

Introduction: I have in my hand a souvenir from a visit to a blacksmith’s shop. In forming this hook, the smith heated, bent, twisted, hammered, and cut a piece of iron. What was a plain piece of metal of no particular use became an interesting and even useful item. But if iron could speak of its experience...

A. Jonah struggled with God’s plan, but we can learn from him.

1. Jonah finally confessed what had been troubling him all along (v.2). We should note that Jonah was concerned for the welfare of his homeland, not so much for a selfish desire. Even so, his conversation with God was not at all a ‘happy’ one, but at least he admitted what was really bothering him!
2. Probably all of us can identify with Jonah to some degree, because life often doesn’t work out the way we thought it would or expected it to. And I suspect that oftentimes the things that bother us are not nearly as significant as the future of the northern kingdom of Israel was to Jonah!

I mention this because there were two ways in which Jonah’s behavior was commendable: he was able to put his finger on what was bothering him (which is not to suggest that his attitude was right!) and he spoke to God about it. [Sometimes we don’t know ourselves well enough to identify what really bothers us (there’s nothing wrong with getting help with this), and sometimes we simply aren’t as honest as Jonah (to God, or even to ourselves!) – both of these points should help to keep us more humble in the midst of life’s struggles.]

B. Jonah needed to be challenged and corrected, as do you and I at times

1. How sure Jonah was of himself (v.4); he obviously needed to change. How easily we believe that our own convictions about what is best really are correct. Great pride is what supports that attitude. Cf. Luke 9:54-55. Such pride also makes it hard to listen to another point of view!
2. God’s purpose wasn’t to crush, but to re-shape. Crushing is never His purpose for His children, though we deserve it! But the Father, in His rich mercy, chose to crush His Son in our place.
3. But the sovereign work of God continued in Jonah – 4:5-8. God appointed a plant (which Jonah enjoyed), then a worm (which also enjoyed the plant, but in a way that left Jonah very upset), and finally He appointed a scorching wind. Was the Lord, by these actions and interactions, trying to destroy Jonah? No, He was working to re-shape Jonah’s outlook on the world around him! (illustration: story of JoAnn’s illness and kids’ unhappiness at ‘pastors’ vacation years ago).

C. Receiving God’s Correction and Adopting His Priorities Must be the Goal of the Lord’s Servant

1. At the end of the Book, that was not the case for Jonah. He would rather have had the plant alive and 120,000 Ninevites dead. But, as in the case of the elder son in Jesus’ parable in Luke 15, the door was still open for real change. The Lord pressed Jonah with the contrast between Jonah’s pity for the plant and His own pity for Ninevah.

2. Clearly, God's priority was Nineveh. And I wonder if it has occurred to you that there may be a parallel between the situation of the church in this country and Jonah (or even a parallel between you and me and Jonah). The prophet was caught up in his own comfort and in seeing things go his way.

3. Is it possible that for the church in this country – for you – the seed of the gospel could be choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14) and bear no fruit?
[Mention prayers of the church in Cuba for the church in this country.]

Conclusion – This is where the Lord leaves things with the Book of Jonah, much like the end of Luke 15. The Savior is wonderfully rich in grace and mercy. And He calls His people, His followers, to be increasingly like Him, both in holiness and in compassionate concern for this lost world. How will you respond to His call? Do you want to be more like Him, or stay the same?