

Preach the Gospel to Yourself, Part 2 When You Have Failed Micah 7:7-10,18-20

David Sunday September 9, 2018



We'll be looking today at Micah 7, a portion of one of the Minor Prophets. Last week I spoke about preaching the gospel to yourself when your soul is downcast, from Psalms 42-43. I wanted it to be clear that there are other reasons for depression and anxiety other than personal sin. Godly people who are pursuing holiness get anxious and depressed for a whole variety of reasons. The causes aren't always spiritual.

When we find ourselves downcast, we need to summon our soul to produce reasons why we're feeling downcast, then cross-examine those reasons with gospel truth. Finally, we've got to command our souls to agree with the verdict of the gospel. That was what we learned last week in Psalms 42-43.

This week I want to look at preaching the gospel to yourself when you have failed, when you have sinned. I want to make it clear that I'm preaching this sermon for real sinners. If you're one of the righteous ones who feels pretty good about how you're doing in your sanctification, if you think you're getting at least a C+, maybe even an A-, then this sermon won't mean very much to you. If you think yourself as someone who has just a little problem with sin, this sermon might be a little boring to you.

You see, Jesus didn't come to call the righteous—He came to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17). It's not those who are healthy who need the medicine of the gospel, but those who are sick—and they know it. I want to preach to sin-sick souls, not smug, self-satisfied, self-righteous people, not to those who see themselves as high performing religious achievers, but to those who see themselves as continually struggling and too often failing, more often than we want anyone to really know.

I want us to turn to Micah 7 because in this passage we find a prophet who is standing in the place of God's people, Israel, at one of the times of their darkest desolation because of their sin.

He imagines them as a city under siege. The enemy is surrounding them and taunting them, accusing them that God has left them because of their sin. The prophet Micah shows us how to fight back against the enemy when he accuses—how a sinful people can preach the gospel to themselves.

In this passage, we find what John Piper calls “gutsy guilt.” I like that phrase. Gutsy guilt. Bold brokenness. Confident contrition. Rugged remorse. Let’s read Micah 7:7-10:

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 judgment 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.

This is God’s Word. Let’s pray.

God, for all who are weary of struggling with sin, please, by Your Spirit, give strength for the battle. For those who are feeling lost and alone and defeated, refresh our joy in the journey and our confidence that You are for us, even when we are at our very worst. *“For this saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”* So help me to preach and help us to hear Your Word today, that we may leave here strengthened by grace. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

So how do you face the most disappointing realities about yourself—your sins, your failures—without drowning in despair? What do you do the morning after you’ve fallen sexually? How do you fight back with the gospel when you’ve exploded in anger at your kids? When you’ve lied to your spouse? When you’ve stolen from your parents? When you’ve woken up with a hangover after drinking excessively? When you’ve covered up the truth and deceived someone because you were trapped in fear? When you’ve denied the Lord, like Peter, because you were afraid of what someone would think of you? How do you fight when you have fallen?

How to fight when you have fallen (Micah 7:7-10)

The first step to fighting when you have fallen is right there in Micah 7:7: *“But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.”* The first step in fighting when you’ve failed is do not delay in coming before the Lord. The first word there—“but”—indicates a contrast to what has preceded it in 7:1-6. Micah is describing the spiritual

barrenness of God's people Israel—just how bad their sin has gotten, and how it has made everyone hateful and untrustworthy to one another. You can't even lie down in bed at night without looking at the one who is next to you and finding that she has a knife to your throat. Or coming to the breakfast table in the morning and seeing your own kids are your enemies. Verses one through six describe the horrible effects of his real sin.

It's just like what Titus 3 describes about all of us before God rescued us—or if God had not stepped in and intervened, this is where our sin would have taken us. Titus 3:3 says, *“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”* Sin becomes so noxious that everyone around us starts to hate us. Sin turns sinners into enemies of one another. No one wants to be near us. No one can help us.

That's where God's people were at. But Micah shows them in verse seven that even at their very worst, even at their lowest point, there remains in heaven a God Who will not reject them, a God Who will receive them, a God Who will hear them when they call upon His name, because He is a God of goodness and lovingkindness. He will save us, not because of works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His own great mercy (Titus 3:5).

So, following Micah's example in verse seven, when you have failed, do not delay in coming before the Lord. Come to Him and say, “God, I will wait for You. You will hear me. You will save me.” No matter how deep sin has taken you, God's grace is deeper still. Maybe today for the very first time you're realizing, “There is something between me and God. There's an enmity there. I have been disobeying Him. I am a sinner.”

I want you to know, no matter how much you have sinned or how badly you have sinned, God will hear you if you call to Him and say, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). That's why Jesus came. He came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). So actively wait on Him, not passively, through prayer, expecting good from Him even in the midst of your guilt and shame.

I know it seems counterintuitive to us to sin and then immediately fall on your knees and say, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Please rescue me. Thank You for saving me. Thank You for forgiving me through the blood of Christ Your Son.” It might even seem hypocritical to immediately go to God after you've sinned and say, “God, please forgive me.” But the reason it seems hypocritical is because we harbor in our hearts this false belief that somehow we have to pay for our sins. We have to do penance. We have to prove how sorry we are. We have to contribute just a little bit of our own remorse and contrition in order to be worthy to go before God again.

That's not gospel. Friends, gospel repentance is not penance. It's not paying for your sins. Repentance is agreeing with God that your sin is wicked and evil, then turning away from your sin. It's wholeheartedly embracing Jesus as the Savior Who saves you from your misery and guilt. He's the only One Who can save you. So what if after you've sinned you didn't wait a week, beating yourself up, but instead came to God right away and acknowledged your sin and guilt?

Let's take a specific sin, such as the plague of pornography that is far too invasive in the church. What if the first thing you did after you gazed at pornography is to fall on your knees, look to the Lord, and wait for the God of your salvation, saying, "God, this is disgusting. It's revolting. I hate what I've done. I hate this cauldron of lust that hisses like vipers in my soul. I hate it, but I'm looking to You, God. I'm waiting for the God of my salvation. You will hear me."

When you experience mercy from God, does it make you want to go out and sin more? Doesn't the experience of God's mercy in Christ make you less likely to keep on sinning and more likely to abhor your sin and adore Him? So don't delay in coming to God. He will hear you when you call to Him from the farthest ends of the earth, from the deepest depths of despair, from the miry pit of a sewage of sin, and from the gloomy darkness of the grave. Our God will hear you.

But Satan's shouting, "No, He won't! God doesn't want to listen to you. God isn't going to save you, rescue you. God isn't going to do anything beautiful or good or fruitful through you. You've ruined every chance you've ever had of being fruitful or mighty in His Kingdom." Satan loves to tempt you, trap you and then taunt you with your guilt. Sin will never satisfy.

Satan is gleeful when he gets God's people to sin. He wants you to wallow there in the mire and muck. He wants to persuade you that you've made such a mess of yourself: "There's no way you're ever going to be useful to God again. Forget about bold dreams of reaching others with the gospel. Forget about worshipping the Lord with passion and joy. Don't even lift your head. Just get used to it—you're a failure as a Christian. You're defeated. You're a slave to that sin. All you can do now is settle into a life of mediocrity, dull devotion, failure."

Many times that's why passion for God wanes. We have allowed the enemy to accuse us and taunt us with the guilt and shame of our sins. Micah says, "Don't do that. Fight when you fall." How do you do that? You call on the Lord. Do not delay. Take up the shield of faith and extinguish the enemy's fiery darts. He's going to show us how to do that in verses 8-10.

God's people are a city under siege. Micah says, "I'm not going to stand aloof from their plight. I'm going to embrace my solidarity with them. I'm going to acknowledge their sin as my own." He gives them voice now: "This is what you need to do, God's people. When the enemy is taunting you because of your downfall, when the enemy is rejoicing because you have fallen, you

need to talk back to the enemy. You need to get gutsy in your guilt. You need to say, *‘Rejoice not over me, O my enemy.’*”

That’s what victory looks like the morning after you’ve fallen miserably. You talk back, to the devil or to anyone who accuses you and says God is no longer capable or willing to use you in His service for His glory. Talk back, saying something like, “You think you’ve got me under your control now? You think you can accuse me and tempt me to despair by telling me of all the guilt within? It’s true—I’m a sinner, but I’m looking upward to my Savior and I’m fighting back.” Here’s a good example from Martin Luther:

When the devil accuses us and says, “You are a sinner and therefore damned,” we should answer, “Because you say I am a sinner, I will be righteous and saved.” “No,” says the devil, “you will be damned.” And I reply, “No, for I fly to Christ, Who gave Himself for my sins. Satan, you will not prevail against me. When you try to terrify me by setting forth the greatness of my sins and try to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt and blasphemy against, you will not prevail.

“On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and tread you under my feet, for Christ died for sinners. As often as you object that I am a sinner, so often you remind me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, on Whose shoulders and not on mine, lie all my sins. So when you say I’m a sinner, you do not terrify me, but comfort me immeasurably.”

That’s gospel logic. That’s bold brokenness, confident contrition, gutsy guilt. And that’s what Micah is advocating here: *“Rejoice not over me, O my enemy...”*

Let’s look at the next phrase: *“When I fall, I shall rise.”* The enemies of God are wholeheartedly rejoicing over the downfall of God’s people and Micah tells God’s people, “Fight back with the confidence that you will rise like a phoenix from the ashes. You will rally from defeat, just like your Savior did on the third day when He rose.”

The Hebrew tense for the verb “arise” is very vivid and dramatic here. It’s describing a future situation that no one anticipated, a complete reversal of expectations. The enemy was not thinking this was going to happen. He taunts you with, “You’re going to rise after that? You’re going to be fruitful after that? God still loves you after that?” Yes, He does. I will rise. I’ve fallen. I hate what I’ve done. I grieve over it. I’m ashamed of the dishonor it’s brought upon my King. But I will not wallow in the mire. I will rise, for my God will bring me up from the miry pit and He will set my feet upon a rock. He will make my steps secure, and He will put a new song in my

mouth, a song of praise to our God, and many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord, when they see how merciful God has been to me (Psalm 40). I will rise.

Proverbs 24:16 (NIV) says, *“Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again...”* Seven in the Bible represents an indefinite number. It could be many, many, many times. *“Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.”* Micah is saying, “God’s people, you need to fight back. You need to say, ‘I will rise,’ because you are confident in the God Who is able to protect you from stumbling. He’s able to keep you from stumbling, and when you do stumble, He’s able to protect from that stumble destroying you. He will make you stand before the presence of His glory, faultless and with great joy, so put your confidence and your hope in Him.”

Micah continues at the end of verse eight, *“When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.”* Here I am, sitting in my dungeon, in my guilt and shame, feeling the misery and gloom sin has brought into my heart. We need to feel that. “I feel guilty. I am ashamed. I am guilty. But that’s not the whole story, because the same God Who brought this discipline of darkness is also my light. He’s my salvation.” As it says in Psalm 30:5, *“His anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”*

“Yes, it’s true that God has temporarily hidden His face from me, but He hears me when I cry, ‘O Lord, be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper.’ Soon you will hear me saying to God, ‘You have turned my mourning into dancing. You have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing Your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give You thanks forever, for Your mercy.’” That’s the confidence of God’s people. That’s our destiny, forever praising Him for lifting us out of the pit of our sin.

Micah says there are consequences to face. Look at the beginning of verse nine: *“I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.”* Do you hear any blame-shifting there, any minimizing of guilt? “Oh, it’s not that bad.” Any denial? Any excuses? Just like David said in Psalm 51:4, *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,”* Micah says, *“I have sinned against him.”*

Friends, we need to understand something. As His children, what we’re going to sing at the end of this service is so true: “No wrath remains for us to face. We’re sheltered by His saving grace.” But that doesn’t mean God doesn’t experience any anger or displeasure toward us when we sin. The fiery wrath of God’s holy condemnation of our sin has been extinguished at the cross, but the fatherly anger of God’s displeasure at our sin is a sign of our adoption into His family. As Hebrews 12:7 tells us, *“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”*

A loving father does become angry at his children's wickedness and rebellion, but it's an anger that is bathed in love, that seeks restoration and what is good for the child. So when we repent as God's children, we submit to God's discipline. We're willing to face the consequences of our sin. We're not like Cain who, after he murdered his brother, moaned and complained, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" No. The believer says, "God, Your discipline is just, because I have sinned against You."

His discipline is also temporary. Did you notice that word in the middle of verse nine: "...until he pleads my cause"? Here's where Satan's theology and the gospel collide. Satan says, "See how God is disciplining you? That's proof that He does not love you. He's against you. He's determined to destroy you." But the gospel says, "Lies! Lies! Those are vicious lies." Just like Job's friends came to him and said, "There's no hope for you in God."

They are lies, because we look up at the right hand of the Father and see there a sinless Savior Who made an end of all my sins. Because He died in my place, as my Substitute, my sinful soul is counted free. God is satisfied to look on Christ and to pardon me. That's the gospel. That's why Micah can say beautifully in verse nine: "*He pleads my cause, and executes judgment for me.*" Not against me—He will execute judgment for me. What a precious truth. He will justify me in His presence. He will declare me faultless with great joy. I will be vindicated before the eyes of all my enemies as one whom God has chosen, cleansed, redeemed and clothed in His glory and righteousness. I will be glorified in His presence.

In verse ten, the enemy is going to see all this and be covered with shame. What's it going to be like for the devil when the sons of God are revealed and the righteous shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father? What are the devil and all his army going to do on that day? We're going to look upon our enemies and see them "*trampled down like the mire of the streets.*" Like dirt and mud on the streets—it doesn't get any lower than that. That's Satan's destiny.

We rejoice in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and the justification we have in the sight of God because of Him. John Piper says:

When you learn to deal with the guilt of sexual failure [or any kind of sin] by this kind of brokenhearted boldness, this kind of theology, this kind of justification by faith, this kind of substitutionary atonement, this kind of gutsy guilt, you will fall less often. Why is this so? Because Christ will become increasingly precious to you. Best of all, Satan will not be able to destroy your dream of a life of radical obedience to Christ.

Friends, we're going to be the radiant bride of Christ. Our failures and sins are not going to have the final word. Freedom from shame will be our eternal future. Everlasting joy will crown

our heads. That's our destiny. Knowing that, we fight against the enemy's lies. We take up the shield of faith and do battle against indwelling sin.

You might wonder, as I do sometimes, "Why doesn't God remove our sinful desires the moment we're saved? Wouldn't that be a lot easier? Why do I have to keep coming up against the same sins again and again, the same temptations? I thought I'd be further along by now. Can't I have just a decade of sinless perfection in this life? Or just five years with no sinning?"

No. God leaves us to fight with indwelling sin for the same reason He left the Israelites to deal with the enemy nations after they inherited the Promised Land. Why did He leave those nations there? Judges 3 says He left them there to test Israel. Would they trust in Him? He left them there to teach Israel how to fight.

You see, if God made us sinlessly perfect the moment we got saved, do you know what would happen? I don't know how this could happen if we're sinless, but pride would rise up in our hearts. We probably would look at the world outside and think, "We're better than they are," and we'd forget it's all by mercy, all by grace. God wants to keep us humble, trusting in Him and not in our own righteousness. He wants to keep us fighting. He wants to keep us deeply grateful for His mercy.

I love the way John Newton puts it: "The riches of His mercy are more illustrated by the multiplied pardons He bestows upon me, than if I needed no forgiveness at all." Thank You, Lord, for Your multiplied pardons for my multiplied sins. They show forth the richness of Your mercy.

So get used to fighting. Don't expect sinless perfection in this life. Martin Luther describes how we should view the Christian life in this way:

This life therefore is not righteousness but growth in righteousness;
not health but healing; not being but becoming; not rest but exercise.
We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The
process is not finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is
the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified

This is what we have signed up for, friends, when we put our trust in Jesus. He will save us, He has saved us, He has delivered us from the penalty of our sins—but we're still fighting against the power of indwelling sin. That's the Christian life. That's the journey.

The fuel that keeps us fighting (Micah 7:18-20)

How do we know we're not fighting in vain? I want us to look briefly at the fuel that keeps us fighting in these wonderful verses 18-20 "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?*" Micah tells us right here in verse

18 why he can be broken yet bold, remorseful yet rugged, contrite yet confident, guilty yet gutsy. It's because God has opened His heart to Micah and revealed His character. Micah has gotten a clear vision of what motivates the heart of God. Verse 18 is the one phrase in this chapter where God tells us what He delights in, what He takes pleasure in.

He tells us, "I do not retain My anger forever, because I delight in steadfast love." *Hesed!* Or as the NIV puts it, "I delight to show mercy." God isn't simply able to show mercy—He delights in showing mercy. He doesn't begrudge being merciful. He's not resentful or hard-hearted or half-hearted about it. He's not sighing and sulking, "Oh, no, not you again. You're asking for forgiveness again? I've got to be merciful to you again?" No, God is glad and generous.

As Richard Sibbes put it, "He is more ready to forgive than you are to sin. As there is a continual spring of wickedness in you, so there is a greater spring of mercy in God." Mercy overflows from the depths of His being. Whatever mercy is in you or me, it's just like a drop taken out of the ocean of God's infinite, boundless mercy. As we sing, "Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore, our sins they are many, His mercy is more" (by Matt Papa). God delights in showing mercy. He delights in doing us good with all His heart, with all His soul.

Micah just marvels at this: "*Who is a God like you?*" When he says that, it reminds me of Moses standing at the far shore of the Red Sea. He's just seen Pharaoh and all his army thrown into the depths of the sea, never to come up to torment the people of Israel again. In Exodus 15:11, Moses raises the song that says, "Who is a god like You? There is none like You." Micah is echoing Moses here, picturing God doing the same thing to our sin and to our enemy Satan that He did to Pharaoh's hosts when He drowned them into the depths of the sea.

God is saying, "That's what's going to happen to your sin. I'm going to have compassion on you. I'm going to tread your sins under My feet, like you would if you saw a snake in a children's playground. I'm going to tread it. I've got big feet. I'm going to crush your sin. I will cast all your sins into the depths of the sea, just like I did to Pharaoh's army." When God does that, He puts up a sign: "No fishing here." They're never going to be dredged up again. They're never going to be used against you.

This is our God. He passes over transgression. He pardons iniquity for those whom He has chosen. He doesn't retain His anger forever. He delights in showing mercy. If you doubt it, ask Jacob. "How did God treat you, Jacob? Was He merciful?" "Yes, He was."

Ask Abraham. "How was God in His dealings toward you, Abraham?" "He was a God of steadfast love."

Ask any of the fathers of the Old Testament, "How did God deal with you?" "Oh, He delighted in showing mercy."

Ask all the saints who've gone before us, who now are in that great cloud of witnesses. Ask Jan Stern, who went home to glory four years ago today. She'll say, "He's a God Who delights in showing mercy to His children."

Who is a God like this? There is no other. Micah begins the chapter with the word "woe." "Woe is me, under the power of sin." I heard someone say a long time ago, "He ends with 'Wow!'" "Who is like You, God, pardoning all this sin?" That's what preaching the gospel to yourself does. It moves you from "Woe" to "Wow, what a God we have!"

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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