

“Who Is a God Like You?”

Micah 7:14-20 ¹⁴ Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago. ¹⁵ As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders. ¹⁶ Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf. ¹⁷ They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.

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Who is a God like you? This question or rather statement comes up quite a number of times in the Bible. Whenever it does the answer is almost always that God is the Creator who is steadfastly loving and faithful and who forgives the people for their repeated failure to love God and neighbour in word and in deed. He is a God who delights in showing mercy or rather loving-kindness (*chesed*) to a people whom he has chosen for himself, to be his very own possession.

To give a few examples, after God destroyed Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea Moses sang this question. “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them. In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling” (Ex. 15:10-13). God’s act of loving-kindness in delivering his people gave Moses the confidence to say that God would lead his people with love and faithfulness until he brings them to his holy dwelling.

Bouncing forward a few years, on the day the Jerusalem temple was completed King Solomon stood before the altar and prayed before the people, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below – you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it-- as it is today” (1 Ki. 8:23-24). He then goes to express his astonishment that the LORD would actually live among his people. God makes his dwelling among the people, and that he makes promises and keeps them.

God’s delight to show loving-kindness to his people in general also pertains to his people as individuals. King David in Psalm 35 prayed for deliverance from his enemies saying, “my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, “Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them” (Ps. 35:9-10). He finishes up the Psalm exclaiming, “Great is the LORD, who delights in the well-being of his servant” (35:27).

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God’s self revelation that he is a god who delights in showing loving-kindness, who is faithful and forgiving towards his people, and who delights in their well-being was an utterly unique idea with respect to any god back in the days of ancient Israel. The Canaanite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian gods couldn’t care less about human needs. In fact, those gods were not kind and loving, but rather the beings who created humans to feed and serve them, so that the gods wouldn’t have to do the work themselves. Humans were their slaves. If they had anything directly to do with humans it was to use them to play out their arbitrary cosmic whims. The gods really didn’t care if people were moral, ethical, upright, or whatever. Obedience to rituals and sacrifice was the requirement and people used them as the means to persuade the gods to act favorably with respect to personal desires and needs, harvest, and the overall wellbeing of the nations. A loving, faithful, forgiving god who simply delighted in showing loving-kindness and who dwelt among the people was unheard of.

Things aren’t too different today. Everybody knows the capricious gods of old aren’t real, but for the most part people don’t want to believe that there is a loving and faithful god either. In the world out there some would call god a power or a force to be tapped into like some sort of Star Wars thing. But for the most part, people act as though God doesn’t exist. If we look at public education, the dominant worldview taught today removes any thought of God from our existence. It says that humans, life, this planet, this universe are just a freak accident, a wonderful one at that, but nothing more than an accident. There was a bang, and then there were gases. The gases became solids and liquids which became stars and planets. Life as we know it on this planet is just some accident that bubbled forth from primordial ooze. In this picture, there is no God, no steadfastly loving and faithful God who is concerned about the well-being of us each and who delights in showing loving-kindness and who wants to be with us.

But, there’s a problem that arises here: we ‘accidents’ are riddled with things like shame, guilt, regret, and we hurt one another. When this inescapable reality within us each couples up with this functionally atheistic worldview the result is that we either live for the day following our own capricious whims or develop some sort of karmic belief system of what comes around goes around. Karma is a Hindu belief where we have an immortal soul that keeps getting reincarnated until we’ve built up enough good karma by doing good things that finally the Divine Essence lets us into his presence eternally and we don’t have to suffer bodily existence ever again. If we don’t buy into karma then we go for superstitions. We engage in silly superstitions like quartz power or pyramid power, or worse, something like witchcraft. The thought that God is forgiving, steadfastly loving, faithful, concerned about us and personally present to each of us despite our guilt, shame, and endless shortcoming is an idea outside the worldview of so many people. There is no grace in a belief system that requires we do something to appease the impersonal and arbitrary divine essence.

Well, that’s out in secular society. Even here in the church where we believe in God’s endless grace, we seem also instinctually to want to believe that grace must be earned. We have this medieval and agnostic belief that God is off on a throne somewhere and for the most part unconcerned with our lives. We often

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feel we have to bargain with God. “God if I do this, would you please do that.” Even for us Christians the fact that God is nature present with us and is in fact steadfastly loving and faithful to us is simply outside the realm of understanding and experience of so many of us. The fact that God can be trusted to be faithful in the midst of difficulty and hardship is a difficult one for us to lean on even when we know that God has proven himself faithful to us time and again.

“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 loving-kindness.” Micah proclaims these words as a statement of faith – a statement of faith to encourage God’s people and to give them hope as they lived in exile. His people, his city, God’s city, Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonians and it would not be long before they would be heading east to resettle in Babylon. Why was this loving, faithful God of theirs letting his own city be sacked and his own holy dwelling? It was because instead of seeking justice and loving loving-kindness, and walking humbly with their God his people had forgotten him and were abusing the weakest among them in an effort to grow rich and richer. They had forgotten the mercies of God and had failed to worship him with all their hearts, minds, and strength. They had defiled the humanity of others by injustice. The loving-kind God expects his people, whom he delivered from slavery and made a great nation, to be loving-kind as well. We’d think this not a hard thing to do, but the Israelites failed miserably and...are we really all that different? Micah knows God’s history of faithfulness and forgiveness and so he boldly proclaims to his people that their God will yet again in time turn and have compassion on the remnant of his inheritance and forgive their sins.

If you remember the sermons from Amos a few weeks ago, then you know his people had gotten really bad. Yet, God will forgive them. Indeed God has forgiven them and all people, even me, even you, for our failure to be loving-kind. “Who is a like you, O LORD?” David said. Well, we look at this cross. We look at the man who gave his life on it – Jesus, God the Son become human. In Jesus God was reconciling the world to himself. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14-19: “we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see! everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Paul also writes in Romans 8:1-4: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh

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but according to the Spirit.” God has forgiven us and has also given his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who enables us to walk in the faith and faithfulness that Jesus himself walked in.

Friends, our God is a God who delights in showing loving-kindness to us each and to us all. He truly is concerned about our well-being, about the well being of all people. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Anything that could separate us from the love of God died with Jesus on the cross and in death it stays. God and humanity are reconciled. Therefore, friends, we are free to live in the steadfast love and faithfulness of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are that remnant of his inheritance. Israel was not able to live accordingly to God’s loving-kindness. We, the remnant, are because God has made us able. We love because he first loved us. Amen.