



Grace Beyond Belief

Text: Jonah 3:1-4:10

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1. Read Jonah 3:1-10. Adam described the repentance of Nineveh as an Apocalyptic Paradigm Shift: a moment when everything switches over to an impossible alternative reality. In reality, for those of us who follow Jesus, all of our stories of coming to faith are an Apocalyptic Paradigm Shift.
 - a. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. How does the apostle Paul describe who we were before we encountered the saving grace of God in Christ?
 - b. You may not have committed crimes against humanity on the level of the Assyrians, but the reality of being dead in our sins and trespasses remains. One dead body may be in worse shape than another, but the lack of life and vitality is the same for both. What characterized your life before Christ? What did your life revolve around? Where did you look for security, happiness, and fulfillment?
 - c. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. What did God do that led to our Apocalyptic Paradigm Shift of coming to Christ and experiencing life transformation in him?
 - d. What role did our good deeds and being a “good person” have to do with our salvation?
 - e. How should these truths affect how we respond to God and how we view other people?

2. Read Matthew 5:43-48.
 - a. In this passage from his Sermon on the Mount, how does Jesus challenge his followers?
 - b. How does God show love and kindness to all, regardless of if they have “earned” it or not?
 - c. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus told his followers that they were the light of the world, meaning we are to live lives of radical love and good deeds so people see God’s beauty and love through us, his people. How is enemy/”other”-love essential to shining God’s light in the world?

3. Read Jonah 4:1-11. Here we get a greater understanding of why Jonah ran from God in the first place. Jonah ran because he couldn’t stand the idea of sharing God’s message with such a wicked people, the people from the “City of Blood.”
 - a. If you’re honest, who is an individual or people group (ethnicity, lifestyle, socio-economic class, etc.) that you find difficult to love?
 - b. What specifically is it about that person or your perception of that people group that makes loving them so difficult?
 - c. Similarly, is there anyone (a group or an individual) who you hesitate to share the Good News of Jesus with because you doubt their receptivity?
 - d. How has this series about the tremendous depth of God’s love for all people, ultimately and most profoundly displayed in Jesus, challenged you in these areas?

Challenge: Adam challenged us to turn off anything that is trying to sell us fear and to resist anything that tries to convince us that the war is against flesh and blood, not the true enemies of Satan, sin, and death. And as we turn off those things, he challenged us to embrace the things that grow our compassion. What are those things for you? What do you need to turn off? What do you need to embrace?

Prayer:

Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). He also said, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27–28).

The Lord's Prayer – Even for Your Enemies

The place to start in praying for our enemies is the prayer that the Lord taught us to pray. Whatever else you pray for your enemies, pray for them like this:

(As you pray through this, keep in mind whoever it is you put for your answer to question 3.)

Father, grant that my enemies – my colleague who snubs me, my wife who belittles me, my child who disrespects me, the ISIS member who wants to kill me – grant that they would come to hallow your name. Grant that they would treasure you above all, and reverence you, and admire you more than anything.

Father, grant that my enemies would come under the saving, purifying sway of your kingly rule and that you would exert your kingly power to make my enemies your own loyal subjects.

Grant, Father, that my enemies would love to do your will the way the angels do it in heaven with all their might, and without reservation, and with the purest motives, and with great joy.

Grant, Father, that my enemies would have all the physical resources of food and clothing and shelter and education and healthcare and transportation that they need to fulfill your calling on their lives.

And forgive my enemies their sins, as you bring them to repentance, and make them forgiving people, and protect them from overpowering temptations and from the destructive power of the devil.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/pray-for-those-who-abuse-you>

STUDY DEEPER

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” (Luke 6:27)

There are two main reasons why Christians should love their enemies and do good to them.

One is that it reveals something of the way God is. God is merciful.

“He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45).

“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10).

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

So, when Christians live this way, by God’s power, we show something of what God is like.

The second reason is that the hearts of Christians are satisfied with God and are not driven by the craving for revenge or self-exaltation or money or earthly security.

God has become our all-satisfying treasure and so we don’t treat our adversaries out of our own sense of need and insecurity, but out of our own fullness with the satisfying glory of God.

Hebrews 10:34: “You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property [that is, you didn’t retaliate against your adversaries], since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” What takes away the compulsion of revenge is our deep confidence that this world is not our home, and that God is our utterly sure and all-satisfying reward. We know that we have “a better possession and an abiding one.”

So, in both these reasons for loving our enemy we see the main thing: God is shown to be who he really is as a merciful God and as gloriously all-satisfying.

The power to be merciful is that we have been satisfied with God’s mercy toward us. And the ultimate reason for being merciful is to glorify God, that is, to help others magnify him for his mercy. We want to show that God is magnificent. We want our love, by God’s mercy, to make God look great in the eyes of man.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-we-should-love-our-enemies>