

Greg Laurie: Repercussions in Eternity

Sometimes people say they believe in the God of the New Testament, but they don't believe in the God of the Old Testament. They view the God of the New Testament as gracious, loving and merciful, but they see the God of the Old Testament as harsh, unforgiving, mean and angry.

To me that shows an ignorance of Scripture.

The God of the Old Testament and the New Testament are one and the same. He is the true and living God. And we see Him demonstrating love and forgiveness in both the Old and New Testaments.

God doesn't enjoy bringing judgment. The Lord Himself said, "I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live" (Ezek. 33:11b, NLT).

For instance, take the story of Pharaoh when Moses confronted him. Moses warned that if he didn't let God's people go, a series of plagues would come his way. And they did. So Pharaoh begged for mercy, and God extended mercy. Then Pharaoh hardened his heart again, and another plague came. This went on and on and on.

Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, and he experienced the repercussions of that. Yet God gave him chance after chance.

How about the story in Genesis of Noah building the ark? The flood didn't come right away. The Bible calls Noah "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5b, MEV), which means that he told people what was true. He told them how to get right with God.

They had plenty of opportunities to repent and turn to God,

but they laughed at Noah instead. He became a form of entertainment for them—until the first drops of rain began to fall.

Then there's the story of Nineveh. This ancient city was one of the most wicked to ever exist. We find the story of Nineveh in the Old Testament book of Jonah. Of course, when we think of Jonah, we immediately fixate on his being swallowed by the great fish or whale. But that isn't really the primary message of the book.

The primary message is that God cares about people. Nineveh was known for its savagery, and its people deserved judgment. But God gave them one last chance to repent. Jonah even said to God, "You are a gracious God and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jon. 4:2, NKJV).

Jonah didn't want to deliver God's message to the Ninevites. He tried to avoid it, and we know how that turned out. But ultimately Jonah did what God told him to do. As a result, Nineveh repented and turned to God, and God forgave them. It probably was the greatest revival in human history.

So don't tell me that the God of the Old Testament doesn't extend mercy. Scripture presents God as good and loving and merciful. But He is also righteous and just. And because He is just, He must administer justice.

God cares about lost people. Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents" (Luke 15:10, NLT). We immediately think from this statement that it's the angels who are doing the rejoicing. But notice that Jesus didn't say "joy among the angels." Rather, He said "joy in the presence of God's angels."

I'm not saying that angels don't rejoice. They probably do. But could Jesus have been referring to believers in heaven who know when someone came to Christ because of their lives and

testimonies on earth? Just imagine being in heaven when a family member or friend or former co-worker comes to Christ, and rejoicing and applause breaks out.

We need to remind ourselves that it's not over until it's over. We assume it's all done when we leave this life, and we don't think about our legacy.

For instance, maybe during your lifetime you reached three people for Christ. Those three might reach 20 people during their lives. And those 20 people could reach 40 people. Those 40 people might reach 100 people. In the end, your testimony could potentially reach hundreds, maybe even thousands, of people.

And who knows? Maybe someone who comes to Christ because of your testimony will become the next Billy Graham, who then will reach a generation. The Bible describes that as fruit to your spiritual account. It all comes back to your faithful witness.

Heaven is cheering us on. Hebrews 12:1 tells us, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."

Who makes up that huge crowd of witnesses? Before Hebrews 12 is Hebrews 11, which offers a description of some of the great men and women of faith who have gone before us. They served the Lord with faithfulness, and God used them—people like Abraham, Moses and Gideon.

Drawing on that scene, the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Since you are surrounded by all of these spiritual heavyweights, run with endurance the race that is set before you." This may mean these men and women are examples to follow, or it might mean they're watching us in some way.

However, even if they aren't watching, I know this much: Jesus is watching. He is the one we're running for.

We don't know when our lives will end. We don't know when we will be among the number on the other side. But what we do here on earth has repercussions in eternity. {eoa}

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