

The God who Forgives

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[0 : 00] Welcome to our services today, and as we come together around the Word of God, let us seek his blessing upon his Word. Let us pray.

Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, surely it is a good thing for us that we draw near to our God.

And as we do so in this act of worship, we seek, O Lord, that it may please thee to bless thy Word to us, that thy Spirit would open our hearts, and that thy Spirit would apply thy Word to our hearts, so that it may bring forth fruit in our lives.

And as we draw near to thee, O Lord, that we can utter the words of another who said, Whom have I in the heavens high but thee, O Lord, alone? And in the earth whom I desire, besides thee there is none.

And we seek thine own countenance to shine upon us as we come around thy Word, and as we come to meditate upon it.

[1 : 25] We give thanks for the efficacy of the finished work of Christ, which gives us boldness and confidence to draw near to thee, and to seek thy mercy, and to seek thy grace to help us in our time of need.

Grant to us, O Lord, the grace to enable us to humble ourselves, and to come and to acknowledge our sins before thee.

We give thanks for that great promise that thou hast given to thy people, that if we confess our sins, that thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We pray, O Lord, that it may please thee to bless our homes and our families, and all our loved ones, wherever they may be, that thy known everlasting arms would be around them.

Remember especially those among them who are careless, we pray, O Lord, that thou would draw them near to thyself, that thou, O Lord, would open their understanding, so that they may see their great need, and that they may see the sufficiency of Christ to meet with that need.

[3 : 00] We pray thee, O Lord, that those who have been taught in the things of God, and who have turned their back upon them, O Lord, may it please thee to work in them and upon them, and to turn them to thyself, that the prodigal son of old, that they may remember the father's house, that they may remember the things that they were taught, and that it would bring them, O Lord, to thine own footstool, to seek thy mercy, to seek thy grace, to seek the forgiveness of their sins.

All we give thanks for the efficacy of the cross, which is able to reconcile us to our God, so that we can have peace with God.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would bless those who are ill, that thine own healing hand may be upon them, and those who mourn this day.

O Lord, may thy comfort be their portion. Remember our young people and our children. In a day when there is so much to entice and to draw them away from the things of the gospel, we pray, O Lord, that thou would raise up a generation, that thou would put thine own fear into their hearts, that they may be thy witnesses in this world.

We give thanks, O Lord, for all the tokens of thy goodness and kindness, that thou dost so abundantly outpour upon us every day.

[4 : 52] And as we come before thee at this hour, we pray that thou would enlighten our understanding, that thou would lead us into thine own truth, that we may be strengthened in our faith, that we may be encouraged, O Lord, as witnesses for thee in this world, that we may, O Lord, go forth and shine out as lights in the midst of the darkness of the world that surrounds us.

We seek thy blessing upon our nation, O Lord, have pity and compassion upon us, and turn us in repentance to thyself.

O Lord, O Lord, that we may become a nation that exalted thy name. We pray, O Lord, that thou would grant guidance to our leaders, O that thou would take the scales from their eyes, that thou would take the veil from their hearts, that thou would open their understanding to know that righteousness alone exalteth a nation, that sin is a reproach to thee.

O Lord, we pray that thou would continue with us as we come to read thy word, and as we come to meditate upon it.

O Lord, we pray that thou would bless thy gospel as it has been proclaimed throughout our nation and throughout the world, O that it may be accompanied by the power and demonstration of thine own Holy Spirit.

[6 : 35] For we are dependent upon thy spirit, for it is the spirit that quickens. And so we pray that thy spirit may accompany the preaching of the gospel.

We give thanks that it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. Bless all thy servants who proclaim thy word today.

Grant to them that they may do so with confidence in the assurance that thy word shall not fail, but that it shall accomplish that for which thou hast sent it forth.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would bless all that was done in these past weeks in our own congregation here. And pray that thy word that was preached may be indeed accompanied by thy spirit to the hearts of our people.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would continue with us now as we wait upon thee. And forgive us for all our sins. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let us now read a portion of God's word from the Old Testament and from the book of Micah and chapter 7.

[7 : 51] Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage.

There is no cluster to eat. My soul desired the first ripe fruit. The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men.

They all lie in wait for blood. They hunt every man his brother with a net. They that may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward.

And the great man he uttereth as much as his desire, so they wrap it up. The best of them is as a briar, the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.

The day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh. Now shall be their perplexity. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide.

[8 : 55] Keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

Therefore, a man's enemies are the men of his own house. Therefore, I will look unto the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation.

My God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy. When I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.

I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him. Until he plead my cause and execute judgment for me, he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eye shall behold her.

[9 : 58] Now shall they be trodden down as the mire of the streets. In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed.

In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.

Notwithstanding, the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their dunes. Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which shall dwell solitary in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.

Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt, will I show unto him marvellous things.

The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might. They shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall leak the dust like a serpent.

[11 : 02] They shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth, and they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee. Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?

He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old. May the Lord bless unto us the reading of that portion of his word.

And now, seeking his help, let us read again these words that we find at verse 18. Who is a God like unto thee?

That pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage. He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

[12 : 12] He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Now, recently, we have looked at certain themes that we find in the book of Micah. First, we looked at the message of God's judgment upon sin, which is found throughout the book.

And also, we looked at what God requires of us. But we saw that Micah not only delivers a message of judgment, but also a message of salvation and hope.

He delivers a gospel message of hope, centred on the coming of Jesus Christ. Now, as he is coming to the end of his prophecy, there are a number of things to which our attention should be drawn.

Among the things to which our attention is drawn is the intensity of the prophet's emotional sufferings. This is sometimes a thing that we miss out.

[13 : 33] This is something that we have noted already in Micah, how he was so deeply affected by the sin and the injustice that he saw in the nation and among the people.

For instance, in chapter 1, at verse 8, he says, And here in chapter 7, he begins by saying, Woe is me.

Now, this is certainly a challenge to us. How do the sins and apathy shown to the things of God in our nation and in our communities affect me and you?

This takes away immediately the wrong perception and opinion that we may entertain of the prophets of being a people who were harsh and hardened as they delivered their message.

Micah feels the woe of his people's sin and God's pronouncement upon their sin unless they would repent. And he feels this within his own soul.

[14 : 44] Micah explains the reason for his distress wherein he compares himself to a person who comes to the fields after the summer harvest but is bitterly disappointed by the absence of fruit.

Woe is me! For I am asked when they have gathered the summer fruits as the grape gleanings of the vintage. There is no cluster to eat.

My soul desired the first ripe fruit. You may recall how Ruth became a gleaner after the harvesters. This was because the Lord in Israel directed the harvesters not to go back through the fields a second time to clean the fields.

The Lord required them to leave it to the poor as we read in Deuteronomy chapter 24. For thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field and as for God a sheaf in the field thou shalt not go again to fetch it.

It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, for the widow. That the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. For thou beatest thine olive tree thou shalt not go over the boughs again.

[16 : 02] It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. For thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard thou shalt not go again to the vineyard. It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

So Micah here compares himself to a person who is hungry and has come to the field expecting to glean and find fruit. But instead there is no fruit, not even a cluster.

He compares himself to the disappointment of a farmer who has spent time preparing and sowing and who at harvest time reaps nothing.

So Micah, after a lifetime of ministry, finds that the nation was worse than when he started and the trend was downward and its destruction was inevitable.

There is nothing that brings so much heartache, that brings so much sadness, that brings so much sorrow to a preacher of the gospel than after spending time preparing and sowing the gospel to find that the people remain unresponsive, going forth in spiritual barrenness.

[17 : 25] And when the trend is downward, culminating in apathy and carelessness, it surely brings sadness and sorrow.

It would appear that Micah was so depressed with the situation that he felt that he himself was the only remaining believer.

The good man is perished out of the earth and there is none upright among men. He is like Elijah, who in his depressed state in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, thought that he was the only one left, although in fact there were still 7,000 faithful people to be found in Israel.

Now this raises a question for each one of us. For God has invested in our communities and in our own personal lives through the ministry of the gospel.

But what fruit does he find in our life? Have we responded to the message of the gospel in faith? For the Christian, we have to ask ourselves, are we growing in faith?

[18 : 36] Are we pressing on in the work of sanctification? Are we advancing in good works? Do we bear the fruits of righteousness?

We find that Micah is a good example for me and you, for he was a man who began and continued his ministry in a broken-hearted manner over his people, and however difficult and painful it must have been for him.

He is an example for us as the servants of God. We must persevere, irrespective of how hard the work might be, whether it be in the church or in the workplace or in the home.

There may be times when we may conclude what is the point of carrying on, just as well for us to give up.

Micah may have felt like that at times, as many of the Lord's servants do, especially among the preachers of the gospel. If it wasn't for the case that they had been called and commissioned by the Lord, they would have given up long ago.

[19 : 49] But parents may be tempted to give up on their rebellious son or daughter. They may say, well, what is the point? They don't listen. But you have a calling as a parent, however hard it may be.

It is your duty to continue with the work of presenting the word of truth to them. For husband and wife, there may be the temptation to give up on talking about the things of God to the unconverted wife or the unconverted husband.

But it is still your duty to continue with the work of presenting the word of truth to your husband or to your wife.

Micah brings before us the sad state of Judah. But what did he do? Therefore, I will look upon the Lord.

I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Therefore, I will look unto the Lord.

[21 : 03] I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. There is one place, and one place only to which he could turn.

Only one place to look for help. Only one place to look for intervention. And only one place of hope. And that place of intervention and hope, as we have seen in recent weeks, is only to be found in the Lord.

There was hope for Micah. And however barren and unfruitful things may look for us today, there is hope for our generation. And there is hope for our communities.

And there is hope for our families. And there is hope for our husbands and our wives. There is hope for our sons and our daughters. There is hope for me and you. And that hope is only to be found in the Lord.

We have already noted that Micah may have been like Elijah, feeling so much alone.

[22 : 16] And there are times when the Christian worker may find themselves quite lonely. That is true of the preachers of the gospel.

It can at times be very lonely work. But there is only one place to which we may turn. And that is to the Lord. We find this brought before us so often, especially in the books of Psalms.

When the psalmist felt lonely with the problems and difficulties of life, when his heart was overwhelmed, he found that his only recourse was to turn to God.

When Micah looked around him, his heart is broken at what he saw. He is like a hungry man seeking fruit in a barren field.

Is that not true of ourselves so often? Our hearts broken as we see the people that we love and on whom so much of the gospel has been invested, turn away into ungodly deeds and ungodly practices.

[23 : 30] A people who is like the fig tree that Jesus came across on the way to Jerusalem that had leaves and therefore should have borne fruit.

But when he came to it, he found that it was only leaves with no fruit. What are we to do? Look unto the Lord as we remember his grace and his faithfulness.

And as we do so, our hope is renewed. Therefore, I will look unto the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation.

It is a good thing to wait upon the Lord. Isaiah says in chapter 40, verse 31, But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. And they shall walk and not faint. Micah was waiting and looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise, especially the promise of a Saviour that he had prophesied, which would take place in Bethlehem.

[24 : 47] Peter says to us in his first letter, chapter 1, of which salvation the prophets have inquired, and such diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, unto whom it was to reveal that not unto themselves, but unto us that administer the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, which things the angels desire to look unto.

It is by looking and waiting upon the Lord and upon his salvation that we like the prophets can gain strength and mount up like eagles.

The Old Testament prophets looked to the coming of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross. In the coming of Jesus and the work of the cross, they saw their salvation, just like me and you.

Men, women, children lost in sin can be forgiven and reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. But there is also a sense in which the believer is still waiting for the God of our salvation.

We are waiting for his return in glory, as Paul says to Titus, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[26 : 30] The man of faith as he looks for the return of the Lord, as the prophet Habakkuk shows us in his prayer that we can have joy with that joy that comes from the Lord, even in barren times.

Habakkuk chapter 3, there we read, Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines. The labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat.

The flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls. Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

The days of the prophets, they warned the people of the real connection between the land's poor productivity and the people's poor spiritual state.

[27 : 39] But they did not give heed. Even after the return from captivity, this was a lesson that they did not learn easily, for the prophet Haggai had to remind them, Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.

Ye have sown much, and bring in little. Ye eat, but ye have not enough. Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink. Ye clothe you, but there is none warm, and he that earneth wages, earneth wages, to put into a bag with holes.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Since those days were, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten.

When one came to the press, to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there was but twenty. They were planting more, but harvesting less.

They were eating and drinking more, but feeling less satisfied, and feeling thirstier. They were earning more, only to watch it disappear, as if there were holes in their pockets.

[28 : 49] The Lord said, I smoke you with blastings, and with mild, and with hail, and the labours of your hands, yet ye turn not to me, saith the Lord.

A call to repentance, to return to the Lord, but it fell on deaf ears. But what does the prophet say? Yet, he says, I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

And the apathy and carelessness shown by the people in our own generation, and to the call of the gospel, to repentance.

Oh, our own generation shows apathy and carelessness to the call of the gospel, to repentance. Yet, what is asked of us is that we will rejoice in the Lord.

[29 : 53] We will join the God of our salvation. Nechemiah taught us people that the joy of the Lord was to be their strength. And my friends, it is the joy of the Lord is my strength and yours in the midst of the apathy and carelessness that is shown by our generation to the call of the gospel to repentance.

William Cowper penned these words. He said, though vine nor fig tree neither the wanted fruit should bear, though all the fields should wither, nor flocks or herds be there.

Yet God, the same abiding, his praise shall tune my voice. For while in him confiding, I cannot but rejoice. Micah had the assurance that as he looked and waited upon God that God would hear him.

Therefore, I will look unto the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. His time was a time of darkness. His time was a time of spiritual barrenness.

But he lifted up his cry to the Lord and he knows that God hears him. Or can you and I approach God with such confidence?

[31 : 20] Do we know the peace of looking and waiting upon God? For Micah, my God meant everything.

It summarised his whole life and work. And for those who may be feeling weary and feeling faint today, remember that God will supply his strength.

As Paul says in Philippians chapter 4, For I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be amazed and I know how to abound.

Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

Because he looked and he waited and he knew that God would hear him. And that is through here of Micah. He looked, he waited and he knew that God would hear him so he can say rejoice not against me O mine enemy when I fall I shall arise when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me.

[32 : 36] The prophet pictures a person sitting in darkness perhaps in a dungeon where there is no light and where there is no hope only despair. But when the person turns to the Lord the person sees light piercing the darkness.

All people crying out in mockery where is the Lord thy God? But God was going to intervene and deliver his people and their enemies and those who taunted them will see it.

So Micah ends with the greatest declaration of the grace of God. Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?

He retaineth not his anger for ever because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again. He will have compassion upon us. He will subdue our iniquities and thou will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Thou will perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn into our fathers from the days of old. This can be a play on Micah's name as we noted that Micah means who is like Jehovah.

[33 : 55] this is such an appropriate ending that the book that bears his name Micah who is like Jehovah should end by answering the question posed by his name.

Can anyone or anything be compared to him or be said to be his equal? At the Red Sea when Israel saw their enemies their slave masters the Egyptians dead upon the seashore they sang out who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods who is like thee glorious in holiness fearful in praises doing wonders.

In Psalm 71 the psalmist asks the same question O God who is like unto thee and he answers the question in personal terms describing how God has delivered him.

Recently we saw that Paul writing to young Timothy that he ends his personal testimony by glorifying God. He said now unto the king eternal immortal invisible the only wise God be honour and glory for ever and ever.

Amen. We should never think of the grace shown to us by God without being lost in wandering admiration. When we give our own personal testimony there comes a time when we ought to leave off praising God for what he has done in our lives and simply praise him for who he is in himself.

[35 : 37] We have recently looked at some parts of the life of the apostle Paul before his conversion and at his conversion and one thing that always comes to the fore as to read and meditate upon his letters is that whenever Paul stands back and looks at what God has done in his life it seems that language fails him.

We have for instance in Romans chapter 11 the greatest theology given to us by the apostle Paul in these words O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out for who hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been his counselor or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again for of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever Amen and that is exactly the essence of what we have here spoken of or written by the prophet Micah who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy although

God is outstanding greater than any other God that there is no one or anything that comes close to measuring up to him yet he will condescend to pardon iniquity and to pass by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage oh who is a God like unto thee who devised the plan of salvation the grace of God and the mercy and compassion of God created to decide with him to do something for the salvation of sinful man oh who is a God like unto thee and having desired to do something for the salvation of sinful man how could it be done God not only devised the plan that could save man and restore man to the righteousness that was required but

God himself carried out the plan he sent his son who took him a nature to himself he that was born of the virgin Mary was God manifest in the flesh and he went on to suffer and he went on to die he went on to be buried but he rose again and as we look at the cross and as we look at the empty tomb can we not join with Micah and say who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy and you know this is our encouragement today like it was for the prophet he will turn again he will have compassion upon us he will subdue our iniquities and thou will cast other sins into the depths of the sea thou will perform the truth to

Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which thou was sworn into our fathers from the days of old that is our encouragement today oh who is a God like unto thee and if you are outside the salvation of God give heed to the words of the prophet who said let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man soars and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon for who is a God like unto thee may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed God we give thanks that we can draw near to a

[40 : 30] God who delighteth in mercy to a God who devised a plan to save mankind and to carry out that plan in himself God manifest in the flesh in the person of thy son the Lord Jesus Christ that thou art a God who invites us to come and to partake of that salvation which thou hast worked out through thy son that thou hast placed that responsibility upon mankind to draw near to the salvation that thou hast worked out in him and to be saved oh who is a God like unto thee and we give thanks that we have that promise that if we will come to thee that thou wilt have mercy upon us for thou art the

God who abundantly pardons we pray oh lord that thou would bless thy word to us that thou would meet with us at every point of our need out of the riches of thy grace through Jesus Christ now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen