

// ILLUSTRATION //

Have you ever **hated** someone?

I know hate is a strong word. But have you ever disliked someone so bad that you didn't want anything good to happen to them?

My mother-in-law, Nancy, tells a story about her uncle. When she was a young girl, her uncle used to molest her. Maybe some of you in here can relate to that – you can imagine the scarring that took place.

Well, there came a time when she got older, and her uncle died. And when she found out that he had died, she was happy about it. She felt like he deserved to die, and he deserved to burn in hell.

// INTRODUCTION //

Have you ever felt that way about someone?

Imagine feeling that way about someone. **What if God told you** that person was going to be blessed beyond measure for the rest of their lives? What if God told you that He was going to make that person a multi-millionaire for the rest of their lives, and they would enjoy good health and a happy family?

And not only that, what if God told you to be the one to tell that person the good news?

Would you do it? Would you be happy to do it?

Most of us would probably be like, "God, you can find someone else."

The truth is, as Christians, we have been entrusted with a message of salvation, of hope, of love, of forgiveness. We are supposed to be helping people find Jesus and the hope of eternal life, and yet sometimes we can find ourselves thinking that certain people don't deserve that.

We do this on a **smaller scale** with people that have hurt us, or have hurt someone we love.

- The ex-husband who physically or emotionally abused us.
- The family member that molested us when we were young.
- The person who hurt our child.

We do this on a **bigger scale** when it comes to Muslims, or ISIS, or North Korea.

- They are anti-Christianity.
- They kill Christians.

And if we're not careful, we find ourselves sucked into the politics, and we began to hate them. **We want them to die, we want them to go to hell, "where they belong"**.

This is exactly what Satan wants. If Satan can keep us hating people, or afraid of people, then we won't bring the Gospel to them. And if we don't bring the Gospel to them, then there is no hope for them.

Cynthia was watching America's Next Top Model, Season 1, and there was an outspoken Christian chick and there was an atheist also who were competing. From the get go, the Christian chick made it clear that she didn't like the atheist. She didn't try and extend love toward her, or win her to Christ. This Christian woman acted like the atheist was the enemy.

How sad.

And we can sometimes find ourselves **acting that way toward people** we hate, or people who have hurt us, or even people with different beliefs like Muslims.

The Bible shares a similar story. It's found in the book of Jonah.

// SCRIPTURE – JONAH //

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

Jonah 1:1-2

Nineveh was the capital of the **Assyrian Empire**, which dominated the Ancient Near East for about **300 years** (900 – 605 B.C.).

³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 1:3

The Assyrian Empire was already in the process of exterminating the northern kingdom of Israel. They were a **brutal** and **relentless** military machine.

No wonder Jonah didn't want to go Nineveh.

So he boarded a ship headed for **Tarshish** - Jonah was heading for the farthest end of the then-known world.

But while at sea, **a mighty storm erupted** and threatened the lives of everyone on board.

And Jonah told everyone that he was fleeing the presence of the Lord, and that is why all this was coming upon them.

So they threw Jonah overboard. And as soon as they did, **the seas were calmed**.

¹⁷ And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 1:17

Many **“great fish”**, or “sea monsters”, have been found large enough to swallow a man. However, the point of the story is that it was a miracle, a divine confirmation of Jonah's mission to Nineveh. Except for some such astounding miracle, the Ninevites would have paid little attention to Jonah (Luke 11:30).

Because of stories like **Pinocchio**, we think of Jonah just chilling in this big open space inside a giant fish. I'm not so sure that is what it looks like to be swallowed by a fish.

¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Jonah 2:10

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God.

Jonah 3:1-5

And word got to the **king of Nineveh**, and he issued a decree for all people to **fast**, to **turn away** from all evil and violence, and to **call out to God**. And when God saw how they repented, God decided not to do what He was going to do.

And this upset Jonah. **Jonah was angry**. So Jonah went out of the city and sat down to see what would become of the city.

⁶Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” ⁹But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Jonah 4:6-11

God wanted Jonah to understand His compassion for the Gentiles so He set up a situation that would help Jonah see God's love for His creation.

God made **a vine grow up over the place where Jonah sat**. Jonah appreciated the protection from the sun that the vine provided.

The next day, **God removed the vine** and Jonah grieved for the loss of the vine.

God pointed out to Jonah how he was mourning the loss of a simple vine in which he had invested nothing.

God used this situation to illustrate to Jonah how much more God grieves for His creation, including the people and animals of Nineveh.

// APPLICATION //

There is so much we can take from this story. And there are so many life lessons we can learn.

For the sake of this sermon, we are going to draw out one thing: **God loves everyone, even those we hate.**

Another interesting thing is that **Joppa**, the place where Jonah embarked from to avoid preaching to another nation, was the very place God chose, **800 years later**, to tell Peter to receive people from other nations (**Acts 10**).

So, how can we create a culture of love that rises above past hurts, religious preference, and so on?

I want to briefly talk about 3 things we can do that demonstrate love:

1. Forgive.

When it comes to people who have hurt us, or someone we love, we need to forgive them.

Jesus, when He was hanging on the cross said:

³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Jesus is our ultimate example. He did nothing wrong, yet was being punished as a criminal and suffering a death that He didn't deserve. Yet, instead of hating the people who were killing Him, instead of wanting them to burn in hell for all eternity, He pleaded that God would forgive them.

To forgive them **does not mean** that we condone what they did. It does not mean that what they did was not wrong.

It just means that we will no longer allow this past incident to affect us any longer. And it also means we are choosing to be like Jesus and love beyond our circle of friends.

2. Pray.

We need to actively pray for those who have hurt us, or those who we hate, or those who are against us.

²⁷ "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Luke 6:27-28

Pray for them like you would any other person.

- Pray that they would be **saved**.
- Pray that they would be **blessed**.

Pray for Muslims all over the world. Pray for ISIS. Pray for North Korea.

If we truly love them, then we'll pray for them.

3. Evangelize.

One of the best ways we can demonstrate love toward someone is to tell them about Jesus.

Even if you don't fully reconcile with those who have hurt you in the past, do your best to **tell them about Jesus**. Let them know there is a hope, a love, a forgiveness, a salvation, that is only found in Jesus.

And don't allow fear to keep you away from **those our culture might hate**, like Muslims. Don't be afraid to talk to them about Jesus.

// CHALLENGE //

I have a challenge for us this week.

For this next week, I challenge you to pray once a day for either: **Muslims, ISIS, North Korea, atheists, or someone that has hurt you in the past.**

- Pray that God would **save** them.
- Pray that God would have **mercy** on them.
- Pray that God would **forgive** all of their sins.
- Pray that God would **open doors** for you to love on them and share the Gospel with them.

Pray for them as if you were praying for your own son or daughter.

// CONCLUSION //

Imagine the **radical testimony** we can leave if we genuinely loved people that have hurt us.

Imagine **if Christians loved on Muslims**, instead of resisting them or being afraid of them.

God loves everyone, even those we hate.

As Christians, we need to love everyone, even the unlovable.