

Seeing God in all his Glory and Beauty

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Date: 05 January 2020

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[0 : 0 0] So let's turn back to the passage that we read in Micah, Micah chapter 7, it's on page 780, Micah 7 on page 780.

And let's reread the last few verses from verse 18. Micah 7 verse 18, 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.

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

When was the last time that you marveled at God? When was the last time that the Lord of Heaven took your breath away?

[1 : 1 6] When was the last time you were reading the word of God and you had to stop and worship because you saw something of God?

When was the last time you were perhaps reading some Christian book or some doctrine and you had to stop and turn that doctrine to doxology or praise? There's the story in Murder Macaulay's Life that's been published in the last couple of years.

Murder Macaulay was preaching one night on Psalm 45 and he was reading the psalm out in order to sing it. And he broke down in the pulpit and I think it was Angus Smith who had to take over and he said to him afterwards, he said, what happened to you in the pulpit?

And Murder Macaulay said, I had a glimpse of the King. He got a glimpse of God in all his glory and he was overwhelmed. And that's what we have here in Micah.

Micah is filled with adoration and praise as he considers who God is. And particularly God in his mercy and God in his love.

[2 : 4 4] Maybe this morning you're saying, well it's all very well for Micah to be full of praise and wonder at God. But Micah doesn't live today.

He doesn't live in my community. He doesn't have the problems that I have in my family. He doesn't have the challenges that I have in my marriage.

Well hopefully this morning you'll see that Micah lived on a very difficult day and he faced many difficult challenges. And his society was in many ways very like our society.

And he faced many of the same challenges. And as we look at Micah this morning and Habakkuk tonight, I hope that you'll be able to see that sometimes we are called to live our Christian lives and we are called to sing praise to God in difficult times and in wilderness experiences.

Now despite Micah being largely a prophecy of judgment, we see in Micah this golden thread of grace and redemption right throughout the book.

[4 : 0 4] We can split Micah into three sections. Chapters 1 and 2, chapters 3 to 5, and chapters 6 and 7. And you can notice that at the end of all these sections there is reference to redemption and grace.

And Micah follows the theme of shepherding. We see it at the end of chapter 2, we see it in chapter 5, and then we see it again in chapter 7.

And of course there is the famous prophecy in Micah chapter 5 about the great shepherd that will come and he will be born in Bethlehem, Ephrata, the old traditional name for Bethlehem.

And Micah, despite being a prophecy of judgment, is full, it's bursting with future promise of redemption and grace.

In many ways, Micah had little to encourage him in his day. His prophecy was written against the backdrop of decline and moral chaos.

[5 : 22] At this time, Assyria was the great superpower. And they were flexing their muscles all over the far east. The northern kingdom had already been conquered.

And Judah had become a vassal state. And King Ahaz of Judah was paying tribute to Assyria.

And he was bringing Judah into line with Assyrian worship. And complete destruction was down the line for Judah.

Judah. But in the meantime, there were other challenges in society in Judah. We read in chapter 2 that the super rich in verse 2 were getting richer.

They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away. They oppress a man in his house, a man in his inheritance. There was great inequality in society.

[6 : 24] The super rich were getting richer and the poorer were getting poorer. crime was rampant in chapter 2 verse 8 but lately my people have risen up as an enemy.

They stripped the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war. Chapter 3 tells us that justice was perverted in verse 9 who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight.

chapter 6 tells us that business practices were corrupt. There was dishonesty in business. And in the chapter that we read we read that family life was breaking down.

We see that in verses 5 and 6 put no trust in a neighbour have no confidence in a friend guard the doors of your mouth for her who lies in your arms. marriage had become toxic and dysfunctional.

And what was the source or the fountainhead of all this corruption in society in Judah? Was it poverty? Was it legislation?

[7 : 37] Well Micah leaves us in no doubt where the corruption of society came from. It came from the priests and the prophets who no longer spoke the truth.

Chapter 2 verse 11 If a man should go about in utter wind and lie saying I will preach to you of wine and strong drink he would be the preacher of this people. We sometimes think that the prosperity gospel is a new thing but Micah is telling us that these prophets and priests they would preach for wine and strong drink are told in chapter 2 as well that the priests and prophets in verse 6 said do not preach thus they preach one should not preach of such things disgrace will not overtake us they were implacably opposed to Micah they were saying don't preach this judgment nothing is going to overtake us this judgment is not going to come and in chapter 3 if you read chapter 3 verses 1 to 3

Micah graphically describes how brutal and callous and indifferent these priests and prophets are to the difficulties that the people were experiencing and what happens when the priests and the prophets become corrupt well we see in chapter 5 verses 12 to 15 the nation descends the nation descends into paganism into witchcraft into sorcery and into idolatry how far had the nation of Judah fallen what a mess they were in and worse was to come but yet right throughout this prophecy as we said we see this golden thread of grace and redemption and we come this morning to chapter 7 which is a lament

Micah starts it by saying 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 it's a psalm or a song of lament but Micah doesn't give himself over to self pity he says in 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 in the midst of tremendous discouragement in the midst of judgment Micah looks to the Lord and then in this final section we have Judah who is almost overcome as he meditates on God who is a God who is a God like you pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance

Micah thinks of all that God has done in the past and all that God is doing and he worships in wonder love and adoration so I want to look at these three verses this morning under three headings first of all a God of pardon Micah is overwhelmed with God because God is a God who delights in steadfast love and mercy the Geneva version of the Bible says of this verse he retains not his wrath forever because mercy pleases him these verses remind us a little bit of Exodus 34 verses 6 and 7 after the children of Israel had made the golden calf the Lord showed himself to Moses the Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord is a compassionate and gracious

[12 : 20] God slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations forgiving iniquity rebellion and sin notice the three different words we have in this passage for sin we have iniquity that word that means missing the target missing the standard then we have transgression which means rebellion against authority and sin that deviation from the right standard Judah's sin was it was multifaceted it was deep rooted it was grievous and it was in the face of God's blessing and grace over many hundreds of years but how does God respond to that multifaceted deep rooted sin well this passage tells us that he responds with pardon and forgiveness the word pardon literally means to lift off and carry away and the word forgiveness literally means to pass over to move on or to cover how can God lift off and carry these horrendous sins how can he move on or pass over these sins well surely only through the cross of Christ

Archibald Brown says the son lifted up the sin up on his shoulders and he walked away with it God is able to pardon through the cross of Christ but how does God pardon let's think for a few moments how does God pardon the sins of his people well he pardons them firstly sovereignly it is God and God alone who pardons our sins that is what makes God's mercy so remarkable God is entirely free in his saving of sinners he does not choose us because of righteousness in us and he doesn't reject us because we are too sinful he is not swayed by outside influences he set his love on us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love that's a great comfort this morning that your pardon and my pardon rests on the free and sovereign grace of God

God's pardon is a royal grant and favour salvation is his prerogative and his prerogative alone as Paul says in Romans 9 I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy and I will have compassion and whom I will have compassion it's God who initiates this pardon it's God who executes it it's God who carries it out it's God who administers this pardon sovereignly but then we also see that God pardons readily he doesn't just pardon sovereignly he pardons readily how does God bestow this sovereign pardon well when you and I have to forgive somebody we forgive reluctantly don't we pardon has to be wrung out of us it's a last resort that we have to apologise don't we that we have to forgive but that's not like

God God pardons readily Archibald Brown says in human pardon there is nothing remarkable save this that it is often remarkably slow in coming and is remarkably ungracious when it does come and that when it is born it is remarkably short lived our pardons like ourselves are full of imperfections but we have a God who delights in mercy Isaiah says that God's judgment is his strange work but he is inclined to mercy as the Geneva version says mercy pleases him we might say even reverently that it puts a smile on his face and this is why we can come again and again for pardon because God is ready to forgive God is lavish with his mercy how do we know that well we see it of course in the person and work of the Lord

Jesus Christ the gospels are full of examples of Christ pardoning and love towards sinners think of God of Christ calling Levi that corrupt tax collector think of the woman who was a great sinner at Simon's house how he washed Christ's feet think of the parable of the prodigal son the father running to embrace the son not allowing him to get out his pardon his prayer of forgiveness that the father embraces him with tears think of the publican and the sinner God be merciful to me a sinner think of Zacchaeus example after example of how

[18 : 28] Christ readily forgives when Christ is about to ascend up to heaven and as he commissions his disciples what does he say where does he tell them to go to preach the gospel he says go back to Jerusalem the place that had just crucified him Christ says go back and preach the gospel in Jerusalem the love of God lavished on sinners God delights in mercy he pardons readily but he also pardons frequently God pardons again and again and again how many times have we gone for pardon in this last year in this last decade God pardons again and again and again how often have we come back to God with shame the same sin defeating us again and again has God ever turned us away so often we think we're making progress with a particular sin or a particular problem in our lives and we hit a crisis or a tragedy and these sins they resurface we backslide how often do we feel like the psalmist in psalm 38 because gone up above mine head my great transgressions be and as a weighty burden they too heavy are for me time and again we can bring our sins to

God in Christ isn't it a marvel that God forgives again and again and of course it's the great example to us isn't it that we must forgive each other again and again reading Ephesians 4 be kind to one another tender hearted forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you God is showing us an example of how he wants to forgive us to forgive each other frequently 70 times 7 but God doesn't just pardon frequently he pardons completely when we forgive somebody when we pardon somebody who has sinned against us we we're so half hearted it's a partial pardon isn't it we we retain the right to bring up those sins again in the future if we don't think that that person is sincere or genuine that's not what

God is like God pardons completely he no longer reckons our sins against us maybe you've got a favourite analogy for forgiveness in the Bible my favourite one is the one we've just sang about as far as east is distant from the west so far hath he from us removed in his love all our iniquity Psalm 103 what about Isaiah 1 come now let us reason together says the Lord though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they are red like crimson they shall be as white as snow what about Isaiah 43 I I am he who blots out our transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins that analogy of

God blotting out all our transgressions Isaiah 44 I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist what about Leviticus 16 the scapegoat in the wilderness the priest transferring all the sins of the people onto the head of the scapegoat and the scapegoat being led out to the wilderness never to be seen again what about Psalm 51 purify me with hyssop and I will be clean wash me and I will be whiter than snow God God God hardens us completely he deals with our sins completely at the cross he casts all our sins into the depths of the sea it's not that God can ultimately forget about sins if God knows everything but it's the fact that God no longer reckons our sin to our account

Psalm 32 says blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes not his sin our sins will never again be reckoned against us because they are completely dealt with so God pardons us completely and then we also see lastly under this heading that God pardons us graciously how do we forgive others as we've said already so often pardon has to be wrung out of us doesn't it we forgive reluctantly but in God there is no harshness there is no hardness or bitterness in God's forgiveness we might think that God's holiness would incline him to justice a God who is all rod a God who is all judgment a God who is all wrath but this passage tells us that

[24 : 47] God pardons graciously and freely he won't dredge our sins up again out of the ocean he won't say to us when we come again and again with the same sin I forgave that already I'm not forgiving it again he forgives graciously God God doesn't look on us with scorn as other people might God doesn't humiliate us he pardons us lovingly and graciously so that we might sin no more so God pardons graciously God pardons completely God pardons frequently and readily and sovereignly but then secondly we see in this passage not only a God of pardon but a

God of power in verse 19 he will again have compassion on us he will tread our iniquities underfoot he will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea God is a God who chastises his people he is chastising the people of Judah he is a God who restores in love and compassion there's no point or there's little point in forgiveness unless God can deal with the power of our sins and this is the remarkable thing about God that he not only pardons but he also has the power to tread our iniquities underfoot he is able to vanquish our sins he is able to conquer them so that we're not only preserved and saved from the presence of sins but the power of sins as Romans 7 tells us by nature we are slaves to sin and we need to become slaves to righteousness this is the wonderful thing about the gospel

Christ has taken captivity captive the glory of the cross that Christ not only deals with sin but he conquers it sin and death at the cross were broken and defeated but we know in this life they can still be deadly and this is why we need the grace of God to fight sin in our lives and as we look back over the last year as we look back over the last decade we can say that we are certainly not what we should be but by the grace of God we are not what we once were there are battles that we would have once lost that by God's grace we are unable to stand and fight maybe we don't win all the battles against sin but at least there is a fight now by grace more often than not we take the hard rough road rather than rolling down the smooth hill of sin we can have some sense of the hymn that says he breaks the power of cancelled sin he sets the prisoner free his blood can make the foulest clean his blood availed for me

God is working in us as Philippians says he works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure he is daily sanctifying us he is daily trampling our sins underfoot by God's infinite mercy we are enabled to love what we once hated and hate what we once loved never look at your sin and say it's too it's too much for God it's too powerful it's too deep rooted God is the God who is able to deal with the most deep rooted corruption in your life to quote that hymn again harlots and publicans and thieves in holy triumph joy saved is the sinner that believes from crimes as great as mine murderers and all ye hellish crew ye sons of lust and pride believe the

Saviour died for you for me the Saviour died all our sins are literally hurled into the depths of the sea only God can lift the weight of your sin and my sin and hurl it into the depths of the sea removed from us forever this passage of course is referring to when the Egyptians were chasing the Israelites in Exodus chapter 14 the Egyptians came into the sea and the Lord brought the water over them in chapter Exodus 14 verse 28 says not even one of them survived and not one of our sins will survive the pardon and mercy of God not one of our sins will be reckoned against us on the last day if we are in

[30 : 38] Christ every single one of your sins will be cast into the depths and the ocean of God's mercy so we see a God of pardon a God of promise sorry a God of power and then lastly we see a God of covenant promise a God of covenant promise in verse 20 you will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old Micah ends this wonderful doxology with reference to God's covenant faithfulness God is a God who makes promises he makes covenants he is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God what did he say to Abraham in Genesis 12 I will make you a great nation I will bless you

I will make your name great and you will be a blessing God is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God and he cannot break his word and Micah points us back to God's covenant faithfulness as an encouragement to us in dark and difficult times he says look at what God has done in the past has God ever broken one of his promises he he has promised to be a God to his remnant in all generations and on the basis of his covenant faithfulness he shows mercy and steadfast love to Judah and this is why Micah says who is a God like you maybe other deities would have given up they would have washed their hands but not the

God of Jacob and Abraham he is a faithful God to his people he never leaves them nor forsakes them what a great encouragement for us as we go into a new year that we have a covenant faithful God that we can rely on his steadfast love in the dark days that we are living in when we feel discouraged we can go back and look over thousands of years in the word of God and see this covenant faithful God we see kingdoms rising and falling in the Bible and yet God keeps his covenant faithfulness he never forsakes his remnant so just as we conclude this morning we started by asking when was the last time you marveled at God when was the last time you truly were lost in wonder love and praise at this hardening and powerful

God well surely at the start of this new year at the start of this new decade what we need more than anything else is a clear view of God in all his glory what we need as a church what we need as a family and what we need as individuals is a clear vision of God in all his glory in all his transcendence in all his beauty we have all sorts of challenges ahead of us in this year as a church and as a family and as a congregation but let's not be discouraged let's be like Micah but as for me I will look to the Lord I will wait for the God of my salvation and my God will hear me let's not look to the Lord through the prism of our sinful minds but let's look to the prism of his word and his son and let's see as

Micah saw as we look at the mercy and loving kindness of God through the Lord Jesus Christ let's see God in all his beauty and all his glory and if you've never seen God in all his glory and beauty this morning I encourage you to look to him stop carrying the weight of your sins on your back God can take all your sins and hurl them into the depths of the sea salvation is free but it's costly it cost the Lord Jesus Christ it cost him coming to the cross but it's free at the point of need it costs so much but it's free to you this morning and for those of us who know God and follow him why don't we make this year a year when we lean into

[36 : 16] God more than we have let's be more often in his presence much in his word let's be often thinking about the great mercy of God towards us as sinners are you are you worshipping God in all his glory and all his transcendence today is this God the great priority of your life Matthew Henry says our holy wonder at pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it our holy wonder at pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it is God's worship is God's day is God's people is God's house your burning passion and priority in this coming year would you stop at nothing to be here on the

Lord's day would you stop at nothing to be in the word of God on a daily basis or has your worship become very mundane well let's learn from Micah to see God once again in all his glory and beauty maybe you need again to bow the knee and be lost in wonder love and praise finish then my new creation pure and spotless let us be let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee change from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place till we cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder love and praise let's pray heavenly father we thank you for these precious words who is a god like you pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance who does not retain his anger forever but delights in steadfast love lord what precious words to start this new year lord forgive us that we have not worshipped you in this past year as we should we have not been taken up with your glory and majesty and transcendence lord give us a fresh vision of you in all your beauty in all your glory help us lord to see you through that prism of your mercy and love that make us all love lord we time we love oh precious god we thank you for your love and for your patience with us we pray that you would continue to work in us in this coming year help us to make your word help us to make your house your day and your people our burning passion and priority that we would be stirred up on a weekly basis to worship you and to serve you better hear our prayers Lord forgive our sins for Jesus sake

Amen Let's conclude by singing the traditional version of Psalm 130 we'll sing the whole Psalm on page 421 the tune is Caroline Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear and to my supplication voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord should mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared that thou mayest be Psalm 130 to the tune Caroline the Lord's praise Lord