

Articles and Sermons :: The Compassion of God by Zac Poonen

The Compassion of God by Zac Poonen - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2010/2/26 12:38

The Compassion of God

by Zac Poonen

In Jonah 3:1-2, we read that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time saying: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city and preach unto it the preaching that I bid Thee." Praise the Lord that when we fail once, the Lord gives us a second chance. That is one of the great messages that comes to us from the book of Jonah. Have you failed the Lord? God is waiting to give you another chance. Have you failed Him a second time? He will give you a third chance. He is not only the God of the second chance - for most of us have blown our second chance long, long ago. He is the God of another chance, no matter how many times you have failed! The Lord can restore you even now and enable you to fulfil a ministry for Him, if you repent wholeheartedly.

Jonah had learned his lesson now. He had been chastened and now he went to Nineveh gladly. It took him three days to walk through that huge city, proclaiming in every street that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. Amazingly, the people of Nineveh repented immediately. This was the greatest and quickest revival that ever took place in the history of the world - and it took place in a heathen nation. Such a revival has never been seen anywhere. Jonah's sermon consisted of only one sentence. But it brought conviction to thousands - and they ALL repented.

What do we see here? When God has successfully dealt with His servant and done a work in him, even one sentence from his mouth has such tremendous power. If God has not succeeded in dealing with your stubbornness, your disobedience, your rebellion and your pride, then even long sermons you preach won't accomplish anything. But if God has succeeded in breaking you, then even one sentence will be powerful.

From the king down to the beggar there was much weeping and repenting. They put on sackcloth and called upon God to forgive them. They knew they would be judged. And when God saw that, He did not punish them. One of the things that encourages me here is that even when a wicked city like Nineveh repented, God was merciful. God knew that some years later, the city would be so evil that He would have to destroy it. But God treats everyone as they are right now - and not as they were in the past or as they will be in the future. His Name is "I AM," not "I was," nor "I will be."

God is more compassionate than we are. There is not a single case in Scripture where a person repented and turned to God, where God did not forgive. Even if Judas Iscariot had gone to the Lord and asked for forgiveness, he would have been forgiven. But he went to the priests instead - like many do today! You can't get forgiveness by confessing your sins to any priest. Judas Iscariot tried it and was not forgiven. And you won't be forgiven that way either.

When God had mercy on Nineveh, one would have thought that Jonah would

have been excited. But he wasn't. Imagine an evangelist who sees an entire city of over 120,000 people (Jonah 4:11) weeping and repenting – the greatest revival in history - and not being excited! Jonah became angry instead. First of all, because his prophecy was not fulfilled. Secondly, because as a patriotic Israeli, he hated the people of Nineveh and had hoped that they would not repent and that God would destroy them.

Are we like Jonah? Is there anyone on earth whom you do NOT want God to bless? Have we forgotten how merciful God has been to us and how He has blessed us even when we deserved only Hell. But Jonah was now concerned about his own honour and reputation as a prophet.

To teach Jonah a lesson, the Lord allowed a plant to grow up over his head. Jonah was very happy for the plant. But the next day because God made a worm eat up the plant, and it withered up. Jonah was very angry again because the sun was beating down on him and he said, "It is better for me to die than live." Then God said to Jonah, "You had compassion on a plant which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:11). God expressed His concern for more than 120,000 innocent babies in Nineveh besides many animals. It is amazing to see God's concern here for the animals in Nineveh! "A good man is concerned for the welfare of his animals" (Prov.12:10).

In this verse (Jonah 4:11) - more than in any other verse in the Old Testament - we see God's tremendous compassion for lost souls. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that no one should perish. Jonah somehow did not get into fellowship with God in this matter. There are many preachers today too who preach and see revivals (like Jonah did), but who like Jonah, are not in fellowship with the compassionate heart of God. Such preachers do not fulfil their ministry as God wants them to. You may preach and get people saved; and yet at the end of it all, like Jonah, you may have no fellowship with God at all. The proper basis for an evangelistic ministry is fellowship with the heart of God. God has such a great compassion for those who don't have light.

The Bible says God wants all men to repent, to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He longs for that. The more we come into fellowship with God's heart, the more we will share His burden. If God has called you to be an evangelist, He will give you a compassion for lost souls. If God calls you to be a teacher, He will give you a compassion for believers who are blinded and deceived, who are not entering into a life of victory. Fellowship with the heart of God in sharing His compassion is essential if we are to fulfil our ministry effectively.