

JEALOUSY OF OTHERS Sunday School- March 14, 2010

Unifying Topic: A COMMUNITY TO REDEEM

Lesson Text

I. God's Compassion (Jonah 3:10)

III. Jonah Is Displeased With God (Jonah 4:1-3)

III. Jonah's Action (Jonah 4:4-5)

The Main Thought: And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, [was] not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou [art] a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.. (Jonah 4:2, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When others receive some sort of benefit, deserved or undeserved, we can experience jealousy and anger and say, Why them? Is there another way to respond? Jonah came to realize that God is in control of things in the world and God's way of dealing with others differs from ours, but God's steadfast love abounds to all.

Lesson Aim: To show how Jonah was given a second chance to obey God and was still resentful.

Life aim: To show that if we repent He will forgive us. His harsh judgment is reserved for those who persist in rebellion.

3:10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

4:2 And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

4:3 Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4:4 Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?

4:5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

HISTORY:

God calls Jonah to be a prophet to the wicked city of Nineveh, but Jonah rebels and flees across the sea in the opposite direction. After God deals with Jonah a second time, Jonah goes to Nineveh, preaches a short sermon, and the whole city repents. So, God did not change. The Ninivites did. They heard God's Word spoken by Jonah and then repented and aligned themselves with God and He responded to their repentance in line with His character. Jonah witnessed a great example of true repentance. The Ninevites were doing fine at this point-but not Jonah. He still needed work. You see, God is not satisfied with mere compliance to His will...which is apparently what He got from Jonah in **chapter 3**. Jonah did what God had asked him, but his attitude towards the Ninevites remained unchanged.

LESSON:

Jonah 3:10: God's Compassion

God took note of Nineveh's repentance, something which involved more than mere words or token gestures. Verse 10 does not tell us that God heeded the words of the Ninevites, or even that He regarded their sackcloth and ashes, but that He took note that their deeds had changed; that they had "*turned from their wicked way.*" Here is genuine repentance. No mere words of regret, no trite, "*I'm sorry,*" but a change of conduct signaling a genuine change of heart. Nineveh had truly repented of her evil ways, and God therefore relented (to become more sympathetic or amenable and do something previously ruled out or allow something previously forbidden) of the calamity which He had threatened. As a result of the genuine repentance of the people of Nineveh, God chose to spare them from divine punishment. God looked on their works. What works?—not sackcloth, not ashes, not fasting; for Jonah does not now mention these; but God had respect to their works —they turned from their evil way. God saw this, and that was the thing He looked for and required. We hence see that God was not pacified by outward rites only or by the external profession of repentance, but that He rather looked on the true and

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important change which had taken place in the Ninevites, for they had become renewed. These then were their works, even the fruits of repentance.

God persists in warning us and confronting us until we turn away from sin and accept His forgiveness. He did that to Jonah through circumstances that got his attention. And He did it to the city of Nineveh through the preaching of judgment by Jonah. But what is even more awesome is that God is the one who instigates our ability to repent and turn back to Him.

- God first sovereignly chose the city of Nineveh on which to focus His love; out of grace He elects these people to salvation.
- Secondly, the people respond to God's Word through Jonah and repent of their sin.
- And then thirdly, God mercifully relented in granting forgiveness for sin and withholding judgment, but in fact that was His purpose all along.

Of course, God knew what would happen before Jonah ever arrived! Thus God spared Nineveh, and did not the evil which He said He would do against them. God has unconditional love, however, His promises and some of His threatenings are conditional. What would have been the use of proclaiming the decree, if it had been irreversible (permanent)? Therefore, He changes His dealings with us according to our relation to Him, and because He cannot repent, or be other than who He was and is.

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent..." Num. 23:19--interpreted to mean that "the Lord informed Balak that He, the true God, is not like a human being who can lie when it's profitable or a mortal who will change his mind for the sake of convenience." Balaam was hired by king Balak of Moab to come and curse Israel. But for all his eagerness to do so, Balaam couldn't curse the chosen people of God. When Balaam discovered that he was unable to curse Israel, he revealed what Jehovah had to say to king Balak: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" Num. 23:19-20.

In another instance, God threatened to overthrow Sodom because of their grievous sin. *"I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." Gen. 18:21.* God's use of the language of "if not" suggests that the future of Sodom remains somewhat open, even if God has primarily decided what to do. Also, God is omniscient—all knowing! He reveals His intentions to Abraham who, indeed, pleaded for the Sodomites. But Abraham was never asked to go and preach repentance to save the city from destruction. However, he tried to intercede for Sodom, demonstrating true compassion for others. God is showing His compassion in talking to Abraham as Abraham asks, if there were 50; 45; 40; finally as few as 10 righteous, would You destroy the city. God says, He would not destroy the city. And we know that there were fewer than 10 righteous people that were not destroyed in that city (Lot and his two daughters escaped the city's destruction; his wife being disobedient turn into a pillar of salt).

When sinners repent of the evil that they have done against God, inasmuch as, He leaves His threatening unfulfilled, and *"does it not."* That's where His compassion is still available. Their conversion was part of His perfect plan! When we change our wills, God wills a change. When we choose to repent, God may choose to relent. God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance He delayed it another 150 years.

(Note: Salvation always works this way! God loves the sinner, has a plan to save his soul and He sends the Word so that the sinner might be convicted and see his condition. When that sinner repents of his sins, God saves him by grace through faith, Eph. 2:8-9. Of course, it's all part of His plan!).

Jonah 4:1-3: Jonah Is Displeased With God

¹Jonah is angry and tells God that this is why he fled in the opposite direction from Nineveh in the first place—because he knew that God was merciful. Despite having just personally experienced the mercy of God in his own desperate situation, Jonah begrudges that same mercy to the city of Nineveh. In chapter one Jonah acted

¹ http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Jonah%203_10-4_11.htm
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like the prodigal son but here in the fourth chapter he is acting more like the pouting of the elder brother. Jonah was steamed...not at his enemies, the Ninevites, but at God Himself. Jonah had a problem. He was not completely yielded to God. His mind knew God's truth – His will obeyed God's orders – but his heart did not follow his mind and will. When the Lord takes the message of Jonah and saves a city, Jonah reacts in a very bad way. As God's displeasure and anger subsided Jonah's displeasure and anger rose.

4:1 The Prophet's Rage

The phrase "*very angry*" means that Jonah "*burned with anger*". He was burning mad at the holy, righteous, and perfect God because God did not kill the people of Nineveh! There are other reasons. Here are a few:

1. One of the marks of a true prophet was that his prophecies always came true, Deut.18:20-22. Jonah had said that the Ninevites would be overthrown, Jonah 3:4. If this did not happen, then Jonah would be looked upon as a false prophet.
2. His fellow Jews would be angry with him for preaching a message that brought salvation to their enemies. They might see him as a traitor.
3. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh! Nothing would have pleased him more than seeing them all destroyed by God!

(Note: Before we get too hard on Jonah, maybe we need to look at our own lives and examine how we have responded to the Lord working out His Will in our lives! How many times have we reacted with anger when God did something that went against our plans? Perhaps we need to remember the counsel of the Bible, Prov. 16:9; Ps. 37:23.)

4:2 The Prophet's Resentment—Pity Party

Jonah prays, "*O Lord was this not what I said when I was still at home?*"; and that this is what he knew and expected would happen because God acted consistently with His character. He said, "*...for I knew the Lord art the compassionate and gracious God, is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*" He doesn't want God to show grace to the Gentile Ninevites, but only to Israel. This is one of the reasons why Jonah ran away in the first place. What you see here is a man throwing a first-class pity party! Jonah didn't get his way and he wants God to know that he is upset. His hurt and anger is so deep that he even attempts to take it out on the Lord!

(Note: Just in case you didn't know it, *your arms are too short to box with God!* Just because He doesn't order life like we think it should be ordered, we had better be careful when we decide to line up against God! Nobody likes life and what it brings all the time, but those who love the Lord the deepest are those who remember that God always knows best and He always does what is best for His children, Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17. The safest and sanest course of action is one of humble obedience and submission to what life brings our way. (e.g. Job - Job 1:20-22).)

4:3 The Prophet's Request—Throwing in the Towel

To put it bluntly, Jonah wanted God to kill him! He wasn't the first. Moses and Elijah both prayed for the same thing, Num. 11:15; 1 Kings 19:4. Jonah did not want to commit suicide; he wanted God to take his life. Because he didn't get his way and because he had to endure embarrassment, he wanted to give up on life itself. What needed to be changed in Jonah was that he needed to be taught the value of a human soul.

(Note: How many people have put their testimony to death and given up on serving God because He didn't give them what they wanted? I will just remind you again that obedience to what the Lord brings our way is better than anything else you can give Him, 1 Sam. 15:22; Rom 12:1-2!)

Jonah 4:4-5: Jonah's Action

4:4 Fundamental Question: God's question to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry?" (v.4, 9) suggests that Jonah doesn't understand the nature of grace. "Is that your right?" Divine logic drives us to only one answer: "No, Lord, it is your right, not mine. Rather than answering the question, Jonah just ignored it.

4:5 Safe Vantage Place: After Jonah is confronted about his anger, he does not change his mind. Instead, he climbs a hill outside the city, folds his arms and sits down to wait. He is probably hoping the Lord will change His mind! God tested Abraham to reveal whether he had the heart of God in him or not, and Abraham passed the test. Jonah failed the same test. Jonah doesn't get his way about Nineveh and he doesn't get his way about dying so he just starts to pout!

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When Jonah reached an elevation where he was high enough to see all of Nineveh, he built himself a shelter, sat in its shade—something to shield himself from the severe desert heat, which was pretty much a necessity because the average temperature in that region was between 110 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit. In other words, it was not a good place to allow yourself to get hot under the collar! After putting up his little shelter, he sat in the shade awaiting judgment to fall on Nineveh. What a contrast to the king of Nineveh, sitting in ashes and sackcloth!

(Note: There are lots of people just like Jonah in the church! For some reason life has not gone as they had it planned. Their response is not humble submission to the will of the Lord. No! They just quit on Him! It does not say much for their love for Him or for their devotion to His will when their disappointments translate into disobedience and desertion on their part. There is no place in spirituality to carry a wounded attitude. I promise you that if you decide to go to war with God over His will, He is going to win that battle every time!)

SUMMARY:

Here is genuine repentance. No mere words of regret, no trite, "I'm sorry," but a change of conduct signaling a genuine change of heart. Nineveh had truly repented of their evil ways, and God therefore relented of the calamity which He had threatened. If God just wanted to save Nineveh the book would have ended in chapter 3. But there was still more to do. God wanted to save Jonah...from himself! Jonah was distraught that God had spared Nineveh. He expected the ashes of destruction, not the ashes of repentance. Jonah didn't want them forgiven. He didn't want God to relent of His intention to destroy them. Jonah was angry because God granted mercy instead of judgment to the Ninevites. Jonah was disobedient because of his own prejudice and hatred and his life was a paradox:

- A prophet of God, yet a runaway from God
- A man drowned, and yet alive.
- A preacher of repentance, yet one that repines at repentance.

Jonah represents Israel in the book.

- If we understand Jonah as a type for Israel we now see the jealousy of the Jews towards the Gentiles due to the Gentiles having been brought into God's family apart from Israel.
- Jonah, as a type of Israel, conforms to the attitude of the older brother who was jealous and angry over the fuss his father made over his reprobate brother.

As a prophet Jonah should have been God's servant fulfilling God's command. However, Jonah did everything he could to avoid fulfilling the divine command. Jonah finally sank into a deep depression and grew angry toward God because of the compassion God had on the Ninevites. In chapter 2, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, but in chapter 4, Jonah prayed that God would take his life. Jonah wanted to die. And as God did not abandon Jonah but still dealt with him, so does God not abandon the Jews but still deals with them.

Observations from Jonah:

1. God desires for us to see the whole world as He sees it; to see that the people who don't know the difference between their right and left hand are the victims of the enemy, not the enemy.
2. God's desire is for us to be available so He can express His compassion toward those people through us.
3. God desires for us to be a sign in our generation. We're to be men and women who have the resurrected Jesus Christ living within us, and the resurrected Jesus Christ is the One who brings life out of death, and He is willing to bring life out of death to everyone around us if you are available and know the real enemy.

APPLICATION:

Where are we right now---in a Tarshish of escape or in a Nineveh of obedience? Are there people we resist loving and caring for because their values, beliefs, or lifestyle contradict ours? Be willing to act on God's passion. Jonah had a hard heart toward the lost. The sad thing is at times our hearts are just as hard as his. We do not want to be disturbed in our lives of comfort. Are you extending compassion to anyone now? Let God move you toward the unbeliever, and as He does, tell the Good News of God's passion for them.