

The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.

Lamentations 3:22

Store In My Heart

Genesis 18:19

For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.

Note three things God says about Abraham in this verse.

Choosing Abraham was not random, but God selected him for His purpose.

God's intent was for him to raise a family that would keep the Way. God expected Abraham give the teaching he received from God to those who would follow. There was purpose in God's choice.

God's plan depended on this legacy. A people devoted to keeping the way of the Lord was needed for God to fulfill His promise. Abraham was expected to carry out his part.

God has similar expectations for us today.

Jonah & Compassion

Matthew Bassford

A few weeks ago, after I finished going through Jonah in my daily Bible reading, I posted on Facebook, "I love the book of Jonah! It is both warm and subtle." In what is perhaps a sign that I deadpan too much on Facebook, most who responded thought I was joking. Those who took me seriously, seriously disagreed.

Apparently, an explanation is in order!

I think part of the problem is that when most Christians think of Jonah, they think of the eponymic prophet and his encounter with the not-whale. The story is dramatic, but it is admittedly not very cozy. However, the book is not about Jonah's ingestion by a great fish, nor even about his preaching mission to Nineveh. As impressive as those things are, they're not the point. Instead, the theme of the book is God's efforts to teach His wayward prophet compassion.

Think about it. In the opening scene of the book, God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah heads in the opposite direction, presumably because he isn't terribly interested in saving the Ninevites. At this point, God would have been fully justified in turning Jonah into a grease spot. However, he doesn't. Instead, He sends Jonah on his undersea journey to give him time to repent, just as He wants to give Nineveh time to repent.

Jonah does, and once he's back on dry land, he grudgingly goes to Nineveh. Then, he warns the people of God's impending judgment, even though he really wants to see them destroyed. However, the outcome is exactly what God wants to see, and exactly what Jonah doesn't want to see. The city repents en masse, and disaster is averted.

Jonah, however, remains as hard-hearted as ever. He camps out on the hills above the city, hoping that God will change His mind and destroy it (the opposite of Abraham's perspective on Sodom, if you think about it). In one last attempt to correct His wayward prophet,



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For Our Information

Joyce Venable fell last week and injured her arm and tailbone.

Let us continue to encourage one another as we have opportunity.

Take advantage of the many resources that are now available for study and contemplation of God's Word.

Take time to refresh your mind with our Sunday Class lesson. We will get back to it eventually.

Pray for safety, courage & healing.

God raises up a plant to shade him and then kills it. When Jonah gets upset, God points out that if Jonah is right to get emotionally attached to a plant, God is right to feel compassion for a city filled with human beings.

This is a story that gives me a great deal of hope. It clearly reveals the depth of God's compassion, not only for Nineveh, but for one of His own who repeatedly refuses to get it. I'm glad I serve a God like that, not least because of all the times when I have repeatedly refused, and probably still do repeatedly refuse, to get it. I am a daily witness to the greatness of His mercy.

Second, the story of Jonah illustrates God's patience. Despite multiple provocations, God doesn't give up on Jonah. Instead, He continues teaching him, right up to the last sentence of the book. As a disciple of Jesus, I know that I am very much a work in progress, and I am thankful that God will patiently continue His work in me and not give up on me.

Is a book filled with storms and judgments stereotypically warm? Well, no, but every time I read it, I find myself warmed anyway. The conflict in it isn't God's fault, but Jonah's. The compassion, though, all belongs to God.

(This is a wonderful, though maybe not familiar, analysis of God's dealing with Jonah and Nineveh. We often read without giving thought to the whole story. I know that I read Jonah with a new appreciation in my Bible reading last year after reading this article. We need to read with fresh eyes and a desire to see both the small and large pictures that are found in God's message. Maybe this is the benefit in reading from younger Christians for those of us who have been at this for a few decades or more. It is certainly beneficial for us to talk with others about what we read in Scripture. We need help sometimes to see that which is obvious to some but hidden from our own minds. Of course, that leads to a reminder of how Bible classes can help us better understand God's Word and how it applies to our life.

I also thought this message of compassion was timely. Though written last year, this article reminds us of the compassion and patience sorely needed in our society today. God has always been an example for us in this regard. It has never been God's goal to just let man do whatever he desired. God has always provided man a way to come to Him. Even when kingdoms, such as Nineveh, turned from His guidance, God sought their return. Time and time again, He sent men to warn and instruct those who turned away. His compassion and forbearance with Israel is well known. The book of Jonah reminds us that this compassion and patience should be present on the individual level as well. God may have used unconventional means, but He prompted Jonah several times to see His compassion. Jonah, like many of us today, accepted God's compassion for himself, but seemed unwilling to apply it toward others. We need to show God-like compassion. DLH)



We seek only to serve God according to His Will!