

31st January 2021

Bible reading: Micah 7:8-20

Theme: Hope and God's Promise" - The God beyond compare v18

Why study Micah? So that we might know God better, recognize and repent of our idols and injustices, and experience renewed hope"

Last week:

Hesed – Loyal Love – Covenant Loyalty of the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob

Lamentations 3:22 –23 *"The **hesed** of the Lord never ceases..."*

Psalm 136 Each verse ends with, *"His **hesed** endures for ever"*

God takes pleasure and delight, in showing covenantal, unfailing, steadfast love to His people. Because He delights in it, God finds a way to remove His anger from His people and make them the recipients of His blessings. Out of this love, God deals with His people's transgressions, and He also confirms the covenant He made with Abraham (v. 20). The Abrahamic Covenant is the foundational one, out of which the Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants flow. By fulfilling the promises Micah has previously described, God remembers His covenant with Abraham and His love for him and his descendants. God is faithful to those promises not merely by giving Abraham a son, but by fulfilling those promises to his heirs both physical and spiritual.

If we have learned anything from Micah, it is that God is faithful to both judge and to bless. His commitment to His own holiness is seen in the wrath the Jews were going to experience in the Exile. It is also seen in His terrible punishment of the crucified Christ. But His commitment to His merciful and forgiving character shines brightly as Micah writes of a coming Kingdom and eternal glories, and of the humble death of the Saviour. As people once cast off and rejected, that Gentiles are welcomed into this fellowship so that all nations can look to the future with unhindered anticipation.

Chapter One: We began where Micah described what might be called a lawsuit against God's people. God gave His testimony, He brought charges against His people, and He pronounced a divine sentence against them. God was going to punish His people for years of disobedience and wickedness. We learned that sin brings judgment – that there are consequences to our disobedience.

Chapter two: Micah continued God's indictment against His people, primarily focusing on those who took advantage of the poor and those who tried to suppress the truth. God had enough of Israel's sin and blatant disregard for His law that He told them to "get out" of the land He had promised them. At the end of chapter two, after sharing that depressing news, Micah gave us a glimmer of hope. He mentioned that God would one day gather His people together. He would raise up a leader for them Who would lead them to victory. Times were good again; however, as soon as we rode that spiritual high for a brief time, we took a nose-dive into misery again.

Chapter three: Micah used very graphic terms to describe the wickedness of Israel's leaders who destroyed God's people. Because of them, God said "Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins." (Micah 3:12)

Chapter four: We rode that roller coaster up again where Micah painted for us a picture of a better and brighter day. God would one day rescue His people from their enemies and the nations would flow to Him.

Chapter Five: In the first part of chapter five, we caught a glimpse of the future King, the Saviour of mankind, who would be born in a little town of Bethlehem. This King would shepherd His people and they would dwell securely in His presence. Micah concluded chapter five with a description of God's passion for our holiness, how God will root out those things that draw His people away from Him. Things were good again...for a while!

Chapter six: Micah resumed God's indictment against His people and reminded us of what God requires of us all: *to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God*. Because they had not done what He required of them, God reminded the Israelites of His judgment against them, that He would "strike [them] with a grievous blow, making [them] desolate because of [their] sins." (Micah 6:13)

Chapter seven: Micah continues the bad news. He laments, "*Woe is me!*" He cried out for the condition of His people and the loneliness he felt. Times were bad again; but in the middle of that chapter, he renewed our hope for a better day. The Lord will be our light, who will take care of us as a shepherd takes care of his flock.

So, we have been on an emotional roller coaster through this book. We have seen the bad times and the good times. That brings us to the final passage in the book and the question that is before us: Who is like our God? The simple and most accurate answer is...No one! There is no one like our God. He is beyond compare. No one and nothing is like Him and our tour through the book of Micah proves it. Micah's prophecy is chock-full of God's judgment on His people, but it is also jam-packed with God's love and mercy. We see the God who punishes His people for their sins is the very same Shepherd-King who faithfully gathers, protects, and forgives them.

Micah's final hymn of praise in the book declares God to be incomparable. No one is like Him. I suggest three things that Micah points out to us in these last three verses of the book:

1. God is Incomparable because of His Unfailing Love (v. 18),
2. God is Incomparable because of His Redeeming Power (v. 19),
3. God is Incomparable because of His Never-ending Faithfulness (v. 20).

1. God is Incomparable in Unfailing Love (v. 18)

In v18 Micah extols the greatness and uniqueness of God for His unfailing love for His people. "*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy*".

This may be a little hard to understand in light of what we have read in this book. God's people left Him, they rebelled against Him, they broke His law and sinned. Therefore, God was angry with them and punished them by exiling them from the land He had promised them. Where's the love in that?

When parents punish a child for some wrongdoing, the child may think that they do not love him. Mom and dad may seem like the worst people in the world, but the child forgets what brought on the punishment. Mom and dad only want to cause pain and suffering!

I remember my parents told me that the punishment I was going to receive was going to hurt them more than me. I thought to myself, "Yeah, right!" I bet you are going to be hurt while my rear end is stinging. But, true parental punishment is not done out of anger. *It is done out of love.*

We can tolerate many things, some things more than others – traffic, a dirty house, crooked pictures on the wall, even certain mistreatment from others. There are things we will not tolerate, though – being taken advantage of in the work place, speaking harshly about our spouse, mistreating our children.

Well, God cannot tolerate sin. He is a holy God and cannot stand it, and all of us sin. We all do things that are not right and displease God because of our sinful nature. We cannot escape it, and God cannot accept it. God is angry at it. He will execute justice on evil and wickedness, as Micah mentioned many times throughout the book.

But God shows us unfailing love. He is incomparable in His forgiving love and grace. Yes, He deals with our sin but He also extends us mercy through His Son, Jesus Christ. His love is demonstrated through His Son. One of my favourite passages is Romans 5:8:

Romans 5:8 *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Notice, *while* we were still sinners, Christ died *for us!*

The judgment we deserved was placed on God's only begotten Son so that whosoever trusts in Him will be pardoned of their debt to God. They will be forgiven of their sin. There is no one else like Him in unfailing love.

2. Incomparable in Redeeming Power (v. 19)

God is also incomparable in the magnitude of our redemption. Forgiveness is an interesting thing. We know from Scripture that we are required to forgive one another. When someone wrongs us, we are to forgive them, and not just once but each time. But our memory is inextricably tied to our emotions and to our ability to forgive. We remember the wrong someone has done us and we do not want to forget it. We do not want to forgive it. We want justice and we want that person to pay for what he or she has done to us. Not so we God. His unfailing love is tied to His redeeming power.

Micah 7:19 *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.*

God does not just pardon our sins; He tramples them down. In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system was put in place to show the seriousness of our sin. Only by the shedding of blood will sin be forgiven (Hebrews 9:22). But that system was not complete. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the priest would make a sacrifice as payment for the people's sins. They had to do this each year – year after year. Therefore, Micah and the Israelites anticipated a day when their sin would be pardoned *completely*. That day was fulfilled when Jesus took on and took away the sins of the world through His sacrifice on the cross. Through Christ, our forgiveness is complete. God conquered sin. He liberated us from it and removed our guilt forever.

Psalms 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* Our redemption is beyond compare.

3. Incomparable in Never-ending Faithfulness (v. 20)

Micah concludes the book by reminding us of the faithful covenant-keeping God.

Micah 7:20 *You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.*

God's character (His steadfast love and mercy) moves him to keep His word thus demonstrating His faithfulness. What God promised to our fathers of the faith, Abraham and Jacob, still stand. When God says He will do something, you can be absolutely sure – He will! Is that true for us? Do we sometimes break promises? I know I have. The incredible thing is that the Israelites were not faithful to God. They broke faith with their God and committed adultery by *whoring after other gods*. But that is not just the Israelites. Lest you believe that this was something unique to the Israelites, we each have left God. We each have been unfaithful to Him. But not so with God. He is always faithful to a people. He will never leave His people or forsake His people. Even when His people left Him, God pursued them. He still pursues us in never-ending faithfulness.

In his book, *“Micah For You”*, Stephen Um gave us this definition:

“Idolatry is choosing one’s own will above God’s will. It is giving ultimate allegiance—which deserves to be given to God alone—to another object of worship, another object of affection.”
The use of time, and resources to pursue such interests.

Micah specifically called out Israel’s idolatry some of which was difficult for us to relate to. So, I asked you to consider two questions to help us relate to Micah’s teaching:

1. **“What’s an idol our culture worships?”**

- Possessions/Wealth/Houses
- Self/Narcissism/Greed
- Pleasures: Screen Time, Sport, Alcohol, Gambling

2. **“What’s an injustice our culture commits?”**

- Abortion
- A legal system instead of a justice system – punishment to fit the crime!
- Oversight and management of nursing homes
- Freedom of speech – cancel culture

Justice and Mercy Come Together in Christ:

In wrapping up this series, we highlight that throughout the book of Micah we have seen the justice of God and the mercy of God woven together.

We have seen that the God who punishes His people for their sin is the very same God who rescues them from their sin.

When Micah said that there is no other god like our God, He was right!

By just punishment and holiness, God dealt with our sin, but by His amazing love and grace, He rescues us, redeems us, and makes us His holy people.

This is most clearly seen on the cross of Calvary. God’s justice was displayed by placing His wrath and our guilt on His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. The innocent Lamb of God took the punishment for my sin and your sin in order to satisfy the justice of God. But at the same time, through the cross of Jesus Christ, amazing grace and love was poured out on us.

Whosoever turns to Him, repents, and places their trust in Jesus Christ, will receive mercy and forgiveness. Their sins are forgiven. They are a new creation, a holy people, a chosen race, adopted into God’s family.

Who is like our God Who lays down His life for us? No one!

Once we were His enemies, but now we are His children. God’s justice and mercy are found on the cross of Calvary. Amen!