

God's Compassion---Our Concern

Are you concerned about what God is concerned about? We get concerned about so many things in this life. When is the last time you evaluated your concerns to see if they were like God's concerns? Growing up, I used to become very concerned about who would win the NBA finals. O.K., I still get caught up in pulling for a team to win. This year will be no different. Six year ago, I was pulling for the Chicago Bulls. They were playing the Utah Jazz and it was to the sixth game that would clinch the 6th title if they won. How many of you watched at least part of the final game? I had the opportunity to watch the last half of the final game and I started getting pretty tense in the final five minutes or so of the game.

Garrison was an eighteen-month-old at the time and he was not quite as concerned. In fact, he'd picked up an interesting habit the few weeks before the finals. When I start to watch basketball on TV, he would start saying "off, off" and eventually go over to turn the TV off. During the game, Garrison decided he wanted to play baseball in the house with dad. He was not concerned at all that the game was on. He was not impressed that he was having a chance to watch Michael Jordan's possible last game no matter how much I tried to convince him otherwise. We eventually watched the game while playing ball. His concerns, however, were different than mine.

Some concerns are more major in our lives. I can still remember the sinking feeling in my stomach when Stephanie and I, shortly after our marriage twelve years ago, sat down and totaled our upcoming expenses for my schooling and realized that neither of us had a job or even a prospect for a job. We were very much concerned about our financial obligations. Most of you have either felt that sense of urgency or are currently facing it.

Small concerns and big concerns. My parents lived in several houses during the years that I grew up. One specific neighbor that we had was greatly concerned with his lawn. He would cut his grass every five days, bagging every clip of grass. He fertilized and watered his yard constantly. You couldn't find a weed in his yard. Excuse me a second while I water my plant (**water a plant on stage**). I can remember my dad and me trying to figure out how to make our yard look as good as his--without all that work. We never figured out the secret but shortly after this neighbor moved the yard changed dramatically. The new neighbor was not as concerned with yard work and before too many months had passed our yard looked much better than theirs...finally. You know there's a man in the Bible who was concerned about plants. The man was Jonah. Before we look at his concern for plants, take a look at his book in the Bible.

Jonah was a prophet from Israel who lived in the 8th century B.C. In the years somewhere between 780 and 750 B.C., Jonah carried on his ministry. In the book of Jonah, Jonah's trip to Nineveh is recorded, probably by Jonah himself. Nineveh became the capital of Assyria, a country that eventually overtook Israel in 723 B.C. and ruled the entire geographic region as a world power for many years. At the time of God's command to Jonah, Assyria was in a state of weak leadership and was in the process of

regrouping its vast empire. Israel at this time had been able to regain control of all their lands that had been taken by the Syrians.

The Israelites were enjoying the lack of oppression from Assyria. However, the Assyrians, if they had chosen to focus on Israel sooner, could have taken over Israel any time they wanted. The Assyrians were the biggest threat to the Israelites and therefore were considered their worst enemies at the time God gave Jonah a message for Nineveh. If you haven't already turned to the book of Jonah turn to chapter one now.

Go where He says go

God, in verse two, ordered Jonah to go to Nineveh. Excuse me while I place my plant in the sunlight (**rotate plant on stage**). A simple principle is at work here. God expects us to go where He says to go. Jonah missed the point, however. Instead of obeying God, Jonah headed for the seaport of Joppa to catch a ship headed in the opposite direction. He headed for Tarshish. Tarshish was located in southern Spain on the Mediterranean coast. Jonah went as far away as he could go. Jonah had no interest in going to the capital city of his enemy and proclaiming a message from God. He boarded a ship at Joppa and headed for Tarshish. God, however, had his own special way of getting Jonah's attention. God caused a storm to blow up that threatened the life of all the passengers on the voyage. Jonah, in the midst of the storm was found sleeping in the boat. The captain urged him to pray for deliverance from the storm. Eventually, the sailors decided that one of them had angered God. They cast lots to decide who was the culprit. God, in His own way, caused the lot to fall on Jonah.

Jonah finally convinced the sailors that the storm would pass if they threw him overboard. This is where, as most of you remember, Jonah was swallowed by a big fish. The fish, in all probability, saved Jonah's life from drowning in the Mediterranean. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah cried out for forgiveness and God answered. After three days, God caused the fish to vomit Jonah on the shore-- I guess you can't keep a good man down.

Jonah failed to obey God's first command to go where He said. With his new lease on life, Jonah was commissioned again to go to Nineveh. This time he headed for Nineveh. From where Jonah lived in Israel to the city of Nineveh was over 500 miles. Jonah probably traveled for about thirty days before he reached the city. The Bible says that Nineveh was a great city with a population of 120,000. It took Jonah three days to travel through the city. By the way, Nineveh is located in present day northern Iraq.

Say what He says

In chapter three and the second verse, God commanded Jonah to deliver His message to the people of Nineveh. Jonah followed the second point of this message without hesitation. He said what God said. "Forty days and Nineveh will be overturned". Excuse me while I check on my plant (**admire plant for a moment**). Imagine going to Baghdad, Iraq and delivering this message. How long would you expect to live? The

people of Nineveh, however, believed God and started a city wide repentance. The king declared a fast for all the humans and animals in the city. He also required them to wear sackcloth. Finally, he urged the people to call on God and stop their evil.

God heard and chose not to destroy the city in forty days. Jonah was irate. He finally went where God had told him and said what God had said, but Nineveh was still there.

Love who He loves

Jonah fails the final point of the message today. God wanted Jonah to love who He loved. Jonah was not ready for this lesson. He was a prophet of God who had given a word from God. If the prophecy did not happen, Jonah would be ridiculed and embarrassed on the long trip home to Israel. Fulfilled prophecy was vitally important to the prophet of his day. In addition, God was showing compassion to His enemies-- the very nation that would overthrow his homeland.

Jonah even admitted that he didn't want to go to Nineveh or say what God had told him because he knew God was compassionate. Jonah was so mad he wanted to die. God had another lesson for Jonah, however.

He set up camp outside of the city hoping that the destruction would soon take place. God provided Jonah a plant to provide shade as he waited for the show. It says that Jonah got downright happy about the vine. His happiness was short-lived. I can just see Jonah walking over with his binoculars waiting to see destruction. God sends a worm to kill his plant. The sun scorched down just like this week, and Jonah was mad again. Jonah told God he was mad enough to die.

God caught him in his pettiness. Let's read Jonah 4:10-11.

Jonah 4:10 through Jonah 4:11 (NIV)

¹⁰But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

He was more concerned about the plant that God blessed him with than the repentance of a city of 120,000. Jonah, after a false start, went where God said to go. He said what God said. He did not, however, love whom God loved.

What about you today? Are you concerned about what God is concerned about? I hear in the story of Jonah the Great Commission given by Christ in

Matthew 28:19-20

19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The problem is that most of us are more concerned about our “plant” that God has blessed us with rather than about His mission. Go to all the world. Are you going where He says to go?

Jesus discussed helping the hungry, poor, naked, jailed, and the sick. Too often we bury our heads and look the other way when we see people in need. It’s easy to slip back into a comfortable Christian life not going to the lost and needy. I ask you again today, are you going where He has told you to go?

Are you saying what He has told you to say? In the Great Commission, Jesus not only says to go to all nations, but He has commanded to teach all things. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve kicked myself because God has sent me into an opportunity only for me to let the moment silently pass by. God does not give a message like Jonah’s everyday. In the New Testament, the message is about the good news of Jesus Christ. Are you sharing your faith?

Jonah showed no love for who God loved. Do you love whom He loves? God so loved the world. Over and over in the New Testament the writers’ record that Jesus was moved by compassion for people.

I’d like to contrast today Jonah’s way of compassion to just one of the ways Jesus showed compassion in the New Testament.

The story is found in John 4:7-26.

Jesus has just finished traveling to a region in Samaria and his disciples left Him to get some food. A Samaritan woman approaches the area Jesus is resting in at a well and proceeds to collect water. Jesus steps out of the custom of his day and talks to her—not only does he talk to her, but he asks her for a drink from her cup. According to Jewish custom—Jesus would become ceremonially unclean if he drank from a Samaritan’s cup. Jews treated Samaritans with little respect in his day. In fact, many Jews who traveled in the region would go out of their way to avoid traveling through areas where the Samaritan’s lived. Jesus uses this moment to share about his mission and his offer for eternal life with God. Jesus was driven by compassion when he ignored the custom of his day.

He was going where God was leading—He was sharing the good news—He loved the unlovely of his day. Over and over in His ministry on earth, Jesus reached out to hurting humanity and brought wholeness. Jesus was concerned about what God was concerned about---Jonah was concerned about a plant---

Jesus when urged by his disciples to eat after they returned to the well, said:
The Holy Bible, New International Version

John 4:32 through John 4:39 (NIV)

³²**But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”**

³³**Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”**

³⁴**“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”**

Are you concerned about what God is concerned about today? The fields of Stafford are ripe for harvest—don’t miss this opportunity---

We have a drama this morning that I think is a wonderful retelling of the story of the woman at the well. Let’s listen...**Invitation after drama**