

PROPHET RESCUED
The Relentless Grace and Sovereign Mercy of God
(Mercy in the Midst of Misery)

A Journey through Jonah:
Embracing and Extending God's Scandalous Mercy

Texts: Jonah 4:5-11; Romans 11:11-22; 33-36

Jonah 4:5-11 *Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"*

Romans 11:11-22 *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! **Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.** ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! ¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand firm through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² **Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.***

Romans 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Introduction

This morning we arrive at the final section of the journey we have traveled with Jonah in the 49 verses that make up the story he wrote to help us ***understand, embrace, and celebrate*** the relentless grace and scandalous mercy that flows from the heart of God toward sinners.

We have already noted in our journey that relentless grace and scandalous mercy initially sound strange to our ear. ***How could anyone be scandalized by such a wonderful thing as God's mercy?***

We understand and actually rejoice in the relentless grace of God as it unfolds in the pages of Scripture. For example, we see God's relentless grace in action as He pursues our first parents when they hid from His presence ashamed and afraid because of the horrific sin they had just committed. We see that same relentless grace pursue Abraham and Sarah and then Isaac and Rebecca. We see relentless grace in full strength when God refuses to let Jacob remain in his stubborn manipulative sinfulness. That grace surfaces in the life of David in the voice of Nathan when God pursues the man after his own heart when he had grievously sinned against God and others. And so we are familiar with relentless grace – and along with that grace we see God's amazing mercy in the lives of these very people.

However, we have become so accustomed to hearing these stories of God's grace and witnessing these amazing displays of mercy that we are not easily surprised, shocked, or scandalized when that gracious mercy shows up. . . in fact, we expect it and count on it and are ***more surprised and offended when it doesn't show up than when it does.***

And that is where Jonah was for most of his journey until one day God decided to show that relentless grace and scandalous mercy to the Assyrians at Nineveh – and that was stunningly offensive to Jonah in his day and if we are honest, to us in our own day (since we each have our own Nineveh that God may not appear to be judging).

By the time we join Jonah under his booth on the hillside to the east of the city of Nineveh – here is ***what we have observed***:

Nineveh, the universal symbol of human ruthlessness and moral evil in Jonah's day will not be judged after all. This modern day Sodom and Gomorra will not be overturned (3:10) by God's wrath. ***Why?*** Because they repented and God graciously relented. ***How did this come about?*** God sent them an appointed messenger with an appointed message. He opened their eyes so they would see and understand the truth of the message. He enlivened their heart so they could respond to the message. He granted them repentance so they would turn from their idols to worship and serve the Living God. And He gave them the gift of faith so that like Abraham, they believed God and it was counted to them as righteousness (Gen 15:1-6)! ***What was God's response to their repentance?*** He saw their Spirit-generated repentance and relented of the evil He intended to send upon them. (3:10)

There was great rejoicing in Heaven over the repentance of these sinners and there was great rejoicing in Nineveh as they gratefully worshipped the God who had delivered them from their great evil and spared them from the great disaster Jonah had warned was coming on account of their sin.

Truly mercy had triumphed over justice in a stunning world-shaking display of God's relentless grace and scandalous mercy to Nineveh. ***BUT . . . not everyone was celebrating this amazing grace and stunning mercy.***

In fact there is someone who is burning with anger at this great evil that has happened before his very eyes when God relented and spared that great city from the great judgement Jonah had been sent to announce (1:3; 3:10). That individual burning with righteous anger is none other than Jonah, the prodigal prophet. Jonah expressed his moral indignation at what God had done in the strongest possible terms (4:1-3): *"God . . . I know you are merciful and quick to forgive . . . which is why I did not want to come to Nineveh in the first place! It is theologically unthinkable, morally reprehensible, and spiritually offensive for you to show mercy to this nation . . . given the depth of their idolatry, the extent of their immorality, and the cruelty of their violence on all the nations around them, including your own nation – Israel. So . . . I insist that you repent of this great evil you have done in showing mercy*

to these monsters. And if you don't relent and revoke your mercy . . . then take away my life!"

Jonah is quite confident that he is standing on solid theological ground built into the covenant relationship that Israel has with God. ***Furthermore, Jonah believes he has the moral high ground*** and not God – how could God possibly send him on a mission to grant mercy to a nation like Nineveh while at the same sending him to announce judgment on His own chosen people? ***Finally, Jonah believes he has the stronger spiritual argument*** in that God can and should save individual gentile sinners who can then enjoy His blessings when they become part of His covenant nation through circumcision and embrace His covenant obligations contained in the Torah of Moses. BUT it is another thing entirely for God to arbitrarily forgive and receive an entire nation apart from Israel and the Mosaic covenant.

In other words if you want the privilege of being part of God's people then you must embrace and assume the responsibilities that go along with that privileged position. ***But shockingly, God has embraced an entire nation apart from Israel and apart from the ceremonial, legal, and religious obligations God had place on Israel.*** And it blew Jonah's mind! He could not comprehend or accept what God had chosen to do with Nineveh.

And so Jonah burns with anger toward God because God is no longer burning with anger toward Nineveh. Put simply . . . Jonah is angry because God isn't. And if we are honest, that is sometimes why find ourselves, like Jonah, deeply angry at God over something He has done.

Clearly God and His prodigal prophet are at odds – and before long, they won't even be on speaking terms, at least on Jonah's part. And by the time we get to the end of the chapter, ***God will deal with the greatest evil in the book – the evil that is in the heart of this self-righteous, spiritually arrogant, self-willed prophet*** who believes he is more righteous than God in the matter of His mercy to Nineveh.

Let's pause to make sure we remember something about this little book – Jonah is writing these chapters long after the events they describe. And as he writes

each chapter, he highlights important lessons he wants his reader to learn from the lessons God had to teach Jonah on the journey. ***And the greatest lesson God had to teach Jonah was that his heart was not at all like God's.***

So, how does Jonah help us see how God exposed his heart and more importantly, how did God go about rescuing Jonah from the great evil in his own heart (1:6) and restore him to fellowship and ministry?

Jonah invites us to pull up a seat under his booth so that we can get an up-close look at how God relentlessly pursued His prodigal prophet to show him his need of the very mercy he was angry God had given Nineveh. BUT in order to restore Jonah's heart, God first had to get Jonah's attention and He does this through a sobering rebuke delivered in a quiet but penetrating question:

I. Sobering Rebuke (4:4)

And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Looking back on these events, Jonah reminds us of an important detail that should govern our understanding of everything that we read in chapter four – *"When God saw what they did, how they turned away from their evil way, God relented of the disaster he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."* (3:10)

Jonah tell us what God saw and what God did on the basis of what He saw – and that tells us how God felt about the events that He witnessed. ***God saw what the Ninevites had done and it was "good"*** and HE was pleased. (*Note creation language here*)

But when ***Jonah saw what God had done, it was not good!*** In fact, it was a "great evil" in Jonah's eyes, and he was exceedingly angry!

A. The Intensity of Jonah's Anger –exceeding (great) fury

- This is the first of two times in this brief chapter that Jonah tells us how he felt about what he saw – "it displeased him greatly!"

- The term used here for Jonah's displeasure is the word for "burning anger" or "fierce fury" – whatever Jonah saw caused him to burn with anger. He was exceedingly furious.
- The great wickedness of the great city Nineveh was now matched by the great fury that burned in Jonah's soul over what he saw happen at the end of chapter 3.

B. The Target of Jonah's Anger – Yahweh Elohim.

- Jonah reminded us of what God saw (3:10) because he wants us to see that his own great anger was on account of what he saw God do in response to whatever God had seen.
- On the basis of what He saw the Ninevites do, God relented of the disaster He intended to bring upon them (3:1).
- Later in the chapter, on the basis of what God saw in Jonah, He relented of the temporary mercy He provided in the plant that He provided to shade Jonah (4:9).
- In other words, all the things that caused Jonah to burn with fury were things that God had chosen to do according to His sovereign will and pleasure – irrespective of what Jonah thought or felt!!
- Jonah's anger was not directed to the Ninevites or even to the harsh circumstances he was now enduring – his anger was directed at God for causing all of the things that so greatly displeased and infuriated Jonah.
- Jonah points this out to us because at the end of the day, we must understand that when we are under our own bush burning with anger at what has happened to us – the real target of our anger is the God we claim to love and serve!
- But what was it that caused such great displeasure and such burning anger in Jonah's soul?

C. The Reasons for Jonah's Anger – God's Sovereign Activity

- At the end of the day Jonah was furious because God had acted in ways that did not conform to Jonah's ***theological beliefs, moral convictions, standards of justice, or personal entitlement.***

- In choosing to spare a foreign nation of pagan idolaters while judging His chosen people, God appeared to violate the theological beliefs Jonah had held personally and preached publicly.
 - In choosing to relent of the just judgment that Nineveh so richly deserved for their idolatry, immorality, injustice, and ruthless cruelty, God appeared to violate all of the moral convictions Jonah adhered to and to which he held them to whom he preached.
 - In overlooking the many years of unrestrained wickedness and unconstrained violence for which Nineveh and the Assyrians were well known, God appeared to be violating His own standards of judgment recorded in the Torah He had given Moses.
 - In choosing to spare the life of Ninevites while causing severe discomfort under life threatening condition seemed unfair to Jonah in light of his life-long obedience and service to God.
- ***Surely he deserved better than what he was experiencing from God.***

D. The Evaluation of Jonah's Anger – "Do you do well?"

- This was not a question designed to give God information that Jonah knew; rather, it was a question designed to give Jonah an evaluation of what God knew.
- Jonah is angry at God because He believes that God has committed a great evil in sparing Nineveh.
- Later he is angry at God over what he perceives is a capricious act where God unjustly piles physical misery on spiritual despondency by removing the one thing that brought Jonah joy – a plant.
- Looking back on all of this Jonah wants us to pick up on the fact that he was actually the one guilty of great evil for which God should have and could have rightly judged him severely – even unto the death he so foolishly requested.
- But God's mercy to the sailors and to the Ninevites has not exhausted His grace. Nor has it come at the expense of His own people. We are stunned by the wideness of God's mercy when He sends a prophet on a mission of mercy to His enemies. We are even more amazed at the loving patience of

His mercy and the relentless pursuit of His grace to Jonah – the self-righteous, spiritually arrogant, self-centered, prodigal prophet!

- God is saying to Jonah – *“Jonah, I know the answer to my question. What I want to know is whether you know the answer.”*
- Clearly, God has a point He wants to make to Jonah – and that point is this – *“You are not right to be angry over what I have done in showing mercy to Nineveh!”*
- Later in the chapter after God took away the shade of the plant, He asks Jonah the same question with the same intent (4:9).
- This time Jonah’s anger explodes out of his mouth – and as we hear his answer, we instinctively know what God knows – that Jonah is not right to be angry at what God has chosen to do in His world.
- And Jonah puts his arm around our shoulders and leans in and gently says, *“Just as my anger was not righteous no matter how hard I tried to justify it; neither is yours! I forgot what I learned in chapter 2:9 when I said that salvation belonged to the Lord. Two chapters later, I am angry when God gave that salvation to people I did not believe deserved it! My self-righteous indignation was coming out of a great evil in me that I was not willing to admit. But God refused to abandon me to my evil any more than He was willing to abandon the Ninevites to theirs! And so, He began to pursue me ... gently and relentlessly pushing me toward His mercy. And He is doing the same for you if you will let him.”*
- Great Jonah... thanks for sharing. So how did it go and what happened next? *“Well, I am ashamed to tell you that my burning anger blinded me and instead of responding and repenting, I repeated my sin back in chapter two when instead of repenting I choose to perish – only this time I didn’t jump into an angry ocean, I went out into a burning desert in sullen, silent, resistance to God.”*

II. Silent Resistance (4:5)

Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

- God was talking to Jonah but Jonah was not talking to God. Instead of allowing the question to expose what was in his heart, Jonah got up and headed out in a direction away from God – just as he had done the first time God spoke to him (1:1-3).
- Back in chapter 1, Jonah makes a point to tell us he went down . . . this time he wants us to know he headed east. This is an important detail because in Jonah’s theological worldview – to head east was to head away from God’s presence. For example, Adam and Eve went east as they left Eden (Gen 3:24); Cain went east when he went away from the presence of Yahweh (Gen 4:16). Later in the chapter, God will use a scorching wind from the east to judge Jonah (4:8).
- So when Jonah tells us he went out of the city and headed east, he is giving us a subtle connection to what he did in chapter 1:3 when he went out from the presence of the Lord.

A. His Disobedient Self-Reliance – he rests under his own provision

- He builds a booth – a shelter for shade.
- The word for “booth” is intended to remind you of a time when God’s people lived in tents for 40 years on account of their rebellion against God and his people.
- Jonah is in silent rebellion against God, and has done exactly what Israel did for 40 years in the wilderness when they had to dwell in tents in the barren, inhospitable desert.
- And just like Adam tried to make his own covering for sin (garment made of fig leaves), Jonah relied on his own ingenuity and self-reliance and built his own booth to protect himself rather than rely on God’s protection – doubly hard to since he was not talking to God at the moment.

B. He Angry Silence – he refuses to converse with God

- In chapter 1:3, Jonah rose up and fled from God’s command to go to Nineveh.

- Interestingly, when Jonah wrote about that event, he omitted any reference to any conversation he had with God.
- We know he voiced an angry objection to God, but we don't know about that until chapter 4.
- Jonah wants to stress that anger at God removes us from full fellowship with God – and so he was silent.
- Once again, God speaks to Jonah and once again Jonah gets up and removes himself for the place of divine appointment (Nineveh) – and as he does so, he remains silent before God.
- Sometimes silence is golden; but sometimes it is sinful. And that is the case here. God is talking to Jonah, but Jonah is not talking to God.
- And that is often the case in our lives – God speaks to us through His word, by His Spirit, through His church – and we refuse to hear and remain sinfully silent before Him.

C. His Silent Demand – He engages in disobedient hope.

- Jonah tells us exactly why he was under that booth in the desert – he was waiting to see what would become of the city.
- Interestingly, God has already told Jonah what will happen to the city – it will experience mercy.
- But Jonah was not about to accept God's decision and so, using his own life as a bargaining chip, he determined to force God's hand by making Him choose between the life of his faithful, chosen servant or the lives of a pagan nation with a worldwide reputation for idolatry, immorality, injustice, and violence – all sins that called for the death penalty under the Mosaic Law.
- Either God would honor His law and execute these pagan sinners (irrespective of how sorry they were); or, He would take the life of His faithful prophet, Jonah.
- And so he waits in ***stubborn silence, nursing a disobedient hope*** that God would come around to Jonah's self-righteous demand and relent from the unjust mercy He had given to Nineveh.

D. His Lost Opportunity – He removed himself from spiritual ministry.

- Jonah tells us he went out of the city and away from the place where God had appointed for him and from the ministry God had assigned him to do there.
- He had preached for one day instead of the three required to reach the entire city with the message. And when he preached, he preached a short message filled with the threat of the coming judgment of God. Clearly he did not want or expect what happened next.
- What an opportunity was before Jonah – a whole city of repentant sinners needed to learn about the God they now believed in and were worshipping.
- What an opportunity to inform them about the ways of God and to introduce them to the will of God revealed in the Word of God. Imagine the unmitigated joy that could have been Jonah's to worship with brand new believers filled with gratitude at the undeserved mercy of God.
- Jonah's angry silence and stubborn disobedience robbed him of immense spiritual blessing and tremendous ministry opportunity – and Jonah records this to warn us lest the same thing happen to us when we become disillusioned, frustrated, and angry over what God has done.
- Jonah may have been done with God but, as we see in the verses that follow, God was not done with Jonah.

III. Gracious Intervention (4:6-8)

Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

- God's questions to Jonah were designed to stir his conscience. But God's actions are designed to submit his will.
- When Jonah refuses to listen to God's voice, God proceeds to enroll Jonah in His remedial school for prodigal prophets. God holds class under Jonah's booth and the curriculum has only two lessons one about mercy and the other about judgment.

- But before we get to the lessons – let us make sure to observe and important detail that Jonah wants us to catch – God is intentionally putting Jonah in the place of Nineveh so that he will experience what it like to receive the wrath he so desperately desires for Nineveh.
- And the clue is in the name of God that shows up in 4:6 – *Yahweh Elohim*. Thus far in the book, the name of God used by Jonah or in reference to Jonah is Yahweh. This is the name God uses for His covenant people – people like Jonah. When God is dealing with pagan gentiles in the book like the sailors or the Ninevites, the name that is used is Elohim.
- For the rest of this section, Jonah is going to interact with God as Elohim – in other words, God is saying to Jonah – I am going to interact with you in the way you wish I would interact with the gentiles you tolerate at times but who you actually despise.
- In other words, Jonah is now firmly in the place of Nineveh – so let’s see how he likes the lessons in God’s school.

A. The Lesson of Gracious Sovereign Mercy (4:6)

- The lesson involves a large plant that God appoints to grow and shade Jonah from the heat – his self-made booth was not enough.
- The point of the lesson was to deliver Jonah from his “discomfort” (4:6) – the word “discomfort” is the same word for evil that has been showing up in the story.
- And Jonah is “exceedingly glad” for the plant.
- He knows the miraculous origin of the plant is God and so he is exceedingly glad because once again God has stepped in and rescued him by divine means. In chapter 2 God rescued him from drowning by appointing a great fish, and here God rescues him again, this time by an appointed plant.
- Jonah is exceedingly happy over the gracious mercy God has provided – he loves the mercy God has shown him (even though he hates the mercy God has shown to Nineveh).
- ***So Jonah gets an A+ on how to respond to God’s unexpected, undeserved mercy when it comes his way.*** But God is not done teaching his prodigal servant!

B. The Lesson of Severe Sovereign Judgment (4:7)

- Just as God appointed a plant, He now appoints a worm.
- This worm was commissioned by God to “attack” the plant that was giving shade to Jonah. And by the time the sun came up, the plant God graciously gave to Jonah had withered and died.
- And then God appointed another part of His obedient creation to “attack” Jonah – a scorching east wind (up to 60 mph and temperatures of over 115-120 degrees). And on top of the worm, and the wind, God’s sun beat down (attacked) Jonah’s head so that his life was ebbing away and he was in great distress (4:8).
- Note the use of the “attack” terminology – Jonah wants us to know that God was opposing His stubborn, self-righteous, proud prophet. Many centuries later James would remind us that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
- Shade in the OT was a reference to God’s gracious provision and protection – and it was given to those who humbled themselves before Him. God now removes that “shade” in order to attack Jonah’s self-righteous, spiritual arrogance!
- And under the brutal heat of the sun and the scorching heat of the east wind – Jonah finally gets a taste of what God’s judgment is like – and he is so miserable he asks to die!
- This is what God’s wrath is like – it is so painful and so brutal that those who endure it eternally will long for a death that will not come. ***And this is what Jonah wants for Nineveh!***
- Jonah gets a deep and bitter taste of the judgement he so desperately wants for Nineveh . . . and he discovers that he cannot endure it and if it continues, death is better than life.
- Sometimes to rid our heart of the anger we have toward God for showing mercy to our enemy; God gives us a little, temporary taste of the very judgment we wish He would give to them to remind us that we desperately need the very mercy we would deny to our enemy.

IV. Penetrating Examination (4:9)

But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”

- God has let His prodigal prophet taste the unexpected joy of undeserved mercy AND the bitter pain of unbearable judgement to bring Jonah to the point where he acknowledges two important lessons necessary for him to be restored to God.
- And the way God introduces those lessons is by repeating the question He asked Jonah earlier (4:4) – *“Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”* In other words, *“Do you have the right to be angry over my sovereign choice regarding the plant that brought you such temporary joy?”*
- In 4:4 Jonah retained an angry silence in the face of God’s probing question. Here all the anger burning in his heart toward God spills out of his mouth in a bitter sentence thrown down as a gauntlet in the face of the relentless grace and mercy He has experienced all along the journey. *“YES! I have every right to be angry at what you did to me by taking away the plant!”*

A. He must give God His proper place as Sovereign Lord.

- Jonah, this was never your plant to start with!
- You had nothing to do with its appearance or its growth. Nor did you have any control over its demise.
- I am Creator God and all of my creation obeys my sovereign will – a storm, an ocean, a fish, a plant, a worm, an east wind, and even the sun – all are mine and I do with them according to my sovereign pleasure.
- And it is that way with mercy and judgment – I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy and I will bring judgment to those whom I determine to judge.
- Both salvation (mercy) and judgement (punishment/wrath) belong exclusively to Me to do with as I sovereignly purpose.

B. He must take his proper place before God as submissive servant.

- You are a member of my chosen people; you have been granted participation in the blessings of my covenant; you enjoy the beauty and goodness of My Torah; and you enjoy the privilege of serving as My appointed prophet.

- BUT . . . don't for a minute think you earned any of this or were given any of this because in some way you merited any of my gracious gifts. The only reason you have any of these incredible blessings that the Ninevites have never even heard of is due to My sovereign mercy toward you.
- Jonah . . . you have what you have because I wanted to give it to you. My grace and mercy came to you out of my sovereign choice.
- And if I wanted to give it to you (and you have no complaints when you received mercy from Me), then you need to take your proper place and rejoice when I decide to give some of that same mercy and grace to people like those in the city below who are worshipping with unrestrained joy and thankfulness over the mercy I have given them.

V. Redemptive Instruction (4:10-11)

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night."¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

A. The Clear Observation

- Jonah – you feel strongly about what happened to the plant (pity). . . a plant you did not make. A single plant that was on the planet for 24 short hours . . . it appeared in the night and vanished the next night.
- And you feel immense displeasure over what happened to this plant that brought you joy and comfort.

B. The Spiritual Comparison

- Compare that single, momentary plant to the immense city of Nineveh – a great city with 120,000 people and much cattle.
- This city has been in existence since the time of Noah (Gen 10).
- The people in this ancient city are numerous (120,000) and they are ignorant of who I am (they believe in idols) and possess no ability to discern what I expect (they have no access to the Torah and thus can't distinguish what I have declared right and what I have declared to be wrong).
- Beyond the city and its people are a great deal of livestock –they are also part of my creation and I care deeply about all of them!

- You care deeply about the plant you did not own and are troubled by its demise. Imagine how I feel about the destruction of an entire city, of 120,000 sinners, and many animals.

C. The Unassailable Conclusion

- Jonah, if you are right to feel displeasure about what happened to this plant . . . then I am more than right to feel displeasure about destroying an entire city and all that lives in it.
- Jonah . . . you take great pleasure in the mercy I gave you in the plant. And you would take great pleasure in the destruction of Nineveh. And that is where you and I differ.
- I take great pleasure in giving you mercy (and I have done it many more times with you than with Nineveh) and I take no pleasure in destroying Nineveh. If you want to know how I feel about death of the wicked . . . wait a few centuries and read Ezekiel 33:11 – *“Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evils ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”*

Conclusion – Lesson for Life from Jonah’s Hillside Academy

- So as Jonah ends his tale we are left with a stunning portrait of God’s love for His enemies AND His love for His prodigal people.
- What Jonah wants to show you about God through his tale is the immense, unmeasurable, unlimited love that is in God’s heart!
- This immense love causes Him to ***wait patiently*** for His people to turn from their wickedness.
- This immense love causes Him to ***give graciously*** even when we pull a Jonah and oppose His will and resist His work.
- This immense love causes God to ***forgive mercifully*** . . . over and over again no matter what we have done or how far we have fallen!
- This immense love causes Him to ***accept compassionately*** every sinner who is overcome by sin; beat down by the curse; lacerated and demolished by the Devil . . . and under our own little booth desperately clinging to life . . . God

comes with relentless grace and an ocean filled with abundant, life-giving mercy!

This is the heart of God!

For God so loved . . . his chosen people
For God so loved . . . the pagan sailors
For God so loved . . . wicked Nineveh
For God so loved . . . prodigal Jonah
For God so loved . . . you and me!

Well . . . what about Jonah? Did he get the lesson and repent of the anger burning in his heart at the sovereign mercy God gave to Nineveh?

If Jonah were here, he would look at us, crack a knowing smile, and ask the simple question . . . “Why do you think I wrote the book?”

And as he started down the trail back to Jerusalem . . . he would turn and ask us one final question . . . “What about you? Did you get the lesson and repent of the anger burning in your own heart?”