

“Should I Not Have Pity?”

“The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and folly is in their hearts throughout their lives.” Eccl 9:3

What is God really like?

I. Preposterous Grace

Contrary to reason - why would God have pity on evil people?

A. For Ninevites

1. Lost

They *“do not know their right hand from hand from their left.”* (v. 11)
Amoral - they can't discriminate between right and wrong.

“They are not morally innocent...but they are helpless in the sense that they are trapped in their sins and undiscerning about how to escape them.” (Estelle, 132)

B. For Jonah

Moralistic, self-righteous judge

1. Remembers who God is

Merciful

Jonah prays: *“I knew that You are a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.”* (v. 2, Ex 34:6, Joel 2:13)

But Just

What about Exodus 34:7? *“[The Lord] will by no means clear the guilty.”*

2. Forgets who he is

A sinner

Spiritual amnesia *“once you were dead in sins... following the course of this world... by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”* (Eph.2:2-3)

Judges God

Burning – so angry at God for granting mercy to the wicked, he wants to die.
Unlike Jesus, who did not *“revile in return, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”* (1 Pet. 2:23)

“Jonah had set himself up as judge. He blurred the distinction between the creature and the Creator. He arrogated to himself the position of arbitrator of life and death from the humble stance of a sinful human creature.” (Estelle, 132)

C. For us

1. The gospel way out

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:7-8)

We are freed from living like self-righteous ‘Jonahs’ when we remember that we were once God’s enemies - deserving of justice, but spared by mercy.

“What man is there who, when reflecting upon his own infirmity, dares to ascribe his chastity and innocence to his own powers, so that he should love Thee less – as if he were in less need of Thy mercy. Let him not despise me – [rather] let him love Thee as much, since he sees me restored from such a great weakness of sin by the selfsame Savior by whom he sees himself preserved from such a weakness.” (Augustine)

“He, who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:48)

Reflecting on our utter need for God’s mercy ignites our love for Him and moves us toward compassion.

2. Should I not have pity?

“Jesus was deeply moved with pity for they were as bewildered and miserable as a flock of sheep without a shepherd.”(Matt 9:36)

This turns the question back on me:

Should I not have pity—a heart for the things that break His heart?

II. Probing Grace

A. God calls Jonah out

God’s word comes to Jonah for the 3rd time - relentless grace.

But the tables are turned, now it’s God calling out against Jonah!

Rebuke is a mercy, a word from God to turn us from irrationality to a sound mind. That’s what God’s word does.

B. God - the good counselor

Comes questioning

“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ... I will question you, and you shall answer me.” (Job 38-2-3)

C. Heart check

1. Control - Who is sovereign?

“Have you any right to be angry?”

Illustration – *“No! Me Mommy!”* (You’re not the boss of me.)

God is sovereign as Creator and Redeemer:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, should not I pity Nineveh?"(v.11)

"Jonah must recognize the absolute sovereignty and freedom of God to act as He pleases." (Estelle, 132)"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy." (Rom 9:15, 16)

2. Comfort – Where is it found?

"Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant," but after it withered, he was "angry enough to die."(vv. 7, 9)

God takes pity on Jonah, putting in his little booth (tabernacle), and provides the comfort of the plant.

Contrast – Whereas Jonah is exceedingly glad (v.7), but exceedingly angry (v. 1), and hoping for judgment, (v.5), God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love (v.2) for Nineveh and for Jonah.

Jonah is blind to God's good gifts, being *"drawn away by his own desires... forgetting that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (James 1:14-17)*

God's questions reveal what Jonah values - temporal comfort over immortal souls. It's idolatry – *"worshiping and serving creation rather than the Creator." (Rom 1:25)*

He's being a 'vine-centered' person. *"One who is so taken up with the joy of God's good gifts that he or she ends up loving the gifts more than the Giver. If we feel that without a certain person, or position, or achievement, our life would not be worth living we may be more [enslaved] that we think." (Smith)*

God sent the worm and the scorching wind to untangle Jonah's twisted heart, which was wrapped around something less than the true source of comfort.

III. Pursuing Grace

A. Providence

"Jonah was caught between the vice of his own self-will on the one hand, and the strong hand of God on the other. The more he pushed, the more God pressed. He was bound to remain miserable until either he or God let go. He knew God had no intention of giving him up!"(Ferguson, 81)

God's providence brings "salvation through judgment and mercy."

He hurled a tempest, appointed the fish, appointed the vine, appointed the worm, appointed the scorching wind, bringing comfort and blessing, as well as affliction and loss. *"These were all the providences of God by which he intended to draw Jonah back into fellowship with Himself." (Ferguson, 83)*

God's hand is at work in every detail of our lives securing our ultimate good.

B. The Last word

1. God is not finished

The book of Jonah ends with God speaking. He is still seeking and pursuing Jonah.

Illustration: *"Mommy, what are you finding for?"*

"The son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

2. The definitive last Word is Jesus

"God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His son." (Heb. 1:2)

Jesus - came as a baby, not *"knowing his right hand from His left,"* because like Jonah, we were *"fleeing from the presence of God."* He *appointed* Jesus to be our rescuer, *"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,"* taking our judgment, for *"by no [other] means will God clear the guilty."*

3. Like a Parable

The book of Jonah is historical, but it is written like a parable. We don't know the ending. It's an enigma. Like the parables of Jesus, we are *"forced to contemplate our personal destiny"* (Ferguson, 98) and write ourselves into the story.

The book of Jonah answers the question, 'what is God like'? How should we respond?

Bibliography

Estelle, Bryan. (2005). *Salvation Through Judgment and Mercy.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub.

Ferguson, Sinclair. (2008). *Man Overboard.* Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust

Smith, Colin. *Gospel Transformation Bible.* Notes.

Questions for Study

1. Why does Jonah get so mad? What is his assumption about God and about himself?
2. What complete turnaround do you see in relation to Jonah's attitude when he was rescued from death by the fish versus his attitude when God has mercy on the enemies of Israel?
3. What do we discover were the motivations of Jonah when he ran away?
4. What do you think Jonah is hoping for as he sits outside the city?
5. How does God strip Jonah, once again? Seeing how Jonah feels now, do you think he was truly repentant in the belly of the fish? Why or why not?
6. In what way are Jonah's three days in the fish and Jesus' three days in the grave similar or dissimilar?
7. What is God's argument to show Jonah how his attitude has gone wrong?
8. Does the ending of the book seem abrupt to you? Why do you think the author ends here?