

God's Mercy at Jonah's Anger (Pt. 2)

Jonah 4:7-11

January 1, 2012

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This Lord's Day we come to the final sermon in our series through the inspired Book of Jonah, wherein we have observed in the pages of Old Testament Scripture a foretaste of God's amazing plan to save the nations of the world (as the Lord accomplished in the salvation of the capital city of the Assyrian empire, Nineveh). After I have addressed the words from our text this Lord's Day, I will bring together a brief historical and prophetic overview that will lead us from the time of Nineveh's gracious salvation (at the preaching of Jonah) to the gracious salvation of all nations (including Israel and Assyria) at the time of millennial blessing. I desire that the big picture of God's amazing salvation be left in your mind, so that you may be a people that live in hope of God's gracious salvation in your own lives and families, and also live in hope of God's most merciful salvation to all nations (including the nations of Israel and Assyria).

You will recall from the last sermon that we considered **Two Contrasts** (in Jonah 4:1-6) between the sinful response of Jonah to God's mercy, and then the merciful response of God to Jonah's sinful anger. This Lord's Day we shall consider a **Third Contrast** (Jonah 4:7-11) between the sinful response of Jonah to God's mercy, and then the merciful response of God to Jonah's sinful anger. Finally, we shall consider **Concluding Remarks** to our study in the Book of Jonah.

III. The Third Contrast (Jonah 4:7-11).

A. You will recall from the previous sermon the first two contrasts that we noted from Jonah 4:1-6. (1) **The First Contrast**. When Jonah saw

that God had not destroyed Nineveh after the designated 40 days had elapsed, “it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” (Jonah 4:1). Jonah (distracted over Nineveh’s salvation) prays that the Lord would take his life, “for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3). To which the Lord (in contrast to Jonah’s sinful anger) responds with great mercy and fatherly condescension, “Doest thou well to be angry” (Jonah 4:4). (2) **The Second Contrast.** Jonah does not even respond to the Lord’s merciful question (at least no response on the part of Jonah is recorded), but rather Jonah leaves the city of Nineveh (proper) to sit on the outskirts of the city. There Jonah makes a temporary booth for himself alone in order to protect himself from the hot sun (rather than enjoying the fellowship, hospitality, and shelter of new converts to the Lord God among the Ninevites), while he yet hopes to see the destruction of Nineveh fall from heaven (Jonah 4:5). To which the Lord (in contrast to Jonah’s rebellious silence and self-imposed isolation from other Jehovah worshippers) mercifully and miraculously appoints a gourd (i.e. a broad, leafy bush of some kind) to grow up during the night over Jonah’s temporary booth in order to grant him a shadow and relief from the scorching sun. Jonah “was exceeding glad” for the gourd that provided him shade (Jonah 4:6). In both of these contrasts, the Lord demonstrates how patiently and kindly He comes to His children to restore them unto Himself, when they have fallen into sin. But, dear ones, we are not finished with the amazing contrasts between the anger of Jonah and the mercy of God.

B. We come now to **The Third Contrast** (Jonah 4:7-11).

1. This contrast between Jonah’s anger and God’s mercy begins with God appointing a seemingly insignificant worm to work tirelessly through the night, so that by the time morning arrives on the next day, the worm has severed the plant from its root, and the plant quickly withers under the hot sun and the scorching wind. When Jonah

loses the benefit of the shady gourd, he falls back into the sinful pit of despair and despondency, wishing again that he might die rather than live. The Lord once again comes to Jonah with such tenderness, asking Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” And the transparency of the Holy Spirit in revealing the anger of Jonah almost takes our breath away as Jonah foolishly seeks to justify his anger rather than to confess it, “I do well to be angry, even unto death”(Jonah 4:7-9). Dear ones, what can we learn from the inspired account of the gourd and the worm in regard to our own lives?

a. First, dear child of God, when your Heavenly Father upsets your plans, you are faced with a decision at that precise moment as to whether you will cry, murmur, and complain (or even despair of life) over the roadblock that is now in your path, or whether you will hope in the Lord that even in what is unexpectedly brought into your life, you are assured that He is up to something good in your life, for He can do you no wrong. I’m not talking about a “stiff upper lip” where you simply resolve in your own strength to make the best of a mess that has occurred in your life (even the world can do that). I’m talking about looking to Christ with an eye of faith and an eye of hope, knowing with assurance that if He took away your gourd (whatever your gourd may be in this life) by means of a destroying worm of some kind, He has something better for your ultimate good and growth in character. Dear ones, the Lord is far more interested in your character than He is in your comfort. And so ought we to be as well.

b. Second, dear ones, the Lord makes the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the strong (according to 1 Corinthians 1:27).

(1) God’s all-encompassing providence uses all things for His glory (not just the wise and great things of the world, but even the foolish and small things of the world). God teaches us through the inspired account of the gourd and the worm that all things are

appointed by the Lord (whether a hurricane-like storm to come upon the ship in which Jonah fled from the Lord, whether a great fish to swallow Jonah, whether a gourd to provide shade for Jonah, or whether a worm to destroy the gourd). Dear ones, there is nothing so small or so insignificant that the Great Creator and Disposer of all things knows it not and controls it not for His glory and for the good of His people (even a small sparrow of the air does not fall to the ground, nor is one little hair in your head lost without the Lord's providential knowledge and control, Matthew 10:29-30). How much more does the Lord's good providence know and control every motion of His beloved children (even every storm that seems to destroy you, and every whale that seems to swallow you, and every gourd that provides for your comfort in this life, and every worm that takes it away). Dear ones, you (as His beloved children) are of infinitely greater value to your heavenly Father than sparrows, for you have been redeemed unto the Lord at the price of God's only begotten Son. How can such love for you be measured? It can't. It's an eternal and infinite love for undeserving sinners who were chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began (Ephesians 1:4).

(2) And dear ones, if the Lord can use a foolish and weak worm for His glory and for the ultimate benefit of Jonah, the Lord can use a foolish and weak man, woman, or child (like you and me) for His great glory and for the ultimate benefit of God's people. Some may ask, "How is the Lord to promote reformation through such weak and few vessels as these Covenanters?" But I remind you that the Lord even uses the voice of praise that comes from the mouths of little children to confirm His mighty strength against His foes (according to Psalm 8:2; Matthew 21:16). Never forget that regardless of how unlearned we are in the eyes of the world (because we do not have a list of degrees behind our names), or regardless of how weak we are in the eyes of the world (because we do not have the riches of the wealthy or the power of the nations at our disposal), the Lord has chosen (in His most amazing

providence) to use even worms (even the chief of sinners) to confound the so-called wise and strong of this world, as the gospel of salvation is preached, and believed, and practiced in both our lives and our families before the world. Never underestimate or belittle your seemingly worm-like gifts in the hands of almighty God; for the Lord delights to confound the wise by that which is foolish and to astonish the strong by that which is weak. Dear ones, our only hope is found in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

c. Third, we also learn from the inspired account of the gourd and the worm that Jonah was “exceeding glad” for the gourd, but he didn’t give God the glory or praise in appointing it for his comfort. He rather rejoiced simply in the gourd, rather than rejoicing in the Lord who appointed and gave the gourd for his pleasure and comfort. When we take the blessings of this life for granted, and simply use them and enjoy them for merely our own benefit, we act as though these earthly blessings were only ours rather than God’s merciful portion allotted to us. Dear ones, sadly we look in vain here in our text for some expressed thankfulness from Jonah to the Lord for the gourd that the Lord sent to shade Jonah from the scorching sun. One of the chief evidences of a heart of faith, hope, and love is heartfelt thankfulness to the Lord for the earthly blessings we have been graciously granted for Christ’s sake, but especially for the undeserved blessings of salvation purchased for us at the price of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Moreover, a thankful heart evidences itself in a giving heart to advance Christ’s kingdom and to help people who have legitimate needs (as did the good Samaritan). Dear ones, do you glory in the comfort of the gourd more than you glory in the God who gives the gourd for your comfort and refreshment? Are you more like the nine lepers who were healed and ran off to enjoy their healing, or are you more like the one who was healed, but returned and evidenced his faith in Christ by first thanking Christ with all his heart for

the undeserved mercy of his healing? Forgive us, O Lord, for our thankless hearts.

2. Having now noted the sinful anger and despair of Jonah in the loss of the gourd, the Lord once again comes to Jonah in this **Third Contrast** with great mercy and kindness.

a. First, the Lord God asks Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” In effect, the Lord asks, “Jonah, are you justly angry over the loss of the gourd which I gave to you, and therefore have the right to take away from you?” Just as the Lord gives to us what is comfortable and refreshing in this life, so also He can send the worm to devour the gourd that provides for our comfort and refreshment (“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” Job 1:21). Are you clinging so tightly to a loved one (whether a spouse, children, parents, brothers, or sisters), to your health, to your home, to your job, or to your own life, that you would stand in judgment of the Lord who in love has given such blessings to you, His beloved children, if in love He should take away such blessings from you? Nothing in this life is so secure that it cannot be taken from us by God’s all-wise and most good appointment. And the tighter we squeeze such blessings, the more difficult we will find it is to hold on to them (like trying to hold sand in our hands that we are squeezing so tightly). Let us, therefore, as Christians enjoy all of the gourds that the Lord has given to us with a loving thankfulness to the glory of God, but let us continue to examine ourselves to see whether Christ is our life or whether anything else in this world has become or is becoming our life and reason for living.

b. Second, the Lord God mercifully responds to Jonah’s self-righteous justification of his anger by laying bare Jonah’s merciless heart while the Lord reveals His own merciful heart in Jonah 4:10-11. In response to Jonah’s self-vindication of his anger against the loss of the gourd, the Lord corrects Jonah by revealing to him that he had shown

such pity upon a mere plant (for which he had not labored and which grew so quickly in just one night), but had shown no pity upon a city full of human beings with immortal souls.

(1) I'm sure many radical environmentalists today would find Jonah's pity for a plant (over that for people) to be very commendable. For overpopulation is blamed for nearly every crisis (actual or imagined) that the world faces (from global warming, to poverty, to unemployment, to famine, to plagues, and to wars). From the time of Aristotle (who recommended abortion and exposure of newborns in order to control the size of the population), to Thomas Malthus and Margaret Sanger (who was founder of Planned Parenthood), both of whom promoted abortion and various forms of contraception and sterilization as means of controlling the size of the population, to China which enforces a one child policy, to Paul Ehrlich (a U.S. environmentalist) who has advocated the use of compulsory agents of sterilization to be put into the water supply and into the food supply to control the population, there have been many proponents who pitied the environment and nature over human life (and the righteous and biblical reproduction of human life). Dear ones, I am not against taking all lawful means to protect God's creation, but we cannot lawfully and biblically do so at the expense of the preservation and reproduction of human beings made in the image of God. What will such well-funded environmentalists and social engineers, such billionaires who send "charitable" contributions to foundations who study ways to control the population, and such religious, philosophical, and political leaders who embrace such wicked principles not stop at in order to achieve and maintain their desired worldwide population size between 500 million and 2 billion? Only God knows. If one's religion is maintaining and managing some man-inspired level of quality and equality of life throughout the world, then the law that supports such a religion is to control the size of the population of the world (at whatever costs).

(2) In contrast to such immoral principles of population control, I read this week of a teenager (17 years old) who was diagnosed with stage three astrocytoma (a cancerous brain tumor), and who learned a few weeks later that she was pregnant. Doctors told her she had to abort the child or stop chemotherapy treatment while pregnant for the safety of the baby. Jenni Lake did not consider aborting the baby, but rather decided to forgo radiation and chemotherapy while she was pregnant. Chad was born whole and healthy. Jenni Lake died 12 days after giving birth to Chad. Although I do not hold Jenni up as an example of Christian chastity, and although I could find no testimony to her faith in Jesus Christ, I submit to you that what she exemplified (even by way of God's common grace) in her self-sacrificial love to preserve her child provides a graphic contrast with those who will murder the unborn in order to achieve and maintain some man-made standard of quality of life for 500 million to two billion people. Now I'm not suggesting that Jonah would have bought into the wicked principles of the overpopulation crowd, but what I find that is common to both Jonah and the overpopulation crowd is a greater degree of pity for the loss of nature (a plant in Jonah's case) than of pity for the loss of people (with immortal souls). Dear ones, what do our thoughts and decisions in regard to the size of our family reveal about our priorities of quality of life over life itself? What do our thoughts and decisions in regard to promoting the gospel and helping those with legitimate needs reveal about our priorities of quality of our own life over the salvation and help of people with eternal souls? Jesus will say to the righteous on the Day of Judgment, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

(3) And so the Lord tenderly corrects and convinces Jonah not only of sinful anger, but also of a merciless heart toward people with immortal souls (120,000 of which were infants not knowing the right hand from the left hand, according to Jonah 4:11). Dear ones,

Jonah had been forgiven so much by the Lord, and yet he showed more compassion for a plant, than he did for men, women, and children made in the image of God. Mercy does not mean that justice must be suspended, it means that if a sin can be covered in love, mercy does so (“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” 1 Peter 4:8). However, if a sin cannot be covered in love, due to the public nature of the sin, due to the heinousness of the sin, due to the frequency of the sin, due to the influence the sin will have in leading others into it, or due to the obstinacy of the sin, then justice moves forward to confront the sin (but does not do so without love and mercy, and an eager willingness to forgive where there is evidence of faith, repentance, and new obedience). The words found in James 2:13 should always guide us in our relationship to others, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” Dear ones, do you delight to show mercy to others wherever judgment against others may be lawfully averted? Although justice cannot be compromised, is it your great delight to show mercy to even the undeserving, just as the Lord has shown His infinite mercy to you who deserve everlasting condemnation?

IV. Concluding Remarks.

A. The great theme of the Book of Jonah is God’s amazing plan to save the nations of the world through Jesus Christ. That amazing plan has been evidenced in part by the Lord’s gracious salvation to the Gentile city of Nineveh through the preaching of God’s faithful (though weak) prophet, Jonah. What I would like to do very briefly in the conclusion to our study in the Book of Jonah is to leave you with the big picture by briefly tracing that great plan of God’s gracious salvation through biblical history and prophetic testimony, so that we are left with the glorious

hope of God's salvation not only to us as individuals, but to all nations in their official capacity.

B. First, let us trace through biblical history God's gracious plan to save the nations, beginning with where the Book of Jonah leaves off.

1. The capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, was graciously saved through the preaching of Jonah in about 790 b.c.

2. The salvation of Nineveh provoked Israel to jealousy but not to repentance. And in 722 b.c. (some 60-70 years later), Assyria became the scourge of God's wrath against the northern kingdom of Israel, and Assyria led Samaria (the capital of Israel) into captivity due to Israel's gross covenant-breaking (2 Kings 18:11-12).

3. In 586 b.c., Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, and was led captive into Babylon. Both Israel and Judah (in regard to their national life) were led into bondage and servitude to foreign rulers.

4. In 538 b.c., Babylon (under wicked King Belshazzar, Daniel 5) was captured by the Persians under Cyrus. It was this very Cyrus concerning whom Isaiah (some 170 years earlier) had prophesied saying, "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isaiah 44:28).

5. From the conquered city of Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree that the captives from Israel and Judah should return to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-3). Under men like Zerubbabel (the prince), Joshua (the high priest), Ezra (the scribe and priest), Nehemiah (the governor), and Haggai and Zechariah (the prophets), the work of rebuilding the temple was finally accomplished.

6. And it was that rebuilt temple into which the greater temple, the Lord Jesus Christ entered during His earthly ministry, and which Jesus Christ fulfilled through his death and resurrection commissioning His faithful ministers to disciple "all nations" (Matthew

28:19), which His ministers did undertake by the grace and power of God as we see throughout the Book of Acts and the Epistles. That is the historical side of this brief panorama.

C. Now let us briefly turn our attention to the prophetic side of the panorama, for the history that I have just presented gives a foretaste of things to come.

1. The salvation of Nineveh at the time of Jonah points to the prophesied millennial salvation of Assyria, along with Israel and Egypt, as representative of all Gentile nations (in Isaiah 19:23-25, cp. Isaiah 29:23; Isaiah 60:21). Interestingly, the ruins of ancient Nineveh are in northern Iraq. This then prophesies the salvation of even the Arab nations that are presently Islamic. It is not Islam that will be the religion of every nation, but rather biblical Christianity.

2. The captivity of Israel and Judah (and especially of Judah into Babylon) points to the spiritual captivity and darkness of God's people held in bondage within mystery Babylon (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church) and under the tyranny of that papal antichrist and man of sin (Revelation 17:5-6).

3. The going forth of Cyrus to crush Babylon and to lead God's people held captive under Belshazzar back into the promise land in order to re-establish the true worship of the Lord points to the deliverance of the greater Cyrus, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by means of His royal scepter and His gospel delivered His people from the captivity and darkness of mystery Babylon (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church) and from the tyranny of that greater Belshazzar (the papal antichrist) into the glorious liberty of Christ in re-establishing sound doctrine, pure worship, and faithful church government beginning at the time of the First Reformation, continuing to the Second Reformation, and being fully realized at the beginning of the millennium (Revelation 17:16; Revelation 18:2-4,21).

4. The re-establishment of sound doctrine and pure worship under the faithful governors, priests, and prophets at the return of Israel from exile into the promise land not only points to the future restoration of Israel (“and so all Israel shall be saved” Romans 11:26), but also points as well to the salvation of the Gentile nations (when the fullness of the Gentiles will be brought into the Visible Church, Romans 11:25; Zechariah 2:10-12). Then, dear ones, the Lord Jesus will rule from His heavenly temple over the nations of the world during the millennium, at which time “all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him” (Psalm 72:11), and at which time there will no longer be schisms, sects, and different denominations within a nation, but rather a covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship, and government (Zechariah 14:9; Isaiah 11:9). This, I submit, is what is anticipated by the salvation of Nineveh through the preaching of God’s prophet, Jonah—a glorious salvation of the nations of this world through the faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May the Lord Jesus ever grip our hearts with the hope of that big picture in destroying that papal antichrist and all false religion, and in bringing all nations (including Israel) into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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