

ESF, Lord's day message
10/28/2018

God's Compassion for All People

Jonah 4:1-11

¹ But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "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. ³ Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. ⁸ 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."

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?"

A Little Boy wanted \$100.00 badly and prayed to God for a whole week, but nothing happened. So, he decided to write God a letter requesting the \$100.00. When the Post Office got the letter addressed to God they

forwarded it on to the Whitehouse. The President was very impressed, touched and amused so he instructed his aid to send the boy \$5.00. He thought \$5.00 would be a lot to the little boy. The boy was, indeed, delighted by the money. He sat down and wrote a thank you note immediately, which read:

Dear God,

Thank you very much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through Washington and, as usual, the crooked politicians kept most of it.

Like this boy we may have our own idea of who God is and what God must do for us. But God is far greater than who we think God is. God's works are far higher and deeper than what we expect or wish God would do.

Have you ever suffered from anybody who hurt you deeply? Is it really hard for you to forgive the person? Do you have anybody whom you wish God would rebuke, judge or even punish for the person's wrong doing against you? Are you wondering why God does not do to the person as you wish?

Today, God wants you to know why He is compassionate to all people including the people who hurt you deeply, whom it is really hard for you to forgive or love. Also, God helps you be compassionate to all including your enemy as God himself does. Why? Because by doing so, you can live not only a victorious life but also a joyful life. You can be victorious over bitterness. You can be joyful regardless of what the people around you are doing to you.

Accept the way of God's compassion on all people

God sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh to preach to the people in the city. God told Jonah to preach that God would judge them if they did not

repent within 40 days. Jonah preached to them as God told him. As soon as they heard Jonah's preaching, all people in the city repented and sought God's mercy on them. And God did not judge the Ninevites but completely forgave all of them. Their number was 120,000. It was a great revival. However, with this result Jonah was displeased. He became angry at God. He was so angry that he wanted to die.

Was it not a time for him to rejoice because there was a great revival in the city? Was it not a time to give thanks to the Lord, because the Lord used his preaching so powerfully that 120,000 people were convicted and repented and were saved from judgment? Why was he displeased with a revival and angry at God's merciful act to the Ninevites? Because he was unable to accept God's love for his enemy. Of course, Jonah believed in God's mercy for sinners. Jonah knew that God is compassionate and gracious: *I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

But when God actually forgave the enemy, it was very hard for Jonah to accept it. The Ninevites were to his nation Israel the worst of enemies. They were cruel people. They were invaders. They had brought many trials and much pain to him and his people. Then how could God forgive them so easily? How could God show them His mercy so quickly without bringing judgment for their wickedness? It was unfair to Jonah that such a wicked enemy could be forgiven so easily. So, Jonah was unable to be on the same page with the merciful God.

A new resident to the community was walking down a street and noticed a man struggling with a washing machine at the doorway of his house. When the newcomer volunteered to help, the homeowner was overjoyed. The two men began working on the bulky appliance one from inside the house the other on the porch. After several minutes of fruitless effort the two stopped and just stared at each other in frustration. They looked as if

they were on the verge of total exhaustion. Finally, when they had caught their breath, the first man said to the homeowner: "We'll never get this washing machine in there!" To which the homeowner replied: "In? I'm trying to move it out of here!"

Even if God is doing wonderful things through us, we can't see them if we are not on the same page with God. We may be even frustrated by what God is doing. To be on the same page with God and share joy in His blessings, we must accept God's way of showing compassion.

We can't accept God's compassion if we stick with our own fairness and justice. We can accept God's compassion when we believe that God's compassion is higher and deeper than what we think is fair and just. If we can't accept this, God teaches us how to accept his compassion. Let's see how God teaches us to accept his compassion and share in the blessings of his compassion.

God teaches us to be compassionate to all including our enemies

1. Through gentleness

Although Jonah refused to accept God's compassion for the Ninevites and was angry at God, God did not rebuke him. Instead God gently asked him a question: *Have you any right to be angry?* God did not respond to anger with anger. There was no thundering rebuke of Jonah, but just a gentle, thoughtful question. God could have harshly rebuked Jonah for his narrow-minded and selfish response to God's forgiveness for his enemy. But God treated Jonah with gentle love.

Why?

Because harsh rebuke would not have solved the problem of Jonah's anger. If God had rebuked Jonah harshly, Jonah would have listened to his rebuke, but he would not have accepted God's compassion in his heart.

God didn't force Jonah to change his thinking or attitude against his free will. As we saw in chapter one in the book of Jonah, God did not force Jonah to obey God's words against his free will.

God is a gracious God, compassionate, slow to anger, quick to relent. God was gracious to Jonah even as he was so selfish and immature. Even if he was rebellious, God saved his life from a stormy sea. Even if he had no compassion for people, God used his preaching to save 120,000 people.

God never forces us to do anything against our free will. God is gentle and patient with us when we are too selfish and stubborn to share His compassion. God just waits and personally talks to us until we realize the truth through our own free choices. God always deals with our stubbornness with patience and gentleness. And he molds us to be patient and gentle with others.

With this example, God encourages all of us not to give up on ourselves. Even if you are still immature, selfish, quick-tempered, God can mold you and use you.

2. By reminding us of His grace

To help Jonah to overcome his selfishness and to share God's compassionate heart, God used an object lesson.

Angry Jonah went out from the city of Nineveh 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. He wished that they would become wicked people again and God would revoke His forgiveness and judge them.

The place Jonah stayed was an open hill where he would be under scorching heat during the day. He needed something to provide shade over him but there was nothing.

So, God provided him a vine with wide leaves that night. Those leaves made enough shade to protect Jonah from the scorching heat. He was exceedingly glad under the cool shade.

But soon God sent a worm to eat all the leaves and the shade was gone. The next day Jonah was put under the hot blazing heat. God sent a scorching east wind too. Jonah got dizzy in the scorching heat and he was angry again.

At that point God said to Jonah, *"You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 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?"*

And Jonah didn't say anything.

Here when God was trying to teach an important truth to Jonah, God did not offer Jonah difficult theology. To teach an important lesson, God just used natural objects such as the sun, a wind, a vine, shade and a worm. Through giving shade through a vine and getting rid of the shade by destroying the vine with a worm, God taught Jonah the precious value of every man's life—either his life or his enemy's life. God helped Jonah realize why God is compassionate to all men. Also, God taught him to realize that every blessing in his life either small or great is from God's grace, and that without God's grace he wouldn't be able to survive.

What a blessing it is to know God who can teach us profound truths in such plain ways. Of course, we need theological studies to know truth

accurately. But we must know that God may use ordinary objects and experiences in our lives to teach us truth.

The shade made by the vine symbolized God's mercy on Jonah. The death of the tree symbolizes the removal of God's mercy from Jonah. There was nothing Jonah could do about the appearing of the vine, the sun, the shade, the wind, or the worm. In fact, without God's intervention and mercy, Jonah should have died already when he was thrown off the ship into the stormy sea. Without God's mercy, Jonah himself could not live one single day in such a harsh environment. Then why did he want to see only the God of justice without seeing the God of mercy?

By this lesson, God showed Jonah how selfish and narrow-minded he was who valued a plant for himself but disdained so many people's lives. God reminded Jonah that without God's merciful grace, he couldn't live a single day. God wanted Jonah to understand that if he was living by God's mercy, he also had to be merciful to all people including his enemy. God wanted to teach him that forgiving his enemy and blessing his enemy was a blessing to him too.

Dale Carnegie said, *“When we hate our enemies we give them power over us - power over our sleep, our appetites, our happiness. They would dance with joy if they knew how much they were worrying us. Our hate is not hurting them at all, but it is turning our days and our nights into hellish turmoil.”*

Stormie Omartian said, *“Forgiveness doesn't make the other person right, it makes you free.”*

After dealing with his self-centered, narrow-minded, and unforgiving heart with gentleness and an object lesson, God challenged Jonah to be compassionate to all people. God's final word given to Jonah was:

“Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Today’s text does not show how Jonah responded to that question. But Jonah’s answer should have been “Yes.”

We all need God’s merciful grace. It is by God’s grace that you are still alive. It is God’s grace which provides you food and shelter today. It is God’s grace which has protected you from so many dangerous accidents. It is God’s grace which has brought you friends and people who are still with you and pray for you even if you have offended them many times. It is God grace which woke you up this morning. It is God’s grace which encouraged you to come to His temple and stand in awe of His glorious presence today.

The reason God has been gracious to us is to bring his compassion to all people in the world.

Jesus says the same thing. In Matthew 5:44-45, Jesus says *“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*

The missionary Helen Roseveare went to the Congo in Africa at the time of the uprisings. She was held captive for months, brutally raped and beaten until she was finally released and sent back to England where she was given an opportunity for healing. Later she went back to the Congo and started a medical clinic right there among those who had been her captors. By sharing God’s compassion and mercy to her enemy, she overcame evil with good.

Do you want to live a joyful life regardless of the people around you? Do you want to be a victor by overcoming evil with good? Always remember God’s grace given to you and share the grace with all, even with your enemy.