

Mercy, Sheer Mercy

Rich Nathan

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Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets

Jonah 4:5-11

I want to begin today by telling you a story that a pastor friend of mine told me. He was helping a guy who had a history of drug addiction. The guy had been clean for a while, so my friend put his reputation on the line and helped the guy find a job at a church member's business. Everything was going along well for a couple of weeks and then this addict fell off the wagon one evening and got high on cocaine. He called my pastor friend in distress in the morning in tears saying, "I can't go into work. I got high last night on cocaine and I've been trying to bring myself down by drinking whiskey this morning. I just know I am going to be fired!" He was so ashamed at what he had done. My pastor friend was angry with him because he felt betrayed; he felt used. He said, "Listen, it would be a lie for you to call in sick. I'm going to come and drive you over to the business and you need to tell your supervisor the truth about what you did. We're finished telling lies, deceiving, and covering up your past. You've got to go in and face the music."

This pastor picked the guy up and they drove to the business where this addict, with great fear and shame, told the supervisor what he had done. He told her that he knew that as a new employee it would be appropriate to fire him. He just wanted to assure her that he would not, in any way, hold a grudge against her because if he was in the same position, he would have fired him.

To both the addict and the pastor's complete surprise the supervisor got up from behind her desk, walked around, put her arm over the shoulder of the addict, and gave him a response that was right from the heart of God. She said, "We're family here. I'm a recovering alcoholic. I know what you're going through. Go home and get some sleep and come back tomorrow ready to work." Then she took his hand, prayed for him to have victory over his addiction, and personally drove him home to get some sleep. What the addict expected was judgement. What he received was mercy. He experienced in very concrete terms the heart of God.

I have been going through a series from the book of Jonah. A series that I've titled "Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets". In this concluding section of Jonah, we see God acting very much like that supervisor in the story that I just told you. People expect judgement and instead what they receive is mercy. I'm calling today's talk "Mercy, Sheer Mercy". Let's pray.

Now let me give you a little bit of background for this text, especially for those of you who haven't been with us the last few weeks. Jonah was commissioned by God to preach a message of judgement against the ancient city of Nineveh, which is located along the Tigris River in the nation of Iraq today. But Nineveh was notorious in the ancient world for its violence. They would march into other nations, like the Vikings or the Huns, to sack the city, loot it,

rape the women, take slaves captive. So, God sends Jonah to announce judgement against this very wicked place. Wonderfully and surprisingly, when the people hear Jonah's message of impending judgement, they all repent and beg God for mercy. At which point, God shows mercy, sheer, undeserved mercy.

This upsets Jonah because he wants the people of Nineveh judged. He wants God to fry them. Nineveh had been particularly ruthless with Jonah's people, the Jews. And so, we read last week, that Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "Oh Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." This is the way that God has chosen to reveal Himself in the Bible, as a gracious and compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Now, I want to focus our attention for a moment on that word compassionate or merciful in verse 2 when it says, "You are a gracious and merciful God". The Hebrew word for merciful is *rachoom*, and it's related to another word, *racham*, which means a mother's womb. You see, when God wanted to communicate to people what His mercy felt like, how connected He was to people, He picked a word that connotes the strongest possible bond of feeling between one person and another—a mother's womb, that internal, almost visceral, response of a mother for her baby who is in need. There's a depth of connection, a rise of feeling from the womb that I don't think fathers know anything about.

I remember hearing Jack Deere, who is a Christian author, comment about his wife's miscarriage. His wife suffered a miscarriage after carrying her baby a few months and was obviously broken hearted about it, as was Jack also broken hearted because they were so looking forward to having this baby. Those of you who have gone through the tragedy of a miscarriage know the pain of shattered dreams, of unfulfilled desires. Jack's wife didn't bounce back nearly as quickly as he did. He found her at home one night just sobbing in bed and he didn't know what to say to comfort her. He didn't know what to do, so he went over and put his arm around his wife and she put her head on his shoulder. Then he made the fateful mistake of saying, "Honey, please don't cry. We can try again. We can have another baby." His wife just pushed him away, got really red-faced, and her fists were all balled up. She said, "I don't want another baby! I wanted this baby! This was my baby!" *Rachoom*, mercy, it comes from that womb connection.

I know in my own home the difference in visceral concern that my wife, Marlene, has regarding the kids. My concern is that I care, I love, but there is nothing of her radical passion, what I consider sometimes almost a neurotic obsession with our children's well-being that my wife displays. She will literally stand by the phone waiting for them to call. There have been very few meals we've ever eaten out in which Marlene hasn't excused herself once or twice to call home and just check up and see how things are going.

What is mercy? It's a depth of love like a mother's love for her nursing child. It's a concern, a pity upon the helpless, the needy. A theological word book on the Old Testament defines mercy this way: this word is frequently used of God and incorporates two concepts; first, the strong tie and strength of feeling that God has towards those whom He has called His own children—God looks upon His own as a mother looks upon her children, and the second concept is that of pity. God shows pity toward the needy in the face of their deserved judgment upon the condition of their repentance. Two ideas: strong affection mingled with pity.

Now it says here in verse 5, "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." He separated himself from the people of Nineveh. Perhaps he was hoping in his heart of hearts God would change His mind again and decide to judge the people. Perhaps he secretly wished that God would rain fire and brimstone down on the city of Nineveh in the same way that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed a millenium and a half before.

You know one of the key attributes of mercy is standing with another person, identifying yourself with them, getting close to them. It is the opposite of mercy to stand at a distance, to separate yourself from another, to push other people away. It is really hard to be merciful unless you get close, unless you get next to somebody. I mean, mercy is more than just writing a check from the safety of your paneled den, behind the gates of a community with its own private security force. Mercy is shown when you volunteer to teach kids. Mercy is shown when you actually serve soup to somebody in a soup kitchen, or pack a bag of groceries and hand them out to somebody through our food pantry, or pray for somebody who is in need by placing your hand on their shoulder. That's why I love Vineyard's very biblical practice of the laying on of hands. When people receive prayer here we don't stand fifty feet away and think about them before God, we get close. We put our hand on their shoulder, on their head. We get connected. We feel what they feel.

Feeling what someone else feels, opening your heart enough to sympathetically share another's feelings. I recently heard John Maxwell, a Christian pastor, speak about how he cancelled a planned speaking engagement, and instead he flew across the country to join in another pastor's 20th anniversary church celebration. He said many Christians are really pretty good at weeping with those who weep - we're up there with the Kleenex up front here; Vineyard is one of the few churches in America that has mandatory boxes of Kleenex on the stage. We're good at weeping with those who weep - but we're not very good at rejoicing with those who rejoice. Someone else is doing great, and most of us have a hard time celebrating their success. "Oh, they got a big push from their dad. Oh, they're kind of obsessive and driven. Oh, they had an unfair advantage."

Why did Jonah separate himself from the city of Nineveh? Certainly, he separated himself because of fear, perhaps the fear of God's judgment, that he would be swept along with it. Perhaps his separation was self-protective. That's

a lot of why we disconnect. We're afraid of being hurt. Most likely, he separated himself because of prejudice. He simply could not believe, because of the narrowness of his own heart, that the people of Nineveh should receive God's mercy just as his own people, the Jews, had received God's mercy.

Prejudice. Have you ever experienced the sting of prejudice? When you are part of the majority in a culture, if you come from a privileged background, you may not know what it is like to feel the disdain, the rejection of another person's prejudice. Most of you know that I became a follower of Christ from a Jewish background and I am proud to say that in this church there are people from virtually every religious background, and some from irreligious backgrounds. We have former Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, many Jews, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Charismatics, many, many people who have come from utterly unchurched backgrounds and they've come to this place of discovering God's mercy offered to us in Jesus Christ. That is what unites us here in the Vineyard. Wherever we are coming from, we all came to God's mercy offered in Jesus Christ.

Anyway, I was about nineteen years old and beginning to attend this church. Marlene and I were at an adult Sunday School class and the discussion turned to the story of the Good Samaritan. The teacher of this Sunday School at a church filled with Christians asked the class if they thought that Jews today were just like the unloving Jews in the story of the Good Samaritan. Well, that provoked a series of remarks from the members of the class about negative encounters they had with various Jews in their neighborhood or on the job, and how Jews acted in a certain way and how you can always tell a Jew. One person said you can tell a Jew by the way they cut their lawn. Apparently, his Jewish neighbor cut his lawn in a way that he regarded as totally unacceptable. Another person commented on the kind of cars Jews tend to drive. Now, you have to understand that these folks considered all this discussion to be safe; it was all protected because they knew no Jews were present in the room, so their defenses were down. They were openly revealing the prejudice of their hearts.

Before you judge them, perhaps you have been in the exact same situation where your defenses are down, where you think everybody here is in my group and so you're safe to say something that's full of prejudice. Every time we pass a prejudice remark, every time we claim someone has a group characteristic, anytime we judge somebody on a basis other than the content of their character, we are separating ourselves from them and we are revealing how far we are from the heart of God. Men do that with women; wives do that when they get into husband-bashing group discussions. White people do that with blacks and blacks with whites. We don't identify with people when we separate from them.

Sometimes we separate ourselves from others because we are forgetful concerning our own neediness and the many times we have required mercy from the Lord. It is often a shocking revelation to be awakened, again, to the fact of your own need.

Christian writer, Phillip Yancey, tells the story of his conversion. He was a good church-going kid, who considered himself to be a Christian. There are

some of you who go to church regularly, or were raised in church, or were baptized as babies and you consider yourselves to be Christians. But Phillip Yancey found himself at a Bible college and he survived, he said, by learning to mimic spiritual behavior. He needed to mimic spiritual behaviors in order to get good grades at this Bible school. It was a requirement, for example, to do Christian service. So each student would participate in a service activity like prison ministry, or nursing home visitation, or street evangelism. Phillip Yancey signed up for university work; every Saturday night he would show up at the student union at the University of South Carolina and watch television. He was supposed to be sharing his faith. The next week he would report all the people he had supposedly approached about personal faith. He said that he must have been a pretty good storyteller because nobody ever questioned him on his totally made up stories.

He used to have to go to these embarrassing prayer meetings. There were four other guys and him, and they would pray. The four other guys first—Joe, then Craig, then Chris, then Bill, then there would be this long awkward pause as they were waiting for Phillip to pray and he never prayed. Then somebody would say, “In Jesus’ name. Amen.” And they would open their eyes and go up to their room. One night, something strange happened, Phillip decided to pray. He said, “God,” and he could immediately feel the tension in the room rising. “God, here we are, supposed to be concerned about the ten thousand students at the University of South Carolina who are going to hell. Well, you know that I don’t care if they go to hell and if there is one. And you know, God, that I don’t particularly care if I go to hell.” You would have to go to Bible college to appreciate how those words sounded to other people in the room, but he might as well have been talking about going out and offering child sacrifices.

For some reason, Phillip began talking to God about the parable of the Good Samaritan and how he was supposed to feel the same concern and the same mercy toward university students of South Carolina that the Samaritan felt for the bloody Jew lying in the ditch, but he felt nothing. Then, he said it happened, in the middle of the prayer just as he was describing how little mercy he had, he saw the story in a whole new light. He had been visualizing the scene—the Samaritan dressed in robes, bending over a dirty, bloody person who is lying in a ditch. Suddenly the scene changed in his mind, the Samaritan’s face became the face of Jesus. It was Jesus bending over the ditch to a bloody, dirty person and then he looked in his mind’s eye at the dirty, bloody person lying in a ditch and it was Phillip’s own face. He saw Jesus reaching down with a moistened rag to clean his wounds, to stop the flow of his blood. Then he stopped in the middle of his prayer and began to cry. He had never seen the mercy of God so personally applied to him.

When was the last time God’s mercy was real to you? When was the last time you saw yourself as the guy lying in a ditch, as much in need as the person you are rejecting and separating yourself from? When was the last time God’s mercy caught you totally off guard? When was the last time you expected and feared God’s judgment, but instead you received God’s mercy?

We separate ourselves by grudges. You know, our lack of mercy not only cuts off physically, but relationally. Our lack of mercy always isolates. In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother who lacked mercy is standing outside the party, he's cut off. Everyone else is inside celebrating and he is outside. I know a woman who is in her seventies and who, over the years, has taken offense at various relatives for supposed snubs, for the failure to acknowledge important dates, for their lack of thank-you, for lack of wedding gifts, and so on. Rather than allowing mercy to triumph over another's offense, she has cut herself off to the point where she only has two, at most three, adult relationships in the whole world. She comes from a large family, but she didn't let mercy triumph.

You know, the Bible is a continual tale from beginning to end about how mercy triumphs over judgment with God. There is one particular story that comes to mind. In Numbers 20, the people of Israel are crossing the desert and are complaining for the 1000th time, like kids in a hot car on a long summer trip – when are we going to get there? I'm hungry! I'm bored! Why do we have to go visit Grandma? – But rather than lash out like a frustrated parent – Just shut up already, I'm tired of listening to you complain – God, in mercy, gave the people fresh water, and he judged Moses, who separated himself from his people and called them rebels. Every other time before, Moses had prayed for the people of Israel. This time, they so frustrated him that he blew up at them. You know, whenever you stand over or against people, whenever you want God's judgment to fall, you're far from God's heart. Let me ask you a personal question. Is there anyone you've secretly wanted God to judge? Any ex-spouse? Any parent? An old boyfriend or girlfriend? A mean kid in school?

God shows His incredible mercy by choosing to identify with people and get close to them. He particularly did this in the incarnation. Instead of staying far away in heaven, God the Son took on human flesh, walked in our midst, rubbed shoulders with us, put his hands on lepers, allowed the dirt of Palestine to cling to His feet. God got near to beggars, and down-and-outers, and up-and-outers, and God's mercy triumphed over his judgment. The mercy...sheer mercy of God.

In verses 6-8 we read of God's merciful provision. It says, "Then 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. 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." Three times in these three verses we read of God's provision. In verse six, God provided a vine. In verse seven, God provided a worm. In verse eight, God provided a scorching east wind. God provided, God provided, God provided. The same phrase is used in Jonah 1:17 to describe God's provision of a fish that swallowed Jonah. I love the fact that we see this incredible contrast between God providing something as small as a tiny little worm to fulfill His purpose, and something as great and big as the weather or a giant fish.

You know, some people think that something is too small, too insignificant to bother the Lord with, as if God is some C.E.O. of a big corporation. In the Middle Ages they had all these saints standing between us and Christ because, after all, Christ is so far away, so important, so big. You can't bother Jesus Christ with your petty, insignificant, little worries. So we needed all these junior secretaries to help out. God provided a worm in verse seven. Do you understand that there is nothing in your life too petty, too insignificant to bring to God? The Bible says to cast all of your cares upon Him because He cares for you. Maybe you need to purchase a wedding gift for someone—did you ever think about praying for God's direction, God's help in finding the perfect gift? Maybe you're concerned about one of your children's friends—have you prayed about it? Maybe you need help to think clearly and not get nervous on an exam or to do well in a sport.

There is nothing too insignificant to bring to God and there is nothing too great! God provided the wind. He's the author of the weather. "Oh my goodness, this is so big, such a massive problem!" Your business is about to go under, you're out of work, you've been diagnosed with some dreadful illness, your parents or a loved one is desperately ill. You need to meet a God who is bigger than any problem you have. The mercy of God is revealed in the fact that there is nothing too small or too big for God's people to bring to their Lord. You can receive prayer for a chronic condition that you've had for twenty years. Rich Evans called me yesterday, so excited. He said a woman had been visiting his congregation since Easter; she's fifty years old, and has been totally deaf since age six. You can pray for the salvation of a loved one. You can pray that God would help you to balance your checkbook. For some of us, that would be a miracle.

This story of the little worm that chewed on Jonah's vine and destroyed it tells me that in God's book you really have nothing unless it's eternal, unless it's lasting. What we have here on earth is so fragile. The least little worm can destroy our precious treasure. You turn your head while you're driving or you show a little inattention and you smash up your car. A Wendy's frosty that's accidentally dumped by one of your kids in the back seat of the car, or a little throw-up from one of your babies and your car loses its new car smell. A little spark near your water heater and your house goes up in flames. One blown account, one lost customer, one theft and your business can be ruined. One indiscretion, one foolish night and you destroy a marriage, you destroy a loving relationship. What do you have in your life that can't be destroyed by something as little as a worm? What do you have in your life, in other words, that's absolutely solid? Absolutely lasting? That a little inattention, a little negligence, a little theft, a little fire can't wipe out? I am asking you a really important question. What do you have that can't be stolen and that can't die?

Jesus said, "Don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourself treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Are you quite certain that you have an eternal treasure waiting for you in

heaven? Do you have a relationship with God that is so solid and so real that it can withstand the little worms of life? God's mercy is revealed through His provision, especially His provision of things eternal.

God's mercy is revealed in His denial of provision. It says Jonah was very happy about the vine, 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." The scorching east wind in that part of the world is called a sirocco. Dennis Bailey, in the geography of the Bible, says, "During a sirocco the temperature rises steeply, sometimes even climbing during the night and it remains high about 16-22 degrees above average." In Mesopotamia, the summer heat will go well above 100 degrees, and so if the temperature rises during a sirocco 16-22 degrees above that, we are talking about extreme temperatures above 120 degrees. Bailey goes on to say, "At times every drop of moisture seems to be extracted from the air so that one has a feeling that their skin has been drawn much tighter than usual. Sirocco temperatures try the temper and make even the mildest people fretful and irritable. Siroccos destroy all of the vegetation in an area."

Isaiah 40:7 says, "The grass withers and the flower falls because the breath of the Lord blows on them." Jonah has his precious little vine, the vine that was providing him with some shade, he has his precious little vine destroyed. And what does he say to God? He says that he is angry enough to die. "I don't want to live without my vine!" You know, it's all too common to be so wrapped up in something created—a business, a relationship, a dream—that if, and when, that thing is taken away we feel like we don't want to live. You know you have an idol in your life when you are overly distressed when and if that thing or relationship or situation is destroyed. Your boyfriend breaks up with you; you don't want to live. You get rejected for a new job; bleak depression.

You can tell how tightly your hands are wrapped around something when you discover how painful it is to have your fingers pried loose. Want to know how much you cling to things here on earth? Just look at how much pain you experience, how much anger you have when you lose that thing. "Oh, I don't care anything about what other people think of me." How much anger do you have when your reputation is in any way, in the least, challenged or tarnished? "Oh, I don't care anything about my possessions." How do you react when someone returns a loaned item and it's damaged? "Oh, I have a free hand regarding ministry, I just want to be where God wants me." Look at the frustration, the anger, the upset when you are cut out of a ministry role.

We think of God's mercy only being revealed when God says "yes". But sometimes God is most merciful when He says "no", when He, with tough love, permits one of our idols to be taken away—business success, academic or athletic success. I call it God's merciful denials. I see God's merciful denials particularly in unanswered prayer.

I want to finish today by looking at God's merciful concerns. Verses 10 and 11: "But the Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and dies overnight.

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?” Two times in these two verses we read the word concerned. In verse 10 the Lord says, “you have been concerned about this vine”, and in verse 11, “but Nineveh has more than 120,000 people, should I not be concerned about this great city?”

Let me share with you what I think cuts down on our show of mercy, our own practice of mercy. One of the chief things that certainly restrains the display of the merciful heart of God from the Christian church towards people in the church, and towards the world, is that mercy is simply not valued, it's not prioritized in many churches. If you were to pick the top five priorities of some churches, mercy wouldn't be even number five among the things valued and admired. One of the truly sad states of affairs in the Christian church is that mercy is not at the top of the list. You say, “What is at the top of the list in many churches in America?” The ability to articulate in a clear fashion, right doctrine, correct opinions—that's right at the top of the list. A person is considered to have strong faith, to be a healthy person, a good Christian person if they have correct doctrine, even if they are cold-hearted, even if they are mean, even if they are ruthless and aggressive. A person could show not a drop of the mercy of God in a year toward the unattractive, toward the uneducated, toward those with limited social skills, toward those who are different than us theologically or in practice, but so long as they have correct doctrine they are admired, they are okay, they are safe.

Do you know how far from the Spirit of God the priorities are in many American churches? In many church circles we have become very nearly Pharisees—picking apart other people's teachings, scrupulously combing over tapes in order to find errors—not a drop of the mercy of God. Be honest, church people—I speak to church people now—what do you prioritize in terms of admirable Christian qualities? I am not suggesting, by the way, that doctrine is unimportant, that truth does not matter, at all. But in the Bible truth is not just something that is intellectualized, truth is not simply something that has an effect on your opinions, truth changes your life. If you really know the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—if you don't simply know **about** Him. Most Americans know **about** the Trinity, they know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but they don't know the Trinity. If you really know the triune God, then the triune God not only changes your doctrine, but also your life. Over and over again, Jesus said to people, “Go learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

What do you value—doctrinal correctness, maybe charismatic gifts, political cause, or mercy? I love the way that the Lord puts it in Jonah, “What do you value, people or things? You were concerned about a vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

We care about things in America, things that we didn't make, as the Lord says in verse 10, “You've been concerned about the vine, though you did not

tend it or make it grow.” The things that we have that have been given to us, how much more should God be concerned about the work of His hand?

We care about things that are temporary. In verse 10 it says, that vine sprang up over night and died over night. In America we place a higher value on things than on people. How often, parents, have you found yourself yelling at your kids because they’re hurting a thing—the cup is in the wrong place, their shoes have a little mud on them, their feet are in the wrong place? We don’t mind breaking a child’s spirit, but we very much mind breaking a lamp. God’s mercy is shown in His prioritization of His people over things. God particularly cares about children. I love this little phrase where it says that there are 120,000 people who don’t know their right hand from their left—it’s talking about kids. God’s heart really goes out for kids. The *rachoom*, the feeling of *rachoom* is really displayed toward children. I pity the person who hurts or abuses a child and has not repented, when they have to stand before God. God feels *rachoom*, deep womb mercy toward kids. There’s a great encouragement to parents who pray for their children, who dedicate their children to the Lord: the Lord cares very deeply for your kids. It’s also an encouragement toward people who work with kids; God’s blessing is on you. Kids or things, people or things—where’s your heart?

I remember one time, my wife, Marlene, turned around quickly and with her elbow knocked an expensive camera to the floor that was balanced on a stair case. Marlene was so distraught and apologetic when the woman who owned the camera ran over and said, “Please, don’t be upset! How are you? Are you okay?” I thought, “Here’s a woman that has the heart of God”. “Forget about my camera, how are you?” Friends, where are you at on this business of people versus things?

Let me make this personal. Do you lend freely? Your car? Your camping equipment? Your athletic equipment? Do you lend freely or do you just give leftovers, your excess, things you don’t really care about? God’s mercy is displayed by open hands that are willing to loan. Do you regularly practice hospitality? Do you regularly have people stay with you? Offering them your bed or a spare bed? Having people eat your food? Some people won’t host a group in their home, they won’t have a regular meeting because they haven’t been touched and stretched by the wonderful, free mercy of God. Are you hospitable, do you have a regular flow of people into your home? Do you make excuses? “It’s not very impressive, I don’t have that much, or what I have costs too much.”

The book of Jonah ends with the question “Should I not be concerned about this great city?” When the Lord wants to stab our consciences He often will end a book or end a story with a question and leave it to us to resolve it. How merciful are you? Have you recently felt *rachoom*, that visceral feeling of mercy as you looked at someone who was in need? Do you find yourself isolating, separating yourself from others, especially the needy? Or do you get close, do you draw near? Have you been touched by the mercy of God recently, His provision, maybe even His denial? Do you value mercy? Do you pray for mercy? Do you ask God to stretch your heart and make you merciful? Are you concerned over this great city that you live in? Where is your heart? Let’s pray.

Sermon—June 28th & 29th, 1997
Nathan
Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets
Jonah 4:5-11

Rich

Mercy, Sheer Mercy

- I. God's Merciful Identification (Jon. 4:5)
 - A. Separation by fear and prejudice
 - B. Separation by forgetfulness
 - C. Separation by grudges
- II. God's Merciful Provision (Jon. 4:6-8)
 - A. Nothing too big or small
 - B. Nothing unless it's lasting
- III. God's Merciful Denials (Jon. 4:7, 8)
- IV. God's Merciful Concerns (Jon. 4:10, 11)
 - A. Mercy or correctness?
 - B. People or things?