

Text: Micah 7:18-20 (The Father's Forgiveness, Peace Choice, June 19, 2016)

Theme: What he *doesn't* do!

Virtue (basic truth): Our heavenly Father is set apart by that which he, lovingly, doesn't do.

Malady (our problem): Sinners downplay our Father's love & challenge perceived inactivity.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace and Truth lifts the hearts of God's children as he focuses our attention on what our Father, so lovingly, doesn't do.

Propositional Statement (aim): To our culture, a father's inactivity usually coincides with a deadbeat dad who is distant and indifferent toward his children. In grace though, today we rejoice in *what our heavenly Father doesn't do*, we give thanks for that beautiful significance, and we learn to thank our Father for his goodness to us.

Specific Law in Text: Implied in what our sins deserve (his anger, our guilt).

Specific Gospel in Text: "Who is a God like you" (Micah 5:18).

Doctrinal Thought: Jesus is the full atonement for the world's sins.

Sanctification Thought: *"Father, what wondrous love you display by what you don't do – you don't stay angry with me, you don't fish up my sins, you don't forget your promises. Lord, for your steadfast love, thank you! Send your Spirit to daily remind me of your love for me and to cause my life, in honesty and joy, to give thanks for every blessing I enjoy as your dear child. Not because I have earned or deserved it; only because you, LORD, are my good and merciful Father in heaven. Hear me for Jesus' sake. Amen!"*

Micah 7:18-20

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.

From him who *shepherds his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD*; from him *who is our peace* (Micah 5:4, 5), grace, mercy, and peace are yours. Amen!

Despite our best intentions, today is one of those “card holidays.” That’s not wrong, but it’s interesting that, nation-wide, Father’s Day exists as a beautiful celebration; yet the majority of us express just how glad we are for our physical fathers, and just how thankful we are for all they’ve done, with a folded piece of colored cardstock that seeks a halfway decent balance of honesty and humor. Home Depot in-store pick-up - great; if we remember. Brunch at his favorite place - lovely; if our work schedules allow. Cards? Easy standby dad’ll appreciate.

Just for a second put your mind in that Father’s Day card aisle. As your mind filters through that card collection, how many of those folds emphasize an expression of thanks for what our fathers don’t do? *Hey dad, thanks for not looking at me – really appreciate it! Hey pops, thanks for not taking me fishing – sure do respect ya for it!*

Bet not too many. In fact, I’m confident the vast majority depict a father who is present, a father who is active, and a father whose love is on full and clear display in the lives of his kids. Most of them gladly parade and ascribe the “world’s greatest dad” accolade. That’s not a surprise, but the reason for it is obvious: because a father’s inactivity usually displays distance and indifference – and *what dads don’t do* is not at all the point or prominence of today’s celebration.

Unless you’re a Christian. And unless you happen to stand in joyful thanks for the heavenly Father you have. Because, in connection to him, it’s exactly ***what he doesn’t do*** that sets him apart as the only God worthy of praise; and it’s exactly ***what he doesn’t do*** that magnifies just how blessed we are to be his children. Note that well. Our Father in heaven is not a deadbeat dad who is distant from us or indifferent toward us. Instead, his inactivity, ***what he doesn’t do***, graciously displays his personal attention to us, his personal care of us, and his deep love for us.

That’s the characteristic of God we want to see, learn, appreciate, and take to life today. To do so, we’ll let the Spirit work through Micah 7. Just a quick bit of context:

Seven centuries before God’s Son was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Matt. 2:6), God’s prophet, Micah (whose name means, *who is like the LORD?*), portrays the unparalleled awesomeness of our God; and he does so with “*vigorous terms, striking figures of speech, plays on words, and concrete illustrations and examples the people could understand and appreciate*” (WLS Notes). Read the book; all that is so vivid. In seven concise chapters, Micah crisply portrays the LORD as the God of love . . . and justice; the God who is so graciously patient . . . and intensely serious; the God who blesses his people . . . and punishes his enemies. All that punctuates that *this* God, our God, not just a decent dad, he’s the perfect dad. As Micah waits in hope for the LORD his Savior (Micah 7:7), his confidence in the heavenly Father escalates to this gorgeous truth:

“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” (Micah 7:18).

Christians, what sets our Father apart is ***what he doesn't do!*** He doesn't look upon our sins and hold them against us; he doesn't look at us as we truly deserve; he doesn't retain his anger against us, he doesn't let his frustration fester until it boils over in our well-deserved punishment.

Why not?! We sin. We're the waywards and rebellious. We lie. We play the hypocrite – and are foolish enough to think he doesn't know. For the sake of our convenience and preference, we set aside what our Father asks and disregard what he demands. We let his Word lapse in our lives and skip about as if we're still his perfect little kids. Why doesn't he turn on us in anger? He should! Why doesn't he let his frustration fester? He could! Why doesn't his anger boil over in our well-deserved punishment? Why can we, should we rejoice in ***what he doesn't do?!***

Why? Because of what he's already done. Remember our Gospel lesson? *"God so loved the world . . . you . . . that he gave his one and only Son"* (John 3:16). Our Father who art in heaven already punished the world's sins . . . your sins and mine; that's the promise wrapped in his Son's cross. His anger doesn't boil over into our punishment because his Son is still the full atonement and sacrificial payment. He doesn't stay angry because Jesus already absorbed his righteous wrath. He pardons, he forgives because Jesus already took what we deserve. *"There is no God like the Lord, who reveals his glory in forgiving sins"* (LSB Footnote); that's what he's done. He doesn't look at us as our sins deserve; he is glad in ***what he doesn't do!***

That gospel truth established, Micah paints a powerful picture of what God, in his forgiveness does – more so, doesn't do. And maybe the reason this picture is so vivid is because we have such a hard time with it. Sinful nature – ours included – wants to hold on and drudge up. But our heavenly Father has zero interest in that. Satan loves to bring up the rot of your past; or at least take you diving for it. Our Father in heaven does not. Instead, here's who our Father is:

"You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

Friends, our heavenly Father is set apart by ***what he doesn't do***; he doesn't take us fishing for our sins. As if they're there sunk in the sea and he brings them up for us to see. Instead, in the fullness of his forgiveness – the forgiveness he proclaims to you – he puts sins, all of them, out of sight, out of reach, out of existence. You remember that every time you see his Son's cross. In Fatherly love, he does not drudge up or salvage your sins against you. They're gone.

That picture is strikingly vivid, vividly concrete, and concretely gracious to burdened sinners; I'm content to move on with this point . . . friends, if our heavenly Father doesn't fish for our sins, why would we? Why would we drudge up our past; why would we let our sinful nature rise? Why fish up someone else's sins; why bring their sins to the surface? Our Father's

forgiveness is full. My sins are sunk; yours are, too. In the joy of that forgiveness, let's leave sins – ours and others - in the depth, let them go, turn from them, forgive as we've been forgiven.

All of that – that our heavenly Father doesn't look at us in anger, that he doesn't fish for our sins – all of that naturally raises the questions, “how do we know” and “how can we be so sure?”

The Spirit of Grace, through the quill of Micah, tells us: “*You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago*” (Micah 7:20).

How do we know? Because of ***what our Father doesn't do!*** He doesn't forget his promises; doesn't go back on his Word. He doesn't. He won't. “*Because of what God has done in the past, believers are confident about the future*” (LSB Footnote). He kept his promise to Jacob – nation was born; he kept his promise to Abraham – Son was born; he keeps his promises to us. And whether those promises made by his Word, in water, or in wafers and wine, he so graciously holds himself to them! As our lovingly just and justly loving Father, that's his promise.

Much as today glorifies fathers, it more so magnifies the kids' benefit in the Father's care. The whole day, the entire celebration, every Father's Day card smiles at the wonderful capability of our fathers, and serves as a glad expression of gratitude. As dads, we're ok with that.

Friends, welcome to life as a children of the heavenly Father; and welcome to the special blessings we enjoy because of it. Every day, by his grace, we exist in the care and mercy of God in heaven – this Book, that cross, that font daily serve as proof and reminder of that. As his kids, actively consider it. Every day you have and enjoy forgiveness from the One who calls us his own. Don't forfeit that. Instead, as his kids, glorify him for it as you put away sin, set aside the masks of hypocrisy, live to his glory; as you spend time in his Word – all of it – and live a life that listens to his Word; as you daily thank and praise him for ***what he doesn't do.***

Those Father's Day cards you got. Despite the picture, they all say the same thing. “Thanks, dad; it's a blessing to be your kid” – and those cards are good and right. Christians, refreshed by the gospel and strengthened by the Spirit, do let your life and your soul rejoice in the Heavenly Father you have; let your life and your soul glorify, thank, and magnify him for all he's done.

Who is like the LORD . . . who is a God like ours, who else is glorified by ***what he doesn't do?*** No one. In unparalleled love our Father in heaven doesn't turn away in anger; our Father in heaven doesn't fish up our sins; our Father in heaven doesn't forget you or his promises to you. Haven't earned that or deserved any of it; but we have it – only, only because he is and he remains our good and merciful Father in heaven.

Amen!