

Love Your Enemies

On October 22, 1945, Time Magazine reported the unusual story of the pilot Sergeant Jacob D. Deshazer, who flew a B-25 in 1942, bombing Nagoya in Japan. His plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, but he parachuted out and was captured. He was placed in a 1.5 metre wide cell in a prison camp. The Japanese prison camp were notorious for daily beatings, sleep deprivation torture and all sorts of cruelties. Deshazer developed a deep and intense hatred for his Japanese captors, and the thought of revenge is what kept him alive. One day, a Bible made it into the prison camp. It was secretly passed around, and DeShazer read it eagerly. At one point, he came to Christ's words on the cross, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do", his heart melted. There in that camp, Deshazer trusted Christ as Saviour, and began experiencing an immediate heart change. He began treating his captors differently. He was rescued in August of 1945, and spent time recuperating in Walter Reed Hospital in Washington. There he made up his mind to go to theological school and return to Japan as a missionary. Time magazine was impressed enough to include this in its magazine.

But his loving his enemies went further. During the war, the man who led the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was Captain Mitsua Fuchita. He had escaped death multiple times in the war, and when it was over, he thought it was all in vain. He hated America, and believed they had treated their POWs just as badly. He tried to gather evidence that this was so, and so ended up meeting his former flight engineer Kazuo Kanegasaki, presumed to have died at the Battle of Midway, who had instead been taken prisoner. He told a strange story of how a young American woman, Peggy Covell, who treated him and his fellow prisoners with great kindness even though Japanese soldiers had killed her missionary parents in the Philippines, Fuchida was astounded. The code of the warrior not only allowed for revenge; it demanded it. He began investigating Christianity and came across the story of DeShazar on a tract. He sought out the missionaries who had printed that, sought out the Bible, and came to Christ. He in turn, became a missionary, and went to America with the gospel. In 1950 Fuchita and DeShazar met for the first time, and eventually began speaking together at evangelistic rallies. As people saw an American and Japanese pilot, former enemies, now serving together as brothers, they were seeing the power of the gospel in front of them. They were seeing something that has no earthly explanation.

To love those who love you is natural. To love those whom you don't know is unusual. To love those who hate you is supernatural. Probably of all the words in the Sermon on the Mount that have struck men with the force of a sledgehammer to the chest are when Jesus said ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸ "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:43-48)

People read that and are slain by its impossibly high standard. Who can love those who hate you? It sounds impossible, like lighting fire inside ice. They freeze me with hate, and I must respond with warmth?

Loving those who hate you is one of the ultimate signs that you are a child of God, and that His nature resides in you. Why? Because He loves His enemies. Everyday, He loves and cares for those who deny Him, ignore Him, take His gifts without gratitude, worship the creature over the Creator, and yet God sustains them, gives them life, gives them food for another day.

In 2 Samuel we see one of the many signs that David was a true child of God because of how he

treated his enemy, Saul.

In the last 13 verses of 1 Samuel, we read of the death of Saul. Saul's life ends in disgrace. Three of his sons are killed in front of him. He is mortally wounded by the Philistines, and knows it is only a matter of time before he is captured and then probably abused the way Samson was. So he asks his own armour-bearer to kill him, which the young man is too afraid to do. So Saul performs the act of self-murder, falling on his sword, and his armour-bearer, who is charged with his protection, could see no escape for himself except through death.

And when the Philistines are scavenging for loot among the slain, they come across Saul and his sons, and do to them in death what Saul feared they would do in life: disgrace them by decapitating them, putting his head and armor in their Temple, and fastening his body to the wall of the city of Beth Shan. Only the bravery of men of Jabesh Gilead rescued their bodies from becoming carrion for the birds and the beasts.

And so ended the life of Saul, who lived to the age of 72, and reigned for 42 years. He began well, but he soon became exactly what the people had asked for: a king like the surrounding nations. Those kings were jealous tyrants, protective of their thrones, vindictive and unjust. Saul became just that: a man who hunted down his rival, who slaughtered a town of unarmed priests, who made promises not to hunt David and then broke them, who tried to murder his own son.

If you have been the target of this man's evil for seven years, how would you greet the news of his death and disgrace? How would you respond?

What we will see in David is how you can respond when you have a new heart, when you have been born from above. David is going to evidence the heart of His descendant and Lord, the Messiah, who prayed for His enemies on the cross.

David is going to love his enemies, and we will see him love them in three ways. Three ways that are really commands for us too, as we are harmed and hated by others in the world.

We begin by reading of how David comes to hear of Saul's death.

2 Samuel 1:1 Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had stayed two days in Ziklag, 2 on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.

Remember, David has recovered his wives and family, and they are back in what must be the smoking ruins of Ziklag. Suddenly, a young fellow appears, who has walked all the way from the battlefield up north just to get to David down in Ziklag. He has done his appearance up to symbolise mourning: ashes and torn clothes. And then he feigns deep humility and submission. David begins to question him.

3 And David said to him, "Where have you come from?" So he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." 4 Then David said to him, "How did the matter go? Please tell me." And he answered, "The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

The man reports that the battle was lost, and adds the fateful news that Saul and Jonathan are also dead. This is important enough news that David needs to know how this man knows that, and how certain his knowledge is.

5 So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?" 6 Then the young man who told him said, "As I happened by chance *to be* on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. 7 "Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.'

8 "And he said to me, 'Who *are* you?' So I answered him, 'I *am* an Amalekite.' 9 "He said to me again, 'Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still *remains* in me.' 10 "So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."

The man claims that he was "by chance" on Mount Gilboa. Very unlikely that someone would by chance find himself at the scene of a battlefield. He then claims that a tired and wounded Saul saw him, and asked him to kill him in mercy. Perhaps the fact that the man was an Amalekite meant he would not have the scruples that others had over killing Israel's king. He claims that when he could see that Saul was dying, he then performed the act, and took the emblems of royalty as proof, and came to give them to David.

Now evidently, this story is a lie. Both 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10 tell us the same story: Saul asked his armour-bearer to kill him, and when he wouldn't, he committed suicide. Very likely, this Amalekite was one of the many human vultures who would scavenge a battlefield after the event, picking up coins, assorted items of value, weapons. But what he does happen upon is the body of Saul before the Philistines have found him. He saw that Saul had fallen on his own sword, and knew the Philistines would soon capture the body, so he could concoct a story and get away with it. He no doubt took the crown and bracelet and then thought of who to give this to.

It was well-known that David was regarded as the king-in-waiting, so this man decides to take these items to David. Since merely scavenging a body, and not burying it, is not exactly honourable, he comes up with a story that Saul had requested a mercy-killing, and he had done so. He mistakenly thought that David would be pleased, and that he would reward and bless the hand that had put Saul to death. He was banking on David hating his enemies, rejoicing in their destruction, gloating over their fall.

Instead of this, David responds with three acts of love.

I. David Felt Compassion on His Enemy

11 *Therefore* David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so *did* all the men who *were* with him. 12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

David does the symbolic act of tearing his clothes, and his men do the same. And for the rest of the day, there is sadness, weeping, and abstaining from food. They are grieved for the personal death of Saul and Jonathan, but also for the defeat of Israel, for what it meant for the people of God.

This is the very opposite of rejoicing when your enemy falls. David is grieved. Yes, he is undoubtedly mostly grieved for the loss of Jonathan, but he is also grieved for the dishonour done to God's name, to the many Israelites destroyed. As a leader he has to be grieved over what Saul's leadership has brought: so much pain, death, disgrace, and dishonour to the nation. But he is also grieving over Saul.

He can see Saul as a fellow Israelite, another man, made in God's image: a father, a husband. A man whose responsibilities crushed him, and as he turned to the flesh, they defeated him. He can look upon Saul in deep sadness and sympathy over what sin had done to the man.

¹² They reward me evil for good, To the sorrow of my soul. ¹³ But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart. ¹⁴ I paced about as though *he were* my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns *for his* mother. (Ps. 35:12-14)

This is what love can do for an enemy. When you love your enemy you remember that he is your neighbour. He is like you. He may have harmed you and brought pain to you, but you understand how humans are twisted, and we can harm and hurt even while we claim to be doing what is right. You can look upon your enemy not only as one who has inflicted pain upon you, but one who has inflicted pain upon himself, ruining his own life, his own relationships, his own future. Sympathy replaces hatred.

As you reflect on how you have been harmed, you may see that monster of a human being who abused you as a child, that awful bully at work, that one who came so close to you only to stab you in the back. By the grace of God, you can understand that there is only one thing worse than being abused, and it is to be the abuser. To be that person who victimises and exploits is to be a wreckage of a person, a deformed and twisted version of God's image, and mangled tortured soul lost in a maze of his own making, beginning to feel the fires of Hell even as he lives, shame and self-loathing mixing in with utter bondage to what he hates to love. By the grace of God, you look upon that enemy and weep for his soul.

¹⁷ Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; ¹⁸ Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease Him, And He turn away His wrath from him. (Prov. 24:17-18)

David has a second response to this man's story of having killed Saul.

II. David Sought Fairness For His Enemy

¹³ Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where *are* you from?" And he answered, "I *am* the son of an alien, an Amalekite." ¹⁴ So David said to him, "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?" ¹⁵ Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go near, *and* execute him!" And he struck him so that he died. ¹⁶ So David said to him, "Your blood *is* on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD'S anointed.'"

It's not clear whether David believed this man's story. David probably read in the man's face the hope that he would be congratulated for his claim to have killed Saul. But there is no doubt that he was by Saul's body, for he obtained the crown and the bracelet. David can spot a dishonourable man, trying to capitalise on death for personal gain. Had he simply delivered the royal insignia, he might have been treated differently. But he took it on himself to claim to have slain Saul.

He is telling this to David, who twice had the opportunity to kill Saul, and chose not to. On both those occasions, David had spoken to his men saying that it was forbidden to harm the Lord's anointed. Now he asks this Amalekite, how is it that you had no second-thoughts about killing God's chosen one? How is it that you had no caution, no fear, no carefulness about such a momentous event?

David then calls for the man to be executed, because he committed a capital crime, that of regicide. Even if the king asks for euthanasia, you do not give it to him. Assisted suicide is sin. This man, by his own mouth, has claimed to be the one who put Saul to death. So David says, by your mouth you will be judged. You've claimed ownership for killing Saul, therefore you are found guilty by your own mouth of regicide, and must be summarily executed.

Of course, this is the opposite of what the man thought he would get. He thought that by claiming to kill Saul, he had done David a favour. He didn't understand how high David's sense of ethics and divine authority were. No one had the right to execute the king.

What David is doing here is another act of love for his enemy. Even though Saul has mercilessly and unjustly sought David's life, now upon Saul's death, David is symbolically seeking justice for Saul. Had this Amalekite been telling the truth, then he had wronged the king and had to be punished. But even so, he laid claim to being the king's killer, and faced the just penalty for it.

Saul needed justice in two ways. He needed to be punished for his own sins, and any who sinned against Saul needed to be punished. Saul needed justice upon him, and he needed justice for him.

David knew that God would judge Saul for his sins. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. He could leave it to God to judge the man. That's why he kept refraining from raising his hand against Saul. But here he seeks justice for Saul. Saul's death, if it were caused by this Amalekite, must be avenged. David wasn't there, so he will take this man's confession as what he will go on, and seek justice for Saul.

When we have been wronged, our focus is on fairness for ourselves. We want debts paid, injuries made up for, wrongs righted. Love for your enemy looks like desiring fairness for your enemy. He has wronged me, and that must be fixed, but the same justice that works for me must also work for him.

It is easy to pray for justice to be done upon your enemy. But what are some of the ways we might seek justice for an enemy?

For one, I want to represent and speak of my enemy fairly. When I speak of that person, I know how much I want to colour the picture in my own favour, and demonise my enemy. But justice looks like speaking of him in ways that are fair. No slander, no character assassination, no innuendo, no unfounded assertions, no planting unfair suspicions. I will speak of my enemy as I would wish to be spoken of. We may be at odds; he may dislike me, but I will only speak truth concerning him.

I also want him to face no more than I would face for my sins. Remember Jesus said, ² "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (Matt. 7:2)

If you want a nuclear holocaust of fury to fall on your enemy's head, know that you are asking for the same thing to fall on you if you wrong others in the same way. And lest you say, "I would never", I remind you of the next thing Jesus said, ³ "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" ⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye?" ⁵ "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matt. 7:3-5)

That is, we have a chronic problem with minimising our own sins and maximising those of others.

I want to speak of my enemy fairly, and I want my enemy to be treated fairly.

What would you want if you were starving and thirsty and the only person who could meet your need was your enemy? You'd want them to treat you fairly and give you what you need.

David loved his enemy by showing genuine compassion on him, by seeking fairness for him, and then he did so in a third way.

III. David Showed Kindness to His Enemy

17 Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son, 18 and he told *them* to teach the children of Judah *the Song of the Bow*; indeed *it is* written in the Book of Jasher:

19 "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!

20 Tell *it* not in Gath, Proclaim *it* not in the streets of Ashkelon-- Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

21 "O mountains of Gilboa, *Let there be* no dew nor rain upon you, Nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the mighty is cast away there! The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

22 From the blood of the slain, From the fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty. 23 "Saul and Jonathan *were* beloved and pleasant in their lives, And in their death they were not divided; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions.

24 "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

25 "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan *was* slain in your high places.

26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women.

27 "How the mighty have fallen, And the weapons of war perished!" (1 Sam. 31:1-1:27)

Now picture the man who has been hunted for seven years by Saul, who now hears that Saul is dead. All eyes are on him. Will he rejoice? Will he pray a prayer of thanksgiving? He first tears his clothes and fasts. He retreats into his tent or burnt house in Ziklag for several hours, hours in which he probably sits with his lyre, and works at composing this song. Finally when he emerges, he questions this Amalekite and executes justice upon him. And then, with all eyes on him, the king-to-be sings.

David composes a song, an elegy or lament for Saul and Jonathan. This is an exquisite piece of poetry that David undoubtedly took many hours to compose. It was a song he taught to others, and ends up in the book of Jasher, which was very likely a book of songs that existed in ancient Israel.

Three times in this song, David says of Saul and Jonathan, "How have the mighty fallen", and the word "how" is best understood as "Alas, the mighty have fallen". He opens and closes with these words, celebrating how great in battle these men were. Verses 22 and 23 celebrate these men who were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions, their bows and their swords found their targets.

There is a symmetry in the song. In the opening lines of verse 20, David calls for this news to be kept from the daughters of the Philistines to sing and rejoice. In the closing lines of verse 24, he calls for the daughters of Israel to weep over Saul, who brought wealth and prosperity to many in Israel.

Three times, David refers to the high places, verse 19, 21, and 25. Saul and Jonathan were killed on Mount Gilboa, and David says this was a tragic offering, since the high places were often used for sacrifices. He symbolically asks for a curse of no rain or dew on the mountain on which they died.

His last words are a deeply moving tribute to his best friend. He calls Jonathan a deep, sweet friendship in his life. More so than any women in David's life, though David didn't exactly have the best marriages, so there's that. David has lost his closest friend in the world.

What is David doing? He is doing what he does best. He is a poet, so he creates, he makes a poem as a gift to his enemy, and to his friend. He makes a thing of beauty in honour of both his friend, Jonathan, and his enemy, Saul. This is a song that ends up sung by Israel, ends up in other books, and ends up in the inspired Word of God. What a gift, a musical tombstone, an artistic monument set up over the graves of Saul and Jonathan.

David gives a gift to his enemy. This is what Paul meant when he said, 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

How can anyone do this? Only if they know and love and are in union with the God who loves His enemies. Only when there is a principle within that frees you from the world's cycle of revenge and doing to others as they have done to you.

Think of the person who has harmed you most. Can you, could you have compassion, seek fairness for them, and if it were in your power, treat them with kindness? You can, if the Christ who died on the Cross lives within you.

In the Christian catacombs of Rome, a story is told of a rich man named Proculus who had hundreds of slaves. One slave named Paulus was so trustworthy that Proculus made him the steward over his household.

One day Proculus took Paulus with him to the slave market to buy some new slaves. The slaves were examined for their health and youth. One of the slaves was a very weak old man. Paulus urged his master to buy him. Proculus refused, as the man was weak and old. But Paulus insisted and said that the work would get done even better.

Proculus didn't understand, but agreed and bought the old man. Paulus was right; the work went better than ever. But it was not because of the old man. The old slave did no work at all, and instead Paulus did the work of two men, and gave the old man some of his food, took care of him and made him rest.

Finally Proculus confronted Paulus. He said, "Paulus, I trust you. I don't mind that you are protecting this old man and doing all his work for him. But I do want to know who he is. Is he your father?"

"No, he is neither my father, nor my teacher. He is my enemy."

"Your enemy!"

"Yes. He is the man who killed my father and sold us, the children, as slaves." Proculus stood speechless. "As for me," said Paulus, "I am a disciple of Christ, who has taught us to love our enemies and to reward evil with good.""