Who is like Our God?

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[0:00] Well, according to Google, there are more than 5,000 different gods and prophets that you can follow in life.

More than 5,000 to choose from. So, from the prophet Muhammad to Buddha to the many gods of Hinduism. And even, well, for us, it's the god of money, isn't it?

Idols and gods don't have to be statues, they can be things like that. And in fact, even for Richard Dawkins and atheism, you still end up following a god.

The god just happens to end up being yourself, your own intellect and your own preferences and the like. And if you don't like any of those kind of gods, there's even an opportunity to build your own god.

So, for those who are younger amongst us, you might know Mr. Potato Head. You know Mr. Potato Head? He's got a potato for a head. And you just kind of put different parts on him and build your own potato head.

[1:07] And that's what people do with gods as well. I like the Christian god, but I don't like that part, so I'll take that a bit. I'll take that away, but then I'll add this bit. That's what people do all the time. And so, how do we know our god is not just the true god, but worth following above all the myriad of other gods available?

How do we know he's worth walking with in this life without adding to or subtracting to from him? Well, today, as I said, we come to the final of Micah's three sermons.

The book of Micah is made up of three sermons, which are there, and they all begin with the word listen. And Micah's name, you might remember, means who is like Yahweh.

And as we heard in our reading today, he will finish with, or almost finish with that question, who is like our god? And the implied answer is no one.

And so, as we look at these chapters, we'll see our god is a god like none other. That he is better than all the others. That we might be encouraged to keep following him.

[2:23] For starters, God's way is not wearisome, which is point one on your outlines, and chapter six, verse one to eight in your Bibles. And you really will need a Bible today, because the speakers often change without notice.

And so, I'm going to have to walk you through it. We've got a lot to cover, so we'll have to move at a reasonable pace, and we'll have to skip some verses as well. But you really need a Bible to follow.

So, if you've got a Bible there, have a look at verse one. And Micah says, listen to what the Lord says, which marks the beginning of this third sermon. But in the rest of verse one, God actually then speaks to Micah, and tells him to stand up, to plead his case as a prosecutor, to convene court, as it were, with the mountains as the jury.

And so, then in verse two, it reverts back to Micah speaking. And he calls or speaks to the mountains to hear God's charges against his people.

Would you see that? And the first charge is that they complain God's way is wearisome. So, verse three, God now speaks and says, My people, what have I done to you?

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[3:48] How have I burdened you? Answer me, he says. It seems at this point in history, they're not worshipping other gods anymore.

Perhaps it's under Hezekiah's reign who got rid of all the idols. But perhaps it's towards the end of his reign when Hezekiah himself became complacent. Because they're all worshipping God, yes, but in their hearts, they're complaining about God.

That His way is a burden. Literally, wearisome. And if we're honest, we can sometimes feel like that to ourselves, can't we? You know, got to get up early for church, again.

Got to love that annoying person, again. Got to, you know, not follow that attractive way of the world, again. Did you just knock Barry then?

Yeah, I saw that. He's not annoying, but no, I'm just joking. It can become wearisome, can't it? But I think it becomes wearisome. It becomes a drag when we forget all that God has done for us.

[4:58] And continues to do for us. And so God reminds Israel of those things. Have a look at verse 4. He reminds them how He saved them from slavery in Egypt.

For us, it's slavery from sin through Christ. Or then have a look at verse 5. He says, remember how I protected you from King Balak, who plotted against them to get Balaam, who was a prophet, to curse them.

But if you remember the story, we don't have time to look it up, but God actually spoke to Balaam through his donkey, of all things, if you remember. And so Balaam didn't curse them.

He ends up blessing them. God was protecting them, you see, on their journey. For us, God protects us spiritually on our journey to our promised land, the new creation.

As we saw last week, no one will snatch us from Christ's hand. But for Israel, God even brought them into the promised land. That's what those names there, Shittim and Gilgal, refer to.

[6:09] Those are the places where they crossed the Jordan River. From Shittim, they crossed the flooded Jordan River on dry ground. It was like another Red Sea crossing to Gilgal, which was in the promised land.

God brought them home. That's what these names are meant to remind us. And all this helped them to know, at the end of verse 5, what kind of God he is. To know his righteous acts.

That God acts rightly for their good. Here it's by keeping his promises to Abraham, like our reading ended with. He has promised Abraham to make these people into a nation and to bring them into a land.

What other God does all that? I read an article about some Hindu gods, which said Krishna steals women's clothes.

The God Ram abandoned his wife. And the God Shiva smokes narcotics. I checked with Grace Nicodemus, who grew up in this culture, and she said, actually, it's worse than all that.

[7:15] Whereas our God acts rightly. He keeps his promises to us, not just saving us and protecting us spiritually, but also will bring us to our promised land.

So which God would you rather? But Israel forgot and complained that God's way is wearisome. Like his sacrifices are never enough.

And so have a look at verse 6. Here Micah now mimics a worshipper who's kind of complaining, you know, what should I come before the Lord with?

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What should I bow down before the exalted God? What sort of sacrifices is he going to be pleased with? And then he kind of lists these extravagant things in increasing costs, like a burnt offering, a year old calf, to a thousand rams, to 10,000 rivers of olive oil.

I mean, that's a lot of oil, isn't it? And then to their firstborn child. And it's as if to say, it's never enough for you, God. You know, what should I come?

[8:23] This, this, this? When are you going to be satisfied? But God's laws never demanded such sacrifices. In fact, the sacrificial laws were even accommodating.

So if the people were poor, it wouldn't be too demanding for them. And the law also made clear what mattered more to God than any sacrifice was love.

Living in love, verse 8. Micah now speaks to this would-be worshipper and says, Look, God has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you? Not 10,000 rivers of olive oil, but to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This is perhaps the most well-known verse of the book. It's one Annette opened our service with. It's Donval Christian College's school motto. It's even on the inside wall of St. Vincent's private hospital.

[9:28] And for good reason. It explains what it means to love God and love our neighbour, doesn't it? And to act justly towards others and not rip them off or cheat them or lie to them.

And to show mercy, even if they do that to you. Which is not always easy, is it? And so that's why we're told here, not just to show mercy, but to love mercy.

To love it so much that you'll show it even when it's hard. That's the horizontal love for each other. And then there's the vertical love for God to walk humbly with him, verse 8 says.

That's what means to be in relationship with him, but it's with an attitude of humility, isn't it? That remembers all he's done for us. And that treats God as, well, God.

Listening to him above all others. This is what matters more to God than sacrifices. And is not this way, this God's way, good?

[10:34] I remember I was with another Christian at a supermarket. I think it was Aldi. And then two people in front of us was a lady who was taking change out to pay for groceries.

But she didn't have enough to cover all the groceries. So she was going to put some back. And then this Christian went and paid the difference. Showed mercy towards this stranger. Is that not a good thing to do?

Don't we know that God's way is good? In fact, it's what it means to be human. Did you notice in verse 8, Micah doesn't say, God has shown you my people.

He says, God has shown you, O mortal, O human, what is good. You see, humans are made in God's image. And as we'll see, God himself acts justly and delights in mercy.

And so to be made in God's image, to be human, means to act similarly. Which is why even non-Christians know God's way is good.

[11:33] Have you ever heard people say, look, I don't believe in God like you do, but I like the Christian morals, the Christian teaching. Have you heard people say that before? And they like it because instinctively they know it's good.

God's way is not wearisome. It's good. Especially if we remember all he's done for us, which encourages us to live his way out of joyful thanks, rather than a begrudging duty.

But these people have forgotten, and so they don't act justly, but rather selfishly. Which means God's judgment is necessary, point two.

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Have a look at verse 9 to 12. Chapter 6, 9 to 12. Listen, the Lord is calling to the city. To fear your name is wisdom, says Micah.

Heed the rod and the one who appointed. And then God now speaks in verse 10. Am I still to forget your ill-gotten gain, my people? Your ill-gotten treasures, your wicked house, the short ephah which is accursed.

[12:41] Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Your rich people are violent, your inhabitants are liars, and their tongues speak deceitfully, God says.

Here is God's second charge, their injustice. Instead of acting justly towards one another, they cheat each other, don't they? So in verse 10, an ephah was a measurement for grain, like a kilo, although an ephah was actually 22 or 21 litres.

And it seems some merchants would use some tricks. You know, they might put some rocks in the bottom, so, you know, it fills up quicker. Or they might use a smaller bucket, whatever it is, to give the customer less grain so that they can save money for themselves.

Or verse 11, they have dodgy scales and false weights. You see, they cheated each other. And then verse 12, they bear false witness against one another, lying and speaking deceitfully.

But this is what happens when people follow other gods than our God. And when people follow gods like money or themselves, they act selfishly rather than justly, don't they?

[13:54] Sellers may not be able to cheat as much as they used to today, but I feel like they do try and mislead you. I mean, ever got a bag of chips? Bag of chips is this big?

And how much of it is air? Tim Walker thinks it's to keep the chips from getting crushed, but this much air? Maybe I'm a bit sceptical.

Or have you noticed how Cadbury chocolate bars are getting smaller and smaller? You notice that? But the price is going up. But customers cheat the supermarkets, too.

Supermarkets like Coles and Woolies, apparently people, what they do is they take expensive fruit and then they go to self-serve checkout. I'm not telling you what to do, by the way. I'm just telling you what others do. They go to self-serve checkout and instead of pressing the expensive fruit option, they pick a cheap fruit option and then weigh it.

And then they save money. Someone from our 1030 congregation does product placement stuff at supermarkets. And she has seen people take stickers off cheaper items and put them on expensive items and then scan away.

[15:02] Or another church member told me that a builder who he paid to do some paving took the money, but then he took off and didn't finish the job. Couldn't get contacted on the phone.

The phone was disconnected. People cheat. And with the supermarkets, you might think, oh, look, they're loaded. They got plenty of money. But what do you think happens when they get cheated?

They put up the prices so then we all suffer. In fact, earlier this year, there was a Channel 9 news article that says supermarkets say spike in shoplifting across Melbourne may be contributing to grocery bills, our grocery bills.

And so these people who cheat the supermarket actually end up cheating ourselves. The point is, people act selfishly rather than justly and they don't care because they don't follow our God.

They follow the God of money or themselves. And so are these gods of money or ourselves, are they really better than our God? Our God, though, does care.

[16:06] He himself acts justly, which for him means he must judge. As he says at the start of verse 10, and I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures.

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The word still reminds us that he's being patient with them, giving them chances, hundreds of years of chances, actually, to stop, to repent. But he cannot forget forever.

Unlike other gods, his justice won't allow it. And so he must judge. But it will be fair, which is what we see in verses 13 to 16.

Therefore, and then he talks about the judgment. And so just as they cheated their neighbour of food and took food away from them, so God will take food away from them.

And that's what verses 13 to 16 go on to talk about. It will be a fair judgment. And in case you think it's too harsh, Micah himself doesn't think so. Come with me down to chapter 7, verse 1.

[17:05] Micah says, What misery is mine? I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of a vineyard. There is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.

What is he miserable about? Is it that judgment is coming, like in chapter 1, when he howled like a jackal, if you remember? Well, not this time. It's verse 2.

Just as there are no clusters of grapes to eat, well, there is not one upright person in the land. The faithful have been swept from the land, not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood.

They hunt each other with their nets. In fact, verse 3 says, Everyone's hands are both skilled at evil. And their leaders?

Well, verse 3, The ruler demands gift, the judge accepts bribes, and the powerful dictate what they desire. Don't we still see that here today in our world?

[18:07] The powerful dictating what they desire. Isn't our former prime minister in trouble for dictating what portfolios he desired? But this is what Israel was like.

In fact, in verse 4, the best person there is, the most upright person in the land, verse 4, is like a briar, a thorn bush, a thorn hedge, they say.

Thorns that scratch and rip your skin. You've never been pricked by a rose thorn before? It hurts, doesn't it? The point is, pardon the pun, God's judgment is necessary.

For they are sinful. There's not one upright. And God is just. All sinful, God is just.

That plus that equals he must judge. And Micah says, it's as good as here, verse 4, the rest of verse 4. The day God visits you has come. The day your watchmen sound the alarm, now is the time of your confusion.

[19:18] At this point in history, Babylon has not yet destroyed Jerusalem. But Micah says, it's so certain because of the people's sin that it's as good as here. The day God's visit has come, so watchmen sound the alarm.

And God's judgment for our world's injustice is certain too. It will come one day. And while the idea of judgment day is hard, do we really want a God who is not just?

Aren't we outraged when we see injustice in the world? When we hear about rape, murder, and mass graves of civilians in Ukraine, or governments killing their citizens in Iran, don't we want to see them be brought to justice?

And so isn't judgment day, while we struggle with it, still a good thing? Where God will call everyone to account and judge everyone fairly? Of course, for us, we only want to see that happen to the really bad people, don't we?

And certainly not ourselves, but that's not justice either, is it? And to be fair, it needs to be everyone, including us. But the good news is, our God not only acts justly, but he delights in mercy, which is why in verse 7, Micah says, Micah is confident God will hear his cry to save.

[20:54] And so what follows is a picture of God's salvation, beginning with their reversal of fortunes. Point 3, verse 8. Here the speaker changes again.

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This time Jerusalem speaks to her enemy. Verse 8, Jerusalem says, Do not gloat over me, my enemy. Though I have fallen, I will rise.

Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath until he pleads my case and upholds my cause.

He will bring me out into the light. I will see his righteousness. Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame. The enemy who said to me, Where is the Lord your God?

Well, my eyes will see her downfall. Even now she will be trampled underfoot like Maya in the streets. And notice here that Jerusalem is repentant.

[21:54] She acknowledges she has sinned against God and so must bear God's judgment. But there is hope of reversal, isn't there? She will rise while her enemy will fall.

And this hope revolves around God's character. God who is her light, who is righteous, who will plead her case and uphold her cause.

She cannot save herself, but she knows God can. And in fact, God will. For Micah is then given a word from God to speak to Jerusalem about her future.

A future that is so certain, it also is as good as here. Have a look at verse 11. Micah says to Jerusalem, Look, that day for building your walls will come.

The day for extending your boundaries will come. In that day, people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

[22:57] Jerusalem represents God's kingdom and the future is so certain. Micah says it will be rebuilt. And in that day, people will come from the nations like Assyria and Egypt.

For those who were here last week, we looked at what that day means for us. And I gave you this picture. I don't know if you can see it on the slide, but that day really spans the whole of our time from Jesus' first coming to his second.

And so that day, the morning of that day, begins with Jesus coming into the world to save people and to bring people from the nations like Assyria and Egypt into his kingdom and people like us in this room.

And so that day has already begun with Jesus' first coming. But we also saw last week that that day will end in the evening, if you like, with Jesus' second coming when he will judge, which is why in verse 13, the earth is desolate because people have either joined Jerusalem or been judged for their deeds.

But here's the thing, for all this to happen, God must do something about Jerusalem's sin. Back in verse 9, Jerusalem may bear God's wrath in exile for her sin, but the reality is she keeps sinning, even in exile.

[24:18] And so if she keeps having to bear her own sin, she'll never come out. So how can God plead her case? How can God uphold her cause?

Well, the answer comes in verses 18 to 20. We have to skip a few verses, so flick over the page, verses 18 to 20. Have a look there. Micah says, verse 18, 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 you delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

You'll be faithful to Jacob and show love to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago. Out of the 5,000 gods on offer today and prophets to boot, who is one like our God?

One who delights in mercy. He doesn't just act justly, but he delights in mercy. He loves it.

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[25:30] He can't get enough of showing it. Is there a God like him? And yet how can he show mercy and still act justly? After all, doesn't justice demand judgment for our sins?

So how can he forgive them and hurl them into the sea and still be just? Well, there's a hint which our English translations make hard to see, and it's in verse 18. If you look at verse 18, the word pardon is the same word as bear back in verse 9 when Jerusalem bears her own sin.

And so the idea here is that this time, God will bear our sin in himself. He will take punishment on himself so that he can still judge sin, be just, and show mercy to us.

I may have told you a story before about that famous preacher, Billy Graham. When he was a young minister, he was driving through a town in southern US, and he was caught speeding. Back then, he had to appear in court.

I believe it was accidental, but anyway, he had to appear in the local court to pay his fine. When the judge asked him, guilty or not guilty, Graham replied, guilty. And the judge said, that'll be $10, $1 for every mile over the limit you went.

[26:53] Imagine if fines were that cheap today. But then Graham added, yes, your honour, and I repent of my sin and will drive more carefully, which made the judge take note and look more carefully.

And he recognised the famous preacher, and then the judge said to him, you have broken the law, so the fine must be paid. But then he pulled out his wallet and said, but I'm going to pay it for you, and took out the $10, put it with the fine and handed it to the bailiff.

And then he took Billy out for a steak dinner. You see, the judge bore the cost of Billy's sin on himself, which meant he could still judge justly, act justly, and at the same time show mercy to Billy.

That's what God has done for us. And of course, he does it through his son. That's why we have Christmas, isn't it? You see, God delights in mercy so much so that he sent his son into the world to bear our sin so that he can still act justly and show mercy to us.

That's what we heard in our second reading. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to have mercy on us as he did the apostle Paul. For Jesus grew up and bore our sins at the cross, like the judge who bore Billy's sin through the fire, so that God can still be just, still punish sin, and at the same time show us mercy.

[28:23] If, like Jerusalem, we are repentant and trust in him to plead our cause. And so firstly, do you trust in Jesus to plead your cause, to pay for your sin?

Because that's the only way God can forgive you. Otherwise, we have to bear our own sin when he calls us to account. And for us who do trust in Jesus, then firstly, we're to remember our God is a God like no other.

A God who acts justly and delights in mercy, even to the point of bearing our sin through his Son. What other God has saved us and protects us spiritually and brings us to our promise, and will bring us to our promised land, who's done all this for us?

Any of these gods? Any of those gods done all this for us? Of course not. We're to remember our God is a God like no other, because we can forget, can't we?

Yesterday, I conducted a wedding for Mark, who has COVID, and I think I'm getting tired because I could not pronounce the groom's surname. And actually, the family's here this morning, so I'm sorry again.

[29:37] And so at the end of the service, I said this, I said, it's my great privilege to introduce to you for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan and Michelle, I can't say this surname, but give them a crap.

It was so embarrassing, I'm so sorry again. But the groom didn't care. All he cared about was getting married, because for Ryan, this girl, Michelle, was a girl like no other.

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In fact, as he walked down the aisle, he was wiping tears from his eyes. It was beautiful. But we all know that years later, it's easy to forget that they're like no other, because we do it to God, don't we?

That's why we're to keep reading his word, keep coming to church each week, so that we can remember. That's why we're to seek forgiveness whenever we sin, not just to get back on track with God, but to enjoy and remember his mercy again and again.

That's why we're to praise him for his character and our prayers, like Micah did. Not just praying for our needs, yes, do that, but don't forget to praise God for his character.

[30:47] We're to remember our God is a God like no other, so that secondly, we might continue to live his way. Not forgetting as Israel did about all that God has done and all that God is, so that they complained his way was gruesome, that it became a begrudging duty, no, no, but remembering, so that out of joyful thanks, we might continue to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our great God.

Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this book of Micah and we thank you today particularly for the reminder of your character, that you are a God like no other.

and so Father, help us to remember all you are and all you've done and are doing for us, that we might delight in walking in your way, a way that acts justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with you.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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