

October 22-24, 2022

Micah 7:18-20: Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.

Dear fellow children of a merciful God,

If you were asked to list 3 examples from the Bible of God's anger, would you go first to the Old Testament or the New Testament? In the Old Testament you find God driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, God's anger at Cain, the Flood, the widespread death the angel of the Lord left in his wake at the Passover, the earth swallowing Korah and the poisonous snakes that left so many Israelites dead. In the New Testament you find Jesus cleansing the temple and driving out the money changers, but that doesn't necessarily compare to the level or intensity of God's wrath in the pages of the Old Testament.

As a child, I too often viewed the Old Testament as the bad news part of the Bible. Stories of serious sins and severe consequences, and stories of lots of "you shall's" and 'shall not's." Unfortunately, I may have missed many of the beautiful gospel promises that are found in the first 39 books of the Bible. Our text this morning has one of those examples of great gospel comfort. Our theme is:

Rejoice in God's promise of forgiveness

- 1. His promise is unfathomable**
- 2. His promise is unconditional**
- 3. His promise is unbreakable**

I. Our text is found in the last verses of the book of Micah. Like the prophet Isaiah, Micah lived 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Like Isaiah, his ministry took place in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was a time of political instability, social injustice and moral failure; a time when many enjoyed great wealth, others lived in great need, and most lived in spiritual poverty. A lot of what Micah's original audience was facing is not too different than what we face in our country today. Micah was a "prophet of the poor," and more importantly, a prophet of God's judgment and God's salvation through the coming Messiah. Over and over again Micah warns the people of a day of reckoning—God had delivered them from

slavery in Egypt and into the promised land, but they had repaid him with rejection and rebellion. Now they would suffer ruin at the hands of other nations. Yet even as he warns of impending doom, Micah also offers a message of hope: God would deliver them once again from yet another enemy. Such undeserved and unexpected good news led Micah to ask this rhetorical question in the first verse of our text:

¹⁸ Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?

This is one of those easy rhetorical questions in the Bible. Who is a God like you? There isn't one. Not Buddah, Baal, Allah, Brahma or any of the other deities that man has invented. The God of the Bible—the only true God, is so different in so many ways: as our God of creation, the God of providence...caring and providing for our physical needs, but Micah focuses specifically on God being a God of forgiveness, a God whose love for us does not depend on our love for him, a God who does not treat us the way we deserve to be treated.

You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. There are numerous examples in the Bible of God's anger. It's important for us to realize that God's anger is different than our anger. 1. God's anger is always justified, unlike our anger that can be triggered by hurt feelings or selfish pride or imagined wrongs. 2. God's anger at sin doesn't disappear with time. Man's anger tends to be an emotion that blows hot and cold. With sin, God doesn't get angry, then take a deep breath, exhale and say, "OK, I'll stop being angry." His anger at sin is eternal. So then how does he **"not stay angry forever"**? Because God moves the target of his anger from the sinner to the one who became sin for us.

Where in the New Testament do you find the most terrifying and intense picture of God's anger? Under dark skies on a desolate hill called Golgotha outside of Jerusalem. It's there that God unleashed all of his anger—on who? Perhaps, don't say "Jesus," even though that is correct. But that depersonalizes it for God and can lead us to gloss over both the terror and the comfort of that scene on Calvary. God unleashed all of his wrath on **his Son**. Not on a random scapegoat, not on someone for whom he had no love, but on his **beloved Son**, because his love for us.

And why would God take out his anger on his Son? Micah says of God: **"You delight to show mercy."** To "delight" in something means to find joy in it. God finds joy in forgiving us. What is unfathomable is that God's joy in forgiving us isn't canceled out by what that means—that he had to target all of his anger at sin—his anger at every sin ever committed in the past or the future—and let his Son experience that wrath. This is what is unfathomable: that God finds such joy in

showing us mercy that he was willing to punish his Son. In one of my favorite passages from Isaiah God says, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** What makes these words so meaningful is the context. God wasn’t saying “My thoughts aren’t your thoughts, so that’s why somebody you love died.” He wasn’t saying, “My thoughts aren’t your thoughts, so that’s why the economy is awful.” Right before this the prophet Isaiah had said, **“Let the wicked turn to the LORD and he will have mercy on them, he will freely pardon.”** “Freely pardon”? That makes no sense, but that’s because God’s thoughts aren’t like our thoughts. **Rejoice in God’s promise of forgiveness, because his promises is unfathomable.**

II. God’s promise is also unconditional. ¹⁹ **You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.** Micah tells his people: “God will **again** have compassion on us.” There were consequences for their rebellion. There would be regrets and tears that had been and would be shed. And yet God, as always, would have compassion on them. That’s God’s promise, a compassionate, unconditional promise. God hurls our iniquities—**all our iniquities**—into the depths of the sea. That was the unconditional promise that God made 2700 years ago, and at no time in the last 27 centuries has God attached any strings to that promise.

It doesn’t depend on how many times I’ve sinned or what the sin is. God’s forgiveness is so complete that he has hurled—violently thrown—every one of those sins into the depths of the sea. The depths of the ocean itself...not the depths of a pond, or a lake or a stream, but the depths of the sea. Such a picture of the unconditional forgiveness of God—such beautiful reassurance for sinners struggling with the guilt of their sins. And God knows that we long to hear of this forgiveness, and to be reminded that there are no exceptions to promise of that forgiveness.

How much does God love you? If you have been a child, parent or grandparent in the last 20 years, you may have read this book or had it read to you: **“Guess how much I love you?”** Little Nutbrown Hare wants Big Nutbrown Hare to know how much he loves him, but what he wants to know even more is this: How much does Big Nutbrown Hare love him? Page after page they go back and forth: as much as I can reach, as high as I can jump, until the last page: How much does Big Nutbrown Hare love him? All the way to the moon...and back.

That is a picture that awes a child, a picture that a child can embrace. No matter what our age, what comfort we can find as over and over again in the pages of his Word God paints pictures of his mercy: **“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:11-12). Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they will become like wool” (Isaiah 1 18).**

And the promise in our text: **God hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.** Such an unconditional promise, such unconditional love. Yet we may still have a nagging question: If your sins have been drowned in the depths of sea, then why do they resurface? A couple of possibilities: 1. While sins of my past lie at the bottom of the ocean, some of those sins may still be staring me in the face because I keep repeating those sins. Not only does God promise to take each of these recurring sins and cast them into the sea, but he also promises to give me the strength to resist those sins.

But what about sins that you haven't repeated, a sin of the past that still haunts you and keeps you awake at night? When sins that have been long drowned in the waters of your baptism resurface months or years later, and your conscience plagues you and Satan lies to you and says “Don't think you're forgiven,” then take a page from Martin Luther: **“When the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is, there I shall be also.’”** What could Luther be so confident? How can you be as confident? Because...

III. His promise is unbreakable. ²⁰ **You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.** God never changed or broke his promises to Abraham, a man who lied and rode the same roller coaster of weak faith/strong faith as we do; God never broke his promises to Jacob, the deceiver. That is because God's promises didn't depend on the quality of their faith or their behavior. God's promises to his children never depend on his children. They depend on God.

Where do you find comfort in pp of Old Testament? Find comfort in God's promise to Abraham that he'd have a son at the age of 100, because from that son came God's Son, your Savior. Find comfort in God's promise to Jacob that all

nations would be blessed through him, for from Jacob came the line of your Savior. Find comfort in knowing that God kept his promise that the angel of the LORD would pass over every house with blood on the door frame, because that's a reminder that he'll keep his promise that Jesus' blood covers you, his hand of judgment will pass over your sins. Find comfort in God's promise that he'd deliver the Israelites from Egypt, because that escape from Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea was part of God's plan to rescue not just the Israelites from slavery, but to rescue you from the bondage of sin.

“Guess how much God loves you?” Let God pull you up on his lap and read page after page of his promises to you. Promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, and Peter, James, and John, and Mary Magdalene. And in so many of those promises you can hear God's promises to you. Not that you will survive a flood, but that God will never again send a flood to cover the earth; not that you'll have a son when you are 100, but that from that son Isaac you have a Savior every one of them, not that God will send you the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but that he sent his Holy Spirit to you on the day of your baptism. Guess how much God loves you? Nowhere in this book does God ask you that question. Instead, he nailed his Son to a cross, and then tells you a story—your story—a story that began before he said “Let there be”, and story that will end when he says, “Welcome home, good and faithful servant.” Thank God that he has made his story your story. Amen.

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