

A few weeks ago in my daily Bible reading, I was reading in Jeremiah and came across something remarkable about God. I mean, you know theoretically that God is patient and forgiving. But sometimes you read about God showing mercy and you think “wow, I’d have given them what they deserved!”. We think “He warned them and they didn’t listen, so ‘off with their head!’”.

The interesting thing is that we typically want justice for other people, but we want mercy for ourselves!

The bottom line is that God JUST IS NOT LIKE US – AND WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL! I think it’s great when we read the Bible with “fresh eyes” and we say “wow, that was unexpected” or “wow, I’m amazed that God did that”!

## **GOD is Not what We would Expect, and He is Better than We Would Imagine**

**THIS IS ONE REASON WE NEED A BIBLE – OUR NATURAL INTUITION CAN ONLY GIVE US A GOD WHO IS LIKE US!  
(Gentle and Lowly by Dale Ortlund)**

This unexpectedness of God is what hit me when I was reading in Jeremiah – see if you feel the same....

### **Jeremiah background**

1446 BC Exodus

1406 BC Israelites into promised land

1399-1040 Judges, cycles of rebellion and repentance, Samuel the Prophet

1043 Saul becomes the first king of Israel

1010 BC David becomes king

931 BC The kingdom is divided into the Northern kingdom of Israel with capital of Samaria (10 tribes) and the Southern Kingdom with capital in Jerusalem (2 tribes)

#### **SERIES OF GOOD AND EVIL KINGS**

730 BC Isaiah prophesies judgment against Israel

722 BC Israel (Northern kingdom) overcome by Assyria and people taken into captivity

711 BC Isaiah prophesies captivity and eventual restoration of Southern Kingdom, Judah

701 BC Jerusalem is threatened

590s BC Ezekiel prophesies that Judah will fall

586 BC Southern Kingdom (Judah) is overcome by Babylon

What is interesting about Babylon’s conquest of Jerusalem is that the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, left some people in Jerusalem and he appointed GEDALIAH as the governor. Gedaliah seems to have tried to make the best of a bad situation, but a member of the Jewish ruling family assassinated him.

Jeremiah 41:1-3

Well, once this happened, the guy who orchestrated it got away and everyone else got scared. So they turned to the prophet, Jeremiah, to find out what to do.

Jeremiah 42:1-43:

The people asked Jeremiah to go and find out what God wanted them to do, and they promised to obey. You have to think that Jeremiah was thinking “sure you’ll obey – you never have before”.

So, Jeremiah went and sought the Lord for 10 days and came back with this message:

“If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you and not pluck you up (LIKE A WEED)...Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are [rightly] afraid. Do not fear him, declares the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land... **DO NOT GO TO EGYPT TO LIVE THERE**”.

**BUT** they said “you’re lying” and went to Egypt anyway.

Then, a little later, God said through Jeremiah that he was going to actually bring Babylon, from whom they fled, into Egypt to judge Egypt!!! Jeremiah actually buried some stones in the pavement at the palace in Egypt and told the Jews “Nebuchadnezzar will set up his throne on top of those very stones”.

And hear the word of the Lord from Jeremiah 46:25 and following:

<sup>25</sup> The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, said: “Behold, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him. <sup>26</sup> I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares the LORD.

<sup>27</sup> “But fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
nor be dismayed, O Israel,  
for behold, I will save you from far away,  
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.  
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,  
and none shall make him afraid.

<sup>28</sup> Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
declares the LORD,  
for I am with you.  
I will make a full end of all the nations  
to which I have driven you,  
but of you I will not make a full end.  
I will discipline you in just measure,  
and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”

When I read this, I had to flip back and forth to remind myself of what these rebellious people had done and get a grasp on the mercy God was showing to them – not all of them, for sure, but to the ones who had turned to Him. You or I – after hundreds of years of rebellious history, after thousands of instances of warnings or judgment – you or I would have brought judgement on them all. But God is rich in mercy....

Remember Exodus 32? What did God reveal about Himself to Moses – after God had delivered the people from slavery and then they thanked Him by worshipping a golden calf? “the Lord, the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, showing mercy to thousands – but who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished”.

## UNEXPECTED MERCY

There are a few different types of people in the world

Those with penitent hearts who feel their guilt, but don't expect mercy (Spirit may be working)

Those with hard hearts who don't acknowledge guilt, so don't feel they need mercy

Those with repentant, Holy Spirit-opened hearts, who know their guilt and have realized that Jesus offers forgiveness, and that His sacrifice for them makes God's mercy possible

### WHY IS MERCY FROM GOD SO UNEXPECTED?

#### **Earthly rulers don't forgive rebels – but God does**

Earthly kings also pursue those who rebel against them – but they pursue in order to execute vengeance. God pursues in order to turn rebels into His own children. Instead of “rooting them out” in order to destroy them, God pursues rebels to change them so that they can repent.

#### **Earthly rulers protect their dignity – but God doesn't**

An earthly king always acts in a way that demonstrates their position and majesty. They dress, travel, speak, and act in a way that visibly demonstrates their highest position. They do that so that no one will challenge their rule. It's part of protecting their royalty.

But God is not compelled to do that. He won't ever do anything that is contrary to His nature, but He often does things that surprise those who are observing. My friend Daniel who is a missionary said when we discussed this:

**“God is infinitely secure in Himself, so He has no need to project or protect an image”.**

God's holy regal nature is so settled and just absolute that it is not threatened when He does things that we think “un-kingly”.

#### **Pursuing those who oppose him**

#### **Becoming ONE with those who oppose Him**

#### **Philippians 2**

#### **Dying for those who oppose Him**

Romans 5 “For a good man one might dare to die – but God shows His love for us in that while we were STILL SINNERS, Christ died for us.”

**Wrath against rebellion is expected, just, and inevitable. Since God is just, He will necessarily judge sin. But His expression of mercy is an act of His loving heart – a DECISION that He made to punish His own Son so that sinners could repent, be forgiven, and experience the Love of the Father.**

## UNEXPECTED DEMEANOR – GENTLE AND LOWLY

I'm drawing a lot today from a book that Daniel Andre referred to me called “Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers”.

In this book, he points out something that Spurgeon noted: “in the four Gospels, 89 chapters of Biblical text, there is only one place where Jesus tells us about His own heart”. Right after He spoke of the judgment of those who rejected him, Jesus said in Matthew 11: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

## **UNEXPECTED ACCEPTANCE – COME UNTO ME**

Matthew 11. How simple. “Come to me”. Not “perform some religious act”. Not “get your life straightened up”.

Jesus’ requirement for showing grace to sinners starts and ends with “come to me” – because only in whose heart the Father is at work, by the Holy Spirit, will heed and come.

### AND WHO WOULD WE NORMALLY EXPECT TO FIND WHEN WE COME?

An old Puritan pastor from the 1700s wrote:

“We are apt to think that He, being so holy, is therefore of a severe and sour disposition against sinners and not able to bear when we sin.”

Ortlund writes that we think “sure, Jesus comes close to us – but He holds his nose”. Honestly, that can be the deep opinion we have of God – that, yes, He has accepted us but stays pretty exasperated with us. At least, that’s what I have too often thought...

### BUT WHO DO WE ACTUALLY FIND WHEN WE COME?

One who is gentle and lowly in heart. Jesus is meek. Jesus is humble. Jesus is gentle. Jesus, says Ortlund,

“is not harsh, reactionary, or easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to Him is not a pointed figure, but open arms”.

“the paragraphs before this give us a picture of how Jesus handles the unrepentant...gentle and lowly doesn’t mean mushy and frothy, but for the penitent, His heart of gentle embrace is never outmatched by our sins and foibles and insecurities and doubts and anxieties and failures...He sustains us with endless kindness”

## **UNEXPECTED ACCESS – DRAW NEAR**

Here’s a great thing about our relationship with Jesus – after we come to Him in faith and are saved, it’s not like “you’re in, go outside and play”. Jesus is still and always accessible. And He is especially accessible when we are struggling with sin or when we are suffering.

Hebrews 4-5

John 6:37 Jesus said (NASB) “all that the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out”.

In the Greek bible, there is a “double negation” that is translated “certainly not”.

It’s like we would say “if someone comes to me, I will NO WAY NO HOW EVER push them away”.

Hear how the great Puritan, John Bunyan, in his book *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, describes an interaction between a fearful sinner and Jesus:

“but I am a great sinner, say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I am an old sinner, say you”

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I am a hard-hearted sinner”, say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I am a backsliding sinner” say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I have served the devil all my days” say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I have sinned against mercy” say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

“but I have no good thing to bring with me” say you

“I will no way no how ever push you away”, says Jesus

The writer of a wonderful book called “*Gentle and Lowly*”, Dane Ortlund, says this:

“fallen, anxious sinners are limitless in their capacity to perceive reasons for Jesus to cast them out. We are factories of fresh resistances to Christ’s love. Even when we run out of tangible reasons to be cast out, such as specific sins or failures, we tend to retain a vague sense that, given enough time, Jesus will finally grow tired of us and hold us at arm’s length.”

## CONCLUSION

I’ve come up with 4 phases of Christian experience

Jesus can save and forgive me – I won’t go to hell

Jesus is amazing

Jesus is God Most High and defines majesty and HOLINESS

I’m overwhelmed that One so high and holy would do so much to save me, so lowly and sinful

No one would expect that the High King of Heaven would be like this UNLESS HE HAD REVEALED HIMSELF TO US. This majestic and transcendent and holy God has stepped down from the heights of grandeur and is pursuing you and me,

who according to Paul, were His enemies. The Bible says that God “dwells in unapproachable light”, so He has stooped down to show Himself to us in the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

***GOD pursues what we would not pursue, he forgives when we would not forgive, He redeems what we consider LOST, and He draws near and stays near His people on their best and worst .***

Today, if you are His, and weighed down by sin or sorrow

Today, if you are His but really concerned whether you are pleasing Him

Today, if you are not HIS,

“Yes, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament hopes and longings. Yes, He is one whose holiness causes even his friends to fall down in fear, aware of their sinfulness. Yes, he is a might teacher, One whose authority outstripped even that of the religious PHDs of his day. To diminish any of these is to step outside of [Biblical Christianity]. But the dominant note left ringing in our ears after reading the Gospels, the most vivid and arresting element of the portrait, is the way the Holy Son of God moves toward, touches, heals, embraces, and forgives those who least deserve it yet truly desire it”.

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