

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**First Sunday In Lent, March 9, 2025**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 371, 377:1, 384, 373:1-4, 508.

Lessons: Jonah 3:1-10, Acts 10:34-45, Matthew 20:1-16.

Sermon Text: Jonah 3:10 – 4:11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How often do we want to tell God that he isn't doing things right? How often do we want to tell God how things should go? God, why don't you do more to punish wickedness in the world? You have done it in the past, and we are certainly living in some very wicked times.

After all, we good people hate all the wickedness and evil and corruption in the world. Isn't that what Jonah was expecting from God? Jonah wanted to see the destruction of the huge city of Nineveh, didn't he? Was he unhappy that his threat of God's promise of punishment wasn't carried out? It would have been quite a sight to see such a huge city destroyed.

You recently heard about Jonah learning the hard way to obey the Lord. Today let's look at what happened after Nineveh believed God and was saved from prompt destruction. We see

**JONAH'S ANGER AT THE LORD'S COMPASSION**

- 1. Jonah had done what God commanded and Nineveh repented.**
- 2. But Jonah wasn't happy with the grace of God as God showed it to the Ninevites.**
- 3. God had to teach the arrogant, self-righteous Jonah another hard lesson.**

The first chapter of the book tells us of how Jonah didn't want to do what God told him to do and a great fish swallowed him. The second chapter is a marvelous prayer to God in which Jonah realizes he should have done what God told him to do and he repents and the Lord rescues him from the belly of the great fish.

In chapter 3 Jonah finally did what God commanded and he preached the Word of God in the huge city of Nineveh. Scripture tells us that Nineveh repented. God was happy, Nineveh was happy that their city wasn't destroyed and Jonah should have been happy too.

But Jonah wasn't happy with the grace of God. He was really angry. *“When God saw what [the people of Nineveh] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.”* (Jonah 3:10–4:1, NIV84)

Jonah apparently wanted some personal glory and he was unhappy that Nineveh repented. Why?

*“He prayed to the Lord, ‘O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.’”* (Jonah 4:2–3, NIV84)

He *“prayed”*. What does this mean? Well, he talked to God but he wasn't thankful for God's grace toward repentant pagans. This was not a prayer of gratitude but of resentment. Strangely enough, he admits that his anger and resentment was not simply a momentary feeling. His words reflect what he thought long before, before he ran the wrong way to avoid doing what God had commanded him to do.

When he said, *“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God,”* Jonah was speaking from personal knowledge. He had experienced God's grace and compassion.

Jonah knew his Lord very well. He wanted God's love and compassion for himself and for his nation, the Jewish people. But to his self-righteous, prejudiced way of thinking, the Lord made a big mistake when he showed love and compassion to Nineveh and relented of his threatened punishment. "**Now, LORD, take away my life.**" Jonah felt he would be better off dead than to see Nineveh spared! In chapter 2 he prayed and thanked the Lord for sparing his life. His prayer now does not thank the Lord for sparing Nineveh but asks the Lord to take his life.

But God does not take his life. Instead, "**the Lord replied, 'Have you any right to be angry?'**"

In a really strange twist of events, Jonah wanted to die because his mission had succeeded! In chapters 1 and 2 the Lord had corrected Jonah by letting him spend three days and three nights in the belly of a fish. Then "**Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh**" (3:3).

Apparently the devil did not allow Jonah's initial selfishness and prejudice to die out, but let it build into a full flame when the people of Nineveh repented and were spared. Now Jonah was in danger of dying spiritually. Unless God corrected him again, he could not experience the joys of heaven. But the gracious and compassionate Lord would not allow that to happen.

It seemed that Jonah expected to see the city destroyed. "**Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.**" Jonah simply could not accept Nineveh's being spared from destruction. The forty days were not yet up, so he sat and waited, hoping and expecting God's judgment would still strike the city.

He is trying to tell the Lord how things should be.

He was thoroughly disgusted with the Lord's ways: "God, why did you show mercy to Nineveh? What have they done to deserve it? They are not God's chosen people like us Jews. They do not submit to circumcision and live by the other requirements of Jewish law. They repent at the last moment and you bless them the same way you bless us. It's not fair, Lord, simply not fair!"

Jonah was here displaying one of the characteristics of a self-righteous attitude. He didn't think that the people of Nineveh should receive God's grace. The older brother in the story of the prodigal son had the same attitude. He angrily objected when his father received the repentant wayward brother with open arms and then treated him like a king instead of like a prodigal. "**The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'**" (Luke 15:28-30, NIV84)

We too, want to tell God how things should go. We draw our own conclusions and applications that don't always agree with the Scriptures and are not consistent with the Word of God.

Selfishness and prejudice are very much alive today, even within the church. One writer made that point in this way: Have we ever felt reluctant to share the gospel with others of a different skin color? Or because they live in the "wrong" neighborhood or speak a different language? Isn't it sad when some Christians resent it when the congregation announces forgiveness to a repentant person who formerly lived an unsavory life of sin? There should be a thankful joy over every sinner who repents as Jesus tells us in one of his parables: "**In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**" (Luke 15:10, NIV84)

Jonah resented others receiving God's blessings. This was one reason he was angry. He was Jewish and could not tolerate the Gentile Ninevites receiving the same forgiveness, love and mercy God had shown the Jews.

Jonah had previously experienced first-hand that the Lord was "**slow to anger.**" God did not kill him or let him die. Jonah was still God's child and prophet, wayward and misguided though he was, and he had to be corrected.

The Lord answered Jonah's prayer with a question, "**Do you have a right to be angry?**" This is the gentle voice of a loving and concerned father: "My son, stop and think of what you are saying. You say I'm unfair in showing grace and compassion to the Ninevites. Didn't I do the same to you when I delivered you from certain death? Now are you being fair? Is your anger at me justified?"

The Lord's question is addressed to us too, isn't it? We quite naturally seek to justify our emotions of anger as feelings we're entitled to. An unkind word or deed easily makes us angry with its self-justifying claim, "It's not fair, it's not right!" And we feel hurt. There is such a thing as righteous anger, but rightness is determined by God's will, not man's. Whenever feelings of anger begin to overtake us, we would do well to remember the Lord's question, "***Do you have a right to be angry?***" Would the Lord want me to be angry?

Instead of letting Jonah die, "***Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, 'It would be better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?' 'I do,' he said. 'I am angry enough to die.'***"

God appointed the vine to grow miraculously to maturity in one day. This was a gracious act of divine love and compassion and a step in the Lord's correction of Jonah.

"***And Jonah was very happy about the vine.***" For once Jonah was happy. How quickly a small blessing from the hand of the Lord can ease our burdens and make us forget our troubles!

But God took away Jonah's shade. Since Jonah had refused to change his mind about the Lord's mercy, God had more to teach him. As the next step, "***God provided a scorching east wind.***" When this hot, dusty wind called the sirocco begins to blow off the desert, it can raise the temperature by twenty degrees and drop the humidity in a matter of minutes. Its effect is exhausting.

"***God provided***" — a vine, a worm, a scorching east wind — just as "***the LORD provided the great fish.***" These are all natural means in themselves, but when they function at God's command, that is a supernatural act, a miracle.

Jonah grew faint and wanted to die. As he waited for God's firestorm to destroy Nineveh, Jonah was risking sunstroke. But even more dangerous for Jonah was the spiritual battle in his heart. His bitter disappointment became despair.

Once again a gracious and compassionate God rebuked his wayward prophet with a penetrating question, "***Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?***"

Jonah's anger had been directed both against God and Nineveh and now he is angry at the vine.

Jonah's abrupt answer was, "***I do. I am angry enough to die.***"

God tells Jonah, Jonah, I'm God, the gardener who made that vine grow up overnight, remember? I have even more compassionate feelings toward Nineveh than you have toward the vine. All those people, all those children, all those cattle, Jonah — I made them, too. I took care of them. I love them. Don't you think I should be concerned about that great city?

Jonah's anger all along was centered in self-interest. Nine times in this chapter alone he had used the words *I, me* or *my*. The Lord had to make him aware of this sinful self-pity and self-righteousness as well as his prejudice.

The purpose of the Lord's lesson was to teach Jonah to love those whom God loves and willingly to extend to them the same grace and compassion Jonah had received. Did Jonah learn his lesson and repent? It seems so. To the Lord's question, "***Should I not be concerned about that great city?***" Jonah's answer was silence which speaks louder than words. Jonah could not have written such a self-humiliating confession of his sin if he had not been sincerely repentant and had not hoped to preserve and save others from similar sins.

We would hope that a chastened but grateful Jonah returned to Israel to report on his experiences and to teach his own people the lesson he had learned: God's grace is universal and Israel was to extend it to all. That lesson applies also to us. May we, who have come to know God's grace, eagerly share it with as many others as we can. Amen.