

Reluctant: Surprising Glimpses of Grace

Jonah 1.7-16

Small Group Discussion

Opening question (this question is designed to get everyone involved in discussion)

- Have you ever had a time when you actively resisted something that would have been good for you—a relationship, a job change, something your parents wanted for you, or even something God wanted you to do? How did it work out in the long run? Share about that experience as you are comfortable.
- Today we get *three surprising glimpses of God's grace*, even in the midst of our failures. Before you dive in, take a moment to define or discuss the meaning of “grace.”

Read Jonah 1:1-16, then discuss the following.

1. First Glimpse of Grace

- Jonah finds himself on a boat, in a deadly storm, with pagan, polytheistic sailors. Yet commentators agree that the writer casts these sailors in a much better light than Jonah, throughout the story. What are some examples of this happening in the story?
- In what way are the sailors doing what Jonah should have been doing?
- Sometimes we get a glimpse of God's grace **in relationships with our unbelieving neighbors**.
- Have you ever seen your unbelieving neighbors (or coworkers, or community members, etc.) responding to community needs more effectively than we believers? Share an example.
- This fact is an expression of what theologians call, “Common Grace.” Leaders, ask your group to provide a definition of “Common Grace” and “Special Grace.” A sermon excerpt is below, in case you need it for reference.
 - *Common grace* refers to the fact that “God bestows gifts of wisdom, moral insight, goodness, and beauty across humanity, regardless of race or religious belief... That means that all good and great artistic expressions, skillful farming, effective governments, and scientific advances are God's gifts to the human race. They are undeserved, gifts of God's mercy and grace. They are also ‘common’” (Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet*).
 - *Special grace*, on the other hand refers to the experience of God's grace that comes uniquely through a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- What are some examples of common grace that all of you have experienced?
- Can you name any ways that non-believing members of the community have shown common grace in the way that they address needs in the community? How might these examples inspire you?
- Try to name 5 needs in our community to which we might respond by bringing God's grace, and our resources, to bear on the need.
 - How could our group take actions to meet at least one of those needs?

2. Second Glimpse of Grace

- Jonah's correct religious knowledge didn't stop his wrong action. Why do you think that was the case?
 - Have you ever faced a situation where you had the right religious knowledge, but it didn't produce the right action in you? Why did that happen?
- What are the sailors ultimately trying to ascertain, in v. 8?
- What does Jonah's core identity have to do with who he worships? How are our identity and the object of our worship inextricably linked?
- Looking at Jonah's answer in v. 9—specifically the very beginning of his answer—what do you notice about the aspect of his identity that was most vital to Jonah? (Leaders: his race or ethnicity).
- What can we conclude, based on the fact that Jonah identifies his ethnicity first and his spiritual allegiance second?
- Have you ever noticed in your life, that you were building your identity on something other than God's love and acceptance?
 - If so, what caused you to realize that fact?
 - How did you make changes once you had this realization?
- **The glimpse of God's grace is in the identity he offers us for free**, which we simply cannot earn. What is that identity?
- Amidst all that he did wrong, what does Jonah get right with respect to the sailors, in v. 12?
- Timothy Keller observes, "The truest pattern of love is substitutionary.... All life-changing love is some kind of substitutionary sacrifice." In what way is Jonah exhibiting substitutionary love here?
 - How have you been the giver or recipient of substitutionary love in your human relationships?
 - In what way is Jonah's substitutionary action here pointing to what Jesus would do in a much greater way? See Matt. 12:38-41.
- The substitutionary love of Jesus is the means by which we receive a new, lasting, identity. Is there anything that is keeping you from building your life on this identity that Jesus offers you?

3. Third Glimpse of Grace

- How do the sailors respond when the storm ends (v. 16)?
- Commentators agree that the sailors are acting on faith in Jonah's God, the God of the Bible. What indicators do you see of that fact here?
- What is so striking about the fact that God used Jonah to point these men to himself?
- **God uses us to point people to himself in spite of our failures.** Have you ever seen God use you to lead someone into relationship with himself, even when you were not living up to God's expectations for you?
- Who, in your spheres of influence, might be spiritually sensitive and open to God's grace right now? What are some next steps that you think God wants you to take in those relationships? What is holding you back?
- When have you seen God's grace being expressed in ways that are greater than your sin?

Share and Pray

- Pray about some of the needs or realizations that have come about as a result of this discussion, or this week's sermon.
- Share other needs and pray for one another.