

Jonathan Bayes: 27 February am

The Lord's Pity (Jonah 3-4)

(Sermon Summary)

Nineveh was the archenemy of Jonah's people, the Jews. Though Jonah had reluctantly obeyed the Lord's command to preach to the people of Nineveh, nothing would have pleased him better than to see it destroyed. The Lord challenged Jonah's angry and resentful stance, saying "Should I not pity Nineveh?" (4:10-11), and drawing the contrast between Jonah's self-centred pity for a plant and His own pity for that great city. If you are not a believer, the Lord has pity on you and invites you to come and experience salvation. For believers, our knowledge of the Lord's pity should spur us on to pray for unbelievers. This sermon draws out six contrasts between Jonah's pity for the plant and the Lord's pity for lost sinners.

1. The contrast between Jonah's attitude and the Lord's. Jonah **had** pity - just a statement of fact, reflecting his annoyance at the loss of something trivial - (v10) while the Lord said, "**Should** I not have pity?", pointing to a sense of obligation. In the Old Testament the word used here for 'pity' is sometimes translated as 'spare', e.g. "The Lord will spare the poor and the needy" (Ps 72:13). The Lord feels deeply moved by our plight. In the greatest expression of His pity, He did not spare his own Son (Romans 8:32). He spares us at the cost of not sparing His Son.
2. The contrast between the plant and Nineveh. The Authorised Version translates the word used for 'plant' as 'gourd', a poisonous plant. The word for 'gourd' derives from 'to be sick'. What a contrast between a plant that makes you sick, and a city filled with people made in God's image! However, in its sin, the human race is even more sickening than a poisonous plant. We must be careful we are not like the church of Laodicea whose lukewarmness made the Lord feel sick ("I will vomit you out of my mouth" Rev 3:16). Despite the sickening quality of our sin, He still has pity on humanity.
3. Jonah had not laboured to grow the plant, but the Lord had done hard labour on behalf of Nineveh. God had done a work in the hearts of the people, and had sent Jonah to them. The Lord shows kindness in sending the sun, rain and food to

believers and unbelievers alike (Luke 6:35, Acts 14:17), hoping to open their eyes to His reality.

4. The Lord, not Jonah, made the plant grow. The implication is that the Lord had nurtured Nineveh. He is sovereign over all the nations and saw fit for Nineveh to become the great capital of that day. Today He nourishes and cherishes the church (Eph 5:29). It's the Lord's work in our lives that counts; we contribute nothing.
5. The plant grew up in a night, but God's strategy with Nineveh - and people in general - is long term. We are called to "pray God's pity down" for a long time. We have hope as we pray persistently over time, as the pity of the Lord never gives up.
6. The plant perished overnight. Jonah had to learn that the people of Nineveh were perishing eternally. "The way of the ungodly shall perish" (Ps 1:6); "Unless you repent, you also will perish" (Luke 13:5). The Lord is angry with a sinful world, but also has pity (John 3:16). His pity lies behind the gift of His Son.

Have you received the gift of the Lord Jesus, so your destiny is changed from perishing to eternal life? If you have, pray that those who are perishing will be rescued, because God has pity on a sinful world.