

The Grace Groove

And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:2)

Big Idea:

Over the course of time, if you are open to the Spirit’s work the regular patterns of worship will cut a deep groove in you that convinces you that if God’s grace is great enough to save you—the chief of sinners—then it is great enough to save anyone. This is the place to which Jonah tells us God had to bring him. He had to be broken to the point of realizing God’s grace is as great as God is, so that he would actually desire it for a city not only great because of its size but because of its wickedness.

I. Atones for Self-Righteous Anger (vv. 1-4, 9)

We are immediately struck by God’s magnanimous grace when he absorbs Jonah’s anger. Who should expect to live after expressing anger toward God! What sovereign allows one of his servants to rant and rave against him? Especially if the servant is complaining that the sovereign is too gracious! But God allows Jonah his catharsis. And in fact he extends it by asking the prophet to explain why he is so upset. Even more amazing is God’s grace to Jonah when the prophet refuses to answer (4, 5) and with passive aggression goes east of the city to pout. There is yet another angry outburst when God removes the shade from Jonah. Three times Jonah’s exclaims that he is so angry, he would rather die than live with his physical and emotional disappointment with God’s grace shown to others (3, 8, 9). Jonah learned to express his anger and frustration to God from God’s Word, particularly from the Psalms. God’s grace is demonstrated here in the fact that not only does God not dismiss our anger, he gives us the words to express it.

II. Disciplines Destructive Emotions (vv. 5-9)

Jonah’s unbelieving emotions were ultimately destructive. If God had left these emotions undisciplined, not only would the Ninevites and the sailors have gone to hell, Jonah himself would’ve been consumed with his self-pity and bitterness. God loves his prophet as well as these Gentiles too much to allow that to happen. These were human beings he had personally crafted in his image who were living in violent, diluted, and self-destructive ways that were transgressing the beauty of God’s reflection in themselves and others. So it is out of mercy that God cast the storm on the Sea, sent the fish, the plant, the worm, and the east wind. He was pursuing Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites with severe mercy.

III. Reasons with Unreasonable Sinners (vv. 10-11)

Jonah may have been more thoroughly convinced of God’s grace than most everyone else in the Bible. The groove of God’s gracious character was cut so deeply in his consciousness by regular worship that he preferred death to seeing the Ninevites benefit from it. Put another way, Jonah preferred that the Ninevites go to hell than for God to be himself with them. Such hatred also distinguishes Jonah. There are few believers in the Bible who openly acknowledged such vindictiveness. So Jonah writes this fourth chapter of his story to show us that God’s grace is even greater than we can imagine. The greatest

demonstration of grace that we might be able to conjure up is that 600,000 cruel warriors all repent upon the first day of an evangelistic crusade as soon as they hear that God threatens their destruction. But in the fourth chapter, God reveals that his grace is even greater than that. It is so abundant that it can even save a prophet who knows that God's essence is mercy, has experienced his lovingkindness, and yet wishes others to go to hell rather than benefit from the same.

Discussion Questions:

1. What struck you most about God's patient listening to Jonah's anger? How was God's grace most evident to you?
2. How can you better utilize the Psalms as a guide to pray when you are angry, frustrated, confused, depressed, etc.?
3. Can you think of a time God or someone pursued you with severe mercy? Can you think of a time you had to do this for someone else? What was your initial reaction? How did you feel about it in retrospect? What does this teach you about the character of God?
4. What were your initial thoughts/feeling upon reading the way Jonah responded to God's grace to the Ninevites?
5. The way we answer question 4 reveals whether we are more like Jonah or God. If our initial response is to become angry and judgmental toward Jonah, it shows we are more like him than we would probably like to admit. But if we are moved to put and compassion toward Jonah because of his hard-heartedness, it shows God has begun to form our hearts into the image of Christ. Whatever our response, God's grace is just as good news for us as it was for Jonah.
6. Spend some time reflecting on what God has taught you from this passage about himself, yourself, and grace. Talk through those thoughts in prayer with God.