



What in the World?

What in the world have I done to deserve this? Three Prayers.

Texts: Read Jonah 2:7-10; Luke 18:9-14

Prologue: God's "furious" and relentless love for sinners.

G.K. Chesterton once called Divine saving grace "the furious love of God." Brennan Manning says this of God's love: "He is not moody or capricious; He knows no seasons of change. *He has a single relentless stand toward us; He loves us.* He is the only God man has ever heard of who loves sinners. False gods – the gods of human manufacturing – despise sinners, but the Father of Jesus loves all, no matter what they do. But of course, this is almost too incredible for us to accept . . . Through no merit of ours, but by His mercy, we have been restored to a right relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of His beloved Son. This is the Good News, the gospel of grace." Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. (BTW, Manning was a close friend of Rich Mullins, whose biographical movie *Ragamuffin* comes out this May).

Q: What do you think Chesterton means by "furious" love? Pursuing? Relentless? Disciplining? Steadfast – God's *hesed*? Chastising? Refusing to leave a person alone? In what ways has such love been shown in the book of Jonah? In what ways, if any, has God's "furious" love been demonstrated to you, your family, or your friends?

Q: What is your reaction to what Manning says of God's love, "*He has a single relentless stand toward us; He loves us*"? Too good to be true? Maybe for some, but not for me? A glimmer of hope – maybe it's not too late after all? Really? Really? Can God possibly always and continuously love even me? Hitler? Stalin?

Introduction: If you remember, for the last three weeks we've looked at the prophet Jonah and his attempted flight from God. His escape attempt ended badly. He was thrown into the sea by the sailors and then swallowed by a great fish sent by God to save him. Chapter 2 is Jonah's prayer and praise *psalm* – recounting his cry for deliverance and praise for God's salvation. You have to keep in mind that Jonah's "trouble" was sinking into the sea and almost drowning, not being in the fish. The fish is God's vehicle of salvation! *Despite Jonah's deliberate disobedience, God loved him enough to actively pursue him, discipline him, redeem him, and then use him to bring warning and hope to the Ninevites. God loved Jonah relentlessly!* Let's examine part of Jonah's prayer and then two other New Testament prayers to illustrate this love.

1. The Prayer of Jonah – Jonah 2:7-10

Although Jonah's prayer is essentially all of chapter 2, we will narrow our focus onto verses 7-10. Throughout Jonah's prayer two things stand out – God loves sinners (that is, all people), and He answers them when they cry out to Him in humility. What else do these verses tell us about Jonah, about ourselves, about God, and about our communication with God?

(Acknowledgement to John Piper, Desiring God Foundation, www.desiringGod.org, for these points)

- God answers despite our sin and guilt. Jonah was running from God – and therefore he was out of God's will at this time – and now his "life was slipping away" (he was drowning) – but God was ready to answer as soon as Jonah remembered Him in

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humble and “earnest prayer.” Jonah did not have to prove himself or get his life together first. *God’s grace was immediate!*

- God answers in seemingly impossible situations and often just in time. Jonah was in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and going down for the last time (verse 7). Like many of us at times, Jonah probably saw “no way out.” God does not always save physically, but He always answers those who seek Him.
- God often answers in stages. I’m sure Jonah would rather have been picked up by the local Coast Guard and immediately taken to dry land, but he seems quite thankful for the salvation that God provides: Stage 1 – swallowed by some ghastly creature. Stage 2 – console yourself that while it may not smell nice it’s better than drowning. Stage 3 – get upchucked onto the beach. Stage 4 – take a really long bath.
- God answers for His purposes and glory. Yes, one of those purposes is His relentless love for us, but think of the other purposes God had in mind for Jonah (Hint: Some in Jonah, some in NT (Matt 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32)).
- God answers to change us – to make us more like Himself.

Q: Do you ever feel like you cannot pray until you have some things together? Stopped some sinful behavior? Been “good” for awhile? In these verses, what is God really looking for from His children? How can this change and encourage your prayers? Consider these words: “The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies/work/Christian activities. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom but trembles when we pray” (Samuel Chadwick). Do you think Chadwick’s view might be too simple or does he get it right?

Q: God’s deliverance of Jonah advanced His plan to offer mercy to Nineveh. In your prayers for “deliverance,” are you willing to be a part of His purposes, or do you just want your troubles removed? (Confession time – yeah, most of the time, I just want God to make things better for me)

Q: God doesn’t want to just keep bailing us out of our self-made difficulties – He wants to make us holy as He is holy and to make us merciful as He is merciful. How is Jonah changed by God’s dramatic rescue? In what ways does he remain unchanged? What about you? What lessons can we take from this? How have answered prayers caused you to grow in Christ, in holiness, and in compassion?

2. The Prayer of the Pharisee – Luke 18:9-12

None of us have ever prayed like this – have we? Let’s look at the distinctives of his prayer.

- “I” – 8 times (in the NLT, 4 in NIV) the Pharisee mentions himself. Anyone see anything wrong here?
- No confession, no repentance, no acknowledgement of God’s provision of his daily needs, no intercession for “everyone else” – it’s as if he says, “no need for forgiveness here Lord – move along please.” His only gratitude is this: “I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else.” Wow!
- John MacArthur says that by trumpeting his own works, this “Pharisee revealed that his entire hope lay in his not being as bad as someone else. He lacked any sense of his own unworthiness and sin.” Read Matt 5:20 and Rom 3:23 to see how sound his hope was.

Q: What is most striking about this prayer? That he actually said it out loud instead of just thinking it? Do you ever have such thoughts – even if you don’t address them specifically to God? Who do you most often compare yourself to – saints or villains?

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Q: Based on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7, and specifically 5:27-28; 5:43-44; 6:5-16; 7:1-5), in what ways is the Pharisee just plain wrong?

3. The Prayer of the Tax Collector – Luke 18:13

In contrast, the prayer of the tax collector is a model of simplicity and humility: "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." That's it! He throws himself upon the mercy of the court, knowing that he has no excuses, that there are no mitigating factors, that there is no one else to blame, and that he has absolutely no hope apart from God's grace. Note how similar this prayer is to Psalm 51 (written by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah), especially verses 1-4, 7, & 17:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge . . . Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow . . . My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (NIV)

Jonah and the tax collector both offer prayers that are a complete contrast to the Pharisee's. Here are 2 men who are made to face the reality of their own sin and their only response is complete humility and repentance. None of them had any hope except for God's mercy and love – and that mercy and love are only offered through the work of Jesus Christ on our and their behalf (even in OT days). Manning says:

"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it . . . We are all, equally, privileged but unentitled beggars at the door of God's mercy!" The Ragamuffin Gospel

Q: Do you see it that way – the same way as Jonah, David, and the tax collector – that your one and only hope is in the grace of God – now revealed in Jesus Christ? Or deep down, do you really, and maybe secretly, believe that there is some saving good in you that God may acknowledge and credit to your account? It's very hard in our age of self-esteem building to admit that we are all sinners and completely dependent on God for our salvation, but so it is.

Q: What answers or results are seen in these three prayers? For Jonah (in 2:9)? For the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:14)?

Q: What do you think of Jesus' absolute statement at the end of Luke 18:14, "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."?

Scary? I'm still waiting for that exaltation? I can't wait till so-and-so gets theirs? How humble do I have to be? How counter-cultural is this truth today, in the world? In the Church (worldwide)? At KCC?

Well, if you haven't embraced this truth yet – that the humble will be exalted and vice versa – you should because it is throughout Scripture. Here are just a few examples:

- Prov 3:34; 16:18; 29:23
- Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11
- James 4:6-10; 1 Pet 5:5-7

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Conclusion and Application

Q: So, what in the world have you done to deserve this – this relentless love and grace of a God who hears and answers the prayers of sinners?

Q: What does this all mean for me in my daily life? Let me tell you how it has helped me and then discuss some other ways to apply these truths?

- It has helped me to be bolder in prayer. I am a sinner, yes, but God has shown he will answer me if I come to Him without pretensions or pride.
- It is helping me to be less judgmental. This is a struggle, but I know that if God can save me, then no one is out of reach of His grace.
- It is helping me to be more forgiving. After all, if God can forgive me (who owes Him an unpayable debt), I can forgive anyone.
- It is helping me to seek ways to be more compassionate. I am surrounded most days by people who desperately need to know the God of “furious” and relentless love.

Q: What about you? How and where can you put these truths to work?

I know I’ve used these before, but I try to say these words of John Newton to myself every single day:

“Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.”