

# Sovereign Compassion

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**Bible Verse:** Jonah 4:1-11  
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We come this morning to the final chapter of the book of Jonah. I invite you to turn there. For those of you that are visiting with us, we have been preaching through the book of Jonah. We come to our final message here this morning from Jonah 4. In the first three chapters of Jonah, you see what happens: you see the departure of Jonah; the rebellion of Jonah; his prayer from within the fish; and then he goes and he preaches to Nineveh and they repent. That tells us what happened. It gives us a historical narrative that this is what happened under the ministry of Jonah to that great city. In chapter 4, we find out why it all happened. Why did Jonah do what he did and why did God do what he did. You get a window open, you get the blinds pulled back, as it were, and you peer deeply into the motivations of the prophet and of the God who sent the prophet, and in this process we get introduced to the great character and the great sovereign compassion of the one true God. I like to say when it comes to the book of Jonah that you have to read it twice in order to read it once. You read it twice in order to read it once and what I mean by that is that as you're reading it for the first time, you're wondering why is everybody acting the way that they are doing, why is Jonah, a prophet, rebelling against God, and why are the people of Nineveh repenting, and why did God send Jonah to a foreign pagan city that was outside the covenant that he has given to Israel. Why? Well, in chapter 4 we see all of those things laid out for us in a way that is a great piece of writing and it is an even more great revelation of the greatest God, of the greatness of God in what we see.

Let's read the fourth chapter together. Whenever I say that, I'm always afraid that somebody is going to start reading it out, "Yeah, great idea. I'll do that right now." I just mean read along in your Bible as I read it out loud. Chapter 4, verse 1. We'll read the whole chapter here. Nineveh had repented, you remember in chapter 3; God turned away from the anger, the judgment that he had declared upon them, he did not do it, and now in chapter 4, verse 1, we come to Jonah's reaction.

Now for any biblical preacher, you would expect a preacher to be thrilled that an audience responded to his message in such visible displays of repentance that were an obvious work of God in their midst in response to the words that had been spoken. With Jonah, you don't see that in chapter 4, verse 1, you see something very surprising instead. Chapter 4, verse 1,

1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." 4 The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" 5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. 6 So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. 7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." 9 Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." 10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

And there the story ends. The story ends on a question. What kind of way is that for a book to end? This story ends without a spoken resolution. How can that be? What's the purpose of all of this? Well, we'll try to do our best to unpack this as we go along.

Let me remind you that Jonah had just seen the city of Nineveh repent but his response is surprising when it says in verse 1, it greatly displeased him and he became angry. Right on the heels of Jonah 3:10, it said God had relented. Jonah somehow knew that the judgment that had been proclaimed in chapter 3, verse 4, was not going to fall on the city after all and he understands that and it angers him; he burns with anger over the fact that what he wanted to happen was their destruction and that was not going to take place.

So Jonah is a bundle of contradiction here in this opening part of chapter 4. He's mad at God and he prays. He's angry about what God is doing and he turns to him in prayer. Look at verses 2 and 3 with me there, "He prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country?'" He said, "God, I knew before I left for this joint that this is what You were going to do. I told You in advance I did not want this to happen and here it is, it has happened. I don't like this. I never wanted this." Look at the middle of verse 2, "Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." He says, "God, I knew what was going to happen because I know who You are."

Now to our New Testament ears, this sounds really bizarre, doesn't it? It sounds bizarre to think for us as New Testament believers who are sent out to proclaim Christ for the forgiveness of nations, that we are sent out and we want to see people converted and come to Christ, at least those who are truly born again, somewhere in your heart you want that; to look at Jonah and to say the last thing I wanted was the conversion of these people is strange and it's even more strange when you look at what he says as his justification. You know, what he says here in Jonah 4:2 is a great statement about the true attributes of God. He is stating sound accurate theology that is consistent with all of the New Testament and Old Testament revelation: God is gracious and compassionate; he is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness; he is one who relents concerning calamity.

Go back, if you would for a moment, to Exodus 34 when God revealed his glory to Moses. Exodus 34. What you find as you read this chapter of Jonah 4, what you find is an echo, a refrain, it is clearly connected by its activity and by its descriptions of God with God's great revelation of himself to Moses. In Exodus 33, without going into all of the background of this, Moses prayed to God that God would show him his glory. Exodus 33:18, "Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!'" Show me what your great shining brightness is like. Manifest your holiness to me in a way that I can see and understand that is previously veiled. Make something hidden known to me. God tells him in verse 19, Exodus 33, he says, "I'll do that, Moses, and here's what I'll do, I will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you," and watch this, watch this, this will be really key at the end of the book of Jonah, he says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." Beloved, what I want you to see is that what we have been talking about as the dominating theme of the book of Jonah throughout the 10 weeks prior to now that we have been preaching this book, we have been talking about God's sovereign compassion as being the theme of the book of Jonah. Not the fish. Not the other stuff that goes up on children's literature and things. God is displaying his sovereign compassion in the book of Jonah to the extent that he shows it to a foreign city that was not seeking him. What I want you to see is that that is rooted in the very way that God showed himself to Moses in the course of progressive revelation, showing forth his glory to his appointed spokesman who wrote the first five books of the Bible, the book of Moses, and in that revelation, God asserts his sovereign prerogative to show grace and compassion to whom it pleases him to do.

Verse 19 of Exodus 33. Look at it with me again. He says, "I'll make all My goodness pass before you." What is that goodness like? What are the aspects of that goodness? He says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." He says, "I will sovereignly display grace to the one to whom it pleases Me to do; to the people to whom it pleases Me to do." Man is under no entitlement to the grace of God, beloved. Man is a sinner who has rebelled against God and deserves nothing but judgment. God says despite that, this comes after Israel had fallen into false worship in the golden calf with Aaron and all of that, God says, "I'll be gracious to whom it pleases Me to be gracious to," and in verse 19 he says, "I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Then he goes on in chapter 34, verse 5, look at it with me in Exodus, it says, "The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD." God said, "I'm going to show you My glory," and now he's doing that. He's displaying his glory and what are the realm of attributes that are involved as God displays his glory to his servant Moses? Verse 6, "the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.'" Do you see it, beloved? God's sovereign compassion is identified with his glory. Part of God's glory is that he shows sovereign compassion on whom he wishes, when he wishes, as he wishes, when he wishes. It is his prerogative alone to show grace and compassion to sinners. No one deserves it and God says, "It pleases Me. This is part of My glory to be like that."

Now beloved, go back to Jonah 4:2. I hope you kept your finger in the text there to make it easy for you to go back there. The echoes of God's encounter with Moses resound in what Jonah prays to God and Jonah understood, he was obviously a student of Moses and of the character of God. He said, "I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God," verse 2, "slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." It's like he's quoting God's own display of his glory to Moses back to God but notice that it doesn't lead him to a place right now, right at this point in the text, it doesn't bring him to a place of submission, of comfort, of peace, rather the character of God provoked him. The very nature of the glory of God was provoking him in this moment because Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to have received the grace that they had obviously received. He did not want them to be on the receiving end of the benefit of the goodness of God. He preferred them to suffer and to experience judgment. Jonah knew God truly, he knew that God was gracious and compassionate but, beloved, mark this, watch this: what Jonah in light of what we saw from the book of Exodus, what Jonah did not like was that God was sovereign in his disposition of that compassion. Jonah wanted to be able to be the arbiter, the filter. He wanted to be the one who decided who received grace and mercy and who didn't. He didn't want God to be gracious to Nineveh. He was perfectly fine receiving grace for himself, receiving grace for his people Israel, he didn't want God to set it outside of the boundaries that Jonah, himself, set. Jonah was missing the sovereignty of the compassion that God had revealed to Moses, "I will show compassion to whom I will show compassion. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." Jonah didn't like the sovereign aspect of that compassion. He knew that the decline that we talked about over the weeks, the prior years of decline that Nineveh was experiencing that the nation of Assyria was experiencing, was in Israel's political benefit. Natural enemies over the course of the centuries, it's in Israel's interest for Assyria to be weak and grace shown to them would strengthen the nation and, therefore, would have adverse consequences for the people of Israel in their earthly, temporal, political lives. Jonah didn't want that. Israel was better off, in an earthly sense, if Assyria was weak.

Jonah was like so many evangelicals today, just thinking from a political standpoint, not thinking spiritually about the kingdom of God and you and I are subject to that same

party spirit and we need to be on great guard against it, beloved. God's grace and compassion is not simply for the Republican Party in the United States. God's grace and compassion is extended to people of all manner of political persuasion and we need to embrace that. These people on either side of the political spectrum, we go to all of them, to the right, to the left, we go to all of them and say, "Forget about the nature of earthly things. You have an eternal soul that you need to give heed to and Christ alone is the One who can save you from your sin." And we proclaim that broadly, not as though these people who have different political persuasions are somehow our enemies. They are not Assyria to us. They are the reason we exist, that we would go and speak and tell them of the grace that saved us, and as we do that, beloved, we understand that we lessen, we mitigate, we reduce in our own thinking the passing political disputes of our day, recognizing that we belong to another world, to another realm, that we have other interests that we are serving with the brief earthly life that we have; not advancing a political agenda but proclaiming the spiritual work of Jesus Christ, proclaiming his death, burial and resurrection that men might be saved eternally and not experience the eternal judgment which they deserve. And when you try to mix a political agenda into the midst of that, you poison it as much as if you were pouring strychnine into a well. You cannot have it both ways and be faithful to the Gospel of Christ.

Jonah's political, national interests were interfering with the purity of the spirit with which he should have been serving the God who called him to prophetic office. What we find here is God displaying forgiveness to a nation that had no claim on it. They had no claim on it. You say, "Well, then why did he do it? Why would he do that, then? There's nothing about them that earned it." To which we say, precisely. That is exactly the point. There is no merit in any man that calls upon and earns the grace of God. By definition it is undeserved favor. By definition we are nothing but a bucket of demerits that is only fit to be tossed out. The glory of God, the glory of Christ, the glory of the Gospel is that God sovereignly, powerfully, extends compassion to those who do not deserve it and it pleased God to send a sweeping revival on a pagan city 700 years before the time of Christ, 750. It pleased him and when it pleases God to show compassion on an individual sinner or upon a collective nation, the people of God respond by saying, "Amen! Glory to God! God, this is your glory displayed. You said to Moses your glory is displayed when you have compassion on whom you want to have compassion." Well, if we love this God, then when that kind of glory is displayed, we respond in worship, not in resentment, and in the meantime we see ourselves as vessels of extending that kind of compassion, being the verbal spokesman.

Now this had a great consequences. You know, it was just a century later that Assyria was strengthened again and they carried the northern kingdom off into exile. Jonah was an insightful political observer. He knew that this had long-term implications and he fled to Tarshish because he did not want Nineveh to be spared. In that period in his life, he valued his country more than his God. He wanted God to do things his way and he was mad when God didn't. This is ever ever ever a temptation and a source of stumbling to true believers as we develop our own agendas for the way that we want our lives to go, we have a certain path that we want our career to go, a certain path that we want our family relationships to go, we have a certain path that we want different aspects of life to

go and they don't go that way. We forget the sovereign providence of God, the sovereign hand of God that is directing things according to his predetermined will and we resent, we resent him for working in ways in our lives that are contrary to what we wanted. The spirit of Jonah is alive and well amongst us. It is ever a stray desire fomenting in the heart of even true believers who so easily lose sight of the sovereignty of God in all of their circumstances and who so easily prefer their will over the will of God. The truth be told, beloved, that in most of our hearts, and I'm speaking within this room, if the truth were really known about what we are really like deep inside our hearts, our prayer is more not thy will but mine be done and it needs to be exactly the reverse as it was for our Lord in Gethsemane, "Father, not my will but thine be done." This searches us, doesn't it?

You see, Jonah in this moment, in this episode that we are reading about, Jonah was missing a basic aspect of fearing the Lord. Look over at the prophet Isaiah in chapter 55, Isaiah 55. This just occurred to me, I hope I can get this to come out right. This is more than just a conflict over who will be saved and who will not be saved that Jonah is wrestling with. That's the way in which he saw it. God wanted Nineveh to be saved, Jonah didn't, and Jonah is seeing the conflict in those terms as we read about them here in verses 2 and 3. That's the conflict in Jonah's mind but the real conflict here, beloved, do you know what the real conflict is going on right here? Do you? Sure you do. The real conflict is who is God here. Whose will shall be done. Will it be the will of God or will it be the will of Jonah. That is the conflict here. Jonah is putting and opposing his will against God. God had made his will known and Jonah did not like it and his will is rising up in rebellion against God. It's just a secondary issue, really, who got saved here. The real issue is whose sovereign will will be executed. Whose sovereign will will be carried out, God or Jonah; 2,700 years later, God or you. That's no less than what we're facing here.

Jonah needed a dose of Isaiah in his heart. Verse 7 just to remind of God's disposition toward the wicked that we've been talking about here. It's amazing. God is just so remarkably different and just so remarkably wonderful and so remarkably awesome. It's a shame that that word awesome has been devalued of all meaning in our discourse. When I say awesome, I mean God is awe-inspiring. He inspires speechless wonder at the grandeur and the greatness of who he is. That's what I mean when I say he's awesome.

In Isaiah 55:7 it says, "Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." An open invitation to flagrant sinners to forsake their ways, come by faith to this God and find abundant, full, complete, immediate and eternal forgiveness of all their sins, the same promise that is offered to sinners today when we call men to faith in Jesus Christ. Immediate, full, complete forgiveness. And in this exercise of sovereign compassion, you see it there in verse 7 too, right? He'll have compassion. He'll abundantly pardon. This is what God does. Verse 8 there in Isaiah 55, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Beloved, when we frame the issue in your heart as a contest of wills, is it God's will that you preeminently seek or is God simply a means to the fulfillment of your own will, understand that there should never be any confusion on the point about which is better for you because God's ways are higher than your ways, his thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Part of our problem as a believing people is that we trust too much in our own thoughts, in our own judgments, rather than trusting the outworking of the providence of God, the goodness of his purposes and the wisdom of his ways, as being that which is best, calculated for his glory and what is best for our good, and the fact that you can't see how your current circumstances could possibly work out for good is not an indication that they cannot, it's simply an indication that your mind works at a lower level than the mind of your God. And this, beloved, while this is a rebuke to our stubborn hearts at one level, this is also a call and an invitation to you to rest in, to recognize the great purposes of God and to trust him, and as things fail to work out according to your will, to step back and say, "God, in a way that I don't see, in a way that I don't understand, there is a better will and a better perspective at work here because I belong to You. And Your sovereign hand and Your sovereign mind knows the number of hairs on my head, Your sovereign knowledge knows when a bird falls to the ground, then God, it's obvious," you say by faith, "God, it is obvious that Your thoughts are better than my thoughts, Your ways are higher than my ways, and the fact that I don't see it in the moment is no condemnation of You, it's simply an expression of my finite, sinful, limited perspective. And therefore," we come back to that word that I've used in the past, "therefore, Lord, in light of everything that I know to be true about You, even though this hurts, even though I don't understand, even though everything that I value in life is on the line here and I don't like the direction it's going, despite all of that, Father, therefore I will trust You because You are greater than I am. Christ has given himself for me. I can't question Your love. I know that You love me. I note that You're sovereign. God, I will trust You rather than rebel. I will praise You rather than complain." This changes everything.

For Jonah in this moment, he hadn't come to that point yet. His heart, instead, is full of resentment and rebellion at the height of his greatest success. Do you know what? Any preacher, I think I can say this, any biblical preacher would love to have one sermon that produced the kind of results that Jonah had. He's insane. "Are you kidding? You're objecting to this, Jonah? What's the matter with you?" And after, think about this from God's perspective, God commands him to go the first time and Jonah rebels, gets on a ship and goes in the opposite direction. God has got to work up a fish to get involved. He goes a second time, he preaches, the results that God wanted are obtained and now Jonah is angry and rebelling and calling on God to kill him, "I don't want to live anymore." You can almost see him stamping his feet. You would think, think about this from God's perspective with your limited ways, I'm really running crosscurrents here, you might, let's put it this way, you might think that after all of that the Lord would have had enough of Jonah. "I'm done with you. After all that we've been through, you're still rebellious like this toward Me, the God who called you to prophetic ministry? I'm done with you." And he could grant Jonah's wish. You know, it would have been perfectly within God's prerogative and perfectly within his ability. We read a little later on about how hot it was and the sun is beating down on him, it would have been no problem from God to dial up the thermostat another 40 degrees, make it 150 degrees out and give Jonah a grinding

death of suffering and torment in order to inflict what Jonah himself wanted. He could have done that. It's perfectly within his power, perfectly within his right, but do you know what? God had not exhausted his sovereign compassion. You see, God's nature doesn't change. He is a God of sovereign compassion always and, beloved, what I want you to see here is that having spared Nineveh and bringing Nineveh to repentance, rather than striking Jonah dead, he's about to show compassion to Jonah. The consistency of God's character displayed in this book is astonishing. It calls us to bow low and to worship him.

Look at verse 4. Jonah just impetuously says, "God, take my life from me. Death is better to me than life." The Lord said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" What he's doing here, what God is doing here is he is gently exposing Jonah's sinful attitude so that Jonah himself can see it. God has a plan that he's working out now for this particular episode in Jonah's life and he's addressing Jonah's mind, he's addressing his reason, he's addressing his motivations. He says, "Jonah, do you have a legitimate reason to be angry over what has just happened? Do you have reason to be angry over Nineveh? Do you have reason to be angry over Me? Talk to Me, Jonah." But Jonah at this point is having none of it. Jonah doesn't even answer the question. He stomps off. Verse 5, look at it with me, he stomps off "out of the city and sat east of it and there he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city." So somewhere east of the city but still within the ability to observe what was happening, Jonah goes out east of the city and sits down, makes a little temporary shelter for himself there in the desert out of interwoven sticks and tree branches, and he sits under it to wait and see what would happen in the city.

Now this is one of my favorite parts of the book and I've got a lot of favorite parts in the book of Jonah. I may just decide to just turn around and do this whole series again just because I like this book so much. But this is really an important part of the book of Jonah in my humble opinion: why did Jonah go out to sit and watch what would happen in the city? There are many commentators who say that in their opinion Jonah is still hoping that God would judge the city and that he wanted to see the judgment if and when it came. So Jonah, they think, has this reservation in his mind that maybe God will still pour out judgment and he doesn't want to miss it if it happens. But does that ring true to everything that we have seen in this book of Jonah? That makes absolutely no sense. It's amazing that so many commentators take that position. Jonah already knows that it's not going to happen, that's why he's angry. Jonah knew this is what was going to happen, it's why he fled to Tarshish. Jonah knew all along what was going to happen. God had already shown mercy. The text had just said that God relented concerning the calamity. What's to make us think that Jonah actually thinks that God might judge them now after everything that we've been through in the prior three and a half chapters? It doesn't make any sense. In some ways it's an incidental point to the narrative.

Here's what I think is going on here as Jonah is sitting out, silently throwing a tantrum before God, "I don't want to talk to You," and he just goes out alone. It's not that he expected God's judgment to fall. That's why he's angry, because he knows that it's not going to. I think that Jonah just didn't know what to expect. He didn't know what was going to happen. There was no precedent for this in world history. A pagan city had just

repented and think about it, from an Old Testament perspective, what was the nature of Israel's religion at the time, centered around a temple, around a priesthood, around sacrifices. The city of Nineveh had none of that. How would they live out this faith that they just confessed? What would they do? And Jonah, I believe, is sitting dejectedly watching to see what comes next because there is no precedent for this at all. Beforehand if you wanted to be a convert to Israel's God, you had to come through Israel's religion. God just bypassed all of that in a manner that prefigured what he would do in the New Testament with all the Gentiles. This is totally new to Jonah.

Think about it this way, those of you that like sports, that have watched a championship game, a big game hotly contested and one side wins and the other side loses. What happens? The winning team celebrating, right? They've got the trophy. They're going to get interviewed on TV. Everybody is happy and the confetti is falling upon them for their benefit. What about the losing team, what do they do? Sometimes they just sit on the sidelines, in baseball they sit in the dugout and they just look out dejectedly, watching what happens, having no control over it. While the winners celebrate, they sit and they think about what might have been. It's not because they expect the result of the game to change. The game's over but they are still watching. They are not ready to leave yet and they are left with their thoughts of what might have been and just kind of ruminating on it all. That's what I see Jonah doing here. God has displayed, God has done his work in a way that is final. It is over. Nineveh has repented. God has forgiven them. God has shown mercy to them and Jonah lost, you could say. So like the conquered athlete, he goes and he sits and he says, "What's going to come next? I don't know what to expect here. I might as well watch and see what transpires."

But God in sovereign compassion doesn't leave him there. God plans to draw Jonah near. Look at verse 6 through 8. It says, "the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort." Remember, it's hot here. He's out in the desert and so God appoints this plant to grow up over his head, gives him shade, and for the first time in this book in verse 6, finally we see Jonah in a better mood. It says, "Jonah was extremely happy about the plant." But then in verse 7, "God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered." Verse 8, "When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die." I might add again, this is the second time in this chapter that Jonah is trying to die. He spent his career in this book trying to die. He runs to Tarshish, he tells the sailors, "Throw me over into the sea." In chapter 4, he says, "God, I want to die." He loses the plant, "God, I want to die." He's begging with all his soul, "Death is better to me than life." Beloved, you see that there is nothing redeeming, there is no redeeming characteristic in Jonah here at all. There is nothing redemptive, nothing worthy of redemption in his attitude here at all. This is bitter resentment against God himself and if it had been up to Jonah, he would have committed suicide.

So we see God sovereignly raising up a plant, raising up a worm to kill the plant, and then a hot wind to come down on Jonah, God's sovereignty being displayed in all of those instances. And what is he doing? What's he doing? Is God just playing a sadistic game

with Jonah to inflict even more pain and discomfort on him to discipline him, to punish him for his bad attitude? That's the way a lot of people raised in a lot of legalistic circumstances think that God deals with us. It's a shame. It's a really miserable way to try to live a Christian life, to think that one stumble and God is just going to deal with you that way. That's for another time. What God is doing here is he is setting up the key lesson for Jonah in verses 9, 10 and 11.

Here's what's going on, that plant gave Jonah some shade for a time from the sun in his little shelter and Jonah liked that turn of events. His spirits perked up. For the first time we see him happy, but the plant isn't with him for very long. The worm comes and he loses it. As quickly as Jonah found relief, so quickly the plant was gone and the scorching east wind comes and starts to beat on his head. Look, every one of you can identify with the misery of that situation, being out in the heat with no shade and the sun just beating down on your head. It was absolutely miserable and Jonah had hit rock bottom. This is miserable and yet the misery had a point to it. The misery was a means to a greater end. The misery, beloved, was a means for a display and an exercise of God's sovereign compassion one more time, and for those of you in the midst of very difficult Christian trials, there is a purpose of sovereign compassion in them maybe unseen to you now but certainly to be displayed eventually because this is how God deals with his children, he deals with them as a loving Father. He disciplines us for a short time so that we might share in his holiness, not in an arbitrary sadistic manner, God has a purpose for what he's doing and he had such a purpose here in verse 9.

Jonah is miserable, he is begging to die and God comes to him and you love the relentless nature of God here, God is undeterred by Jonah's rebellion. Look at verse 9, "God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?'" Poor Jonah, in one sense, poor Jonah. God just brings him back to the same point. "Let's talk about your anger problem, Jonah." You know, the one thing you don't want to talk about when you're angry is your anger problem, right? "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" Jonah said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death," verse 9. He's defiant almost to the end. I say "almost" advisedly. Almost to the end, "I'm angry even to death." And in verse 10 the Lord speaks to him. Jonah doesn't really want to hear it at this point, but God overrides that in his sovereign compassion on Jonah. Now God is being compassionate on Jonah here in these three verses.

The Lord said to him in verse 10, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight." He said, "Jonah, think about what's going on here. You loved a plant. You loved a plant that existed for one day and was dead the next, and you loved the plant and all of your affections went out to that plant. As a sinner, you loved a plant for what that plant could do for you. Jonah, you wanted to spare a plant. A plant. You wanted to spare a plant, Jonah, and you felt it as though you had a sovereign right to that plant and what you wanted to happen with that plant should not have been violated. That's what you thought, Jonah. That's what was going on in your heart and you are so certain and justified in your position that you're angry when it didn't go your way. Jonah," God says to him in verse 11, "in light of that, Jonah," in verse 11, "Should I not have compassion

on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" The "I" here is emphatic. "Jonah, if you can do that with a plant, can't I do something that I want to do? Jonah, if you can have compassion on a plant, can't I do something with a city that belongs to Me?" God is using a lesser to the greater argument. If you acknowledge the lesser point, you're compelled to acknowledge the greater point. The lesser point here is, "Jonah, you had compassion on a plant, here today, gone tomorrow. Jonah, I'm God. Jonah, I am God and it pleased Me and I had desired to have compassion on an entire city." Some people think that the 120,000 who don't know the difference between their right and left hand are speaking of children, and that the actual population would be more on the order of the magnitude of 600,000 or so. God is saying, "Jonah, if you as a sinner can have compassion on a plant, how much more should I be free to have sovereign compassion on a city if it pleases Me to do so? If you can have compassion as a sinner on a plant, why can't I as a holy God have compassion on whomever I wish, whenever I wish?"

That, beloved, that is a devastating unanswerable argument. The sovereign prerogative of God to have compassion on his creation, to have compassion on creatures if it pleases him to do so, it's at the core of his glory, that kind of sovereign freedom. Beloved, it is the nature of man that he deserves no compassion from God. He deserves no mercy from God whatsoever. It is the nature of God that he can show sovereign compassion on men who don't deserve it whenever he wishes. He is utterly free in his grace and he is not obligated. He is not obligated by any so-called merit to men and he is not restrained by any objections from men. He is utterly free and it is the freedom of his sovereign compassion and that is the only reason that anyone, anywhere at any time can be saved. Not by works. Not by merit. By God's sovereign compassion.

His argument to Jonah is obvious, isn't it? It's okay, you can nod here. It'll help you stimulate your circulation. We've been going for 60 minutes here. It's an obvious argument, isn't it? This cannot be refuted. This is right and now we come to the climax. Do you know who was the first person to understand this argument from God? Do you know who the first person was to get it? Do you know who it was? Without a doubt it was Jonah. It was Jonah. You say, "How do you know that? There is no verse 12? I turn the page and all of a sudden it says Micah. There is no verse 12. There is nothing else here to tell us that." Do you know what, beloved? If the argument of God is so obvious to us, it was obvious to Jonah. Once Jonah understood the sovereign compassion of God, there was nothing left to be said. There was nothing else that needed to be said and what I believe happened here is that Jonah wrote this book, this four chapter book that we have spent 11 weeks studying, he wrote this book as a confession of his own sin and to provide a model for the Jews who would read it after him. Jonah's sinful attitude and God's response to it became an example to the rest of the nation. The book of Jonah displays the hardness of the entire Jewish heart in that period. Jonah was an example of what they were like. They didn't care about the nations. They were steeped in idolatry, even though they were God's covenant people, but when the pagans in Nineveh heard a brief message from a reluctant prophet, they responded with universal repentance. The grace that God showed to the Gentiles in the Old Testament should have acted as a stimulus to jealousy

and a model of repentance to Israel just like as explained in the New Testament. Jesus said, "Those people will rise up and judge future generations."

Beloved, Israel had no right to object if God brings salvation to Gentiles. Jonah had no right to be angry about that plan. God is God and it pleases God to show compassion to sinners when and where he wants to do it. The people of God respond not with objections, not with resentment, not with a substitute plan, the people of God respond by saying, "Amen, God. To you be the glory." It's what he did to Nineveh, he showed sovereign compassion. He had shown compassion to Israel before that to call them out to be a nation of priests on his behalf.

Beloved, do you see that if you are here and you are in Christ, that the sovereign compassion that God showed to Israel, the sovereign compassion he showed to Nineveh is the same kind of sovereign compassion that he has shown to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. There you were living behind the walled cities of your sin, dead, indifferent, strangers to the covenant of the promises that God had made to his people, having no right, no call, not even a desire of your own to know this God or to receive his mercy and God in sovereign compassion to you put you in a Christian family, brought you a friend, brought you someone, brought you a book that explained that God has mercy on sinners just like you and he showed that mercy and he paid the price of that mercy at the cross of Calvary; 2,000 years before you were born, God in sovereign compassion had already established the certainty of your salvation when Christ died for his people outside of Jerusalem. You had no right to that. If God had not turned your heart, you would have continued to rebel against it, you would have kicked against the goads, but God had mercy on you. Why? It's not because you deserved it. It's not that God looked down the corridors of time and saw that you would respond in faith and said, "Oh, I'll have mercy on him now that I see what he'll do." No, no, God had ordained that mercy from the start. The mercy that he showed to Nineveh was planned. The mercy that he showed to us today was planned and it's because of who God is.

Look at Micah 7, the next book over. Micah 7:18. We are brought to the throne of grace, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love." In Galatians 2:20 it says, "He loved me and He gave Himself up for me."

Beloved, the book of Jonah brings us to the throne of grace and we see that it is a throne of sovereign compassion and those of us that have drunk from the fountain of the shed blood of Jesus Christ for the cleansing of our souls have every reason to praise him. And those of you that are outside looking in, the offer comes to you as well. This God is a God of compassion on sinners just like you. Those who come by faith in Christ are never turned away. Christian, worship. Unbelieving friend, lay down the weapons of your rebellion. Join Jonah, join Nineveh, join the people of God throughout the ages in repenting of your sin and casting yourself upon Christ alone for his great mercy.

Let's pray together.

*O God, we understand that some don't like a message of sovereign compassion, Jonah certainly didn't, but we bow before it, Lord. We recognize your sovereign prerogative to be exactly the God that you want to be; to have mercy on whom you will have mercy. Bless those who stand in opposition to that message. Father, have mercy on them and lead them to Christ. Help us who know Christ to be faithful, to proclaim the glory of your name as we have sought to do here today. We commit these things to you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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