

God's All Embracing Love

Jonah 4:1-11

SS Lesson for 05/28/2017

Devotional Scripture: Ps 86:8-13

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson explains why we should have a greater perceptoin of the wide extent of **God's All Embracing Love**. The **study's aim** is to feel how unworthy we are of God's love to us. The **study's application** is to thank God daily for His unfailing love for us.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Jonah 4:11

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

4:1. **Jonah** blatantly rejected and repudiated the goodness of God to the Ninevites. In that attitude he symbolized the nation Israel. Jonah's self-interests were a reminder to Israel of her lack of concern for the ways and mercies of God. The word **but** points up the contrast between God's compassion (3:10) and Jonah's displeasure, and between God's turning *from* His anger (3:9-10) and Jonah's turning *to* anger. Jonah's anger (**became angry** is lit., "became hot") at God for sparing Nineveh stemmed from his unbalanced patriotic fervor. Jonah probably knew from Amos and Hosea that Assyria would be Israel's destroyer. Jonah's fickle attitude toward God's dealings with him are remarkably abrupt and variegated (disobedience, chap. 1; thanksgiving, chap. 2; obedience, chap. 3; displeasure, chap. 4).

4:2. Out of anger and disgust the prophet rebuked his **LORD**, saying in essence, "I know **that You** are forgiving and now look what has happened!" Jonah admitted that he fled toward **Tarshish** because he did not want the Ninevites to be saved from judgment. (*He* wanted to be delivered from calamity, 2:2, 7, but he did not want the Ninevites to be kept from disaster.) The Ninevites were more ready to accept God's grace than Jonah was. Jonah, an object of God's compassion, had no compassion for Nineveh's people. Jonah knew **God** is willing to forgive but he did not want his enemies to know it. Their threat of doom (3:4) could be diverted if his hearers turned to his forgiving God. The prophet certainly had a clear grasp of God's character, as reflected in his near-quotation of Exodus 34:6. In fact Jonah's words about God are almost identical with Joel's description of Him (Joel 2:13; also cf. Neh. 9:17; Pss. 103:8; 145:8). **God** is **gracious** (i.e., He longs for and favors others) and **compassionate** (tender in His affection), **slow to anger** (He does not delight in punishing the wicked; cf. 2 Peter 3:9), **and abounding in love** (*hesed*, "loyal love, or faithfulness to a covenant"). The psalmists often spoke of God being "gracious" and "compassionate," though sometimes in reverse order (Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8). Jonah also said He knew God **relents from sending calamity**. The prophet feared that all these attributes of God would be extended toward the despicable, cruel Ninevites—and it happened!

4:3. Jonah's anguish over what God did led him to request that he might **die** (cf. Jonah 4:8; 1 Kings 19:4). Earlier he had prayed to live (Jonah 2:2). Perhaps now he was embarrassed that his threat was not carried out. Because God relented of His wrath and did not destroy the city, Jonah was so emotionally disappointed that he lost all reason for living. God was concerned about the city (4:11) but Jonah was not.

4:4-5. Though Jonah knew that God is slow to anger (v. 2) he still wanted **the LORD** to execute His wrath swiftly. Yet God, hesitant to be angry with even His prophet, sought to reason with him. God asked the sulking messenger whether his anger was justified (cf. v. 9). This question implied a negative response: Jonah had no **right to be angry**. A person should never angrily question what God does, even when it differs from what he expects or wants. **Jonah** was so distraught that he did not reply to God. Instead he left **the city** and built a crude **shelter**, perhaps from tree branches, and **sat** down (cf. the king's sitting in the dust, 3:6) **in its shade** (cf. Elijah under a broom tree, 1 Kings 19:4). Apparently Jonah had a clear view of the city. Why he **waited to see what would happen to the city** is difficult to understand. Perhaps he felt that God would answer his plea and judge the city anyway. Unable to imagine God not carrying out His justice on people who deserved it, Jonah was determined to wait till Nineveh was in fact judged. But he was wrong and his action was childish. Obviously he had forgotten that he, who also deserved death for disobedience, was delivered by God (chap. 2). God, being slow to anger (v. 2), again attempted to reason with Jonah (cf. v. 4). This time God gave him a visual lesson. God erected an object of Jonah's affection (creaturely comfort) and contrasted it with the object of His own concern (the souls of people). God

rebuked Jonah, not through a storm in this instance, but by exposing the selfishness of his likes and dislikes.

4:6. God provided (cf. “provided” in 1:17; 4:7-8) **a vine** to give the prophet **shade** that his crude shelter (v. 5) could not provide. The God of the sea, who could provide a fish to swallow **Jonah**, is also the God of the land (cf. 1:9) and its vegetation. Here is evidence that God is compassionate (4:2)—even when His servants are upset and depressed. As this plant grew it covered the prophet’s hut. The shade from the green plant, covering his booth with its dense foliage, protected him from the rays of the desert sun. The plant (*qqāyôn*) may have been a castor-bean plant (*Ricinus communis*), which grows rapidly in hot climates to a height of 12 feet and has large leaves. It easily withers if its stalk is injured. The fact that the plant grew overnight (cf. “at dawn the next day,” v. 7, and note v. 10) shows that more-than-usual rapid growth was as much a miracle as God’s providing the fish for Jonah. Delighted with this relief, **Jonah**, though he had been angry and depressed, was now overjoyed. Ironically he was glad for his own comfort but not for the Ninevites’ relief from judgment.

4:7-8. Early the next day God provided (cf. “provided” in 1:17; 4:6) **a worm** that destroyed the plant that had brought joy to the prophet. Then the following day **God provided a scorching east wind** that left Jonah comfortless and **faint**. The prophet’s own shelter was not enough to protect him from the terribly hot wind from the east. Strikingly in chapter 1 God intervened by a storm and a huge fish; now He intervened with a lowly worm and a sultry wind. Again the prophet was so discomfited—first by Nineveh’s repentance and now by the loss of the shade from the vine—that he wanted **to die** (cf. 4:3).

4:9. God asked **Jonah** the same question He posed earlier. **Do you have a right to be angry?** (cf. v. 4) But here He added the words **about the vine**. God was wanting Jonah to see the contrast between His sparing Nineveh and His destroying the vine—the contrast between Jonah’s lack of concern for the *spiritual* welfare of the Ninevites and his concern for his own *physical* welfare. Both Jonah’s unconcern (for Nineveh) and concern (for himself) were selfish. Jonah replied that his anger over the withered plant was justified, and that he was so **angry** he wanted **to die**. “Life for Jonah [is] a series of disconcerting surprises and frustrations. He tries to escape from God and is trapped. He then gives up, accepts the inevitability of perishing, and is saved. He obeys when given a second chance, and is frustratingly, embarrassingly successful. He blows up; his frustration is intensified” (Judson Mather, “The Comic Act of the Book of Jonah,” *Soundings* 65. Fall 1982, p. 283).

4:10-11. God wanted Jonah to see that he had no right to be angry over Nineveh or the **vine** because Jonah did not give life to or sustain either of them. Nor was he sovereign over them. He had no control over the plant’s growth or withering. The vine was quite temporal (**it sprang up overnight and died overnight**) and was of relatively little value. Yet Jonah grieved over it. Whereas Jonah had no part in making the plant **grow**, God had created the Ninevites. Jonah’s affections were distorted; he cared more for a vine than for human lives. He cared more for his personal comfort than for the spiritual destiny of thousands of people. What a picture of Israel in Jonah’s day. God’s words to the prophet indicate that Jonah had no right to be angry. Donald E. Baker paraphrases the Lord’s response this way: “Let’s analyze this anger of yours, Jonah.... It represents your concern over your beloved plant—but what did it really mean to you? Your attachment to it couldn’t be very deep, for it was here one day and gone the next. Your concern was dictated by self-interest, not by genuine love. You never had the devotion of a gardener. If you feel as bad as you do, what would you expect a gardener to feel like, who tended a plant and watched it grow only to see it wither and die? This is how I feel about Nineveh, only much more so. All those people, all those animals—I made them; I have cherished them all these years. Nineveh has cost Me no end of effort, and it means the world to Me. Your pain is nothing compared to Mine when I contemplate their destruction” (“Jonah and the Worm,” *His*. October 1983, p. 12). Whereas Jonah had thought God was absurd in sparing the Assyrians, God exposed Jonah as the one whose thinking was absurd. In contrast with an insignificant vine, greater **Nineveh** was significant; it had **more than 120,000 people**. The words, **who cannot tell their right hand from their left**, may refer to young children, in which case the population of Nineveh and its environs may have been, as some commentators state, about 600,000. But other commentators suggest that the 120,000 were adults, who were as undisciplined or undiscerning as children, thus picturing their spiritual and moral condition without God. (In that case the total population may have been about 300,000.) The figure of 120,000 for Nineveh *proper* accords with the adult population of Nimrod (Gen. 10:11-12; also known as Calah, a suburb of Nineveh). An inscription states that Ashurnas[irpal II (883-859) invited 69,574 people of Nimrod to a feast (Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p. 234, n. 27; Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924, p. 116). And according to Donald J. Wiseman, Nineveh’s walls enclosed an area twice that of Calah (“Jonah’s

Nineveh," *Tyndale Bulletin* 30. 1979, p. 37). Jonah is a remarkably tragic example of the plight of the nation Israel. Both Jonah and Israel were accused of religious disobedience and disaffection. What a tragedy when God's people care more for creaturely comforts than for the interests of God's will among men. By contrast, God is unselfish. He has a right to **be concerned about** (*hûs*, "to spare"; cf. Joel 2:17) **that great city**, a city with many people who needed His grace.

The two Minor Prophets that deal almost exclusively with Nineveh—Jonah and Nahum—each end with a question (cf. Nahum 3:19). The question in Jonah 4:11 leaves the reader with a sense of uneasiness, for the curtain seems to drop abruptly. No response from Jonah is recorded. How is this silence to be understood? Most likely Jonah could not have written the book unless he had learned the point God was seeking to bring home to him. Apparently Jonah perceived his error and then wrote this historical-biographical narrative to urge Israel to flee from her disobedience and spiritual callousness. As the book concludes, Jonah was angry, depressed, hot, and faint. And he was left to contemplate God's words about his own lack of compassion and God's depth of compassion. The Lord had made His points: (a) He is gracious toward all nations, toward Gentiles as well as Israelites; (b) He is sovereign; (c) He punishes rebellion; and (d) He wants His own people to obey Him, to be rid of religious sham, and to place no limits on His universal love and grace

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

I grew up singing in Sunday school. I learned about Jesus best when I sang about Him. Music has always spoken deeply to me, and I still recall so many of the songs we sang when I was a child. One of my favorites has always been C. Herbert Woolston's "Jesus Loves the Little Children." As a girl I liked hearing that Jesus, this wonderful Saviour I heard about, loves every child. It does not matter who you are, where you come from, or what you look like. He still loves you. In this week's passage, we find Jonah under a gourd. He had turned from his earlier disobedience and journeyed to Nineveh, where he preached as commanded. His message to the Ninevites had been successful, and they were now a changed people. You would think that he would be jubilant. But what was Jonah doing? He was not sitting under that gourd just to rest. He was actually sulking, Jonah was complaining to God because his mission was too successful! You are probably questioning his actions. Jonah was furious because the Ninevites had repented and God had chosen to spare them from disaster (Jonah 3:10—4:1). He was basically throwing himself a pity party because God had mercy on people who Jonah really did not think were worth it. Now a lot of you are probably thinking, well, that is downright childish of him! Stop and think a minute, though. How often do things like this happen? It likely happens more often than you think. We see someone who does not fit in with the crowd walk into the church. Perhaps that person's hair is different, or maybe he is wearing clothing that is just on the other side of appropriate. How do you react? Do you go up and greet him, or do you just pretend the person is not there? Some of God's chosen servants were considered ruffians or unusual. Among them were a tax collector (Matt. 9:9), a prostitute (Josh. 2:1-21; 6:17-25), and an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). God even chose to use Saul, who had been one of His most vehement enemies (chap. 9). He welcomed people such as this as His own. In John 1:12, we read that anyone who receives Christ is given the blessing of becoming God's own child. We learn from Galatians that God does not base His favor on gender, race, or ethnicity (3:26-29). Romans 8 tells us that anyone who is led by His Spirit is His child (vs. 14). Many people, though, take on an attitude much like Jonah's. This is not the sort of attitude God wants from His children. God expects His people to receive any and all of His true children. When we reject others simply because we do not feel they are worthy of God's love, we reject our Lord's explicit teaching. Is there someone in your congregation who is not being received as he should? Do you know someone who needs to be accepted into the love of Christ? It may not be easy, but it is up to us to take that person into the fold. Race, income level, occupation, or former lifestyle does not matter. If that person is sincere, we need to extend a welcome. If God says a person should be accepted, then who are we to deem otherwise?

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

A previous Deacon said that in his younger days he was known as “the fighting deacon.” This reputation was acquired by the fact that on two occasions in meetings of the church board he had “slugged” (his word) someone who disagreed with him. He no longer had such a violent temper, but he was almost proud of what he had done. But anger can be a very toxic emotion. Mark Twain wrote that “anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” Some have rationalized their outbursts of anger by saying that they lose their tempers quickly and then calm down almost immediately. Billy Sunday, a famous preacher of the past, once encountered a lady who said, “I blow up, and then it’s all over.” Sunday replied, “So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind.” The Bible has much to say about anger (Proverbs 29:22; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19, 20; etc.). The words anger or angry occur several times in Jonah 4, the text for our lesson. Jonah had a problem with anger. As the Lord worked through him to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance, God also worked with Jonah to help him overcome this problem. Anger is not sinful in and of itself (note Jesus’ anger in Mark 3:5). But irrational anger needs corrective action, and that’s what God provides Jonah in today’s lesson.

1. Jonah is the only prophet recorded to have traveled on the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Jonah is the only prophet recorded to have outright refused to undertake a mission from God. Other prophets revealed doubt from time to time (example: 1 Kings 19:3, 14), but Jonah stands alone in his flagrant rebellion.
3. When Nicodemus attempted to defend Jesus during a discussion, he was rebuked with the observation that “a prophet does not come out of Galilee” (John 7:52). This overlooked the fact that Jonah was from Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:25), which was less than three miles northwest of Nazareth.
4. The book of Jonah, being primarily a narrative about the man, records just one predictive prophecy—a prophecy of only five words in Hebrew (Jonah 3:4).
5. The book of Jonah is the only prophetic book with miracles by God that involved the prophet personally—from the storm and the fish to the worm and the wind.

The traditional view of authorship for the book of Jonah is that Jonah himself wrote it. As he came to the end of it, he must have been greatly embarrassed about the prejudice and anger he had displayed so blatantly. Our lesson begins just after the point where God saw the repentance of the Ninevites and decided not to destroy the city (Jonah 3:10).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God's Loving Mercy is Sometimes Confusing to Man (Jonah 4:1-4)

- 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.
- 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.
- 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"
- 4 Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Anger (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The question that God put to Jonah needs to be put to all of us. The setting may be different, but the question is still valid: “Doest thou well to be angry?” (The *New International Version* reads, “Have you any right to be angry?”) Sometimes, of course, the answer is “Yes.” It would be strange indeed if a person never got angry. There are many injustices and cruelties in the world, to which we ought to respond with righteous indignation. On the other hand, often the answer to God’s question must be “No.” Our reasons for anger can amount to nothing more than “molehills.” James advised, “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). We do serious spiritual damage to ourselves when we live in anger. We cannot think, speak, or act like Jesus when we are angry. And anger unchecked will feed on itself, becoming more intense and harmful in the process. If you are living in anger, it is time to move out

God's mercy is confusing because man doesn't understand God's plans (1)

Man doesn't understand because man thinks in terms of "fairness" (Matt 20:1-15)

20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 7 "Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' 9 "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

Man doesn't understand because God choices are based on His own criteria (Deut 7:5-7)

6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. 7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

Man doesn't understand because God does things as it pleases Him (Jer 27:5)

5 With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.

Man doesn't understand because God hides certain things from man (Matt 11:25-26)

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Man doesn't understand because mercy does not depend on man's desire (Rom 9:15-16)

15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Man doesn't understand because grace is grace only when it is not of man choice or knowledge (Rom 11:5-6)

5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Knowledge of God's mercy doesn't always mean understanding God's ways (2-3)

Man can't understand God's ways because God's thoughts are not man's (Isa 55:7-9)

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Man can't understand God's ways because God's ways are higher than man (Job 11:7-9)

7 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? 8 They are higher than the heavens-what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave-what can you know? 9 Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

Man can't understand God's ways because no man can know the things of God (Job 42:1-6)

42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3[You asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4["You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Man can't understand God's ways because the plans of God thwarts the purposes of man (Ps 33:10-11)

10 The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. 11 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Man can't understand God's ways because God's thoughts are too profound for man (Ps 92:5-6)

5 How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts! 6 The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand,

Man does not have the right to question God's mercy (4)

Don't question God because He is the creator (Isa 45:11-12)

11 "This is what the LORD says-- the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? 12 It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.

Don't question God because that is testing God (Mark 8:11-13)

11 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." 13 Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

Don't question God because one who is in sin has no right to question a Holy God (John 8:5-7)

5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

Don't question God because it is useless and unprofitable (Titus 3:9)

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Don't question God because it sometimes is the influence of Satan (Matthew 16:21-23)

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Object Lesson on God's Loving Mercy (Jonah 4:5-11)

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

10 But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?"

God's Mercy is always initiated by God Himself (5-8)

God initiates mercy because He loves us (Rom 5:8)

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God initiates mercy because Jesus took the initiative and bore all of our transgressions (Isa 53:5-6)

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God initiates mercy because God is faithful and righteous (Rom 3:3-5)

3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." 5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

God initiates mercy because of grace (Eph 2:8-9)

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

God initiates mercy because it is mercy that prompted God's salvation (Rom 9:16)

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

God initiates mercy because God started it before the beginning of time (2 Tim 1:9)

9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

God's Mercy is all about helping people (9-11)

God's mercy to people should prompt us to be merciful to others (Matt 18:28-33)

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

God's mercy to other people doesn't mean that He doesn't love us (Luke 15:28-31)

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

God's mercy to people teaches us how to be merciful (Luke 6:35-36)

35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

God's mercy to people teaches us about forgiveness (Eph 4:32)

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

God is merciful to us so that we can be merciful to others (2 Cor 1:3-4)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Jonah's Anger With God

Had Jonah been any other prophet in the history of Israel, he would have been overjoyed with the results of his ministry, the repentance of the great city of Nineveh. Throughout Israel's history, her prophets had failed to turn the nation to God, and were rejected and even killed by the people. As Stephen put the matter, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" (Acts 7:52a).

In spite of joy at the repentance and salvation of so many, something for which his colleagues would have been overjoyed, Jonah was angry with God: "But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry" (4:1). Why would Jonah have been so angry with God? Jonah is not hesitant to explain, and so he prays this prayer of protest:

"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 Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life" (Jon. 4:2-3).

Jonah's anger is incredible. Let us take note of what his anger was all about.

(1) Jonah was angry with God. In the final analysis Jonah was not angry with himself, or with men, but with the holy, righteous, perfect God. Jonah's anger was so intense that he would rather die than live. Having prayed in chapter two that he might live, Jonah prays now that he might die (4:3).

(2) Jonah was angry with God because He acted consistently with His character, and for doing exactly what Jonah expected Him to do.

(3) Jonah was angry with God, protesting those very attributes of God for which the psalmists praised Him. The psalmists of the book of Psalms praise Him for His lovingkindness, His grace, and His mercy (cf. Ps. 86:5, 15), but for Jonah this is grounds for protest rather than praise.

(4) Jonah was angry with God because He showed grace toward the Ninevites. God's question to Jonah should have served to instruct this prodigal prophet. It should have called Jonah's attention to the utter sinfulness of being angry with God in the first place. Who can sustain a holy anger against a holy and perfect God? Furthermore, the gentleness of God's rebuke should have reminded Jonah that He was not only gracious to the Ninevites, but also to Jonah. Indeed, more so, for while the Ninevites had repented, Jonah had not. Jonah persisted in his rebellion.

The Plant and the Prodigal

Because of Jonah's persistence in maintaining his anger toward God, God presses on with yet another experience for Jonah which will serve to expose the root problem of the prodigal prophet. This is accomplished by means of the giving and the taking away of a plant, which gave Jonah pleasure.

It would seem that the forty days have passed, yet the judgment of God does not fall upon the city of Nineveh. This is no surprise to the reader, but it was a great disappointment to Jonah. Jonah went outside the city, where he made himself a mini-grandstand, a shady booth from which he could enjoy the spectacle of the destruction of Nineveh, perhaps in a hail of fire and brimstone like that which overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Here was Jonah, a spectator waiting for disaster to strike, so that he could watch, like the Romans who later would gather at the coliseum to watch the Christians eaten by the lions.

God caused a plant to grow, the shade of which gave Jonah great comfort (4:6). For the first time, **Jonah is described as being happy**, extremely happy in fact, over the presence of this plant. His happiness was short-lived, however, for on the following day a divinely appointed worm came to do its work, which resulted in the destruction of the plant. When you stop to think about it, **Jonah should have found it easier to identify with the worm than with the plant.** He, like the worm, seemed to find greater fulfillment in the destruction of God's creations than in bringing pleasure, as the plant brought shade and enjoyment to Jonah.

Along with the worm, which brought the demise of the plant, God sent a scorching wind, which caused Jonah great discomfort. **While Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be "torched," he himself was "scorched" by the heat of the wind** (4:8). Jonah did not need to be here, and thus did not need to suffer, but he was determined to stay put. He once again begged God to die.

Jonah is angry with God again, now in regard to the plant and the worm. For the second time, God challenged Jonah to consider his anger: "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" (4:9). In no uncertain terms, Jonah reiterated his right to be angry with his God: "I have good reason to be angry, even to death" (4:9).

God has the final word in the book of Jonah. His last words press to the heart of the matter:

"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. And 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?" (4:10-11).

By means of the provision of the plant there is at last some common ground between Jonah and God. Jonah had compassion on the plant; God had compassion on the people. Jonah's "compassion," like his "psalm," are inferior. God now presses His point, to show the self-centered nature of Jonah's "compassion," especially when contrasted with His compassion of the people of Nineveh. **Consider the following points of contrast between the "compassion" of Jonah for the plant and the compassion of God for people.**

(1) Jonah had compassion on a plant; God had compassion on people. Jonah was willing for the entire city to perish in great pain, even though there would be many innocent victims, including 120,000 people and many cattle. Cattle and people suffer pain. There is no evidence that plants do. Jonah had compassion on the plant, but not on people or their cattle.

(2) Jonah had compassion on a plant, in which he had no investment; God had compassion in people, whom He had created, and for whom He had prepared and promised blessing. Jonah had no real relationship with the plant. He had not made it, nor had he contributed to its growth. God created man, and He

is the Creator of every creature. God cared for that which He had made, so much so that He purposed to bless men through the offspring of Abraham, so much so that He would send His Son to die for men. Jonah cared for something that cost him nothing.

(3) Jonah had compassion with respect to the demise of a plant; God had compassion with respect to the eternal damnation of people. Jonah had compassion for a plant which existed for a day. Granted, the plant might have lived for a year, perhaps longer. But the judgment of men is for eternity. The “passing” of a plant has no real significance; the death of the people of Nineveh was the outpouring of divine wrath. The eternal judgment and damnation of people is vastly more important than the withering of a plant.

(4) God had compassion on the innocent; Jonah did not. He would have enjoyed watching the destruction of the innocent, along with the guilty. (Remember, it would be the descendants of this generation of Ninevites which would take Israel captive.) It was one thing to want the wicked to suffer for their sins, but totally another to want the innocent to suffer along with the wicked.

(5) Jonah had compassion on himself; God had compassion for others. Jonah’s “compassion” is not really centered on the plant, but rather on what that plant did for him . The plant made him very happy. Had the plant not pleased Jonah, he would have had no compassion toward it at all. Jonah’s compassion was really self-centered. He cared for himself, but not for others. On the other hand, God cared for people, people who had greatly sinned and who had offended Him.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/3-nineveh-s-repentance-and-jonah-s-wrath-jonah-3-4>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In general, there are two mistakes we can make in our relationship with God. First, we can lag behind him, failing to move as fast as he wants us to (example: Haggai 1:1-8). The other mistake is to run ahead of him. This may involve making plans that are not his (example: 2 Samuel 7:1-13) or anticipating what we think he “must” do, as in today’s lesson. It is so easy to run ahead of God and presume that he must do such and such! That presumption resulted in anger and pouting on Jonah’s part, and it can do the same to us. Don’t run ahead of God!

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Be open to submit your own prejudices and wrong motives to God's correction as you work for Him (Jonah 4:1)
2. God loves all people, and His mercy is available to anyone who will repent and believe (vss. 2-4)
3. God meets us where we are and uses our circumstances to teach us about Himself (vss. 5-8)
4. Uncontrolled anger poisons our hearts and destroys our witness (vs. 9)
5. Approach the lost realizing that you too are a recipient of God's mercy (vs. 10)
6. Our work for God must be motivated by our love for God (vs. 11)