

## ***“Too Little to Save”***

Bethlehem Ephrathah is like six-man football going up against Waverly – like a class D-2 school going up against class A.

Bethlehem is well-known to us – it has a certain aura about it, a Hallmark patina. We sing, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” – and we hear in the Christmas story that Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem, and Jesus is born there.

But it’s not really much of a town. It’s po-dunk. At least Alvo and Prairie Home are on the highway and see a lot of traffic.

“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 ...”

Man says Bethlehem is “too little” – and so the wise men end up in Jerusalem, expecting to find the newborn king there. But the Lord promises that out of this “too little” town He will bring forth a ruler.

Bethlehem is the city of David – who would become the greatest king in the history of Israel. But he was the youngest of all of Jesse’s son – his brothers probably thought he was annoying – and definitely “too little” to do anything of importance. He’s the last one you’d pick to go out and fight Goliath.

And yet, the Lord promises to bring forth His ruler from Bethlehem – one “whose origin is from of old, from ancient days ... And He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord ... and [His flock] will dwell secure ... and He shall be their peace.”

Soon we’ll hear the glad tidings of great joy that shall be for all the people – the angel’s announcement that the Lord’s promise through the prophet Micah has been fulfilled – that the Savior has been born!

But wait, the Savior is a baby? Isn’t He “too little”? And when the shepherds go to see the sight – oh, what mean estate in which He lies, a manger, a food-trough for the cattle. And his parents, they too seem to be poor, of humble estate.

The great good news of the Savior really got our hopes up – but this One is not much to look at – He’s not what we expected. He’s ..... well, “too little.” He’s “too little” to rule because we’ve got big problems. He’s “too little” to shepherd – he doesn’t engender much certainty, security, or peace.

That’s the Standard Operating Procedure for Him whose origins are from old, from ancient days – that He works in unexpected ways – and not just works, but as Micah declares, “rules”! Jesus is the ruler from ancient days – God in the flesh, ruling on earth, and ruling over all.

Yet the “incarnation” itself – God becoming flesh – is met with the charge of being “too little.” If God is man, then He is “too little.” Look at where His incarnation gets Him – nailed to a cross – and laid in a tomb. “See,” man says, “too little.”

But Jesus teaches all along that this is how God rules on earth. How many times do we hear Jesus say – “the kingdom of heaven is like ...”? The “kingdom of heaven” – that is – “how the God of heaven rules here on earth.” It’s like a little bit of leaven – like a tiny mustard seed – like a field full of weeds --- to which man says, “too little.”

But this is nothing new with God – He’s been doing the unexpected from the beginning. He gives the promise of countless descendants to old Abraham and barren Sarah. He turns things on their head saying that the older son Esau shall serve the younger son Jacob.

He takes a little baby and places him in a tiny basket of an ark so that one day he may deliver his people. He gives bread from heaven, and His people say, “mah-annah, what is it?” He sends little David out to battle a Goliath. He rules over the Egyptian gods with a wooden staff.

He creates all things in heaven and on earth by the power of His mouth – and mankind just keeps saying – “it’s too little ..... we’ve got big problems.”

Folks, this is how God works. As they say, “Let God be God” – actually, there is no “letting” God do anything – it’s WHO He is and HOW He rules, whether you believe it, or not. He is revealing His rule to you – so that faith can receive it.

Yes, we have big problems. What is the biggest problem of your life that haunts you – nags you – weighs you down? What is the biggest problem you're dealing with today? Is it one that you've had to deal with, day after day?

Sin is like that. It is serious – deadly serious – but it also has a way of being made “too big” by the devil. As in, “Your sin is too big for Jesus” – “your sin is too big, too wicked, for God to forgive.”

And while you sit there and expect a big solution to your big problem – God is coming to you in simple, humble, lowly ways – using common means – promising to rule your life.

He washes you with plain water, but adds His Word of promise – a Word so powerful that it creates all things and forgives all sin – and now, it rescues you from death and the devil.

He takes a thin, flake-like piece of unleavened bread – tells you to eat – and promises that He is giving you His God-in-the-flesh Body to resurrect your body from death to life. He takes a bit of wine, tells you to drink – and doesn't just promise to release you from your sin – He's actually doing it!

This is how God works – ruling over your sin with His holy, precious blood – ruling over your death with His resurrected-and-never-to-die-again life – ruling over your conscience with a calm that only He can give.

God on earth “for you.” Jesus ruling for your sake, for your benefit – so that you may be certain – so that you may live in peace.

Jesus stands and shepherds you in the strength of the Lord ... so you may dwell secure ... and He shall be your peace. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.