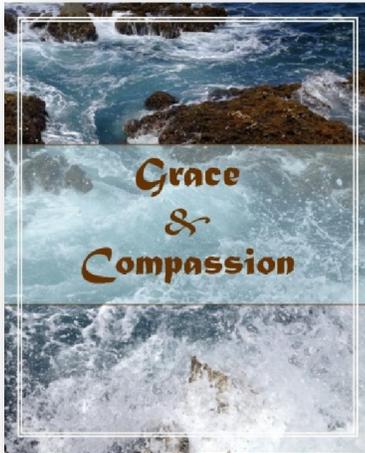


## Grace and Compassion (The Book of Jonah)



I've always thought of the story of Jonah to be about a disobedient man and a big fish, but reading through God's word always seems to bring new insight, and today it brought great hope!

You can find the story for yourself toward the end of the Old Testament in the book entitled, "Jonah". It's the story of a prophet whom God sent to preach repentance to a rebellious and wicked place called Ninevah. It was a large city, so large it would take about three days of walking to reach from one end to the other. And although the Lord tells him to go, Jonah really does not want to go to Ninevah (we could stop a while right here and ask, "what's your Ninevah?" but we'll tackle that one another day. Today I think we need to focus on the hope found within the pages.)

We've heard the story of Jonah trying to run from God (uh, that never works, in case you're wondering) and he ends up getting thrown overboard by his shipmates when they find out that he is the reason the seas are so stormy. Jonah ends up in the belly of a great fish, until he finally repents and tells the Lord he will obey Him and go to Ninevah. (Lesson #1 - don't try to run from an omnipresent God. Lesson #2 - when He tells you to do something, do it right away. Lesson #3 - if you don't obey right away and find yourself being divinely disciplined, REPENT QUICKER! Don't wait three days! Three days in the belly of a fish, ewww... I'm pretty sure that the smells and the discomfort would have brought me to my knees a whole lot sooner than three days! But then again, I can be as stubborn as the next one.) So, that's the story and the lessons we grew up with. A story of repentance. A story of obedience. A story of learning to follow God's leading, and finding Him to be a God of second chances. (Oh how I love that!)

The story tells us much more though, and in fact, tells us exactly why Jonah didn't want to go to Ninevah in the first place - Chapter 1:2, God says to this prophet, Ninevah's **"wickedness has come up before Me."** The wickedness in the city had come to a point that God could not overlook it (ever notice that God seems to overlook a lot of sin? Sometimes it frustrates us to no end that He doesn't pass judgment on others more quickly, doesn't it?). But Jonah's reason for not going isn't because the people are so wicked, but rather, it's because of *what he knows about the Lord*.

We see in Chapter 4:2 these words regarding Jonah, **"He prayed to the Lord and said, '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 You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'"** Jonah knows God well enough to know that He is full of grace and compassion. What had he said, and what was he trying to forestall? That answer was in Chapter 3:10, **"When God saw their deeds [the people of Ninevah], that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."** Jonah knew that if there was any sign of repentance among this wicked people that God's grace and compassion would relent from destroying them. He also knew He could not thwart God's overall plan, but he hoped to at least *"forestall"* it.

The Lord goes on to reply to Jonah, **"Should I not have compassion on Ninevah, 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?"** 120,000 people who don't know the difference between their right

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and left hand. God was not going to hold them accountable for what they did not know. Nothing can thwart God's overall plan, and therein lies the hope!

Whether we are looking at the political arena, the current state of the United States of America, or looking closer to home at situations in our own lives, we can know that the Lord is a God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and thankfully, one who relents concerning calamity. With a God like that, there is always hope!

There are so many who do not know the Lord God. If you've watched any interviews lately, or watched the news, you know that there are so many that do not know their right from their left hand. So many misguided. So many lost. So many who do not know God, nor His word. Sadly, even among believers we are often quite biblically illiterate and have settled for having the golden ring to get into heaven, grabbing on to our "fire insurance", but content to live in spiritual immaturity; we have become a lazy people, thinking His word too hard to understand so why bother trying? The result is that we, too, might as well be sitting in the belly of a stinky old fish, for we surely are not living out God's plan for our lives.

But there is hope, because our God is one full of grace and compassion. He is one who relents from calamity. He is indeed a God of second chances.

Like Jonah, we, too, have been appointed to share the gospel, the good news that there is a Savior, and ladies, that Savior is never found on a voting ballot. With it being an election year, especially, we hear so much. And in truth, we would not be nearly as patient as the Lord is, and certainly not as slow to anger, would we? We would have destroyed those who oppose Him and His principles, long before now, at least that is how it sounds to me when we talk politics. Perhaps we are a bit like Jonah, and would rather them suffer than to know the saving grace of our Father. Sometimes I find us more concerned with the state of the Union than we are with the state of another's heart, having concluded that they are beyond hope. But, ladies, no one is ever beyond hope! For our Lord God sees a much bigger plan. He knows every need, and is good to provide. He has given us instruction to share the gospel, to speak the truth in love. And He offers second chances, even third and fourth and fifth...

He is a God that is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and His lovingkindness is ABUNDANT, greater than we can ever imagine. So when we fear this is the end, when we see the wickedness among us, know this... We serve a God of second chances, a God of great grace and compassion. We can trust Him to do what it takes to make things right.

Let's do our part and walk in obedience to what He calls us to do. To speak when we should speak. To go where He would have us to go. May our answer to His leading always be "Yes, Lord, send me."

*Father, thank You for the hope we have in who You are. You don't offer a smidgen of grace, or a pinch of compassion, but it is fully all we need that You bless us with minute by minute. Your lovingkindness is what has brought us into a relationship with You and we are blessed! May we never try to thwart Your plans, nor Your forgiveness to others. By Your Spirit, may we be quick to respond when You ask us to speak or act. Bring healing to this land and to our hearts, for Your glory. In Christ I pray, Amen.*

More Reading:

Jonah 1-4

Psalm 27:13

Psalm 73