

- I. Why did Jonah run from Nineveh?
- a. The reasoning: Nineveh, either as an autonomous city-state within its borders, a major city, or its imperial capital, was representative of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
 - i. The Assyrians were known by their cruelty
 - ii. They were likely in a stagnant/declining period of their empire, but the hallmarks of cruelty became the single defining element of their rule.
 1. Their royal art and inscriptions depicted their cruelty to keep the violence visible to their people and their future enemies.
 2. Their violent acts during conquest would become the stuff of nightmares.
 - a. Mutilation and torture
 - i. Impalement of captives displayed outside of conquered cities
 - ii. Flaying of rebellious rulers or nobles, with the skins draped over city walls as a warning
 - iii. Mutilation of hands, feet, ears, noses, tongues, eyes of captives
 - iv. Beheading
 - v. People often took their own lives rather than being captured
 - b. Mass destruction
 - i. Plundering and razing of cities
 - ii. Destruction of surrounding fields and orchards
 - iii. Designed to starve people out and encourage surrender
 - c. Mass deportation
 - i. Taking entire peoples into a foreign place to disrupt national identity
 - ii. Forced labor and servitude
 3. Assyria was not unique in its cruelty, but it took unique pride in documenting and boasting in such atrocities
 4. We see examples of this cruelty in Scripture, and though they happen later, Jonah would have been aware due to his position and prominence
 - iii. Though they were in decline, Jeroboam II was expanding the kingdom of Israel and thus they would come into conflict (cf. 2 Kings 14:23-29)
 - iv. With all of this in mind, it is perfectly reasonable to see why Jonah would want nothing to do with Nineveh!
 - b. The real issue: Jonah knows who God is and what he would do.
 - i. Jonah goes to Nineveh and (perhaps gleefully) declares the city's impending doom.

- ii. The Ninevites believed the word of the Lord!
 - 1. Imagine the sight of someone bleached pasty white delivering an ominous oracle – you’d probably believe them too!
 - 2. They demonstrate right behavior in the eyes of a just God
- iii. God, as is his character, relents from the calamity to come
- iv. This is what makes Jonah angry
 - 1. The Hebrew renders 4:1 as “it was exceedingly evil/distressing to Jonah.” It seemed UNJUST to him!
 - 2. In his anger, he declares a beautiful truth about God (cf. Exodus 34:6-7)
 - 3. Instead of recognizing this amazing work of God, he is caught up in his own sense of justice
 - 4. Instead of going along with God, he feels like he has convinced God to go along with him!
 - 5. Jonah sits in the place of God, and implores God to take his life
 - 6. Lest we be too hard on Jonah, we often find ourselves in the same situation
 - a. (Think of some examples where we get angry that God shows mercy/grace)
 - b. We often forget that mercy and grace are, by definition, unfair!

II. God reminds Jonah about priorities

- a. The plant is an object lesson for Jonah, and for us
 - i. Lesson for Jonah
 - 1. Jonah cared more about the plant than the people of Nineveh
 - 2. Jonah’s self-absorption prevents him from seeing God’s power
 - a. Nineveh had more than 120,000 people
 - b. God would have spared Sodom for 10 righteous!
 - c. Nineveh repented and turned to God
 - d. Jonah is left with a rhetorical question to ponder
 - ii. Lesson for us today
 - 1. Our world has never *felt* more divided
 - 2. Even inside the church, there is often a tendency to view people who think, look, act, etc., differently than us as our enemies and unworthy of redemption
 - 3. We might think it unfair that certain people are able to receive the grace of God, because of the things they’ve done
 - a. Make no mistake: many times the acts are reprehensible
 - b. God can and does forgive nonetheless
 - c. This does not absolve judicial guilt or punishment

4. That same grace that was extended to the Ninevites, and those with whom we might struggle, was extended to us too
 - a. If we started gatekeeping who was within and outside of God's grace, none of us would make it!
 - b. God calls everyone everywhere to repent and turn to him
 - c. All have mercy extended, those who respond have mercy applied
 - d. *Such were some of you* (1 Cor 6:11)
 - e. If we reject this, we begrudge God's generosity, just like Jonah did
- iii. The priority is God's kingdom and righteous rule
 1. Jonah did not make the plant, but God made the people
 2. Right response to sin and judgment is turning to God's mercy
 3. Receiving God's mercy allows people to extend that to others
 - a. Forgiving those who have sinned against us
 - b. Receiving those who have been reconciled to God
 - c. Rejoicing when those far off from God are brought near