**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from May 16, 2021
Jonah Learns His Lesson**

This morning has been a very special morning for all of us. Today Farryn was dedicated to the Lord and a blessing was spoken over her and even sung over her. As Christians we are to be people of blessing.

In the Scriptures, the power of blessing is an important theme. This is true from the blessings spoken from the patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Jesus describing what a blessed life looks like in the beatitudes, such as blessed are the poor in spirit.

It matters to the Lord that people seek to live a life under His blessing and that we seek to bless others in Jesus’ Name as well.

Most of this importance has been lost to many over the years. And the message of Scripture is that we are not to merely bless our friends and loved ones, but also our enemies. Bless those who curse us. This is easier said than done. The love of Christ most compel us to be people of blessing.

And this, I believe, was the challenge that Jonah felt as well. The message God gave to Jonah was offering them the possibility to live under God’s blessing. But Jonah did not want to bless his enemies in offering them the hope of God’s mercy.

Truly, when there are blatant evils taking place, it is tempting to just want judgment. But God always desires mercy and compassion over judgment. That is one of the biggest messages of the book of Jonah.

Today, as we conclude this book of Jonah together, we pick up at a very interesting moment. The inhabitants of this city had listened to Jonah’s message of God’s impending judgment and they responded by truly repenting of their evils, from their sins. And we read that God relented from the destruction that He threatened to bring upon it.

When I picture this story, I can see Jonah finishing his preaching in Nineveh and heading outside of the city and then sitting down with a bag of popcorn just waiting and hoping to see some fireworks. Waiting and hoping for destruction and judgment to fall upon wicked Nineveh.

But then all he hears is celebration. The forty days leading to impending judgment come and go and yet Nineveh is still standing.

And Jonah becomes angry. We read in verses 1-3 of chapter 4 the following:

**1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”**

The first point I would like to highlight from this text is that in Jonah’s anger he turns to God in prayer. This is a very good thing. When we are angry, we should turn to God in prayer as well. When we earnestly come to God in prayer, He will bring us aid. He will help us with whatever we are going through, including feelings of anger.

Anger in and of itself is not sin. In fact, Scripture teaches us that in our anger we are not to sin. So it is possible to be angry and not sin. And there is righteous anger as well.

But the Lord does not want his people to remain in a place of anger. Scripture teaches us to not let the sun go down while we are still angry. In other words, when we are angry, we are to take it to the Lord in prayer and the Lord will help us as He did Jonah.

In Jonah’s prayer, he basically tells the Lord that he is so upset that God did not bring judgment on Nineveh that he would prefer God take his life than Nineveh be spared.

Wow! That’s quite a statement. That reveals that Jonah’s heart was filled with hatred and bitterness.

**4But the Lord simply replies, “Is it right for you to be angry?”**

Oftentimes God answers our questions with questions back to us. This is what the LORD did to Job. Towards the end of the book of Job, you may recall, the Lord asked Job question after question after question. This was after Job tried to justify himself before God. And by the end of God’s questioning Job, Job was humbled and repentant.

Here in the book of Jonah, the Lord does something similar. We have this question. **“Is it right for you to be angry?”** Then, God gives Jonah an object lesson and then He gives him a few more questions. Object lessons and thought-provoking questions are still great teaching tools for today.

Let us continue with the scene with verse 5-8.

**5Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+4%3A1-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22575a)**] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”**

The Lord is such a good teacher, isn’t He? And He is so patient with Jonah. Here we see God providing this plant and causing it to grow so much so that Jonah received shade from the blazing sun. But then the next day, God brought a worm on the scene to eat up the plant, causing it to wither. This was an object lesson.

Again, Jonah states, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

**9But God says to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”**

**“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”**

**10But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”**

And so the story of Jonah comes to sudden conclusion with these questions from God. If Jonah is upset about this plant and lamenting its demise, why would God not be concerned about Nineveh? The Lord has tended to these people and animals of Nineveh. He had provided food for them. And there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left. These are the children who were not as far along on the path of evil as their parents. There is still a measure of innocence. Shouldn’t Jonah be compassionate to them at least?

The story ends with Jonah facing this important question from God. We are not told his response in the text, but I think we can assume that because we have the Book of Jonah, Jonah eventually learned his lesson from God. Jonah was able to share his story with the world.

Friends, as I think about this story from Jonah, there are a few things that the Lord would want us to grasp for our lives today.

#1 **God desires mercy more than judgment.** Yes, God is just and yes God has brought, is bringing, and will bring judgment on the unrepentant. No evil will go unpunished. Either the punishment will fall upon the one offender or the punishment is transferred to Jesus Christ. It is up to us.

And this includes Nineveh as well. In Jonah’s day, there was repentance in the land. In our same Bibles, we find the book of Nahum. The Book of Nahum was written many years after the book of Jonah. And this time, Nineveh does receive God’s judgment for their evils. Just because one generation turns to the Lord does not mean that it will continue.

#2 **As followers of Christ who are being conformed into His image, we are to be people who love mercy.**

Micah 6:8 teaches us that we are to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

Like Jonah, this is easier said than done. We can all think of some very evil crimes. Dr. Larry Nasser, with all the gymnasts he abused, the crimes committee by the Nazis or other evil leaders and governments.

It is easy for us to become consumed by hate towards those evil-doers. While we should hate what they have done, we are to earnestly pray that they come to Christ.

We must desire mercy for the wicked.

Paul writes in Romans chapter 12 **“Do not become overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

#3 --- The key is being filled with the love of our Triune God.

Jesus’ love enabled Him to pray for those that were crucifying him. Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

The more that we are filled with this amazing love of God, the more we can be people who love mercy.

So please, ask the Lord to fill us with more and more of his love, His agape love. This has been a daily prayer for me.

In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul’s prayer was that the Christians would grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

So a life of love, of blessing, of dedication to the Lord --- this is what we are all called to. As Jonah was vessel of God’s truth to the people of Nineveh, our same God was doing perhaps an even more profound thing in shaping Jonah to be a man of mercy and love, even for his enemies.

Let’s pray…