

I. Jonah Really Didn't Get It

- A. Jonah Is (Unjustly) Angry over the Repentance of the Ninevites (vv. 1-2).** Jonah's reaction in 4:1 strikes us as odd. Why isn't he rejoicing over the positive response to his preaching? Sadly, it is because he is angry over the repentance of these hated enemies of God. It seems from what we read in v 6 that Jonah hoped that the Ninevites would suffer judgment rather than mercy. Nineveh is the capital of a sworn enemy of Israel, and it is hard for Jonah to imagine that God would have mercy on such a nation.
- B. Jonah's Foolish Request Shows that He Hasn't Understood God (v. 3).** Jonah's request of God that he take his life shows that he still doesn't get it, and that he really has not understood God. He would rather die than see the Ninevites saved. How selfish and foolish is that! Most preachers would be overjoyed to see the kind of repentance that took place in Nineveh. But Jonah is focused on himself instead of on God and his plan of salvation for the nations. The prophet still does not understand the character of God.
- C. Jonah's Campout East of Nineveh Shows He Still Has a Lot to Learn (vv 4-5).** Verse 5 shows that Jonah still has a ways to go. He goes out east of Nineveh, to “see what would become of the city.” It isn't likely that Jonah thought that something good would happen to Nineveh. He still couldn't understand God's mercy (cf Ro 9:14-26). Jonah may even hope that the Ninevites will revert to their old ways so they will “get what's coming to them.” The prophet has not yet grasped the breadth of God's grace. Jonah just doesn't get it.

II. God Really Wanted to Teach Jonah (and Us) a Lesson

A. God Provided the Plant as an Act of Grace (v 6)

1. God providentially provides a plant for Jonah, and for the only time in the entire book, the prophet is “exceedingly glad.” If only Jonah had been “exceedingly glad” over the saved souls in Nineveh! The prophet again shows himself to be more concerned about himself than about others. The plant has provided needed shade in the hot desert, but it has grown purely out of God's grace.
2. How gracious God is to Jonah! Even after the prophet's rebellion, God didn't give up on him. How patient and kind our Lord is with us as he bears with our stubbornness, our selfishness and our foolishness! How encouraging that God does not treat us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities (Ps 103:10). The Lord doesn't abandon us, he continues to work graciously in us to change us so that we are more like Jesus.

B. God Took Away the Plant as an Act of Discipline (vv 7-8)

1. Just as the first part of the lesson was the provision of the plant, the second part of the lesson was the destruction of the plant. The plant disappears as the worm consumes it, and coupled with the strong, dry and hot east wind, Jonah once again wishes to die. God provided the plant and now has taken it away. Jonah's pouts in the desert as he feels increasingly sorry for himself.
2. Isn't this what we do sometimes? We'll experience the grace of God and then complain when things don't go our way or something doesn't work out. We think we deserve better when what God has already done is far more than anyone deserves. A look at the Lord Jesus helps to change that self-centered thinking. God disciplines us to make us more like Jesus. The Lord disciplined Jonah to teach him about his merciful character, especially toward those who do not know him. Our Father disciplines us to teach us about who he is so that we turn from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. We need to exhibit the fruit of righteousness that comes from living unto Christ.

C. God Used the Plant as an Object Lesson about His Mercy (vv 9-11)

1. The plant is an object lesson for teaching about God's mercy. God correctly points out to Jonah that he had nothing to do with the plant, which had shaded him, yet he showed more concern for the plant than he did for the great city of Nineveh. Jonah was willing to pity the plant, which came from God's hand, but unwilling to pity the Ninevites, image-bearers of the Living God.
2. The book of Jonah ends with a question about the prophet's concern for the Ninevites. Clearly **God** was concerned about the Ninevites, but what about his servant? We are left to consider Jonah's heart, along with our own hearts, as we are astounded by the tremendous mercy of our God who saves sinners even from among his enemies (Ro 5:6-11).

III. Have We Christians Really Learned that Lesson?

A. Do We Christians Understand God any Better than Jonah Did?

1. The question is whether we understand God's character more than Jonah did. Sometimes we don't seem to have a very good grasp on the vastness of God's mercy and compassion (Ezek 18:23; Ro 11:25-36; 2 Pe 3:8-10). How often are we like the Pharisee in Luke 18 rather than the tax collector? How often do we take for granted our salvation, as if we deserved it more than "sinners" around us?
2. Jonah had a heart for what **he** wanted to do rather than what **God** wanted him to do. He did not have "the mind of Christ" (1 Co 2:16), but the mind of an OT Pharisee. I think that sometimes we struggle to have the mind of Christ in our postmodern world that can be indifferent toward Christianity. But we must remain humble, recognizing that we do not deserve salvation any more than those lost souls around us. With the entire Bible before us, we must understand God better than Jonah did.

B. Have We Learned the Lesson about God's Character?

1. Have we understood the greatness of God and that he intensely seeks the lost (Lk 15; 19:1-10)? Sometimes the Lord has people in unlikely places (1 Ki 19:18; Ac 18:10); certainly no Israelite would have thought of anyone in Nineveh as deserving of salvation. We may think likewise of certain groups (even if we don't admit it). But take heart! God is at work in the world, calling his chosen into his kingdom.
2. Jonah also teaches us that God places value on obedience and faithfulness. Our great knowledge and understanding of the whole of Scripture should drive us to a humble adoration of God's beautiful character which has called us out of darkness into light so that we can be lights (Mt 5:14).

C. Who Are We Really as Christians?

1. What we really need to contend with is our own unworthiness before the Lord and the glorious salvation that Jesus has earned for us. Jonah seems to have forgotten what God said in Deuteronomy 7 about why he chose the nation of Israel as his treasured possession. And it seems there was no room in Jonah's theology for bringing the Gentiles into the covenant, even though God allowed for the conversion of foreigners (Ex 12:48).
2. So who are we really? A people saved by faith in God, who sent his beloved Son as the atonement for our sins, and who has put his Spirit in the heart of every believer. The good news for all of us, even some of us cranky Calvinists, is that God is in the business of saving and sanctifying a people to himself. Let us pray to God for a firmer faith, a deeper love and a greater obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior who has given himself to reconcile his enemies to himself.