

Hey, Jo, Where You Goin with that Gospel of Mine?

“I See a Bad Worm Rising”

Jonah 4:1-11

We sometimes will use a common word in ways that convey a completely different meaning than its definition.

- We say something is “sick” when we mean it is exceptionally cool.
- We use the word “bad” to describe something we really think is very good.

Words we encounter in the Bible can mean something different than we assume. “Pity” is a word we sometimes use differently than the Bible:

1. We say something is a “pity” and mean that it is to be regretted.
2. The Bible uses the word of things and people that are to be regarded with mercy.

God said to Jonah, “Should I not pity Nineveh...” God had no regrets. He had regarded them with mercy and spared them from destruction.

While God was full of pity, *Jonah was pitiful!* He had just preached the greatest revival recorded in human history. But he regretted that the people of Nineveh had been regarded with mercy and spared from destruction.

Jonah was not completely without pity. In verse ten God pointed out to him that he had pity on his plant.

He was not without pity, but his pity was misdirected. Instead of being directed at the persons in Nineveh who would perish for eternity, his pity was personal. His own personal life was his top priority.

God designed a life-lesson to try to get Jonah from pitiful to pitying.

Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

Prior to Jonah's ministry, God had spoken through Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah saying He would use the Assyrian Empire to discipline His people Israel for their sins. Jonah was aware of these prophecies. Jonah also read the morning newspapers. Assyria was in a state of decline and had suffered military defeats. If Assyria continued to decline, perhaps Israel would be spared.

Not gonna happen! **The Assyrians would be spared to discipline Israel.** Jonah ministered between 793 and 753BC. The Northern Kingdom of Israel began to fall to the Assyrians in 745BC and was finally destroyed by them in 722BC.

It was through Jonah's ministry that Nineveh was spared. Jonah was instrumental in preserving Israel's enemies.

Think in terms of today's climate of the war on terrorism. I don't want to suggest an illustration... But you get the idea.

We would not be too excited about someone who was instrumental in preserving our enemies. In fact, we would think them a traitor.

Jonah 4:2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, “Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

Jonah had warned of judgment after forty days. *The judgment never came!* His reputation as a prophet was shot.

It’s alright to be concerned about your reputation – but not at the expense of caring for others. Look at Jesus Christ:

- Jesus “made Himself of no reputation” in becoming a man.
- Then, as a man, He hung around with the wrong kind of people – people like you and me.

Jonah put a priority on his perceived personal rights. He exercises his perceived “right” to *complain* in verses three and four; then he exercises his perceived “right” to *quit* in verse five.

Jonah 4:3 “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!”

Was Jonah suicidal? Not really. In a moment you will see that he builds himself a shelter for protection. If he really wanted to die, he could have walked out into the desert and died.

You'd think that, after the episode with the great fish, Jonah would understand that he did not have the right to his own life. His life belonged to his God. That being the case, he had no "right" to complain about God's overall plan for his life.

Too much time is spent complaining. We complain at work... In school... In the Church... At home. It's ugly.

Jonah 4:4 Then the LORD said, "*Is it* right for you to be angry?"

Questions can be better than counsel. Ask biblical questions to help folks see what they are actually saying and doing. "Is it right for you to be _____," then fill-in the blank.

Next we see Jonah quitting:

Jonah 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

Jonah entered from the west, then went out on the east three days later. He spent as little time in Nineveh as was absolutely necessary. He did the minimum in his job description as a prophet.

Population estimates for Nineveh come in at anywhere from 120,000 to 600,000. Literally tens or hundreds of thousands were getting saved. Think of it: There was no instruction, no organization, no follow-up, no counseling. There was no one to establish a home Bible study or a church.

Jonah ought to have moved from prophet and preacher to pastor. Instead, he went camping.

Jonah felt he had the freedom to quit. He exercised what he believed was his right to quit serving God.

When it comes to serving your Lord, you can quit anytime and go camping like Jonah did... But you have no right to do so.

Jesus said He was directed by the will of His Father in Heaven. He never quit, never thought He had the right to quit. In fact, Jesus gave up His rights for your wrongs. He went to the cross at Calvary though He was without sin.

Jonah was a hard case. The fish had gotten him back on track, but his heart was still hard. He needed a life-lesson.

Jonah 4:6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

God went camping with Jonah. His contribution was a gourd to give Jonah comfort in the shade. Its growth was obviously supernatural.

Jonah 4:7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

Jonah 4:8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is better for me to die than to live.*"

The gourd, the worm, and the wind were a life-lesson to show Jonah that his pity was misdirected. Jonah had pity for his *plant* when he should have had it for *persons*.

Jonah 4:8 ... Then he wished death for himself, and said, “*It is better for me to die than to live.*”

Once Jonah was ‘out of his gourd,’ he wished for death.

I want to say this carefully. You can wish for death without being suicidal, and without having plans to act upon it. Life can hit you so hard that you wish you were dead. I’m not defending it; only acknowledging it.

The apostle Paul once said that he was “burdened beyond measure” and “despaired even of life” (Second Corinthians 1:8). Commentators spend all their time arguing he didn’t really mean it. I think he did.

We’re not shy about telling you that bad things happen to good people, and to God’s people. Some are lengthy - they are losses lasting the rest of your life. Others can be terminal.

All I can do is point you to the spiritual perspectives of Job and Habakkuk:

- Job put this into perspective for us when he declared, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21).
- Habakkuk put this into perspective for us when, after he detailed all his coming loss, said, “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation” (1:18).

With the Lord's help, we are enabled to go from being a Jonah to being a Job or a Habakkuk.

You may have seen an article circulating on Facebook that puts things into heavenly perspective. In part, it reads,

I asked God to grant me patience. God said "No," patience is a byproduct of tribulation. It isn't granted, it's learned. I asked God to give me happiness. God said, "No." I give you blessings; happiness is up to you. I asked God to spare me pain. God said, "No." Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to Me.

There was more; you get the idea. We need to look at things on earth from the perspective of being seated in the heavenlies in Christ.

Jonah 4:9 Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!"

In the Hebrew construction of the words, the sentence literally reads, "Is doing good displeasing to you?"

God was "doing good" to Nineveh. It **was** "displeasing" to Jonah. He ought to have been humbled.

But Jonah dug-in and justified his feelings. Jonah's answer, however, sets him up for the lesson:

Jonah 4:10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

Jonah 4:11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left - and much livestock?”

Jonah *did* have pity. It's just that Jonah's pity was selfish. It was other persons that he should pity – persons in Nineveh who were perishing.

Even if Jonah thought that the Assyrians deserved to die, what about the children? What about the animals? He had no pity for any of them.

Look at it this way: Both Jonah and God were camping out in the foothills overlooking Nineveh. They both saw the same people. God had pity on them; Jonah did not.

The book ends abruptly. What became of Jonah? Well, *he wrote this book*. And because he did, most Bible commentators conclude that Jonah learned his lesson and went from being *pitiful* to being *full of pity*.