

Lack of Compassion Jonah 3

By Dave Urbanski

In this past Sunday's sermon, Pastor Scott emphasized that we must learn from Jonah's lack of compassion for the people of Nineveh so we don't repeat his sin.

When we last left Jonah the previous Sunday, he was repenting of his sin in the belly of a fish — and then God rescued him. As we delved into chapter 3 through the very beginning of chapter 4 this past Sunday, we find the Lord giving Jonah a second chance to do his will. God tells him, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."

Interestingly, it's almost the exact command Jonah disobeyed in verse 1 of chapter 1, which was, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." Jonah probably had legitimate reasons for not wanting to go to Nineveh the first time. Pastor Scott noted to us that it was a "brutal" place.

But Jonah finally does go into Nineveh and speaks to its citizens the following warning: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

And wouldn't you know that short declaration was all it took?

Jonah 3:5 tells us "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." Wow!

It stands to reason that Jonah likely didn't think such wicked people would turn from their sins — but they did. Even the king of Nineveh repented and believed in the authority and power of the one true God.

With that, the Lord spared Nineveh and "relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

Well, that was easy! Jonah could have gone home at this point, focusing on the graciousness of God who gave him a second chance. But instead, Jonah gets angry at God!

In chapter 4, verse 2, we find him praying the following: "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. ..."

For some reason, Jonah is "displeased exceedingly" at the Lord, as Pastor Scott put it. The reason why is unclear. Maybe he doesn't like the people of Nineveh and wants them to be destroyed. Maybe he has a grudge of some kind.

Whatever the reason, Jonah seems to have quickly forgotten all the grace and compassion the Lord just bestowed upon him. Is Jonah so lacking in humility that he can't understand he's just as guilty of sin as the people of Nineveh?

Before we get too (rightfully) judgmental in regard to Jonah, let's turn the mirror upon ourselves: How many of us have reacted this way to God giving other people grace and compassion? We (and Jonah) ought to be forever thankful that the Lord places us underneath his grace and compassion "umbrella" as well.

In regard to God's "bio" that Pastor Scott described based on Jonah's prayer — gracious ... merciful ... slow to anger ... abounding in steadfast love ... relenting from disaster — Pastor Scott also showed us other places in the Scripture where God presents us with that same "bio" Jonah noted above. Those same words describing the Lord can be found in Exodus 34:6, Nehemiah 9:16-17, Joel 2:13, and Psalm 86:14-16, 103:8, and 145:8.

This's a big part of the Good News the Lord brings us. Because as Pastor Scott said, we need these attributes of God "continually" in our lives. For starters, we need God's grace — his unmerited favor that we can't earn. Certainly neither Jonah, nor the people of Nineveh, nor US, can do nor could do anything to receive the grace of the Lord. Pastor Scott also called attention to a descriptor he's used before, calling God's grace something we can "fall into" amid our deepest needs.

Pastor Scott also referenced a wonderful Hebrew word for compassion — "rechem," which connotes the womb. That is apt and so humbling! Think about it: Unborn babies are completely helpless, but through the miracle of life, God provides everything an unborn baby needs through the mother's body, including nourishment and protection.

But aren't we all, in many ways, residing in the Lord's "womb" right now? Doesn't he give us breath as he wills? Isn't he the one who makes our hearts beat every second? Doesn't he ultimately provide for all our needs? Don't for a minute make the error of thinking you have any kind of power in life that God has not allowed you to possess!

God's grace gives us the power to love our enemies — even if they're from a place like Nineveh — and God's compassion reminds us all of us reading this words right now that we're still breathing only because the Lord says we can.

Jonah got seriously mixed up. As Pastor Scott told us, Jonah "has truth but not compassion." May it never be so in our lives.