



Micah 7.¹⁸⁻²⁰— meditation

- ¹⁸Who 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.
- ¹⁹He 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.
- ²⁰Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob,
and the mercy to Abraham,
which thou hast sworn unto our fathers
from the days of old.

Maybe you know someone whom you think of as extraordinarily forgiving. Maybe you marvel at them. But they don't hold a candle to God. Hence, Micah's

"Who is a God like unto thee?
Who pardoneth iniquity like thee?"

As in all things, God reigns supreme in this characteristic. In fact, if you compared the most forgiving individual you know and their willingness to forgive with God and His willingness to forgive, it would be like comparing the light of the faintest of stars on a not-so-clear night with the brightest mid-day sun void of all obscuring conditions. But, Micah contends, God is more than willing to forgive. It is part of His character. It is one of His absolute greatest delights.

"He delighteth in mercy."

Maybe you know something, too, about delight. One goes out of one's way to experience that in which they find delight. No search is too onerous. So, as one of His delights, merciful forgiveness is something that God goes out of His way to experience and bestow. He doesn't go around hunting for reasons to withhold mercy and blessed forgiveness. Any little excuse He can find, and off He goes, forgiving, even, as Joseph Smith once said, at the first and slightest *intimation* of repentance.

Of course, Micah knows something else that you and I know. It is one thing to *want* something. It is a step up from *wanting* to *delighting*. But all the wanting and delighting in the world is not enough unless one has the power. Well, no need to worry about God's *power* to forgive. He, Micah boasts, "*subdue[s]* our iniquities," thrusting them away from us and into the sea with such force that they sink to the "depths of the sea," never to be seen again. Now, that's dominance and power!

Now, tell me. Have you ever seen anything like this? Not here. Not on earth. Not now. Not ever. And herein is one of the major difficulties. Having never seen or experienced anything like it in our daily lives,

we find it difficult to wrap our brains around the reality of God's willing, delighted, and powerful mercy and forgiveness. We read of His forgiveness in the lives of others and think, "Oh, how wonderful for him or her." But, really, we question whether we can experience such a wonder in our life. In all my studies and in all my living, I have found very few individuals who have shown greater insight into the psychology of the religious mind than the early Protestant reformer, Jean Calvin. I might question some of his doctrine, but I have learned to trust his observations about human religious psychology.

"There are very many who so conceive God's mercy that they receive almost no consolation from it. They are constrained with miserable anxiety at the same time as they are in doubt whether he will be merciful to them because they confine that very kindness of which they seem utterly persuaded within too narrow limits. For among themselves they ponder that it is indeed great and abundant, shed upon many, available and ready for all; but that it is uncertain whether it will even come to them."

Yes, indeed. I have seen this in many. I have seen it in myself. Having described this too common form of faithlessness, Calvin goes on.

"This reasoning, when it stops in mid-course, is only half. Therefore, it does not so much strengthen the spirit in secure tranquility as trouble it with uneasy doubting. But there is a far different feeling of full assurance that in the Scriptures is always attributed to faith....

"There is no right faith except when we dare with tranquil hearts to stand in God's sight. This boldness arises only out of a sure confidence in divine benevolence and salvation.

"Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them. Hence, at last is born that confidence which Paul elsewhere calls 'peace'... Now it is an assurance that renders the conscience calm and peaceful before God's judgment. Without it the conscience must be harried by disturbed alarm, and almost torn to pieces."¹

If you have been reading our Lent readings with their accompanying *meditations*, then you know what comes next. Lent is a good time to re-examine scripture's witness of God's willingness, delight, and power to forgive. During it we can, perhaps, plead with extra energy and faith that He exercise His willingness, delight, and power to forgive us. Those who shared their own experience with God's forgiveness in scripture did so for more than antiquarian interests. They intended their readers to graft their experience into their own lives. They ask their readers, "If He did it for me, why not for you too?" A good question for the present Lent and Easter Season.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. I, Book III, p. 561