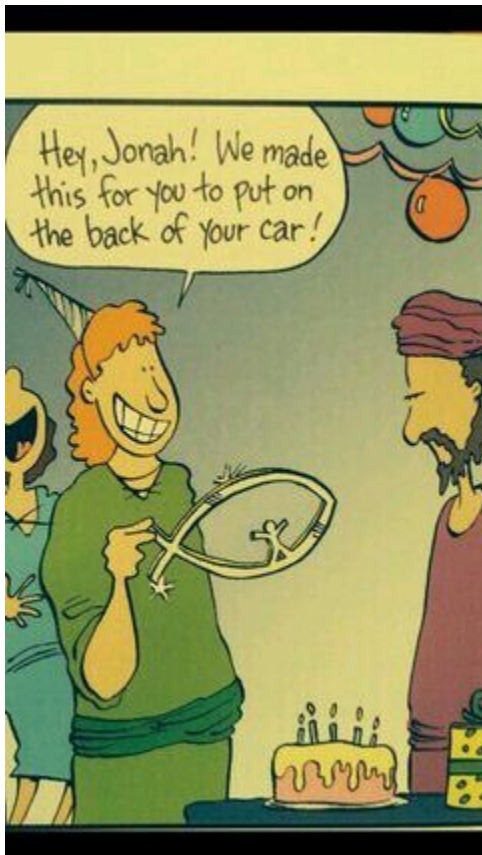


June 5, 2016
"Good Question!"
Jonah 4:5-11



We all know the story of Jonah who ended up in the belly of a great fish because he tried to run from God. Perhaps you've heard of the book he wrote, no not the one in the Bible but this one...



Jonah is an intensely personal story of God's grace, not just to a wicked pagan nation, but, to a rebellious prophet. Jonah was a prophet, he knew God's ways. He understood God's mercy and grace and that God looks to show His grace and mercy to people. God had to use extreme measures to get Jonah to repent and obey.

First of all I want you to notice that the writer of Jonah makes it clear to us that everything that happens in our text, happens because it was appointed or arranged by the Lord. This is seen throughout the book of Jonah. God appointed Jonah to preach in Nineveh and pronounce His judgment on that nation because of its wickedness. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh, but He knew God and he knew that if they repented God would have mercy on them. So Jonah got on a ship and headed in the opposite direction to run from God and what God wanted him to do. So God appointed a storm that threatened all on board the ship. Jonah tells the crew to throw him overboard and it would become calm again, and they do, and it does. But God arranged for a fish to swallow Jonah. That's when Jonah comes to his senses, prays this prayer:

Jonah 2:7a, 9-10 THE MESSAGE

When my life was slipping away, I remembered GOD,
And my prayer got through to you ...I'm worshipping you, GOD, calling out in
thanksgiving! And I'll do what I promised I'd do!
Salvation belongs to GOD!"
Then GOD spoke to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah on the seashore.

I'm sure that made Jonah smell really good. I would suggest you go wherever the Lord sends you and do what He asks you without hesitation or you too may smell like fish vomit. But when you do, because you disobeyed then pray a prayer of repentance and God will forgive you. He is a God of second chances.

God appointed Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh; and guess what, this time Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh, seems like he learned something from his first experience of disobeying God, becoming fish food, and smelling like something a fish just spit up on the beach.

Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" And the people of Nineveh believed God's message given through Jonah, and from the greatest to the least, they repented. And when God saw that they were sorry and turned from their evil ways God appointed that the city would not be destroyed. Then we read this:

Jonah 4:1-4

This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. ² So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD ? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. ³ Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen."

4 The LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"

Good question isn't it? Has God ever asked you that same question? "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"

Jonah 4:5-11

5 Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

7 But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. **8** And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. "Death is certainly better than living like this!" he exclaimed.

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?" "Yes," Jonah retorted, "even angry enough to die!"

10 Then the LORD said, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. **11** But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"

I mentioned all the other things God appointed or arranged in the story of Jonah, let me continue to point out that God also appointed the plant to bring shade to Jonah and God appointed the worm that killed the plant. God appointed the scorching heat and wind. You think he might be trying to tell us that God is sovereign and in control? And that it's better to work WITH the One who is sovereign and in control than to try and go AGAINST Him?

God showed mercy and grace to Jonah, forgave him and again appointed him to be God's agent to bring mercy and grace to the people of Nineveh. And its mind boggling isn't it. I don't know a single pastor, preacher, or evangelist who wouldn't be overjoyed if an entire city of 120,000 repented when they preached on Sunday, but not Jonah. He was angry that God showed mercy, and then he gets angry when the plant dries up and no longer shades him. God shows Jonah mercy and grace through a fish and again through a plant; because Jonah didn't deserve a plant for shade. Jonah didn't deserve anything – that's what God's grace is, the unmerited, undeserved favor of God. But then when God removes the plant, Jonah is angry. In fact our text tells us that he was angry enough to die (that's verse 9). And the Lord says to him, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"

There's another good question. Has God ever asked you a similar question? Should you feel sorry for yourself because some gift was taken away from you, but not have

compassion for others, especially for souls and for the spiritual needs of your city?

So what's the point here, and the lesson we need to learn?

Well I think it comes here in God's response to Jonah. God is pointing out to Jonah that instead of being bitter and angry, he should instead rejoice over the non-destruction of the city of Nineveh.

Stay with me here for a minute... This plant that God created to shade Jonah was an act of grace. It was God doing something for an undeserving man. God shows His love to all people whether they believe in Him or not. He blesses whether they deserve it or not. For God causes it to rain on the just and unjust. Let me read the full quote from Jesus: [Matthew 5:43-48](#)

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

In other words, God is gracious to us, over and over, and over again; and God is gracious to all people, and He wants you to be gracious to all people.

And so this plant here can represent any sort of grace or gift from God. And let's be honest; how often do we forget that all of God's gifts are given to us even though we are totally undeserving of them?

So God causes this plant to spring up and give shade to Jonah, and our text tells us that Jonah was glad. He was happy with this gift from God... again there's a contrast here. He was unhappy with God's grace toward the Ninevites, but he was glad when God showed grace to him. Keep in mind what we're talking about here.

The jerk at work gets a promotion and you don't... God showed him a bit of grace and he got the promotion – do you get angry or celebrate that God showed such an undeserving sinner grace? Or the guy you know who seems to have it all... you know... big house, nice vehicles, money never seems to be a problem. The Bible tells us not to be envious of them, or to be angry with God because He has blessed them. Instead we should look at it as an opportunity to praise God for His grace.

And even if we receive His grace with gratitude, what happens when God removes a blessings from us? In other words, when things are going good and we are praising God for His blessings, but then all of a sudden some unexpected trouble comes. What happens then?

You see; Jonah's problem, is often times our problem. Somewhere along the way, Jonah got to thinking that he had somehow merited God's favor, and God's blessings,

and God's calling and God's grace. He had forgotten somewhere along the way that God's grace is undeserved, and totally dependent upon God. And we have to remember it too. Like this plant that shaded Jonah, the grace of God comes to us without any labor on our part. It comes to us without our laboring to earn it, produce it, or make it grow. It happens without our intervention or ingenuity, but we tend to claim it as our "RIGHT" and we complain when it's no longer ours. We; as Christians, have to remember that we're still in the land of exile. We're still engaged in spiritual warfare. We're still required to carry our crosses and repent and take our share of suffering for Christ's sake. And so when these things happen we have to be more like Job than Jonah. Remember Job All the bad things happened to him and he said, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" (Job 2:10)

Go back to Jonah 4:10– 11

Then the LORD said, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"

"Jonah; I caused a fish to swallow you, and then caused it to puke you out on dry land. I sent you to Nineveh and 120,000 people got saved, and the only thing you care about is this stupid plant?!?"

Jonah causes us to look at things from God's eternal perspective. We need that so bad! God provides us with things and we get so captivated by the things that He has provided and we start caring more about things than about the eternal souls of people! We start caring more about the things He provides than the One who provided them. We can be just like Jonah... we can care more about our little shaded spot than we care about the community around us!

Here's the deal – Jonah got upset because the thing that gave him comfort and made him happy was something that God gave him, and not God Himself. Jonah had found his happiness and comfort in the thing, rather than in the One who provided it. So God takes it away to show Jonah where his affections lie, and the result of it all is that Jonah gets angry. And I'll just tell you... I think Jonah is angry because he's finally seeing himself for the first time. God has shown him what he really is. God has shown him that he's selfish, self-centered, arrogant, and that he's still an idolater who worships and adores himself more than he worships and adores God.

So God's like, "You care about a plant... shouldn't I care about 120,000 people. Jonah's mad because God doesn't smoke them all, and he's mad because his plant has died and now he has to sit in the sun. God rebukes him. God gets the last word in, and that's where the book ends.

Here's how we apply it to us.

Often times; God wants us to do the work with Him so that we can see ourselves in the

work. You see; we tend to think we are so glorious and God is so impressed with us and our skills, and the reality is that if we're honest; we probably don't love the way we should. We don't care the way we should, we don't understand grace the way we should, but we don't see it until we step out and begin to serve in God's mission for us. And that's what happens... God sends us out of this building on a mission to love others and by our lives and our lips bring a message to our communities and our neighbors so that we can see change in our communities, but in the process we will begin to see change in ourselves. God used Jonah, not because He couldn't find a better prophet. He used Jonah because as God converts the sailors on the ship, and as God converts the people of Nineveh, He's working on Jonah as well, and it concludes with God taking Jonah on journey through his self-righteousness, and through his rebellion, and through his anger, and through his racism, all for the purpose of making Jonah the man of God he is meant to be!

This is just as much a story of God's mercy and grace to Jonah as it is a story of God's mercy and grace to the people of Nineveh.

It's a story about humbling ourselves to glorify God in all His grace and awesomeness. The purpose of the Book of Jonah is to show God's glory. How do we bring glory to God? Here is what Jesus said as He prayed to His Father for us:

John 17:4

I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

How do you bring glory to God? What work has God given you to do here on earth? Good question, here is the answer: Worship Him only, Love others (especially one another), serve others by using your gifts, tell others about Jesus, be like Christ.

I'm going to close with some questions for all of us.

- 1 – Has God spoken to us as a Church?
- 2 – What has He called us to do?
- 3 – Has God spoken to us as individual Christians?
- 4 – What has He called us to do?
- 5 – Who has God called you to go to?

The purpose of the Book of Jonah is to show God's glory; how are we showing it?