

"Looking Away"

Lesson Passage:

Jonah 4

Lesson Focus: The children will learn that we must see people as God sees them not how we want to see them and perceive them.

Key Verses: 4:1, 11

Lesson Intro: Have anyone ever been mad at anyone? What do you do to the person you are mad at? (*Ask for examples*) If they do not have any give them a few. It may be that when you are mad at someone you give them the silent treatment. Maybe you ignore their texts. Maybe some of you try to make them feel bad. Many try to exclude the person they are mad at from their group of friends. And it may be that you think you have a good reason to be mad or angry at them. You may think you are right to be angry at them. Hopefully no one hopes something bad for whoever they are mad at. But how do you think God sees that person who probably did something wrong or bad that made you mad? You see you are not the only one that has had something against someone. In our story of Jonah, we find out he has something against the Ninevites. Let us look into our story and find out what happened.

Story Outline

- I. The Prophet's Anger. Jonah 4:1
- II. The Prophet's Assessment. Jonah 4:2-4
- III. The Prophet's Angle. Jonah 4:5
- IV. The Prophet's Attachment. Jonah 4:6-8
- V. Amending the Prophet. Jonah 4:9-11

Story Overview

Fast forward to the part of the story after Jonah preached in Nineveh once he was out of the belly of the fish. Jonah reveals why he had walked away. He did not want God having mercy on Nineveh. He was furious that the destruction did not happen but hoped for something to still happen. God had to show Jonah what He saw.

Start with the story of Jonah in Jonah 4

I. The Prophet's Anger. Jonah 4:1

Without going too much into chapter 3 Jonah had delivered the message God gave him and Nineveh turned from their evil. That is where chapter four begins. Jonah was not happy that God had forgiven Nineveh and decided not to destroy it. Two things are noted about how Jonah reacted to what God had done. First Jonah was displeased, he did not agree, and did not like what had been done. Second, Jonah became angry, his attitude was not in amazement of what the Word of God had done but anger because God had worked through His Word.

What a crazy start to this story. Jonah was displeased and angry for the good that God had done. What could possibly have caused Jonah to have this attitude?

II. The Prophet's Assessment. Jonah 4:2-4

Jonah does something in this story that seems so weird. He actually goes to God to complain about his disagreement with what God had done. Jonah knew that God was good. Jonah knew that if he went and delivered the message to Nineveh and the people listened and turned from their evil ways God would show love and mercy to them. Jonah knew this about God and that is why he did not want to deliver the message in the first place. It seems Jonah did not want these people being forgiven. Perhaps Jonah thought they did not deserve it. These people were known as evil people in history. These people would also cause trouble and pain to Israel where Jonah was from. It is for this reason that Jonah did not see them as people who deserved mercy or forgiveness. Jonah was so angry, that God had to ask him if he was right to be angry. Did Jonah really have a reason to be angry at the goodness of God?

How do we look at people? Jonah saw these people as undeserving of the goodness of God, so he was mad when God showed His goodness to them. Do we look at people this way? Are there some people we think are good enough to have the goodness of God and that there are people who do not deserve the goodness of God? Do we think that the goodness of God, His love, mercy, and forgiveness, is something that is deserved or earned in some way?

III. The Prophet's Angle. Jonah 4:5

After Jonah prayed, perhaps while still in Nineveh, he left Nineveh and sat outside of it. While he looked at the city, he expected something to happen. It may well be that Jonah still expected or hoped that the judgment of God would fall on the city. That the people of Nineveh would get what Jonah thought they deserved. That God would not show mercy, love and compassion. So, he went and sat where he could see the city see if by chance something would still happen to it.

We may also sometimes sit back and hope that people we do not like or that we think are bad will have something bad happen to them or receive punishment from God. We hope for that to happen instead of the love and mercy from God that could change everything. Sometimes we fail to see what and how God sees.

IV. The Prophet's Attachment. Jonah 4:6-8

God began to work to teach Jonah. God grew a plant for Jonah to have shade. Jonah responded with a good and happy attitude towards the plant God had provided for him. Then, God sent a worm that killed the plant that brought shade to Jonah. After that God sent a hot wind that wore Jonah down. It was so hot he felt like he was going to faint. This took Jonah to one of his drastic reactions. He thought he would not make it and that it would be better if he did not. He was upset about the plant.

As this story develops, we find out that God was not only loving and merciful to the Ninevites. He was also being merciful and loving to Jonah. God took the time to show Jonah what He saw. He used the plant. How loving and merciful God is with us, that even though sometimes we see people as those who do not deserve the love and mercy of God, He teaches us in love and mercy. He is patient to show us that we have it all wrong.

V. Amending the Prophet. Jonah 4:9-11

God had set up His lesson for Jonah. Jonah had for a brief moment been pleased with the plant God had provided for him. But God had now taken it. Jonah responded in great despair and was angry about his plant. God then showed Jonah how wrong he was about the way he was looking at the Ninevites. Jonah had come to like the plant that had only existed for a day. A plant Jonah did not even plant or grow. Yet when it was gone, he was so angry and disappointed. This was all for a simple plant. Yet, when God showed His mercy, compassion, and love for Nineveh Jonah was angry. The Ninevites even with all their evil were still part of the creation of God. God wanted to reach them not because it was something they deserved, but because of the love He had. God could not overlook these people who really needed Him.

We sometimes may fail to see people how God sees them. We may think that what they deserve is punishment. We may think that God should not show them mercy or love. But God shows us that His love and mercy is not given as something deserved but as something He has and freely gives.

Conclusion: How do we see people? Do we see them as people who need God? Everyone needs God. The ones we think are good and those who we think are evil. They were all created by God and God wants to reach them all. The love, mercy, and compassion from God is not something anyone earns or deserves. The goodness of God is not limited to certain people. God loves us all and His love, mercy, and compassion is for everyone. So, we must go to everyone and let them know the love of God. We must not only be willing but glad that the goodness of God is given to all who will receive it. We cannot take the attitude of Jonah and try to pick and choose who will get it or who deserves it.