

Great Things Come In Small Packages

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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.” Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 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. And he will be their peace.” (NIV 2011)

Well, have you had a chance to check the presents under the tree? Did you shake them? Did you hold them carefully to see what they might be? How many are big, and how many are small? We tend to think that bigger the package, better is the present, right? Not always. What if mom got two gifts under the tree, one huge one and one small one? You would think that the huge one was better. But it isn't. Maybe the huge one contains a new pillow for mom, but the small one is a diamond bracelet that costs a ten times more. Sometimes the better things come in small packages.

That is the story for today. Great things come in small packages. Today we will see how small our Savior began in this world, and then see how great his blessings are for us and for all people.

I. How small our Savior began in this world.

First, look at how small and insignificant Jesus was. I read something about our own Civil War not too long ago. Shortly after the war began, Union troops began to pour into Washington, D.C. President Abraham Lincoln made an interesting observation about these men. He said that anyone of them could someday become president of the United States. A couple did. Anyone of them could become a governor or senator or maybe even sit as a judge in a courtroom. Several did. Lincoln should know. His own beginnings were very humble. No one could guess that this man who grew up in a log cabin reading by lamplight would become president. But he did, and in many ways that is the dream of America. We love to see and hear, and maybe even live, a rags to riches story, poor people aspiring to great heights.

Look at the humble beginnings of Jesus. **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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.”** Bethlehem. That was a teeny little obscure town. Sure, it was the birthplace of King David. But that was about it. It is one of those, “Don't blink, you will miss it,” towns.

Yet, from here the Savior of the World and the Ruler of the universe will be born. And it sounds like your typical rags to riches story. A baby from poor parents. Dad was a carpenter; mom was a stay-at-home mom. But is Jesus is a rags to riches story? I suggest to you he is not. In fact, Jesus' story is not rags to riches, but riches to rags. Micah said of him in our text, “. . . **whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**” Micah lived about 2,700 years ago. That's ancient history to us. But Micah says that Jesus was ancient to him. What is ancient to a person living in ancient times? From before the beginning of the world and history. This person who would be born in Bethlehem, Micah tells us, is none other than God.

What did God have to do in order to be born a baby in Bethlehem? I will let the Apostle Paul describe for us: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself NOTHING, taking the very nature of a SERVANT, being made in human likeness. And being found in a appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”**

Friends, let's say you get some gift certificates to, let's say, A-Town Tavern, or some other restaurant. So you take the family out for dinner. Now the waitress comes to your table to take your order. This is what you do not do. You do not sit her in her seat, you do not take the order yourself, you do not go into the kitchen and cook it yourself, you do not bring it to the table, and you do not wash the dishes afterwards and then pay for all of it. No, you came to be served food cooked by someone else, brought to you, and cleaned up by someone else.

But what did Jesus do? He came not to be served, but to serve. When Jesus was born, he humbled himself, he became nothing, the Lord of the universe became obedient to stupid, failed humans on earth, obedient even to death. Jesus set aside his crown in order to place himself beneath each of us, to submit to each of us, to serve each of us. Jesus is a riches to rags story.

II. He came to give us great blessings.

But from this small, humble package comes great blessings for us. **“Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 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. And he will be their peace.”**

Jesus gave up his riches to take on rags to save us. Let's say that there is some underprivileged family in Arlington you want to help out, really help out. They live in some shanty, with left over pieces of plywood and corrugated tin as walls and a roof. The floor is dirt and the bathroom was a coffee can in the corner. And let's say there is some obscure little law that says in order to help them, you must exchange places with them. This means you will have to live in their shanty and they can move into your house. Would you do that?

Jesus did. Imagine the Lord whose throne is in heaven and the universe is his footstool needing to walk wherever he went, wearing thrift store clothes instead of kingly robes, and having to wait in line like the rest of us. He not only lived in our world, he took our place. Where the wages of sin is death, Jesus became obedient to death on a cross and died our death. And where we sinners are nothing more than objects of God's wrath and worthy of hell itself, Jesus suffered that wrath and that hell. And the exchange? We get to live in his mansion in heaven after our measly few years here on earth. And when we do, the resurrected Jesus will be right there waiting for us in all his godly glory with the crown rightfully on his head. In fact, he is preparing our room right now for us. Jesus went from riches to rags to save us, and now he took up his riches again and is sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

This great blessing comes in small packages. It came as a baby in Bethlehem. It still comes to us in small packages. It comes to us in Baptism. Think about it. The pastor pours a little water on the head of a baby. The most it could do is make the baby cry, but when he adds the Word of God, suddenly this baby is washed clean of all of his or her sins, all sins. Think about it. The pastor says words from the pulpit. They are mere words, but the Spirit is working in those words. When you hear that your sins are forgiven, they are. These words alter your future as they open up heaven for us. Great things in small packages, a little wafer and a taste of wine in Communion but containing the very body and blood of Christ given and shed for your sins. The glory of heaven is ours when we open a book called the Bible and read it and believe it.

III. He will shepherd us home.

Finally, this Jesus not only saves us, he will shepherd us all the way to heaven. **"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. And he will be their peace."**

Jesus wants to shepherd us. Jesus wants to shepherd you. And we need him to shepherd us because, like sheep, we love to wander and stray. I remember when I was really young, preschool or kindergarten age. My mom took me shopping, and when we walked near the toy aisle, my eye turned instantly to the long shelf of toys. That was all I could think about. I wandered away from my mom and went to that aisle. Then it hit. I looked for my mom and she was gone. I panicked. I started to cry. I was lost. Then my mother turned the corner and gave me a big hug. I didn't know it at the time, but my mother was always there, one aisle away watching me the whole time.

The world is one big shopping store with all the toys and distractions we could ever want. They catch our eye and we fixate ourselves to them. We so easily let go of Jesus' hand and wander away. If Jesus didn't care, he would go his way and let us go ours. But he cares for us. He is watching us. He will bring us back to him. Today is just one example of that for us. Why are we here? Being in church seems the right thing to do. But one more thing is going on.

We have left the world outside the doors for a while and gazed into the manger. Where the world sees merely a baby, we see the Lord of the universe in the flesh. For just a moment here, the Christmas plans, the presents, all the music, everything has faded off to the background as we focus on this child. We have heard his Word and its many promises concerning this baby. We see sinners forgiven, graves opening on the last day, we see a throng of people in heaven who should not be there, but they are because God so loves us.

But don't let this be just an isolated moment. As we go out those doors again after the service, let's not lose focus on who Jesus is or on what he has done for us. The rod and staff this shepherd uses is his Word. With it we find security, peace, hope, love. Let him use that rod and staff to shepherd you outside this church. And look at anyone you meet this week. Do they feel the same security and joy you have? Take them to this baby and tell them what he means to them.

Great things come from small packages. Great blessings come to us through this child named Jesus. Amen.