

Who doesn't love a heartwarming Cinderella story? The well-worn trope of someone who was overlooked becoming the unexpected hero? It's a universal fascination that even goes beyond culture. There is something about Cinderella, and most Disney movies, that capture a deep longing within each of us. I know I'm just a 90s child, but from Cinderella to Hercules, no matter if you are a Boomer or Gen Z-er, we gravitate toward stories of the "nobody" becoming the "somebody." There's power in potential, hope in tomorrow. Whether it's a fairy tale you're reading to your kids or a reality you're living, have you found yourself longing for your own "zero to hero" story? It's a natural wish to have, especially at this time of year when maybe your Christmas plans are already unraveling. You couldn't find the perfect present, your work party was a bust, that end of the year project still undone, and here you are, maybe feeling more "zero" than "hero," wanting to come through, but falling short. Lost in all this seasonal shuffle, you look back in regret, wishing you would have spent more time meditating on the Messiah than meandering through this mess. If self-pity is your life outlook right now, your weaknesses all you feel, a "zero" metaphorically stamped on your forehead, where is your Hero?

For oppressed and forgotten people, that unknown brings fear close to home. For Micah's small town of Moresheth, such fear held them down daily. There was no hero for these tiny towns of Judah. Their property taken away without any due process, a legal system driven by bribery and not liberty and justice for all. "Prophets" supposedly from the Lord, paid off by corrupt politicians and landowners, preaching messages of suppression, not salvation. Micah saw families forced from their homes and left to live in caves and fields. His people felt like less than zero. All the while, they'd watch their abusers and oppressors go up to the Temple, give a sacrifice, and seemingly wash things over with God. No justice, no hope, no hero. I can only imagine the amount of times Micah sat face to face, across from a person whose tears were all they had left, who could only say, "Who could possibly want to help someone as insignificant and weak as me?"

That heartbreaking question has been heard in your life too. You hear it when you give up on yourself in your struggle with sin. You feed it when in self-pity and forlornness you self-medicate, only to watch true peace in your life constantly slip away. The feeling of being a "zero" is so dissociative. Such thoughts drive us away from the people who love us most. Such self-identification leads us to question if there really is a purpose to what we go through. Such "zero-minded" thinking distorts who our God is, and what he values most.

Tell me if this conversation sounds familiar: "How are things going for you?" "Well, it's busy, it's stressful, but I'll manage." Or what about this one happening in a grocery aisle near you, "Do you need help finding anything?" "Nope, I'll find it on my own, thanks," as he precedes to spend the next half-hour "finding it on his own." It's that element of our sinful nature who simultaneously knows how weak we are, yet convinces us we can recreate ourselves from "zeros" to "heroes."

It's the crazy cycle that starts with stress, progresses to pride, falls to failure, spins to self-pity, and rolls to rejection. Where is our hero? Where is the Lord? Our hearts launch in a centripetal motion around this sin-driven cycle. Am I not good enough for God's love? Do I need to find it in me to love him and others? Do I need to help myself before God helps me? Do I need to create my own peace, before I have peace with Jesus?

In this cycle of self-pity, when zero becomes the sum of our life calculation, how can we expect to find our hero within? How can we change our life narrative? How can you and me, "zeros", become "heros?"

As Micah sat at his desk, looking at the hunched over and weeping scene of his hometown, his hero emerged and it nearly knocked him off his chair. His people's hero would have a hometown, just like Micah's, forgotten, seemingly insignificant, from "Noplace, Nowhere, Israel." Maybe you've heard of this tiny town? "**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.**" The Lord opened his prophet's eyes to see a Hero who would come from zero. In this forgotten, backwater town with an historical marker of being King David's home, decaying in memory, a Hero would come to fulfill the Lord's cause.

This Hero would not bribe his way to the top of Jerusalem's throne. This Hero was not bound by human opinion or life circumstances. This Hero would not pound everybody into the ground so he and his ego could be raised up. He is the Ancient of Days. A name but two words: I AM. He is the greatest ruler, yet the humblest servant, doing nothing but the will of the One who sent him. This Hero brings deliverance out of disaster, transforming garbage into glory. He rejects everything the world is inclined to choose and chooses everything the world is inclined to reject.

This Hero would come when God's people seemed "**abandoned.**" He would come when the people of God's promise seemed scattered to the wind. He would come to the people who were forgotten, who felt like zeros.

So, where are you in all this? You find yourself in Micah 5:3, you hear your voice as you hear Mary's song. You and me came from noplace, nowhere. You and me as Christians are looked at by the influential and elite of this world as insignificant, weak, forgotten. We look at ourselves, and identify much more readily to be zeros not heroes, nobodies, not somebodies, but that's not how Jesus looks at you.

Whether your name is Micah, Mary, or Me, Jesus identifies you far differently. When you feel inadequate and weak, when you wonder why Jesus would choose to love you, when you've done nothing to deserve that? See your Hero who sees you as far more than zero. How do I know that? Because look at what your Hero has promised to do for you:

**“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the LORD his God.”** In our “zero-mindedness,” He is mindful of you. In our wandering in the fields of self-medication and self-loathing, He chose you to be his sheep. He broke through our self-pity cycle. He stood where we fell. He laid down his life for you, his sheep. Here’s the thing about our Heavenly Hero. He was lifted up on a cross so he could lift you up in joy and peace. He wants to end your hunger for purpose and hope. He longs for you to see yourself like he sees you: Blessed. He willingly offers his help every second and reminds you that he will never forget you.

This is the Christ-cycle. He calls out to “zeros” like you and me through the voice of Scripture, he uncovers us in our pit of self-pity and carries us like lambs, he shifts our story, he shows us who we really are by faith: Most highly favored. Not favored and exalted because of what we’ve done, but because of who our Hero is. He isn’t the hero at the end of the movie who alone stands tall. No, he is the Hero who proudly lifts you up, a mere spectator, pulling you through the screen of Scripture, so you can stand beside him to join in his victory, even though we played no role at all! He isn’t the hero who seeks glory for himself. No, he is the Hero who glorifies his Father and reaches out his hand so you can share in this glory too. He is the Hero who holds all the strength in the universe and chooses to put it to use by serving you and me, the weakest of the weak. He is the Hero who is also the Hero-Maker.

Jesus became zero so by his grace, he could transform us into heroes. What does that heroic life look like for you and me, his sheep? Let the Lord’s words written by Micah clue you in, **“They will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”** We are heroes because we live fearlessly, no longer afraid of our weaknesses, no longer nervous if we’ll come through, no longer worried about our life’s direction, the Shepherd-Hero is leading us! We have spiritual security! We live in a state of constant spiritual strength! Imagine with me what this heroic life means for you on the day to day level: It means a husband who loves and respects his wife, not expecting anything in return, but doing so, because Jesus is his hero and he wants nothing more than to love self-sacrificially like him. This heroic life means a mom, who willingly makes life sacrifice after life sacrifice so her kids can see a glimpse of Jesus, their hero, through her. It means you are a hero, when you stick up for Jesus even though it’s unpopular. It means you are a hero when you silence self-pity and fill your self-talk with the words of the Shepherd. Through you and me, his greatness reaches every nook and cranny of our lives, spreading throughout the world.

This zero to hero life all happens in a place the world would consider “noplacel, nowhere” but it is there where we find the rarest of jewels: peace. It is at that manger in Bethlehem where we find the context, content, and crux of meaning. The Lord describes it like this through his prophet Micah, **“And he will be their peace.”** Jesus is your peace. He who was rejected, dismissed, deemed insignificant, is in actuality the Lord Almighty. He is your peace when you can find none within yourself. He is your peace when life changes are happening a mile a minute with no time to process. He is your peace when you are disappointed in yourself. He is your peace when everything around screams chaos. He is your peace because he will never

stop reminding you that you are not a zero, but a hero after his own heart, just like the first king who was born in Bethlehem, a forgiven, restored, child of God.

A mere few days from now, we will make that familiar trek to the cattle stall to see this peace up close and personal once again. Just don't forget the Hero who is already with you every step of the way. See your identity through his eyes. When you are weak, He is strong, when you feel like zero remember your Hero. In your weakness, see his strength. From zero to hero, the story you thought would be left untold is your story found at the manger below. Amen.