

Jonah 4:5-11

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[0:00] The book of Jonah, chapter 4, verses 5 through 11, and that can be found on page 775 of the Provided Blue Bibles. Again, that's Jonah, chapter 4, verses 5 through 11, and that can be found on page 775 of the Provided Bibles.

Please rise for the reading of God's Word. Amen.

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.

And should I not 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?

Well, this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, today we conclude the book of Jonah, and are reminded, even with a first time hearing of the reading, that one of the chief characteristics of God is his tender pursuit of his wayward people, of which Jonah is an exemplar for us all.

[2:36] The tender pursuit of God. When we left Jonah last week, we indicated that he was in a bad way.

He had arrived at a point in life where his internal spirit, the interior world, was so bound up that his voice was nearly always abrupt, oppositional, outbursting with dissatisfaction, dissatisfied with the world, and dissatisfied with God.

And his sorry state was such that he could not even see his own condition. Verse 5, by way of retrospect, 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. What does God do when his own wayward son is in such a state?

Interestingly, he, in a sense, returns him to elementary school, grammar school, grade school. He does for Jonah in our text what our teachers did for us at primary levels.

[4:26] Do you remember the learning device show and tell? It was an indication that many of us are visual learners.

And an acknowledgement that if we could see something, then you might be able to say something. That's what show and tell was. An enablement to see followed up by what is said so that we would be the beneficiary of some new knowledge.

There was something to show, something to tell, and there was some benefit for us who would know. It's exactly the structure of the text. You'll notice in verses 4 and in verse 9 that repetitive refrain, Are you doing well to be angry?

And those become the linchpins for something he's going to show Jonah, Verses 5-8. Followed on the heels by something he is going to say to Jonah, Verses 9-11.

And so while Jonah is on the mountaintop waiting to see what God would do, God pursues him, not by letting him see what's going on in the city, but he wants him to see something even where he is sitting.

[6:05] While Jonah waits, verse 5, God goes to work. Verses 6-7 and the opening of verse 8.

Notice the threefold appointed word to signal the work of God. 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. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm.

A worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. 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. God goes to work while Jonah awaits.

[7:12] He appoints first a plant or a gourd, something that comes from the ground and the vine begins to rise evidently, miraculously so, for it seems to take place within just a few hours time.

This supernatural work of God to bring covering to Jonah who is in a very open place subject to the the day that has come.

Jonah's quite happy here, isn't he? He was, the text says, exceedingly glad. Reminds me a little bit of Winston Churchill who certainly liked his creature comforts.

He had a house outside of London. He would call it at times Ho Farm. And he would write once, I am off to Ho Farm.

How I wish you could be there. It really is a delightful valley and the garden gleams with summer jewelry. We live very simply. Now, listen to Churchill's idea of simple.

[8:28] We live very simply but with all the essentials of life understood and provided for. Hot baths, cold champagne, new peas, and old brandy.

That is the gourd the vine, the plant for Churchill concerning the summer jewelry of gracious provision.

Jonah was quite happy because God had provided for him. I think of our hymn sung earlier this morning, Praise to the Lord who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth, shelters thee under his wing.

Yea, so gently sustaineth. God deals with his wayward prophet by providing graciously on his behalf.

God and with that you run into the chief characteristic of God, his tender pursuit of those who are dissatisfied with him.

[9:46] And so I ask you this morning, regardless of your view of God or his people or your place, what gourd has he given you?

what plant covers you? What shade is there that provides for you?

What gracious goodness of a tender God is there for you? For indeed, he has done for all of us continually, repeatedly, what he does for Jonah here.

He appoints. He provides. The word appoints here is almost like to number something. He sets it out. He almost looks and goes, now that's going to go there.

He's orchestrating. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. And for his rebellious prophet and for all of his people, he nevertheless looks down upon our saddened state and says that there cover shade grace provision.

[11:10] What a tender God. Especially given what we know of Jonah. It's the same word that was used in chapter 1 verse 17 where he appointed a great fish.

God is in the business of appointing things for the deliverance and the provision and the protection of his people. But this was a show and tell this day at school.

It wasn't merely the appointing of the plant from which he gained great joy. But verse 7, narrative moving straight on but when dawn came up the next day God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

It's obvious that God is conducting here an object lesson for an adult who is now back in primary grades. He has given.

Yes, he has given. And today he has taken away. this also is within his prerogative. This also is what he appoints and orchestrates and does in Jonah's case by way of divine intervention.

[12:34] God often takes things away from us so he can go to work in us. so it is.

Whether it be health, happiness, location, whether it be the lack of employment or other things, there certainly is not a universal truth here that's being indicated at, but this is true that for Jonah who was greatly dissatisfied with God, God gave him enough provision to know that he was with him and enough taken from him that he might turn back to him.

The scriptures teach the principle that God disciplines us because he delights in us. And that true children are disciplined.

A disciplined child in our midst is an indication of a parent that loves and is nurturing and desires the best for them.

The parent who lets the child run haywire is obviously indicating to the rest that there is no great care or love extended to him.

[14:11] And God is this way with us all is he not? He disciplines us because he delights in us. And so God has done this even on this singular day in the life of Jonah a worm which was a real disaster for Jonah because now the thing that made him exceedingly glad has been taken from him and he's exceedingly sad.

I don't know why I have Churchill on the brain today but Churchill did say something to the effect that yes it is true we are all worms but I do believe I am a glow worm. In other words his perspective was yes we're all creatures but I'm a special creature.

Jonah felt very much like he was a special creature one who deserved God's attending graces. it is right that God would provide for me and wrong that he would withdraw himself from me.

And then the wind the idea that the plant is not coming back the sun rose God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

He asked that he might die and said it's better for me to die than to live. That is the state of Jonah.

You need to understand that just as a divisive outburst of anger betrays a heart's divided affection so too livid ones are often susceptible to becoming the despairing of life ones.

[16:11] It's a rage filled person who says I cannot believe this is happening to me who is also the person who might at one point say what is the point of going on with this?

God is now I think by Jonah's response there in a difficult place. What do you do when you show someone in the class the object lesson so that you might see God's gracious hand and he still doesn't get it?

He's been taught. He's been shown and he's still angry. I don't know about you but I know what I would do if I were God well I know what my tendency would be is to take this dramatic juvenile display of a prophet flailing on the floor telling me he can't go on as you just look at him and say well so be it there you lie.

I mean what Jonah's response shows us is it is in a sense beyond the drama of a child who throws himself on the kitchen floor and says I'm starving what's to eat I can't make it till dinner.

we're beyond that here. We need more than simply an appeal to patience. If I were God I might just say well I'm out.

[18:07] I'm done. What do I need to do for you Jonah? You tire me. fine.

See ya. Book closes. But no. Some of the most tender words in the whole book are those opening words of verse 10.

And the Lord said he has showed him and now he'll tell him he's still with him. think of the song that we sang earlier today though on my head in early youth did smile thou on my head in early youth did smile and though rebellious and perverse meanwhile thou hast not left me oft as I left thee on to the close Lord abide with me.

And I want to tell you you have a God that is like that. You have a God who is on to the close and the Lord said he 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 and should not I pity Nineveh see the entire lesson of the show and tell is now coming full force that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left comma pause pause pause oh and by the way much cattle God's way of saying my tender concern extends to the furthest reach of my created order a few years ago

I was in Africa on a on a game park and I saw a herd of big monstrous black wild buffalo was this I don't know what they were big old horns they came out of nowhere there were hundreds of them and I thought God provides for them every day how does he do it how does he provide for the fullness of the created order but he does there were external signals that Jonah was sending that he needed something much more than patience for Jonah arrogance was underneath if

[21:30] Jonah had said I know I know I need to work on my patience I got it I think we might say no that's just a surface matter the issue lies

deeper if only your heart could be rid of a self-centered pride that consumes!

For Jonah lots of things in life seem to be a waste of time they weren't worthy of his time especially anything that required him to attend to the needs of others he was easily put off when asked to put out his heart actually was what had grown cold toward the things of God his life was nothing missional it was all about me he is the self-absorbed prophet who stands as a representative for a self-absorbed people a people of God who are appreciative of God when our own needs are met but easily set off when they are not he had high expectations that God would provide for his every personal comfort and those expectations were only exceeded by this dramatic stage-like volatility that would come on display if personal exertion or endurance were required instead and so as the book closes we are right to ask in what degree are we like

Jonah for more often than not our interactions with others serve as warning bells that our relationship with God needs correction tell me are we not quickly filled with contempt when not content are you easily ticked off set off if the tiniest bit in life is off are we affronted if our needs are not immediately attended are we offended if our pleasures are omitted are we incensed at any inconvenience all these things rest within the heart of every human breast and they are indications horizontal indications that reverberate toward a vertical problem the word on which Jonah closes is the word of God should I not pity Nineveh in contrast to our cold and calloused hearts we find that the heart of God is the heart of compassion his compassion for others and the created order is simply the indication of his character and our lack of compassion for others and the created order is equally an indication of our character at the simplest level the difference between God and us is this he is concerned for others the word in the Hebrew pity do you not pity the Ninevites is in a sense don't you think I should spare them but it's not merely this kind of let's let them go it is actually this almost this affectionate emotional attachment to it you might almost say the idea of pity someone who's moved not just by declarative action but by heart commitment this is your

God if God were to enter into this room today filled with people his first thought is oh there you are not here I am and therein is the difference between God and us there's a plaque in my living room made from a mold by my great grandfather probably in the 1920s he made a number of plaques they're all over the world today most of them are metal this one's plaster the original mold cannot be found it's a one of a kind plaque on the bottom of it is the clue to unwrapping it it's a key and it says the golden key of happiness and the plaque is this assemblage of letters and it's difficult at first to figure out what is the golden key to happiness

[26:54] I've seen people come to my house and look at it for minutes and hours and the word that the letters spell is simply others and that captures the tender pursuit of God and what Jonah needed he needed to understand that God's concern is for others I'm convinced that we see this story played out in the ministry of Jesus in Luke 15 with the prodigal son Jesus was spending time with the tax collectors and the sinners the people who needed

God's extended mercy and the righteous people of God were grumbling about it and he tells the story three stories the lost this the lost that the lost son but the last story brings you face to face with the older brother who was what angry because the younger brother finally verse 17 come to his senses or he was no longer the fool and God's heart the heart of the father is to extend kindness to the prodigal To celebrate!

That was the lesson the people of God needed to learn at the time of Jesus! Jesus So just as Jonah is a fulfillment of Moses' prophetic declaration in Deuteronomy 32 that I will make you angry with the people who are not my people that I might stir your heart to repentance so too on the other end of the biblical spectrum Paul is pursuing the Gentile world in an effort to bring God's angry people back by a consideration of his mercy and right in the middle is the Lord Jesus Christ telling the people of God about the heart of God that they might get on with the mission of God we open the summer talking about Nineveh we've made many connections between

Nineveh and Chicago in terms of a mission field but the book of Jonah teaches us something more foundational even than that I've come to see that the first work that must be done in Chicago is the work that takes place in our own heart we need a reordering of our mind and heart to the categories and characteristics of God we need to develop the heart of God it's the very first thing God must do

if the city is to be helped God saves the people by securing his own we need to come to grips with what he can do for us I don't know what the coming year holds for us next week

I'm going to preach a one-off sermon just talking about my hopes for the coming year it's going to be more setting the stage a break between two moments in our church's summer between the summer series and the fall but I do want you to know my prayer for the coming year that this would be a place where God would speak to you that this would be a place where progress would be made in you that this would be a place that would be beneficial to those who live outside of you because it's a place where God is working within you conforming you changing you calling you exhorting you showing you telling you remaining with you walking with you well if he cares for the cattle he cares for every citizen of

[32:04] Chicago our heavenly father we ask that as we close down this summer book it would remind us that we are in need of help because there's so much work for us to do and yet we have so easily so easily and quickly we find our own hearts not bent toward you so help us help the helpless help even us in Christ's name amen through