

## **Text— Jonah 3:10 to 4:11**

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

We learn from 2 Kings 14:25 that the LORD God of Israel had a servant, a prophet, named Jonah, the son of Amittai, which was of Gath-hepher. Hence, Jonah was from a town located about 5 miles from Nazareth in lower Galilee, northern Israel.

Our Old Testament Scripture selection follows upon the historical account of the prophet Jonah attempting to evade a command which the Lord had given him, for Jonah 1:1-4 reports, “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.”

You probably recall what happened next to Jonah, for he knew he was the cause of the raging tempest. Consequently, Jonah told the other folks onboard the ship to throw him overboard; and so, Jonah 1:15-17 relates, “they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

Jonah got the Lord’s message, for Jonah 2:1-10 informs us, “Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods

compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” Thus, the Lord graciously spared Jonah’s life when the man turned to Him in faith and prayer.

Subsequently, Jonah was again called upon by the Lord God to go forth as His prophet, for we read in Jonah 3:1-4, “And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Hence, Jonah preached as the Lord had instructed him, threatening destruction to the wicked people of Nineveh. Nevertheless, our sermon text for today reveals a major turn in events as it emphasizes:

“GOD’S GREAT MERCY”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) How and why God showed great mercy to the people of Nineveh
- 2) How and why God showed great mercy to the prophet Jonah
- 3) Why we all need God’s great mercy

Verse 10 of Jonah chapter 3, ----- (Jonah 3:10)

It will be helpful to consider the context in which the events reported in the opening verse of our sermon text took place, for Jonah 3:5-9 reports, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Then, the opening verse of our sermon text adds: *And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

Thus, the people, from the king of the city on down the line, sincerely repented of their sins and turned to the Lord God in faith and prayer, pleading for His mercy and forgiveness, and in effect saying: Thy will be done, O Lord.

Interestingly, Nineveh was located along the Tigris River in Assyria, and lay about 280 miles north of Babylon. So, it was quite a journey for the Israelite prophet Jonah to go to those Assyrian people and preach to them. Nevertheless, Jonah did preach to the people as the Lord had commanded him, for the Lord cared about those non-Jewish folks as He cares about ALL people, regardless of race. Yes, it is as Romans 2:11 declares, "there is no respect of persons with God."

My friends, the important facts about all people are those of which we read in Psalm 14:2-3, "The

LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Yes, ALL naturally conceived human beings are sinners who need the forgiveness of sins and salvation which God Himself provides.

The people of Nineveh responded to Jonah's heavy Law preaching in which he told them God would destroy their city in 40 days. The people rightly came to believe that God could be merciful toward them if He so chose— which reflects the fact that they also had heard the Gospel at some point. Accordingly, the first verse of our sermon text reports that *God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

The penitent people of Nineveh showed by their works they were truly sorry for their sins as they ceased from their wickedness and believed on the Lord. Hence, God did not destroy them, but rather showed great mercy to the people of Nineveh.

Therefore, let us take comfort from what we've seen in God's dealing with the people of Nineveh. Let us also take comfort from the following words of Psalm 103:8-14, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." Accordingly, let us be thankful for God's great mercy.

As we continue to ponder our text, let us see how

and why God showed great mercy to the prophet Jonah.

Verse 1 of Jonah chapter 4, -----. (Jonah 4:1)

What a sinful reaction from the Lord's prophet named Jonah, for upon the people of Nineveh repenting and God canceling His plan to destroy the city, *it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry*. Yeah, Jonah was quite ticked-off because God did not immediately waste the city of Nineveh and its inhabitants. It seems Jonah had more than just a little bit of Jewish national pride, for he truly desired to see those Assyrians destroyed by the Lord.

Verses 2 & 3, -----. (Jonah 4:2-3)

Jonah believed in the one true God who is plural in Persons, the LORD God, Jehovah Eloheem in the Hebrew, for Jonah *prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.*

It's as if Jonah was saying: yeah, I knew it Lord; I knew you would cave-in and forgive those Gentiles after I traveled all that distance to tell them they would be dead-meat in 40 days— that's why I didn't want to go there and I fled by ship to Tarshish, because Thou art always ready to show mercy. So, I've had it; O Lord, take my life from me as I no longer wish to dwell in this world. Thus, Jonah indeed acted sinfully. We would think Jonah would have been happy to see his preaching move people so that they took God's Word to heart and repented of their sins, turning to the Lord. However, Jonah was not happy; Jonah wanted to see that city and its people wasted.

However, are we not at least similar to Jonah in our thinking at times? Oh, it's true that we have not seen widespread repentance among people in

our nation, despite the preaching of God's Word going forth in our little churches and broadcast over the internet and undoubtedly proclaimed in other small churches of which we are not aware.

Nevertheless, we indeed know that God promises in Isaiah 55:10-11, "as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Therefore, some folks must still be responding to God's Word in repentance even though we are not personally aware of them. And yet, we frequently ask: Lord, why hast Thou not yet visibly returned to earth to burn it in fervent heat? After all, Thou hast promised to do so. Yes, my friends, we are impatient at times as we forget that 2 Peter 3:9 states, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." So, let's be careful not to look upon Jonah as if our thinking is so much superior to his, for we are all sinners.

Verse 4, -----. (Jonah 4:4)

God had every right to be highly displeased with Jonah's sinful behavior and to punish him. Nevertheless, behold God's marvelous mercy and patience with His servant Jonah, for our text reports that after Jonah's whining and complaining, *Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?* Thus, a question we all should think about is this: is it right for any of us to be angry when the Lord shows mercy?

Fellow Christians, we are all happy when we are the objects of God's great mercy; and yet, we sinners are sometimes bummed-out when we see God being greatly merciful to others. Let us repent of our sinfulness.

Verse 5, ----- (Jonah 4:5)

Interestingly, Jonah did not verbally respond to the Lord's question as to whether he was doing well to be angry; instead, *Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.* It seems likely that Jonah hoped that his temper-tantrum would move the Lord to go ahead and destroy Nineveh; so, Jonah wanted to witness the event from outside the city.

Verses 6-8, ----- (Jonah 4:6-8)

God did some preparing of things in order to teach His servant Jonah a much needed lesson in mercy.

Jonah had made a booth to sit in and shield him from the desert sun and heat. The Lord God supplied further comfort and relief to Jonah in that God prepared a plant which grew up rather quickly with large leaves to provide shade and comfort to Jonah. Jonah was quite pleased with the plant. But God prepared a worm the next morning, and that worm attacked the plant and killed it off so that its big shady leaves quickly withered away, thereby removing the comforting shade from Jonah. Then, God did some more preparing in that He caused a violent east wind to blow, bringing in heat which added to the high warmth the sun was already supplying to Jonah's head. Consequently, Jonah became faint and wished to die, *and said, It is better for me to die than to live.* Oh, Jonah was very uncomfortable and quite ticked-off over the entire situation.

Verses 9-11, ----- (Jonah 4:9-11)

Now came the Lord's lesson to Jonah concerning mercy, for *God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.* Oh, Jonah was so distressed over the loss of a shade-plant. *Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a*

*night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*

Think about the Lord's comments to Jonah. Jonah had more compassion over a plant perishing than over an entire city of 120,000 souls who were little ones in knowledge – those unable to *discern between their right hand and their left hand* – plus the cattle. Thus, the Lord especially emphasized the fact that human souls are much more worth His sparing than is a plant.

The people of Nineveh had repented of their sins and turned to the Lord God in faith; therefore, it was a commendable act of God's great mercy that He spared those people; and so, Jonah should have been joyful over God's great mercy shown to those folks instead of being angry about it. Furthermore, Jonah himself was shown God's great mercy when the Lord God patiently taught him a lesson in valuing human life rather than simply striking him down for his stubbornness and baseless anger.

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As we continue to ponder our sermon text, let us see why we all need God's great mercy.

We've seen from our Scripture selection God's great mercy shown to the people of ancient Nineveh and God's great mercy shown to His prophet named Jonah.

My friends, we ALL need God's great mercy because we are ALL sinners, just as those people of old, for in honesty we must all confess as did David the psalmist, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5) And, Ecclesiastes 7:20 declares in no uncertain terms, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Hence, we ALL certainly need God's mercy since Romans 6:23 clearly states, "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." And, 1 John 1:8-9 tells us, "If we say that we

have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So, it is certain that we ALL need God's great mercy.

Thankfully, God the Father in great mercy sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem us, for John 3:16-18 informs us, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Hence, looking at Jesus with the eyes of faith and clinging to Him as our personal Savior and Lord, we truly have God's great mercy since Ephesians 2:8-10 informs us, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Therefore, let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord. And, let us go forward being ever thankful for God's great mercy, for Lamentations 3:22 states, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." So, I repeat, let us go forward being ever thankful for God's great mercy. Amen.

m.e.l.