

## Chapter 19

### THE GREAT HEART OF GOD

We come to verses 10 and 11 in Jonah chapter 4, and we have entitled the subject as "The Great Heart of God."

***"But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?'"***

We come now to the close of this marvelous little book. There will be one more lesson in the series which will be taken from the New Testament on the subject, "A Greater Than Jonah is Here."

In our last lesson, we left Jonah standing before God in his guilt and shame having had his mouth shut by God. God did this by revealing to Jonah the comparison of His own compassion or pity with that of Jonah's lack of compassion and pity. Jonah has been shown his lack of love for the Ninevites, the very people whom God has just lavished His amazing love and compassion upon. Today we come to consider the great heart of compassion that God has for His suffering creatures. This is the revelation of the heart of God to which this whole book has been moving, and for which it has been written. Before we begin our observations upon today's text, I make this note. In the delivery of the last lesson, I made reference to a man who labored with the American Indians. I wrongly attributed that person to be Robert Murray McShayne when it was actually David Brainerd. I knew better, but a mental error was committed and deserves correcting. That is what happens when you reach my age, and you depart from your notes.

Now we will primarily look at the compassionate makeup of God's moral character as seen in verse 11. God asked Jonah this question. ***"Should not I pity Nineveh, that great city?"*** The theme of the Book of Jonah is summarized in one word, "Compassion." If you have listened to or read all of the previous eighteen lessons, and this is the last time we cover the book of Jonah, then if you forget many other details of this book, remember this one thing, that its theme is the "compassion of God for sinners."

However, this central theme does not become evident until you reach verses 10 and 11 of the last chapter. However, is that not the way a good story is supposed to be? A good story unfolds itself as it develops and then at a certain point you suddenly realize what the whole book is about. Thus, God saves the real focus point of the book until the last of the book. The Book of Jonah was never written to just tell us the story of Jonah. No, we are told the story of this man and the city of Nineveh because of what it reveals to us about

God, not about Jonah. Therefore, when we leave the book we should not be thinking upon the fact that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, but upon the God to whom Jonah must give an account and worship. What kind of a God is He, not what kind of a fish swallowed Jonah. I am afraid there is far too much of "Jonah and the whale" in the history of biblical teaching. There has been far too much debate on the species of the fish that swallowed Jonah than what there was about the character of God that the Book of Jonah is designed to teach.

Most people, even good Bible commentators, come away from the book thinking about the escapades of Jonah and the hardness of his heart rather than being overwhelmed with the loving compassion of God. What a tragedy to read a book like this and miss the main focus of the book. However, this only reveals the earthliness of our minds and our thinking. You see, we have a tendency to gravitate toward that which is seen, the sensual, the earthly, and the human, and our thinking is very dull toward that which is unseen, the spiritual, the heavenly, and the divine. So because of our natures being dull and insensitive, we have a tendency to gravitate to the character of Jonah rather than Jonah's God.

*"Oh God, may we pray to you this morning, take our eyes off the creature and turn them upon the Creator who is blessed forever and ever."*

Now at the outset of the lesson, let us give a definition of "compassion." We are going to be talking about the great heart of God or the compassion of God. What do we mean by compassion? An examination of both the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek words, we see that they are in unison on this meaning. Compassion means "to have inward affection, coupled with pity and mercy; a desire to spare from suffering." In the Biblical languages, to have compassion means a desire to spare from suffering. When we come to our English word "compassion" in Webster's original unabridged dictionary, the first one that Webster produced, we have the prefix "com" which means "with or along side of." So if I called someone to come up here and stand with me, or along side of me, he would be participating in what I am doing. To show compassion means that you "enter along side of." If you had compassion for someone, you would stand with that person in his or her suffering. In the dictionary, compassion means "a suffering with another, a sensation of sorrow excited by the distress or misfortunes of another, pity." Compassion is a mixed passion compounded of love and sorrow. The word "compassionate" is defined as "having a temper or disposition to pity, inclined to show mercy, merciful, having a heart that is tender, easily moved by the distresses, sufferings, wants, and infirmities of others." Is the God of the Bible, a God of compassion? Is He a God who is predisposed to show mercy, or is He a God who is predisposed to be wrathful? It is not either/or but what is His basic character? What is He predisposed to do, and does He have the capacity to be compassionate? This has brought about a great debate among Reformed and Calvinistic

teachers who have been greatly influenced in their studies by the philosopher, Aristotle, in trying to uphold the perfection of God, that God cannot be influenced by anything outside of Himself. God is then viewed as being incapable of being affected by anything outside of Himself. Therefore, according to that position, if God had seen the person in the ditch that the Good Samaritan came across, He would be entirely unmoved because of His so-called perfection. It is not my purpose this morning to try to discuss that issue in detail. We are only taking the position that if God purposes to show compassion, that compassion originates within Himself. He certainly has the ability to feel, and if He does not, we are no longer dealing with a personal God. We are dealing with some type of being who may be powerful and have a mind, but totally immune to the circumstances around Him. If that is the case, He would not be a living personal being.

Remember that Jonah believed God to be of this particular makeup, and that He was predisposed to show mercy. Look back in Jonah 4:2: ***"So he prayed to the Lord, and said, 'Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness. One who relents from doing harm.'"*** Jonah has described here the very being of God which is the uniform character assigned to God in the Old Testament law of Moses, the Psalms, and by the prophets. This is not an isolated aspect of God's being. This is the uniform character or being of God that is expressed in those three divisions of the Old Testament scriptures.

Look first in the law of Moses in the Exodus 34:5-6 when God came to Moses: ***"Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.'"***

Now you would expect to hear a name like "God" or "Jehovah," or something of that nature. That is not what the name of the "Lord" is affiliated with. When the name of the Lord is revealed, it is associated with His being, His character. What kind of a God is He like? Look in verses 6 and 7, ***"And the LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'"*** Notice all of these attributes about the goodness of God. Lest a person think that God is of such a disposition that He is too loving and kind, and will not judge the guilty if they refuse to return to Him, look at the next part of the statement. ***"And that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."*** The law of Moses affirms that God is a God of basic compassion, predisposed to show mercy unto His creatures.

Look in Psalm 86:5. David, the author of this particular Psalm says: **"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You."**

God has a disposition where He is ready to forgive. If you read your Bible, you will find that forgiveness is never bestowed until first of all there is repentance and forgiveness is asked for. That is why God does not forgive without repentance, and that you and I cannot grant forgiveness to another person until that person is willing to ask to be forgiven. The prevalent idea today is that you must forgive people when they have never made restitution by asking for forgiveness. You will not find that taught in the Bible. The person who has wronged another person is responsible to go to that person and ask to be forgiven, and that person who has been wronged is to be ready to forgive. You cannot forgive unconditionally. God does not. But God is predisposed, He is ready. If you call upon Him, He will forgive. That is the nature of the God with whom we are dealing. Notice that David said, **"and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You."** So this Psalm reveals the same concept of God as the law of Moses. We don't have a different God in Psalms that we have in the law of Moses.

Now let's examine the writings of the prophets. Have they described a different God in their writings, or do they describe Him the same as Moses and the Psalms? Look in the book of Joel, one of the minor prophets along with Jonah and right in line with Amos and Hosea the minor prophets. Joel 2:12-13: **"Now, therefore,' says the Lord, 'turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, (will it do any good if I do it?) for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."** Therefore, the writings of Moses, the poetry literature of the Psalms, and the prophetic literature, all of these Old Testament writings reveal that it is the same God, who is basically predisposed with a temperament to show mercy to repentant individuals.

In Luke 24, our Lord Jesus Christ followed the threefold division of the Jewish canon of scripture. In Luke 24:44-45, He makes this statement: **"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."** Do you see here this threefold division of the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, and our Lord Jesus Christ said all of them spoke of me? Jesus Christ came to reveal most clearly the character of the unseen God. So the statement that Jonah made in chapter 4 reveals to us that what he knew about God, was the same as how the law, the prophets and the Psalms had unanimously declared God to be like. Thus, God's character, by which His name is expressed, has been the same throughout all the ages of men, and remains the same

today as expressed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have one God in the Old Testament and another God in the New Testament. You do not have a God of wrath in the Old Testament and a God of love and compassion in the New Testament. He is the same God in the Old Testament as revealed most clearly in the tender, compassionate person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If you want to know more about "compassion," we will deal with that in the last lesson of this series, as we see that there is One present today who is far greater than Jonah. When He preaches, He has a love for the people to whom He preaches. Jonah did not have that love. But this man Jesus, the God man, has a love for the people that He ministers to. There are texts after texts in the New Testament that tell us that Jesus was moved with "compassion" when He saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. When He saw a hurting person, the Bible tells us that He was moved with compassion, and would set out to relieve that suffering. This is the God of the Bible, who has a basic nature which is predisposed to show mercy and to relieve the suffering of those who are in misery.

As we go back to our text in Jonah 4:2, there are several descriptions about this God in that chapter. First, it says that He is a gracious and merciful God. That means that God has a disposition of goodness in His very being. He is a good God. In Biblical terminology, grace is defined as God's unmerited favor shown to other beings and objects. Some of you may have never made this distinction before in your thinking, but mercy is somewhat different than grace. They are not the one and the same thing. We have a tendency to lump them right together. If grace is unmerited favor, then what is mercy? Mercy is God's favor expressed to suffering and needy beings. If these beings are sinful beings, such as men, mercy is God's demerited favor while grace is His unmerited favor. For example, God has shown grace to the angelic creation, but no mercy. The angels which have remained in His favor have never needed mercy, but God has been gracious to them in giving them an existence and confirming them in that state of righteousness. Also, no mercy has ever been extended to the angels who fell and remain in rebellion against God. However, we who have fallen in Adam, not only have no merits to commend ourselves to God, but we have numerous demerits against us. What is the difference between a merit and a demerit? A merit is something that I have earned, and it is something that I can use to my advantage. When I stand before God, I have nothing that I can claim to bargain with God, because everything I have comes from Him. It is unmerited favor or grace that He even gave me an existence. So, I am what I am by the grace of God. But there is something worse in this matter, and that is I have demerits against me. I have sin in my life. I need more than just grace. I need mercy shown to me that can cover my demerited position. If God is going to show favor toward me, it must overshadow and cover my demerits, so that I need both grace and mercy to restore me to the favor of God Almighty. That is why our God is revealed to us as a gracious and merciful God.

The second thing we see in Jonah 4:2 is that God is slow to anger. This means that He is not quickly provoked, but He is longsuffering. We should be very glad that God is longsuffering. In Ezekiel 33:11, God says **"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."** Look how long He had dealt with Nineveh. His longsuffering comes down to forty days when He said the city will be destroyed. Are you not glad that we have a God who does not become suddenly infuriated by something, but grants His moral creatures opportunities to turn from their wicked ways and return to Him. If you are a Christian today, you should be glad that you are dealing with a God who is slow to anger? If He was otherwise, we would be in the "wood shed" all the time. It would be a continuous twenty-four hour a day chastisement going on if our God was not predisposed to be slow to anger.

Next, the third thing our text in Jonah declares is that God is of great kindness. That means that He is abundant in goodness and love. I John 4:8 says, **"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."** This states that not only God loves, but that God IS love. There are three ways love is used in the Bible, and each of these is true of God. First, there is a love of "benevolence," which means what God is by His very nature, a disposition to good and goodwill to others. Remember at the birth of Jesus, the angels declared **"Peace on earth and goodwill toward men."** God has a benevolent love in which He is basically predisposed to goodness. Secondly, there is a love of "beneficence" which means to do or show acts of kindness to others. The love of benevolence means what a person IS in their disposition. A love of beneficence is when one shows acts of love toward another. The God who is benevolent is also beneficent when He shows acts of love and kindness toward His creation. The ultimate act of beneficent love is found in John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** God had that basic benevolence, but that benevolence led Him to give in a beneficent way. Thirdly, there is another sense in which the love of God is described in scripture, and that is what we call the love of complacency. The word "complacency" means to take delight in, to enjoy, to receive satisfaction and pleasure therefrom. Remember, in the opening chapters of Genesis, when God created the universe, after each day God said, **"it was good."** When He had finished His creation, He looked upon it and said **"it is good."** This is a love of complacency. It gave God satisfaction, pleasure, and delight to look upon what He had done. Now put those three definitions together. God has a benevolent love - He is predisposed to show kindness. He is a God who has a love of beneficence - He acts and demonstrates this love toward His creation, and He takes great delight in receiving pleasure from that which He works out in His creation. These varying aspects of God's love can be expressed by saying that God is predisposed to be good and kind to His creatures. Secondly, He has given His only begotten son for Adam's race to display this kindness, and

He takes no delight or pleasure in the death of the wicked who reject His love and His being by acts of unthankfulness.

The next statement about the character of God that is revealed in Jonah 4:2 is that it says He **"relents from doing harm."** That is an expression which means He turns away from inflicting the deserved punishment. This is what He did with Nineveh. Nineveh deserved the wrath and judgment of God, but when they repented, turned from their evil ways, turned to God, and cried out for mercy, God turned away from inflicting the punishment which He had said He would do to them. We should be thankful that God is like that? Have you ever been brought to see that you are deserving of hell? If so, and you are a Christian, then you should be rejoicing today that God turned away from the punishment that was due you. If we all got what we deserved, it would be separation from our Creator forever and ever with not one ounce of comfort from God or the creation. God turns away His wrath and from inflicting deserved punishment. This is the very nature of the being of God. Reflect on this statement in Ezekiel 33:11 that God takes great delight, complacency, and great satisfaction in pardoning sinners. **"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"** Here is the disposition of God to deflect the punishment that is due unto sinful people.

Micah, another of the minor prophets, based his hope for Israel's future in this very character of God. That is also the only thing we can base any hope for the United States of America and for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hope cannot be found in the character of you and me and all the other human beings here now and in the future, but it is only based on the character of God. There is only one hope for the future of man and that is found in this very being of God Himself. That is, God is predisposed to show mercy and forgive sinful men. *"Sing it over and over again, Christ receiveth sinful men."* Listen to the prophet Micah as he makes this statement: **"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."** (Micah 7:18-19). Micah based his hope for the future of Israel, not upon Israel's goodness, but upon Israel's God and His willingness to forgive Israel's sinning. John Newton wrote a tremendous hymn that he entitled *"Great God of Wonders."* It goes like this in the second stanza:

*In wonder lost with trembling joy, We take the pardon of our God.  
Pardon for crimes of deepest die, A pardon bought with Jesus' blood.  
Oh may this strange, this matchless grace, The God-like miracle of love*



*Fill the whole earth with grateful praise, And all the angelic choirs above.  
Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?"*

Newton based that song on the prophecy of Micah which we just quoted. This is the God with whom we deal. He is a God who takes delight in pardoning sinners. Just as He can look down on His creation in the opening chapters of Genesis, and see all He had done with a love of complacency, and satisfaction, and say "**it is good,**" so our lovingly Heavenly Father can welcome us, the returning prodigals from the far country. When we return to Him, He takes great delight in forgiving and pronouncing pardon on us. "This, my son, was lost and now he is found." (Cf. Luke 15:24). That is why the Bible says, "**There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.**" (Luke 15:7). It gives God delight, satisfaction and pleasure when a sinner is brought back to Him.

Now what are some references to God's compassion? There are many more, but I will select a few of these. Is God a God of compassion? Can He be touched with the feelings of our infirmities? Can He be moved toward us in a disposition of benevolence, beneficence and complacency?

Psalm 78:38: "**But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.**"

Psalm 86:15: "**But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.**"

Psalm 112:4: "**Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.**"

Psalm 145:8-9: "**The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.**"

Lamentations 3:22-23: "**Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.**"

Do we need to read any more from the revelation of God's Word whether God is a compassionate being or not? Yet some would have me believe that the God of the Bible has no passions or compassion toward His creatures. We are dealing with some serious matters here when we are talking about the love, mercy and the compassion of God



Almighty.

In this story in Jonah, God looks down upon the largest and the most sinful city in the entire world, and what does He see? He sees its inhabitants clothed in sackcloth and ashes, crying out in repentance to God to pardon their sins. Can you imagine this scene? Even the animals are all crying out for their sins to be pardoned. What does God do? Jonah would have God destroy them all for their wickedness even though they have already repented and are seeking God for pardon. God could justly do so, but He would be acting entirely out of His character if He did so. Why? Because God would no more destroy repentant sinners in the midst of their repenting than He would save them without their repentance. God will not take anybody to heaven without their being brought to repentance and faith in Christ. God does not save sinners apart from the sinner bowing before the mercy of God and trusting in Him. Likewise, God does not destroy sinners who are clinging to the altar of repentance and faith, not trusting in their repentance, not trusting in their faith but in trusting in the God who delights in showing mercy to those who do so. If I perish, I will go to hell trusting God's mercy, and God cannot deny Himself. Do you see how the old Puritans could present an argument before God by presenting His very character in return back to God. Here is a typical prayer of a penitent sinner:

"God, you were the One who said You were like this. You are the One who said You would pardon. You are the One who said You were gracious. Lord, I am a sinner. I am desperately in need of mercy. I do not present my own merits or actions. *Could my tears forever flow, thou must save and thou alone.* My tears cannot atone for sin, but You can. Your character can save, and You have set forth in Your word that You delight with a love of complacency of welcoming the returning prodigals from the far country of sin and wickedness. I come as that prodigal, not demanding anything out of You but that You just forgive me, and pardon me and put me out there in a pasture some where as one of your unworthy servants."

What does the Father do? He welcomes the returning prodigal and kills the fatted calf. He clothes him with the best robe and puts a ring on his finger. He gives him the best, because God delights in sinners who return. This is the God with whom we deal. This is the God who we can share with our friends, relatives, and our loved ones. He is a God who is predisposed to forgive guilty sinners.

We have seen God's compassion on the people of Nineveh. Let us not forget that God was also patient and long-suffering with His hard-hearted preacher, Jonah. God said to Jonah, "you had pity on your gourd, but you do not want Me to have pity on the Ninevites." You can see the greatness of God's compassion to the Ninevites when you view it beside

Jonah's angry reaction to God's compassion. God loved and cared for the wicked and cruel Ninevites just as He does for today's wicked and cruel drug dealers. Does God have any compassion for the wicked people on the face of the earth today? It is true that He requires repentance and faith before He will clear the guilty, but I want to declare, on the basis of God's character, that He stands ready to receive the most wicked people on the face of the earth when they turn to Him in repentance and faith. Is that okay with you, or do you just want God to save a few respectful people and bring them here to sit with us in our worship service? Do you find that you do not want God to save the drug dealers or someone who is different from you, and bring them into this church to sit by your side? Do you have any problem with that? God is ready to save the most wicked person on the face of the earth. He is ready to pardon. He is ready to forgive, because where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

"Oh God, save some great sinners and bring them into our midst. Save some outcasts and some down and out persons. Manifest your greatness and your ability to pardon."

Jonah saw this great forgiveness as a great evil. The Assyrians were an extremely vicious people and were the deadly enemies of the Hebrews. They had done great harm to all the nations over the face of the earth, and Jonah could not conceive how God could so quickly forgive them of all the evil that they had done. After all, had not David, the man after God's own heart, been required to suffer all the remaining days of his life for the sin of adultery and murder? Is God going to forgive these wicked Ninevites and let them get by so easily? Isn't this compassion sort of a manifestation of cheap grace? No, that is what the great love of God will do no matter how great a sin you have committed. If you are truly desirous of being forgiven of your sin, God has the ability and the desire to forgive it. Ask Him, He is ready to forgive.

Jonah was a man of passion but he did not have much compassion. This is the mark of immaturity in the life of a believer. As I bring this to a close, I hope you will stay with me and be able to comprehend the lesson we have labored to teach through these six months of studying the Book of Jonah. It is the mark of immaturity in the life of a believer to not have compassion for lost people. Jonah was not a young believer. He was not a young prophet, but an old prophet. It is quite often that younger believers have more passion than compassion. Do you remember when James and John first started out in the ministry with the Lord? Remember that they were known as the sons of thunder (cf. Mark 3:17). They were filled with zeal. Remember when they were going through Samaria with Jesus and the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, James and John asked the Lord, "**do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?**" (Luke 9:54). Later in life, the beloved John would write more about the love of God than any of the

other disciples. But when he first started out in ministry, he was ready for heads to roll if people did not immediately follow his Lord.

My brethren, especially you younger brethren, beware of an excessive zeal that tends to run over the feelings of people. While not shielding the wrath of God from men, let them know that God is angry every day with the wicked (Psalm 7:11). Be careful that you do not convey to men that God is predisposed to wrath rather than mercy. That is a mark of immaturity in your understanding of the character of God. Jonah would have a God of wrath rather than a God of mercy. What was true of James and John may be said of you by the Master. I know it could be said of me in days past. Do you remember what the Master said to James and John in response to their "zeal?" He said, **"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."** "I did not come to call fire down from heaven on these people. I came to save them." The predisposition of Jesus was **"to seek and to save that which was lost."** (Luke 19:10).

Now look at God's closing question to Jonah. The book suddenly closes here in verse 11. It seems like part of it has been lost. We are not told what Jonah said or did in the light of this question that God asked. It was not intended that we should have Jonah on our mind at the close of the book. To some critics the book seems to end with a strange sudden abruptness and incompleteness. This is because the critics do not have a concept of the real purpose of the book. Nothing in the Bible is merely told for the sake of telling. All that is written has a moral and divine aim. **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."** (II Timothy 3:16). In verse 11, we are left in the presence of God, and face to face with the moving revelation of God's compassion.

Early in this study, some of you have already asked if Jonah remained angry at God or did his heart enter into the great heart of God and begin to love what God loved? Most of the commentaries say we don't know what the outcome was. I am going to go a step further and speculate that I believe he did. You may say, "for what reason, pastor?" The text doesn't say one way or another what Jonah's response to God's question was. From what I know about human nature, I believe that Jonah did repent, and he was humbled by what he was taught, on this basis. Human nature being what it is, Jonah would never have penned such a revelation of his own sins and shortcomings had he remained unrepentant. If you had been Jonah, would you have written a book like this and told us all about what was going on in your heart if you had not come to repentance? You or I would hide everything that Jonah revealed, and yet Jonah has written all of this for future generations. His only desire to tell future generations about the most private thoughts of his sinful

heart, was so that you and me might profit from his errors and bring glory to God.

John Gill makes this closing observation regarding Jonah and God's question.

No answer being returned, it may be reasonably supposed Jonah was convinced of his sin and folly; and to show his repentance for it, penned this narrative, which records his infirmities and weaknesses, for the good of the church, and the instruction of saints in succeeding ages. (Gill, *Commentary on Jonah*).

I submit to you the very fact that Jonah would even entertain the idea of writing a book to reveal the inner recesses of his heart of getting angry at God, was for our benefit and for God's glory. If we wrote a book like this about ourselves, we would not want to be known for having bad thoughts about God and other people. We would not want anyone to know that unless we were brought to repentance and wanted others to profit from the way that we had so failed our God.

Now what are the book's closing lessons? The selfishness of fallen man is the main lesson I want to leave with you. This wonderful little book has given us a picture of the human heart retrained by the grace of God, but stripped of its hypocrisies and disguises. Jonah speaks out to God. He acts out before us and writes down for us the sinful thoughts which we have in our hearts, but we keep suppressed, and do not want others to know. Jonah has done this for us. We have before us a picture of God's character and a mirror in which to behold our own character, and it has not been a very pretty thing if you have looked in the mirror. The second lesson that we can learn, is God's sanctifying providence for His people. As God sent Nathan to David with a parable to make David condemn himself out of his own mouth, so He sent Jonah into the storm, the sea, the fish, the gourd, the worm, the wind and the sunshine to prepare the way for Jonah's better feelings to condemn his worse feelings. God will make Jonah's pity for the plant explain God's pity for Nineveh and condemn Jonah's lack of pity for the multitude of the souls perishing in Nineveh. God's providential dealings with you and me on a daily basis in nature prepare us to receive the teachings of His Word.

When we preach the Word, we will find that there will be some people who will grow in the grace and knowledge of God, but on the other hand, some people will receive the word like pouring water on a duck's back. They are totally unresponsive, and there will be a reason for that. The people who are receptive to the Word are the people who God's providence is bringing to a state of humility where they are teachable. At that same time, God's providence may be such that the others do not see that He is doing anything in their lives. If someone experiences a car wreck, it is amazing how receptive of the Word they become.

If a person has a heart attack and goes through a frightening experience in an emergency room, it is amazing what they begin to hear as they listen to the Word. God put Jonah through the mill and Jonah was brought to receive the Word. God sanctifies His people and prepares them to receive the Word.

Finally, the closing lessons of this book are (1) the great lesson of the sinfulness of fallen man; (2) God's sanctifying providence for His people; and (3) the great compassion of God. Ponder then this revelation of God in the closing two verses of this book. It is perhaps the tenderest anticipation of John 3:16, the parable of the prodigal son, and worldwide preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles to be found anywhere in the Old Testament scriptures. God's tender patience with the resentful prophet, and His tender concern for the Ninevites, despite their wickedness, give us a unique expression of God's compassion. See in this final verse, the compassion of God toward penitent sinners, toward little children who have not sinned against a known standard of right and wrong, and even to the non-moral creatures of the animals that are found in Nineveh.

We close with Psalm 145:8-10 - ***"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You."*** Where does this leave you at the closing of Jonah? Does it leave you with a greater appreciation for the God of the Bible, His name, and His character? Does it leave you under a sense of, "O God, help me to be more like You and less like Jonah?" Where have these messages taken you? Have they brought you to see the greatness of the very being of the God of the Bible? Have they brought you to see your own inadequacies? Have they brought you to see the lack of love that you may have for your fellow man? If so, go to that great God and ask Him to make you what He would have you to be. Let us pray.