



GOD IS PLEASED BUT JONAH IS NOT, PART 1

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Review:

- Our last time in this Jonah series was two weekends ago. We had our special guest, Naghmeh Panahi here last week. Great lady!
- She had a wonderful time here and she had lot of good things to say about Solid Bread Community and the people she met here.
- The video of Naghmeh's powerful testimony is already up on our YouTube channel. It's definitely worth watching if you missed last week. It's something you should direct others to watch.
- But here's a quick catch-up on Jonah. Our last lesson was on **Ch. 3:5-9**. This is the passage where Nineveh responds to Jonah's simple message, *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."*
- We used a 5-point outline to help us understand that passage. Here's a quick review:
- **First**, we looked at the **response** of Nineveh.
 - We saw in **vs. 9** that the Ninevites *'believed God.'* They responded to God, not to Jonah.
 - God had prepared the hearts of the city to receive His message, and they responded properly to Him and to it.
 - We saw that God was finally able to use Jonah, since Jonah was an open channel by this point. He'd learned his lessons, and he obeyed God.
- **Second**, we looked at the **regret** of Nineveh.
 - We saw in **vss. 5 and 6** that the Ninevites fasted, they put on sackcloth, and they covered themselves in ashes.
 - We noted how these three things were demonstrated from the lowest person all the way to the top. Even the king showed this posture of extreme humility.
 - These things were outward visible signs of an inward invisible change.
- **Third**, we noted the **rule** of Nineveh in **vss. 7 and 9**.
 - The king of Nineveh issued a proclamation. It was a rule, and it applied to everyone – no exceptions!
 - It even applied to all the animals, which was a highly unusual decision. The bottom line was that the king was determined to demonstrate comprehensive shame.

- The king set the tone. He admitted the city's sins, and he infused a sense of hope in Nineveh's citizens.
- The **fourth and fifth** points of our outline were Nineveh's **repentance** and **reliance**.
 - The king says in **vs. 9** that Nineveh needed to '*give up*' its evil ways; it needed to '*give up*' its violence.
 - This is a total turnabout – a total change. It's going the opposite direction, and we learned that THIS sort of response is indicative of true repentance.
 - And then we saw that the king and the city's residents were powerless against the dire circumstances for what they had become.
 - All their wealth and strength and prestige meant nothing anymore. In response to the message Jonah delivered, their **reliance** was completely on God.
 - This is a position of absolute trust and dependance. It's a posture of complete and total humility where no seed of independence is in the mix anymore.

NOTE: This was the impact of God's message, through Jonah, to the citizens of Nineveh – from top to bottom. And that brings us now to **Ch. 3:10** and I'll read from there through **Ch. 4:3**.

NOTE: I have a very simple two-point outline to help us get through this passage, and I'll try to capture the important things we need to consider under these two points:

- 1. God is pleased, and He shows compassion**
- 2. Jonah is displeased, and he shows anger**

(I'll probably get through the first point of this outline today, and we'll tackle the second point next week.)

NOTE: Here, in this part of the story, we have a contrast set up – and it's a stark difference. The two responses – God's and Jonah's – are many miles apart.

- Both God and Jonah see the same thing.
 - Jonah's been walking around the city for at least three days (according to **vs. 3**), and he's been pounding this simple message of Nineveh's pending destruction into every nook and cranny of this city.
 - I am sure that, along the way, Jonah has seen the response of the city's residents. He's seen the sackcloth, the fasting, the ashes.
 - Chances are good that he's heard their wails of despair, he's heard the cries of the hungry livestock, and he's heard the king's decree.
- God perceived all of that too - - in fact, **vs. 10** says, "*When God saw...*" So, God and Jonah saw the same things.
 - Now, we understand too that God also saw something Jonah could not see. God saw the sincerity and humility of the citizens' hearts.
 - But the point is both God and Jonah saw Nineveh's outward display of an inward condition. They both saw Nineveh's demonstration of shame and repentance.

- But that's where the similarities end. We see God and Jonah have two very different responses to the same situation.
- But for today, let's look at the first of these two points in this outline....

A. God is pleased, and He shows compassion

NOTE: I want to put the spotlight on a few points about God that we read in **vs. 10**

1. First, God notices our change in direction

- Now, God is omniscient, He's all-knowing, and so there is no detail of this life or this universe that has ever escaped His full comprehension.
- But that's not really my point; I'm not talking about God's 'omniscience.' I'm talking about something much more personal – much more intimate.
- God notices when we change our direction. He sees when we make wrong turns – and as our text shows, He sees when we make the right turns.
- And my bigger point here is He CARES about those directions. He genuinely CARES when we make a wrong turn, and He genuinely cares when we make a right turn.
- God looked down on this depraved, wicked, evil, violent city (remember, this was Nineveh's reputation, and even the king knew this when he instructed all his citizens to '*give up their evil ways and their violence*' [**vs. 8**]) – but God looked down, and He saw evidence of something.
- God saw the fruit of Nineveh's belief. He saw the actions of genuine repentance. And at this moment – even when the citizens of Nineveh did not know it, God had noticed their change in direction.

NOTE: We need to pause and take note of something here. God does not loudly play 'Taps' on a bugle to reaffirm His presence and His attentiveness in our lives.

- It would be rare that there are any fireworks shows to let us know that God notices us.
- It's often true in the modern church that we are tempted to conjure up some sort of **artificial affirmation** that God is present, that He notices us, and that He's approving of what we're doing.
- And so, you see many charismatic-leaning churches talk about 'great signs and wonders,' or 'a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit.'
- This amounts to some significant 'evidence' – TO THEM - that God is noticing, and He's affirming His presence in their lives and ministry. I am very wary of these issues.
- I've observed in many years of being around those of deep faith, that God often moves quietly, subtly, and almost imperceptibly. He tests us and gently moves us along.
- That's true even when tremendous things are being accomplished in His name and in His power.
- And it's often true that sincere men and women of God struggle in these periods of God's relative silence. They struggle when they don't see evidence of what's actually taking place within the unseen spiritual dimension.

- We want to know that God notices us! We want to feel His power and presence when we move from a wrong position to a right position, or when we're faithful under trials.
- I think of Elijah here. Elijah was a servant of God and an outspoken and bold man. God used him to do mighty things.
- But despite all of Elijah's accomplishments and standards, he was like you and me. When word reached Elijah that Jezebel had threatened him (**Cf. 1 Kings 19**), Elijah ran for his life, and he complained to the LORD about things as he saw them.
- It's significant how the Lord affirmed Himself to Elijah. In **1 Kings 19:11-12**, *"The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."*
- Elijah was provided a display of great, obvious, loud, and powerful things – big signs and wonders - but God did not affirm Himself to Elijah in any of those moments.
- God HAD noticed Elijah. God saw the good that Elijah had done. God saw Elijah's faithfulness - - and God affirmed Himself to Elijah, but - - - in a *gentle whisper*. In a *still small voice*.
- The truth is God notices us. He sees our change in direction, He sees our work in ministry, He sees our faithful perseverance under trials, and so on.
- But if God seems silent to us as true believers, it may mean that we have stopped listening to His voice - - - or we've lowered our spiritual bar, and we expect God to play by choreographies of man's design.
- Many times, we become consumed by the cares of this world because they are a much bigger priority to us than we'd like to admit.
- We therefore no longer perceive as we ought to with our spiritual ears - - or perhaps we have neglected a right focus on God's Word.
- We have the entirety of God's revelation to us in the Bible, and so God does not need to speak to us today in signs, wonders, fire, earthquakes, or wind, or anything like those things.
- His Spirit speaks to us through His all-sufficient Word, and in that Word, we have the only true "words of life."

2. Second, I now want to look at that word 'compassion.'

NOTE: In **vs. 10**, we read that God '*had compassion*' on the Ninevites.

- In the Bible 'compassion' means "to have mercy, to feel sympathy, and to have pity."
- The Bible is clear that our God is a God of compassion. **Psalms 86:15** says, God is "*a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*"
- Compassion is one of God's core attributes, and so His compassion is beyond measure; it is eternal; it is infinite. It's WHO He is!

- He is a compassionate God – it’s His true nature, if you will. And that is why **Lamentations 3:22-23** remind us that, “*His compassions never fail; they are new every morning.*”
- When Jesus saw His close friends weeping because of the death of Lazarus, He felt compassion for them. He wept alongside them (**Cf John 11:33-35**).
- When you fall flat on your face, God is compassionate. When you feel alone and full of failure, God is compassionate. When you have sinned – and you know it – and you are exhausted from falling prey to temptation once more, God is compassionate.
- When you’re not getting answers you need, God is compassionate. When your Christian journey is full of valleys, swamps, and dark places, God is compassionate.
- When, even by man’s assessments, you deserve judgment and consequence, God is still compassionate.
- We see this attribute of God in this very text in **Jonah**. God’s compassion replaced His right to carry out destruction.
- His message to Nineveh was boldly proclaimed > that brought about the city’s transformation > and that resulted in God showing His compassion.

NOTE: The simple beautiful truth is, ‘Our God is a God of compassion.’ That’s WHO He is. And because it’s who He is, God expects US to show compassion. Let’s bring this down to a few basic applications:

- a. **1 John 3:17** asks a probing question, “*If anyone with earthly possessions sees his brother in need, but withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God abide in him?*” (Berean Standard Bible)
 - Because we are made in God’s image, we are to display God’s traits, including compassion.
 - From this passage, it follows in **1 John 4:20** that “*If anyone says, ‘I love God’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen*”
 - The Bible says that compassion is a litmus test for the believer. Since it is an attribute of God, it should be an attribute of God’s people as well.
 - Part of this attribute is showing help and generosity to others in need. This is part of showing compassion, and it should be a natural expression of our love for God.
- b. Compassion is also seen in properly dispensing the truth of Scripture.
 - **Mark 6:34**, in talking about Jesus, says, “*When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.*”

- Many churches today have leaders who are not true shepherds. How do we know that?
 - They lack compassion. Well - how do we know THAT? They lack compassion because they do not properly teach the truth of Scripture.
 - The plain fact is the Bible contains all the truth and all the direction we need for enduring life and combating deception.
 - It is the responsibility of Christian leaders to watch out for the welfare of their flock, and to show their compassion for those they minister to, by *‘(properly) teaching them many things.’*
 - I believe most pastors and teachers today have not grasped this all-important point. Instead, they CHOOSE to mishandle God’s Word.
 - They CHOOSE to teach it in a way which supports their own desires, and they CHOOSE to see the position they have been placed in as a means to some personal end.
 - According to God’s Word, this is not showing compassion. According to what we learned in **Jude 12**, they are *‘shepherds who feed only themselves,’* and **Jude 13** says, *‘blackest darkness has been reserved (for them) forever.’*
 - We learned the hard – but important – truth in our study in **Jude** that there are many false teachers, and their spiritual condition and eternal prognoses are not good.
 - So, another way true compassion is exemplified is by properly teaching the truth of Scripture.
- c. Compassion is also made clear when we have proper fellowship one with another in the body of Christ.
- **Colossians 3:12** says, *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, **compassionate hearts**, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,”*
 - Do you want to know what Godly fellowship looks like? It’s a compassionate fellowship. It’s one where kindness and patience reign.
 - It’s a fellowship where compassion is a priority, and humility and meekness show up - - that means ‘strength under control.’
 - We don’t live in a compassionate world. Instead, we live on a ruthless, callous, deceptive, selfish, dog-eat-dog planet. It will eat you up and spit you out without a flicker of conscience or regret.
 - So, the Christian virtue of compassion within the body of Christ is intended to stand in stark contrast to the world’s ways and methods.
 - It’s SUPPOSED to. That’s part of our testimony. That’s part of our message to a world that is headed for destruction.
 - When we show compassion to one another as we ought to, we are directing the focus back to God.
 - He is a God of compassion, and we are reflecting His nature in our lives and in our choices.

NOTE: We're still on that first point of this outline which is, **'God is pleased, and He shows compassion,'** and now we need to contrast this with what might have happened - -

B. God relents from bringing destruction

NOTE: We've seen that part of demonstrating compassion is meeting a need or addressing a problem.

NOTE: Now, here, we see that God's compassion is also demonstrated by Nineveh avoiding a certain outcome.

1. We need to understand this passage in its proper context. Nineveh narrowly avoided a similar fate here as Sodom and Gomorrah (Cf. Gen. 18 and 19).

- In fact, the same Hebrew word that is used for the destruction God had threatened against Nineveh (*'hapak'*) is also used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- In both instances *'hapak'* means "to overthrow" or "to turn over." It is sometimes translated in our English Bibles as "destruction" or "destroyed."
- It doesn't necessarily mean that God would have rained burning sulfur down on Nineveh as he did on the other two cities.
- But the point is God had warned about a violent overthrow - an apocalyptic destruction - of Nineveh.
- Their sins – like the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah – became so great and commonplace, that Nineveh was headed for complete annihilation.
- Jonah knew that. He knew his *'forty days'* proclamation was all about Nineveh being violently destroyed. He HOPED it would take place....
- That's why he gets a good seat to watch it all happen a few verses from now.
- But God relents. He chooses to not destroy Nineveh as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He decides this because Nineveh repented.

2. In similar fashion, God relented from destroying the rebellious, stiff-necked Israelites in Ex. 32:14. He had told Moses He would 'consume' them in vs. 10.

- Recall that the Israelites in the desert had complained a great deal.
- They'd seen God at work, they'd received God's provisions for them, they'd been protected by God and led by God - - but all they did was moan and complain. They wanted to go back to Egypt and return to slavery.
- And so, God had had enough. He told Moses that He had a *'fierce anger'* against the Israelites for their grumbling and discontent.
- But Moses intervened, and God relented. God decided not to destroy the Israelites for their unbelief - - not at that point anyway.
- The Israelites were eventually destroyed in the desert because they refused to trust God as they were about to enter the Promised Land.
- But this time, THIS time, God relented. He did not destroy them. It's similar to the pattern we see in God's response to Nineveh in this story of Jonah.

IMPORTANT POINT: The God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT. Why do I bring this up?

1. One of the lingering criticisms liberal theologians and irresponsible pastors make is that God is somehow different between the OT and the NT.
2. They point to God destroying the world in The Great Flood. They critique God's command to Moses and Joshua as being genocidal when He instructed them to *'kill every man, woman, and child'* as the Israelites entered the Promised Land.
3. They look at various battles in the OT when entire armies were wiped out, and some of them even critique God's destruction of the priests of Baal and his destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as somehow showing God's 'intolerance.'
4. I've read some commentaries where liberal scholars try to argue that God was trying to figure out how to be God, and it took a few go-rounds before He finally got it right.
5. This is utter blasphemy. This is a willful choice to put God in a box and a refusal to see Him properly as the Scriptures reveal Him. This shows an ignorance of God's Word.
6. Don't ever be tempted to see God in the OT as being any different than He is in the NT.
7. In fact, Jonah admits the truth of what I'm saying here. I'm getting ahead of myself, but look at **Ch. 4:2**.
8. David even writes in **Psalms 103:8**, *"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love."*
9. In **Joel 2:13** it says about God, *"For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion. And He relents from sending disaster."*
10. In **Nehemiah 9:17**, the Levite priests told the people about God and God's dealings with the Jewish people, *"But You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in loving devotion, and You did not forsake them."*
11. Most churches, pastors, and teachers today MUCH prefer to focus on the NT incarnation of Jesus Christ than to try to teach on the full perspective of God.
12. It's partly why they choose not to teach about the End Times, about future judgment, and eternity in Hell. This stuff reminds them of the OT God, and that's not how they WANT to see things. **They prefer part of God's Word and not the whole of it.**
13. But the important takeaway here is God never changes. It's not like Jesus Christ is one version of God, and what we read about God in the OT is another version.
14. **Hebrews 13:8** cuts to the chase. It says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*
15. In the very next verse, we are cautioned to not be *'carried away by varied and strange teachings'* - - in other words, it's important to remain Biblically sound and accurate.

NOTE: Let me wrap up with a couple of things for us to think about:

1. **First, God is pleased whenever His message is faithfully proclaimed.**
 - Jonah, as we've already learned, delivered God's message to Nineveh. It was short and not-so-sweet. But the people *'believed God'* in **Ch. 3:5**.
 - The point is this all worked out as it did because Jonah did not tell the Ninevites what they wanted to hear; he told them what they needed to hear.

- Just as God is pleased whenever His message is faithfully proclaimed, so the reverse is also true: God is NOT pleased when His message is NOT faithfully proclaimed.
- Jonah proclaimed God's message faithfully, and the result was the greatest recorded revival in human history took place.
- It had nothing to do with Jonah; he was full of faults, and we will soon see he showed those things again.
- God's pleasure had everything to do with the fact that HIS message was faithfully proclaimed, and so, as **Isaiah 55:11** says, it did '*not return void.*'
- God's Word is like that. If it is faithfully delivered, great things can happen.

2. Second, God uses flawed, failed, and fearful people.

- Jonah was all these things - - and God still used him.
- God could've used anyone to turn Nineveh around. He could have used an angel to achieve the same thing.
- He could have SENT angels to Nineveh as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah, but He didn't do that. He sent Jonah.
- Our God is a God who is FAR greater than our impracticalities, improbabilities, and impossibilities.
- Just as it is true that God's Word, properly proclaimed, will not return void - so it is that God uses flawed, failed, and fearful people to do great things.

NEXT TIME: "God is Pleased, But Jonah is Not, Part 2" (Jonah is not happy about the whole situation)



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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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