

**Jonah 4: 1-11; “God’s Pity & Jonah’s Anger”, Sermon # 4 in a series –
“The Disobedient Prophet”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
September 27th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

As we begin to think about what I have just read for you here, we see that there was a problem with Jonah. He was displeased with God. He was displeased that God had been gracious to the Ninevites and had not judged them and overthrown them. It is always a problem when we are displeased with God, but sometimes that is the way that Christians become, when they think that justice has not taken place. They think that somehow God has been unjust in showing mercy and pitying sinners, like these people were. And so this morning I want to speak to you about God’s Pity and Jonah’s anger; that is, why we as Christians should not be angry with God in any situation, but especially in regard to His showing mercy to sinners. We should not be angry because God’s Pity is a part of His essential nature which is love and kindness.

And so, let’s ask ourselves some questions which will open up this final chapter of Jonah, and pray that we will receive the profound truths which are given to us here. 1st of all – If you know God and the character of God, why do you become angry with Him? 2nd – If you know God and the character of God, can you not meditate upon all the details of His providential ordering of things in your life, and draw the right conclusions? And 3rd – If you know God and the character of God, then will you not allow God to teach you what He wants to teach you, even to the end of your life?

1st of all – If you know God and the character of God, why do you become angry with Him?

Chapter 3, verse 10 says – “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” “So he prayed to the Lord and said, ‘Ah Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?’” “Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.” “Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!” “Then the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’” Now, I want you to notice that God wanted to teach Jonah about Himself and His way of doing things. God wanted to deal with the way that Jonah was reacting to; what He, God, was doing. He wanted to deal with Jonah’s anger; what was going on his heart. The same is always the case with you, as well, dear Christian. Are you angry with God?

Why are you angry? You see, God is very concerned with the way that you think about Him, the way that you view Him. He is very concerned about the way that you react to His plans for your life; whatever ministry of service that He has given you to do, in relation to the gifts that He has given to you. You may not know it, but God has very definite plans for you in relation to your service to Him as a Christian. These plans that He has, they involve your personal ministry of service to Himself, in relation to the many other people in your life. Or, as it was in this case of Jonah’s, the people whom He sends you to, if you are a missionary or a pastor. But the thing that I want you to see is that this truth applies to all of us as Christians. If you are angry with God, God will be moving to deal with your anger.

We should understand that all anger against God is sinful; for God is pure and perfect and holy in all of His ways, and all of His deeds. Our responsibility is to learn from God where our thinking may be wrong about Him, and what He is doing. For it does not glorify Him when you are angry with Him. Now, you should understand that there are some commentators who believe that Jonah said what he said here, because he was his concerned about his own reputation. They believe that he was saying these things to God because he was afraid that since

God didn't judge and overthrow the Ninevites, that he would be seen as a false prophet because God did not bring judgment upon them. Since God didn't bring it, it made him look like a fool. But I do not believe that this was at all the case with Jonah. Jonah doesn't mention that idea, once, here in his reply to God. The real issue here was Jonah's conception of how God was dealing with the nation of Israel versus how he was dealing with Nineveh. We can see this from the wording of the text itself; that the issue was the character of God Himself in relation to how He dealt with his nation Israel and their nation; specifically this city of Nineveh. He thought God was not justly judging the city of Nineveh.

How could God actually show mercy to these undeserving people who had invaded and troubled Israel so much in the past? This is what he says in verse 2. "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?" "Therefore I fled to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm." So Jonah's anger was over the fact that God actually had shown them mercy when he, Jonah, felt that God should go ahead and judge them, as he had threatened to do, for their past sins. Jonah knew that God was a God who was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and One who relents from doing harm, and that is why he fled to Tarshish, he says.

Jonah had such strong feelings about the need for these Ninevites to be judged, that he had not gone along with God's plan until he was forced to do so. These feelings ran so deep in Jonah's mind and heart that he became angry with God. Yes, he had repented in the belly of the fish. He repented of not going to preach, but now that his preaching had met with the success that he feared that it would, he felt very justified in being angry. The fact that God had shown them mercy displeased him exceedingly, it says in verse 1. We should see from this that when we make mistakes in our judgment of God, that God will take steps to prove to us His righteousness. The real question is, will we receive His instruction. Sometimes we hold things against people who have hurt us personally, or perhaps it is someone who has hurt someone we love, very badly, and so we do not believe that we can forgive our enemies for what they have done. But we must realize that God expects us to forgive our enemies and pray for them, that we might prove ourselves to be His children.

Listen to what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 6: 14 and 15. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." We need to think about Jonah's view of God's justice at this point, then, don't we? Should Jonah have forgiven the Ninevites for their sins against himself, those he loved, and his nation? Yes, he should have been able to do this; especially since he knew that God is a God of strict justice. The Bible declares it in many places, and so we must believe it. No person is ultimately going to get away with any sin in the sight of the holy God. If we believe this, then we must also believe that God righteously judges all men and nations. And just because He shows mercy to nation now, does not mean that He will not judge all men and punish them according to their works on the Day of Judgment which is most certainly coming.

Remember, if God does not judge now, in your lifetime, He will most certainly do so on the Day of Judgment. His judgment or His salvation of people is according to His wisdom. He knows best how to deal with wicked men now, and He knows what He will do to punish them in the future, if they will not repent. I want to show you this from Psalm 7. First let me read for you the statements of how God really thinks about unrepentant sinners here. Verses 11-16 say this – "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day." "If he does not turn back, He will sharpen his sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready." "He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts." "Behold the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood." "He made a pit and

dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made.” “His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.”

Now, this is certainly how God thinks about the wicked, no matter who they are. But now let's look at David's prayer concerning what he thought that God should do about the wicked, verses 1-6. For I think that the things which David wrote down here, apply to the way that Jonah was thinking in this situation. “O Lord my God, in You I put my trust; save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me, lest they tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while there is none to deliver.” “O Lord my God, if I have done this: if there is iniquity in my hands, if I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me, or have plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue me and overtake me; yes, let him trample my life to the earth, and lay my honor in the dust.” “Selah.” “Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies; rise up for me to the judgment You have commanded!”

This, I believe, is how Jonah was thinking about these Ninevites. He believed that Israel had been unjustly treated by these Assyrian people in the past. Nineveh was one of the three capital cities of the Assyrian nation, and it being governed by the king mentioned in chapter 3. The Israelites at that time, in the the time of Rehoboam, and the kings that followed him in both Israel and Judah would have hoped to have been at peace with Syria, and the Ninevites. But instead Syrian had come and attacked them and plundered them without cause, for many years. In 2nd Kings 13, verses 22 and 23 it says this: “And Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.” “But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence.” So here we find God showing mercy to Israel even though they deserved judgment.

In 2nd Kings 14: 23 it says this – “In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty one years.” “And he did evil in the sight of sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.” “He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher.” “For the Lord saw the the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel.” “And the Lord did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.” So, you see here, that it was according to the prophesying of Jonah that God had shown mercy to Israel before. Jonah knew this.

The Lord had even used Jeroboam the son of Joash, a man who was king but who did evil in the sight of the Lord, to restore their territory to them. The Lord it says here that He would have mercy upon them because he saw their affliction was very bitter, and that they had no helper. He would not blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but he would not do it because they had repented, but He would not do it because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So Jonah knew these things, but still he thought that God was not right in granting repentance to their enemies but not to them. Was he forgetting was God had ordained the success of their enemy against them because of Israel's continual unfaithfulness to God? I think he was! He was not considering the fact that God had brought this long term judgment upon Israel by Syria because Israel would not completely turn from their sins and turn back to Him. The people and their king would not seek Him for forgiveness and for the restoration of their kingdom to His Divine favor.

This is the problem in our country today as well. We become angry with God because He will not judge the wicked. Rather, it seems that He often shows them mercy; at least in the sense of letting them continue on for a time in their wickedness. We may believe in the sovereignty of

God, as Christians who live in this nation. But sometimes we may forget that because we have received greater light upon the Scriptures, more spiritual light than many nations, that we will be judged by God, as a nation accordingly; that is, if we do not live up to that light which has been given to us, God will judge us as a nation, and discipline us who are believers, for our good! It is how we view God during those times especially, that He takes notice of our attitude towards Him. What is your attitude toward God at this time in our nation's history? Is God right to show temporal mercy for a time, to our enemies; during those times when they want to tear down our society?

We are even seeing the madness of many people who hold political office in our nation, and our states, taking sides with the enemies within our own nation, in their reproaching our nation for its founding fathers. Those men who drew up the Constitution were supposedly racist, they say, and our form of government therefore is supposedly unrighteous. And so they want to tear it down! We who hold fast to the truth of the word of God, when we hear such things, we would like God to judge them according to their sins, don't we? But what if God wants to show them greater mercy, or even saving mercy, by granting them repentance? Will you be upset if He does? Ah, we need to make this chapter of Jonah personal don't we? Because sometimes we can get so angry and so disappointed with what God does in our life, or in the life of our nation, that we want to die. We can apply this to national matters, or personal matters, or both. For Jonah had personal issues with the Ninevites, but he also had personal issues with God. He thought that what God, did, did not seem to be consistent; that is, in His application of justice.

2nd – If you know God and the character of God, can you not meditate upon all the details of His providential ordering of things in your life, and draw the right conclusions?

Verses 5-8 say – “So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city.” “There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.” “And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery.” “So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.” “But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.” “And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint.” “Then he wished death for himself, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’” So we see, from the way that this is worded here, that evidently the Ninevites repented very quickly after they heard the message which Jonah preached.

For here is Jonah, now, going to the east side of the city, he builds a shelter for himself and he is sitting there in the shade until he sees what will become of the city. He evidently thought that there was still a possibility that God would still judge them in some way, even though they had repented! After all, were there not 30 some days left until the 40 days were up? This shows us the depth of His sin in this matter; that he wasn't ready to sit down with himself and consider where his thinking might be wrong, but he was still secretly hoping that God would change his mind again, and that He would still bring judgment upon them in some way. He thought this way because of the strength of his own feelings. He did not want to believe that God was right in His relenting of His judging of them.

How strongly we want what we want, don't we, in terms of God's judging our enemies. Yes, it is evidenced for us in the behavior of Jonah at this time. God knew that it was time for a more personal lesson; one in which He would teach him how wrong he was, in holding on to the idea that He should not show the Ninevites mercy. And so, it says in verse 6, that God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. I hope that you can see from this that God takes notice of all of our creature comforts, and He often gives us earthly blessings to encourage us to consider His goodness and

His kindness to us in His care over our lives. And, it says in Romans chapter 2 that His kindness and goodness are meant to lead us to repentance. This was a fast growing plant and it served God's purpose well! Surely Jonah needed to repent of his bad attitude. Well, we see in verse 6 that Jonah was very happy about the plant. It was hot out there in the sun. What a relief it was now, to be in the shade!

But now that Jonah felt this great relief, it says that the next morning the Lord prepared a worm, that so damaged the plant, that it withered. And a little later God also prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. And then it says in verse 8 that he wished death for himself because of these things. He said – It is better for me to die than to live. Now, here again, I want you to take notice of the sovereignty of God in this situation. God knew exactly what to bring to Jonah's experience, in order to accomplish His end. God's end, His object lesson here, was to teach Jonah about how important it was for him, in light of God's having shown mercy to Nineveh, to learn to show mercy also. How easy it was for God to do this by providentially ordering all of these things to happen to Jonah; things that affected his well-being very much.

Dear believer, do you realize that God does the same type of thing with you, when He would have you learn lessons related to your showing mercy and showing pity towards sinners around you? He would have you consider all of the little acts of goodness and kindnesses that He does for you, on a regular ongoing basis, to make your life pleasant. In Psalm 145, verse 16, it says that He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. Well, God was saying to Jonah, and He is saying to each of us here today that His providential care in your life ought to lead you to consider the little things that you can do for sinners around you to show them that God cares about them, and that you care about them. Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify God. Tell them of God's goodness and mercy to you, how it follows you all the days of your life.

But if you do not want to show mercy to sinners around you, then He also knows just how to get you to sit up and take notice of what He orders for your life in particular, so that you will acknowledge how important it is to show pity, and to be merciful. He can so order things that the thing that you rejoiced in, the thing that you were very happy about, is taken away from you, and other things are brought in their place; things which make you feel like dying. With a worm and a vehement east wind, God did this, in Jonah's case. I hope that you can now see that God is indeed sovereign over all of the details of your life. He is sovereign over the life of every man, to teach them the very practical lessons that they need to learn. He intervenes and He interferes in the lives of His own dear people. He instructs them and to teaches them in the way that they should go. And He expects you to be thankful to Him for this, and to learn to show pity. If we are shown pity by God, then we ought to know how important it is for us to pity other people, who are perishing in their sins.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” Psalm 103 verses 6-14 – “The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.” “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” “He will not always strive with us.” “Nor will He keep His anger forever.” “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.” “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” Sometimes our view of God, even if it is correct in some respects, it is not correct in others. This was the way that it was with Jonah. He thought that God should judge when God, it was plain, intended to show mercy to the Ninevites. Jonah should have rejoiced in this, but He could not.

3rd - If you know God and the character of God, then will you not allow God to teach you what He wants to teach you, even to the end of your life?

Verse 9 says – “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ “And he said, ‘It is right for me to be angry even to death.’” “But the Lord said, ‘You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.’” “And should I not pity Ninevah, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their life – and much livestock? So God had to teach him over again the first principles of what it meant to know Him. To really know God, you want to be taught by God. The characteristic of all New Testament Christians is that “they shall all be taught of God”, from the least of them to the greatest of them. But this attitude of Jonah’s, this was just plain stubbornness wasn’t it? Jonah had this great unwillingness to learn from God what God wanted to teach him.

Sometimes even we Christians are this way. They think that they have a case against God and we will attempt to stand it out against Him. We take issue with even the most plain of statements of the Bible. We take issue with the most plainly given illustrations of how wrong we are. Look at the patience of God with him. This whole providential ordering of the growth of the plant was meant to show Jonah how great God’s mercy was, to him personally. Jonah appreciated the plant very much. He found relief from the burning sun. It was meant to picture to him what God had done for the Ninevites in granting them repentance and relief from His burning judgment which most certainly would have come upon them, if He had not showed them mercy in His sending Jonah to them.

Let us remember from this passage that even those who are given the greatest gifts and the most knowledge among us, still have things to learn from God in relation to how we might use our gift, and how we should continue to add to our knowledge, not only moral excellence, but Christian love. Dear Christian, learn to receive God’s reproofs to you. Reproofs for discipline are a way of life to you. Learn by God’s grace how to be gracious to people around you. Learn to be thoughtful and loving and caring towards people around you so that they will know the love of Christ. Let not your love for Christ or for other people become cold, or analytical. Stop being angry with God over your not getting to see sinful people around you judged for what they have done to you or to others. Help them by your words and deeds to understand the better way of love.

Yes, we should see from Jonah’s example of continued stubbornness that God did not condemn Him on account of it, but He would patiently continue to instruct him and teach him. Are you not thankful that this is so? He is faithful, even when we are faithless. He cannot deny Himself. But we should look to ourselves that we do not lose those things that we have worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoice in His good gifts, both the earthly ones and the spiritual blessings which come to you by the working of His good Spirit in your heart and mind. For these are intended by Him to teach You His good and right way of looking at things. Remember the words of Psalm 32, verses 8-11 – “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.” “Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.” “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.” “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”

