

Racial profiling, prejudice, chauvinism, and other things like that should not be tolerated because it treats one person differently from another for no valid reason. It should not matter what our race is, what color our skin is, what gender we are, everyone should be treated in the same manner — should be treated equally. From little on, we have an aversion to things which are not fair. How many times have we complained about someone getting preferential treatment, such as, “His piece of cake is bigger than mine!” or “How come he did not have to sit in the corner when he said that word?” Boards and commissions worry about setting a precedent, because if you allow an exception for one person, then you will probably have to allow it for others as well. This idea of being “fair” really does permeate our whole society, and rightly so, because it is not right to be showing favoritism to special groups of people. This idea was placed into the bill of rights of our constitution when it stated that our government was not to show favoritism to any specific religion, but was to treat them all equally. So it really ought to surprise us when we realize that the God we worship is not fair. He is not fair in that He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He treats us out of His love and forgiveness, and then asks us to LOVE, AS GOD HAS LOVED US. As we look at the end of the account of Jonah, the great missionary to Nineveh, we can see that 1) God shows our self-centeredness, and then 2) He shows His great compassion.

We are all familiar with the account of Jonah. When God called Jonah to go to the wicked city of Nineveh, Jonah got on a boat going in the opposite direction. After being swallowed by a great fish and then deposited back on land, God again told him to go to Nineveh with God’s message that He was going to destroy that city in 40 days. This time Jonah complied with the Lord’s request and went to preach to the people of Nineveh. Now, if we were to compare the people of Nineveh to the extremists of ISIS today, the people of Nineveh were probably even more cruel. They delighted in torturing and murdering the people they defeated in battle. So the people of Nineveh were both hated and feared. It is no wonder that Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh and announce to them that God was going to destroy that wicked city in 40 days. I am sure that Jonah feared for his life, not knowing what the people of Nineveh might do to him for proclaiming this message.

But there was another reason that Jonah also reveals about why he did not want to go to preach to the city of Nineveh. Earlier in this final chapter, Jonah says, *“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”* (2) Jonah knew of God’s love and compassion for sinners, and did not want that love and compassion to be shown to the people of Nineveh. Jonah really wanted to see those people gone, destroyed by God’s anger against sin.

When they repented after hearing Jonah’s message, Jonah was upset. **“Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.”** (5) Jonah wanted to see if God might still carry out His threat to destroy this city, so he made a shelter and waited. God, in His love even for Jonah, provides him with an object lesson in order to show him how self-centered he was. **“The Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.”** (6) The loving God miraculously provided for a vine to grow over Jonah’s makeshift shelter to provide him shade from the hot, desert sun. This made Jonah quite happy.

“But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” (7–8) What the Lord gave, God took away. Jonah was so miserable sitting in the hot, dry sun that he wanted to die. So God came to him and asked him if he really had any right to be angry about this vine dying. Jonah admitted that he was so angry about it that he really did want to die.

In His love, God was doing all of this to show Jonah how self-centered he was. All he was interested in was himself. He had a hatred for the people of Nineveh because of what they had done (and maybe what they were prophesied to do) to Israel. He wanted them to suffer the destruction that God had told him to

announce. While he had no concern for the people of Nineveh, he did have a great concern over this vine that grew and provided him with some comfort from the hot sun. He was angry that God allowed that vine to die. This is where this account gets personal for us.

In this heated political season, there are times when we get so focused on ourselves and our desires that we lose sight of the big picture, just like Jonah did. We may lose sight of the fact that God loves all mankind and desires that all be saved. Listen to what the Lord said to Jonah, who was worried about that vine. So God 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.”** (10) The only reason that he was concerned about the vine was because of the shade which it provided for him. Jonah had not planted it or made it grow. Yet, when it died, he was very upset because it affected him personally.

But God is the Father of all people, even those of Nineveh. So He continued: **“But 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?”** (11) Those 120,000 who could not tell their right from their left were probably children. Nineveh was a very large city with many people living in it. God is concerned about their welfare and their souls, just like He is concerned about ours. He even mentions the cattle in that city, reminding us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without Him knowing about it. Certainly God was concerned that this wicked city repent of their sins. Aren't those people more important than that vine? Jonah was to open his heart to show love and concern even for those people of Nineveh because they were also loved by God.

Like Jonah, we also know that the Lord God we worship is gracious and compassionate, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. We come to Him repeatedly to have Him announce to us that all of our sins are forgiven. We are assured of it each day as we come to Him, confessing our sins, and being assured by Him that He has washed them all away. We come to His house to have it announced to us once again that all of our sins of thought, word, and actions have been removed from us. We know that His love and compassion reaches to all. His love was meant not only for Jonah and the children of Israel, but for all people as well.

But the Lord also knew that He needed to be speaking to Jonah to change his attitude. That is why He sent the vine and the worm — to call Jonah to repent of his selfish ways, and to open his heart to love as our heavenly Father loves us all. How about us — do we have the type of love for those around us like God does? Or do we get upset with opposing political views that we desire evil things for them? Do we freely forgive one who had been caught in sin when they repent and come back to the Lord? Do we judge others by the color of their skin when they come to worship with us? The list could go on.

But you probably noticed that this is where the book of Jonah ends. It does not record for us the response that Jonah had to all of this. We can assume that since he wrote the book and confessed to these sins of selfishness, that he realized what the Lord was saying to him, and that the Lord was right in His love and compassion. But more importantly, it is up to us to find the ending for ourselves and our reactions to what God did for Jonah. Are we filled with the same love and compassion for the lost that God has? Or are we more interested in the vine, that is, the things that affect us more personally. Does our heart go out more for the animals that get abused and we hear about on the news than it goes out for our neighbor who does not yet know about Jesus' love and forgiveness? Do our hearts ache to hear about those who turn away from the Lord, or who do not know how loving and forgiving that He is to all?

Our God is not fair in that He does not punish us for our sins, but cleanses us of them in the blood of His Son. He also is not fair in that He wants all men to share in that forgiveness. May we not be self-centered in trying to keep that love and forgiveness to ourselves. May we look to share this love of our heavenly Father with all of those around us who, like us, do not deserve such a loving Savior.