

Jonah 4:5-11

Introduction

When I'm driving down the road and a person is going slower than the speed limit, I yell at him to go faster. When drivers zip past me going quite a bit faster than the rest of traffic, I scream at them that they are going to hurt someone. I complain to my wife and lecture her when someone swerves into my lane, or cuts me off, or is not driving the way I think they should drive.

We also complain when life doesn't go our way. We get mad at God. We tell God how we think it should go. "God, I should be getting a better pay than my unbelieving coworker. I love you and you haven't blessed me like you have my atheist neighbour." "Why did you chose me to get sick, Lord? What did I ever do against you? I go to church most Sundays." We grumble against God when he doesn't do things the way we want it to go.

Jonah had the same issue. He grumbled against God when God didn't deal with Nineveh the way he thought God should have. And so God had to show Jonah and us that

God is Gracious to his People

1. He disciplines the erring
2. He calls the lost to repentance

Part 1

Context

We all know something about Jonah. If nothing else, I'm guessing that you were like me and saw the Veggie Tales movie on Jonah. Jonah was called by God to go and preach to Israel's enemies. Nineveh was the largest city in the world at the time and it was a wicked city. And so Jonah got on a boat to go the other way. God sent a storm to get Jonah moving the right way, and possibly to convert some sailors. After spending three days in the belly of the fish, it seems that Jonah was finally on board with Gods plan. He preached to Nineveh and they all repented.

Exposition

Jonah finishes his preaching in Nineveh and he still doesn't want God to be gracious to these people. So he goes out to a hill and makes a shelter. He wants a show from God. When God doesn't strike Nineveh with holy fire from heaven, Jonah starts to get angry. God wants his prophet to be happy so he sends Jonah a vine for shade. That worked for a bit. Jonah was happy, and distracted, for a short time . **Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow**

up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

When the vine no longer distracted Jonah, he turns his attention back to Nineveh. And so God decides to teach him a lesson. God wants Jonah to learn some things. So while Jonah is asleep, God sends a worm to chew through that vine and to kill it. Jonah had done absolutely nothing to grow that vine. He didn't plant it, or water it or do anything to make it grow. God made it spring up overnight. And Jonah did so little nothing to kill it. But we also hear that somehow Jonah did so much to kill that vine. Not with his actions, but with his attitude. He had a putrid attitude that stunk in God's nostrils. His attitude that a vine was worth more than one hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites was what killed that vine. **But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.**

And on top of that God makes life unbearable for Jonah. **When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."**⁹ **But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."** God sends a scorching summer wind, like one of those winds on a one hundred degree day that dries out your lips and makes things even hotter. And God points the sun directly at Jonah. Kind of like a little boy pointing a magnifying glass at an ant, until it catches on fire. Jonah even faints because he has a severe case of heat stroke. If you've ever had heat stroke, it's not a fun time and you're about ready to do anything to cool down, but not Jonah. He is still convinced that God should smoke Nineveh. Do away with them completely. Jonah even tells himself, "If God let's these Gentiles into his kingdom, then I have no reason to live." Jonah is acting like a child.

Since Jonah didn't get the point of the object lesson, God explains it to him. **But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.** God wants Jonah to see that he is wrong. God is not going to strike down Nineveh. And Jonah has no right to be angry. There is no reason for him to die. God is in control of everything. Jonah has no right to be angry over what he can't and doesn't control. God tells Jonah, "I am God. You are not. If I want to make a vine grow, I make it grow. If I want to destroy the vine, I destroy it. So it is with Nineveh. If I want to save Nineveh, you have no business telling me what I should do. And don't forget that you had no problem when I showed you compassion in the belly of the fish." **God, in his graciousness, uses an object lesson to discipline mistaken Jonah.**

Application

It's all good to sit here and look at Jonah and see how he messed up. That is, until we have to ask ourselves, "do I do that?" "Surely I don't wait for God to give me a show. Or do I?" If we are being honest with ourselves, we have to say sometimes we do. We want God to do what we want, when we want it and in the manner we want it done. And when God doesn't do what we want, we grumble. We grumble against God when that coworker gets the promotion, even though the boss promised it to us. We might not actually tell God that he is unfair and mean, but when we grumble against others, God tells us we grumble against him.

When we start grumbling against God, he tries to cheer us up as well. He sends other Christian believers to cheer us up. That's why we are here in church. On the road, it's my wife telling me it'll be ok. We get together and we enjoy his Word and fellowship. But then we leave, and we are unhappy again. God shows us our blessings and maybe he gives us more. We pull our car into a garage, attached to a nice house. Maybe we stop at the grocery store and pick up a little extra something for ourselves. But we don't even recognize these as blessings. Instead we focus on what God didn't do for us. How he didn't govern my life exactly how I want it to go.

Sometimes God deepens his teaching methods by taking blessings from us. Sometimes you might not get that much needed raise because you complained about your boss. In fact, you might end up taking a pay cut. Maybe God takes your health from you and you aren't able to accomplish the things you were just boasting about.

When God starts taking blessings from us, do we respond with pride? Do we question God when we are inconvenienced in the slightest? Do we pray, "God why did you let this happen?" instead of seeing his blessing? When someone dies, do we tell God that we have no need to live anymore? (I sure did when my little brother died.) When we drive our friends away, do we blame it on them or chalk it up as their loss? Or do we let the God of all creation be in control of all creation. God always has and always will have everything under his control. He does not need us to tell him how it is done, nor does he allow us to. But he does hear us when we earnestly and sincerely pray to him for help.

You see, sometimes **God disciplines us, his children, with object lessons**. But not always. Not everything bad that happens to you is an object lesson from God. When it is an object lesson, God is gracious in every part of it. After he has shown you what you need to learn, he gives you time to repent just like he did for Jonah. In fact God is gracious in every part of our lives. He gives us our breath and everything that we have. But God was most gracious to us when he sent his Son into this wicked world to die on a cross for my sins and for your sins. For every time we grumble against God. He should have smoked us the very first time we sinned but instead he punished his Son on that bloody, painful torture device used for criminals. And there he ransomed me from the eternity of hell I deserve. **God is gracious to us. He gives us his grace in his discipline when we sin against him.**

Transition

The other day, I watched a video on Facebook. It's about a taxi driver who waves at people when they get upset at him on the road. It made me think, "I should probably do something like that too." The taxi driver's point was you never know what it is that is really making them upset. I would add to his point that they are all God's creation and Jesus loves them just as much as he loves me.

Part 2

Exposition

Not only did God care about Jonah, but he also cared about Nineveh. God says to Jonah **But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left,**

and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" God had created Nineveh. He had created all the people and the animals in it. God loves all of his creation, including Nineveh. And Jonah knew that God loved Nineveh. After he gets done preaching, before he goes out to the hill, he prays to God **"O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."** Jonah knew of God's grace and it's the very reason he didn't go to Nineveh right off the bat. And God didn't destroy Nineveh but instead **he gave the people a chance to repent Because he is gracious.**

Application

God's grace extends to all people. He cares for everyone he created. Paul tells Timothy that God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. So how do we go about helping that happen? It's easy; you just have to tell people about their sin like Jonah did. But you say to me, "that's not easy. That means that I have to talk to someone I don't know." And you'd be right. It isn't easy to tell others about their sin, and their Saviour. We would rather run in the opposite direction. But people are lost and we have the solution to their problem. We were once standing in the same shoes as those people. Then someone brought us the gospel by God's graciousness. You know, more people than you think actually long to hear what you have to tell them. God is gracious to us by being with us. And he graciously gives lost people here a time of grace to repent. He shows them that he exists and in this wonderful country of ours, they have easy access to his Word. We can freely give that word to them.

Conclusion

From the way that the book of Jonah ends, it seems that Jonah wrote the book out of shame for his sin. He repented and continued to minister to God's people. But it took Jonah awhile to come to repentance. When God sends discipline your way, heed his discipline and listen to his call. And because he is a gracious God who is slow to anger and abounding in love, he will be with you when you go and share his good news with those around you. Amen.