

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 11th Aug. 2024 am
TITLE: "Trusting God in the dark place" TEXT: Ruth Chapter 1
SERIES: "There is a redeemer" Part 1
Scripture references from the ESV

Micah 7 Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires.² The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net.³ Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well; the prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul; thus they weave it together. ⁴ The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand.⁵ Put no trust in a neighbour; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms; ⁶ for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.⁷ But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.⁸ Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. ⁹ I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgement for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended.¹² 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.¹³ But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvellous things.¹⁶ The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf;¹⁷ they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds; they shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall be in fear of you.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 for ever, because he delights in steadfast love.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.²⁰ You will show

faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the assurance that God forgives the sin of his people.

God does not hold our sin against us

Instead, he pardons our iniquity, passing over our transgressions, defeating our sin forever, and putting those sins in a place where they will never be seen again and never be used against us. This does not mean that believers will never sin again. The Bible tells us: **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us** (1 John 1:8).

Micah 7 was written to people who were truly God's people (v7 above), and they are testimony to that. Micah is clearly a saved man, yet he acknowledges that he has sinned against God (v9). Though he is under the discipline of God, he is not in despair. He has the assurance that God will forgive him, as his song of praise (vv18-20) shows. We see that

God is unique among all other 'gods' because he deals justly with our sin

It is this particular uniqueness of God that offers hope for his people who have sinned against him and are experiencing his divine displeasure. How does God deal justly with our sin?

1. **He pardons our sins. (v18).** As believers, when we sin, we feel it weighing down our hearts, so that we are grieved that we have grieved God. We feel the weight of guilt. The word pardoning means to lift up, and when we confess our sin ask for God's forgiveness, then

God lifts the burden of iniquity from off our shoulders

2. **He passes over our sins (v18).** Transgression is rebellion against God, when we do the opposite to what he commands rather than obeying him. God passed over the homes of his people in Egypt, when the angel of death brought judgement upon that land, because of the blood of the slain lamb that was painted on the door posts and lintel. The lamb had died in the place of the firstborn and those homes escaped God's judgement. In the same way,

rather than us experiencing the just judgement of God for our rebellion against him:

God passes over our transgressions.

3. He defeats our sins (v19). To tread down means to get victory over. People who were defeated in battle were taken as slaves by the victors and had to serve them. Micah uses this image to show sins as defeated enemies trodden underfoot by our incomparable God. As we live in fellowship with Christ, these enemies that wage war on our souls can no longer have the victory over us. **For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.** (Romans 6:14)

God's grace defeats sin

4. He forgets our sins (v19). How can God, who is all-knowing, forget something? He does not forget in the same way we do, but he forgets sin in the sense that he no longer remembers our sin against us. Our sins are cast into the depths of the sea where they are washed away, never to be seen again or used against us.

God casts all our sins into the depths of the sea

These four attributes of God demonstrate his uniqueness, but also raise four questions.

1) Does this mean that sin does not matter? (v18) The backdrop within which God deals with our sin is that of anger. At this point in their history, Israel were about to experience God's indignation because of their sin. Earlier, Micah has highlighted how life had become corrupt. The people had turned away from God's holy commands and were following their own sinful desires. God was about to severely discipline them, using the Babylonians to judge them. **Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour, for now you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon.** (Micah 4:10).

We need to remember that God will not allow his people to continue in their sin.

Despite the attributes of God that show how he deals graciously with our sin, he is still hotly opposed to it. This is not cheap grace, where we can continue to rebel against God simply because he forgives us.

- The reality is that he will discipline us when we turn away from him to follow our own sinful passions.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives....
he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (Hebrews 12:6,10)
But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not
be condemned along with the world. (1 Cor 11:32)

These words are written to those, like us, who are trusting in Christ for their justification before God. Although they are laced through with God's love, grace and goodness, they still give a clear message:

God will chastise us when we wander away from his word.

God cares deeply about our sin. If we refuse to come to a place of repentance, he will take action.

- He is hotly opposed to our sin because it is an enemy of our soul and it grieves his spirit.

When we live in patterns of sin, we lose our fellowship with God. To show us the horror of life without him, he withdraws his presence and takes away our peace.

- He causes us to sit in spiritual darkness because he wants us to feel the horror of sin and so turn away from it and back to him.

2) **Does God's anger at our sin mean that he is reluctant to pardon? (v18).** Our forgiveness is actually something he delights in. It is not forced out of him.

He delights in steadfast love

This steadfast love is God's covenant love.

- It is his love for us before we were born and before he even created the world.
- It is his love for us that is eternal and will never run out.

God does **not** delight in holding a grudge against us or in bottling up his anger. Hell is the eternal righteous wrath of God against sin and sinners who refuse to repent, and we would all be destined for Hell if God kept his anger forever.

Instead, God delights in steadfast love

**He delights in turning away from anger and turning towards us
with love that chooses to forgive and forget our sin.**

3) **Will he change his mind about forgiving our sin? (v20).** Micah celebrates God as a God who is faithful to his promises and hence faithful to his covenant to love his people forever. Just as he faithfully loved Abraham, Jacob and Israel so

He will continue to delight in loving us.

The apostle Paul tells us: **For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)**

Steadfast love is steadfast because God is faithful to his covenant

4) **Finally, we must ask how can God justly forgive and forget our sin?** Micah gives us the answer, almost certainly without realising that it is the answer: **But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.... And he shall be their peace. (Micah 5:2,5).** God would be able to forgive and forget our sin because a ruler would be born.

That ruler would BE peace for the people of God.

The ruler who would bring peace is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is only through Christ that we can experience the blessings of which Micah speaks:

- The burden of guilt and sin is lifted because it was placed on Christ
- God's condemnation passes over us because Christ was condemned in our place
- We have victory over sin because he defeated sin through his sinless life and dwells in us by his Spirit
- God is able to put our sin where it can never be seen or used against us because it was buried with Christ and left in the grave when he rose again.

This is what makes our God unique

Other gods may appear to offer forgiveness, but it is either conditional or has no cost to it and so is not just. Only the Christian God demands payment for sin against him but then comes himself to pay the price for his people.

Micah asks: Who is a God like you?

The answer is: There is no other God like our God.

Knowing this we will respond with:

- a) **Confession. (v9)** As God is willing to forgive and forget our sin then we need never fear coming to him to confess our sin, knowing that we deserve his wrath. We need to forsake our sin in order to experience the joy

that is expressed in **vv18-20**.

- b) **Trust. (v8)** Micah knows he cannot save himself and looks to God to save him. It maybe that currently you feel that God's hand is heavy against you because of sin, though you have confessed your sin. Micah encourages us to trust and wait. We experience God's forgiveness when we stop trying to earn favour with God and wallowing in our guilt. We are to look with faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting that his death on the cross is sufficient to atone for all our sins and to cover our unrighteousness.

- c) **Praise. (vv18-20)** These verses are praise addressed to God for his steadfast love to forgive and forget our sin.

Praise can be a response to what God has done for us

but it can also strengthen our faith in God to act for us.

Micah praises God and that leads to faith in God to show grace. As he speaks about God (v18), it strengthens his faith and leads him back to praising God for his steadfast love and faithfulness (v19 -20).

If you are a believer in Christ, then

God has entered into a covenant with you to love you forever.

Nothing you do or say will ever change that love

- Though he may discipline you when you sin, he does it because he loves you and wants you to enjoy the blessing of fellowship with him.

When we confess our sin, he will never use our sins against us, and we too need to learn to leave our sins in the depths of the sea. When others sin against us, and it is dealt with, we are not to bring their sin up either.

Our God is the incomparable God who:

- In Christ, pardons our iniquity
- In Christ, passes over our transgressions

- In Christ, treads our iniquities under his feet
- In Christ, casts all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger for ever, 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.