

# Who is a God like unto thee

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[ 0 : 00 ] You will find my text this evening in that chapter we read together, Micah chapter 7, and those marvellous words in verses 18 and 19.

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. Micah was a contemporary of the great Isaiah.

He prophesied in Judah in the 8th century BC, in the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz and Hezekiah. He belonged to the village of Moresheth near Gath in the southwest of the Judean lowlands.

[ 1 : 28 ] Micah denounced the sins of the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, and the people of Israel, the northern kingdom as well.

He castigated them for their corruption of justice, and for their oppression of the poor. Their sin was greatly aggravated by their enthusiastic observance of religious ritual.

In chapter 6, for example, we read there at verse 6, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul? Such religious observance, divorced from righteous living, is an abomination to the Lord.

[ 2 : 41 ] What doth the Lord require of thee, asks Micah, Micah clearly warns the people that the judgment of God is going to come upon them because of their sin.

Samaria in the northern kingdom will fall to the Assyrian invader, who will also devastate much of the southern kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem itself in the southern kingdom will fall to a later invader to the Babylonians, and the people will be carried away into exile amongst the heathen Babylonians.

There will take place the terrible Babylonian exile. Yet, nevertheless, Micah prophesies a glorious deliverance.

He tells of a day when God will turn again to his rebellious but chastised people.

He tells of a day when he will reverse their fortunes, he will restore their fortunes, he will recall their bondage, and he will do such marvelous things for his own people, that the very nations of the world around will have to place their hand as it were upon their mouth.

[ 4 : 14 ] They will be struck down by the marvelous things that God does for his own. Verse 16 says, And such blessing as God will give to his people then will be clear evidence that his rebellious but chastised people have been forgiven.

All this points forward to a yet greater deliverance. The deliverance experienced by every Christian believer and by the whole Church of God.

The deliverance from the bondage of sin. The deliverance that should cause every child of God to cry out in adoring wonder, 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. 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. Notice here, first of all then, what we are told concerning the nature of God.

[ 5 : 53 ] The nature of God. Nothing is more important than that we should be clear concerning the character of God. There are many who form their own ideas concerning the character of God.

They are guilty of forming in their own minds and imaginations a God made and a God created in their own image. But God does not leave us to ourselves to discover what he is like.

He has given to us a revelation of himself, of his character, of his nature. All we can ever know about God is the result of his own self-disclosure.

Here in this passage of God's word, through the prophet Micah, we are given teaching concerning the nature of God.

We are given teaching negatively and positively concerning the nature of God. First of all, negatively. Micah tells us here that this is the kind of God he is.

[ 7 : 05 ] He does not retain his anger forever. Such is our God. Judgment is his strange work.

Notice then the application of this, first of all, to the penitent sinner. It's application to the penitent sinner. When a sinner remains impenitent, refusing to repent of his sin and to believe in the Saviour whom God has so graciously provided, he remains under condemnation.

The wrath of God remains upon him. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness in men. And if a person lives and dies in that condition, the wrath of God remains upon him throughout all eternity.

The last words of John chapter 3 are, He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth, remains upon him.

But the Bible's message to us is this, that God does no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Rather, that he should turn from his wicked way and live.

[ 8 : 30 ] When a sinner repents of his sin and believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ, then he can have the assurance that it is not God's wrath that rests upon him, but God's favour.

He can sing with abounding joy the glad song of the redeemed. Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

What tremendous encouragement there is here for the convicted sinner. God has provided for him a saviour, an all-sufficient saviour.

And God urges him, turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die? In Christ crucified, God has provided a perfect and an everlasting shelter from the storm of his wrath.

Why remain under that wrath a moment longer? Flee to Christ, trust in him, the sinner's only refuge.

[ 9 : 41 ] He retains not his anger forever. But then we notice also, secondly, the application of this to the returning backslider.

Its application to the returning backslider. Indeed, in the context here, these words in their primary application apply to the people of God.

God's people had sinned very greatly. They had been guilty of many and of heinous sins. And Micah has warned them that judgment is going to come upon them.

That is a dominant theme in the prophets. They return to it again and again and again. Yet they never fail to point out that in so dealing with his people, God does a grand and a glorious and a gracious purpose in view.

What he is doing is he is dealing with their sin. He is purging them of their sin. He is weaning them away from their idolatry.

[ 10 : 55 ] He is chastising them for their unfaithfulness. That they may return to him and know his blessing upon them yet again. That they may return to him and know again the joy of his salvation.

He is so dealing with them that they will know in days to come a glorious future. The message that God sent to the exiles in Babylon under the prophet Jeremiah was, We have it in the prophecy of Isaiah as well.

Isaiah says, He has a gracious and a glorious purpose in view in doing so.

It is so that his unfaithful people, so that unfaithful Israel, will be brought to the place where she will have to confess, I will go and return to my first husband.

For it was better with me then than now. How marvelous is God's restoring grace. Under his chastisement, his people suffer shame.

[ 13 : 21 ] But instead of their shame, he gives to them, as Isaiah tells us in chapter 61, a double portion. Instead of dishonor, they rejoice in their lot.

He does not retain, he does not keep his anger forever. Who is a God like unto him? The same truth is so plainly and so emphatically taught us in the New Testament.

The classic passage there, of course, is Hebrews chapter 12. When God's own people persist in taking a sinful way, heedless of the warnings which he gives, inevitably they have to suffer his chastisement.

In his love, in his fatherly love for them, he disciplines them. They suffer what is unpleasant and grievous, but God is causing them to suffer in that way, in his love for them, in order that they might come to their senses and return to faithfulness to him, and know again great happiness, great joy in loyalty to their God.

No chastisement for the present seems to be joyous but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby.

[ 14 : 47 ] The chastising rod lies upon the child of God only until he repents and returns again in faithfulness to his God.

For but a moment lasts his wrath, life in his favour lies, weeping may for a night endure, at morn doth joy arise.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones tells a remarkable story in one of his sermons. He tells of a man who was converted under his own ministry, his first ministry in South Wales, in Port Talbot there.

This man was converted from a terrible life of immorality and of drunkenness. He became a fine Christian man, full of zeal for the Lord.

But sadly, that man returned to his sin. He robbed his wife and he lived in adultery. So many said that man was never converted truly at all.

[ 15 : 50 ] But the doctor would not have it so. He said that one day he will return to faithfulness to his God. That man left South Wales, went to live in London.

He continued to live there in adultery. He was utterly miserable. So miserable was he that one Lord's Day evening, he decided that he would end it all.

He went down to the Thames embankment. He was going to throw himself into the river. It was about half past six. He heard Big Ben chime out at 6.30.

It suddenly occurred to him that his former minister, Dr. Lloyd-Jones, who is now the minister of Westminster Chapel, will be beginning his evening service. I'll go and hear him once more, he said, before I drown myself in the Thames.

He was, of course, a little late in arriving at Westminster Chapel. The minister was leading in prayer. The first praise was over as this man laid his way into the gallery.

[ 16 : 53 ] The minister, quite unaware of his entry, said something in prayer about God's love to the backslider. And God used that word marvelously to restore that poor man to faithfulness to himself.

And he went on again to lead an upright and God-honoring life. God does not retain his anger forever.

Who is a God like him? But Micah also gives us here teaching concerning the character of God positively, positive teaching.

It is in these words, the end of verse 18, he delights in mercy. He delights in mercy. The word that is here translated mercy is one of the loveliest words in the scriptures.

It is a word that very often in our authorised version is translated loving kindness. Steadfast love is how another version translates it. Unfailing love is how the New International Version very often renders it.

[ 18 : 05 ] What is this mercy, this love that is referred to here? It is covenant love. It is that special love that God has for his own people.

Covenant love, steadfast love. In grace, God does bound himself by covenant bond. There are those whom he has embraced within his own covenant.

And those people he loves with everlasting covenant love. In that love, he has obligations towards them, which in righteousness he is honour bound to fulfil, having voluntarily bound himself in grace. By a covenant bond to them. If you have an interest in the covenant, my friend, God's covenant of grace.

If you're a Christian believer, a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then all the blessings and privileges of the covenant must be yours.

[ 19 : 11 ] God forgives your sins completely. God sanctifies you. He makes you completely holy in due time. God will eventually glorify you.

Even when his hand is upon you in chastisement, it is because of his love for you to make you like Christ. There is nothing, nothing in all the universe, no experience in life or in death through which

you can ever pass, that can ever separate you from his love that comes to you in Christ. He has pledged himself to perfect that which concerns you. You can never drift beyond his love and care.

The soul that on Jesus has limped for repose. I will not, I cannot desert to its foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.

The nature of God. But then we have teaching here, secondly, concerning the works of God.

[ 20 : 28 ] The works of God, and two works in particular are brought to our attention. First of all, this, he pardons him. He pardons him.

This is what calls forth the wondering cry of adoration on the part of Micah, who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity.

God pardons iniquity. It is as though Micah finds language inadequate to express the wonder of this great truth. He uses three expressions to put it across.

He pardons iniquity. That is very wonderful. He passes by transgression. He does not have it in view. And then he reaches his grand and glorious climax.

He casts all our sins into the depths of the sea. And why? Why does he do this? Because of his love.

[ 21 : 30 ] His covenant love is everlasting love toward his own. It is his nature to love. It is because he loves us.

He loves us because he loves us. This means, of course, that merit, our own merit, has nothing whatever to do with our obtaining God's forgiveness.

It proceeds entirely from his love, from his grace, from his free and undeserved favor. We, for our sins, for our sins deserve his judgment.

But in love he comes and he freely forgives his people. However vile your sins may be, however vile your sins may be, however numerous they may be, God forgives them all.

He forgives all the sins of all his people. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

[ 22 : 37 ] That notoriously wicked king of Judah, Manasseh, that man who made Judah to sin, sins worse than the sins committed by the heathen themselves, sought and found the pardoning mercy of God while he was a prisoner in a heathen jail.

And throughout the centuries, there have been countless thousands whom people have regarded as the dregs of society, who have been marvelously transformed by the love and the grace of this pardoning God, who is a God like unto him.

He's the same God still. Where in all the universe is there a message more glorious or more thrilling than this? Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity?

Notice how complete is the forgiveness which he gives. He pardons iniquity. He removes utterly the guilt of his people's sins.

He casts them, says Micah, into the depths of the sea. They sink there as Pharaoh's great host sank in the Red Sea down like a stone to the bottom.

[ 24 : 02 ] They sink not in the shadows from which they can one day be washed up upon the shore. They are drowned in the depths of the deepest ocean.

He blots them out of view. He removes them entirely from all remembrance. My Christian friend, is there some particular vile act, some terrible foul sin in your past which still troubles you and robs you of your peace?

It causes you so much heartache. That one sin. Here is the glorious message of the gospel that God will not confront you with that sin.

He will not confront you with it in time. He will not confront you with it of the judgment itself. He has hurled that sin and all your sins into the depths of the sea.

But you say to me, is that righteous? If all the sins of a person are completely and utterly forgiven in that way, does that not mean that God's justice, God's righteousness is violated?

[ 25 : 17 ] Not at all. For you see, God does not connive at your sin. He does not let it go unpunished. The only ground on which God forgives you is the atoning sacrifice, the finished work, the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There at the cross, Jesus died, in the Roman stead of each one of his people. There he paid sin's penalty.

There he took the punishment. The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and he answered to God for all our sins. He made a complete atonement.

You see, the cross declares not only the love of God, it most certainly declares that. It declares also the righteousness of God.

When you look at the cross, you see that God is righteous, and that he is the justifier. He is just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.

[ 26 : 30 ] Because the penalty has been paid, because the punishment has been taken, he sees not our sins. If we're believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our sins have been transferred to him.

He has borne them and answered to God for them, and his righteousness, his flawless righteousness, is reckoned ours, so that in our standing before him, we are perfectly righteous in his sight.

Who is a God like unto him who pardons iniquity? The works of God. First of all, this he pardons sin, and secondly, this he subdues our iniquities.

He subdues our iniquities. We are told that in verse 19. The term means he treads them underfoot. When God takes away the guilt of our sin by his pardoning grace, he deals also with its power with him.

Sin shall not have dominion over you. He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free. Professor John Murray, the late Professor John Murray says, there is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin.

[ 27 : 59 ] It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital. It is another for his defeated hosts to harass the garrisons of the kingdom. My Christian friend, is there some besetting sin that still defeats you?

Humbly and graciously, but emphatically, I have to say this, that when that is so of the Christian, he is without excuse. By the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, the deeds of the sinful nature can be mortified.

You can know victory over that besetting sin. God subdues our iniquities. Who is a God like unto him?

The works of God. He pardons sin. He subdues our iniquities. Micah gives us here teaching concerning the nature of God.

He gives us here teaching concerning the works of God. And thirdly, he gives us here teaching concerning the people of God. The people of God.

[ 29 : 10 ] Who are those people? Those people whose sins are pardoned and whose iniquities are subdued. We are told in verse 18 who they are.

They are, that verse says, the remnant of his heritage. They are his heritage. God's people are his heritage.

They are his inheritance. They are his special possession. They are the people whom he has pledged himself to bless.

They are the people for whom Christ came into this world and died upon the cross. They are the people for whom he intercedes now before his Father in heaven.

Father, I will that they be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. Throughout all eternity, his people shall behold Christ's glory and rejoice in him.

[ 30 : 12 ] His people are his heritage. And we are told here that they are a remnant, the remnant of his heritage. At any given point in time, they may appear to be few in the world.

Not all mankind are his people. Not even all within the professing church are the people of God.

There will on the day of judgment be many who will say to him, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? In thy name cast out demons, and in thy name done many wonderful works.

Then will the Lord Jesus profess to them, I never knew you. depart from me, ye that work iniquity. God has his people, and they are his little flock.

Who are they? The remnant of his heritage. They are, as we read in Romans chapter 11, the remnant according to the election of grace.

[ 31 : 21 ] They are his chosen people, those people whom before the world was made in love he chose to be his own. He elected them not because of any good that he foresaw in them, not because he foresaw even that they would come to Christ.

They only come to Christ because of his prior choice of them. Their salvation is entirely of God's grace. What security this gives to you, Christian believer.

What a comfort it should be to you. You're a Christian tonight, not ultimately because of any choice that you have made, but because of his choice of you.

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. In his covenant love, in his everlasting love for you, he made choice of you.

You cannot therefore ever perish. Your very name is written upon the palms of his hands. In this rejoice. Oh, my friend, do you know?

[ 32 : 33 ] Do you know tonight that you are of this blessed number? Are you a Christian? Are you a child of God? Have you been converted?

Have you been born again? Do you look to Christ and to Christ alone for your salvation? Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you abandoned all hope of being saved by any efforts or works or righteousnesses of your own?

And do you rely only and utterly and entirely upon Jesus Christ and upon what he has done? Are you a Christian? If not, then there comes to you tonight the general call of the gospel.

unto you, unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. It's a call that goes out to all men everywhere, to all men without exception.

God has done all that is necessary for the sinner's salvation. He has provided in Christ an all-sufficient Savior. And now he calls the sinner.

[ 33 : 50 ] He calls you. And urges you to come to Christ and to believe in him that you might be saved. He invites you to come. Nay, he commands you to come.

To believe upon his son, the sinner's only Savior. As Christ's ambassador here tonight, in his stead I beseech you, be ye reconciled to God.

Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust him as your own Savior. Come to him in genuine repentance and in faith. And you will be saved.

Come to him. On the authority of the word of God I say to you. On the authority of this inerrant word I say to you. Him that cometh to Christ, he will in no wise cast out.

He will welcome you. He will receive you. He will forgive you. He will save you. Come to him. Come to him now. Trust in him.

[ 35 : 03 ] Believe upon him. And then you can know that you belong to this blessed number, the remnant of his heritage.

Let us pray. We pray, O God, that thou wilt bless to us thine own word this evening.

We ask that we might rejoice in this great salvation. And that if there be those in our gathering tonight still out of Christ, we pray that thy spirit will draw them.

And that drawn by that same spirit, they will come in repentance and in faith to the Lord Jesus and find in him a shelter and a refuge, an all-sufficient saviour.

For his name's sake. Amen.