

Part of fishing is deciding which ones to keep. How late is it? How late do we want to be up cleaning? How many do we already have? Is it big enough? Big fish are easy, they're keepers. But small fish, which get kept and which get thrown back? Any thrown back are spared. In a certain way that fish has been shown compassion. This time around they won't get eaten.

Imagine the entire world is one big lake and we're all fish. God is fishing. When God is fishing the ones caught are shown compassion. To be caught by God is a good thing. But how many does God want to keep? Doesn't he have to do some evaluation on whether each is good enough? He wouldn't be interested in all us fish here on earth. Surely there are some that are "too small" and not worthy of being caught by God. Some are just too rotten, too wicked, too undeserving.

You probably have heard the famous story of Jonah and the big fish. That was not a fish Jonah caught, that was a fish that caught Jonah. Maybe you recall Jonah spent three days inside that fish. Maybe you remember it was because he didn't listen to God. Maybe you remember the big fish spitting Jonah back out. God's command to Jonah was always the same, so reluctantly Jonah listened. But Jonah's story is more than a fish story. In fact as amazing as living inside a fish for three days is, there's an even bigger miracle in the story of Jonah. It's a story that helps teach us something. From the first lesson we hear...

A miracle more than a fish story
The Lord's compassion rescues a city
The Lord's compassion angers a prophet

What makes a city great? We might say, Thunder basketball, the Zoo, Devon Tower, and the capital. Of course many other things make Oklahoma City great. Population wise, as of 2010 Oklahoma City was the 29th biggest city in the United States. That's pretty impressive. Total land area Oklahoma City is even more impressive, the 2nd biggest. Jonah was commanded to go to a great city. **"Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days."** What made Nineveh so great? Well it was the capital of its country. Population was a little less than Oklahoma City at around 500,000. Land area was smaller too, more on the size of Austin Texas. It did have culture, power, and size. It could be called the New York of its day.

God sent Jonah to rescue Nineveh. The residents of that great city didn't believe in God. They didn't care about him. Jonah looked at the city and saw only enemies. The Israelites, God's chosen people, were enemies of Nineveh. Israel enjoyed God's favor, Nineveh did not. Nineveh was more like a thorn in Israel's side. They were always provoking them, fighting them, and trying to conquer them. Jonah didn't want to preach God's Word to that city because they didn't deserve God's Word. Yet God thought Nineveh was great because he had compassion for the people of that city.

When you drive home today after church, look at the homes. Look at the cars next to you on the road. Think about all the people in those homes and cars. Do you think they know God? Do they have a church home? How many are going to heaven because they know Jesus? Do you think about that, or do you simply drive past them figuring it doesn't matter? Oklahoma City is big and God couldn't expect us to care about a whole city. If statistics tell us anything one out of every three people you see doesn't know Jesus and isn't in church hearing about him. In Oklahoma City that's almost 200,000 people alone that might be going to hell. Do you care? Do you see them as God sees them? Or are you too busy, too worried, or too comfortable being part of God's family yourself to notice?

Jonah walked into Nineveh a foreigner and enemy and preached this message, **"40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned."** Many could've ignored him or passed him off as crazy. But thankfully they admitted what was true. God's judgment was crashing down. God was rightly angry with them because of their killing practices, idol gods, and corruption. They deserved to be destroyed. But Jonah's message also shared the compassion of God. God was giving them 40 days. It was a time of grace, a time of compassion, a time for them to recognize their sin and change.

Nineveh needed just one day. **"The Ninevites believed God."** They took God at his Word. And it was his compassion that changed them. Everyone in the city stopped their behavior, not one person refused. City-wide they believed God and heard that he was compassionate. **"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."**

This is your time of grace. Do you hear how serious God is over your sin? He wants to see a change in you. It's his compassion for you in Jesus that changes you. You believe God. You trust in his compassion. When you hear how compassionate God was over Nineveh, how could you think any differently about your city? Stop thinking, "Why bother with some people?" Stop and remember that the Savior was sent for you and all people. No one is worthy of God's love. But God bothered to send Jesus for all. He died for all. Now he calls you and me to go to all. Match your heart with God's. Match your desire to tell other people with God's desire to have you tell other people. Share law and gospel. Show their sins and show their Savior. Rejoice that God is gracious and share that grace.

God was happy. Nineveh was happy. Jonah was miserable. **“But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.”** The success was without question. Through Jonah’s proclamation God saved 500,000 people, a whole city. And how did Jonah react? He got mad at God. **“O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”** Jonah basically said he knew God loved people and would save them. That’s why he didn’t want to go in the first place. Jonah was okay with a city of 500,000 all going to hell.

Are some more worthy of God than others? That’s maybe a loaded question. What about Muslim people, are they worthy of God? Or evil dictators? Or thieves and murderers? What about the people who cut us off on the road or make fun of our looks? What about anyone who takes advantage of us? Haven’t we at times thought they weren’t worthy of hearing God’s Word? Haven’t we thought it would be better if they didn’t know Jesus and weren’t saved? Maybe we’ve even wished that someone would go straight to hell.

The amazing thing is Jonah was right. God is compassionate and loving. He is gracious and abounding in love. He is all those things to me and you because we sinned. Not others. Jonah put the blame on someone else. Instead of doing that admit that I have sinned, you have sinned. God’s threats of punishment and judgment should come down on me. Then understand he says those things so he might win you for heaven. Now is your time to hear about the Savior who frees you from sin. God planned for an empty cross and empty tomb that would mean forgiveness for the Ninevites, Jonah, you, and me. God was compassionate to send his Son Jesus for us. In his strength we can turn from sin and rely on his grace. We receive the Lord’s compassion that once rescued a whole city and today has rescued us from our sins in Christ.

When I was younger my dad would help me decide if I should keep a smaller size fish or not. Usually he said, throw it back. If I pleaded and wanted to keep it he would look at me and say, think about what you’re saying. He knew every fish meant work, time, and effort. When God goes fishing he doesn’t look at it that way at all. He put in the work. He gave the time. He made the effort. Jesus did it all out of love for you and me, and everyone. Now we have the opportunity to put in the work, give the time, and make the effort. Share Christ and God’s love, make it more than a fish story, make it about God’s compassion.