

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 12

Jonah 4.7-8 Jonah's anger and displeasure (4.1, 4) turns to "exceeding" gladness (v.6) as God *appoints* a plant to shade Jonah.

Besides being shaded from the desert heat, some scholars suggest that perhaps Jonah's gladness was from his hope that Yahweh would still destroy Nineveh.

"...delight has been fueled by the miraculous provision of a plant. Now he can sit in the cool of the shade and watch as Nineveh is destroyed. He knows that the vine is a divine gift, and it is possible that he sees it as the Lord's reconsideration of his decision to forgive Nineveh in the light of Jonah's personal protest. Jonah dares to believe that the Lord has come round to his way of thinking after all. If so, he takes it that the kind provision of a shade from the burning heat must be God's way of apologizing to him. This is vindication of the highest order....he sits down for a front-row viewing of the coming spectacle."¹

However, God is not done with Nineveh or Jonah! Again...God "appoints" a worm that ate the plant.

God also "appoints" a hot, east wind that destroyed his shelter. What was God doing?

Jonah likely felt that God was finally answering his prayer in 4.3...That he will die.

Very similar to being in the belly of the great fish, Jonah has again "hit bottom."

What began as a question from God concerning the appropriateness of his anger...Jonah is being shown what is *truly* in his heart.

Jonah 4.9-11 God's question is a repeat of the one in v 4...Except for mention of the plant. God's "object lesson" was coming to its end! How could Jonah care more for a plant than for people?

God is revealing to Jonah His divine character and Jonah's lack of understanding of God's character. Jonah is more concerned for his *physical comfort*...then the *spiritual* and *eternal well-being* of an entire city!

"God's mercy toward Nineveh had made him angry, and then he was angered by God's withdrawing mercy from him. God attempted to deal with Jonah's inconsistency by asking him, "Do you have a right?" The question is identical to the one God asked in v. 4. Stuart is right in saying that this question is central to the whole book. "What right do we have to demand that God should favor us and not others? By reducing the question to the particular issue of the gourd, God focused it in a way that would cause Jonah to condemn himself by his own words. Jonah did just that."²

Again, Jonah's understanding of God is growing (a theme we have seen throughout Jonah). Jonah did not create the plant that gave him shade...Nor could he control the east wind!

God is the creator of all...plants and people! God is free to love and redeem whom He chooses.

Jonah wanted things his way...even if it was not part of God's plan or if it conflicted with God's mercy!

¹ P. Mackrell. *Opening up Jonah* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007).

² B.K. Smith and F.S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

The deep truth about God's immense love for Nineveh (all people), as well as for Jonah (Yahweh's chosen people), is being revealed once again through the vivid experience of the withered plant.

The Hebrew word in *vs. 9-10* for "pity" is... רַחֵם (*hās*)... "To be (show) concerned" ... The word implies an emotional connection to something or someone.

What Jonah is coming to understand is that he had become indifferent to the fate of God's creation beyond the borders of Israel.

God's questions in *vs. 10-11* summarize the very intention of the book of Jonah.

Jonah's extreme anger was the result of an inconsequential event, the death of a plant for which he could take no credit and which had only temporary value.

The primary lesson is of God's grace and mercy. Jonah's did not deserve the provision of the plant's shade and neither did the Ninevites deserve God's provision of grace and deliverance.

"This message is driven home by the Lord as he describes Nineveh as having "more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well"... The description, literally, "not able to distinguish between the left and the right," may refer to one or more characteristics...Possibly the best understanding of this text is to recognize that the Lord was referring to an entire city of morally and ethically naive, though not morally innocent, individuals...The Lord ended the statement with the phrase 'and many cattle as well.' Here he attempted to impart to Jonah that even cattle are superior to plants or vines. His mercy is great for all his creation."³

This is the key lesson of the book of Jonah...God's love and pity for lost souls.

Jonah felt sorry for himself, and even felt sorry for the plant that sheltered him and then died, but he had no heartfelt love or pity for the multitudes in the city of Nineveh.

The challenge and question from the book of Jonah...Are we like Jonah?...Do we love or hate our enemies?⁴...

...Accepting grace and mercy for ourselves but justice and rejection for others?

God's people are called to an alternative ethic...

Matthew 5.44...God demonstrated this for Jonah and for Nineveh...

...Jesus demonstrates this for us... *Luke 19.41-44*.

Going Forward: "The book ends with a clear contrast between the ways of God and the ways of Jonah...The story is deliberately left open-ended for those who study its message to complete in their own lives. Ellul is right in saying, "The book of Jonah has no conclusion, and the final question of the book has no answer, except from the one who realizes the fullness of the mercy of God."⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.