



“Justice and Mercy”  
Jonah 1:7-16

**Idea:** God is both just and the justifier in salvation.

**Intro:** Justice and mercy... Here are two ideas that we may not fully understand but desire to see at work in our lives. We want to see justice brought on people who do harm to others, yet we expect mercy to be granted to ourselves when we harm others. Expressing this expectation, Sydney Harris said, “We evaluate our friends with a Godlike justice, but we want them to evaluate us with a Godlike compassion.” We are often quick to call for justice, while withholding mercy. Thankfully, God does not respond in the same way we do. Yes, He is just, justly dealing with sin and the sinner. The Lord is also merciful and gives grace to those who have transgressed. Hear what the Bible says about God’s justice and mercy.

*For the Lord is righteous... - Psalm 11:7*

*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. – Deut 32:4*

*I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. – Isaiah 13:11*

God justly addresses sin, but He also extends mercy.

*Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.  
– Isaiah 30:18*

*Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.  
– Psalm 116:5*

We praise God for His justice and mercy! We praise Him for rightly dealing with sin, and we praise Him for His tenderness toward the sinner. Today, as we continue looking at the story of Jonah, I want you to see God’s justice and mercy. Evangelism is at the heart of God’s call for Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach. He was to go and preach of the Lord’s justice and mercy to them. The beauty of the gospel is that sinners can receive mercy and be forgiven for their sin when they believe by faith that Jesus has paid the penalty. We discover in

these verses that our God is both just and the justifier in salvation. He justly exhausts His wrath against all sin, and on the cross Jesus experienced that wrath in order to justify those who trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation.

In our passage today, Jonah is questioned about whether or not he is the cause for the storm. The polytheistic, pagan sailors had a decent understanding of theology. They, like Charles Spurgeon, understood that God never allows His children to sin successfully.

Read Jonah 1:7-16.

**Inquiry:** God said, “Go!” Jonah said, “No!” He is a man who is running from and subverting God’s will. As we think about this rebel, let’s not forget, that Jonah is the prophet of God. He has been used of God to strengthen and expand the borders of Israel (2 Kings 14:23-25). He follows in the line of great men of God such as Elijah and Elisha. Unfortunately, over time Jonah’s heart has grown dull. His ears can barely hear the Word of the Lord, and his eyes have closed.

Jonah went down to Joppa and found a ship that would take him as far as possible from the Lord’s call on his life. The storm that the Lord hurled at him “*threatened to break up*” the ship. The mariners recognized that this storm had a divine aspect to it and discerned it as a divine reaction toward some kind of sin. In response they called upon their gods, while doing whatever they could to save themselves. They threw the cargo overboard in order to lighten the ship. While all this chaos was taking place, Jonah was asleep. He was as dead to the world as he was to God.

The captain found him sleeping below deck. His reaction to the sleeper is understandable. “Get up!! What are you doing? Call on your god!” As Jonah emerges from below, the sailors are casting lots to determine who is at fault. Casting lots consisted of tossing rocks of multiple colors. If a certain color fell toward somebody or if all the colors but one fell toward everybody else, they would say, “Aha! That is the person whom the gods (or God) have picked for what we are asking.”

The lot fell on Jonah, so they questioned him. They wanted to know why the storm was after him. They were looking for an answer within the realm that they could control. They needed a real solution. The storm was getting stronger, and their idols were not helping. Jonah answered their questions. He confessed his liability; he owned his Hebrew nationality and religion. Yet he never mentioned his occupation. Jonah refuses to tell them that he is the prophet of God running from an assignment. Instead, it seems he leads them to believe that he is leaving the faith (1:10).

The sailors need a solution, and Jonah offers one that will work. If they will throw him into the sea, the storm will cease (1:12). Just as we do not see Jonah praying in chapter one, he is also not repenting of his disobedience. His solution is death. He would rather die than preach to the Ninevites, but the sailors were more compassionate than the prophet. They work another solution and try to row harder (1:13). They want a solution without acknowledging the Lord. God’s storm grew in intensity with ever row they made until they finally gave up. They called on the Lord and prayed for mercy in throwing Jonah overboard, recognizing they would be held accountable for his blood (1:14). When Jonah was made to “walk the plank,” the storm dissipated in an instant. This unusual and miraculous event brought a holy awe upon the sailors. They offered sacrifices and made vows to the Lord. It is very possible that the language here speaks of their conversion to the God of Israel and forsaking of their idols.

There is much going on in this passage. We see that believers can and do continue to rebel and walk in sin while experiencing the judging hand of God. We see that sinners seek a solution to their situation outside of God even when the path has been made clear. We see the description of a substitute who dies on behalf of others. The one dies for the many. Jonah’s life is to be offered so that the sailors can be saved. This imagery finds its full expression in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Matt 12:40). We also see the dual theme of

justice and mercy that is woven through the other components. Let's look more closely at justice and mercy. In these verses we see...

## 1. Justice is brought against sin.

A few weeks ago, as we studied verses four and five, we said that God always responds to sin. He does so because of justice. When a crime is committed a just punishment is what we desire. We want justice to be served on the one who committed the crime. We inherently know that justice should be served against those who steal, kill, or harm others. This inherent desire originates in God. The Bible portrays Him as just and righteous. He never glosses over sin. Instead, He always responds to sin justly and righteously, which means He always responds to your sin. As a good Father, God disciplines His children.

Justice is brought against Jonah's rebellion. God hurls a storm upon the sea to break apart the ship the prophet has chartered. The storm is meant to get his attention and bring him to repentance. If he refuses to repent, the storm will bring him to his death. The same is true for the sailors. They have not refused a preaching assignment like the prophet, but they are living in rebellion against God. They are idolaters who worship false gods, denying their Creator the worship He rightly deserves. Their hearts are wicked and rebellious as they seek their own solutions to life's storms (1:13).

The Bible makes very clear God's justice toward sin.

*...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. – Gen 2:17*

God warned Adam of the danger of disobedience. If he ate from the forbidden tree, he would die. Humanity was created to live not die. God breathed into Adam the breath of life (Gen 2:7). He was created to live in community with God, walking with and following God. The warning was that disobedience would sever the relationship by breaking the trust. In that moment, death would enter the picture. Unfortunately, this is exactly what took place in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve experienced the justice of God when they ate from the forbidden tree. They died. Paul picks up this theme as he explains the theology of the gospel to the Romans.

*For the wages of sin is death... – Rom 6:23*

Sin is serious business. It condemns you before God. It separates you from Him. As a Christian, living in open rebellion against God, it places you in a dangerous position. Justice demands that your sin be judged. As a non-Christian, your sin will take you to hell for all eternity.

God is just, and He justly judges sin. Thankfully, there is another component at work in Jonah's story and in ours.

## 2. Mercy is extended toward sinners.

Mercy is going to be extended to Jonah as we shall see next week, but it is first offered to the sailors. The storm was sent to garner the attention of God's prophet and get him back in service. The Lord also graciously used it to show His superiority over the gods the sailors served. He used it to reveal the vanity of self-reliance.

Their repentance and faith are somewhat unexpected. The storm was after-all sent to turn back Jonah. He is the Jew not the sailors. They are pagans from outside the borders of God's chosen people and land. Yet as we read the rest of the story, we discover that His heart was open and seeking after far-from-God people just like the sailors. Jonah was sent to preach to the Ninevites. Mercy was being

extended toward them. Through the preaching of the storm, mercy was likewise being extended toward the sailors.

*For the wages of sin is death, (justice) but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (mercy).*

– Rom 6:23

Sin is serious business, but mercy is readily available.

*Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. – Isaiah 30:18*

How can God be just and at the same time be merciful?

Read Romans 3:21-26.

God is both just and justifier in salvation through the death and resurrection of God the Son, Jesus Christ. All people are sinful both in nature and in practice. They are totally depraved and cut off from God (3:23). Justice has rightly cut them off, and they stand condemned. In mercy and grace, however, God has made a way for condemned sinners to be forgiven and adopted into the family of God. This way is through Jesus Christ who is a propitiation that appeases God's wrath against sin. The penalty for sin was and always is death (Gen 2:17). God's offer of mercy and grace to sinners cannot and is not divorced from His justice. In Christ both are displayed. God's justice is upheld against sin as the wrath of the Father was poured out on Jesus who bore the sin of humanity as a substitute. At the same time God's mercy is upheld as Jesus now freely offers mercy and forgiveness to all who trust in His atoning sacrifice for their sin.

What should we do with this knowledge?

#### Action Points

- 1) Recognize that God justly punishes sin.

You cannot and will not escape the eye of God. He knows your sin, which means He punishes your sin. You will never get away with it (Gal 6:7).

- 2) Receive God's gracious mercy.

Stop running from God and turn toward Him. Through Jesus you can be forgiven and set free. By faith place your faith in Jesus through repentance. If as a believer, you are walking at a guilty distance, come home. Return to the Lord.

**Conclusion:** In October of 1996, sixteen people went missing after reporting that they were abandoning their sinking yacht, *Intrepid*, off Fort Pierce, Florida. The passengers of the 65-foot yacht sent out a MAYDAY call saying the ship was sinking and everyone on board was escaping on a life raft. The Coast Guard reported that seas in the area were rough with waves up to 7 feet high. Four aircrafts searched all night and into the morning for the life raft. After searching 6,000 square miles, the search was called off. *Intrepid* and her sixteen passengers were never found.

Why did the captain of the *Intrepid* not turn back earlier when the storm was not as strong? Did the captain trust in the design of the ship? Did he trust in his ability to navigate? Did he fear turning back? We will never know the answer.

How do you respond when the storms are raging in your life? Do you attempt to ride it out and make it on your own? Do you recognize the divine aspect of the storm and look up, calling on God for help? What is God's Spirit saying to you?

Maybe, today you recognize your need for Jesus as Lord and Savior. You know that you are broken, and you understand He can restore the broken areas of your life. What is keeping you from rising and coming to Jesus?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ?

Maybe you are a believer who is on the run. Stop running from God. Have you not had enough of His disciplining hand? Let's turn to Him in faith and repentance.