



Mercy Withheld

For I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Jonah 4:2b

Jonah is not a very admirable person. The lessons I am taking away from studying this account are negative ones, things *not* to emulate. Jonah was perhaps the worst preacher ever. How sad for him. Unfortunately, there are so many characteristics that Jonah displayed in this brief account that are still active in our lives today.

He ran away from the call of God, endangered his own life and the lives of others in the process, was only repentant when he was forced to be because he was in an intolerable situation, only did what God told him to do after getting in a great deal of trouble. He likely didn't give the entire message that God gave him, then got mad when God received His desired result anyway. He turned the great mercy and compassion of God into a negative. He was only happy when God saw to his own comfort, and exceedingly angry when God took his comfort away. He completely missed the heart of God.

It struck me that in the feature verse above, Jonah used these five characteristics of God as the basis for his argument against preaching in Ninevah. Those five characteristics were the very *reason* Jonah didn't want to go. How terribly sad! He didn't want to tell this group of people that they were wrong in their way of thinking, that there was a better way, and that the God of the universe wanted them to know it and to turn away from their wickedness. In his mind they didn't deserve it.

Do we withhold the truth from certain people? I have to say I am guilty, if not in deed, certainly in thought. There are those who I think don't deserve the mercy and grace of God. Look what they've done! Look how they've hurt others! Look how they've hurt *me!*

Jonah didn't give the Ninevites any hope. He only told them that in forty days they would be overthrown. What a merciful God we serve that stirred the hearts of some 120,000 people to acknowledge their wickedness, repent, and humble themselves from greatest to least in the hope that God would relent.

I had to ask myself why would God use such a miserable man to spread His message of hope. But the account clearly shows that even the prideful arrogance of Jonah could not forestall the message of hope and mercy of our loving God. I'm thankful, because I needed that mercy though I did not and could not deserve it. I pray that I do not withhold the mercy I have received from others who do not and cannot deserve it.

Father, we thank You for Your grace and compassion, Your patience and mercy. Thank You for offering it to us when we didn't deserve it. Help us to see with Your eyes as we look at those around us and have Your heart of compassion on those who need You so desperately.