

Who is a God like You?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. If Pastor Nick got you excited that I was preaching on Isaiah, I'm preaching on Micah. But it's understandable because Micah and Isaiah overlap a lot.

They prophesied during the same time. It's understandable. So just wanted to clarify that before we get too far into it. It is good to be with you this morning. As Nick mentioned, today we're going to finish our series in the book of Micah. And then next week we're going to start with the book of 1 John. So if you're someone who likes to read ahead and prepare ahead of time, we will be looking at the book of 1 John next week. So that will be our summer preaching series.

We're looking forward to that. In the book of Acts in chapter 17, there is a picture of the Apostle Paul as he comes to the city of Athens. And as he walks around the city of Athens, he sees many images, statues of gods of the Greek pantheon of various kinds.

He acknowledged them. And as he spoke to people there, he said, I see you are religious people. He acknowledged their desire of the human heart to know God. And he acknowledged that from their standpoint, there were a lot to choose from. Now we in the United States don't have a lot of statues that we walk around as a part of religious worship. For the most part, there are certainly some places where that is true. And certainly we live in a world where religious idols, icons, are still a significant part of their religious activity and worship.

But I think that universally, even here in the U.S., there is a human impulse to want to know God.

[2 : 03] And just like in the first century in Athens today, it seems like there are a lot of choices. In our culture today, spiritual search is kind of like going to the food court in the mall.

You could go to Five Guys, you could go to Chick-fil-A, you could go to China Panda, and so on and so forth. So many different options. We get to pick maybe a little of this, a little of that. Sometimes we even like it like a buffet. We can make our own plate and choose our own dishes to make up what God we think we want.

If I were to venture, think about some of the kinds of gods that we are most drawn to today in our culture, two of the strongest flavors that we long for, they would be these.

One would be a God of justice, someone who will bring righteousness to this world. Because we have a desire to see that wrong be punished, that evil be stopped, that suffering end, that oppression be overcome. And we long for Thor with his hammer to come down from heaven and smite all the bad guys so that we can continue to move towards a better world and a better society. So some of us long for a God of justice. And then there might be another flavor that some of us are attracted to, and that would be a God of acceptance. A God who says, I love you just the way you are, and you don't have to be anything different. A God who embraces our choices, supports our dreams, a God whose love fuels our pursuit of a fulfilling life, no matter what.

[4 : 07] But I have a question for you. Do we really get to choose? Now, it's been argued by some that all human religions are just, all religions are simply human constructions. That this human desire for something transcendent has no real object, and so everything that we worship and all that humanity has worshipped throughout history has all been created by us. And if that's true, then, well, let's go to the buffet. Let's choose. Let's make it right. Let's decide what we want. But what if...what if it's not a human construction?

What if our desire to know God is a human response to a reality? C.S. Lewis argues that it's like hunger.

We have hunger in our human bodies because we were made to eat food. We didn't create hunger so that we could enjoy food. We have hunger because we were made to eat food.

And he would argue, and I would argue with him, that our desire for God is not because we like to create something that doesn't exist, but because we were made for something that we have not yet

discovered. The God of the Bible comes, and he says to us, here I am. I am a God. Not of your own making. I am a God who will be surprising in who I am. And I call you to come and to know me. And that brings us to our text in the book of Micah this morning. If you're looking in the Pew Bibles, it's page 732. Micah is buried in the Old Testament prophets, so you might have a hard time. And remember, Micah is preaching around 700 B.C. He is proclaiming, he's prophesying to the people of God, the nation of Israel, when they're between one calamity and another. The one calamity is that the northern part of the nation of Israel has been conquered by Assyria, who have swooped in and taken over half of the land. They've not gotten to Jerusalem yet, but they've taken over the northern kingdom. And what's coming for them and what Micah is predicting or previewing is that in 586, the southern kingdom will be conquered by Babylon, and the nation of Israel as a nation state will cease to exist for 70 years. It's a significant time of crisis.

[6 : 58] And it's raised questions in the mind of the people. God, what kind of God are you? And this is what Micah is bringing to us. Who is a God like you? We'll see it in verse 18.

So let's read Micah chapter 7. We're going to read verses 18 through... Sorry, I didn't... There it is. 18... Nope. 8 through 20. That's what we're going to do this morning. Micah chapter 7, verses 8 through 20. So let's read God's Word together, and let's pray, and then we'll look at it for a few minutes.

Rejoice not over me, my enemy. O my enemy, when I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him. Until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me, he will bring me out to the light. I shall look upon his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, Where is the Lord your God? My eyes will look upon her. Now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets. A day of building of your walls. In that day the boundaries shall be far extended. [8 : 28] In that day they will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the river, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants for the fruit of their deeds. Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things. The nation shall see and be ashamed of all their might, and they shall lay their hands on their mouths. Their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, like crawling things of the earth. They shall come trembling out of their strongholds. They shall turn in dread to the Lord our God. They shall be in fear of you. Who is like you? Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance. He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. This is God's Word. Let's pray together. Lord, we ask this morning that you would help us as we finish this book, Lord, as we hear this last word, this last oracle. God, I pray you would give us your help today. Lord, that by your Spirit you would open our hearts to receive your Word and open our minds to understand it and open our wills that we might submit to it. God, I pray that we would see you this morning more clearly through this text. Lord, I pray that you would help me to speak as I ought, that together as we sit under your Word, Lord, you would be glorified. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Who is a God like you? This is actually what Micah is telling us. As is often true in prophetic reading, one of the challenges is that the pronouns change. The perspective or the voice changes consistently. So I'm hopefully going to help you walk through and help you understand who the voices are and how. But in the big picture, what I want us to see this morning is that Micah is telling us two things about this God. In verses 8 through 17, he's going to tell us about God as our shepherd. And verses 18 through 20, he will talk about God as our Savior. So if you're taking your notes, there's the outline. First of all, God as our shepherd, verse 14, he says, Micah is crying out to the Lord saying, shepherd your people, O God, with your staff. And you know, it's a surprising thing because I don't know if you know any shepherds, but in the first century at least, and certainly in the Old Testament times, shepherds were not the sort of people you'd have over for coffee. They tended to be, well, people who hung around with sheep all day. And they were not particularly well regarded in society. It was not an honored profession. And one of the remarkable things about the Bible is that it takes this role and it fills this and it imbues it with all of

this goodness and this glory and this greatness. Because the shepherd who is a dirty workman in the cultural view becomes this precious king ruling and overseeing with care and protection for his people.

And this is the kind of shepherd that Micah is referring to when he says, shepherd your people. What kind of a shepherd is he? Well, there are two things in this section that I see. First of all, he is a shepherd who disciplines those he loves. Go back to verse 8. And this is a remarkable thing because now it's the nation of Israel speaking to their enemy. And he's saying, rejoice not over me. Why is he saying that? Because they've experienced God's discipline on their nation. Rather than experiencing victory and glory in the world, God has disciplined them. Assyria has been a physical rod of discipline to defeat the northern kingdom to bring to light their idolatry, their disobedience, and their trust in other things. They've experienced the discipline of God's judgment because of their rebellion against him. And so the people around them might be saying, ha ha, see, your God has abandoned you. He's not much of a God after all, isn't he? But that's not true either. The discipline of what God brings is also a restorative discipline. So you see in verse 9, in verse 8, you see the Israel confessing their sin. We know we've sinned. We know this is God's discipline. But then he goes on and he says, but I will wait for the Lord because he will come and he will bring light into the darkness of my present situation. He will bring redemption and even vindication at the end of the day.

The Bible says this in a number of places, that the Lord disciplines those he loves. And if those of you have small children, you know this. When your one-and-a-half-year-old walks over to the outlet and wants to stick the fork in the outlet, you stop him from doing that and you discipline him.

[14:58] And he will do it again, he will do it again, and he will do it again. And you discipline him to train him not to kill himself. Right? This is a loving action that is good and right. We teach our children right and wrong by the discipline that we use. Another kind of discipline that happens in this world is the discipline of a coach. When you go to two days in August for soccer practice, and your coach makes you run figure eights where you have to sprint every sideline and you get to jog across. And then you sprint the other sideline and you jog across. And he says, do it ten times.

And you're exhausted. And then he gives you a water break. And then he says, do it again. Why? Because the discipline that he is building into you is strengthening you to accomplish the very things that you want to do but wouldn't do on your own. The Lord disciplines those he loves.

This is one of the kinds of shepherding that God does of his people. It's what he does for us. We often just want a God who will give us our own desires and our ways.

We often want God to just do what we want him to do for us. But in various ways, God disciplines us and he tests us and he strengthens us so that we might grow in our trust in his care and so that we might become the people that he has called us to be.

And you know, it's a beautiful thing because this God is a... this kind of shepherding, this disciplining God is a God of mercy and of justice because he doesn't simply allow us to continue in our sin forever. He doesn't allow us to do wrong over and over again. In his church, he continues to do... bring this discipline. When leaders have gone wrong, it becomes exposed and it becomes rightly condemned. And yet... and yet... in his mercy, he continues to raise up new leaders and he continues to provide for his church in various ways. So, the God of the Bible is a God who disciplines as part of his shepherding. But it's not just that. It is also in verses 10 through 17 that in his shepherding, he is a... he is a God who triumphs over his enemies. Now, this is surprising because at this time, Israel was a small nation that had just become smaller and it was surrounded by the superpowers. Assyria was stronger than them. Egypt was stronger than them. Babylon was stronger than them.

[17:59] Sometimes even the smaller nations around them like Moab or Edom were stronger than them. And it seemed like God had abandoned them. And it seemed like there was no way they would survive.

But Micah reminds them their great shepherd will triumph over these enemies. So, verse 10, he comes and he says, these enemies who are gloating now saying, where is your God? Well, you know what?

How long has Israel existed after Moab fell away? How long did Assyria or Babylon last? But Israel, God preserved and took forward sociopolitically. Where is your God? He is here and he's going to bring victory for his people. Verses 11 through 14 is this beautiful picture.

Look with me at it because... so that you... what... he's talking about a day. He's talking about a day when the walls would be rebuilt. That's actually a picture not simply of the walls of the city, but expanding the boundaries of territory. And you see that in the second verse... second part of verse 11.

That what God is going to do is... so even though it feels like God's people is small now, God is going to expand the impact. He's going to stretch the boundaries out. And what it was a small nation will have a huge impact and a huge influence on the world. And he will restore it to flourishing.

[19 : 26] Right? And verses 16 through 18 says, the nations around that are arrogantly, proudly crowing that they have won, they will not last. But notice as well that not only is there a sense of victory, that God will bring his judgment and his justice on these other nations, but also there's an invitation with the warning. Look at me... look with me at verse 12. In the day that God will expand his nation, people will come to him. People will come from these other nations and they will say, we want to be a part of your nation. We want to be under your umbrella. We want to be under your shepherd. That's what verse 12 says. Some will recognize the rulership of God in the world.

And in the desire to be a part of that kingdom, they will come and be with God. So, the shepherd king is a disciplining king. The shepherd king is a king who is victorious over his enemies. And friends, this is meant to comfort us. This is meant to comfort us today.

Because we recognize that much of the world has no regard for the God of the Bible. And there is much evil, and there is much suffering, and there is much oppression in the world.

And friends, if we just looked around, we would think, where is God? Is he really at work? And the Bible reminds us that he is. That though the wrong seem off so strong, he is the ruler yet.

That there is a storyline of the Bible that leads to, at the end, the triumph of God and his kingdom over the kingdoms of this world. And it is a kingdom of beauty, and a kingdom of righteousness, and a kingdom of love, and a kingdom of hope, and a kingdom of all the things that we long for.

[21 : 39] And this is the great shepherd, who holds out his shepherd crook and says, come, be a part of my flock. Be a part of my sheepfold. Be a part of my kingdom.

Micah is telling that to Israel in the seventh century. He is telling us the same thing today. When we feel like the world, the secular culture, may be pressing in. This is why we're doing the conversation in two weeks about Pride Week. Because where it might feel like we're pressed in and squeezed, and we're getting crushed by it, we need to have confidence that that is not true, that God has us in his hands, and that he will carry us through.

But Micah is not simply concerned that we know God as our shepherd ruler. He wants us to know God as well as our great Savior. This is what verses 18 through 20 tell us about. If in the first section, verses 8 through 17, there was more emphasis, it felt, on the justice part of God, that he was disciplining people and triumphing over enemies, in verses 18 through 20, we see much more, the emphasis on grace, and his acceptance and love for his people. Verse 18 is, I believe, the key verse in this whole section. 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. Now, friends, recognize that this God was speaking these things in the context of the law of Hammurabi. Do you guys know the law of Hammurabi, right? An eye for an eye is sort of the way people summarize it. And I'm sure there are some ancient scholars who are like, ah, that's not really quite fair. But it's still a broadly true pattern that this was a reality in the ancient world.

And this God comes and he says, the world will tell you, if you hurt me, I hurt you. If you offend me, I will retaliate. If you disobey me, I will punish you. But Micah says, the God of the Bible is a God who, when he revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, said, he is the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. This is the way that the God of the Bible reveals himself to the world, he says, I am a God who delights in love, not in punishment.

I am a God who delights in forgiveness, in removing your sins from you. And not just removing them by saying, ah, it's all right this time, but removing them the way that a convicted felon has his record erased so that if anyone goes and looks at his record, all you see is a clean sheet. This is what God has done for us, trampling over our sins, casting it into the depths of the sea, which at that time no one could get to. Nowadays, we can do submarines and go to the bottom of the ocean. But back

then, you couldn't get to the depths of the sea. So that was like, it'll go to a place where it will never come back as if it were never there. Michael wants us to know, who is a God like you who forgives sin? Do you know that power today? Do you remember what it was like?

[25 : 47] Or maybe you're sitting today feeling like this is true of me now, where you have really blown it, where you have sinned against someone else, or you have sinned against God, and you know it.

You've rejected him, you've gone your own way, you've caused harm, and you've walked away from it. Friends, you know the beautiful story in Luke 15 about the prodigal son, the one who rejected his dad and said, basically, I wish you were dead, took his inheritance and abandoned him, and went off to live for selfish gain and selfish pleasure. Yet when he realized what he had done, he remembered the character of his father, and he went home.

He thought, maybe I can be a part of my father's house as a servant. But the father saw him a long way off, and he ran, and he embraced him, and he gave him the robe and the ring and the sandals to restore him to his place. He forgave his sin and embraced him and welcomed him back. Friends, this is the power of forgiveness. This is a God unlike any other God.

And if you're sitting here thinking, gosh, I don't know that, remember this, God knows everything about you. Not just the public things where you've really blown it, but all the private thoughts, all the hidden acts done in secret, all the words you spoke, and even the words you didn't speak, but you thought really hard in your mind, all the ways that you have sinned.

And God says, I am a God who pardons iniquity and casts your sin away. He is a faithful Savior. In verses 19 and 20, he uses this word twice, the steadfast, sorry, at the end of verse 18 and then in verse 20, he uses this word to say, I am a God of steadfast love towards you. And if you've been around the Bible for a while, you know this is *chesed*. This is the Hebrew word for God's covenantal love, and it's a really rich word, because it's not just affection or feeling well towards someone, but it has to do with covenant faithfulness.

[28 : 33] It has to do with loyalty. It has to do with commitment as well, a treasuring love. And God says, I am a forgiving and a treasuring, covenantal, loyal God.

The image is like that of a faithful husband who hangs in there when his wife's affections wander away, or a faithful wife who is constant in his loyalty, even as her husband goes off and has an affair.

God says, I will be faithful to you. I will still be here, and I am here to forgive that sin and to invite you in to be my people.

This is the kind of God that Micah is saying we have. And remember, this is for those who have blown it, because Israel rebelled and pursued other gods and other idols. Israel didn't trust God, but went to other political alliances to save them.

And Israel didn't love God, but acted evilly towards their own people. We've seen this, if you've been here for the series on the book of Micah, how corrupt and how broken and how oppressive the people of Israel were towards themselves and their own people, let alone others.

[30 : 00] Their selfishness was on display over and over and over again. And yet God says, God is a God of forgiveness and of steadfast love for his people.

And friends, we need to recognize that we are the wayward spouse in this analogy. All of us. None of us are righteous. None of us have been faithful to God in the way that he has been faithful to us. All of us are in need of forgiveness for our sins. And God says, I will do this. Now, if you've been following the thread of justice and grace that I've been trying to weave through this, you will ask, where is the justice in this?

How can God justly, simply forgive our sins and clear our slate? How can he do that? Well, Micah doesn't really explain that.

He hints at it in a couple of places, verses 8 through 10, where it talks about him coming to vindicate his people. But friends, we know the answer to that question.

[31 : 13] Because we don't read the Old Testament in a vacuum. We read it in light of the whole Bible. And we know what God has done. So that his forgiveness of us is not merely an overlooking, but is a just forgiveness of our sin.

Because this is why Jesus came. Jesus came for us to be our Savior by stepping into that place of judgment.

The sin that we committed, he took upon himself. The judgment that we deserve, he took upon himself. The death that we should die for our sins, he took upon himself. He bears God's wrath against it so that God might be both just and the justifier of the ungodly like us.

He crushes sin and death by drinking the bitter cup of the cross for us. And so this grace that is free and rich and beautiful to us comes at an infinite cost to God himself.

[32 : 27] And in love, he says, I will bear it so that you don't have to, so that you can be mine. All I do is call you to come to me.

Come in faith. Come not because you are righteous, but because you know you need me. Come and believe in what I have done in Jesus for you. And be my people.

And be the one who can say, who is a God like this God? Certainly a God like no other. So how do we respond?

For those of us who have known God for a while, how do we respond to this passage? First, we want to have courage. We want to have courage to believe that the guide of the Bible really is a God like no other.

He is not merely our construction, but he is a God who has revealed himself. He is the God who is outside of us that we were made to find. And we want to have the courage to say, we believe that God does exist and that he is knowable and that he has revealed himself to us.

[33 : 36] And so as Paul says in Athens, what you worship is unknown. I declare to you today, this is the God of the heavens and the earth. So we ought to have courage with that.

But we also ought to have humility. And that humility comes in two different ways. One is a humility to say, we know this God not because we have done anything to deserve or earn this, but simply because he has revealed himself to us in grace.

We cannot claim to be the best out of all the tribes of the world. In fact, we are the least. But like poor beggars, all we can do is say, this is where the feast is.

Not with us, but with him who has invited us. Come with us to see this great God that we have seen. We also need to have the humility to keep from falling into the arrogance of remaking God in our own image.

We don't get to choose whether God is a God of justice like Thor who will rain down fire to defeat our enemies, or whether he's a God of acceptance who's going to accept us no matter what we do.

[34 : 49] The God of the Bible is a God who is outside of us, and we don't create him or choose him. We simply explore and get to know him better as he has revealed himself.

And the beauty of it is that he is both of those things. He is both just and gracious. He is both unbelievably accepting and intolerantly resisting evil and sin.

And this is the God of the Bible. And Jesus has come to show us who he is. And as we understand that Jesus shows us the fullness of God in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, grace and truth he came to show us.

Let us respond in worship. This is what God calls us to. When we think, who is a God like you? When we see him as he is, let us treasure him.

He is worthy of our praise. He is worthy of our daily study. He is worthy of our prayer. He is worthy of all of our life being under his lordship and his control.

[36 : 02] He is worthy of our love and our devotion, that he is the first priority and the one we seek to please above all others. He is the one worthy of our sacrificial commitment and our even suffering for his name.

Lord, we do pray this morning that you would open the eyes of our hearts so that we might know the greatness of who you are.

Lord, that we might know what a great privilege, a great calling it is to be your people.

Lord, I pray this morning if there are those here who are seeking and seeking to understand the God of the Bible, Lord, that they would see you clearly.

And Lord, that they would respond to your invitation to come, to come to you in faith. Lord, I pray for those of us who have known you for a while that we would be renewed and strengthened in our confidence in you and our faith in you today.

[37 : 28] And Lord, will you fill our hearts with worship that we might know you and love you. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.