world with the promise of peace in Jesus.**

III. The Promise of Peace

Let's look at Micah 5 together. We're going to see God's promise of peace here in this passage, but in order for us to appreciate God's promise of peace we need to know that the book of Micah has a lot to do with God's justice. If we were to read the whole book together, we'd see most of it is pretty grim because the Prophet Micah is mostly warning of God's judgement for sin. God's people have sinned against him. The leaders of Israel are corrupt. They've bent justice in favor of the wealthy and the poor have no security. And as a result, God is using the movement of the nations to judge the injustice of his own people. Micah's warning is that the nations are coming against Israel. The city of Jerusalem is going to be defiled by the nations because of the sin of the people. The people are going to be cast into exile because of the sin of the people. The picture here is that because of their sin, God is allowing his people to become embattled. Siege is laid against them. And then, cutting through this bleak picture of turmoil comes a message of hope: **"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."**

Here's the first thing I want us to see from this passage: **God is both just and merciful.** This promise of peace that we're unpacking comes in the midst of God proclaiming judgement on his people for their sin. God does not paper over the sin of his people in order to achieve peace. Many of you this week are going to be gathering with your extended families for Christmas and in order to keep the peace you know you will stay away from certain topics, you will overlook things. You just aren't going to go there in order to keep things nice. God is not interested in keeping things nice with you. He's not interested in giving you that sort of shallow, superficial peace. He desires deep reconciliation with you. And in order to do that, he is going to address injustice in the world. He is going to call out your sin. He's going to deal with it! God's merciful promise of peace comes through his justice. And so in the middle of the warning of coming judgement, as he addressed the sin of his people God gives a word of comfort: a ruler is coming.

A ruler is coming. He will come from a small, lowly, nothing of a place. Bethlehem, where King David is from. And he's from of old, from Ancient of days, which means he is one who will fulfill the promise of old that was made to David...

And what will that ruler do? What kind of ruler will he be? Look at verse 4: ⁴ And he shall stand [That means he will be a victorious ruler. People of God, you who are surrounded on all side, a ruler is coming who will be victorious] and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. [And as a result of his shepherding...] ⁵ And they shall dwell secure, [they will no longer be embattled. And remember Israel was embattled with the nations as a judgement for sin, which means that this promise to dwell secure means that under the shepherding of this ruler God's people will no longer be under God's judgement for their sin] for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.

IV. He is Our Peace

Four hundred years after the Prophet Micah spoke these words, Magi from the east would come to Jerusalem. They would foolishly ask King Herod, the pretender king, where they could find the one who had been born king of the Jews... and the unbelieving chief priests and scribes would point to Micah 5 and point them to Bethlehem.

Shepherds out in the field keeping their flocks would be visited by a heavenly host of Angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased." To announce the coming of the Savior who is Christ the Lord, born in the little nothing-town of Bethlehem.

The lowly child grew and as he grew he lived a holy life before God. He lived that life that we should have lived. He taught his disciples that was the Good Shepherd. He was the ruler that God had promised. Israel's corrupt leaders executed him on a cross, but just like the nations attacking Israel in the book of Micah, the corrupt leaders and the Roman soldiers had no idea that God was sovereignly using them in their unbelief to deal with the sins of his people once and for all. Jesus died on the cross and three days later he rose from the grave, victorious over sin! And now he stands to shepherd his people. And because of him, we who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote about Jesus, "He himself is our peace." Does that sound like Micah 5:5? Micah said of the ruler that was to come, "He shall be their peace." and Paul says, "He is our peace."!

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise in the book of Micah! He is the ruler from of old, from ancient of days who was promised. He is the one who stands as a shepherd to his people. He is the one who rules in the strength of the LORD and in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. We dwell secure because he is great! And Jesus doesn't just give us peace, Jesus Christ is the substance of our peace. He is the foundation of

our peace. He is the treaty that ended the war. He is the embrace of the safest person you can think of that causes all your tension to melt away. He is our fortress and our protector. He is the shepherd who leads us to green pastures and beside still waters. Jesus is our peace! Would you come to him? Would you worship him, church? He is the answer to the longing of your soul!

V. Conclusion

So what does this mean for us today as the people who live in the tension between the first coming of Jesus and the second?

Since Jesus is our peace, we can now be a people of peace. We see this throughout the New Testament as the church of Jesus is formed and matures... Romans 14 tells us that the kingdom we are called into is a kingdom of peace (14:17). One of the fruits of God's Spirit at work in our lives is peace (Gal 5:22). We are called to be a people not anxious about anything, but guarded by the peace of God (Phil 4:7). Colossians 3 tells us to let to Peace of Christ rule on our hearts... (Col. 3:15). For some of you, you just need to hear that reminder. Maybe you hear it and it would be like Jesus in the middle of the stormy sea saying, "Peace. Be still." The turmoil of your heart comes to rest in the peace he has purchased you.

But I wonder if, for some of you, this feels like a trick from God. Maybe you feel like, "I tried you Jesus. You promised me peace that surpasses understanding, but my life feels anything but peaceful." I know that for some of you, your lack of peace is complicated and layered and it's not as simple as preaching you into a more hopeful mindset. I know for some of you your ache for real peace is chronic and difficult. I'm so sorry for your pain. I believe the gospel holds out hope to you. For others of us, and I want to say this gently... I wonder if we don't have peace because we are expecting from God a kind of peace that he has not promised to us right now.

Our western world has trained us to expect progress and comfort and ease, but these things are not promised in the Bible. Not on this side of eternity. There's a false gospel (something that masquerades as christianity, but isn't at all christianity) that teaches that life in Jesus means no more defeat, no more obstacles, nothing but blessing from here on out. But that false gospel takes the promise of Jesus second return and tries to make it apply today. But that promise hasn't yet been realized. This is why we wait for him to come again! Jesus tells us to expect the hatred of the world. In fact, he promises that in this world we will have trouble. So I just want you to consider if you feel tricked by Christianity because you've believed a false christianity that made false promises.

And in contrast with that false gospel, I want to lay out the peace that does belong to followers of Jesus. Believe it or not, the peace Jesus brings is better than a peace tied to our circumstances. We can have peace in Christ today. The ache of your heart can be met with the peace of God today. Here's what I mean. I heard another pastor use this analogy and it resonated so truly with me that I had to steal it: In my family my Dad is kind of the steady anchor. I'm pretty sure he's that person for a lot of people. I think that's part of how God has gifted him - to just be a steady, strong presence. And, at least for me, I've noticed that when we've gone through hard things, I tend to gauge the way I'm feeling based on how he's feeling. So, when my sister has been in the hospital over the years, if my Dad doesn't seem worried, I felt the freedom to not freak out. Throughout the pandemic I've called my dad multiple times to ask how he's feeling about the virus of the variant or what have you... and usually if my Dad is at peace, I can be at peace.

Listen, we can be at peace despite our circumstances. We can be at peace though the mountains fall and the earth give way, because we look to a King who sits enthroned over it! King Jesus isn't ever wringing his hands in heaven. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, the earth gives way and King Jesus is sovereign over all of it, and he is good, and he holds us. This is how followers of walk through tribulation, and distress, and persecution, and famine, and nakedness, and danger, and sword, and death... all of it with a peace that surpasses understanding - because they look to Jesus and their peace is rooted in him.

Finally, followers of Jesus, I want to hold out the promise of God that we will one day have full and final peace forever. The book of Revelation gives us a picture of the peace that will come when Jesus comes again.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."(21:1-4)

Friends, the day will come when we shall dwell secure with our shepherd king forever. That is God's promise of peace to us.

Let's pray.