

Session 4: Compassion

Scripture questions:

Jonah 1:1-3

What does God tell Jonah to do?

What is God's message for Ninevah?

How does Jonah respond? Why do you think he responded in that way?

How does the message that God gave Jonah to preach in chapter 1:1-2 differ from what God actually did? How do you explain this difference?

Jonah 1:4-17

How do the sailors respond to the situation?

How are the sailors more righteous than Jonah, the prophet of God?

Jonah 3:1-10

How do the people of Ninevah respond to Jonah's message?

How does the message that God gave Jonah to preach differ from what God actually did?

Jonah 4:1-11

Why is Jonah angry?

What is God trying to teach Jonah with the plant and the worm?

How does verse 11 show us the extent of God's compassion?

The story of Jonah is **not just a story about a big fish**, but about the limits of our compassion and how we relate to those we despise. Notice how the writer of this book uses contrast and irony when telling the story. The sailors who are not followers of God seek to do the right thing while God's prophet, Jonah, seeks to avoid God's will by running away.

Message of Judgement

- God calls Jonah to deliver a message of destruction to Ninevah, the home of the Assyrians

who conquered Israel. The problem comes when Jonah, the prophet of God, does not want to deliver this message of judgement. Jonah is afraid that God might have compassion on the people, and he wants no compassion for his enemies.

- Jonah flees from God by heading to Tarshish on a boat. Because of Jonah's decision, God sends a storm, and Jonah knows that the only way the storm will stop is if he is thrown overboard. The sailors remorsefully throw Jonah over the side of the boat and he is swallowed by a great fish.
- The fish spits Jonah onto dry land, and Jonah delivers God's message to the people of Ninevah.

God's Compassion

- When the people of Ninevah hear Jonah's message, they repent of their sins.
- God has compassion on the people and does not destroy them.

Jonah's Anger

- All along, Jonah knows that God is compassionate, but Jonah still grows very angry at God for not destroying Ninevah.
- God grows a plant to teach Jonah about compassion, and shows Jonah that he cares more for the plant that gave him shade than the many thousands of people in Ninevah.

In this book, we see that God has compassion on people that need it, not just those who deserve it.

Application Questions:

In the book of Jonah, the roles are reversed. The Godliest people are the sailors and the Ninevites, and not the prophets of God. How do you identify who the people of God are in your life?

Jonah did not want God to help his enemies. In your life, how do you respond when God helps your enemies, or those you disapprove of?

What do you think discourages you from expressing compassion and forgiveness toward other people?

What specific act can you take to express God's love and compassion toward someone you do not like?

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