

The Lord Uses Object Lessons to Teach Jonah

Jonah 4:5-8

Jonah 4:5-8 - *“So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. ⁶ And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. ⁷ But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. ⁸ And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”*”

Background Notes

Did you know that every year, in the month of February, Assyrian Christians hold a three day fast? This fast is a commemoration of the great spiritual awakening that took place in Nineveh, recorded in the book of Jonah! A tradition like this doesn’t just appear out of thin air, so such a tradition lends credibility to the fact that this event really took place in history. This was probably the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of mankind!

But of all things, Jonah wasn’t happy about it! Most preachers are elated when even a few souls are saved in response to their preaching. In Jonah’s case, the entire city of ancient Nineveh - as many as 600,000 people (and maybe many more) - repented at his preaching! But Jonah was not thanking the Lord - in fact, he was angry! *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry”* (v1). Jonah was angry because the Assyrians were Israel’s enemies, and Jonah didn’t want God to show mercy to the cruel and pagan Assyrians. Jonah’s attitude was, “Let them go to hell!”

When the Lord asked him if he had a good reason to be angry, Jonah didn’t answer. He just stomped out of the city. *“Then the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.”*

What was Jonah doing out there, making a shelter for himself, sitting down in it, and watching the city? He was actually giving God another chance (so to speak) to send judgment on Nineveh! Jonah reasoned that maybe Nineveh’s repentance was only a temporary profession of faith, and God would still judge them. He thought just maybe, after the forty days were over, God would still send fire and brimstone on Nineveh. And that’s what Jonah was really hoping for.

But God was not going to judge the city of Nineveh in Jonah’s time, because the people had truly repented and had turned from their wicked ways. In fact, God withheld His judgment of the entire Assyrian Empire for approximately 150 more years. Nineveh finally fell to the Babylonian armies in 612 BC.

While Jonah was sitting under the shade of his makeshift hut, waiting to see what the Lord would do, God taught him some important lessons through a series of object lessons.

Doctrinal Points

1. All of life's comforts are under God's control.

Verse 6: *“And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.”*

Apparently the little shelter that Jonah had built for himself didn't give him much shade. It was probably like a *sukkah* – the temporary structure that the Jewish people make out of cut branches for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Jonah had probably made many *sukkahs* in previous years. But *sukkahs* aren't built for shade.

So the Lord allowed a fast growing plant to grow up overnight, to give Jonah some better shade. What was this plant? Perhaps it was a castor bean plant - a rapidly growing leafy plant that grows in that area. It can grow anywhere from 8 to 12 feet high. On the other hand, verse 6 says that God prepared the plant, so it may have been a special plant. After all, God prepared a special fish in chapter 1. In any case, the plant was a miracle, because it grew big enough to give shade - overnight!

Jonah was very happy for this comfort! He may even have thought this miraculous plant was a sign of God's approval of his attitude and actions. But nothing could have been further from the truth! This amazing plant was part of the lesson that God wanted to teach Jonah.

We need to be careful not to make the same mistake that Jonah made. Notice that God did indeed provide the plant for Jonah's benefit - to give Jonah some shade, to deliver him from the misery of the blazing sun. But even though God provided it for Jonah's comfort – the plant was certainly **not** a sign of God's approval of Jonah's attitude!

God, in His grace, will often provide “shade plants” for us along life's way. Let's face it - life is hard. But God provides good things for us: a better job, a good friend, a nice home, the best doctor. These are all little comforts of life.

But remember, the comforts of life are all under God's control. He provides them, and we should be thankful for them. But we should never make the mistake of assuming that the good things are a sign of His approval of our life and our lifestyle! Along with the blessing and comfort, God may actually be in the process of teaching us some valuable lesson, as He did in Jonah's case. In fact, when the Lord provides us with comforts along life's way, we should thank Him – and we should also ask Him if He wants us to learn a lesson through them.

We tend to think that we have earned the nice things that God provides – but remember 1 Corinthians 4:7: *“What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”*

Everything in our lives – including all the comforts of this life – is from God, and is under God’s control. We need to learn the truth of that verse.

Everything we have is from the Lord; it is all under His control. How dare we boast of “our” achievements, or think that we had something to do with it? Don’t ever think that what you have, including the comforts of life, are the result of **your** brains, or **your** abilities or **your** talents! Remember, all we have is from the Lord. And **everything**, including all of life’s comforts, is under God’s control.

2. All of life’s circumstances are under God’s control.

Verses 7-8: *“But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.””*

The comforting shade plant lasted for only one day, because God had prepared a little worm to attack the plant. Think of this: God controls all the fish of the sea - and all the plants of the earth - and all the worms of the earth as well!

Everything is under God’s control! At just at the right time, God prepared a little worm to attack the shade plant so that it withered and died. Notice - the worm didn’t even have to eat the whole thing.

And then God prepared a vehement east wind. This type of wind is known as a *sirocco*. It’s a hot scorching wind that sucks the strength out of you. Notice - God prepared this wind so that just at the right time it blew on Jonah. We certainly see the sovereignty of God over all things in the book of Jonah.

The strong wind probably destroyed Jonah’s little lean-to. Now he had no shelter and no shade, and the sun beat down on his head so that he grew faint. Notice Jonah’s reactions to these circumstances at the end of verse 8: *“Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.””*

Jonah didn’t respond as Job did. When Job lost his children and all his possessions, he said: *“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21). Job submitted to the sovereign will of God, even in far worse circumstances. Jonah’s response is not like Job’s.

What is our response when God allows the “little worms” or the “big winds” to come our way? What’s your response when things go wrong? Do we recognize that all of life’s circumstances are under God’s control? Do we realize that He’s using circumstances to teach us valuable lessons? Do we really believe Romans 8:28, that He is working everything together for the good to those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose – to make us more like Jesus?

Maybe a little worm is eating away at one of your comforts right now. Or maybe you're facing a strong wind of opposition that's sucking your strength and leaving you faint. What's our attitude when things don't go smoothly? Do we react as Job did – or, like Jonah, do we say, "I'd rather die than go on living!"

Listen - the Lord speaks to you through **all** the events of your life. Listen - and hear - and pray. Remember, **all** of life's circumstances are under God's control.

Practical Application

Are you an emotional yo-yo?

Jonah was an emotional yo-yo. One day he was very happy because of a shade plant. The next day he was down in the dumps and wanting to die because the plant withered. Jonah was an emotional yo-yo because **his emotions were governed by outward circumstances!** – His emotions were not governed by his trust in God.

What about you? Are you an emotional yo-yo? Are you up and happy one day, when life is going smoothly - but take an emotional plunge when God allows a little worm to come along? Maybe the little worm is a drop in the stock market. Maybe it's a scratch on your new car. Maybe it's a tear in your favorite shirt, or a bad grade on a test, or rainy day on your vacation. And when this happens, down you go.

We "yo-yo" in reaction to outward circumstances when we're not strong and stable in our faith. When the winds of life come our way we despair, and we even wish we could die.

What's the solution to this problem? We need to grow in our faith and trust in our loving Father! We need to recognize that God is sovereign. He is in control of the worms and the winds. He's in control of **all** the circumstances of our lives, and we can trust that He's working **everything** together for our eventual good - to make us more like Jesus Christ.

Are you strong in your faith - or are you an emotional yo-yo?