

“The House of Bread” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 4 December 22, 2024

- I. **Micah 5:2** – “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 origin is from of old, from ancient days.”
- II. **We are in the season of baking.**
 - a. As a child, my mom used to bake for weeks leading up to Christmas.
 - i. She would make caramels, fudge, sugar cookies, shortbread cookies, pies, toffee, pecan pralines, rosette cookies, and much more.
 - ii. One thing I don’t remember her baking was bread... and maybe that’s why I don’t eat sweets anymore, because I had plenty of those as a kid... but I sure love bread!
 - iii. Bread is often a big part of our menus, and during this time of year, we often see homemade bread at many meals.
 - b. As much as I would like to talk about all kinds of delicious breads covered in warm butter... it’s time to turn our attention to a bread that comes from the House of Bread.
 - i. Not everyone knows the Hebrew meaning of Bethlehem, but it begins with “*bait*”, meaning house, and “*lehem*”, meaning bread.
 1. So, the birth of our Lord and Savior would be in the little town of House of Bread.
 - ii. Bread is a very simple food... a staple food for much of the world – especially in ancient days.
 1. This basic necessity was also an important part of God’s deliverance for His people after they left Egypt.
 - a. God gave them bread from heaven, or manna, as they wandered in the desert for forty years... giving them just enough to live for each day and no more.
 2. Also, bread was placed in the temple each week.
 - a. Twelve loaves of unleavened bread, called the Bread of Presence, were put on a table in the temple.
 - b. These loaves were a sign of God’s love and presence in the lives of His people and represented God’s constant provision.
 - c. That bread was a sign that God said He wanted to dwell with His people, as Exodus 25:8 says, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”
 - iii. God considered bread a source of life and a sign of His presence.
 1. Bethlehem, the House of Bread, was also the place God chose for King David to be born, the king from the tribe of Judah.
 2. We might think that God would choose Jerusalem, the city where the temple was built and the kings would call home.

- a. However, God tends to choose the simple things to make a big statement – things like small towns, or bread, or a man in David who was the youngest in his family of 8 boys... but who would be raised up as the king and even ancestor of Jesus Christ the Messiah.

III. **The prophet Micah lived during a time of upheaval for God's people.**

- a. After King David was long dead, the tribes of Israel were split into north and south... and the north was in the middle of an invasion by Assyria.
 - i. The temple and Jerusalem were in the south, but they were also facing destruction, and they needed a good ruler to restore peace.
- b. Micah is prophesying about the end of the north, but also the end of Jerusalem and the temple in the south... as all the Jewish rulers would be exiled and taken into foreign lands at some point.
 - i. The people would face the horrors of war and famine because they turned away from God and His presence.
 - ii. It was a constant theme with the Israelites from the moment God led them out of the slavery of Egypt – trusting in other gods to feed them both physically and spiritually.

IV. **We know that story well, as we turn to other gods to help us too.**

- a. Other gods and idols are satan's way of turning us away from God... and we fall for these tricks and lies all the time... as we set aside boring bread.
- b. For example, our finances become a constant source of temptation.
 - i. We trust in our savings accounts and our retirement accounts as though they will save us... make us happy... meet our needs.
 - 1. Rather than tools for us to use for God's glory and a gift that He calls on us to manage, we spend all our time stuffing our barns full of all the good gifts God gives us (Luke 12:16ff) and forgetting that material goods are not going to help us in heaven.
 - ii. We spend much more time focused on making, managing, and spending money than we do on spending time with God through His Word, worship, prayer, and praise.
 - 1. Jesus brings up money over 250 times because it's an idol that becomes a stumbling block for so many people.
- c. If we don't turn to money as another god, we find many other things to put in His place... trying to feed ourselves spiritually and physically.
 - i. Some will trust in professionals more than God...
 - 1. Therapists and counselors become more important than the Word and God's healing that comes from Christ alone.
 - 2. Doctors have the final word for us when only God is worthy of that kind of trust.
 - 3. Political and social pundits (or so-called experts who offer commentary with authority) capture our attention and we can

watch hundreds of hours of people talking about issues instead of spending time loving God and loving others.

d. No matter what the idol or other god we put in front of the One True God, they will all leave us empty and hungry... never satisfied.

V. **The prophet Micah proclaims the Savior will bring peace through His rule.**

a. Yes, the Savior, or God Himself is the only rule and place to trust, and the only one who will bring peace.

b. Strangely, God didn't choose a more prominent city to deliver King David... or King Jesus... because they both came from the House of Bread.

c. Micah says this chosen One will rule with divine authority and bring peace (vv 4–5a)... which means Bethlehem will live up to its name as the “house of bread,” because peace, good rulers, and good governance are all part of our daily bread (as Luther says in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer).

d. Ultimately, Jesus Christ did come just as the prophecies foretold – born in Bethlehem... and becoming the source of bread for all...

i. He is the bread of life (John 6:35)...

1. He gives His life on the cross for the life of the world.

2. He continually feeds us, the Church, with the Lord's Supper, or His body and blood.

3. He sustains His people with daily bread, or everything we need for life and sustenance until He comes again.

e. Jesus provides for us in all our hunger.

i. When we hunger for money and saving it at the expense of trusting in God... we are given the forgiveness of our sins and reminded that God loves us so much He will take care of the smallest detail.

ii. When we hunger for someone to give us guidance and relief from whatever ails us, placing them on a pedestal... God gently brings us home to Jesus, where He rightly belongs in the most important place of trust.

iii. Whenever we are anxious about the future, about our health, about anything that might tempt us to seek out help without God... we are brought to our senses by the Word and the grace that comes through His supper – the first and best place to seek... is God.

f. Yes, our God works in mysterious ways – sometimes in the most simple ways that don't seem attractive or powerful.

i. Yet, He chooses a little town called Bethlehem, or House of Bread, to deliver the Bread of Life – the only bread that will sustain us forever.

ii. God chose to make His presence known in a much more tangible way than having us bake twelve loaves and put it in the church to remind us... He came to us in the flesh to dwell among us.

g. As we celebrate Christmas—the birth, life, and mission of Jesus Christ—we recognize Him as God's greatest gift, bringing peace from heaven and the true bread that saves and sustains our souls forever. Amen.