

Should not I pity...?**Read Jonah, chapters 3-4****INTRODUCTION**

1. This is **Lesson 2**, but the Lesson Notes were very scantily written for **Lesson 1** since my time and attention was so preoccupied the week leading up to **Lesson 1**. I invested what time I had in study and lesson preparation and very little to the writing of Lesson Notes.
2. **Lesson 1** was titled *'Salvation Belongs to Yahweh!'* from Jonah's concluding confession of faith and thanksgiving in **ch 2.9** following his 'salvation' from the belly of the great fish.
3. This lesson is titled *'Should not I pity...?'* from Yahweh's concluding rebuke and explanation that He delivered to Jonah at the end of **ch 4.11**. We'll elaborate further on that question at the end of this lesson as Yahweh expresses the overall theme of this Book: Salvation Through Judgment and Mercy [from the title of Bryan D. Estelle's excellent commentary on this Book...].
4. The Book of Jonah neatly divides itself into these two divisions which we are now concluding...

ch 3.1-4 / YAHWEH'S SECOND CALL TO JONAH & JONAH'S RESPONSE

1. **vv 1-2 / Take Two!** Compare these two verses with **ch 1.1-2**. In this call, Yahweh also commissions Jonah to **call out against it the message that I tell you**. Whereas in **ch 1**, He simply said **call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me**. It very well may have been that He included the **message that I tell you** in the first call also. Whether He told Jonah what the content of that message would be, we don't know ... or whether He would tell Jonah what the message was when he got there. We do know from **v 4** here, that when Jonah got to Nineveh, his message was primarily a message of their accountability to Yahweh and His judgment against their sin.
2. **v 3a /** This time, Jonah obeyed Yahweh instead of running away from Yahweh and his responsibility in the opposite direction.
3. **v 3b /** The description of Nineveh being **an exceedingly great city** means specifically **'a great city to God.'** God cared about them [as He will express at the end of the Book in **ch 4.11**]. His first and priority desire was not to destroy them, but to save them. Hold on to that...
4. What do we make of this description of Nineveh: **three days' journey in breadth**? It was not that expansive in circumference or physical size; rather, being an important diplomatic city of Assyria, most likely it means that there were strategic centers of activity in the city where Jonah would deliver his message from Yahweh – it would take him at least three days to stop long enough and preach in these strategic points to convey his messages to the whole city.
5. **v 4 /** Which is what Jonah did the first day which is described here. He began to publicly and boldly preach his message of Yahweh's judgments against their sin: **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!** And we can be sure that he based his messages firmly on Yahweh's authority and His sending him to them to deliver it!

ch 3.5-9 / THE PEOPLE AND KING OF NINEVEH RESPOND WITH HUMILITY, CONFESSION OF THEIR SINS & REPENTANCE

1. **v 5 /** **There was a popular response among the populace of Nineveh.** The record here says **And the people of Nineveh believed God**. Notice that the word **God** is used here instead of Yahweh. However, they were acknowledging that Yahweh was the Supreme **God**. There is something else we must not miss. In **Luke 11.32**, Jesus says **for they repented at the preaching of Jonah**, meaning they accepted his message being from **God**. But Jesus also says back up in **v 30**, **For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh** [comparing this to the 'sign' that He Himself was to His own generation]. So what we can and should learn from this statement is that Jonah himself was a

‘*sign*’ of Yahweh’s judgment against sin and disobedience, but also His willingness to have mercy and save those who repent of their sin [which Jonah himself had done...and was saved from the belly of the great fish]. Maybe something about his physical appearance? Or from his personal accounts of how Yahweh had saved him from the belly of the great fish?

2. **vv 6-7 / There was also a royal response from the king of Nineveh – his own humility and repentance as well as a royal decree to every citizen of Nineveh, including even the livestock!**
3. **v 8 / His decree included not only public humility and mourning over their sin accompanied by fasting, but also a decree to cry mightily to God.** This was the same kind of crying prayer that the sailors offered to God in **1.14** and Jonah himself prayed in **2.2**. It is the praying, crying, calling out to God in abject desperation, casting oneself upon His sovereign mercy to save them from the impending judgment against their sin. He also commanded **Let everyone turn** [repentance is another meaning of this word ‘turn’] **from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.** This ‘**violence**’ means all their acts of oppression, cruelty, and injustices against others. It means ‘infringement of human rights’ that are perpetrated against others.
4. **v 9 / Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish.** This is his clear summary of their dependence on the sovereign mercy of God. See another expression like this in **Joel 2.12-14.**

ch 3.10 / YAHWEH DOES RESPOND WITH COMPASSION, MERCY, & SALVATION

1. This is precisely what He wanted to do ... and why He sent Jonah with His messages of judgment. Again, Yahweh will reiterate His desire to save – yes, even His worst enemies and among the Gentiles – in **ch 4.11.**
2. **This is the Gospel Yahweh is pre-enacting in the story of Jonah...which will be fulfilled in the mission of Christ? see Romans 5.6-11.**

ch 4.1-3 / JONAH’S FURIOUS OBJECTION TO YAHWEH’S MERCY: “I OBJECT!”

1. **Now we’re coming to the real core and pith of Yahweh’s heart for the nations and His desire and purpose to save them.** But Jonah quickly gets cross-ways with Yahweh and begins to protest angrily with what Yahweh has done in His mercy to the Ninevites...
2. Jonah’s response here makes us question and speculate what was in his heart when he did obey Yahweh to deliver His message to the Ninevites. We know he obeyed the second commission and went. But did he go reluctantly? Did he go ‘under protest’? We know he had reservations about what Yahweh would do if he obeyed and went because he will tell Yahweh he did. He knew he had no choice but to obey, but did he obey Yahweh under the coercion of his own knowing he had tried the alternative and it had failed? Of course, we don’t know what all was going on in his mind and thoughts, but he’s going to show us at least part of it here...
3. **v 1 / Jonah was not only ticked – ‘But it was evil to Jonah a great evil.’** Meaning, Jonah considered Yahweh’s salvation of the Ninevites a great travesty of justice. And he told Yahweh so. He begins to give Yahweh ‘a piece of his mind.’
4. **v 2 / But at least Jonah began to pray.** He’s trying to ‘wrap his head around’ what he knows about Yahweh’s character. **O Yahweh, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? This is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish...** Now he reveals some of what was going through his mind when he fled from the Presence of Yahweh [**ch 1.3 & 10**]. ...**for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.** This was the primary standing summary of Yahweh’s heart and character ever since He revealed Himself to Moses with these words in Exodus 34.6. [Again, the ‘relenting from disaster’ is in **Joel 2.13**] Like Jonah is telling Yahweh *“I knew You would do this. That’s why I didn’t want to be party to it!”*

5. So what Jonah reveals from his own heart here is not so much a xenophobic hatred against the Assyrians and Ninevites – a prejudice and bigotry against them – but more so, **his problem is with Yahweh Himself**. Jonah could understand how Yahweh could and would show this kind of mercy to Israel, even in their own rebellions, faithlessness, and disobedience against Him [as He had shown on numerous, repeated occasions] ... but how could and why would He show this mercy on Ninevites? Didn't His mercy belong exclusively to the covenant nation and people? Weren't they exclusively entitled to His covenant mercies? *“Your saving mercy belongs to us! Why are You giving it to these Ninevites?”*
6. **v 3** / Jonah would rather die than have to witness Yahweh's mercy and salvation being shared with and extended to the Ninevites.

ch 4.4 / YAHWEH BEGINS TO PATIENTLY COUNSEL AND REASON WITH JONAH

1. **And Yahweh said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’** *“Jonah, I'm going to give you an opportunity to look into your own heart and see what's there. What's your problem with Me? What have I done that I shouldn't have done? Where have I done wrong?”*
2. There is so much compassion for Jonah here. Yahweh could have zapped Jonah into ether for questioning or objecting to His mercy to His and Israel's enemies ... but instead, Yahweh begins to try to bring Jonah around to being in sync with His own heart and salvific purposes. But it's going to be a hard sell!

ch 4.5-9 / YAHWEH WORKS JONAH THROUGH AN OBJECT LESSON TO EXPOSE HIS MISPLACED PRIORITIES AND ‘PITY’

1. **v 5** / Jonah doesn't even answer Yahweh's question. He knows he's cross-ways with Yahweh and in the wrong. But we know how stubborn, hard-headed, and insistent on having his own way he can be. Instead of responding to Yahweh, he stomps out of the saved city, and goes out of the city a 'safe' distance [just in case Yahweh changes His mind and reverses course to destroy the city after all], builds himself a lean-to with as much shade as he could construct, and sits and sulks and stewes in his continuing anger at Yahweh: *“How could You?”* He's obviously throwing a hissy fit and temper tantrum ... thinking he might persuade Yahweh to pity his attitude and concede to him?
2. **v 6** / Now Yahweh begins His object lesson by **‘preparing’** or **‘appointing’** a number of physical phenomena. [Remember: the first object lesson Yahweh **‘prepared’** or **‘appointed’** was the great fish in **ch 1.17**. There are three more to come in this object lesson: **vv 6,7,8**.] **Now the LORD God [Sovereign Yahweh] 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.** Just another expression and demonstration of Yahweh's 'saving' mercy to Jonah personally ... as the great fish had already been.
3. **v 7** / Yahweh again demonstrates His absolute sovereignty over all the elements and creatures of His universe: **But when the dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.** The LORD giveth, and the LORD taketh away. But this time, Jonah will take it personally... *“Hey, that's MY mercy! I'm entitled to it! You can't take that away from me!”*
4. **v 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.”** Now we have to see here that Yahweh is revealing to Jonah – from his own heart, experiences, and words – that Jonah is self-centered on his own comfort, convenience, preferences ... and on his own mercies that he receives from Yahweh. But he has no heart at all, no pity at all whether the Ninevites would have been destroyed under Yahweh's judgment. In fact, he would have preferred that! He was glad for the plant because it shaded and 'saved' him from his own

discomforts. But he was furious at Yahweh because He had ‘shaded’ and saved the whole city of Nineveh from the heat and wrath of His fury had He chosen to destroy them!

5. For the second time, Jonah prays to die: **for it is better for me to die than to live.** He would rather die than live to see the Ninevites saved [v 3]. Here, he would rather die than suffer his own physical discomfort from the shade of the plant Yahweh had provided for him. He didn’t want to suffer from the heat of the noonday sun ... but he would have been happier if Yahweh had poured out the heat of His wrath upon the whole city of Nineveh.
6. v 9 / Yahweh again confronts Jonah with His searching question: **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.”** We call this ‘doubling down.’ **“Jonah, do you see yourself? Do you hear yourself? Are you willing to stand by what you have just done and said to Me?”** Jonah’s stubborn, insistent response: **“Yes, I am!”**
7. The object lesson has been demonstrated, and the lessons clearly drawn out ... but Jonah refuses to see the point in what Yahweh has done or learn the lesson Yahweh wants to teach him. Or, if he does see the contrast between his own self-centered heart and that of Yahweh’s, he’s not willing to admit and concede to this exposure of his heart.

ch 4.10-11 / YAHWEH APPLIES THE OBJECT LESSON – WHY HE HAS SAVED NINEVEH & HE CALLS JONAH TO GET IN SYNC WITH HIS OWN HEART FOR THE NATIONS

1. v 10 / So here Yahweh just points out to Jonah what He just demonstrated in the object lesson: **And Yahweh 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.”** Of course, that was irrefutable. To ‘pity’ means more than just having sympathetic feelings toward or feeling sorry for. *It means to have enough concern for the plight of the objects of your pity that you are willing to act and intervene to save them through every means available to you.* Which Jonah would have done for the plant if he could have. The plant was ‘saving’ his life ... or at least the comfort of his life. Since he couldn’t save the plant, then he might as well die. He hadn’t created the plant; he hadn’t made it grow; he couldn’t sustain it or save it – Yahweh did all of that by His own sovereign power and mercy toward Jonah. **Why couldn’t Jonah feel any of this ‘pity’ toward a whole city of Ninevites – and even furiously object and protest against Yahweh when He did?**
2. v 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?** The 120,000 demographic apparently applies to the whole population of Nineveh. Ancient cities were not large enough for that number to apply only to children who are ‘innocent’ of moral culpability. When Yahweh says ‘**who do not know their right hand from their left,**’ He is not saying they were innocent of sin because they certainly were not. **“For their evil has come up before Me [1.2].** But, they were ‘ignorant’ of sin as Yahweh defines sin. They were ‘ignorant’ of their accountability to Yahweh until Jonah went at Yahweh’s commission to tell them they were and to call them to repentance. But, when Jonah did, the Ninevites **believed God,** and they repented for what Yahweh had told them. And He saved them.

Jonah’s story is Yahweh’s intentional picture, pointer, prophecy, and pre-enactment of His desires and purpose to save the nations – yes, even those outside of His Old Testament covenant – by His future sending and the coming of Jesus Christ into our world: “And behold, something greater than Jonah is here!” [Matthew 12.41]. And Jesus will save us by suffering upon Himself the full weight and fury of God’s wrath against our sins. Our sins will suffer the just punishment and judgment against them by Jesus’ death on the Cross. And God will have mercy on us when we put our trust and faith in Jesus. This is Yahweh’s “Salvation Through Judgment and Mercy”!