

God is Relentless in His Compassion – Jonah 4

If you recall from Jonah's story, when he finally arrived to Ninevah and delivered the 8-word message from God, the entire city, including its king, believed that God was going to do exactly what He said He would do. As a result, they sat in ashes, put on sackcloth, and participated in a national fast. Of course, their reasoning for this is given in Jonah 3:9 where the king asked: *"Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."*

Read Jonah 3:10 - *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

It's remarkable to me that the people of Ninevah believed God and made the decision to turn from their wickedness, especially from such a brief message. It is not remarkable to me though that God had compassion on them. That's just how God is... Compassionate. We need to understand that the Word of God, whether received as little or in much, is powerful and can absolutely change a person hearts. This is why the writer of Hebrews informs us; *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* **(Hebrews 4:12)**

We also need to understand that God recognized what the people did. He witnessed the things they did as a demonstration to Him that they had heard His warning and had changed their ways. It may seem silly to us, but if we consider their actions, we'll see that they understood the situation and did what was normal to them, culturally speaking, to change God's mind. Take note about this situation... God did not change His intentions. They, however, changed their attitude towards Him and the result was God dealt with them with grace rather than judgement.

How long has it been since you felt the power, presence, and work of God in your life? Perhaps the reasoning for this absence is that God has not witnessed you doing some of the things that people who love Jesus should be doing? Please do not misunderstand what I am saying here. You cannot work your way to salvation, but it is your salvation that serves as a motivator for your actions. This is what James meant when he said, *"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* **(James 2:17)** I'm not going to spend a great deal of time here because we need to get to the rest of Jonah's story, but, Biblically speaking, some of the daily works that demonstrate our love for Jesus are things such as reading your Bible, praying consistently, serving others, showing Christ-like characteristics such as: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.* **(Galatians 5:22-23)** Recognize those? That's right! The fruits of the Spirit.

To say that God relented here in Jonah 3:10 is to say that God had compassion on the people of Ninevah. Aren't you glad that God is a compassionate God. I bet in the end; Jonah was glad too.

Read Jonah 4

The first thing that should stand out to you after reading these verses is that Jonah did not learn from his previous adventure. He was still so filled with hatred for the Ninevites that when God spared them, he turned his anger to God. He even turned his anger towards himself. So much so, that he pleaded with God to take his life from him. I love how God manages Jonah's immaturity though. He simply looks at Jonah and in question form says, your anger is only causing you harm. Don't you see that? *"Do you do well to be angry?"* Let me offer a suggestion to you for the next time you are angry. Ask yourself the same question. *"Do you do well to be angry?"* Most of the time, our anger does more harm to self than to someone else. It's like unforgiveness in that regard. Here's what I know about uncontrolled anger. It eventually leads to resentment. Resentment leads to bitterness. Bitterness then turns to hatred and hatred leads to a whole mess of problems. If Jonah were here with us, I'm sure he would back me up on this. This is why Paul advises against holding onto anger when he writes in **Colossians 3:8**: *"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."* Jonah, in this little temper tantrum with God, shows us how "not to" follow Paul's advice. Doesn't he?

I want you to think about something this morning. When we read the book of Jonah, we discover some of the strongest evidence in all of Scripture for the sovereignty of God. Throughout this entire story, God knew exactly what was going to happen and He knew exactly what He was going to do. Only, God, garners such ability.

There was no message of repentance in Jonah's preaching. None! He said that the city of Nineveh was to be destroyed. Period. No hope was offered, no forgiveness was extended. On their own, the people of Nineveh humbled themselves and asked God's forgiveness. From a human perspective God changed His mind and did not destroy Nineveh. Yet we should not assume that God altered His plan. Since He knows the future, He knew that they would repent. Jonah knew this about God. He knew how God works. This is why he attempts to explain his disobedience in **Jonah 4:2**. Jonah knew that the Lord was compassionate and that if the Ninevites heeded the warning, that God would be faithful to handle them with mercy and grace. Guess what? That's exactly what happened.

What lessons should we take from our studies of the book of Jonah?

- God is not pleased when we are disobedient, but He expresses tender love when working to bring a sinner back to obedience.
- God's mission is to redeem all things. He desires to redeem and restore you through His Son Jesus Christ. Will you trust Him to do this?
- God will use every means possible to extend His grace to all kinds of people.
- God's mercy and grace shows up in His compassion and love. Even when we do not deserve it.
- God's ways are not our ways. We can rebel, just like Jonah, but God's plan can never be messed up.
- God's plans often involve our enemies. The same mercy and grace offered to me, and you are the same mercy and grace offered to them.