

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
THE FINAL QUESTION

Friday, July 17

Reading: Jonah 4:9-11

Jonah 4:11 *And 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?"*

We now come to the point of the whole book. God's final question shows us just how selfish and prejudiced Jonah really was! Jonah was angry that a plant had died and deprived him of comfort. While at the same time, Jonah did not care that an entire city of people could be destroyed. In fact, he prayed for them to be destroyed!

Jonah was showing how immature and childish he had become. The prophet had done nothing to make the plant grow. And yet he was upset and wished to die now that it was destroyed. In contrast, God had made the people of Nineveh and He had deep concern for them, even if Jonah didn't!

The "hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left" has been taken in two ways. First, the statement could be taken as relating to the number of children in the city – those too young to know their right hand from their left. If this is the case, then the population of Nineveh could be over 600,000 people. Second, it could suggest that the people of Nineveh were spiritually confused. They could not tell the difference between their idols on one hand and the God who created them on their other hand. Either way, it shows God was concerned and loved these people who needed to know Him.

The final words drive home the absurdity of Jonah's attitude: "and also many animals" (literally cattle). It is as if God is saying, "Jonah, if you don't care about the people, could you at least care about the cows!"

The book of Jonah ends with this question from the Lord. We are never told Jonah's answer. We do not know if he repented or not! This open-ended conclusion forces us to ask ourselves God's question: Do we really care about other people like God does?

Leslie Allen, former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, wrote, "A Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whispering his insidious message of smug prejudice, empty traditionalism, and exclusive solidarity. He that has ears to hear, let him hear and allow the saving love of God which has been outpoured in his own heart to remold his thinking and social orientation."¹ Ask yourself the following questions and allow God to search your heart to discover the answers.

- Are you willing to let go of your wants and desires and adopt God's will for your life?
- Are you willing to see people the way God sees them and "vomit out" your selfish, hateful, and prejudiced opinions, just as the fish vomited out Jonah?
- Do you have a love for the people of the world (friend or foe) that drives you to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

¹ Leslie Allen. The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament series), p. 234