

## A Gracious and Merciful God

*Jonah, Part VII*

Jonah 4:1-11

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### An Outline of Jonah

1:1-3	<i>Jonah Disobeys God</i>
1:4-17	<i>God Pursues Jonah</i>
2:1-10	<i>Jonah Turns to God</i>
3:1-4	<i>Jonah Obeys God</i>
3:5-10	<i>God Delivers Nineveh</i>
4:1-11	<i>Jonah Complains Against God</i>

### I. Out of the Heart

Jesus insists that our words and actions reveal what's really going on in our \_\_\_\_\_. Hence, rather than excuse our sinful words and actions, the path of wisdom is to confess them and to seek God's forgiving and empowering grace to continue to transform us.

<sup>17</sup>Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? <sup>18</sup>But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. <sup>20</sup>These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man." (Matthew 15:17-20)

### II. A Gracious and Merciful God

#### A. Jonah's First Complaint and God's Challenge (4:1-3)

Most preachers would be thrilled by the response of the Ninevites to their preaching. But Jonah is \_\_\_\_\_, *exceedingly angry*. He suspected all along that God's intention was to show mercy to Nineveh and he did not want this to happen. God graciously challenges Jonah's anger, "*Is it right for you to be angry?*"

#### B. Jonah's Second Complaint and God's Challenge (4:4-9a)

Rather than respond to God's challenge, Jonah goes out of the city where he builds a "*shelter*" and sits to observe what would happen to the city. God graciously provides a plant for shade "*to deliver Jonah from his misery*" (6). This word \_\_\_\_\_ occurs at key moments in Jonah's book (cf. 1:2; 3:10). This plant, in other words, is God's means of delivering Jonah from his *sin* and \_\_\_\_\_; from the *calamity* that his sin would bring upon him were he to remain in it. God uses the plant to expose Jonah's anger and then challenges him again, "*Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*" (9a)

#### C. Jonah's Response and God's Challenge (4:9b-11)

In this way, God finally provokes Jonah to respond. God then exposes Jonah's sinfulness and total lack of proportion. Jonah pitied the plant under which he took shade, yet he wished that the city of Nineveh in which over a hundred thousand children found shelter would perish! His values were completely amiss!

### III. The Furnace of Affliction

The text before us today highlights that God is indeed "*a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm*" (2). And the contrast between God

and his servant Jonah is abundantly clear – for while God is \_\_\_\_\_ to anger, Jonah is boiling over. He is *exceedingly angry* (1a), *became angry* (1b), *angry* (4), *angry* (9a), and *angry, even to death* (9b). “Right where God’s anger ends, Jonah’s anger begins” (Brito, 56). But “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (Jas 1:20). So God acts to transform Jonah.

A. Where do afflictions come from? (cf. Jas 1:2-4)

So how does our gracious and merciful God accomplish this objective in Jonah’s life? He uses affliction to expose Jonah’s heart so that Jonah might come to see his own sin and folly. God does this same thing for us. James writes:

<sup>2</sup>*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup>knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup>But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

Even as God placed Jonah in the furnace of affliction in order that he might be *perfect and complete, lacking nothing*, so God often sends trials our way for the same purpose. Why? Because He is *gracious and merciful*. And even as He was determined to “deliver [Jonah] from his \_\_\_\_\_” (6), so He is determined to deliver us from ours.

B. What do our reactions to affliction reveal?

God relentlessly pursues Jonah and uses affliction to expose Jonah’s heart and deliver him from his sinfulness. Sinclair Ferguson remarks:

*“...God was bringing Jonah to a point at which what was in his heart would come out of his lips... How we \_\_\_\_\_ is often a better thermometer of our heart than how we act” (Ferguson, 86,88).*

What do your \_\_\_\_\_ reveal about what’s in your heart? When life is hard and you get bumped, what comes out? God uses afflictions to expose what’s in our heart and then challenges us to face our remaining sin, “*Is it right for you to be angry? Is it right for you to be fearful? Is it right for you to be anxious? Is it right for you to be unbelieving?*”

C. Who or what do you love / desire most?

If we worship our gracious and merciful God, if He is the deepest object of our affection and longing, then we will become a gracious and merciful people, a people who delight to have compassion on others. Yet this is not Jonah’s character at this point in the book. He is a hardened man. He is so angry that God has shown compassion to Nineveh that he would rather \_\_\_\_\_ than go on living with the Lord (cf. 4:3, 8, 9b). Uri Brito and Rich Lusk observe:

*“If we do feel this way, if we would rather die than go on with the Lord, it is most likely a sign that at some level, our hearts are battling an idol. It means we are probably seeking meaning and significance in something other than God” (Brito/Lusk, 60).*

Jonah loves and desires something more than he desires \_\_\_\_\_. So what of you? What do you desire and love most? Such that when God strikes it you are tempted to despair and would rather die than go on with the Lord? Beware, there is your idol.

#### IV. Conclusion