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JONAH 4:1

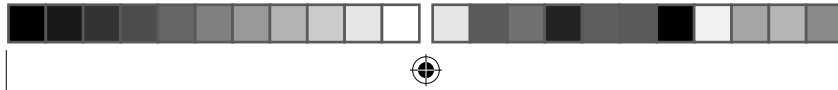
But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry

God had compassion on the Ninevites and did not bring about the sort of overturning Jonah had anticipated, but instead of the messenger being delighted that the preaching had been heeded, such was the depth of his prejudice and racism, Jonah was upset and annoyed when the recipients of that message responded! The prophet who himself had benefited from God's mercy and salvation in the belly of the fish and liked it for himself, resented it when it was extended to those he felt were not deserving of God's forgiveness! Poor Jonah hadn't understood grace. 'God's riches at Christ's expense' isn't for nice people. God's mercy is not for 'worthy' saints but for unworthy sinners. The Apostle Paul (who we call a Saint) had the correct gospel insight. In 1 Timothy 1:15 he



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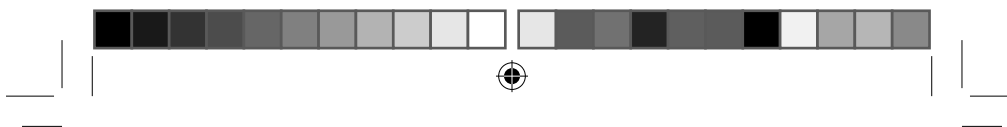
wrote: *'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life'*. The greatest hurdle for Jonah in discharging his missionary mandate was not the pagan sailors, nor the great fish, nor Nineveh's powerful ruler or ruthless people but Jonah himself! Jonah was angry because God was treating those outside the covenant with the same compassion as those within it. He was upset because God had shown mercy to a vicious and cruel imperial power that constantly threatened his homeland. Jonah felt Israel deserved better than for her God to show kindness to her enemies. The Jews were called to be light to the Gentiles but Jonah didn't want to shine the love of God's light to these 'dogs'. How easy to love God's grace when it is for 'me' but to resent it when extended to people 'not like me': to asylum seekers, to child-abusers, to Islamic Terrorists. It's only as we begin to appreciate the sheer depth of sin within our own hearts and the magnificence of God's mercy toward us, that took Jesus all the way to the cross, that we can begin to understand the Lord who wants to extend His mercy even to those we most fear.



BUT JONAH WAS GREATLY DISPLEASED AND BECAME ANGRY
JONAH 4:1

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy shown to me in the gospel. Forgive me when I am happy to keep that to myself instead of wanting to share it with others not like me. Change my heart so that I may develop your love of compassion even to people I dislike most, for Jesus' sake. Amen.







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JONAH 4:2-3

Gracious and Compassionate God

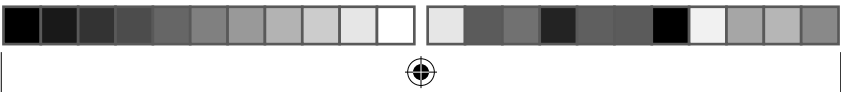
Jonah prayed to the Lord, *'O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'*

It has been suggested that in Chapter One Jonah runs from God. In Chapter Two Jonah runs into God. In Chapter Three Jonah runs with God and in Chapter Four Jonah tries to run God! In this prayer Jonah was telling the Lord off. Jonah was saying to Almighty God, 'I knew this was going to happen!' It sounds so astonishing! Could it be that prayers we pray might also be every bit as absurd! Giving out to God and having the temerity to tell Him how



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He ought to behave? Prayer can be a funny thing if we are the ones telling God what He really ought to do and what not to do. Having refused to pray on board ship and then having prayed a prayer of thanksgiving in the belly of the fish, now Jonah prays a really selfish, angry prayer. See how many times ‘I,’ ‘me’ and ‘my’ appear in this outpouring? Six times. Less than perfect Jonah! O. Hallesby in his masterful book defines prayer as ‘An offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.’ William Still shares Brother Lawrence’s conviction that prayer is practising the presence of God. ‘Practically my every thought – about myself and about everyone else which comes to mind - should be shared with my ever-present Lord.’ While Jonah does indeed pray here in Nineveh, it’s not in order to develop a relationship of love and humility and trust but to scold! It’s just as well the Lord is indeed gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love! How good God is letting His children rant. But the Lord who is kind, merciful and forgiving wants Jonah to grow in grace and knowledge and love of Him and so He lets him speak before answering. How very different was Jonah compared to another preacher ‘full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14) who shed tears over the city to which he had

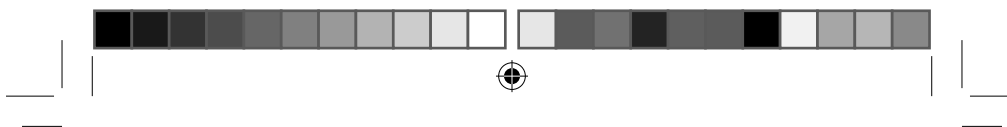


GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE GOD
JONAH 4:2-3

come to preach: *‘As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring your peace...” (Luke 19:41-42). ‘O Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing’ (Matt. 23:37).*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how very patient you are with us and with our prayers that are more often letting off steam and demanding things we want. Please align our hearts to yours so that even as Jesus prayed with tears, we too might have His compassion, not hardness of heart toward those in need of the Saviour. For His name’s sake. Amen.







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JONAH 4:4

But the Lord replied

Jonah prayed and God responded: *'Have you any right to be angry?'* Prayer is a two-way conversation and here we can see a fairly robust exchange! Jonah knew God to be slow to anger and yet Jonah is angry! Jonah questioned God for not being exasperated at the Ninevites and God questioned Jonah for being resentful with Him! Jonah's theology about God was correct but his personal prejudice against people he did not think God should like overshadowed what he knew to be the Lord's will. His understanding of Scripture and his heart were in conflict. His orthodoxy knew, *'It is by grace we are saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast.'* (Eph. 2:8-9) But his heart said, 'I and my people are better than them. We deserve to





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be saved. They don't! Chapter 4:1 said '*But Jonah*' and now Ch. 4:4 says '*But the LORD*'. It's good that in prayer we can be honest with God. We may as well be because as Psalm 139:4 reminds us, '*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD*'. But just because we are honest, does not mean to say that it is the final word: '*But the LORD*'! Thank God for '*But the LORD*'. God did not call Jonah to Nineveh because he was special. He called him because God had a message of hope and salvation to give through him to people who, without Him, were heading for self-destruction. And God will not permit His servants to wallow in the joy of their own salvation while at the same time wishing for the annihilation of others. This will not do! Unwarranted and out-of-proportion anger against God for His mercy and grace to people we do not like cannot remain unchallenged by the maker of heaven and earth. God confronted Jonah with the idols of his heart: pride in his religion, ethnicity and culture, which when contested led to irrational fury.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive us that when our hopes and passions are dashed, we display sinful anger towards you and other people. Save us from the idolatry of making good things into ultimate things and help us find our meaning and fulfilment in you and in your glory alone. Amen.



25 JONAH 4:5

Silent treatment

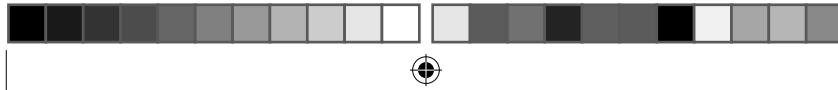
Jonah didn't reply! God had responded to his prayer (v. 4) but Jonah didn't reply to God's answer! Instead he gave God 'the silent treatment'. *Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.* Sometimes children think that if they hide their head under a pillow they can't be seen and sometimes adults think that if they ignore God then maybe He can't see them either! But giving God the silent treatment is no more effective than trying to run away to Tarshish. In his childishness Jonah took things into his own hands. He went outside the city walls and sat down. He made himself a hut and waited. If God didn't do what he wanted and if God didn't think the way he thought God ought





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to think, then there was only one thing to do... pout! The truth was this, God was not a Jewish nationalist but Jonah thought He should be. Yes, God was covenantally committed to Israel but that was not to the exclusion of everyone else. Jonah was proud of his nation and felt God ought to share this attitude too. Jonah loved his wee country but felt God ought to dislike the traditional enemy nation too. When personal bigotry and political prejudice are projected on to God, it's a grave mistake. The Apostle Paul had once been a Jewish nationalist. *'Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, ... a Pharisee'* (Phil. 3:5), but God had helped him see that his Jewishness did not have to make him into a hard-hearted Xenophobe; for in Romans 9:15 Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 where the Lord says, *'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'* and then came to say: *'I raised you up for this very purpose, that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'* (Rom. 9:17). Jonah didn't like the answer God had given to him. You would now expect God to yell at this narrow-minded prejudiced man who had the temerity to give God the silent treatment, but in keeping with His character, the Lord is still as compassionate towards the bigoted Jonah as He had been towards his bitter enemy Nineveh!



SILENT TREATMENT
JONAH 4:5

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how easy it can be for us to imbibe the sinful prejudices of secular society into our own hearts and sometimes even to be more bigoted than unbelievers! Have mercy on us. Expose our racism and destroy fear by your grace so that we may be liberated to see people as gifts rather than as problems, through Christ our Lord. Amen

