

While We Were Still Enemies, Jesus Died for Us

Read Time: 4 Minutes 27 Seconds

May I ask you a candid question? If you are a follower of Jesus today, what kind of person were you before you knew the Lord?

Perhaps you were raised in the faith and, as far back as you can remember, you always loved the Lord.

But others, like me, can sing, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me”—with an emphasis on that word wretch.

Although I was raised in a fine home, supported and loved by a wonderful mom and dad, I had become a wretched human being.

I started getting high at 14 years old and was shooting heroin at 15.

I stole money from my own father on several occasions and, of course, lied about it, to his face.

I caused my parents untold grief and pain.

I broke into a doctor’s office with a friend and stole drugs, just to do it. We also broke into a few other homes just for fun.

I lied through my teeth to those very same friends—my best friends.

I had a very cruel tongue and was mean-spirited and nasty.

I was full of pride.

I had a terrible temper.

I gratified the flesh however I could.

I mocked God.

Are you getting the picture? And this is from my limited, human perspective, not from God's perfect, omniscient perspective.

Paul put it like this: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior," (Col. 1:21). So much for the idea of us being good people who just needed a little help along the way!

Paul also wrote this: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath," (Eph. 2:1-3).

Yes, that is how God saw us when we were lost in our sins. We were His enemies. We were rebels. We were transgressors and sinners. We were "by nature deserving of wrath."

And it was in that very state, the state of being God's enemies, that Jesus died for us. Yes, it was then that He set His love on us and laid down His life for us—when we were still scheming; when we were still immoral; when we were still corrupt; when we were still vile. That's when He died for us, as He looked at the human race through all time, took full note of our evil and laid down His life for us.

What extraordinary love. What mind-boggling compassion. What unmerited mercy and favor and grace.

We deserved nothing. He gave us everything.

We merited death. He died in our place.

What can we do in return but give the whole of our lives to loving and following and serving Him with all our hearts and souls?

But there's something else to consider.

Jesus saw who we could be.

It's true that He saw our sin and our guilt. He knew full well what we deserved. And tragically, if we refuse His grace, we will pay our debt in full.

But He didn't stop there.

He looked at a man like Saul of Tarsus (aka Paul). He saw his murderous ways. In Paul's own words, "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man," (1 Tim. 1:13).

Yet Jesus appeared to Him—while he was that very man he just described, "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man"—and told him who he was going to become and how much he would suffer for Jesus' name.

From that time on, Saul (Paul) was never the same. As he explained, "I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief," (1 Tim. 1:13).

But if that could be said of Saul/Paul, who was a deeply devout, tremendously learned Jew, how much could it be said of many brazen sinners today? How many have no idea who they are sinning against? How many are deluded into thinking they are doing right when they are guilty of terrible wrong?

There are men and women who are Christians today who once were abortion providers. Some of them will tell you that they thought they were doing the right thing. They genuinely believed in the goodness of abortion—until their eyes were opened.

It's the same with people who are practicing Muslims. Or

staunch atheists. Or people with what we deem to be destructive political ideologies. (For all conservative readers, just think “Democrats.”) Some might even be our ideological or societal enemies, even sworn enemies.

But Jesus died for them too.

They too can be transformed, just as we were.

They too can receive forgiveness and new life, just as we did.

And in many cases, they too are acting “in ignorance and unbelief.”

So, while we engage in the culture wars and stay involved politically (and we do this without compromise or wavering), let us not think and fight as the world does, demonizing our opponents to the point of dehumanizing them.

Instead, let us ask God for His perspective, seeing the potential value in every human life, remembering that Jesus died for each and every one of us and envisioning what the worst of our enemies could become on the other side of the cross.

And rather than retweet (or re-post) the latest nasty, mean-spirited, derogatory, mocking comment or meme about one of the people we find it easy to hate, how about we stop for a moment and breathe a prayer for their redemption? What might happen if we did? {eo}

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