

A Prayer for When You Need God's Grace

By Frank Sellar

Jonah prayed to the Lord, "O 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 are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:2-3

It has been suggested that in Chapter One Jonah runs *from* God. In Chapter Two Jonah runs *into* God. In Chapter Three Jonah runs *with* God and in Chapter Four Jonah tries to *run* God!

In this prayer, Jonah was telling the Lord off. He was saying to Almighty God, 'I knew this was going to happen!' It sounds so astonishing! Could it be that prayers we pray might also be every bit as absurd! Giving out to God and having the temerity to tell Him how He ought to behave? Prayer can be a funny thing if we are the ones telling God what He really ought to do and what not to do.

Having refused to pray on board ship and then having prayed a prayer of thanksgiving in the belly of the fish, now Jonah prays a really selfish, angry prayer. See how many times 'I', 'me' and 'my' appear in this outpouring? Six times. Less than perfect Jonah! While Jonah does indeed pray here in Nineveh, it's not in order to develop a relationship of love and humility and trust but to scold!

It's just as well the Lord is indeed gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love! How good God is, letting His children rant. But the Lord who is kind, merciful and forgiving wants Jonah to grow in grace and knowledge and love of Him and so He lets him speak before answering. How very different was Jonah compared to another preacher 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14) who shed tears over the city to which he had come to preach:

'As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring your peace..." (Luke 19:41-42). 'O Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing' (Matt. 23:37).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how very patient you are with us and with our prayers that are more often letting off steam and demanding things we want. Please align our hearts to yours so that even as Jesus prayed with tears, we too might have His compassion, not hardness of heart toward those in need of the Saviour. For His Name's sake. Amen.