

Into The Depths • Micah 7:18-19

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Promise of Forgiveness*

1. For some time now, psychiatrists and psychologists have realized the tremendous power *guilt* has in directing our thoughts and behavior.
 - a. guilt can lead to all kinds of mental and emotional problems
 - b. some people become *psychotic*, others have a mental breakdown
2. As a result, much of the therapy that's offered has been aimed at lowering their sense of *guilt* by lowering the standard
 - a. *sin* has been redefined as *weakness* or *disease*
 - b. *selfishness* is relabeled as *survival*
 - c. *offenders* are turned into *victims*
3. Despite the attempt to eradicate the feelings of guilt by lowering the standard, guilt-induced emotional problems continue to increase.
4. No matter what we do to try to assuage our feelings of guilt, there's a nagging and persistent sense that we don't measure up and are accountable for our sin.
5. A leading secular humanist was interviewed on television some years ago.
 - a. in a moment of surprising candor, she said to the host, who happened to be a believer -
 - b. "What I envy most about you Christians is your belief in forgiveness. I have nobody to forgive me."

B. *Forgiveness*

1. We're going to take a look at *forgiveness* this morning – the forgiveness that God offers.
2. The prophet Micah has some incredible words about the *extent* to which God's forgiveness *goes*.
3. It's my hope that what we find here will set us free from guilt and so cleanse our hearts from every stain of sin that we'll know the kind of liberation Jesus came to give us.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 18-19

18 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights *in* mercy.

19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

1. As always, we need to understand the context in which the prophet Micah utters these words.
 2. Micah's ministry spanned 40 years and the reign of 3 kings.
 3. During his lifetime he witnessed the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel and the exile of the nation into captivity.
 4. Micah knew this defeat and exile was God's judgment because of their gross idolatry.
 5. Living in the southern kingdom of Judah, he could see the very same sins that had led to Israel's demise.
 - a. the people of Judah were worshipping the same idols -
 - b. and the moral decay and political corruption that had marked the north was being relived in the streets of Jerusalem.
 6. Micah's book contains 3 speeches in which he confronts the people with the evidence against them and warns them of what will result if they don't repent; they too will be carried away into exile.
 7. But that isn't the end of Micah's message: Each of the 3 addresses ends with a word of hope.
 - a. though the people have forsaken God, He will not forsake them
 - b. after judgment, He will restore them to their land and covenant with Him.
 - c. God's abundant mercy will see them renewed to a place of favor and blessing.
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8. Micah knew he lived in a time of *mercy* when the judgment Judah so richly deserved was being withheld.
 - a. God had shown him that the day of mercy would end, and

- judgment would come as surely as the night follows day.
- b. but God had gone on to show him that night was *not* the end –
 - c. a new day of mercy would dawn – the light of which would never fail!
 - d. mercy, then judgment, followed by unending mercy
9. So the first and last words from God are, “MERCY!”
 10. It’s fitting that the last words of Micah’s prophecy, which has been laden with the harsh words of judgment, end with a word of hope and promise.
 11. As we read through the book of Micah, we ought to have Gorecki’s Symphony No. 3 playing in the background.
 - a. the entire composition is played in dark, somber minors
 - b. it begins quietly with double basses and builds ever so slowly -
 - c. but always dark, always with the slow plodding of heavy and reluctant steps
 - d. as we read through the chapters and hear Micah’s occasional glimpses of future glory against impending judgment, the sound of sweet violins is layered on top of the mournful basses – but it’s all still in those minor chords that yearn to be resolved some 52 minutes later in these verses at the end of chapter 7 when the symphony strikes the final chord – a brilliant A Major.

B. V. 18

1. Micah begins the last draw of the bow with the question . . .

18 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?///////

2. What a great question – Who is a God like our God?
3. As Micah asked this – he would think of the other gods worshipped by the surrounding nations – we mentioned them last week – Baal, Asherah, and Molech were the most prominent among the gods worshipped in that area at that time.
4. How did these gods deal with the sins of the people who worshipped them?
 - a. did Molech forgive?
 - b. did Asherah or Baal pardon?

- c. Hardly! In fact, they didn't *care* about sin or guilt or forgiveness.
 - d. as long as people paid them attention and brought offerings, the idols were happy.
5. This is one of the reasons Judaism stood in such great contrast to all the other religions – it promised a release from *guilt*!
 6. The gods the heathen worshipped were hostile & fickle toward men and women.
 7. People had to butter them up through countless offerings in order to curry their favor.
 8. But Yahweh, the God of Israel was completely different in that He was loving and kind.
 - a. it was His constant desire to bless and prosper.
 - b. the only obstacle to this blessing was sin – it stood in the way of God's favor.
 - c. so out of mercy, God provided a way for the people to cover their sin by the sacrifices.
 - d. their offerings provided a *temporary covering* that allowed fellowship between God and man to be restored
 9. This appealed to many Gentiles and they converted to Judaism.
 - a. weighed down with a heavy burden of guilt, they saw in Judaism a way to be free.
 - b. this is why we find so many God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogues Paul visited during his journeys.
 10. As Micah asked this question against the backdrop of the gods of his day, we might ask it against the things people worship today
 11. Who is a God like our God, who pardons our iniquity and passes over our transgressions?
 - a. how does Buddha stack up?
 - 1) does Buddha forgive?
 - 2) No! Buddha would teach us that all is *illusion*
 - b. how does Allah compare?
 - 1) does he forgive?
 - 2) absolutely NOT! For Allah is outside the realm of our understanding – He is utterly unknowable.
 - c. what about the billions of gods worshipped in Hinduism?
 - 1) do they pardon?
 - 2) no, because humans and all other living creatures are locked

in an eternal cycle of reincarnation and karma where each must atone for his or her own sins

- 3) while preaching to a group of Hindu pilgrims who had come to bathe in the "sacred stream" of the Ganges River in India, Dr. Jacob Chamberlain tells how a man joined them who had crawled many agonizing miles on his knees and elbows to reach that spot.
 - 4) The poor man made his prayer to Gunga, and then slipped into the water but emerged with the same weight of guilt as before.
 - 5) The fear of death still tugged at his heart and there was a haunted look in his eyes.
 - 6) He overheard Chamberlain tell the wonderful story of grace and how Christ died on the cross to rescue needy sinners.
 - 7) With new hope the man staggered to his feet, clasped his hands together, and cried, "Oh, that's what I need! Forgiveness and peace!" Chamberlain quickly led him to Christ.
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- d. where does the *materialist* go for forgiveness – his bank account?
 - e. where do the *secular humanist*, the *pragmatist*, and the *agnostic* go for pardon?
 - f. where does the atheist take his guilt – you know what an atheist is don't you: Someone who's all dressed up with no place to go.
12. **Our** God Pardons! **Our** God Forgives! He covers over the sin that separates us from Him and the manifold blessings of His love.
13. WHO is like our God? No one – not even close!
- He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.**
14. Does God hate sin? Indeed – but as DL Moody used to say, "God hates sin but loves the sinner."
 15. And that is why God hates sin and is angry towards it – because it drives a wedge between Himself and us and hinders us from experiencing the best!
 16. I think I shared this story not too long ago but it applies well here so let me share it again;
 - a. little Sally had a toy necklace made of cheap plastic beads

- b. it was just a toy but it was colorful and she lacked the maturity to realize it was cheap and worthless
- c. she wore it everywhere she went, even to bed at night
 - 1) it had broken many times but she always repaired it
 - 2) her parents asked her time and again to take it off and put it away, but she refused - it was her special treasure
- d. every night at bedtime, her daddy came in, sat on the edge of her bed to join her in a prayer, then she would roll over and go to sleep.
- e. one night, after prayer, he asked her, “Will you give me your necklace?”
- f. she shook her head.
- g. every night for a week he repeated this same question – and every night her answer was the same.
- h. finally her daddy said, “Sally, I will only ask once more; will you please give me your necklace? It’s dirty and broken and doesn’t belong around your pretty neck. You are far too beautiful for such a piece of junk.”
- i. but Sally held it too dear to let go.
- j. her father got up and left the room, but Sally couldn’t go to sleep.
- k. she lay there in the dark with the image of her father’s face still etched in her memory – a look of deep sadness in his eyes.
- l. so she crawled out of bed and went in to her father’s bedroom – she slipped the necklace off her head and laid it on the night stand next to his bed and went back to her own.
- m. when she woke the next morning, there was a beautiful box lying on her pillow.
- n. she opened it to find a string of gorgeous real pearls – a new necklace to grace her neck.

17. God is a gracious Father who wants to give us a string of pearls but we tend to want to hang on to the cheap costume jewelry of this world.

18. We must empty our hands of the cheap and worthless that we may laid hold of that which is truly valuable.

19. So *yes* – God is angry – He’s angry at all that which hinders us from experiencing the best.

- a. He’s righteously angry at the sin which hurts and harms -

- b. that blinds and cripples.
- 20. But His anger doesn't last forever – it builds until it is spent in a time of judgment, and when judgment has taught the lessons only judgment can teach, then *mercy is restored*.
- 21. Note carefully what Micah says at the end of v. 18 – God *delights in mercy!*
 - a. God's heart is turned toward mercy, not wrath!
 - b. if you're here today and your idea of God is that He's some kind of mean-spirited tyrant who sits in heaven, delighting to rain trouble on earth – that's completely the wrong picture of God.
 - c. God delights in mercy! God holds forth forgiveness to us this morning.
- 22. Christian – lay hold of that truth and make it your own – please!
 - a. God does not forgive *reluctantly*
 - b. His pardoning of our iniquity is NOT begrudged or slow.
 - c. we don't come to Him and fawn before Him, pleading for forgiveness!
 - d. His delight is *mercy* and mercy is His *delight*
 - e. it is *He* who pleads with *us*, not *we* who plead with *Him*.
 - f. it is God who stands at the door and knocks – it is God who seeks and searches, the good shepherd who goes out after the erring sheep.
- 23. This is where the Roman church has gone so far astray – they make the granting of forgiveness an issue of *absolution* that requires *great effort* on man's part to convince a reluctant God to grant pardon.
- 24. They've got it all wrong – *God delights in mercy* – and the Cross proves it.
 - a. forgiveness is not an issue of man climbing up to God –
 - b. it's God coming down to man.
- 25. God loves us and reached out to give us what we most needed!
 - a. if our greatest need had been *information*, God would have sent us an *educator*.
 - b. If our greatest need had been *technology*, God would have sent us a *scientist*.
 - c. If our greatest need had been *money*, God would have sent us an *economist*.

d. But our greatest need was *forgiveness*, so God sent us a *Savior*.

C. V. 19

19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

1. Micah looks past the soon coming judgment of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians to the nation's restoration when they repent and seek the Lord in sincerity and truth.
2. God delights in mercy – but He will not force Himself on them – they must *respond* to His offer of forgiveness.
3. We'll come back to this in a moment, but for now look at what the prophet says God *does with our sin*
4. He will *subdue our iniquities*
 - a. literally the words mean to “*trample them underfoot*”
 - b. this was a figure of speech which referred to the act of destroying something in battle.
 - c. you broke the power of you enemy by putting his territory *under your feet*; this is the posture and picture of victory!
5. Then Micah says God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea; a picture of complete and final *separation*.
6. What Micah says here would cause the strictly religious of his day to sit up and take note.
7. You see, up to this point, sin was not *removed* from the people – it was only *covered over* by the sacrifices.
 - a. as a Jew, if I brought an animal to the temple to offer as a sacrifice, it was to cover *past* sins.
 - b. but new sins required a new offering – so the people kept coming because the sacrifices were imperfect and temporary.
 - c. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was an *annual* event in which the high priest would offer *another* goat to renew the nation's covenant with God
 - 1) the Hebrew word for atonement is “kippur” & means – “to cover”
 - 2) not *remove*, just *cover*.
8. But here Micah speaks of a time when God will make *an end* of sins – when He will destroy that which has been destroying the

objects of His love.

9. And He will dispense with sin by *removing* it altogether, casting it into the depths of the sea.
 - a. of course, this was written in a day before submarines, sounding equipment, and diving gear.
 - b. if you dropped something over the side of a vessel – it was gone for good!
10. Conveying the same idea in another way, the Psalmist says,

Psalm 103:12 • As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us.

- a. on the Day of Atonement, the Jews would follow an interesting ritual
 - b. two goat were brought before the high priest
 - 1) a lot would be cast and one would be selected to be offered as a sacrifice,
 - 2) while the other was called the scapegoat
 - 3) the high priest would then lay his hands on the head of both goats, symbolically transferring the sins of the people onto them
 - c. the scapegoat would be taken to the eastern side of Jerusalem and set loose
 - d. people would make shout and whistle and make noise aimed at scaring it to run farther and farther into the eastern wilderness
 - e. the path was miles long and bordered by people the entire way until several miles from Jerusalem it led to a solitary hilltop where the last of the people stood
 - f. they would stand on that hill top and watch as the scapegoat disappeared from view, representing the removal of their sins from the sight of God
 - g. then starting at that hilltop and moving all the way back to the temple in Jerusalem the people would break out in wild rejoicing.
 - h. for another year, the sins of the nation had been taken care of – but only for another year.
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11. Micah is here looking forward to the Day when the Messiah would come and offer Himself as the *final offering* for sins.

- a. in Him all sin and judgment would be *finished*.
 - b. offering Himself as the final and perfect sacrifice, He wouldn't merely *cover* sin – He would *destroy* it and take it out of the way altogether.
12. This is what Jesus did at the Cross
13. And it's one of the main reasons why Christianity spread so incredibly fast during the first 200 years.
- a. all over the world, people who had been in bondage to whimsical gods and who were weighed down with a lifetime of guilt –
 - b. heard the message of forgiveness and responded enthusiastically.
 - c. even when Christianity was banned as an illegal religion, people still converted by the thousands –
 - d. all because they found something greater than mere physical survival -
 - e. and that was the hope and promise of eternal life; purged of sin and the crushing sense of guilt it brings
 - f. it's awful hard to stop people from converting when the only options they have are continued existence with a guilt-riddled conscience in a hard, cold, impersonal and cruel world –or- eternal life with a clear and clean conscience in a place of ultimate bliss.
 - g. so, even though the threat of martyrdom hung over their heads – they still converted by the thousands
14. It was this offer of forgiveness that was so appealing in the ancient world.
15. While the modern church tries to find new way to appeal to the world and market it's religious product, we'd be best served by staying faithful to what we find here and what proved true in those early years.
16. What man needs is *forgiveness* and what the gospel offers is precisely that!
17. It's time that what we offered the world isn't entertaining dramas and slick musical productions to coddle their fleshly desires while they work their way slowly to a Christ-less eternity.
18. Let's be faithful to share the message that Jesus came to pay for our sins and that through faith in Him sin is removed from us, as

far as the east is from the west.

19. God has buried our sin in the depths of the sea, then He's posted a sign on the shore that reads – No Fishing!

III. CONCLUSION

A. God Forgives!

1. I want to end with this this morning – with a reflection on just how far God's forgiveness goes
2. I'm convinced that if we *could get our hearts around* this truth, it would draw forth from us the kind of praise Micah gives and would empower the Church to be far more effective in it's mission of sharing the gospel than it has been.
3. Christian – own this! At the cross God *subdued our iniquities* and *buried our sin in the depths of the sea*.
 - a. all of them – past, present, and even *future* sins
 - b. God no longer relates to you on the basis of the law, on how you're doing in relation to the commandments
 - c. now He relates to you on the basis of WHO YOU ARE – and because you've been born again, you are His child!
4. Do we still sin? – certainly.
 - a. but now God deals with sin in an entirely different manner than before we came to faith
 - b. then we were under wrath and faced judgment
 - c. but now, in Christ what we face is the merciful correction and discipline of a loving Father
5. O Christian – do not let the devil paralyze you with guilt.
6. Hold fast the promise that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness.
7. What God *forgives*, He mercifully *forgets* – that's what it means when it says He buries them in the depths of the sea.
8. Listen to the words of Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

9. Some years ago a woman visited the church office needing counsel

- a. her marriage had been troubled for some time and she'd fallen into sin with another man
- b. the affair didn't last long but she was filled with guilt
- c. thinking that religion might be the answer, she went to church and responded to the altar call
- d. but the guilt lingered and tormented her; she was losing sleep and was falling apart both emotionally and physically
- e. she cried out for help and as I listened to her, seeing the tears stream down her face and her body convulse with deep sobs, the Spirit came over me in a way I have only rarely experienced
- f. I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion and mercy and knew I was being given a glimpse into the heart of God for this woman
- g. then, an image of the Cross flashed into my mind
 - 1) there was no one else in the scene except Jesus hanging on the cross and this woman standing before Him.
 - 2) it was so clear to me; when Jesus died, He died for her and her sin –her sin of adultery
 - 3) when He hung there 2000 years ago, He looked down the corridor of time and saw her sin and died for it that day
 - 4) then He said, "It is finished."
 - 5) but she said – "No – that's not enough! I have to pay for my sin by my own suffering and torment."
- h. when I shared this with her – she looked at me with this strange look in her eyes and her mouth hung open.
- i. I asked her, "Are you saying Jesus was wrong when He said, 'It is finished!'?"
- j. in that instant, her countenance brightened as she realized that Jesus' work on the cross was enough and that in Him was forgiveness –
- k. a forgiveness that forgets, pardons, and subdues.

B. Free!

1. A little boy came to the Washington Monument and noticed a guard standing by it.
2. The little guy looked up at the guard and said, "I want to buy it."
3. The guard stooped down and said, "How much do you have?"

4. The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out 34 cents.
5. The guard said, "You need to understand three things.
 - a. First, 34 cents is not enough. In fact, \$34 *million* is not enough to buy the Washington Monument.
 - b. Second, the Washington Monument is *not for sale*.
 - c. And third, if you are an American, the Washington Monument *already belongs to you*."
6. We need to understand three things about forgiveness.
 - a. First, we can not earn it.
 - b. Second, it isn't for sale.
 - c. And third, if we accept Christ, we already have it.

C. But You Must Take It!

1. About the year 1830, a man named George Wilson killed a government employee who caught him in the act of robbing the mail.
2. He was tried and sentenced to be hanged.
3. President Andrew Jackson sent him a pardon but Wilson did a strange thing; he refused to accept the pardon, and no one knew what to do.
4. So the case was carried to the Supreme Court.
5. Chief Justice Marshall wrote the court's opinion.
 - a. In it he said, "A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged."
 - b. And so he was.
6. God holds forth to us today the offer of forgiveness.
7. He is neither stingy or reluctant in that offer but because he delights in mercy, He urges us to take it.
8. Once bestowed, it goes all the way to the root of our sin and separates us from it.
9. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah's

Isaiah 1:18 • Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

10. Forgiveness is your deepest and keenest need – and that is what God offers us today.
11. Now Christian – reckon you sin forgiven and forgotten!