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“It is God’s compassion, shown to us on a hill outside of Jerusalem, that has made it possible for each of us to enter the New Jerusalem and spend eternity with our Savior, beholding His glorious face.”

JONAH BECOMES ANGRY WITH THE LORD – JONAH 4:1

He didn’t want to go to Nineveh — to carry out God’s will. Then—
He didn’t want to leave Nineveh — until God carried out His will.

Jonah wanted to see God destroy Nineveh. He had preached its condemnation with fervor throughout its streets. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” But Nineveh’s repentance had overturned Jonah’s prophecy and discredited him. Pride and anger were now controlling Jonah’s disgruntled attitude.

God’s anger toward Nineveh had subsided when the people repented. But Jonah’s anger against Nineveh remained red hot. He wanted vengeance, not forgiveness, to fall on Nineveh. It was the capital city of Assyria, Israel’s constant enemy.

JONAH VENTS HIS ANGER – JONAH 4:2-4

It is amazing that the Lord of heaven and earth stooped down to hold a conversation with one of His pouting children. The Lord began by asking Jonah a question. “Have you any right to be angry” because I showed compassion to Nineveh? Jonah did not answer. He gave God the “silent treatment.”

OUR REACTION TO GOD’S QUESTION

We all have times when we become angry with God:

- When we lose a loved one.
- When we are diagnosed with a debilitating or incurable illness.
- When our children go astray.
- When our paycheck doesn't provide for our family's needs.

Thankfully, we have a loving God who forgives our angry moments and casts them "into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19) We who belong to the Lord are recipients of His blessings, even during difficult times in our lives. He stands beside us, lifting our burdens and giving us needed strength.

GOD IS A GOD OF COMPASSION

In the first chapter of Jonah, we were told that Jonah had chosen to run away from God's call on his life, but we were not told why he had chosen to do so. Jonah finally voiced his "why." "Lord ... You are a ... compassionate God," was Jonah's excuse.

- It was God's compassion that had kept Jonah's boat afloat during the storm.
- It was God's compassion that had provided a great fish to swallow Jonah to keep him from drowning.
- It was God's compassion that had caused the great fish to safely eject Jonah onto the shore.
- It was God's compassion that had given Jonah a second chance to preach to the Ninevites.

Jonah was a willing recipient of God's compassion, but he was not willing to see God's compassion extended to repentant pagans that were enemies of Israel.

JONAH IS FAMILIAR WITH GOD'S WORD

Jonah knew: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." (Psalm 103:8) David had written these words many years earlier, and Jonah apparently had committed them to memory, but he had not committed them to his way of life.

Jonah did not know that one day it would be God's compassion that would cause Him to send His only Son, Jesus, to this earth to become his Savior, our Savior, and the Savior of all — including pagan Gentiles who repent and believe in Him.

JONAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jonah is a prototype of the "older brother" in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, who became angry because the father chose to forgive his disobedient sinful brother. (Luke 15:28-31)

We also see "Jonah" in Jesus' parable of the Unmerciful Servant who was personally forgiven much by the king, but then unwilling to forgive a lesser debt owed to him. (Matthew 18:23-33)

JONAH'S PRAYER LIFE

Jonah had prayed to the Lord God when he was terrified in the belly of the great fish. Jonah's prayer then included these words: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and You listened to my cry." (2:2)

Now we are told that Jonah again prayed to the Lord. This time, he prayed because he was angry.

Jonah's prayer began with an accusation against the Lord: "Is this not what I said when I was still at home?" Then he quickly turned to an excuse for his disobedience: "That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish." Next, Jonah went to the heart of his complaint: "Lord, You are a gracious and compassionate God... Who relents from sending calamity." Jonah ended his prayer with a death wish: "Take away my life. For it is better for me to die than to live."

The same man who had clung to life and prayed to live while inside of the great fish, was now praying to die, because God was not doing what Jonah wanted Him to do — destroy the Ninevites. They had demonstrated their repentance by wearing sackcloth and sitting in the dust. This was the very thing which Jonah now needed to do, rather than sitting in defiance of God.

Interestingly, there is no mention of Jonah praying for the people of Nineveh while he preached God's judgment to them. He did not ask God to bring revival to the Ninevites. Jonah was a prophet, but he was not an evangelist. He was willing to preach God's Word of judgment, but not His Word of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jonah was fleshing out the first words which Jesus would one day say in His Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" But Jonah was not following Jesus' correction of that statement: "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:43-44)

JONAH WAITS FOR GOD'S DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH – JONAH 4:5-7

It is disheartening to read that Jonah made himself comfortable while he waited to see Nineveh destroyed. Imagine being comfortable while watching the mass destruction of thousands of people, especially people he had just preached to.

When our Savior walked this earth, He wept over sinful Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41) Jesus also corrected James and John for wanting to call fire down on the sinful people in a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54-55). But Jonah went into the hill country east of Nineveh and picked a choice spot to sit and watch its destruction.

Jonah's self-serving nature encouraged him to be at ease while he waited. So he built a shelter to shade himself. Then God again showed compassion to Jonah by providing a vine with large leaves to grow over his makeshift home. R. Reed Lessing suggests that it was a qiqayon plant which provided the extra shade for Jonah's comfort.

Jonah's attitude had now vastly improved. It is the only time in the entire account of Jonah that we are told, "Jonah was very happy." His self-designed comfort zone brought him pleasure, and the vine God had provided added to his pleasure.

But Jonah's comfort zone was short-lived. The next morning, as the sun rose, God sent both a worm to eat the vine and a scorching east wind which likely destroyed Jonah's makeshift shelter, leaving him exposed to the hot blazing sun. Before long, Jonah became sick. Most likely he suffered a heat stroke.

Jonah had failed to make his shelter "in the shadow of the Almighty." (Psalm 91:1) So often we, like Jonah, look

to a vine for protection when we should be looking to the Creator of the vine for protection.

JONAH AGAIN BECOMES ANGRY – JONAH 4:8-11

Jonah once again reverted to his angry, "pity me" self. He again stated his earlier death wish. "It would be better for me to die than to live." (4:8)

God's Word to Jonah did not change. His question remained the same. "Do you have a right to be angry?" This time Jonah answered the Lord. His thoughtless "I do" response came from a stubborn, self-centered, "I'm right" mind-set, not God's mind-set which would have encouraged him to "be kind...compassionate...forgiving." (Ephesians 4:32)

In spite of Jonah's short, surly retort, God answered Jonah with kindness and wisdom.

God's earlier provision of the vine was now going to serve His purpose by providing an object lesson meant to help Jonah understand why He had chosen to forgive the people of Nineveh. God said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

God's question is an open-ended question. It leaves us wondering how Jonah responded.

- Did Jonah again disregard God's Word given to him?
- Did Jonah try to justify his anger? or
- Did Jonah go back into Nineveh and mentor its new found believers?

Perhaps archeologists have provided a clue to our question. In the ruins of ancient Nineveh, there is a mound which covers forty acres and is 100 feet high. Its name is "Nebi Yunus", or "Prophet Jonah", and is believed to contain the remains of Jonah. It lies in present-day Iraq.

GOD'S UNANSWERED QUESTION INVITES OUR ANSWER

Jonah's lack of a response to God's question serves to open His question to each of us. Do you believe that God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to every person, in every culture, in every nation? God does! That is why He has called us to: "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

We have a choice. We can disregard God's Word, or we can respond by sharing the Good News of Jesus' redemption for all people with those around us.

God had the last word in His dialogue with Jonah at Nineveh. He always has the last word in your life and in my life. His last word to Jonah was a word of compassion — compassion for the people of Nineveh.

His last word to each of us who belong to Him will be a word of compassion. "Enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21b NAS)

*Jonah, you were right.
Our God is a God of compassion.
"His love endures forever." (Psalm 136)*

EPILOGUE

The entire book of Jonah is a clash between obedience and disobedience, anger and compassion. At the end, compassion wins because God is compassion in its highest form. God is love! (1 John 4:16)

While studying Jonah, God provided each of us with a person we could identify with. We share Jonah's struggles:

- Lack of obedience
- Anger
- Frustration
- Terror
- Pain
- Relief
- Testing
- Usefulness
- Questioning

We may not want to be like Jonah, but most of us are. There is a constant struggle in our lives between wanting to please God and wanting to please self. Jonah could be your parent, your child, your spouse, your friend — you. Jonah mirrors many of our lives. Jonah was used by God in spite of his weaknesses. We, too, are used by God in spite of our weaknesses.

Perhaps Jonah is the best example of grace—pure grace. Jonah did nothing to merit God's kindness, yet God showed him kindness and love. He is a perfect example of sinner/saint.

SIMILARITIES WITH TWO PSALMISTS

King David shared many of Jonah's negative feelings when he wrote, "If only You, God, would slay the wicked!... Do I not hate those who hate You, Lord,... I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies." (Psalm 139:19-22) But David did not end his thoughts about hatred and enemies on a negative note. David, "a man after His [the Lord's] own heart," asked God to "Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24) That is something which each of us should regularly pray.

We are not told if Jonah's negative thoughts changed. The psalmist Asaph penned words which perhaps describe Jonah's thoughts as the book ends: "When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You. Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory." (Psalm 73:21-24)

That is the desire each of us has, to be with our Lord Jesus in glory one day. It is God's compassion, shown to us on a hill outside of Jerusalem, that has made it possible for each of us to enter the New Jerusalem and spend eternity with our Savior, beholding His glorious face.

*May "the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make His face shine upon you and be
gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you
and give you peace."
(Numbers 6:24-26)*