

Title: God is Gracious (Filters in Jonah week 5)

Verses: Jonah 3:1-5, 10, 4:5-11, 1 Peter 2:9

Main Point: God's graciousness extends to all people

Intro: [Author note: This was my favorite lesson of the whole series to teach on. There is so much beauty in seeing the graciousness of God played out in this time.] Tonight is the final night in our "Filters in Jonah" series. If you will recall or you missed last week, we talked about how Jonah gets into Nineveh and preaches a very simple message. "Nineveh will be destroyed in 40 days." Quite literally the bare minimum that he could have done. We saw that when Nineveh repented, Jonah was angry with God. He went and waited to see the Ninevites repent from their repentance, that is to go back to their evil ways and be destroyed. When that didn't happen Jonah begs for God to end his life. His reasoning? "for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster." How truly amazing is it that this prophet for the Lord takes His mercy, grace and love as a reason to be angry at Him.

The truth is that this is the true unfiltered picture of God. He is a great God, abounding in steadfast love, unrelenting from disaster, full of mercy and grace! It took Jonah long enough to see this and yet even when he did see it he didn't truly see it. See not once in his message to Nineveh did Jonah tell them how to avoid the destruction (maybe he did this intentionally) yet they still repented. Let's read from Jonah Chapter 3:

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time saying 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days'

journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. (Jonah 3:1-5
ESV)

It's amazing to see this turn around from the Ninevites. Jonah's book tells us that they turned to God yet Jonah said absolutely nothing about repenting, (unlike in VeggieTales) he didn't tell them to stop doing all the evil they had done, nothing like that. Jonah waltzes into town and simply says in 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed. This had to be a working of the Holy Spirit to lead the Ninevites to the heart of God! They didn't know God before, they didn't hear about God during but they turned to God after the message had been preached. Do you guys remember how bad Nineveh was in the ancient world? We talked about it on week 1 so it's okay if you forgot, but this was a bad place.

First off, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians were well known for being ruthless towards their enemies. It was not a warm welcome if you were not an ally. The Assyrians grew a reputation of being masters of war and torture. They were really bad dudes.

Second, Nineveh was situated in the middle of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This made the city very rich as most trade from the east and west would have to pass through Nineveh. Being as rich as they were would explain why it was a three day journey to go from one end of town to the other.

When we look at these factors we could see why Nineveh would have no desire to turn to God. In the world's eyes they were a power to be feared and had riches that were greatly desired. We see it now where humans will

reject God to obtain things of this world that are highly desired by others. Yet this great city, and powerful capital, still repented and turned to God. God being God knew all the evil they had done, he knew all the evil they were going to do. So what do we see in verse 10?

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:10 ESV)

This is the true picture of God. The world tries to tell us so many things about God and the fact of the matter is that these are just seeing God through different filters that distort the true image and nature of God. People in our schools or at our jobs will tell us things like, *God is just a bully that is just waiting for us to mess up so he can punish us, God is so unfair I mean why punish somebody to eternal torment just for not believing in Him, Those people deserved what happened to them because of the life that they lived* [Author note: growing up the last thought was one I heard a lot especially when hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, you may not want to use all of these examples I just put ones in that I could think of off the top of my head]. If we're honest there have probably also been times when we have all thought one or all of these thoughts. We have allowed filters from the world, or from Satan to distort our view of God and it's time that we clear them all away and see the picture of God that is true. Jonah sums it up great for us by saying "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." This is the picture that God wants for you to see of Him tonight. The Ninevites were enemies of God's chosen people, the Israelites, and yet He showed them compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness.

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