

“Gracious and Compassionate”
Jonah 4:2
(Preached at Trinity, January 17, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Tonight I want us to bring to a close the Book of Jonah. The Book of Jonah is a grand display of God's tender mercy. We've seen it displayed from the beginning. God commanded Jonah to go and preach to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was a pagan city, a wicked city. And yet, God sent His prophet to preach repentance. What a glorious display of God's pity and mercy.
 2. And then we saw Jonah's act of defiance in fleeing from God. Justice would have demanded God's sudden, irreversible judgment upon Jonah. Instead God mercifully pursued Jonah in order to bring him to repentance. What looked like God's judgment upon Jonah was actually displays of His compassion. The storm was sent to arrest Jonah and the great fish was sent to deliver him.
 3. As we enter **Chapter 4** we are surprised to read of Jonah's anger. One would expect to see Jonah overwhelmed with joy. Instead, we find the exact opposite.
Jonah 4:1 NAU - "But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry."
 4. We should be encouraged, however. In Chapter 1 Jonah fled *From* God in his anger. Now Chapter 4 Jonah flees *to* God in his anger.
 5. But in his anger Jonah disparages the glory of God's divine character.
Jonah 4:2 NAU - " He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."
 6. Although Jonah was speaking against God and calling into question the display of God's compassion it was an accurate description of God. He is indeed gracious and compassionate.
 7. Tonight I want us to ponder for a few moments the wondrous compassion of God and then we'll need to consider more carefully the attitude of Jonah. Jonah has much to say to us.
- I. First, we need to see that compassion is one of God's attributes
- A. God's attributes are those characteristics the Bible ascribes to God
 1. God's attributes are what God has revealed about Himself – they describe His essential being; His divine character; that which is intrinsic to Him
 2. Each attribute is essential to God. If God lost one of His attributes He would lose something essential to Himself.
 3. God's attributes are divided into two categories:
His incommunicable attributes and His communicable attributes.

- a. There are some attributes of God that are particular to God alone in His transcendence – such as His omnipresence or His omnipotence or His eternity or His self-existence or His immutability or infinity
 - b. God’s communicable attributes are those that He commands us to imitate – such as holiness, goodness and mercy. Graciousness and compassion also fall into this category.
- B. The Bible describes God as being full of compassion
Psalm 86:15 KJV – “But thou, O Lord, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”
Psalm 111:4 – “He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion.”
- 1. Compassion is very similar to God’s attributes of grace and mercy
 In fact the Hebrew word, רַחֻם (rachum) is translated both as “compassion” and “mercy”
 - 2. **Compassion defined** – “Pity for the suffering or distress of another”
- C. God has demonstrated His compassion on all men
 Sin has brought much suffering upon the earth – yet God has shown great compassion and pity—we see it in many ways:
- 1. Our very existence reveals the compassion of God.
Lamentations 3:22 – “*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*”
 - a. In other words, sin deserves death. Justice demands that we be consumed in God’s wrath. Yet God is temporarily withholding His judgment by His great compassion.
 - b. We deserve great suffering, yet God is demonstrating His pity and compassion. We see this displayed daily in many different ways.
 - 2. Nature’s elements are generally kind
 - a. Temperatures are tolerable
 - b. Storms are within limits
 - c. The earth yields rich fruit – all tokens of God’s compassion
 - 3. Sickness is held in check
 - a. God has given the body a wonderful defense system
 Our bodies respond well to self-discipline which testifies to the benefit of self-discipline to our souls
 - b. God has given medical wisdom – drugs, treatments
 - c. It is by God’s compassion that an epidemic doesn’t sweep the earth
 - 4. God has allowed technological advances
 travel, electricity, communication, computers, internet, comforts like AC
- D. The greatest act of God’s compassion is in sending forth His Son
- 1. There was nothing that compelled God to do this. It was by His pity and grace that He determined to rescue a multitude from the fires of hell
 - 2. The Gospel is a grand display of God’s compassion. He has sent forth His Son and declared that all who look to Him will be saved.
 - 3. It is out of compassion, God has granted us a period of time before the final judgment and the full outpouring of His wrath – it is an age of mercy.
 - a. Since the fall of Adam each second of time has been by God’s gracious compassion - Each second is a gift – we must be wise stewards

- b. The lost person does not realize that each moment of life is granted by a compassionate God. The Psalmist writes of Israel:
Psalm 78:38 NAU - "But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger And did not arouse all His wrath."
 - c. All who refuse to bow before Christ now will bow on the Day of Judgment. Only, they will bow as convicted criminals.
 - E. And although God's wrath is kindled upon the sinfulness of humanity, God takes no pleasure in the condemnation of the wicked
 - 1. God was sending Jonah to Nineveh as a demonstration of His rich compassion. Jonah understood this perfectly
Jonah 4:2 NAU - "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God"
 - 2. History tells us that Nineveh was conquered by a coalition of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC but even as their judgment was upon them the prophet Nahum spoke of both wrath and compassion:
Nahum 1:1-7 NAS - "The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. ² A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
 - 3. Nahum's words describe God's character of compassion:
"The LORD is slow to anger and great in power"
And yet, His compassion will never be in conflict with God's other attributes of perfect holiness and justice
The LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished."
 - F. The Gospel goes forth to all as a plea for repentance
 - 1. God is continually calling all men to turn from their sin. The Gospel isn't an invitation but a command.
He is rich in compassion and will be merciful to all who turn to Christ in faith and repentance.
 - 2. Nahum's words continue to stand as a warning:
The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
- II. This speaks loudly to us. As God has demonstrated compassion upon us He commands that we also have compassion upon others
 - A. Remember, God's communicable attributes are to be replicated
 - 1. As Christians we have become partakers of His divine nature
 - 2. He tells us to be holy as He is holy
 - 3. We are commanded to love because God is love
 - 4. We are commanded to love our enemies because God has shown compassion upon His enemies.
 - 5. We are commanded to imitate God's compassion
Zechariah 7:9 NAU - "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother;'"

- B. We must show compassion upon our fellow man – particularly our brethren
1. We are broken, all of us. Only the Gospel can repair the damage of sin. But we are not yet perfected.
 2. We need to show pity and compassion upon the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not yet perfect.
 3. All of us have insecurities. All of us suffer with self-centeredness and pride. All of us sometimes speak before thinking.
 4. None of us have perfect understanding. God is continuing to teach us.
 5. Christians are terrible about criticizing and condemning one another. We pretend that we have all the answers. We pretend that we've never made a mistake or a wrong decision.
 6. Love must permeate everything we do.
1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NAU - "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,"
- C. We must show compassion upon the lost man.
1. He is blind – he cannot see from a spiritual perspective. He is bound by sin. God tells Jonah of the Ninevites:
Jonah 4:11 NAU - "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand"
 2. We must have compassion upon their blindness
 Would you strike a blind man for accidentally bumping into you?
 3. The example of our Lord
Luke 23:34 NAU - "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
 4. The example of Stephen
Acts 7:60 NAU - " Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep."
 5. It is easy for us to be compassionate towards small child, or an older person weak and frail. Nineveh was a powerful city. They would stack the skulls of their enemies like pyramids. They would destroy Israel. Compassion upon them!! Jonah says, Never!!
 What about the bully? Perhaps your cruel coworker; an unreasonable boss; a belligerent neighbor? We must be compassionate.
 6. We owe them the Gospel. Jesus has entrusted it to us. We must have compassion upon the perishing.
 7. This is what Jonah was lacking. Instead of rejoicing at their salvation he became angry. He only wanted to see God consume them in His wrath.
- D. Jonah's problem is he thought Nineveh deserved condemnation while he did not
1. God showed continual mercy to Jonah but Jonah took it for granted because he thought he deserved it.
Jonah 4:6 NAU - "So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant."

2. God then brought an intense oppressive heat upon Jonah. For Jonah it was unbearable and his anger was kindled again. He thought the Ninevites deserved to suffer but not him.

Jonah 4:9 NAU - "Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

3. We can't help to see God's sovereign mercy in all of this. It was God who raised up the plant to shade Jonah's head. It was God who caused the worm to eat it and it withered. It was God who caused the intense heat. Just like it was God who raised up the great storm and the great fish. All were wonderful tokens of God's mercy, and Jonah failed to see it because he thought he was deserving of all good things while the Ninevites were only deserving of God's wrath.

E. How this condemns us

1. It is all too easy for us to be self-centered, more concerned for ourselves and our comforts than for the good of others. The self-centered person finds it easier to criticize than to show compassion towards others, not worried about how their words make others feel.
Richard Philips – Experience shows that self-centered people are the most unhappy people: they constantly complain, are never satisfied, take no joy out of life, and give little joy to others and precious little glory to God. Unless our hearts become consumed with causes and glories far greater than those of self, we waste our gifts and calling and sit miserably under the beating sun of the world's trials, wishing we could die."
2. It is far too easy for us to forget the lost. We are guilty of enjoying the peace and joy of our salvation and pretend we have a right to it. We don't share it with others because we feel they don't deserve it or simply because we don't have pity upon them.
3. We don't realize how poisonous critical thoughts are to our souls. Too often we are guilty of harboring resentful or hateful thoughts towards others or maintaining a heart of unforgiveness. Bitterness and resentment festers in our heart until we are consumed. Jonah no longer wanted to live.

Conclusion:

1. There are two things that poison evangelism in the hearts of God's people. One is a low view of God. Jonah did not have a true grasp of the grace of God. The other is a high view of ourselves. Jonah rejoiced at his own deliverance but cared little about the deliverance of others.
2. It take much grace to be compassionate upon those we see as unworthy. How selective we tend to be in the spread of the Gospel. And how segregated the church of Christ continues to be. We choose our friends and forget about the rest.
3. Christ is the only cure for hardness of heart. His love must become our love. We must demonstrate the love of Christ to this world.