

3. An ungrateful prophet

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When it comes to God's mercy, we are quick to ask for it from the Lord. But I've noticed in my life as well as others', we don't extend the same kind of mercy to others, especially to those who are against us or don't get along with us well, in the same urgency.

In other words, we say, "Have mercy on me, but not them." I don't think that this kind of attitude would fly it well with our gracious God.

If this Book of Jonah had ended at the last verse of chapter 3, history would have portrayed Jonah as the greatest prophet and evangelists of all time. After all, preaching one message in three day crusade that motivated over a half million people to repent and turn to God was no small accomplishment. But the Lord wants us to learn something important from the heart of this ungrateful prophet.

As I mentioned to you before, in the chapter 1, we find Jonah was running away from God. In chapter 2, he was running to God while he was in the belly of the great fish. In chapter 3, after he was called back to his duty, Jonah was running with God. Finally, in chapter 4, we see him again running up against God. Jonah must had one very hard head like us.

If in chapter 1, Jonah is like the Prodigal Son, insisting on doing his own thing and running away from the Lord. Then in chapter 4, he's like the Prodigal's older brother – critical, selfish, legalistic, angry and unhappy with what was going on.

It is not enough for God's servants simply to do their Master's will. We must do the will of God from our hearts. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart. That's where Jonah's problems were to be found.

The most remarkable thing is that God tenderly dealt with His ungrateful prophet and sought to bring him back to the place of joy and fellowship like He would do with anyone of His children.

A. MERCY TO ME, NOT TO THEM

Jonah 4:1-4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4 Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

For the second time in this account, Jonah prays, but his second prayer was much different in content and intent. He prayed his best prayer in the worst place, the fish's belly, and he prayed his worst prayer in the best place, at Nineveh where God was working mightly. His first prayer came from a broken heart, but his second prayer came from an angry heart. In his first prayer, he asked God to save him, but in his second prayer, he asked God to take his life!

Once again, Jonah would rather die than not have his own way. In other words, he says, "I quit. I am going for a non-prophet status from now on."

Jonah didn't give his message because he cared about the people of Nineveh, but he was hoping that they would reject his message and God would fry them extra crispy. That would be his pleasure to see them getting God's wrath.

Jonah himself called on the mercy of God while he was inside of the belly of the great fish and enjoyed the mercy of God when it was extended to Jonah. Now he resents God's mercy when it is extended to others. What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the people of Nineveh?

Luke 6:37-38 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh is so painful to Jonah that he would rather die than witness it. It has been said, "We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive."

Can you imagine Billy Graham finishes a crusade and the people running down the stairs to receive Jesus into their hearts and he gets upset because they become Christians? No right-minded evangelist would do that except Jonah.

As we can see Jonah might knew some of the attributes of God, but He didn't realize how the sovereignty of God works.

Jonah also was concerned about his reputation, not only before the Ninevites, but also before the Jews back home. When Jonah's friends found out that he had been the instrument of saving Nineveh from God's wrath, they could have considered him a traitor to official Jewish foreign policy.

If we are angry against God, He will ask us the same question He asked Jonah: Is it right for you to be angry? And the answer must always be "No, Lord. All Your ways are right even if I don't understand them."

About ten some years ago, I was working for a big nationwide corporation. I was working on creating a graphic management position that would require a lot of traveling around the country. Before I went to the corporate headquarters in Denver, CO, I asked the Lord for His will in this matter. They didn't accept my proposal and I didn't get that position. I should have known better, but I was angry at God for not allowing me to have that job. A few minutes later, I had to apologize to Him for my stupidity.

B. AN OBJECT LESSON FOR JONAH

Jonah 4:5-8 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint.

Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah hoped that the repentance of Nineveh was not real and hoped that he would see the city destroyed after all. He went out of the city for his own safety and made himself a front row seat to see God's wrath against the Ninevites.

Just as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, now He prepares a particular plant to grow overnight to shelter Jonah as he waited hoping that they city would be destroyed. This is the first time we find Jonah happy. He was selfish and petty. His happiness was just as fleshly as his anger.

The Lord was giving Jonah an object lesson here:

The combination of the hot sun and the smothering desert wind made him want to die even more. As God had done in the depths of the sea, He was reminding Jonah of what it was like to be lost – helpless, hopeless, miserable like the people of Ninevah before they repented. Jonah was experiencing a taste of hell as he sat and watched the city.

A simple test of character is to ask ourselves, "What makes me happy? What makes me angry? What makes me want to give up?"

Jonah was a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways as the Book of James declared.

- One minute he's preaching God's Word, but the next minute he's disobeying it and fleeing his duty post.
- While inside the great fish, he prayed to be delivered. But now he asks the Lord to kill him.
- He called the city to repentance, but he wouldn't repent himself!
- He was more concerned about creature comforts than he was about winning the lost.
- The Ninevites, the plant, the worm and the wind have all obeyed God. But this ungrateful prophet still refuses to obey, and he has the most to gain.

Can a godly person go from being godly to being selfish in no time? Yes, any one of us can be in that situation. Whenever we discard God's perspective for our sins and ramifications of our selfishness, it will happen.

C. A LESSON FROM THE PLANT

Jonah 4:9-11 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10 But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?"

The plant was just a plant, and Jonah had no personal interest or investment in the plant except what it provided for him at the moment. Jonah's anger was unrighteous. Unrighteous anger feeds the ego and produces the poison of selfishness in the heart.

We can be quick to say that Jonah was wrong. What about us? When we know how much we have been forgiven by God, how can we not forgive those who offended us?

A wise man gave us the definition of "Forgiveness": Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me.

Do you have someone in your heart who offended you before and you don't want to forgive that person? I said that you DON'T WANT, not CAN NOT. Yes, you can forgive that person. You might say to me, "You don't know what he has done to me." You are right, I don't. That person might be someone took advantage of you emotionally, physically and financially. What are you going to do about it, since you heard the message from God? You need to forgive that person no matter how you were hurt by that person. If you are not going to forgive, you are not hurting anyone else except yourself. You would become bitter, a short-tempered and nasty person to be around.

There is one person who wept over when He saw a city. It was Jesus Christ our Lord. I need to compare a few things between Jesus and Jonah:

1) Jonah preached a message of judgment.

But Jesus preached a message of grace and salvation.

2) Jonah almost died for his own sins.

But Jesus willingly died for the sins of the world.

3) Jonah's ministry was to only one city.

But Jesus is "the Savior of the world".

4) Jonah's obedience was not from the heart.

But Jesus always did whatever pleased His Father from His heart.

5) Jonah didn't love the people he came to save.

But Jesus had compassion for sinners and proved His love by dying for them on the cross.

6) Jonah waited outside the city to see if God would kill those he would not forgive.

But on the cross, outside the city, Jesus asked God to forgive those who killed Him.

Since Jonah wrote the Book, I think it is reasonable to say that after this experience, Jonah left the dead plant and went back to Nineveh, and I think that he rejoiced with them that they had come to a saving knowledge of God.

But the real issue isn't how Jonah answered God's question. The real issue is how you and I today are answering God's questions:

Do we agree with God that people without Christ are lost?

Like God, do we have compassion for those who are lost?

Do we pray that the Gospel will go to people in every part of Sahuarita, Green Valley, Corona de Tucson, Rio Rico and the world, and are we willing to be a part of that process to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Do we rejoice when sinners repent and trust the Savior?

Are we willing to overcome the differences and to forgive those who were against us with the same grace and mercy of God that we received from Him?

All of those questions and more are wrapped up in what God asked Jonah. We can't answer for him, but we can answer for ourselves.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) It is our choice to accept the will of God that is backed by His sovereignty or refuse it and face the consequences.

No matter what we try to do against God's will, He will accomplish His will over ours in His time. By standing against Him, we are the ones who miss out wonderful opportunities to be used by Him for His glory.

2) We need to remember that salvation belongs to our God.

No other name under the heaven than Jesus we can be saved – no special social class, no particular race would receive any special preference from Him. It is available to everyone only through Jesus Christ.

3) God's forgiveness is not only for our own sins against Him, but also it is our model so we can extend this forgiveness to others.