

Our Incomparable God

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[0 : 0 0] uh, office of Micah, and I hope we'll see its relevance to the passage read, uh, in second Kings. So it's Micah chapter seven and the final three verses of chapter seven of Micah. Micah in between Jonah and Nahum, these minor prophets as we call them. So Micah chapter seven, we'll read from 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 out iniquities under foot. 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. How interesting in the light of this passage itself, that the name Micah in Hebrew means who is like the Lord, because that's really what he's saying in this passage to the people of his own day. Who is a God like you? Although it's addressing particularly to God, it would be in the context in which Micah lived at that time. He overlapped with the prophet Isaiah.

These were days that were really critical in the life of the nation and of the people of Judah. Because Ahaz, King Ahaz, had allied himself with the king of Assyria, with Tiglath-Pileser, as we read in 2 Kings chapter 16. And not only that, but he had set about copying some of the things that he'd come across in Damascus, which was associated with a departure from the Lord on the part of the people of that particular region of Israel. And in that case, he had ordered Uriah, his priest to actually make a copy of the altar, especially. You remember how it was put in 2 Kings and chapter, 2 Kings and chapter 16, as we read, where the altar that he had come across in Damascus was something he ordered would be copied and made for himself and for the people. So in that particular regard, he was departing from the ways of the Lord, not just by copying something that the Lord had not ordered and specifically asked to be made. He was also changing the practice itself of using that particular altar. And he had specified that the bronze altar would be specifically for his own use to practice divination, practice something that was completely forbidden by God for the people of Israel or Judah. Here is a really drastic departure from the ways of the Lord on the part of Ahaz. And his alliance with Tiglath-Pileser is particularly offensive to God because there he is allying himself with a pagan king when he is really the Lord's king in Judah. And it's interesting how he spoke to Tiglath-Pileser as he sent the message to him to come make an alliance against Rezin and others who were attacking him, for I am your son. The Bible, God had clearly specified that the king in

Judah, the king in Israel, was indeed the son of God. He was appointed by God. He was God's appointee in his place over the people as a shepherd of the people. And you can see all of that is really indicative of not only Ahaz, but a society that's gone bad because this was a time where there was a huge difference between the lot of the poor and the lot of the rich in the land. Here was a time when there was much oppression, when there was a lot of social disorder. And when that social disorder could be seen in Israel and Judah right through from the highest in the land, like King Ahaz himself, right down through to family life. When you read through the chapters here in Micah itself, you can see, and even this chapter, you can see how Micah is describing for us the contemptible things that were happening in the society of his time. And that's a reminder for us again of how significant and how relevant Old Testament scripture, as well as New Testament scripture, is for our contemporary situation. You know, because when you read through that and you see the social disorder and you see the breakdown in society right through to the breakdown of family life, through all the strata of that society, you can immediately see something that relates to our present day and to the generation that we belong to. And it just proves the point that God's word is always relevant and always hits home in our situations and is always applicable to all the developments that you find in human society down through the generations. But Micah has hope, despite the fact that things are bad from the top right through to the bottom level of society, he has hope. And he has hope because of the knowledge that he has of his God. His hope is founded not on human ingenuity, not on human ability to turn things round, but on the nature of his God. And in fact, to be more precise, he has hope because he looks to God as the incomparable God. His hope is based on the fact that God is unlike anyone else. And that's so important in the context of idolatry and of departure towards idolatry that so marked the society of Micah's day.

[6 : 22] So God is the incomparable God. And on that, Micah is basing his hopes. That's a lesson and an indicator for ourselves as to where we take our particular concerns and how we address them by looking to the incomparable God that still remains the incomparable God. And he's incomparable in respect of two things. He remains the God of continuing pardon, but he also remains the God of covenant promise.

These are the two main headings we're taking from these few verses from 18 to 20. He remains, God remains the God of continuing pardon, forgiveness, and he remains the God of covenant promises, ongoing covenant promises. Look at the way he remains. First of all, the God of continuing pardon as he's addressed here in prayer by Micah. Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? You could probably answer that question, who is a God like you, in many ways. But Micah wants to actually focus in upon the incomparableness of God in respect to forgiveness of sin. That's so relevant to his own age because he's looking in hope towards this incomparable God who remains the God of continuing pardon and his hope is based upon him that God will turn and have mercy upon them and again bring them to know himself as they once did.

And that takes us back, of course, to the likes of Exodus where he described himself to Moses in Exodus chapter 34 as the God whose name was actually shown forth, if you like, in the fact that he was the God of pardon, of covenant mercy and so on. You remember there in chapter 34 of the book of Exodus where God revealed his name to Moses in verses 6 and 7.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, He did go on to say, There was God's emphasis. This is the content of his name as God, as the Lord, as Yahweh or Jehovah.

This is the content of the name that he is the God of pardons, the God of forgiveness, the God of mercy, the God of steadfast love. Look at how that is really pretty much the same as Micah here is using in his appeal or prayer to God.

[9 : 23] Now, of course, that really is presenting to the people something that he was presenting to them in his prophecy all through, that they are actually leaving the living God, the living personality of God.

You cannot have your sin forgiven unless God is a living personality that does so. And the relevance of that for our own generation is surely obvious because many people out there tonight will deny the existence of God.

Or at least if they have passing reference to God, they don't actually know him as a living personality in their own lives. And because sin is carried around, as we'll see in a moment, in our present generation and indeed for ourselves until we came to have our sin highlighted by God, it wasn't something very heavy, something very serious.

And really bear little relation at all to God. But it's, I think, especially relevant when the people had deserted God pretty much by and large, apart from the remnant, and had given their allegiance to the idols of the Canaanites, and now importing Syrian and Assyrian practices into their way of life.

Here is Micah's prayer. Who is a God like you? Where amongst all the alternatives to you, Lord? Is there anyone like you? And of course he knows the answer to that is there is none.

[10 : 53] And you look out on our world and see all the gods that are saved in our world, and we want to bring home to people by our witness to the gospel, by our own particular way of life as Christians, that our God is incomparable.

That there is nothing out there to compare with him or can match up with him or even come near to it. And that the hopes of people are actually based upon gods or idols that can never satisfy and can certainly never deal with the primary problem of us as human beings, our sin, our guilt.

And indeed, the passage, we're not going to go into this part of it, but the passage uses the three words, the three main words in the Old Testament for sin.

You'll find these words there, iniquity, transgression, and the word sin itself. And they appear elsewhere in the Old Testament in passages such as Psalms, Psalm 32, Psalm 51, where David makes his confession of sin and he uses the three words there.

What does that indicate to us? When you find them together in a passage like this or in the Psalms, the passages I've mentioned, well, it indicates for one thing that when God forgives sin, it's a comprehensive forgiveness.

[12 : 18] There is no aspect of sin that is left out of that forgiveness. Whether you think of sin as transgression, which really means breaking of his law or coming short, whether you think of it as iniquity, which means the twistedness of our sinful hearts, when you think of it in terms of the other word sin itself, it means coming short of the standard God expects, missing the mark.

All of these aspects of sin and descriptions of sin and nuances of sin, they are all inside of God's dealing with it. They are all part of the way God forgives.

When he forgives, he forgives totally, comprehensively. We need for guilt. And isn't that a wonderful emphasis for us, just to remind ourselves that whether we think of our sin as sin or iniquity or transgression, God says, you are pardoned.

They are all pardoned. All aspects of sin are taken account of when Christ died on the cross. There was no aspect of sin, your sin or my sin, that was left out of the reckoning, left out of the transaction between himself and the Father when he laid down his life for his people.

And in the forsakenness that Jesus expressed on the cross, we find the remembrance of all aspects of sin, so as they would be taken away completely by God and his forgiveness.

[13 : 52] And what he's saying is this, who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity? Pardoning actually meaning literally lifting away. We've mentioned the fact that so many people, indeed ourselves, don't realize that sin has a certain weight to it.

You don't, actually, and I don't realize the weight of sin until God shows us what sin is, until you are convicted of sin, until we come to have God show us something of what sin is, and that we are sinners, and that we are sinners destined for hell, that we are sinners under his condemnation, as we are by nature.

But you know, when God lays his finger upon your sin and my sin, and as he did with David, point out the fact that you are the man who's guilty of all this, then sin begins to feel heavy.

And all that will be different from one person to another. Nevertheless, this word pardon here reminds us that forgiveness of sin means lifting the weight of sin out of our persons, the way in which the guilt of sin lies upon us heavily.

And when God pardons, that is lifted away. And it's a reality. You see, sin is not a reality to most people out there. It wasn't much of a reality to myself to most of yourselves, possibly till God came and showed us.

[15 : 25] But it's certainly not a reality if you mention it to so many people out in the world today at this moment. You went to the town of Stornoway tonight and asked people, do you feel the weight of your sin?

Many of them would probably say, what are you talking about? I don't feel any weight at all in my lifestyle. I've chosen what I want to do. It feels good. It's something that I want to be left to follow out myself.

Sin does have a weight. It's in fact a condemning weight as God sees it. And the beauty for you and for me tonight is that in God's pardon, that weight of guilt, that weight of sin's guilt, is taken away.

It's lifted off your person and your record. And he goes on to speak about passing over transgressions. He remains the God of continuing pardon.

See, that's where his hope is based, as we said, because he's the God who's passing over the transgression of the remnant of your heritage. Of course, that goes back, as you well understand, to the Passover incident in the book of Exodus, chapter 9 and chapter 12 into 13, where the Passover, which really gives name to the Passover, as you know, as God said, specifying there in Exodus 12, 13, when I see the blood, the blood of the Passover lamb, I will pass over you.

[16 : 54] I will not come in to destroy you like I'm coming into the homes of the Egyptians. So, although there was certainly a death in all the homes of the Egyptians, the death of the firstborn, there was also a death in the homes of the people of Israel, the death of the Passover lamb, the death that prefigured and symbolized and showed in advance the death of Jesus, the death of the cross.

And through that, God was passing over. You see, their guilt, their transgression, their sin was met by blood, blood ordained and provided by God in such a wonderful way that the idea of this being an atoning blood is there from the start of their journey.

That's where they're released from the bondage of Egypt by the beauty, by the brilliance, by the power of that blood that signifies the blood of Christ.

And that's here in the word passing over, passing over transgression. Although it actually includes the idea in Hebrew also, it seems, of passing on to something else.

You see, when God passes over our sin, he doesn't just pass over that without moving on to something else in its place. He passes over our sins in his forgiveness and he moves on to put salvation, to put righteousness in its place.

[18 : 31] What a wonderful, wonderful language the Bible has in the descriptions it gives of God and of his forgiveness of sin among so many other things.

He does not retain, he says then, his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. It's the idea of Psalm 130 where he says, if you were to mark iniquity, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you. If you were to mark iniquity, same thing as here or pretty much the same where he says, he does not retain his anger forever.

He does not hold on to his anger forever. And here is the prophet Micah with his contemporary Isaiah looking out at the devastation spiritually and morally in their society and they say, where is our hope?

Our hope is in God. Our hope is in the incomparable God. Our hope is that God who continues to be the departing God will turn and come and put his anger aside because he doesn't retain his anger forever.

[19 : 39] You see, because he delights in steadfast love and really you can see the longing, the almost impatience on the part of Micah that God would move from the right punishment and the right indignation that he has against the people that he would hurry from that to what he's associated with in terms of being the incomparable God to delight in steadfast love.

There is our hope for our nation, friends. It's in nowhere else. It's not in any political party, whichever one of them you or I support. It's not in any form of government. It's not in ourselves in terms of what we are as human beings, even as Christians.

Where is the hope of our nation? Where is the hope of the church into the future? It is in the incomparableness of God. The incomparableness of God as one who continues to be a pardoning God.

God who pardons iniquity, who lifts away guilt, who passes over transgression, who does not hold onto his anger forever.

So when we appeal as we do to God, you know, we can use these great expressions of the Bible and put them before God in our appeal that he will be merciful and turn to us.

[21 : 03] We can use such an appeal as this. Lord, you delight in steadfast love. Please turn from your wrath. Please turn from your anger.

You'll find it all through the Psalms as well. People burdened for the glory of God. People burdened for the good of their fellow human beings. People burdened for the progress of the church and the progress of the gospel and the blessing of God's people.

And there is a privilege, friends, we can lay hold of God and ask God if we don't have that intensity of desire to do that as we would want. We can pray for that too.

Because our land is like the land of Micah, devastated by the ways of sin from the top through to the bottom of society, marked by departure from God, by ungodliness, by throwing in God's face, his laws, his promises.

He remains the God of continuing pardon. He also, secondly, remains the God of covenant promise. And a bit more briefly, I know it's difficult with your masks on.

[22 : 18] He's the God of covenant promise. You can see here in verse 19, he will again have compassion on us. Same idea as him looking to what's been done in the past.

Now he's saying he will again return. He will again have compassion upon us. And this word compassion we've come across before is one of the great Old Testament words.

It's Isaiah 59 all over again. A mother's compassion for the child of her womb. Even they may forget, said God, but I will not forget you because I've graven you on the palms of my hands.

The compassion of God compared indeed to a mother's compassion for her child. The strength of that compassion. But yet, God's compassion is incomparable even though it may be symbolized by that of a mother for a child.

And the result of that is in two images. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. That's the image of total victory.

[23 : 29] Because when God deals with sin and turns to have compassion on us, he takes our sins. He not just lifts the guilt of them away and passes over them and doesn't hold on to his anger and respect of them.

Here is Micah saying he will tread our iniquities underfoot. He will take them and stamp them out of sight. Remember Romans chapter 16 verse 20 where Paul is assuring the Romans that shortly God will crush Satan under your feet.

He's looking forward to the victory of God's people, to the victory of the church. It's assured. It's not a maybe. It's something that is absolutely secure in Christ and through faith in Christ it's yours.

Triumph in that. Glory in that. Celebrate that fact. Let it flood into your life when you feel disconsolate. Remember that you are already triumphant in Christ.

Don't let Satan persuade you that somehow or other you're not really what the Bible tells you you are as God has made you in Christ to be a partaker of his forgiveness.

[24 : 41] will tread underfoot our iniquities. He will stamp them out. And then second image is he will cast all our sins.

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Well again you know that reminds you doesn't it of Exodus. The great song of Exodus 15 and from chapter 14 there onwards chapter 14 27.

which says so Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. This is the Red Sea and the sea returned to its normal course. When the morning appeared and as the Egyptians fled into it the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea.

That's the expression. He just didn't let them walk into the sea or ride into the sea and just leave them to it. The expression here is in a spiritual sense in a theological sense God was throwing them into the sea.

They were his enemies. And that's celebrated in the song that follows that. I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously.

[25 : 50] His horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. And you find it in verse 4 and you find it in verse 21. The same thing. Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously.

His horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. Now it's difficult in some ways to follow the triumphalism of that because there are people being destroyed in that.

The Lord's enemies are being cast into the depths of the sea. They come under his judgment. That's not easy to actually sing about.

The book of Revelation shows us that in the perfect state of glory there will be no problem about singing the Lord's victories over his enemies with a perfect mind and a perfect will attuned to the will of God.

That's what the Lord's people will be singing triumphantly about. That Christ has conquered and that they have conquered in him. That their enemies are indeed thrown out by God into outer darkness.

[26 : 56] We don't sing that without emotion. We don't sing that even without an element of regret. We don't sing that without compassion. Without prayer.

That these people that are presently as enemies will be turned by God. Will turn themselves under God's grace to embrace him. To come to know him as their friend. If they don't then this is really what it's about.

This is what he is assuring himself and his people of. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Our sins into the depths of the sea.

Isn't it interesting that you can take that right up through to the end of time where all the sins of God's people will certainly then be known as having been thrown into the sea.

That's to say thrown into the depths of God's forgiveness completely. And it's interesting that Israel's journey to the promised land began with such an emphasis on their enemies being thrown by God into the depths of the sea.

[28 : 06] And the imagery continues right through to the church's final triumph and victory where their sins are said to be thrown into the sea. And to the sea of God's total forgiveness in the past.

The past is over. The past is gone. It doesn't remain there anymore. And it's interesting too, and I know I've taken too long already, but there's so much of an interest in this.

Let me just, Exodus 15 verse 11, the same emphasis again as you find in this passage in Micah, and where you find the same emphasis on God being incomparable.

In verse 11 there he says, Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome and glorious deeds, doing wonders? You see, the incomparableness of God is celebrated there in Exodus 15, here in Micah, and it will be all the way through eternity for God's people.

You will always be singing throughout the endless eternity with Jesus, with Christ forever. Who is like you, O Lord? You'll never be tired of singing of the incomparableness of God.

[29 : 21] And you can celebrate it now on the way through to the promised land. It's yours to sing of. And that, of course, brings great assurance to us as Christians.

We have this incomparable God who remains the God of continuing pardon, the God of covenant promises. The root of it is in being faithful, verse 20, faithfulness, steadfast love.

Whatever can be displaced or moved, this never can and never will be. what an assurance you have from the way in which the Bible speaks of the forgiveness of God.

I think I told you already for an incident where a missionary had a real problem over a sin that had been in his past as a young man.

and he just, he'd been a Christian for many years but the sin kept coming up and kept troubling him and he decided eventually he just have to share this with someone so he shared it with an old Christian woman, a mature Christian woman that he knew and he said to her, I've got something from my past that's just troubling me all the time.

[30 : 37] When you come to speak to the Lord and pray to the Lord, will you ask him please to give you some word for me about this sin? She said certainly I will and a few months had elapsed and he met with this good woman again and as they were talking he said, by the way did you remember to pray to the Lord to ask him to give you a word for me relating to this sin?

I did, she said, of course I remembered, I prayed for you. And did he actually give you a word? Did he say something to bring to me? Yes, she said, he did.

What he said was this, you go and tell him that the sin that's troubling him, I don't remember it. I don't remember it.

It's forgiven. It's in the past. It's covered. It's lifted away. It's in the depths of God's sea.

who is a God like unto our God. Let's continue and conclude our service from Psalm 103, Psalm 103 and page 238.

[31 : 59] that's soon.