

MBC - 1/20/2019 - Pastor Doug Thompson
Jonah: A Story of God's Relentless Grace
#1: "The Merciful God and the Merciless Prophet"
Jonah 1:1-3

This morning we are going to begin a new study, so turn with me to **Jonah**, the 5th of the 12 Minor Prophets that come after the 5 Major Prophetic Books. If that still doesn't get you there, you can look it up in your index, or use mapquest. (And on the back of your outline I've given you a way to remember the order of the Minor Prophets that I still use!)

- Most of you know the basic storyline of Jonah, but as we work through this little book, you're going to see what a powerful, relevant book this is for Christians today. It's got much to say about how we view people of other races and religions, and how God views them. The whole story is a contrast between Jonah's small-minded, small-hearted racism, and God's breathtaking mercy for all sinners - whether they are pagans, or prophets. And as we read Jonah, God is going to read us - and our hearts. The question is going to come up over and over: Are you more like Jonah, or like God? Let's read the whole book together, right now—

Jon 1:1-17 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, (2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." (3) But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. (4) But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. (5) Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

(6) So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." (7) And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. (8) Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" (9) And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

(10) Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. (11) Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. (12) He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." (13) Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

(14) Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." (15) So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. (16) Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made

vows. (17) And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jon 2:1-10 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, (2) saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. (3) For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. (4) Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' (5) The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head (6) at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. (7) When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. (8) Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. (9) But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (10) And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Jon 3:1-10 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, (2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." (3) So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. (4) Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (5) And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

(6) The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. (7) And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, (8) but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. (9) Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." (10) When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Jon 4:1-11 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. (2) And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (3) Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." (4) And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

(5) Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. (6) Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. (7) But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. (8) When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (9) But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." (10) And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. (11) And should not I

pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

[pray . . . about our blind spots . . . we want to see people the way You see them, and see You the way You have revealed Yourself in Your Word.]

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Intro: "We are Jonah."

On the day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Jewish synagogues do what we just did. They read the entire book of Jonah. And then these congregations replied in unison: "*We are Jonah.*"

But I read at least 4 different Jewish interpretations of what "*We are Jonah*" is supposed to mean to them. None of them agreed with the others, and none of them got what it really *should* mean for us to say, "*We are Jonah.*" Do you get it?

The book of Jonah ends with an open question for Jonah, but it's a question for us too: "Are we compassionate and merciful toward our enemies the way God has shown compassion and mercy toward those who were His enemies? People like . . . *us*? Are we more like *God*—?"

Or are we more like *Jonah*, who loved God's mercy for himself and his own people, but would rather die than see those he hated receive the same mercy? Do we love the free grace of God when it is given to us insiders, but question Him when it is given to outsiders? Do we argue with the Potter about what He does with His own clay?

- Jonah was like that self-righteous Pharisee in Lk.18 who boasted to God about his own good works and thanked Him that he wasn't a miserable sinner like that tax-collector cowering over there in the corner with his head down. (And be careful that you don't say, "And I thank God that I'm not like that hypocritical Pharisee, judging other people!" Because if you say that - then you are just like him!)
- And Jonah was like the older brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son - he had always been the good son, he never rebelled, he never brought shame on his father like his loser brother. But when the no-good son comes back home, the father treats him like a prince, kills the best calf and throws him an extravagant party.

How did the older brother react? He wouldn't even go into the party. He stayed outside and sulked and pouted - *just like Jonah*. How dare his father show mercy to someone like the bad brother, who didn't deserve it - like *he* did. Like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable thought that *he* did - and like you and I often think that *we* do! But those bad people, they don't deserve mercy.

We would never say that out loud - and we probably don't see it in ourselves, but it's rooted in our sin nature - it's in me and it's in you. And my brothers and sisters, we won't get what the Holy Spirit wants us to get from this book until we can search our own hearts and say that more than we want to admit, '*We're Jonah.*'

- So don't take this book lightly. This book of Jonah isn't just a big fish story. I know that we have a lot of fishermen here at MBC, and they tell a lot of big fish stories. Some of them are even true! But Jonah isn't about a big fish, it's about a big, merciful God. Jesus, called Himself "One *greater* than Jonah," and He summed up the message of this book in Luke 6:36: "*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*"

Turn your outline over, and look at this from the intro to Jonah in the ESV Study Bible (also on your outline):

- “The primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to engage readers in theological reflection on the compassionate character of God, and in self-reflection on the degree to which their own character reflects this compassion, to the end that they may become vehicles of this compassion in the world that God has made and deeply cares about.”

Yes. And it does so by contrasting Jonah and God. And let say one more thing: This has everything to do with your heart for evangelism and missions. If you have lost your heart for the lost, I guarantee you that you are starting to take your own salvation for granted, thinking that it’s something you deserve - and you also think that some people are so bad and so godless, they don’t deserve it. This book of Jonah is going to remind us that God’s mercy is *always* undeserved, and if it’s undeserved, then *no* sin, no race, no nationality can disqualify a person from that mercy. And has always intended for His mercy to go global.

This morning, we’re just going to look at the first 3 verses, so let’s jump in - *like Jonah did* . . .

I. God commands - Jonah flees. (1:1-3)

- **Jon 1:1-17** Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, (2) “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” (3) But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

Now first of all, it’s stunning that God would call a Hebrew prophet to leave Israel and go preach to a Gentile city - God had never done that before. What would Israel’s Jehovah-God have to say to godless Gentiles? But God came to His prophet and gave him a command: Three verbs in the Hebrew: “Arise, go, call out.” Pretty simple. Was God unclear? He couldn’t have been more clear: God’s clarity was what Jonah had a problem with!

- Mark Twain said, “It’s not the parts of the Bible I don’t understand that trouble me. It’s the parts I *do* understand!”

That’s what troubled Jonah, he understood exactly what God told him to do. The very next words we *should* we read are: “And Jonah *obeyed* the word of the Lord and went to Ninevah.” Instead, what do we read? “*But Jonah* . . . !” Let me tell you, when God gives you a command from His Word, there is no negotiating, or bargaining. No excuses. No if’s, and’s, or but’s. Our only response should be “Yes Lord!” And slow obedience is - no obedience.

- And this is a respected prophet of God, with a track record of faithfulness, *fleeing* from God - he literally ran away from doing God’s will. Amazing.

Why?

To find out, let’s look at the three cities mentioned here:

A. *Nineveh*.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. It was the largest city in the world at that time; the capital of Assyria, which corresponds to modern day Iraq. And Nineveh was the ancient site of modern day, Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq today. You’ve probably heard of Mosul. It was under

the control of ISIS until just recently - and it's still recovering from that reign of terror. I just read that the city still smells of death from the 11,000 people who were killed there, and the corpses are still everywhere. Some of the bodies are ISIS fighters with bombs still strapped to their bodies. Horrible.

- It was just a few years ago that ISIS terrorized that city, with public beheadings; they would throw gay men off the roof of the 11 story National Bank building there. Now imagine that during this time, one day you heard God speaking to you from heaven: "Arise, out-of-shape, northern California Christian! Catch a plane to Mosul, and walk through that ISIS-controlled city with your big ole study Bible under your arm crying out, "Hey all you Muslims, your evil has come up before my Christian God!"

Imagine getting that commission from God. And you start to get a feel for how Jonah must have felt! The Assyrians weren't Muslims back then, but they were pagans and they were bitter enemies of Israel. Within about 3 decades, they would swoop down and take the 10 northern tribes of Israel captive. 722 B.C.

- The Assyrians really were the ISIS of their day. They were notorious for their cruelty. When they took over a town, they didn't have enough troops to leave in the town to keep control, so they had to convince the townspeople not to attempt any revolt. The first thing they would do is to bring the entire town together and slaughter the most important citizens in front of everyone.
- Then they would take others, reach down into their mouths and tear their tongues out, others they would stretch out on the ground with stakes and then skin them alive and hang up their skins on the town wall.
- They would impale others while still alive and hoist them up for everyone to watch them die.

And that was when they were being nice! People got the message. They were absolutely terrified of the Assyrians. We would have been too. Now imagine Jonah getting word from God that he is to go to the capital city of the Assyrians and tell them that his God is about to judge them for their evil! Many scholars say that the reason Jonah fled from God was fear. That would be understandable! But that wasn't the reason he fled. It wasn't fear. It was *hated*.

Let's jump ahead in the story: Jonah did finally go to Nineveh, he preached, they repented - look at what we read:

- **(4:1)** But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [What displeased him? That his enemies repented and found mercy from God instead of judgment.] (2) And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? *That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish*; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (3) Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Wow. Jonah says, "I would rather die than see my enemies receive mercy at Your hands, God! I would rather be dead." I.e., "My hatred for them is greater than my love for You, or even my own life." Wow. That's a bitter man.

*This is where we stop reading the book and the book starts to read us: Ask yourself this—

“Is there any person, or any group of people, ethnic group or political persuasion, that I would rather see punished in hell, than forgiven in heaven? Now think about that - deep in your heart, you have no desire for them to hear the Gospel, and you don’t share the Gospel with them, because it would make you happier if they received justice from God instead of mercy? from God?” Hard questions.

- I had a good friend who was raised in a Christian home, but his dad was a bigot. My friend heard that an Iranian family had moved next door to his parents and he said, “Hey dad, why don’t you learn Farsee so you can witness to your new neighbors?” His dad said, “If they can’t learn to speak English, I’ve got nothing to say to them!”

That was Jonah too! Now think with me: both of these men thought they had a higher standard than God! They would keep heaven neater and cleaner than God would - God is so eager to let in low-lives like Ninevites and Iranians, but they would only let in good people, i.e., people like them.

So that’s why disobeyed God and fled. Now let’s look at the second city—

B. Tarshish.

- (3) But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

God said, “Set your GPS for 500 miles to the northeast,” but Jonah set it for 2,000 miles to the west. Tarshish was in what is now Spain, and that was as far away as he could possibly go in those days. The opposite direction from obedience. Jonah was saying, “I’m done with the prophet business, find someone else to do Your ‘mercy-work.’”

So Jonah runs, but God is always one step ahead of him! Do you ever think that you can run away from the presence of God? That you can hide someplace where He can’t find see you? Jonah knew better, because he knew David’s Psalm—

- Ps. 139:7-12 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (9) If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, (10) even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (11) If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” (12) even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Sometimes the omnipresence of God is our greatest comfort, isn’t it? And other times, it’s our greatest fear. Jonah dreaded the presence of God because his heart wasn’t right. And Jonah knew what Proverbs said—

- Pro 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man!

God not only knows where you are, what you are doing, even in the darkest place you can find; He knows what you are *thinking*: even your thoughts are open to His gaze. How foolish for us to think that we can get away from God. What is even more foolish is *wanting* to get away from His presence! That’s where mercy and forgiveness and Fatherly love are found. That’s last Sunday’s sermon, right?

- Jonah knew better, but here is a profound theological principle. Write this down: “*Sin makes you stupid!*” It’s true: Reason flees when you *turn* from God’s will. Whenever

you sin, you are *acting* as though you can escape God's presence, and *acting* as though sin will bring will more happiness and fulfillment than obeying your heavenly Father.

That's stupid, but that's what sin does to your thinking. Someone I hardly know sent me this passage a few weeks ago - and it's the cure to theological stupidity—

- Proverbs 3:5-6 ⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

The straight path for Jonah was Nineveh, not Tarshish. The third city mentioned here was—

C. Joppa.

Joppa is the modern Israeli city of Jaffa, right on the coast of the Mediterranean. Janice and I have been there. It's the birthplace of Benny Hinn, btw . . . That's where Jonah went—

- . . . He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

What are the chances that right at the time when Jonah runs down to Joppa there would a ship going to the furthest place a ship could go in that day? And Jonah had just the money in his pocket to pay the fare - without even asking for the clergy discount? It's obvious that God is sovereignly guiding Jonah, even when He is out of His moral will.

- But I can just hear some Christian reading this and saying, "But if all the doors are open isn't that the will of God!"

Oh, we need to remember that Satan can open doors too! We don't determine the will of God by 'open doors,' or 'closed doors.' We find the will of God in the wisdom that comes from the Word of God. What we learn from Jonah is that *when a person decides to run from the Lord, Satan will always be there to provide the transportation!* So be very careful that you don't mistake Satan's temptations for God's guidance. Spurgeon said it this way:

- “. . . the Word of the Lord is to be our guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. *It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so.* If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence.”

But there is something amazing about Jonah going to Joppa: there is a biblical connection between Jonah, Peter, and the city of Joppa: let me explain—

****The Cornelius connection.***

In Acts 9, Peter was doing some missionary work of his own, but only among his fellow Jews of course, until something very strange happened - while he was at Joppa.

This is where Peter was when he received that vision of the sheet coming down from heaven with all sorts of unclean, non-kosher animals in it; then the voice of God in heaven telling Peter to kill and eat. Peter refused, he was a good Jew. But God said, "Peter, if I say it's clean, it's clean."

This happened 3X, then the sheet was taken up to heaven, and while Peter is pondering this vision, trying to figure out why God is so concerned with what he eats, who knocks at his door? Mormon missionaries. No, *Gentiles*, inviting Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, a *Gentile*, to speak the Gospel to a whole houseful of - *Gentiles*.

Now at this point in his life, Peter is still like Jonah - he is like the older brother in Jesus' parable - he's not down with anyone but Jews getting in on God's grace. But unlike Jonah, Peter obeyed God and went to Cornelius' house. And God did an incredible work in Peter's heart—

- Acts 10:34-45 ³⁴So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” ⁴⁴While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. *[ethne = the nations] The Great Commission was being fulfilled!*

Oh, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all peoples! Peter was in Joppa to learn that lesson from God. Jonah was in Joppa because he was running from that very same lesson from God. Do you get the lesson?

II. God commands - what will *you* do?

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah.” Beloved, the word of the Lord has just come to you - right here in the last 45 minutes, the word of the Lord has come to you. How are *you* going to respond? Let me try and help guide your thinking—

1.) *What is your Nineveh?*

Are you fleeing from God right now? (This is not the best place to come if you are doing that!) Ask yourself where God has clearly spoken to you in His Word, but obedience seems so hard, such a bitter pill to swallow, that you're considering running away from His will, or maybe you *are* running right now.

- Is it some hidden sin? It's not hidden from God. Is it in your marriage? With your money? Is it something in your heart, a problem of coveting? Or a purity issue? Are you running from serving God in some hard area?

If you don't turn back to God, count on it, sin will make you stupid, and you will begin to rationalize your sin, and excuse it. “Everyone does it, it's not that bad.” And if you keep run-

ning, you will change your beliefs to match your behavior. And that is *deadly*. Are you doing that, or considering doing that?

*What Jonah found out was that every step away from God was another step down, down, down.

My friends, no matter how hard it is to obey God, disobedience will be much harder! And the more God is asking of you right now, the more of His power and blessing and sufficiency you will see when you obey Him. That's what He wants you to see, and that's why He has you in this hard place—

- 2 Corinthians 12:9 ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2.) What is your Tarshish?

If you are fleeing from God, there is a pretty good chance that you are fleeing *to* something else to give you comfort, to provide escape. What is that? Alcohol or drugs, or pornography - is that your Tarshish? It might be TV, or some other relationship. Or maybe your Tarshish is to sleep. Or to work.

Whatever your Tarshish is, it's an idol, and you can't serve two masters. Turn from it. Cut it off. And cut off every possible way of returning to it. Are you willing to do that?

Brothers and sisters, don't flee to Tarshish. Flee to Christ!

3.) What is your heart for the lost?

Maybe you rarely think about that. Maybe you rarely have any contact with unbelievers, but God's not going to let you get away with that as we go through this book of Jonah. It's going to expose twin sins:

1.) The sin of thinking that others don't deserve salvation in Christ - and that always goes along with 2.) the sin of thinking that you do.

These are like logs in our eyes that we just see as tiny little specks. They're blindspots: we might see them in others, but we don't easily see them in ourselves: “I've got my salvation, I'm happy. And there must have been something that God saw in me that He liked. But others are so lost, those people I see at Wal-Mart, that intellectual atheist, that Muslim, that Mormon, that liberal Democrat, that homosexual - obviously there's nothing God likes about them. They don't deserve heaven.”

You and I would never say these things, but is that in our hearts?

And you and I might not think that we hate other people, people who aren't like us, people who live on the other side of the world. But if we never pray for them, if we're content with our own salvation while they are dying and slipping into hell, then the truth is, in some measure, we are guilty of both of these sins. Ask the Holy Spirit to expose to you—

- Is there any person, or group of people that you won't talk to about Christ? Or pray for? Who is that person or that group of people?

Let me put it another way: Is there any person in your life that you refuse to forgive? Now listen: if a certain person comes to mind - I'll bet my bottom dollar that you don't want God to forgive that person either. And if that's true, that is a deadly sin. Jesus said that if you won't forgive others, God will not forgive you.

If there is any of this in your heart this morning, plead with the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how gracious and merciful God has been to you. Undeserving as you were and still are! And then remember the words of the Lord Jesus—

➤ Luk 6:36 *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Has He been merciful to you? Thomas Carlisle wrote a poem called *You Jonah*. It ends like this:

*...Jonah stalked
to his shaded seat
and waited for God
to come around
to his way of thinking.
And God is still waiting
for a host of Jonahs
to come around
to his way of loving*

Prayer: You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. If You've done that for us, how could we not want others to have the same? You showed Your love for us by loving us when we were your enemies, and the Lord Jesus commanded us to love our enemies in the same way. We are Your people! They won't see *Your* love for them if they don't see *our* love for them. Help us Lord. Help us to see every person we meet as an image-bearer who needs Jesus Christ - regardless of their skin color, the language they speak, regardless of their sin, regardless of whether or not they are in this country legally or illegally - open up our hearts to them and help us to be channels for Your love, and by Your grace, messengers of Your saving Gospel.