

Who is like the Lord? Saviour

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Preacher: Benji Cook

- [0 : 01] The reading is from Micah chapter 7, which can be found on page 943 of the Church Bibles. Micah chapter 7.
- Woe is me, for I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned. There is no cluster to eat, no first ripe fig that my soul desires.
- The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind. They all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net.
- Their hands are on what is evil to do it well. The prince and the judge ask for a bribe. And the great man utters the evil desire of his soul.
- Thus they weave it together. The best of them is like a briar. The most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment has come.
- [1 : 14] Now their confusion is at hand. Put no trust in a neighbor. Have no confidence in a friend. Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms.
- For the son treats the father with contempt. The daughter rises up against her mother. The daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the men of his own house.
- But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.
- Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.
- I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him. Until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light.
- [2 : 15] I shall look upon his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, Where is the Lord your God?
- My eyes will look upon her. Now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets. A day for the building of your walls.
- In that day, the boundaries shall be far extended. In that day, they will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the river, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.
- But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds. Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest, in the midst of a garden land.
- Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt. I will show them marvelous things.
- [3 : 25] The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might. They shall lay their hands on their mouths. Their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth.

They shall come trembling out of their strongholds. They shall turn in dread to the Lord our God. And they shall be in fear of you. Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us.

He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Thanks very much, Esther, for reading. Please do turn to the back of your service sheets where you'll find an outline that will be helpful for where we're going.

[4 : 44] My name is Benji. If we haven't met, please do come say hello to me at the end. I'm one of the assistant ministers here at Grace Church. But before we start, I'm going to ask the Lord's help for us this morning.

Almighty God, you are the same God who will trample the high places of this world under your feet. Under your feet, the mountains will melt like wax and the cities will be destroyed.

And under those same feet, Lord, you will trample our transgressions forever. Lord, please would you this morning, please help us put aside the nonsense that will be clouding our mind and trying to snatch your precious word from us.

And please, this morning, would you give us such an enormous picture of you in this weary, weary world. Amen.

It's 6 a.m. Your alarm has gone off. And you've set your alarm half an hour early because you know that's the right thing to do in order to have a quiet time. And you've opened up your Bible app or whatever the case may be.

[5 : 59] And you see Jeremiah 22. And you think, gosh, I have no idea what's going on. And it feels stale. And then you turn to pray. And it feels like eating sandpaper.

And the words don't really come. And you're stumbling. And you're thinking, gosh, is this really what a quiet time is supposed to feel like? You remember back to your university days, perhaps, when you read that incredible Christian biography, how they spoke about the immense joy that they would have in the Lord each morning.

They would spring out of bed. And you'd think, man, I hate that guy. And you just end up thinking, this is very, very wearisome.

Or maybe you think, as you're praying, and it's a good practice, you think, to ask the Lord for forgiveness for your sins. And you list the sins that you are asking God to forgive. And you realize that it's the same sin over and over and over again each day.

And you just think, does this ever end? This is so very wearisome. And then you end up at the school gate. And you have the same conversation over and over and over again of holiday, home, and hotel recommendations.

[7 : 08] And you think, goodness, the nonsense that people reject the Lord Jesus Christ for and blind themselves with. It's so very wearisome. Or perhaps you go into school and you see the three or four friends over the years that you've asked to read the Bible with you.

And they've all said no. And they all, for various reasons, have rejected your invites. And you know that you probably should be praying for them, but you forgot. And you know that you should probably invite them to a carol event, but you forgot.

And you just think, I can't face the rejection again. It is just too wearisome. Or perhaps you are tired of hearing sermons and small growth group and one-to-ones where it feels like the only application that encapsulates the whole of the Christian experience is, are you reading your Bible, saying your prayers, and sharing the gospel?

That's it. It repeats Tuesday after Tuesday, Sunday after Sunday. It is so very wearisome. In fact, I was speaking to one member of the congregation this week, and I asked her how her week had been.

And she said, I'm just so tired of seeing the world so full of sin. It's just so vicious, isn't it, and cyclical. It's wearisome.

[8 : 24] And the question I wonder if we've ever asked ourselves, and I ask myself this on a regular basis, is how, as a Christian, do I keep going?

When the Christian walk seems so very wearisome and the answer seems so very repetitive and the problem seems to just go on and on and on.

How, as a Christian, do I keep going? Now, this would have been a very common question for Micah's readers. We know if we've been in the history at all.

Micah is now talking in chapter 6 and 7 about the exile that is to come, the exile from Babylon that is to come. That's what is in view. And there is absolutely no point of kind of discrepancy here or confusion.

The answer is absolutely clear. God is going to punish sin. Verse 3 to 5 of chapter 6, the indictment is brought before them.

[9 : 27] The people have forgotten everything that the Lord has done. Verse 4, they've forgotten that the Lord has brought them out of the land of Egypt and redeemed them from the house of slavery. They've forgotten, verse 5, God's faithfulness to them in the wilderness with King Balak of Moab and Balaam, the son of Beor.

They've forgotten the righteous acts of God. And we've been seeing, haven't we, as we've gone through Micah, that the Lord is a Lord of judgment and that is good news, justifiable news, news that they deserve.

And sadly, Micah chapter 6 doubles down on this. Because not only does Micah present us with a picture that God's people deserve judgment, it also doubles down that the solution to this judgment will not come from them.

It cannot come from them. Micah 6, verse 6. This is God's people speaking, trying to barter with God to get back to him.

With what shall I come before you, Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

[10 : 42] Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

In other words, do you see what they're saying in verses 6 and 7? Lord, you're angry with us. I want to escape the exile. Can I do more? Can I offer more? Can I give more? Even perversely, shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?

It is breathtakingly boring, isn't it, how common this is. One of my favorite podcasts is called Cultish, not because I'm thinking of a career change, but because I find it interesting.

And in the podcast, they interview people that have left various different Christian cults. So there's a lot of people there from Mormon backgrounds, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists.

And they're recently going through a series on Seventh-day Adventists. And Seventh-day Adventists, which I didn't realize, teach very clearly, just like all other cults and world religions, that, yeah, Jesus did some of the work for you on the cross, but you have to do something too.

- [11 : 53] That Jesus kind of does 95%, but your works get you over the line. It's exactly the same here in Micah's time. God's angry at me. God, what can I do to self-justify myself?
- What can I do to please you? And verse 8 of chapter 6 is a verse that many of us will probably be familiar with. Chapter 5, you know, the famous one about the prediction of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- This is probably number 2 of the verses that we know from Micah. He has told you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love, kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. That is a rebuke.
- You've not done that. I've told you this from days of old. You know what it means to follow me faithfully. It's nothing to do with you. You need to walk humbly with me.
- And they've not done it. So in other words, exile is coming. They've forgotten. God's judgment is coming. And they cannot solve the problem themselves.
- [12 : 51] And Micah doubles down on this for us in some biting indictments in verses 10 to 12. And this is God speaking. Can I forget any longer the treasures of the wickedness and the house of the wicked and the scant measure that is a curse?
- Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights? Your rich men are full of violence. Your inhabitants speak lies. And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.
- Therefore, I strike you with a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins. In other words, of course I must punish. You've sinned.
- You can't solve the problem. Of course I will not acquit the guilty. And the result of this that we saw in the beginning of our reading, chapter 7 verses 1 to 6, this is going to be a judgment that is so completely cataclysmic that societal collapse will follow.
- Summarized completely in chapter 7 verse 6, well 5 and 6. Put no trust in a neighbor. Have no confidence in a friend. Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms.
- [14 : 00] For the son treats the father with contempt. The daughter rises up against her mother. The daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the men of his own house.
- In other words, complete family breakdown. No trust. No confidence in anyone. When the judgment of the Lord comes, there will be no one to turn to. Complete societal collapse.
- And there is absolutely no escape. But there's a difficult kind of theological point here. And this is kind of the hardest part of the sermon, so I really need us to kind of go with me on this.
- Christmas is not yet upon us, so a warm fuzzy feeling hopefully hasn't come upon our brains. Although some of you are looking a little bit more tired than others, but that's okay. Because there's a very difficult but very important theological point that Micah is making for us here this morning.
- Which is that when the exile or when the judgment of God comes, it comes on both the faithful and faithless alike.
- [15 : 06] I'm going to say that again because I think it's huge for us as Christians to get to grips with. That when the judgment of God comes, when the exile of God comes, it comes on the faithful and faithless alike.
- Just to show us that, 7 verse 9, this is Micah speaking. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him.
- In other words, this judgment that Micah is talking about, about Babylonian exile, it's not going to just be for those who've completely rejected God. It's going to be for Micah too.

Because all have sinned, therefore all go into exile, faithful and faithless alike. And if we pause for a second and just think, you know, as Christians, we know that makes sense intuitively.

The Christian is not exempt from illness and death and natural disaster and suffering and aging and the brokenness of this world.

[16 : 14] We live in exile now as New Testament Christians and tragedy and travesty falls on all of us. Faithful and faithless alike.

Do ask me about that afterwards. This is not saying that individual sins lead to kind of individual retribution. But that God's anger at our sin affects everyone, faithful and faithless alike.

So Micah is preparing his people, faithful and faithless, for the coming of Babylon. And he gives two imperatives. When the exile comes, there are two things that you must do.

And this is my first point, which should hopefully come up. There are two imperatives. Number one is found in 7 verse 7. But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation.

My God will hear me. And the second is bear, found in verse 9, reading from verse 8. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise.

[17 : 23] When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord. So what are we to do, Christians, in the exile, in a weary world?

Wait and bear. Wait and bear. And I wonder if, like me, when you hear that, your immediate response is, really?

Is that all you're going to give us, God? That in the exile, when life is so wearisome and so difficult and the world is so broken, are you really saying, God, wait and bear?

Wait and bear. It can feel jarring, I think. How am I supposed to keep going? That's the question that we started with this morning as a Christian, when things are so very wearisome.

And God's answer through Micah is, wait and bear. Wait and bear. Now, I want to say that this is not the bear in particular, bearing the consequence of sin.

[18 : 30] This is not karma. I was recently having a chat with a New Age chap in Rocco. Rocco. Rocco. I don't know what it's called. The place in Dulwich Village.

And he said to me that he's a huge believer in karma. Huge believer in karma, because it's a wonderful opportunity to learn. The only problem is that karma, I think, is possibly one of the most evil worldviews possible, if you pause to think about it.

Karma basically goes something like this. In a past life, you did something bad. Therefore, you were punished for it in your next life. In other words, the person in a wheelchair, the person with cancer, deserves it.

They deserve it. They did something bad. So they get something bad. This is not what God is talking about here. Notice that this is societal judgment, not individual judgment.

Chapter 6, the final part of verse 2. For the Lord has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. But do ask me about that afterwards, how that works.

[19 : 32] But this is not karma. So in the exile, wait and bear. Why? Point 2.

Because God is a sin-bearing God. God is a sin-bearing God. Now, I wonder if, as you were reading these verses, you were thinking, gosh, how am I supposed to simply wait and bear?

Well, did we notice that beautiful little word in verse 9? Until. Until. Until. Until. Until. Until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.

And I can only describe this as kind of like a cinematic Ridley Scott or whatever the director might be turn. That suddenly we've gone from the judgment of God coming like a freight train, complete societal upheaval, and then there is an until.

Until. And notice the outrageous things that Micah says are going to happen after that little word until. Verse 10. My enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, where is the Lord your God?

[20 : 45] My eyes will look upon her. Now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets. God's enemies will be put to shame. 11 to 13. A day for the building of your walls, this is Jerusalem.

In that day the boundaries shall be far extended. In that day they will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt and from Egypt to the river, from sea to sea, from mountain to mountain. But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants for the fruit of their deeds.

In other words, the city that is going to be pillaged by the nations, all the nations will flow to it so that no one will be left in any other part of the world except there. Or how about verse 14?

God will be there.

Shepherd your people. This is referring back to Micah chapter 5, the king that is to come. So this city will be filled. God's people will be ashamed. God the shepherd king will be there.

[21 : 43] It's an almost kind of Eden-like language. Did we notice that in verse 14? In the midst of the garden land. This is a complete universal return to a glorious land where God is king and all the nations are flowing to it.

And the nations themselves, I mean it is again, the Eden language is striking. Verse 16. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might. They shall lay their hands on their mouths.

Their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent. Like the crawling things of the earth, they shall come trembling out of their strongholds. They shall turn in dread to the Lord, O God.

And they shall be in fear of you. Somehow we're going from exile, weary exile, to some kind of enormous orchestral crescendo of the city of God being full to the brim with the nations.

With God himself shepherding his people and God's enemies licking the dust. And I wonder as you're reading that, as 21st century, slightly jaded perhaps, Christians, in the midst of exile and our whole lives as Christians has been spent in exile thinking, Oh Jesus, that sounds a little bit too good to be true.

[23 : 01] Just on one word. Until. Exile and weariness. Until. Exile. Big crescendo. Best thing you could ever imagine.

And I can well imagine us as here as Brits thinking, That sounds a little bit too good to be true. Or is that just me? Surely, Lord, that's a little bit too good to be true.

Not all the nations. Surely not all of them. Surely not every single nation humbled. Surely not you dwelling with your people forever in another garden of Eden-like paradise.

It just sounds a little bit too far-fetched. A little bit too good to be true. Is that really all you can give me, Lord? Some pie in the sky ideal?

To wait and bear something that is just so wearisome? Wonderfully, Micah doesn't leave us there. He gives us two, three more verses.

[23 : 59] Because what Micah wants to do to give us confidence that this is coming to pass, Is tell us what our God is like. Micah wants to tell us what our God is like.

That's what Micah's name means. Who is like you, God? And that's where he ends his book. In verse 18. Who is a God like you? Pardoning iniquity.

Iniquity. Now that word pardoning, it's the same word as in 7 verse 9. I will bear. In other words, a better way to read 7 verse 18, and I don't really know why the ESV have done it this way, is who is a God like you bearing iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnants of his inheritance.

In other words, Micah wants to tell his people about his God. That do you realize that the God that you follow, the God who will bring that until, is a sin-bearing God.

He is a sin-bearing God. And the picture is beautiful, isn't it? We have the great kind of exodus name of God here in verse 18. He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.

[25 : 22] Verse 19. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. If you remember back to Micah 1, it was the high places of the world that were being crushed under God's feet.

Now it's the sin of the world. And you will cast our sins into the depths of the sea, like another exodus. Verse 20. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you've sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Do we know what our God is like? Again, I can imagine many of us in this room saying, yeah, but Benji, all you've done is simply add another thing that sounds like it's not going to happen.

It's like, great, we've got this big until, and we've got this beautiful picture of reversal, and then you've told us about this God who's going to bear our sins and crush them under his feet. It still sounds too good to be true.

But there's a detail which I, you know, not in a kind of rabbit out of the hat kind of way, but I've kept until the very end, that is all over these verses. And it is the nature of God's faithfulness.

[26 : 30] Now I wonder though, as you think about faith, it's become kind of a dirty word, I think, in our society, the word faith. And often, I wonder if we maybe have slightly capitulated to society's definition of faith, that it's a blind leap for naive people, those naive religious types that believe things like verse 9, until, and then suddenly, incredible reversal.

Faith is for people like that, the wackos, or the naive. And I wonder if we think that that's what faith is. One of the leading New Age atheists said this about faith.

Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to avoid the need to think, evaluate evidence. Faith is the belief in spite of, perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.

And I wonder if we have somewhat bought that lie, that somehow biblical faith is blind, that this great promise of the until, and the nations coming to the city of God to be under his kingship, and licking the dust, and death being swallowed up, and sin being no more, it's just blind, pie-in-the-sky hope.

I wonder if that's what we think faith is. But that is not Micah's faith. And Micah has scattered all through his book, and all through these verses, references to what this God, this God that he wants you to know what is like, has done in history.

[28 : 09] I wonder if we noticed some of these as we went through. Chapter 6, verses 3 to 5, we have reference to the Exodus, which is kind of like D-Day for Britain, I guess, and the Exodus for Israel.

It defines their national consciousness, how he brought them out of the land of Egypt, how he brought them through the wilderness with Moses and Miriam and Aaron in verse 4, how he protected them from Balak, the king of Moab, and Balaam, the prophet against them.

And then when he references again, the Exodus in 7, verse 15, as in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvellous things. And then of course, verse 18 and 19 and 20, the Exodus is all over this.

He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. And verse 20, you will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you've sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

In other words, Micah wants to make clear to his readers that the only way you're going to get through an exile, the only way you're going to persevere in faithfulness to God when the world is hard is by trusting that God will do what he says he will do.

[29 : 25] And that must be the same for us here this morning, that we trust that the Lord will do what he said he will do. But wonderfully, God does not give us no evidence for that claim.

Think of all the things that Micah's readers will have seen and heard God has done in their history up until this point. Think of Noah and his drunkenness. God was still faithful.

Think of Abraham and his lies. God was still faithful. Sarah and her barrenness, God was still faithful. The judges and the atrocious things we see God's people do there, God was still faithful.

David and Bathsheba, God was still faithful. Solomon and his 900 wives and concubines, God was still faithful. The desecration of the temple, God was still faithful.

The return from exile, God was still faithful. All of these things, Micah's readers will have seen and heard. And so when Micah says there is this incredible reversal to come until, until, Micah is saying you can have absolute confidence that the God who has done what he said will do what he said he will do.

[30 : 39] The God who has done what he said will do what he said he will do. We as Christians do not believe in blind faith. I agree with that quote that you need evidence for faith.

And we have it in bucket loads. We believe in the God of history. But of course, Micah's readers were waiting to see that God is a God who pardons sin, who bears sin.

That's a promise in 7 verse 18 that we have seen fulfilled here this morning in the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. We can say with far more certainty than Micah's original readers that God is a sin-bearing God.

In other words, God does what he says he will do. He does what he says he will do. He is faithful. So for us, as we close, some points of application for us to think about.

I am certain that many of us in this room will find the Christian walk wearisome, if not now, at some point in our Christian walk over and over again.

[31 : 56] Exile is painful and it comes on everyone. And the only thing that we have as Christians to wait and bear through such a difficult, wearisome life is the faithfulness of God.

We are Christians waiting on the promises that one day this image that we see in Micah 7 of God's city being full to the brim of God dwelling with his people and death and pain being no more, that's a promise that we must put our trust in, that God asks us to put our trust in.

But wonderfully, we can wait and bear because God does what he says he will do. he always has and he always will.

Two points, I think, for us as we close. Many of us, and it's been a joy to have these conversations with you over the last year and a half, have loved ones who don't trust the Lord Jesus Christ and it is immensely painful.

I speak both from my own experience but also from having spoken to you. Can I say that this is wonderfully encouraging for us here this morning? that our God is far more faithful to our loved ones than we ever could be and that God will do what he said he will do.

[33 : 17] God is a faithful God. Secondly, in a weary world, when our quiet time feels like scraping sandpaper on the inside of our mouth and our church family is difficult, we can trust in the fact that one day we will stand in the new creation before the Lord Jesus Christ and see him face to face and it will never be difficult to love the Lord again because he will do what he said he will do.

And finally, all of us in this room are going to die. That is the great decider, isn't it, of faith. We have to do that alone. Who would you want to trust your death with?

Atheism, some vague notion of a spiritual afterlife or the God of history who does what he says he will do. I know who I want to trust.

Why don't I close with some prayer. Who is a God like you bearing iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. Lord, thank you that you will do what you said you will do because you have always been faithful to your promises.

[34 : 38] Amen.