

Jonah

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. (Jonah 1:3a ESV)

And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:2 ESV)

And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4 ESV)

And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:11 ESV)

How the Story Ends

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Jonah 4

Matt Szkarlat

Introduction:

Good morning! Turn with me in your Bibles to Jonah 4. As you are doing that, I just want to recap what we saw last week. Jonah had *finally* obeyed God and took the message of the coming judgement to Nineveh. And what happened? An amazing revival took place! You had the enemies of God trembling at His Word and turning from their wicked ways. From the peasants to the King, everyone repented! And then we read these words at the end of chapter 3:

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, **God relented of the disaster** that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:10 ESV)

God relented. Instead of receiving the just judgement they deserved, Nineveh received the unfathomable mercy of God.

And as many of you know already, when we come to the end of the book, rather than seeing a rejoicing, God glorifying, ecstatic prophet, we get just the opposite. This isn't the usual fairy-tale ending where the hero learned their lesson and is changed for the better. No, the story of Jonah is the opposite. He is in no more merciful of a state than he was when he *originally* fled from God back in chapter 1. And this makes for a very *human* ending.

Because, if we are honest, we have all been little Jonah's. WE HAVE been the ones who have gloried in God as He took pity on us, and yet refused to have pity on others. WE HAVE been the wayward ones who God has had to shake up in order to set us straight. And we have been the ones who have forgotten the scandalous and paradigm shattering mercy of God. The mercy that extends to even His enemies.

So this morning, as we finish the book of Jonah, let's be humble hearers of God's Word. Let's lean into the lessons that God is teaching us through this story. Hear now God's holy, inspired, powerful, and necessary Word of the Lord:

¹But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

¹⁰ And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:1-11 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Again, not the way you would have thought this story would end is it? But that's good news because it reminds us that it is a TRUE story. These events happened. Jonah really did get thrown into the sea. He got gobbled up by a fish. God ushered in a revival. And Jonah sat by miserably as the Ninevites were spared. *That's* the true story of Jonah.

How The Story Comes to an End

So as we come to the end of the story, we are simply going to walk through and point out some of the key points in the story.

As the great story of Jonah comes to a close, the first thing we see is:

1. An Angry Prophet

Look with me to verses 1-4:

¹But **it** displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was **angry**. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, **please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.**” ⁴ And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?” ⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. (Jonah 4:1-5 ESV)

Jonah was angry. And what was he angry about? He was angry because the great city of Nineveh had repented at HIS preaching! Hear that again: Jonah was angry because God used him to bring about a revival! I love what Matthew Henry says about these verses:

What a strange sort of man was Jonah, to dread the success of his ministry! Many have been tempted to withdraw from their work because they had despaired of doing good by it, but Jonah declined preaching **because he was afraid of doing good by it**; and still he persists in the same corrupt notion, for, it seems, the whale’s belly itself could not cure him of it.¹

Jonah was stewing at God’s wonderful mercy shown in sparing Nineveh. In response to Nineveh’s repentance and God’s withholding of judgement, this is what he says:

O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; **for I knew** that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:2 ESV)

¹ Matthew Henry, *An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Book of Jonah*, *Matthew Henry’s Complete Commentary*, (Public Domain), (Digital).

Jonah, word for word, quotes what God proclaimed to Moses about Himself way back at Mount Sinai. We read this:

⁶ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Exodus 34:6 ESV)

The very qualities that Jonah had been rejoicing in while he was in the belly of the fish were now the ones that he was condemning! Can you imagine shaking your fist at God condemning Him for being a GOOD AND GRACIOUS GOD?!?! For being a God who would offer forgiveness rather than judgement?!

But that is what Jonah did. Jonah should have been REJOICING within the walls of Nineveh! He would have been a welcome guest at any of those repentant peoples home but instead he left the city. He got just far enough that if God changed his mind and rained judgement on Nineveh, he would be able to watch it from a safe distance. And he waited for the 40 days to pass hoping for God to have a change of heart.

Now, as we have said several times throughout this series, Jonah had every right HUMANLY SPEAKING to hate Assyria. But surely, by this point in the story, after God sent a fish to swallow him up, and after Nineveh repented the way they did, SURELY by now Jonah would have learned his lesson. But it was not the case at all.

You see Jonah hadn't YET repented of his anger and hatred towards Assyria. He still saw them as his enemies who were past the point of receiving mercy. The prophet who understood the rich and tender mercy of God himself was unable to glory in it being given to Nineveh. As Matthew Henry said, ‘the time in the whale never cured him of his hatred.’

Have *you* ever been gripped by hatred the way Jonah was? So much that you were unable to rejoice in God forgiving someone who had wronged you? Have you ever been so gripped by your prejudice that salvation for someone seemed like *hell* to you? Or have you ever been so stewing in sin that you were unable to glory in all that God was doing? Some of you have.

And that was Jonah. Real hurts and anger had so blinded him that he condemned God's mercy and forgiveness. Instead of rejoicing at a miracle, Jonah was angry and stewing.

So what did God do, he asked Jonah if he was right to be angry. And then as Jonah sat in silence and anger, God spoke to him through:

2. A Prophetic Plant

Let's read verses 5-8 to see what happened:

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:5-8 ESV)

In order to teach Jonah, really to shake him up and show him his pitiless disposition, God gave him an object lesson he wouldn't forget.

Jonah left the city, he set up a shelter and waited. He waited out those 40 days that God had given Nineveh to repent. He was waiting and hoping to see if God would change his mind. Maybe God would remember all that Nineveh had done and rain down fire!

So Jonah was angry, waiting, and baking in the heat from the sun. Then, to save Jonah from the heat, God *appointed* a plant to shade him from the heat. The text tells us Jonah was:

Exceedingly glad because of the plant. (Jonah 4:6b ESV)

Do you remember what emotions he felt when he heard that God would relent of his judgement? Verse 1 tells us:

But it **displeased Jonah exceedingly**, and he was **angry**. (Jonah 4:1 ESV)

The CONTRAST cannot be anymore clear. Vehement anger at God showing mercy, and exuberant joy at the temporary shade brought about from the plant. That was Jonah. Now to be

fair, Jonah was tired, stewing in sin, angry, and sitting in the extreme heat, so you can see how the shade would be welcomed.

But in those moments of weakness, emotional and physical fatigue, he said some pretty silly things didn't he? Maybe you've done the same thing recently. Here's a reminder to be careful what you say and think when you are going through difficult seasons. Maybe don't EXPRESS all of your emotions on Facebook right now because like Jonah, you are exhausted, confused and distressed. That's a good lesson.

There's Jonah's delighting in the plant that brought some temporary relief from the shade. His joy brought about from the plant SHOULD NEVER have compared to his joy at seeing God spare the great city of Nineveh. But as one commentator says, this was Jonah's crime. He refused to rejoice in God's saving grace. Matthew Henry comments on these verses:

Do we do well to be angry at that which is so much for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom among men - to be angry at that which angels rejoice in and for which abundant thanksgivings will be rendered to God? We do ill to be angry at that grace which we ourselves need and are undone without; if room were not left for repentance, and hope given of pardon upon repentance, what would become of us?²

Jonah forgot the mercy he had just received as God saved him from drowning.

Then as Jonah was rejoicing in the plant, God appointed a worm to eat the plant. The plant withered and Jonah was left where he started this chapter: angry, stewing, and baking in the sun.

Then vs 8 tells us what happened:

And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."¹⁰ **And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night."**¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:8-11 ESV)

² Matthew Henry, *An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Book of Jonah*, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary*, (Public Domain), (Digital).

Twice in the small chapter, Jonah asks that God would grant him death! First it was because God was showing mercy to Nineveh, and second because the plant withered. Do you see how far Jonah had fallen? Jonah delighted more in the temporary plant than he did in the repenting of the great city of Nineveh. If we aren't careful, we will leave this Jonah series not truly understanding the awful depths that sin had taken Jonah to. That it can take us to.

God grew a plant and then destroyed the plant so as to create the sensation of deprivation and hardship for Jonah. Why? To reveal to him his own selfish worldview with respect to suffering. In LOVE, God orchestrated this object lesson for Jonah. God desires to pull us OUT from the sin we are in. To pull us OUT of wrong beliefs and replace them with truth. Instead of granting Jonah his death wish, God *mercifully* exposed his sin. You see God wasn't toying with Jonah by giving him shade and taking it away, He was graciously pulling him out of his sin. He was rescuing him from further ruin.

Is that you this morning? Is God grabbing your attention? Has he put in your life a prophetic plant of sorts to shake you out of your sin? To rid you of the idols you have set up? Maybe it's your career that God has sprung up and withered away in order to get you attention. Or maybe it's a relationship that God will use to shake you from your sin.

Friends, God will tear down every idol, in whatever form it takes, not because He hates you but because He LOVES YOU.

Don't make Him send a storm, whale, or a plant in order to get you on the right track. Turn. Repent. See Jonah the unrepentant prophet and learn from his mistakes.

As Pastor Levi said a few weeks ago, God loves you WAY too much to let you stay in your sin. So take heed to God's object lesson here and turn from your sin.

And thirdly, as we come to end of the book of Jonah, God has the final word. God reminds His people one final time that He is:

3. A God of Mercy

This was the lesson right from the start of the book. Jonah was sent to a people who were wicked. But God said ‘GO! Go and proclaim that I am a God who is merciful and who will relent.’ Then when Jonah rebelled against God, He showed him mercy and sent the fish to gobble up and save him. THEN, when Nineveh heard God’s Word and repented, God relented of the disaster that He had planned. And then you have Jonah, stewing in his anger and sin, angry at God’s mercy to Nineveh, asking for death. But even then, God mercifully sent him the plant to shield him from the hot sun. Rich mercy has been present throughout this story.

God had shown His compassion and mercy to the Ninevites who didn’t deserve it. And He showed it to undeserving Jonah as well. Do you see that? That was Jonah’s problem, he FORGOT that Israel never deserved God’s mercy and kindness either. Israel deserved God’s wrath just like the Assyrians but God spared them just the same. The mercy that Jonah was condemning God for giving to Nineveh was the same mercy he and all of Israel had received!

So listen to how God rebuked Jonah:

¹⁰ And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ **And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”** (Jonah 4:10-11 ESV)

That is a knockout punch to anyone who would harbour hate and prejudice in the name of God. God said to Jonah, ‘look at them. They haven’t heard the Gospel. They didn’t grow up travelling to Jerusalem to worship at the festivals like you Jonah. And look at all of the animals? Should I not pity them?’ That’s who our God is.

Our God is one who delights to show mercy to repentant sinners. He is *not* like us who are so slow to forgive and who are so quick to hold grudges. HE is a God of mercy. A God who is even willing to show mercy to His enemies. He is a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

If you forget everything else about this Jonah series, do not forget this. The God we love and serve abounds in mercy far more than we could ever imagine. Not a passive mercy, not a quiet mercy, but a LOUD MERCY. God WENT AFTER Nineveh. Even though Jonah tried to avoid his

mission God would have none of it. NOTHING would stop God from getting His Word to Nineveh. NOTHING would stop Him from proclaiming that mercy was there for the taking. Not even an angry, prejudiced, sulking and rebellious prophet could stop God from getting His Word of mercy to Nineveh.

That's who are God is. A God of radical mercy. Jonah would rather die than see his enemies live. But God would rather die for His enemies than see them perish. He would die so they could live. John 3:16-17:

¹⁶ “**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17 ESV)

For God so loved the world, not a world that loved him, not a world that obeyed His commandments, not a world that sought Him. A world that rebelled against Him. A world full of Israelites and Ninevites who deserved wrath. Just like Assyria, Israel and Jonah, we didn't deserve mercy. We deserved destruction BUT GOD took pity on us. He saw us diving headfirst into destruction. Wallowing in sin and despair, refusing to repent and submit to Him. But unlike Jonah, unlike us, He is full of mercy. Full of love towards sinners that don't deserve it.

Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a fish not because he loved his enemies, because he *hated* them. But Jesus spent three days and three nights in the grave because He *loved* His enemies. He tasted of the judgement you should have because He loved YOU. Because He would rather see you experience His grace and love rather than His just judgement. And it is good news that *this* is our God: A God of unfathomable mercy. Thanks be to God.

Two Concluding Questions

As we close the book on Jonah, it is pretty clear, he is not the hero. He is the poster boy for what NOT TO DO. Eventually though, Jonah saw how misguided, how silly and sinful he was being because he wrote the book! Eventually Jonah saw that God was both just and merciful and the One who could give them out as He pleased. Eventually Jonah saw that this was true and that this was GOOD. Eventually he marveled and gloried in His merciful God.

And the story ends with God rebuking Jonah and Israel by extension. God asked Jonah:

“Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” (Jonah 4:9 ESV)

Do you get to decide who gets mercy? Do you get to decide who has crossed the line and is passed the point my salvation? That’s what God was asking Jonah. The question should have been rhetorical. The answer was obviously no.

And so we get a human and humble ending to the story. A miserable prophet unable and unwilling to rejoice at God’s awesome mercy. And we learn that Jonah acted in the exact opposite way of how we are called to act. But we end in hope, knowing Jonah got the message. And I hope we have understood it as well.

As we come to a close this morning, I think it is fitting to ask ourselves a few tough questions. Because that’s how the book ends. It ends with God questioning Jonah. So let me ask you:

1. Are you prone to pout?

Jonah reminds us that even prophets, those whose sole job is to proclaim God’s Word, can be chained by their sin. Jonah’s hatred and prejudice gripped him so much that he was unable to glory in God bestowing mercy on Assyria. Jonah hated that God’s ways were bigger than his ways. Jonah wanted to control God. He wanted safety for HIS people, comfort for HIS suffering, justice for HIS enemies. When it became clear that God’s plan was different than Jonah’s, he sulked. He pouted while he should have praised.

Is that you? Are there people in your life who you believe have passed the point of no return and only deserve judgement? Like Jonah, would you be angry if God granted them mercy and forgiveness? Would you pout instead of praise if they repented and God relented?

Remember, Jonah had heard and maybe even seen some of the brutality that the Assyrians inflicted upon Israel. He had heard the stories. He had seen the scars left on his people. My point is that he had experienced real pain and real grief! And yet, when Jonah was stewing God didn’t

sit by idly and let him do it. He didn't let Jonah indulge his anger. God's Word to Jonah was to repent of it. God's Word to Jonah was very similar to Jesus' words on the sermon on the mount:

⁴⁴ But I say to you, **love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44 ESV)

Are you prone to pout? Are you indulging in holding grudges? Are you unable to forgive those who have wronged you? Are you like Jonah, sitting, watching from a distance hoping that destruction would come to your enemies?

If that's you this morning, then you need to re-ask yourself this final question:

2. Do you believe His mercy is more?

When Jonah thought of Assyria, all he could think of was a people who were terrorists. A people who deserved justice for all of their evil done to Israel. And they did. They deserved swift justice. But the message of Jonah is that God's mercy is far beyond anything we can ever imagine! The message of Jonah is that NO ONE is too far gone for God to save. NO ONE.

Do you believe that today? Do you believe that God's mercy is enough to save even your enemy?

Jonah witnessed firsthand the wonderful and staggering mercy of God. But you and I, on this side of the Cross have seen an even greater mercy. We have seen Jesus: crucified, condemned and forsaken for OUR SIN. Bearing the righteous judgement that we deserved. Because we, just Israel, Jonah, and the Ninevites, didn't deserve God's mercy. But God's mercy is far beyond anything that we could comprehend. It's a mercy that extends even to His enemies.

If you have believed and tasted this mercy, then glory in it again today. Extend it and proclaim it to everyone. And know for CERTAIN that it can turn even the vilest of sinners into transformed, Christ savoring, Christ exalting, God glorifying saints. For the glory and adoration of God, and for the good of ALL PEOPLES.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray.