

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace-Part 17

Jonah 4:10-11

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I am a sinner like every other human being that has ever lived: by *nature* and by *choice*
I came into this world with a heart pre-programmed like software, to rebel against God
Born into a world system that, like a mother board, with an upgradeable processor ran that
software with ease and speed
Born with an evil programmer, and a whole legion of his staff customizing immoral tech for
my particular life, using all their tricks of the trade to help me rebel even more
Of course, I am referring to my *flesh*, this *world*, and the *devil*
Not watch what happens...God came to *rescue* me
He started His rescue mission early in my life, and the Holy Spirit put in my heart an
understanding and belief that heaven and hell is real, not made up places by preachers to
manipulate their churches
I came to my mom asking her how I can go to heaven, and she explained that God sent His Son
Jesus Christ to save me by dying on the cross and raising Him from the dead
That if I place my trust in what God has done for me, not in what I can do for Him, he'll forgive
me my sins, which I already knew I had because I felt guilt when I would disobey
We prayed together, and I confessed them to God, but the reality of what it meant to have faith in
Jesus and live in that forgiveness would not emerge for several years
That moment when I asked God to forgive me, He gave me a new software, a different, better
motherboard with the ultimate processor, and a Helper that began to reprogram my heart,
so my naturally defiant heart would learn to love God's Word and live by it
He replaced my citizenship, my allegiance to this world system, with full rights to His kingdom
along with others whom He has saved, and I began to learn how to love and serve, and to
share this good news of salvation with others, and to become more like Jesus Christ

Let's leave my story and return to Jonah's as we conclude this series
Jonah was a sinner saved by God's grace, meaning he'd done nothing to deserve God saving him
He wasn't saved because he was a nice guy, or came from the right family, or just happened to
live at the right time, or attended church classes or took communion regularly
His salvation was planned before creation, but he was born broken, fallen, defiant
God set His eyes of grace on him, gave him spiritual life, opening Jonah's eyes to his great need
Jonah believed and trusted in God's willingness to give him mercy, and grace, and God did, and
put him into His kingdom where Jonah began to learn about God and how to serve Him
Now listen very carefully...in my life, in Jonah's, and yours, Christian brother and sister, God
has brought us into His kingdom to live and serve Him in His great story

And God hasn't left us alone to figure out how to live this Christian life
He has sent the Holy Spirit to live in every Christian to work with us to build His kingdom

PP This is what Peter meant when he said: ***"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."*** 2 Peter 1:3-4

That *'divine power'* is the Spirit of God living in us transforming and teaching us through the *'knowledge of Him Who called us'*, His living and powerful scriptures Kingdom work, like the gospel, is more than salvation, and we are about to see this with Jonah

"And the LORD said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.'" Jonah 4:10

PP The word *'pity'* here means to have a tender feeling for others in distress or misery It is related to but slightly distinct from compassion

Pity is motivated by the condition of a person, while compassion is motivated by the misfortune When Jesus came upon the city of Jerusalem as He neared the day of His crucifixion, He

PP lamented saying, ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Matthew 23:37***

What a contrast we have with Jonah who saw the city of Nineveh with a different attitude If you think the God of the OT is all sternness while the God of the NT is all love, then you do not understand God

God had great pity on the people of Nineveh while Jonah had none!

Jonah had pity for the plant, which is another way of saying, he had pity on himself, because the destruction of that plant brought great stress on Jonah

He wasn't mourning the plant because he felt sorry for it, but because he felt sorry for himself

He felt pity for something he had no personal attachment for the plant was not from his

'labor', he did not *'make it grow'*, he hadn't even known it more than a *'night'*

It was a gift of grace from God to him, and what a much greater gift of grace He gave the city

It is against the background that God asked His final question, intended to help Jonah see his self-directed, off-mission heart

"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" Jonah 4:11

PP The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary explained it this way, *"All those people, all those animals—I made them, I have cherished them all these years. Nineveh has cost me no end of effort, and they mean the world to me. Your pain is nothing to mine when I contemplate their destruction."*

God's heart is full of relentless grace, more than we could ever understand!

But who are the *'120,000 persons'*?

There are pages and pages of interpretations written on this verse, with several differing ideas

The most popular one is that these are children, not yet knowing their left from their right

Most experts will agree that if the *'120,000'* persons means children, as many take it to mean, then that would put the population of the city at around 600,000 people

We aren't talking high rise apartment complexes, rather sprawling homes, and that is too many people that could reasonably inhabit the city, even one as great as Nineveh

120,000 could reasonably live in Nineveh, as you bring in the surrounding area of metro Nineveh

So who in particular are the 120,000 if it isn't the popularly thought children of Nineveh?

A key is in the phrase, ***"who do not know their right hand from their left"***

This was an idiom, meaning a phrase that isn't to be taken literally

There are many idioms in scripture that have endured even to today
A drop in the bucket, or Fly in the ointment, or Am I my brother's keeper?
The English language has hundreds of idioms
You are barking up the wrong tree, means you are looking in the wrong place
Or, *Let's get back to the drawing board*, meaning it's time to start over
A well-known one is *Curiosity killed the cat*, nosiness can lead to a bad situation
The idiom, ***'right hand from their left'***, appears in several places in scripture

It appears in several places in the bible, 3 of which are the following:

PP *"According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left."* Deuteronomy 17:11

PP *"Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go."* Joshua 1:7

The phrase means the ability to discern and choose between good and evil, or ignorance

PP This is seen in **Matthew 6:3**, *"when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"*

That 120,000 persons in Nineveh did not know their right hand from their left, meant they could not discern and choose what is right from evil, ignorant of spiritual truth

These were brand new believers... *"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."* Jonah 3:5

Is that salvation?

PP *"what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'" Romans 4:3*

A city of 120,000 new believers, all of them coming from a polytheistic religious mindset

They didn't know God's law, they did not know what God was like, they were spiritual infants

PP *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...you have forgotten the law of God"*
Hosea 4:6

God has compassion on Nineveh, for He knows the difficulty they will have, they must be taught
Jonah had no compassion, and though he should have been with these new believers, teaching them, praying for and with them, he separated himself from them and left

Jeremiah looked on the city of Jerusalem and wept over it

Nehemiah heard of the destruction of Jerusalem and wept over it

Jesus rode over the hill overlooking Jerusalem and wept over it

But Jonah, camped outside the city of Nineveh and cursed it and God

Now I want us to read what happened to Israel, after Joshua their leader, died

PP *"And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel."*

Judges 2:7

PP *"And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel."*
Judges 2:10

What will happen to Nineveh, will they share the same fate?
40 years after God saved this city, the Assyrian people attacked and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, as cruel and savage as they ever were before
150 years after God saved this city, they were utterly destroyed, so badly that
In 612 BC, Nineveh was destroyed by a coalition army: Babylonians, Persians, Medes, Scythians
Within two generations of their fall, no one even knew where the cities had been
Its ruins would be buried by sand and not uncovered for the next 2,000 years

Let me bring it home to us while we draw near to a close to this message and series
The gospel is not just about lost people being saved, it is about lost people being rescued and learning to live out their salvation in a way that increasingly looks like Jesus Christ
Jonah preached the gospel, the entire city of Nineveh believed the message, but they are now spiritual babies in the kingdom of God
The work of the prophet is not done, it is just beginning, for the mission of God is to redeem all creation and restore it to its glorious purpose

What does all of this mean for the church today?
It means the church must get off the sidelines, out of the locker room, and back on mission
And that mission is the one that Jesus Christ gave to every one of His followers
PP “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

PP “Missions arises from the heart of God himself and is communicated from His heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God.” John Stott

This is every Christian’s mission... **Go...and make disciples**, and we can evaluate ourselves against it, simply, are we engaged in this all-consuming work?
The mission that Jonah was given was identical...go and make disciples at Nineveh
Some have reduced this to salvation, but this is beyond salvation
Some have reduced it to a prayer to pray, or an altar call after a message, but it’s more than that
It includes a person becoming a follower of Christ but it is way more
It’s about teaching one another the Word and ways of God, about helping people become mature in the Christian faith
It’s about sharing the good news, and helping people to live the good news

So as we close, let’s each ask ourselves this question: *Am I living out God’s mission?*
Am I living it out right where God has me, and where God sends me?

The book of Jonah ends without telling us how Jonah will respond
But it ends this way deliberately, so that each of us will put ourselves in the story and evaluate ourselves...*Am I living out the mission of God?*
Is my life, a beacon, a light, that draws the eyes of others to our relentlessly gracious God?

Amen?
Pray