

For the Living of These Days

Session 4: Jonah – Running Counter to God

Jonah's complaint

Jonah was displeased

"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry." Jonah 4:1

Jonah was exceedingly displeased. The Hebrew word used to qualify his displeasure is strong!

Strange for him to be displeased given that the Ninevites had listened to his message and repented. Usually, that would make a preacher very pleased!

Jonah prayed to God expressing his anger

"He 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 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 4:2-4

Jonah comes clean; fully confessing why he didn't want to leave home to go to Ninevah and why he ran in the opposite direction.

He didn't run away because he thought he would be ineffective.

He ran away because he thought he would be EFFECTIVE!

Why? Because God was GOOD! Too good to the WRONG people

Goodness of God: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, forgiving and saving.

Jonah again used the Psalms in his prayer: Psalm 103:8 and

Psalm 145:8. Joel and Nahum also used these phrases:

Joel 2:13 and Nahum 1:3

Jonah was angry that God has offered forgiveness and mercy to his enemy

The Jews did not want to share God's message with Gentile nations; particularly, wicked nations in Jonah's day. They also resisted in Paul's day as well. See I Thessalonians 2:14-16

The Jews had forgotten their original purpose as a nation – to be a blessing to the rest of the world by sharing God's message with other nations. See Genesis 22:18

Jonathan Swift wrote some verse that expresses Jonah's frame of mind:

*We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There is no place in heaven for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.*

Jonah himself called on the mercy of God and enjoyed the mercy of God when it was extended to Jonah. Now he resents it when it is extended to others.

What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the people of Nineveh?

What if God treated us the way we want God to treat some people (our enemies, those we think who are unworthy of God's mercy and grace?)

Jonah is so upset (so angry) that he wants to die!

The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh is so painful to Jonah that he would rather die than think about it!

Wow! Isn't this sad?

God confronts the prophet Jonah

God questions Jonah's heart

"But the Lord replied, 'Have you any right to be angry?'" Jonah 4:4

God likes to ask us questions, because they reveal our heart. It also put us on proper ground before God, because He has every right to question us and we owe Him answers.

- Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you have done? (Genesis 3)
- Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? (Genesis 4)
- Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? (2 Samuel 12)
- Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? (Isaiah 6)
- Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16)
- What do you want Me to do for you? (Matthew 20)
- Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? (Luke 22)
- Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? (Acts 9)
- What question might he be asking you today?

Jonah, in expressing his anger against God, was being honest about his feelings – something good; but we should not for a moment think that all of our feelings towards God are justified.

Jonah was angry towards God, and yes, it was all right for Jonah to state his anger towards God; but he must also repent of his anger towards God.

Does it make you upset (infuriated) when someone questions your right to say, feel or do something that is an overreaction, inappropriate, down-right immature?

Do you immediately recognize the error of your ways or do you become defensive? (Just asking for a friend!)

God provides an object lesson for Jonah

“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. 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. He wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’” Jonah 4:5-8

Jonah went out of the city so that he might see what would become of the city.

God ministered to tenderly to Jonah just as he had to Nineveh. He could have destroyed Jonah for his defiant anger but instead he taught him a lesson.

Just as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, now God provides a vine to shelter Jonah from the sun.

This is the first time we find Jonah happy!

Could it be that Jonah’s anger and his happiness was about himself?

God takes away the vine and adds the hot sun and driving wind to help Jonah as a further lesson for Jonah. What was the lesson God was trying to teach Jonah?

The sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint: Jonah was angry with God because He brought the people of Nineveh to repentance (Jonah 4:1). The ancient Hebrew word for "angry" is literally "to be hot." Now God would let *Jonah* feel some of the heat!

Jonah was very grateful for the plant... "It is better for me to die than to live": When God took the plant and its pleasant shelter away from Jonah, he missed the plant so much that he wanted to die.

Jonah allowed even a silly thing like a plant to become an idol.

God applies the object lesson

"But God said to Jonah, 'Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?' 'I do, he said, 'I am angry enough to die.' 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 died 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?'" Jonah 4:9-11

Jonah made three errors that angry people often make. Each of these things put Jonah in a worse place, not a better place. Jonah quit, Jonah separated himself from others and Jonah became a spectator.

"It is right for me to be angry, even to death:" These are the last words of Jonah recording in this book.

God's last words: "And should I not pity Nineveh..."

The lesson is clear: not only does God's concern for people go beyond Israel, but He is totally justified in doing so.

The lesson of Jonah reminds us that **God is the God of all people!**

God is more merciful than we would ever imagine. There is a wideness in God's mercy.

God spared the sailors when they pleaded for mercy.

God saved Jonah when he prayed from inside the huge fish.

God saved the people of Nineveh when they respond to Jonah's preaching and repented of their evil ways!

God saved us!

"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8 New Revised Standard Version