**“God of Mercy: The School of Providence”**

**Jonah 4:1-9**

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 7/25/21)

Our God is a gracious and patient teacher, even though we, like Jonah, are often slow, stubborn, and troublesome students. At this point, Jonah ought to be celebrating the greatest gospel harvest ever! But he was sulking… God’s wrath was not poured out on the Ninevites the way that Jonah had planned. Instead, God poured out His mercy. Jonah was also mad because he had hoped to go home as a hero, when the enemy was destroyed. What does God do with such mixed-up children? Does He cast them aside? No. God’s way is not punishment, but preservation and preparation for future service. How? God sometimes gives us circumstances, or providences, sent directly from Him to make us into what He wants us to be.

God’s providences must always be read through the lens of scripture. Look carefully at verse 2: Jonah knew that God was slow to anger and merciful (and all those other attributes), but he ignored what he knew to be true about God. God overthrew the Ninevites’ rebellious hearts and granted them repentance and mercy. But Jonah was not joyful… he was angry! He was full of pride and prejudice because his desired outcome was not what God allowed. Jonah’s disobedience (and ours) comes at a high price: it leads to wasted time and lost opportunities to live for God.

The key to this lesson is this: God is sovereign over all things. **ALL!** His providences are always purposeful and good. God is purposefully guiding all things to accomplish His good purposes and His promises to His people. We are meant to take shelter in God. Verse 6 tells us that Jonah was grateful for the plant. He believed that “every good gift comes down from the Father of lights.” (James 1:17) But an attitude of gratitude often melts when “life happens,” when things don’t go the way that **you** wanted them to go. The same Hand that sent the wind and the whale now sends the worm. Earthly comfort disappeared at God’s command. Remember: God’s goodness doesn’t change even when our circumstances change. God is still in control and His purposes will not be thwarted. When God causes the plant to whither, He knows he is adding to Jonah’s misery. He is orchestrating this. Earthly afflictions ebb and flow at God’s command. His lessons are sometimes quite difficult. He often uses the “school of hard knocks” to get our attention, and so we will learn to find security and satisfaction in Him and Him alone. Jonah believed the right things about God, but he needed to learn a few things about himself. He was not the servant of God that he had imagined himself to be. He was still full of prejudice and self-righteousness. Teaching from God never stops: Jonah had not “arrived” yet and neither have we. We are all works in progress!

Until we are taken home with Jesus, we are to purify ourselves and be grateful for God’s purification. We are to conform to His image. Read 2 Cor. 12:7. Even Paul needed that thorn so that he didn’t get too proud. The big lesson here: take comfort NOT from God’s gifts, but from God Himself.

Jonah needed to see that it was God’s message and God’s mission, NOT Jonah’s. Like Jonah, we need to examine the gap between what we believe and how closely we conform to His image. God will relentlessly send His teaching providences until we are finally conformed to the image of His Son. Pray that we see Jonah not just as a messed-up guy, but as someone who needs God’s grace just like us. Starting right now, let us NOT live by feelings, but by faith in our Sovereign Savior.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. When has God sent you through a hard time to teach you an important lesson about you?
2. What are some of the other costs of disobedience, besides the 2 that were mentioned?
3. What does conforming to Christ’s image look like? How is it done? What does not conforming to our culture look like? How is it done?
4. Jonah was angry because God didn’t do things Jonah’s way. What lies at the root of your anger?
5. What does God’s treatment of Jonah reveal about God’s nature?

“Grace Greater than Our Sin” (Julia Johnston)

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured,

There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

Refrain:

Grace, grace, God’s grace,

Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God’s grace,

Grace that is greater than all our sin.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,

Freely bestowed on all who believe!

You that are longing to see His face,

Will you this moment His grace receive?