

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgement!

“...judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13 NIV)

Everybody is familiar with the story of Jonah. Even kids sing “who did swallow Jo-Jo-Jonah” in VBS and Sunday School. But the story has much deeper meaning than just what happened to Jonah. It’s WHY what happened to Jonah happened that’s important for us to know.

Jonah was told by God to preach to the people of Nineveh, the chief city of the Assyrians. Nineveh was described as an extremely wicked city that was worthy of God’s wrath and destruction. However, God told Jonah to preach to them because of his mercy. Jonah ran in the opposite direction because, in his judgement, Nineveh should be destroyed without mercy. He knew that God’s message might bring about repentance and forgiveness. Jonah was swallowed up by a big fish, and, after being “deposited” on dry land three days later, Jonah did preach to the people of Nineveh.

The people of Nineveh did repent. In sackcloth and ashes. On the animals as well. And God relented and forgave them of their great sin. Their repentance was so complete and sincere, it was mentioned by Jesus in **Matthew 12:41 (NIV)**:

“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.”

Jesus point here is that He (the Word of God made flesh) had the power to extend God’s grace to all men and accept their repentance, even to a greater extent than the preaching of Jonah to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah wanted Nineveh punished. God wanted them to repent. Many of us want vengeance on our enemies, yet God prefers that we use the word of God to change them.

One additional note: Jonah was so disappointed that God’s words caused the people of Nineveh to repent that he pouted. He didn’t get his way—the total annihilation of those he wanted to punish. God got His way—repentance and salvation from judgement.

And that’s what He wants for us. Peter put it this way:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9 NIV)

When we want revenge on our enemies; when we’ve acted as judge, jury, and executioner, remember what God wants is what is important. And I, unlike Job, thank God for his mercy.