

August 4, 2019

(Bigger Series):

“The One That Got Away,” Jonah 4:6-11

The message of Jonah is: God loves! God loved the lost pagan sailors, he loved the wicked Ninevites, and he loved his disobedient prophet. Jonah is still angry, but God is still Bigger. He's about to use Jonah's misplaced priorities to reveal even more.

God gives Jonah an object lesson to show that he was right to have mercy on Nineveh.

At this point in the story, Jonah is angry the Ninevites repented and that God relented. At some level, Jonah holds out hope God will see things his way and still might destroy the Ninevites. He sets up camp just outside the city, building a shelter for shade to sit and wait. God responds to Jonah's implied stipulation by providing a vine as shade for his discomfort in the heat and sun. Just as Jonah is quite pleased about the plant, (the shade and comfort it affords him), God provided a worm to eat it. To make sure He's got Jonah's attention, he sends a hot wind and lets him burn in the sun before asking about his anger about the withering plant. “Oh the injustice,” Jonah cries, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” God wanted Jonah to see the irony of his priorities, showing more compassion for a destroyed plant than that of an entire city of people – who do not know right from wrong.

From the object lesson in this passage, we can draw these basic applications:

1. God cares about people who are not his people.

God's mercy is for all... for anyone who does not know Him. It's too easy to be like Jonah, enjoying God's grace and mercy for ourselves, forgetting we too are to be messengers of God's love, compassion, and grace.

a). God cares about those who are wicked.

Nineveh was evil, so it is shocking that God would go after them, rescue them, and even describe him as he does in this passage. “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” That is the God we serve. Did not Jesus defy the establishment, dining with thieves, prostitutes, and the demon possessed? God is love, and He cares for the wicked.

b). God cares about people more than stuff.

Jonah shows more concern for a living plant, but not for living beings. What momentary comfort has your attention? What priority have you given it?

2. God cares about broken people who are his people.

Jonah directly disobeyed God, but throughout the story God showed loving correction to bring about His purposes for Nineveh, and, hopefully, for Jonah. Is Jonah the prophet who got away? We only know God ensured the story of His messenger was recorded so we may know this “bigger” God who loves, has mercy, and who saves. So... go! We are messengers. God is love!

Discussion Questions:

1. From whom are you withholding mercy (the lost, wicked, or broken)?
2. What are our “vines” that we care more about than the lost? Do we have unrealistic expectations of the lost (their ability to know right from wrong)?
3. Can we effectively share the good news with someone if they don't know that we care for them first?
4. How might you explain to a seeker the apparent contradiction of God caring for every person since He created all people with the existence of hell?
5. Discuss any correlations you draw from these verses in regards to this story. (Hebrews 12:6, 2 Peter 3:9, Matthew 5:44-48, Mark 12:30-31, 1 John 4:16, John 3:16 & 17).