

Compassion for the Lost

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Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah 4

[1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." [4] And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

[5] Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. [6] Now 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. [7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] When 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." [9] But 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." [10] And 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. [11] And 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?" (ESV)

- The book of Jonah ends with Jonah, in our passage, having a conversation, in prayer, with God.
- In it, God rebuked him for his anger and for his sinful lack of compassion towards the Ninevites.

Main Lesson: Because God demonstrates great compassion for lost sinners-- even His worst enemies -- so should we.

Jonah's Self-Righteousness

- What Jonah feared the most was actually happening -- his greatest enemy and Israel's greatest enemy....and in some sense you could say, God's greatest earthly enemy at the time, was now repenting.
- Because Jonah knew God's character, because he knew God was compassionate and gracious, He also knew that because The Ninevites had repented God was now going to bless them.
- This was the very opposite of what Jonah wanted to happen. He wanted the Ninevites destroyed!
- There is irony here. When God rescued Jonah from certain death, at that time, Jonah wasn't complaining about God being so compassionate.
- In chapter 2 we see Jonah praising God and thanking God from the belly of the fish that God saved his life.
- When it came to the Ninevites ---that was a different matter. Jonah said in effect "God, no mercy for them, no compassion for those wretched, no-good Ninevites."
- In this his self-righteousness was exposed.
- Even though he had recently sinned badly, Jonah still seemed to think of himself as better than the Ninevites and hence more deserving of God's mercy.
- For Jonah, how quickly God's mercy towards him in his own sin had faded into a long forgotten, distant memory.
- How quickly God's mercy to us, in our sin, can fade into a distant memory.
- Sadly, when God's mercy to us in our sin is forgotten, we don't easily sympathize with fellow sinners—and our ability to show compassion wanes.
- It is possible to become angry like Jonah as well.
- Sometimes in our darker moments, we may want others to get a bit of what they deserve, to get what they have coming to them, even though God has not given us what we deserve.
- The lesson: True compassion cannot thrive or survive in the soil of self-righteous pride.
 - The Apostle Paul viewed himself as the Chief of Sinners. Do we?
 - Had Jonah not been so self righteous and proud and instead viewed himself as the chief of sinners —how that would have transformed his own attitude towards the Ninevites!
- May we all follow Paul's example of humility and not Jonah's example of self-righteousness in how we relate to others— both believers and unbelievers.

Jonah's Anger

- God asked Jonah verse 4 "do you do well to be angry?"
- It was a powerful, probing, heart- searching rhetorical question with an obvious answer designed to correct Jonah and furthermore to correct all who are yielding themselves to the sin of anger.
- Clearly, Jonah did not do well to be angry.

- If you are struggling with anger, it is good to consider this same question: “*do you do well to be angry?*”
- Thankfully, God is eager to forgive us of our anger.

Jonah’s Selfishness

- The incident with the plant shows that Jonah’s primary concern was not the spiritual welfare of the people God had sent him to, but instead it was his own personal comfort and ease.
- For those of us living in this prosperous nation it would be wise, as an application of this text, for us to consider “are we more preoccupied with our own ease, our own comfort— than we are with the spiritual welfare and salvation of the lost souls around us?”
- Just as compassion cannot thrive in the soil of self-righteousness, compassion also cannot thrive in soil, in hearts, that are self preoccupied and self consumed.
- This passage breaks through any self-righteousness and self-preoccupation we may have and it says to us
 - ‘ don’t forget the thousands in Nineveh.’
 - Don’t forget your neighbors
 - Don’t forget your coworkers
 - Don’t forget your family members who don’t know the Lord

Ambassadors for Christ

- 2 Cor. 5:21 -- “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”
- So you and me... like Jonah in our story, are authorized representatives of King Jesus to this lost world.
- Because God demonstrates great compassion for lost sinners-- even His worst enemies -- so should we...How? By proclaiming Christ.
- Jonah was commissioned by God to go. And we have been as well.
- In the Great Commission, God has called us to go make disciples of all Nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit.
- Every believer and every church is called to go.
- May we go with the heart of Christ, with hearts filled with compassion.

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the text, Jonah 4. What initial observations and insights do you have from reading this text?
- How does this story reveal Jonah's self-righteousness? In what ways can we also be self-righteous?
- Paul viewed himself as the "chief of sinners." In this, how was he different from Jonah?
- How does remembering the gospel help us to be humble, and not self-righteous?
- How does the whole plant situation reveal Jonah's selfishness?
- In what ways can we at times be like Jonah, perhaps more concerned about our own comfort than seeking first God's kingdom and reaching out to the lost.
- How is it going with reaching out to your One Life? Is there anyone you might consider inviting to the Bridge Course.
- Consider taking time to pray for the upcoming Bridge Course, and each person's "One Life."