

I Stand Amazed

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Micah 7:18-19

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.

A few Wednesday evenings ago we came to the question as to where was the verse that said the Lord “cast our sins into the sea of His forgetfulness”? If you were here and remember, I said I was relatively sure such a statement was not recorded in the Bible. I told you that such a phrase, the “sea of His forgetfulness,” is much like another statement that men believe is a part of sacred Scripture but is not. The statement “God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform” is perhaps to your surprise not words of Scripture but of a hymn that the Englishman William Cowper wrote. Neither are the words concerning God casting our sins into the sea of His forgetfulness in the Bible. I did a quick search in the concordance, and, as I was sure I remembered, it was not to be found.

But the Bible does assure us that God does not remember our sins against us. There are four like passages that tell us that God does not remember our sins. But there is one verse that is very much like our phantom verse “casting our sins in the sea of God’s forgetfulness” and it is Micah chapter seven and verse nineteen.

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 7:19).

Upon reading this verse and the preceding verse eighteen, I have had much to think about. As a result of my reflection on these verses, I have some things to share that have been warmth to my heart and comfort to my soul.

The prophet Micah in verse eighteen begins:

Who is a God like unto thee?

The prophet begins with a profound question. It is profound in that it distinguishes God from all other gods. What kind of God would continue to love His people after they had rejected Him for hundreds of years? The false gods of the heathen nations were gods whose forgiveness was

earned at a high price. Micah was not suggesting that he believed there were other gods besides Jehovah. But according to the religion of the surrounding heathen, they worshipped these false gods. Micah knows that he is not addressing some idol but the living God who pardons iniquity solely upon the basis of His mercy.

The prophet ponders on such a God. He fills His mind with the wonders of God. That is what I want us to do this morning. Fill your mind with God; fill your mind so full of God that it must spill out into your heart. Is not this a problem with us? We have so little understanding of who God is that we could barely rub a match on what we know and light it. How then do we even dare to talk about our hearts blazing with God? The heart burns for God on the fuel of truth that is in our brains, not just filed information about God, but truth that we mull over and over until it touches our hearts.

We cannot begin to grasp all there is to know about our God. You see the God of Scripture cannot be known fully and completely. He exceeds the limits of our finite minds. But the finite mind can know much about Him, and the little that we know about Him is enough to send our hearts in orbits of joy and ecstasy as we ponder and muse on this knowledge of the Divine.

“Who is a God like unto thee?” What was it that sent Micah on this holy consideration of what God is like and who He really is? It was that God is unlike the idol gods of surrounding nations, and in particular in His forgiveness. He forgives unlike other gods. Secondly, it was God’s nature of mercy; and thirdly, that God does more than forgive our sins but He also conquers our sins.

GOD FORGIVES UNLIKE ANYONE ELSE

It is the forgiveness of God that distinguishes God from all other would-be-gods. It is not that there are not other religions whose gods are believed to forgive. There are such religions. But in order for forgiveness to be granted to the transgressor, he or she must perform some significant religious act. Those who worshipped the idol named Molech believed if you angered Molech he might require you to sacrifice one of your children in the fire to him. If you offended one of the Egyptian gods you could not be restored without some great work assuaging the anger of the idol. Other religions went to the opposite extreme and state forgiveness is automatic and never an issue. So two extremes exist, a stringent legalism and a permissive lawlessness.

But Micah is amazed that God is not like either extreme. He knows that God is holy and His righteousness exceeds the heavens. He no doubt understands the anger of God and knows it can burn hot against those who sin. He has prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah in the third chapter verse twelve, *“Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest”* (Micah 3:12). Micah knows that God’s justice must be satisfied and that God cannot be righteous and simply acquit the guilty.

However, the Lord has shown the prophet that He would forgive the guilty and that He would pardon their iniquities and restore them to their land. What is seventy years captivity compared to the hundreds of years of rebellion and sin that Judah had committed? Seventy years in Babylon did not remove the guilt of the people, and Micah realizes this although he did not know how long God would leave His people in captivity. All he knew was that for what Judah had done to be allowed to return was an act of infinite kindness. And he is so overcome with amazement and wonder that he declares, *“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.”*

As Micah did, let us marvel at our God’s mercy to us. Is it a wonder that God would make a provision by which He could satisfy His holy justice and at the same time show us mercy? Does not your heart stand so amazed that sometimes you can hardly believe that God has pardoned you? Doesn’t it seem so remarkable, so unbelievable that God considers you blameless?

*I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazerene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner condemned, unclean.*

*For me it was in garden
He prayed, “Not my will, but Thine.”
He had no tears for His own griefs,
But sweat drops of blood for mine.*

*He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Calvary,
And suffered and died alone.*

*How marvelous! how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be;
How marvelous! how wonderful!
Is my Savior’s love for me!*

I dare suggest that if it does not seem so amazing to you, it is because you do not know your own corruption and evil tendencies, or you have forgotten. It is only when we first see how righteous God is that we can truly appreciate His forgiveness. For not until you see the radiant light of God’s holiness do you even begin to understand your ungodliness.

Modern evangelism has failed to see this or refuses to believe it. The error of modern fundamental Christianity is this aversion to making the sinner know his evil. I constantly hear that if you tell sinners how wicked they are and what God’s holy response will be to their wickedness, you

will not see anyone converted. I have three things to say to this. First, it is not my gospel, nor is it yours. It is God's message, and therefore, we are not to tamper with it. We have been commissioned to proclaim it faithfully in its original construction. Leave it alone and quit trying to perfect what already is perfect. The Gospel is good news and it yours and my task to proclaim it as it has been given to us. The Bible says that every man stands under the terrible curse of sin. **We have** *"all gone out of the way, we together have become unprofitable. There is none good, no, not one."* (Romans 3:12) *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Romans 5:12). **That is God's word, and therefore we must deliver to men as it is.**

It is not our business to be successful in the converting of men but in the preaching of the pure and simple gospel of Christ. We have become a results oriented church rather than an obedient and faithful church. We are much more concerned about appearing powerful in converting sinners than in being faithful deliverers of God's message. Evangelistic campaigns and modern evangelism techniques with emphasis on visible results have done more to undermine the gospel than to promote it. Any time we make numbers of conversions the standard for success rather than adherence to the message itself then we begin a downward spiral.

Second, we cannot help men by telling them what they want to hear. If a man is sick and he goes to the doctor, the doctor cannot tell him that there is nothing wrong with him, although that would please the patient. He is morally obligated to tell him the truth because only the truth can set him on the road to recovery. Tell men that they are basically good and that there is not a hell and that God loves them, and they will never turn their hearts from continual evil and set themselves to know God. Continue to witness that God loves them, that He is neither angry nor opposed to them, and they will have no reason to repent and turn to Christ for mercy. Why turn from the sins they love so much? We have told them God loves them and surely that must mean that God will not let them die and go to hell. In their minds genuine love for them would not allow this. Preaching to the sinner that his problem is not one which he cannot fix and persuading him that all he needs is a little religious education and everything will be all right is exactly what man wants to hear. But such a message will seal his doom. It is the business of Christians, all Christians, to tell sinners what they do not want to hear, but must, if there is any chance of their salvation.

Third, we must tell the truth as God's word presents the gospel because the modern method of evangelism is not working. As a whole, church attendance is declining in America. More and more are rejecting absolute truth for a relativism that says there is no right and wrong. The church has lost its voice in mainstream society. Less and less important is religion to the marketplace. The modern method of evangelism of telling sinners how much God loves them and of persuading them to make a decision and pray a prayer has not changed lives, churches, or society. It simply doesn't work. If we are to see different results, it seems to me that we should try a different approach, and I for one am for doing it the way the apostles did it.

Micah realized that the Jews of Judah deserved eternal rejection rather than forgiveness. The same is true about you and me. God has saved us and forgiven us of our sins. He has in effect said to the guilty that we are to be now treated as the innocent. Oh, yes, I must ask the question, *“Who is a God like thee, that pardoneth iniquity?”*

*Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it all away.*

From this text I find great encouragement to know that God will forgive His people and that He will revive the weak and pour His Spirit anew on the thirsty. Revival is the promise of all of God’s people. An awakening of sinners we cannot predict, but a refreshing and reenergizing of the people of God can be expected. Micah says in verse eighteen, *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?”* God *“passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage.”* **What does this mean? Who is the remnant of His heritage? In Joel 3:2 the Lord says,** *“I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and [for] my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.”* **Moses told us that Israel was God’s heritage in Deuteronomy 32:9.** *“For the LORD’S portion [is] his people; Jacob [is] the lot of his inheritance.”* The word “inheritance” is the same Hebrew word as “heritage.” Israel was a type of the New Testament church, the regenerated and redeemed people of God of all ages. The church is the true and eternal heritage of God. The imagery is pristine; God always has a people and those people He will forgive when they turn their hearts toward Him.

That is why this verse has been such a blessing to me this week. I have gotten much comfort from the fact that the Lord will forgive us if we humble ourselves and seek His mercy. He is willing today to stimulate our dull minds and enliven our dry hearts. We are the inheritance of God. Paul prays for the Ephesians that *“the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”* (Ephesians 1:18). **We the forgiven are the riches of God, purchased for Himself as a special people. It is the promise of God that** *“the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance”* (Psalms 94:14).

Let us with a humility plead our sins and with a holy boldness claim our inheritance—the forgiveness of God and the refreshing that follows repentance and comes with the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

Is this possible? More than possible—it is the promise of God. Shall we believe God? Come now, when have you ever known God to lie? If we cannot believe Him for this forgiveness of sins, then we cannot believe Him for the saving of our souls and the basic needs of life.

IT IS GOD’S NATURE TO BE MERCIFUL

Micah goes on to tell us that God does this unbelievable work of forgiveness *“because He delighteth in mercy.”* It is the joy of God to pardon us. It thrills His soul to be kind towards us like this. But do not make the mistake and think His thrill is because you deserve or are worth it. The reason the Lord saves us and forgives us of sin is ultimately not about us or even necessarily for us, but it is for His own joy in doing it. This confuses many people and it really shouldn't, but because of the great deal of wrong information we have been given about God and human nature, it confuses many. God's mercy is not like yours and mine when we feel merciful to help someone because we are motivated solely by pity or sympathy for them. We feel sorry for them and so we show them some undeserved act of kindness. That does not mean God does not somehow pity us, because He does. In verse nineteen Micah says that God *“will have compassion upon us.”* But this compassion is not the sole engine that drives God to be merciful. There is something more at stake. If we do not see this we will be as guilty as others in the last 100 years or so and misrepresent God and man's sinful condition. God's mercy is an attribute of God's nature. He is merciful and therefore acts mercifully toward us. He delights in mercy because mercy is a quality of God, and God delights in Himself more than anyone or anything else. He is merciful and therefore He exercises mercy to the undeserving. He cannot help but be merciful. It is like asking a child to not ask you why, and the child immediately asks you why it can't ask why anymore. The child cannot help it; it is its nature to be inquisitive. And it is God's nature to be merciful.

This leads me to the conclusion that there is nothing in you or me that elicits this mercy from God. It is not because you and I were the victims of Satan's devices and we could not help ourselves from sinning. It is not because Satan took advantage of us. Man is not some helpless victim, rather he is a co-conspirator with the devil in his revolt against God. We are not darlings of God who have accidentally fallen into some mud pit and have soiled ourselves. Far from it! You and I have willingly and with malice in our hearts toward God committed treason against Him.

Why then should He forgive us? Because it delighteth Him so. A parallel verse to verse nineteen is Isaiah 43:25 that says, *“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”* Did you hear the Lord? He said He has forgiven us and blotted out our transgressions not for our sake but for His own. It blesses Him to act according to His nature and mercy is His nature. Would the Lord forgive you today, you may ask? This is not the question you should be asking. Rather, the correct question you should be asking yourself is will I humble myself before this God whom I have despised and despicably treated and confess my sin? Will you, friend, deplore your hatred of His right to rule over you and submit? That is the question. It is God's nature to be merciful to you, but it is not your nature to surrender to Him. It is not the lost man's nature to yield himself to God. Therefore that is the question, will you yield Him what He deserves that you might receive from Him what you do not deserve—His forgiveness?

I have no doubt that if you repent, meaning hate your sin and love righteousness, turn from sin, and turn to Christ, that He will forgive you. Many have come to God with a faith that is barely that—it is more of doubt than faith—and have asked if God would save them. Men and women who have sinned in a flagrant or brazen manner have become weary with their sin and have wondered how the Lord could forgive them of such terrible sins.

Do not doubt the very nature of God—He is merciful. I love the words of David in the One hundred and third Psalm when he sees his sins against the backdrop of God’s mercy and says, “*Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies*” (Psalms 103:4). **Believe God, my friend, when He says He delighteth in mercy and will pardon your iniquities.**

But the question must be answered, does He have no love at all for us? Are we not pitied at all? Does He forgive us only because of His sake? Well, as I said a few moments ago, there is another reason why God forgives us, and it is because He has compassion for us. Micah says in verse nineteen “*He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us.*” God does love us. I do not wish to minimize this fact. It is my desire, though, that we see God’s love in its biblical perspective rather than magnify it above any of God’s other attributes. God’s love can be described as eternal in duration. How long shall the Lord love us who have yielded to His compassion and been saved from our sin? Forever is the only biblical answer. Yes, God loves you and it is forever. It can also be said that His love is infinite in scope. There is not a sin or transgression that cannot be forgiven by the love of God in Christ Jesus. And I can also say to you that the love of God is redeeming in nature. That is what the last part of verse nineteen instructs us in—the redeeming nature of God’s love for us.

GOD CONQUERS OUR SINS

The amazed prophet says in the latter part of verse nineteen “*he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*” The Lord not only forgives us of our sin, but also He has promised to conquer our sins and bring us to eventual and complete victory over sin. Again it is here that much of Christianity is in error by departing from the preaching and teaching of Christ and the apostles. Salvation has been placed within the context of forgiveness only. It is explained as a one time experience. Therefore, if you ask someone if he is a Christian, he will answer “yes,” thinking about the initial experience of being justified or forgiven of his sins. Very little preaching is heard explaining the ongoing nature of salvation, which includes sanctification. Thus many Christians are dwarfed in their maturity and churches are full of “sinning saints.” Because of a departure from apostolic preaching that stated that God not only had power to forgive sin but also was powerful enough to cleanse us from the power of sin, men invented all sorts of terrible doctrines justifying Christians’ lack of spiritual development. Some teach a later work of grace that makes the Christian holy, while others put forth ideas such as Christ can be your Savior but not your Lord. These monstrosities have led to a demise of New Testament Christianity and have left many a good brother and sister defeated and discouraged.

The gospel of Jesus Christ promises victory over the works of Satan, flesh, and the world. He is not out to conquer only the sins of our past but also our present and future. He is not finished with us until He presents us blameless before the throne. Christ died to deliver you from the work of Satan prior to conversion and after. The text states this in the most definite and certain terms, “*he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*” If there is remaining corruption in me, and there is, then Christ’s work is not done and my deliverance is not yet complete.

This was the promise of the New Covenant when it was first made known through the prophets. Ezekiel said in his thirty-sixth chapter, verse twenty-five, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." The Apostle Paul shares that this was the very intent and purpose of Christ in dying as the Lamb of God in Titus 2:14, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." I call your attention to the words "all" and "purify." There is no way that these objectives of Christ cannot be achieved. The only way they can go unfulfilled is if you could silence the heart, the heart of God, from which the promises flow. Christ our sacrifice has made an end of sin.

It seems almost too good to be true, but the sacrifice has been made. On the cross Christ gave Himself on our behalf and in our place died for sins. He received the punishment of our guilt so that the Father may forgive us freely. Our Lord is still working on behalf of His people and He has not finished. The payment is finished but our cleansing continues. The work continues and He is subduing our sin and inward corruption. We are at this present time being delivered from sin.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5:10).

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32).

But one may say "if this is so why do I so feel my sin? Why is it that I feel as if I am making no progress in holiness?" **My, dear friend,** to have the reality of your sin and corruption is the work of God's sanctifying grace. To be made sensitive of sin's ugliness and evilness is a supernatural work. If this is not so, how then could the Lord move us from sin to godliness? The Christian grows in grace and the more he grows, the more distasteful sin becomes, and the more he will detest it. It is only natural since the believer is not perfect and corruption remains that he or she will grieve over the knowledge of personal sin. If you do not so grieve and long to be rid of sin then I am assured you do not know Christ and you are not one of His.

Again, I warn you that a true Christian cannot long abide in willful sin. It may at first appear sweet in the mouth, but it quickly turns bitter in the stomach. Oh, there is a pleasure in sin for a season, but it is short lived. Eat something which does not agree with your constitution or digestive tract and what happens? The body begins to try to expel it from the body. You must forgive the crudeness of the illustration, but it is exactly what the holy and divine nature of God within us must do when we willfully ingest sin; it must expel it.

Surely, if you are a Christian, you do feel as if you make little progress. There is a groaning that occurs to be rid of this body of death and clothed with a body not made with hands.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only [they], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, [to wit], the redemption of our body (Romans 8:22-23).

Why do we so long for this redemption of our body? Because we know our sinfulness and we so desire to be free of it. And the more you progress in holiness, the more you feel the remaining corruption. This work of conquering your sin and making you holy will be done. It is as much a part of salvation as is the new birth. You can count on it.

Therefore, it is no wonder that Micah was so amazed at this great God who pardons iniquities, who delights in mercy, who conquers our sins. Matthew Henry has said:

All those that have experienced pardoning mercy cannot but admire that mercy; it is what we have reason to stand amazed at, if we know what it is. Has God forgiven us our transgressions? We may well say, "Who is a God like unto thee?" Our holy wonder at pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it.

Do you have this "holy wonder" of God's forgiveness and pardon? Do you "stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how He could love you a sinner condemned unclean?" If we know it and have experienced it then, yes, we surely stand amazed.

How is it then, my friend, that you do not have such a feeling of wonder? You who claim to have experienced God's forgiveness, how is it that you do not often feel like the prophet and say, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" The answer is one of two: you have not genuinely been made by God to know your sin and wickedness and thus have not been genuinely converted, or you are now in a low spiritual state and have become dull of mind and heart. The remedy is the same for both diagnoses. Humble yourself and ask God to let you see His holy perfection. Plead with Him to make you know your unholy imperfection. Turn from your sin and resistance of His goodness and trust in His merciful nature. I tell you there is none like Him who pardons. He will show you mercy and subdue your sins and bury them in the depths of the sea. Amen.