

The Compassion of God

Jonah 4:5-11

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⁵Jonah 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. 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?"

Last week, we saw that Jonah became very angry when God relented of the disaster. God shows grace. But Jonah has not relented of his anger. He was exceedingly angry. Hold that word 'exceedingly' in your mental note. And God had only one question for Jonah. Do you do well to be angry? And what does Jonah say or do? You would think Jonah would say something to God. But he doesn't. He simply walks away. Let's look at verses five and six.

⁵Jonah 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. 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.

The first time God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he ran away and tried to hide from God. The second time, he obeyed. And when he doesn't like the outcome, he gets angry and walks away from God. Jonah

was already sullen and angry. Now, he is being just petty. And what does he do in his petty anger? He builds a make-shift shelter and waits for the city to burn. This is quite unusual for a prophet of God. Jonah wants the people of Nineveh to perish. Yes, Jonah's message was a message of doom. But he was only a messenger.

The Bible tells us not to curse our enemies or rejoice when an enemy falls.

"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, ¹⁸ lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him." Proverbs 24: 17-18.

If God brings judgment, the prophet would be content with God's Sovereign will. If God decides to relent, the prophet would see his role at an agent of mercy.

The prophet Elisha was one such prophet. In 2 Kings chapter six, we see Syrians coming to war to with Israel. And the king of Israel appeals to the prophet Elisha. And Elisha asks the Lord to blind the armies of Syria. And he leads to a place where they are surrounded by the army of Israel. So the king of Israel sees this an opportunity to destroy the army and asks Elisha for permission. You know what Elisha tells the king? Give them a meal, a feast. *"Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."* ²³ *So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel."* 2 Kings 6:22-23

Listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew five - *"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 and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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 do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Matthew 5:43-48

Are you known for a critical spirit more than an accommodating spirit or forgiving spirit?

Jonah knows God and is appointed by God. But Jonah, in this evangelistic mission to Nineveh has become very inward. Do you see a pattern here? The farther Jonah goes from God and the more inward he becomes, the less joyful he is. When he ran away from God, things got worse. When he becomes inward, he gets angry and sullen. Yes, he repented and was thankful for his rescue from the ocean. But Jonah quickly goes back to his own feelings.

But God is so gracious with Jonah. And God bears with him. But God is about to teach a very important lesson. And God does it with such grace and gentleness.

Jonah isolates himself. But God appoints a tree as shade for him and to give him comfort. Another translation tells us that Jonah was miserable by himself. And look at Jonah's disposition now?

So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

See that word 'exceedingly'? Jonah was exceedingly angry. Now Jonah is exceedingly glad. This is the very first time, Jonah is actually happy. You could call his gladness a very shallow kind of happiness. Because, Jonah's happiness is very short-lived when God removes the plant. And he goes back to anger. Look at verses *seven* through *nine*.

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."

When the shade is gone, Jonah quickly miserable again. So miserable that he rather die. You see Jonah's joy is not rooted in God's presence but in the circumstances around him. And this time God asks Jonah the same question he asked the first time. But now, Jonah is angry again. Angry about what? He is angry that the plant has died and he doesn't have shade. You see the irony here? Jonah wishes that people of Nineveh ought to die but he wishes that the plant should have never died. God's compassion is far greater than we can ever imagine.

God has the final word for Jonah. Verses *ten* and *eleven*.

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?"

This is such a brilliant and touching question for Jonah. Jonah has concern for a plant that he did not grow. He would have some entitlement if he had planted the seed, watered it and seen it grow into a tree. The plant was there by the provision of God. And yet Jonah has sympathy for the plant. It's not wrong to

pity the plant. But when you see Jonah's heart condition about the people of Nineveh. They surely were subject to God's wrath. But they believed God, they called on God, they hope on God. They repented. Jonah was to take on God's nature. But he was unwilling to give grace even when he himself received grace.

God's question to Jonah is something like this.

You see God appointed Jonah as his messenger. God appoints a wind. God appoints whale. God appoints a plant. God appoints a worm. God appoints a scorching wind. Everything obeys God exactly as they are told except for Jonah. And when evil and violent people undeserving of God's mercy have desire to obey God, should God not have pity on them?

Not just one. A whole city. One hundred twenty thousand of them. And animals too. God cares for them too.

God's message today is the same. Not just for Nineveh for the whole world. God has appointed his own Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world. Whoever believes in him has life.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." Hebrews 1:1-2

And what did Jesus do?

"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Matthew 12:35-36

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **The Compassion Of God.** Jonah 4:5-11

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What does God's question to Jonah in verses 10-11 reveal to us about God's compassion and Jonah's? Compare and contrast.

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Read verse five. Just as Jonah went to "see what would become of the city", should you ever wish for anyone to fall or stumble? (including those who may have wronged you or hurt you) What should we do instead? Exodus 23:4, Proverbs 25:21-22, Matthew 5: 43-48, Romans 12:14-21
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: What can we learn about being compassionate from the Bible? Matthew 6:14, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 3:8