

LACK OF COMPASSION

JANUARY 29, 2023 | JONAH | JONAH 3:1-4:4 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Father, thank you for the privilege of having a church, a place where we can find support and encouragement and comfort. I'm grateful for the friends that I am making and have made here at GraceWay, and for the way that I can grow spiritually here at this church. Lord, I thank you for the opportunity we have to have other believers we can rely on and connect with. Connect with to grow, but also just to face the challenges that we have in life. We ask that you give us the ability to be that kind of church that reaches out, who cares for those who are in need, and has the ability to share and care in a special way. Lord, now we look at your word and we ask you to do what you regularly do, and that is to teach us through it. We ask that you'd speak this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

[Video starts]

Our lives are marked with calling. Calling from a great God who chooses to use us to further His kingdom. Throughout history, we see people who have said "yes" to this calling, and in doing so have been used by God in incredible eternal ways. In the Bible we see many examples of people running toward the calling on their lives. However, we also read of people who ran away from God. Which one are you? Do your fears, your struggles, your disappointments in people tempt you to turn and flee from the very mission that God has for you? Perhaps you've even forgotten what you yourself have been saved from. Our God is big and His love for us is infinite. May we not run from Him and His plans, but instead embrace the calling on our lives and take this infinite love to a lost and dying world.

[Video ends]

Jonah problem number three: lack of compassion. We saw in Jonah 1 the first problem he had was "I need to" versus "I don't want to." The second problem we saw was a poor response to correction. He could have responded to the fish, he could have responded to the storm, but it took being in that fish for three days for him to respond. Today we're going to see that he does the right thing in Jonah 3. He goes and he preaches the word, and there's going to be a response from the people to believe in the Lord. It's such a great thing. But we also see in the beginning of Jonah 4, which we'll look at today, that he really lacked the compassion that he needed.

We need both of those. We need compassion, we need truth in order to make an impact in our world. We're going to see that today in this passage that we're going to look at.

There's a very important success principle here for young people that I want to share with you. But first, let's read the passage. If you would stand with me in honor of God's word as I read Jonah 3 and part of 4.

It says – Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”

You may be seated.

Yes, Jonah obeyed. He did the right thing. But he lacked the compassion that's so important in our lives as we bring truth and we share the message of truth with other people.

Young people, I want to talk to you for a moment. I often speak to you as young people for a very important reason. I speak to you because I am committed to investing in our next generation. I target my sermons and I'm preparing them for people aged ten years old to twenty-five years of age. I do that because I want you to see that the Bible is relevant and practical for your lives now. You're going to be the next leaders of our church. You're going to be the next leaders of our families. You're going to be the next leaders in our community, in business, in politics. You're going to be the next leaders and I want to invest in you any way I can.

Of course the rest of us need to be listening to these messages as well. Children younger than 10 need the message of compassion and how important it is for their lives. And certainly all of us as adults need to grab on to these truths that we see. But you as young people are so valuable and so important that I want to invest in you because you're the future of our world.

Compassion is one of those very important concepts that you don't want to miss. It's one of those things I feel like sometimes I'm a tour guide of life in the Bible. I'm going, “Don't miss that. Be

sure to get this. Let me explain to you why this is here,” as a tour guide, guiding you through to these principles that will mark you, that will help you to be the person that God wants you to be.

Compassion is one of those qualities that will help you to have greater emotional intelligence. It will help you to feel better about yourself. You'll feel good in that regard. It'll just help you deal with life better if you have a sense of compassion so you don't become an angry person, like Jonah did.

But it will also help you deal with relationships. Because when you can show compassion and empathy, it will help those relationships to work more smoothly. We need compassion in marriage relationships. When someone disagrees with you, or does something you don't expect, or does something a different way than you do, it's very important for you to walk in their shoes or to experience life from their perspective so that we can avoid some of the arguments and disagreements that take place in life. Compassion is great for relationships. It's very important if you're in business, it's important if you're working with other people. It's going to be important for you continually in life. The person who has compassion and empathy is that person who can interact more effectively with other people.

But compassion has another significant benefit, and that's the benefit of seeing evil and speaking to it and taking action. Compassion drives us morally to do what's right. When we see something that's wrong, we feel this inside. We've got to do something about this to stop this evil or to deal with this problem. Compassion is this driving force that we must embrace in our lives. Jonah was missing that.

I'd like to go through the passage verse by verse and learn some lessons about this, and then see God's compassion as it's described in Jonah 4. Let's go through this and see what he has to say.

It says – Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”

A second time. It just tells us something about God's compassion. If we look at this book as a whole, this isn't just a book about the repentance of the Ninevites. This is a book about the repentance of one of God's servants. God loves His servants so much that He's compassionate and steps into his life and He wants to bring about change in his heart. He is on this detour with the fish for three days, but God has committed to him. When he gets back and he says, “Okay, I'm ready to do the right thing,” then He says to him, “Okay. I'm going to give you this word of the Lord a second time.” It just says something about God, how compassionate He is, how He gives second chances.

One man said, “I had my second chance about twenty years ago. I blew that. I went about the thousandths chance.” It is true that God gives us chance over and over and over again. It just reveals God's compassion. That we can come to Him. That's what God does with Jonah. He gives him a second chance.

Notice verse 3. *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.*

Aren't you glad he obeyed? I like asking kids the question – What do you think God would do if Jonah didn't obey this time? Yes, I think that we all need to learn how to obey. We don't want to know some of those other things that might happen. Obedience is so important.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.

Let's talk about the city of Nineveh for a moment. Nineveh is in modern-day Iraq. It was the capital of Assyria. It was a very large city, population about 500,000. A huge city for that time. Assyria was the governing nation in the world, conquering different people. It's eventually going to conquer Israel. This is before that though. Assyria is the enemy of Israel. Here's Jonah being called to speak to Nineveh.

It's a very big city. It had walls that were eighty-feet tall, and they would do chariot races on the walls. So these very large walls. In those days, a city often was made of the walls and people could come in for protection. But the city would spread out all around, in the fields and the farms. People could live out there. But if there was any danger, they could run inside the city and be protected by the city.

This city was very large, probably 50 miles wide, three days journey through. That's a huge city, all spread out and so big.

But Nineveh is not just a city that's mammoth in its size, but it was known for its brutality, for its violence, for its meanness, especially in war. They would conquer people and do all kinds of atrocious things to them, things that I'm not going to tell you. I read about them during the week. But they're rated R. They're not edifying for you to hear. Except you need to know they're very mean. They're brutal. They're violent people. They would do this to put fear into the hearts of all the enemies that they would have so they would give up. But they were just brutal people.

I say that and I think it's important in the story, because as we put ourselves into the place of Jonah, who's called to go and share the message with them, I think we need to just draw attention to some of the people that are mean. Because I know that some of you have experienced emotional abuse in your life. Maybe you've experienced physical abuse. Maybe by a former spouse, or maybe by someone else in your family, or someone in your life somehow. So when we put ourselves in that situation, it's understandable why Jonah wouldn't want to go and talk to the Ninevites. Why he wouldn't want to help them repent, because these were really bad people. They were evil. They were violent people.

God calls Jonah to go and speak to them. Did Jonah not want to go? I mean, why didn't he want to go? Maybe because he's thinking, "These people are just terrible people. They don't deserve the grace of God. They're not Israelites. God's grace is for us, not for those people." Have you ever said "those people"? We got to be careful when you say "those people," because when we start talking about "those people," it's those other people that are different than us that sometimes we don't want to spend time with, we don't want to talk to. God is interested in "those people."

Or maybe Jonah was concerned about his own reputation because he knew that God's going to forgive them. He's going, "I'm going to proclaim the message and then it's not going to come

true.” Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. But at this point in his life, he realizes, “Well, that's what I've got to do.” So he's going to do it.

It says that he went to Nineveh. It says in verse 4 – *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey* (that means probably about 20 miles into this big city). *And he called out* (this is his eight-word sermon), “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*”

Eight words. Maybe he preached a longer sermon, maybe this is a summary, I don't know. But there's only five words in Hebrew. This is a short message. But the point is, he goes into the city and he plants the flag, and he says, “This is the truth.”

Our world needs this. Our world needs more people who are going to plant the flag and say, “This is the truth.” Because the truth is what brings about change in people's lives. Even though Jonah does not have compassion in this story, even though it's revealed that he's angry about this, he still has the truth. It's very interesting that God uses truth to bring about change in people. These people are going to respond.

I think we have to think about how are we planting the flag? What are we doing to plant the flag in our community, in our family? I encourage parents regularly, plant the flag in your home so that your children, so that your mate realizes you're a believer. You stand for something. The truth is so significant, so powerful in everything that we do. We need to proclaim the truth. It's the truth that brings about changes. It's the truth that people need.

Sometimes we emphasize compassion a lot. I think compassion is really important. But if we emphasize compassion so much that we water down the truth and we say, “Can't we just all exist together? Let's all just feel good together,” because we're compassionate, we miss something. We must proclaim the truth.

In my early twenties, I had a mentor. His name was Giff Claiborne. He's in his nineties now and he and his wife sometimes sing hymns on Facebook. They're so cute to hear them do that. I love them. But Giff was a mentor of mine. I really appreciated him. He was a pastor back then. I remember one time he and I were sitting in a restaurant together. There was a group of guys at another table and they were being boisterous and using foul language. It was disheartening to be in that place. All of a sudden, Giff Claiborne yells out, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” in the restaurant. I said, “Why did you do that?” He says, “I'm reclaiming the territory for the Lord.” I love that. I think we need more Giff Claibornes. We're going to plant the flag.

How do you plant the flag? How do you communicate the truth? We have to be careful sometimes at work about how we do that. But maybe at the watercooler, you can say, “Hey, I heard this sermon yesterday that was really good. Maybe you would like to listen to it.” Maybe you talk about the power that God has to change lives of people. I don't know how you proclaim the truth. But we have to plant the flag.

Jonah's coming into the middle of the city and he's planting the flag. It's really interesting what happens when you do that, when you share the truth. Because people are hungry for the truth. Even wicked and brutal and violent people have a conscience. Maybe it's seared, but they have a

conscience. When you speak the truth, God is able then to use that truth. For someone to even come in and say, “Yeah, we got to get rid of this evil and violence in our world.” Wow, wouldn't that be great?

I love the next statement. Verse 5 – *And the people of Nineveh believed God.*

Whoa. That is a miracle. Of course it's a miracle anytime someone comes to Christ. When a child chooses to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, we rejoice. When a young person, a teenager says, “I'm going to commit myself to Jesus,” that's really valuable. When a young adult says, “Yes, Jesus is the most important thing in my life,” that's a miracle. We appreciate that. It's especially amazing when someone who's been so evil and violent and brutal says, “Okay, I'm going to change my heart. I'm going to change my life. I'm going to follow the Lord,” and they do. We go, “Whoa, that's a really big miracle.” God is in the business of doing miracles. He changes people's lives.

So it says right hidden in this passage – *And the people of Nineveh believed God.* What a miraculous story that is. They want to demonstrate. They want to demonstrate their humility before God, they want to demonstrate the repentance, they want to demonstrate the fact that they are changed people. That's why we have several verses about what they did.

It says – *They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.*

Sackcloth is a rough cloth. If you put that on, you're going to feel itchy and uncomfortable. Of course, when you fast and don't eat, you feel uncomfortable. Essentially what's taking place in this story is these are people are saying, “Okay, we're going to move the comfort of our life out of the way because we want to reorient ourselves.” Sometimes that has to happen in our life. Sometimes you have to say, “I'm going to remove the comfortable things, the things that make me comfortable, and I'm going to reorient my life.” So they put on these uncomfortable things. I like wearing comfortable clothes. I like eating comfort food. But in this case, they're abstaining from those things because they know that sometimes it requires discomfort in our lives in order for us to bring about change in our hearts. That's what they're doing.

They put ashes on their heads or sit in ashes because it will be uncomfortable. I feel great after I take a nice shower. It's uncomfortable to have ashes on you. They're entering into this discomfort because they want to communicate the seriousness of their willingness to change.

Sometimes when we're going to change, we have to be so willing to change that we're willing to move out of our comfort zone. Take some of those comfortable things out of the way so that we can make the changes that God wants to make in our lives. So they do that. Even up to the king.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

That is remarkable.

Wouldn't it be great if the leaders in our country would admit they were wrong every once in a while? Wouldn't that be nice? There seems to be this unwritten policy. I don't care whether you're Democrat, Republican, or some other thing, that if I'm wrong, I can't admit it. I need to blame it on somebody else. I need to defend myself. Wouldn't it be great if a king or a president or somebody in authority would say, "I'm wrong." Wouldn't that be great?

This is what the king does. *He issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh.* He uses his power to bring about change in the community. He says in this decree – *“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out to the mighty God.”*

I don't know what the animals have to do with it. I'm thinking, wow, they're really serious. They want to make sure everybody's uncomfortable, even the animals. Poor animals. I'm having compassion on the animals. Imagine these animals now in sackcloth, the donkey has sackcloth on him. We have in our neighborhood people who walk their dogs and they put these cute little coats and sweaters on them as they're walking. We even have one neighbor who puts lights on their dog as they're walking them around. We take a lot of care about our dog. Some people think dogs are children. I understand. But here they're taking their animals because they're showing how serious they are. What an interesting statement.

Here's the repentance part of his statement. He says – *Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.*

When you recognize the violence and the evil ways present in them, for them to make this statement, this is miraculous. This is powerful. *“Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”* Who knows? Maybe God will change his mind. Does God change his mind? Your theology must embrace this idea here about God's response to His people. *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

What a great ending to the book, Jonah 3. It could stop right there and we'd all go home happy. We'd say, “What a great book.” But God has more to share with us in chapter 4. I want to take the first two verses and illustrate what God wants to say to us today. Because God does not stop the story there. In fact, the story ends at this abrupt place where we're left with this question we'll look at next week. Because I think God wants to prompt us to think about our own lives here. This is so important. We're going to see not that God has the truth planted in this city, and that these people are turning to Him. That's not the only thing we're going to see. But now we're going to go back to God's personal care. God's personal care of one of his own people, Jonah.

I like this because that means God cares about you and me. So we're going to get some insight into the heart of a man of God. We're going to get insight into the challenges that he's facing. It says that he was angry.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. It was good for him to pray to the Lord. But this is what he said. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew..."

There's a tendency we have in our hearts. When we don't like what's going on, things don't fit into our plan, we tend to blame other people. It started in the garden. When God says, "Adam, did you eat of the fruit?" Adam says, "It was the woman that you gave me. It's your fault, God." There's this tendency for us to blame other people for challenges. That's what's happening here. That he's this angry guy. We'll talk more about that next week as we talk about his anger, as God wants to counsel him through the worm and the bush that grows up in the heat of the sun and all those things. Next week He's going to illustrate the power and the importance of compassion some more.

But notice what he says. *"That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a (underline these four words) gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."*

Four words there that are very important for us to consider. Not just because they're here, but I want you to see these verses appear in many places in the Bible. I want to show you the four words and I want to talk about the first couple of them. But I want you to see, first of all, how they're all present in different places of the Bible. Because I believe this is God's bio. If God had a LinkedIn account, this is what would be there. This would be the bio of God Himself.

Especially when we find ourselves doing the wrong thing, especially when find ourselves needing the mercy of God. God wants us to know, this is the kind of person He is. This is who He is. So probably the worst offense that the Israelites had was they came out of Israel and they crossed over into the Red Sea and God is caring for them and rescuing them. He takes them to Mount Sinai, where Moses is up on the mountain ratifying the covenant. These people build a calf and they start worshipping another god. Moses comes down. He's angry. He throws down the tablets. He disciplines these people. God disciplines these people. Then he goes back up on the mountain again, kind of embarrassed, I think, or perturbed at least. Like, "God, what are we going to do with these people?" kind of thing.

So in Exodus 34:6-7 this is the first time these words appear. That's why I want to take you back there. He says – *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."* Sometimes in the scripture this word *faithfulness* is also thrown in here as part of the job description or the bio of God. *"Keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* What's Moses response to God's words introducing his bio? It says – *And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worship.*

I think that's what happens when we get to know God in this special way that He's merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love, then we are thrown down on our face and we worship Him. We ask Him for those things because we need them.

We saw in the book of Nehemiah last year as we studied it, that the people were looking at the history of their forefathers because they found the law. Now they're looking at that. The same bio is present there. It says – *But our forefathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.*

Wow. God's bio is also found in Joel 2. This is the passage a little bit after this, where Peter quotes from the Old Testament. He's talking about the end times, the day of the Lord. He's saying, "You need to repent. The day of the Lord is coming." Earlier in that passage in Joel he says – *Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding and steadfast love.* There it is again, the same four words over and over again.

Psalms 103:8 is a psalm of thanksgiving. In the psalm of thanksgiving, the psalmist is recounting this. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

In Psalm 86:14-16, it is a psalm of "Lord, deliver me. Lord, I'm hurting so much. Lord, I'm being trounced by my enemies. I need your help." We think that song was written by David, we're not sure. But he's calling out to God in a time of need in his life.

O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them. But you, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant.

I think there's times in our lives where we just need to be rescued. We come to this bio of God and recognize He's the one that's going to rescue us. He's the one we need. He is gracious and He's slow to anger and He's merciful, and He's abounding His steadfast love and faithfulness. Wow. We need that in our lives.

Then one more psalm. This is an acrostic psalm. This is a psalm of praise to God. Praising God because of His bio. *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.*

We all need this message continually. Whether it's in our thanksgiving, whether it's in our praise, whether it's our time of desperation, whether we've sinned and we need to come back to the Lord, we must remember this is who God is. God is merciful. He's gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. That's who God is.

Now some people will look at the Old Testament and say, "The Old Testament is all about God's wrath and His justice and His holiness." We do see the wrath and the justice and holiness of God in the Old Testament. We see it in the New Testament too. Ananias and Sapphira were given a lot of grace there. They were just knocked off. That's God's holiness in action. We see God's holiness and wrath and justice demonstrated in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

But we also see in the New Testament this grace of God. We see in the Old Testament this grace of God that's demonstrated. This is the bio of God in the Old Testament that's recounted over and over again.

We need to recognize that God is this gracious God. He demonstrates that most critically when truth and grace come together in the cross. Because it's the truth of God that recognizes holiness and justice and wrath, but it's the compassion of God that provides a way for us to accept Him through Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the grace of God.

So if we come back now to our passage in Jonah 4, we have these words. I just want to look at the first two today. Next week we're going to look at the other two as we continue the rest of the passage and conclude the book. The first, who is *gracious* and *merciful*. God is gracious. This is our word *grace*. The New Testament word also used to describe the fact that God gives unmerited favor. We don't earn it. There's nothing we can do to receive it except to respond to Him. Sometimes we have to obey, that is get under the shower of God's grace. You don't get wet by getting into the bathroom. You get wet by getting into the shower. Sometimes you have to obey God and stand under the grace of God in order to receive it. So you can't just say, "God, give me grace," without obeying Him. Because when you obey Him, you receive the grace of God. God's grace is so prevalent and we need it so much in our lives. It's the grace that not only saves us. It's the grace that we fall into when we have challenges that are so overwhelming and difficult in our lives.

When Paul prayed, "Lord, take this thorn in the flesh away from me." Three times he prayed, "Lord, this is overwhelming for me. This is so hard." God says – *My grace is sufficient for you*. This is the grace we fall into in our deepest needs. It's the grace we fall into when we have a challenge, like an addiction that we must overcome. It's God's grace that helps us when we have sinned so much. We feel like we can't come back to God, but we can because God's grace receives us back. He forgives us. It's the grace that we need to love our enemies and to deal with the challenges that they face. That is hard.

That's what Jonah is being called to do here in this passage. That's what he's confronted with. He doesn't have the compassion necessary. He has the truth. He doesn't have the compassion as he comes forward to these Ninevites. Grace is so important.

The word *merciful* is this word 'compassion.' That's what the word means, compassion. In its noun form, or adjective form, or its verb form all come from this idea from the word *rechem*. It is the Hebrew word for the womb. It's this place of protection where you have everything you need. Everything is satisfied right there in the womb. That's the idea of this compassion. God has this sense of compassion that He gives to us. He's so compassionate to us. It's powerful. It's something we need that overflows all over our person, that goes into those special places of our heart that need the compassion of God. That's who God is. He wants us to know that. It's a place where sins are forgiven, where challenges are met when we experience the compassion of God deep within our hearts.

So God had compassion on us and He sent Jesus down. Jesus as God came down to be a man. We see Jesus demonstrating compassion in life continually. The Bible tells us that the boat came

toward the shore. The scriptures and the disciples are writing this down somehow, or they're remembering it. Because it says – *And Jesus looked up, and he saw the crowds, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

The greatest story that Jesus told about compassion happened when He talked to a lawyer. The lawyer asked Him a question – *“What is the greatest commandment?”* Jesus says – *“It's love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”* The Bible says this: *The man, seeking to justify himself* (the idea is here he wants to find the minimum he needs to do in order to get this one taken care of so he can be considered godly), *“Who is my neighbor?”* I think he wants to know, is it the guy on my left and right? Or do I really have to go to two houses down over here, and two houses down over here? So God chooses to tell the story. He tells the story of the Good Samaritan. A man who comes along the hurt man, when other religious leaders, other Jewish men have come along this Jewish man who was hurt and didn't help him. But the good Samaritan, someone who had animosity between the two ethnic groups came and took time, took energy, took money and helped a man. Jesus is describing this.

The message is for this lawyer to go away and recognize that every person we come in contact with, every person that we touch, every person needs the grace of God. Every person needs to plant the flag, but they also need the compassion that God wants to offer to every person in our world today.

This week was a difficult week at GraceWay Bible Church. There were several people that needed some help because of the intense challenges that they were experiencing this week. It was hard for GraceWay leadership this week, and Pastor Don was in the center of all of that, just trying to help people in different ways. It was hard. Yesterday I said to him in the middle of the day, “Man, how are you dealing with all this? Are you doing okay?” He said this: “This has been emotionally draining. It's been upsetting. I called my wife, I already told her I'm going home and I'm going to spend the rest of my day watching cartoons.” I laughed. Do you feel it? Do you feel that right now, as you think about Pastor Don and his experience yesterday? That's compassion.

God has called us to experience this compassion for people. It's easy to have compassion for Pastor Don because we love him. Because he's doing the right thing. It's harder to have compassion against someone who's doing the wrong thing or has hurt us. It's hard to have compassion. But even grouchy people need compassion. We really need to plaster compassion all over them. But if you can't bring that about in yourself, then take a teaspoon full of compassion. Because when you take a teaspoon full of compassion, it starts to exercise something inside your heart. It does something for us when we exercise compassion. Because when we do that, it helps us to be able to address the deepest challenges that we experience in our own lives. It helps us to be able to build the emotional intelligence. It helps us to be able to have significant relationships. Compassion is that thing that drives us to strong moral character. Compassion is essential for who we are and what we do. When we're compassionate, we're being more like Christ in our world.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, I pray right now that you would give us the ability to see with your eyes the people around us. I pray that you'd give us the ability to touch people in ways that demonstrate your touch. That as Jesus said to us, "As you do this for the least of these, you've done it to me." The sense of compassion that we have, that we're driven by your truth and your compassion. We thank you, Lord, for the lessons we can learn, even the lessons of what not to do from Jonah. But we ask that you drive us with a heart of compassion into the lives of those people that we meet and spend time with. We ask this in Jesus' name (and all God's people said), amen.