

Jonah 4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 June 2015

Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] Amen. Amen. We have weighty things going on.

And this afternoon is a parade. You know, people will be gathering for this parade all along 60th Avenue, all along Library Square.

There will be hundreds, if not thousands, of people coming out to watch the Kenosha Civic Veterans Day Parade. Surely, many people will have been saved.

Many people in attendance will have gone from darkness to light, but the majority of people that will be participating in and watching this parade are perishing in their sin.

Now, I know that by saying that, I can be a giant party pooper. That I can be, so to speak, reigning on your Civic Veterans Day parade.

[1:19] Maybe you're like, you know, Salvati, I just really want to go and hang out with friends and family, see some muscle cars, be wowed by some acrobats, listen to some bands, celebrate our great country, and I really don't want to be thinking about the people around me.

I don't want to be thinking about their standing before God. You must. You must. Because it's true. What is more important to God? A parade? Celebrating our independence as a nation?

Or the eternal standing of each person present? This morning, we've reached the climax of the book of Jonah.

Chapter 4. Climax of the book. It's been quite a story. Chapter 1, Jonah gets called. Turns the other way. Goes as far away from Nineveh as he can. God catches him.

[2:35] Remember that storm at sea. And during that storm, the unbelieving, those non-Hebrew crew, do you remember what happens to them? They end up crying out to Jonah's God for deliverance.

And do you remember what God did? He delivered the crew. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And so chapter 1 closes with this non-Jewish crew having believed in Yahweh, going and rejoicing in this great deliverance they've experienced.

And the prophet himself is now in the Mediterranean Sea. That's how Jonah 1 closes. And then with Jonah 2, as Jonah sinks down into the depths of the Mediterranean, as he draws closer and closer to the gates of death, as he descends lower and lower, it finally occurs to him that not only is he perishing, but he can call out on the name of the Lord Himself.

And so at the verge of losing consciousness, Jonah cries out to his God of whom he's a prophet. And God supernaturally delivers him.

He sends a great fish that swallows him whole in order to wholly deliver him. And as a result, Jonah rejoices. He celebrates. He declares, salvation belongs to the Lord.

[4:09] Hallelujah, amen. I've been delivered. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. And now, at the end of Jonah 2, Jonah has experienced deliverance from being, from perishing.

God commands the fish to spit him out. Spit out. In chapter 3, Jonah is recommissioned by God. Sent to Nineveh.

And Jonah has been changed enough to be willing to go. And so Jonah obeys. And as he gets to Nineveh, into the very heart of the city, he declares a message that's just five words in Hebrew. Just five words. But it was anointed by God. And as a result, there is a city-wide revival of foreigners. And they call out to the one true God, Yahweh.

They have realized that because of their sin, they were perishing. Doomed for destruction. And so they repent.

[5:17] They cry out to God. And God, seeing their repentant hearts, He relents of the disaster He foretold. You see that in chapter 3, verse 10.

All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And so the book of Jonah is one supernatural deliverance after another. God saving Gentiles, God saving Hebrews, God saving Gentiles.

God has a heart for all people. And so here we are in Jonah chapter 4. The climax of the book.

It's all been moving to a point. And it comes to a head in a dialogue between Jonah and God. A dialogue in reaction to what God has just done.

God's delivered the Ninevites and Jonah is hot! Man, he's angry! And so the dialogue starts with a heated accusation from the prophet to his God.

[6:25] We'll see that in verses 1-3. And that moves to a loving confrontation of God with His prophet. And then finally, the chapter in book climaxes in a very challenging question in verses 10 and 11.

A question that we're going to have to end up asking ourselves. So let me walk through this story with you. Let's start with this heated accusation. So God has just delivered 120,000 Ninevites.

By the way, they were enemies of Israel and brutal enemies of Israel. He's just delivered him. We see in verse 10 of chapter 3, God has relented.

And then the very next verse, chapter 4, verse 1, what you read is this. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry.

God relents and Jonah rails. He is so mad. It's quite a contrast.

[7:33] Why is Jonah so angry? I mean, is this the same Jonah that we see rejoicing in God's deliverance at the end of Jonah 2?

Salvation belongs to the Lord! Same guy? It is the same guy. Why would Jonah rejoice in God's deliverance at the end of Jonah 2, but then get all bent out of shape at God's deliverance that we see in Jonah 3?

What's going on? Well, it has everything to do with those who are being delivered. In Jonah 2, it was Jonah that was perishing.

In Jonah 3, it was the Ninevites who were perishing. And so what we see going on here is that when God's mercy and steadfast love was extended to Jonah in Jonah 2, thanksgiving, praise, and glory to God.

But when we see God extending this same mercy, this same steadfast love to the Ninevites, the enemies of Israel in Jonah 3, Jonah is outraged.

[8:41] His true colors are revealed. Jonah accuses God out of his anger.

By the way, we shouldn't be surprised that when we are saved by Jesus that there is more work to be done later on to work out bigotry, to work out edges.

It's typical. It's normal. But in verse 2, we see Jonah angrily accusing God. And we learn, finally, why Jonah left in the first place.

Why he hightailed it out to Tarshish. 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?

What he's saying is this. Is this not the reason why I left in the first place? What's the reason? His reason for running is astonishing.

[9:49] For, I knew that you, God, are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Jonah's anger is because God is compassionate towards sinners. Jonah is angry at God that God would deliver the Ninevites.

What is blowing Jonah's categories here is that the Ninevites were not only not Jews, but they were enemies of Israel in a looming and brutal threat. What are you doing, God, saving them?

What we see happening here is an 8th century B.C. prophet who is throwing a temper tantrum after he's just preached and seen 120,000 people repent and experience God's deliverance.

It's amazing, isn't it? It's not. Jonah is angry because he did not want Nineveh to be spared and he holds God responsible. It's so arrogant.

[11:09] It's like he's saying, I knew it. I knew if I went and preached, you would do your nice God thing. You would deliver him. I knew it! You know, it's like Jonah is saying, hey, you can deliver your people, the Jews, all you want, God.

Show us compassion over and over and over again, but when it comes to showing any kind of mercy and compassion on our enemies, done! You've crossed a line. I'm ticked! That's what he's saying. Jonah. It's obvious that Jonah is not getting the scope and scale of God's heart for all people.

That's obvious, isn't it? He's stuck. The very reason God chose Israel in the first place to be his covenant people was to show to the surrounding nations his great and steadfast love.

He chose Israel to be the object of his affection so that their resulting holiness would shine like a beacon to the Gentile nations surrounding them, calling them to the worship of the one true God.

[12:29] But Jonah has gone inward. Jonah is hoarding his God. God is for us and us alone. His grace, His mercy, His pity, His compassion, His steadfast love is for us.

And what God wants to do here and what God does here is correct that. He's not going to let Jonah put him in a box.

God wants to use His people. He's always wanted to use His people. He wants to use His people to show the world who He is. A holy God willing to save any sinner who calls upon Him because He's gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

So in verse 3, Jonah is so angry that he's so caught up in the injustice that he sees, he wants to die. He'd rather die than see the Ninevites live. That's the point. It's kind of ironic. I mean, this is the same guy that called out to the same God when he was dying and God delivered him.

[13:44] What happened? Jonah is being really selfish with his God.

Jonah wants God to save his way, not God's way. Jonah, his disdain for the Ninevites forms his theology, forms his thinking about God and God is like, no, you can't do that, buddy.

And so he corrects him. He lovingly confronts Jonah. And so here we have the beginning of Jonah 4, a really angry prophet, angry at his God.

For saving people who needed to be saved. And if there's one thing that we can learn from Jonah's mistake is that we, the church, the new covenant people of God, we don't hoard God's mercy and grace.

We don't want to keep it in the walls of this building. We're not to keep who our great God is a secret from the rest of the city.

[14:59] We don't decide who God shows compassion on. We don't decide who God shows his wrath to. We don't make that decision. We have no grounds to challenge God's compassion because we, of all people, we deserve wrath, but Christ has shown us grace, mercy, and steadfast love.

Jonah is standing in judgment over the judge. It is astonishing. And so God, the judge, lovingly confronts this angry prophet.

God puts on a clinic. So Jonah vents. He has a hissy fit. And now God responds in verses 4 through 9.

In verse 4, Jonah in verse 3 is like, I'm so mad I can die! Take my life! And in verse 4, God totally ignores it.

Totally ignores it. He totally ignores Jonah's drama and confronts him with a question. A question intended to expose Jonah's heart.

[16:17] Jonah, do you do well to be angry? Maybe a better way of understanding it is, Jonah, what right do you have to be angry? What grounds?

How can you, Jonah, be angry with my compassionate heart to save anyone who will call upon my name? Why are you getting angry at that, Jonah? And in verse 5, we see Jonah's response.

So God asks him the question in verse 4. And in verse 5, what does Jonah do? I'm out of here. He walks out. Walks out of the city of Nineveh.

Walks out, sets up a booth, sets up shop, and it's kind of like, okay, God, show me. Clear him out. Basically, it's kind of like Jonah saying, okay, God, I'll give you one more chance.

I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm going out. I want to see, I want to see you do your stuff on this city. So Jonah's hoping that God will change his mind or something, but what we know is that he's still angry.

[17:29] So what's God going to do? How does God handle this heated prophet? I mean, I guess God could have responded by wiping Jonah off the

face of the earth if he wanted to.

but he doesn't. God responds to Jonah as he's responded to Jonah all throughout the book of Jonah with tremendous patience.

God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love not only to sinners, not only to those outside the people of God, but with his people. And the way that God handles Jonah's sinful anger is just simply amazing.

And this is our God. He patiently addresses this guy. He is patient with Jonah. He is patient with us. Even in the midst of our missionary call as a church, God is patient with us. Working things out. So in verse 6, God in his loving wisdom changes tactics.

[18:37] He's not. It's kind of like God takes stock. Okay, Jonah, you're not obviously listening to me. So I'll just expose you in another way.

And so, call to mind that God is sovereign over all things. He orchestrates all things to do his bidding. And we've already seen it in chapter 1 where God calls out a storm and throws it onto the Mediterranean Sea to get done what he wanted to get done.

And we see it in chapter 2 and God appointing a great fish to swallow Jonah and then to spit him out. Here in chapter 4, we see God's sovereign control over all things to carry out his purposes. It's on display again with three appointees. And might I just tell you, God is determined to expose Jonah's hypocrisy that God can save him but God can't save anybody else.

It's double standard. He's going to expose it because he loves Jonah. So in verse 6, God appoints a plant. Appointing number one. And he makes this plant grow over Jonah in order to provide shade for his heaven.

[19:55] Remember, we're in the Middle East. This is in modern day Iraq. It gets hot. And we read that God raised this plant up to verse 6 to save him from his discomfort.

It's tongue in cheek. And what is Jonah's response to this leafy plant that has just grown over him? Exceeding gladness.

He's now run the gamut. He was exceedingly angry and now he's exceedingly happy. He's so happy that he's got shade for his head.

But God, in his loving wisdom, knows that this is just a setup. God is sovereignly, wisely setting Jonah up for a very important lesson.

verse 7, God appoints a worm at dawn the next day in that worm attacks the plant. Sometime early morning, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, worm eats the plant, some aspect of it, and the plant withers.

[21:08] Right at the, just at the right time. So now, the plant withers, Jonah's exposed, just in time for verse 8, when the sun rises and appointing number 3, God appoints a scorching east wind that when coupled with the sun, beats down on Jonah's head and pushes our prophet Jonah to a physical breaking point.

He wants to die again. Echoing the words of verse 3, he asks God to take his life. It's better for me to die than to live. I can't stand this heat.

I can't live without this plant. Jonah is upset that the plant has perished. He has pity on the plant. And up until this point, in the book of Jonah, the only one he's been concerned about when it comes to perishing has been himself. He wasn't concerned about the captain or the crew who were perishing on the ship in chapter 1, verses 6 and 14.

He wasn't concerned about the 120,000 Ninevites who were going to perish if they hadn't repented. Chapter 3, verse 9. For the first time in the book, Jonah is concerned about something perishing besides himself.

[22:34] And do you know what it is? A plant. God is exactly, He's got Jonah exactly where He wants him.

God has exposed Jonah and once again, God has brought Jonah to an end to himself. We saw that in chapter 2. Why is God bringing Jonah to an end to Himself?

Because God loves Jonah and He does not want Jonah ruled by any kind of selfish hate that boxes God in to some kind of self-made God. He wants Jonah to take on His heart for those who are perishing.

Instead of being bitter and callous and whatever, I don't give a rip, God wants Jonah to be full of pity and to be compassionate and to be concerned about these people who are perishing.

The whole episode with the plant is one great sovereign orchestration of love for Jonah to expose Jonah, to confront Jonah, to show him his double standard.

[23:50] Now that God has Jonah where He wants him, verse 8, God asked Jonah the same question as He did in verse 4 with a slight adjustment. Jonah, do you have the right to be angry about the plant that's just perished?

Jonah, do you have the right to be angry right now about that plant that is no more? Jonah gets the question and man, He has had it.

Yes, I have the right to be angry, angry enough to die. Thank you. Let me just die, God! He doesn't want to, He doesn't get His way.

And so He does what we do when we don't get His way. He pouts. I mean, big time pout, like, I'm out of here, pout. Classic, self-preoccupation.

And before you look down at your nose at Jonah, remember, we've got the same tendency ourselves. Even after being saved, when things don't go our own way, when we're denied our comfort, we get upset.

[25:09] could it be that when we are denied comfort, it's actually God orchestrating our situation in order to expose our hearts so that He can get at the comfort that gets in the way of His compassion for all people?

Could it be? Could it be? God lovingly confronts Jonah and us. Do we have the right to get angry with God when He sovereignly denies us some kind of shade?

Some kind of comfort? When He exposes us with some kind of scorching heat? Some kind of hardship? We're going to experience some heat with the Supreme Court's decision this past week. Do we get angry with God? Do we have the right to be angry? God is just scratching at the surface of Jonah's heart.

Because you know what He's really doing? He's helping Jonah and us see what we really get upset about. What really ticks us off.

[26:32] What really gets our goat. what do you get upset about? What do you get angry about?

What happens when you're denied some shade? Do you get angry when you are denied the shade of sleep?

I do. When you're denied the shade comfort of money, the shade of advancement success? When you're denied the shade comfort of being well thought of by those people around you.

What God is doing here is setting Jonah up, exposing him in order to make a glorious point. plant. In other words, this whole plant episode is a divine setup.

What God is doing is showing Jonah that he is getting upset about something terribly insignificant. a plant.

[27:52] He pities a plant more than 120,000 people. So in verses 10 and 11, God turns the table on Jonah.

It comes to a head. This whole book comes to a head in verses 10 and 11. And it takes the form of a very challenging question. It's the climax of the book. And it represents a kind of rationale.

So let's look at verses 10 and 11. I'm going to read that. 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 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.

The kind of rationale that God is using right here, it's a kind of argument. It's called a how much more argument. And so there's a contrast between two things in order to show how much more one is over the other.

[29:04] We see it in Matthew 7. Jesus says, If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?

So it's a comparison between evil dads and our Heavenly Father and it gets to the point that God gives awesome gifts better than we can ever imagine.

So Jesus' point is go big, go often to your God, ask Him for big stuff. That's the point. Back to Jonah 4. Here the how much more argument takes the form of a question.

A question aimed to make a point. And the comparison in this how much more argument is between Jonah's pity for the plant and God's pity for the Ninevites.

So Jonah's pity for a plant. He did not labor for this plant. He did not make this plant grow. It was just one plant. It came into being in a night and perished in a night. It was a short-lived plant.

[30:05] Bottom line is it was a very insignificant plant. Now let's compare that to God's pity for the people of Nineveh. A great city important to God.

Remember Jonah 3.3 a great city to God. 120,000 people not plants. Image bearers.

120,000 people made by God like God and for God. 120,000 people created by God himself to worship him alone. 120,000 people who will one day stand before God someday at the judgment.

120,000 people who do not know their left hand from the right. What's being said there is they're ignorant of who God is even though they are morally accountable to God. I mean the whole reason God sent Jonah in chapter 1 was because their evil was being rising up to God.

The very last line is a little odd isn't it? Also much cattle. It's like where did that come from? Well it's kind of like this. God's saying hey if you don't buy the image bearer argument cattle are more important than plants.

[31:26] 120,000 people perishing is more important than one plant that perished Jonah. From God's perspective what's more important are people than plants.

Jonah was not seeing things from God's perspective but is from his own distorted perspective. He was valuing one plant over 120,000 people therefore the question Jonah you pitied one insignificant plant how much more should I pity 120,000 of my image bearers whose eternity is in the balance. Point made. The point has been made. Jonah has no right to be angry with God. God has every right to save whoever he wants.

And we are left asking ourselves the question does God have the right to save anybody he wants? And here's the point. God has every right to show mercy on whomever he pleases.

God has every right to show mercy on whomever he pleases. God is not bound by human expectations of who he can and who he can't save. God's not even bound by our disobedience and obeying him in the mission.

[33:00] God is free in who he is. He's gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster. He is free to have mercy on whomever he will.

And he invites all to come to him for salvation. Let's fast forward to Jesus in Matthew 11 28 and 29. Jesus says it this way. Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. No qualifications on the all. All who are heavy labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. God wants all people everywhere to call upon his name for salvation.

And what we see in the book of Jonah is that the scope of God's saving grace defies Jonah's expectations. It makes him angry.

[34:13] God wants all people everywhere to call upon his name. Experience the mercy he alone can give.

All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Salvation for anyone belongs to the Lord.

So the point being made here is God has the right to show mercy on whomever he pleases. So I want to bring that to bear in three ways in our lives.

First, God's heart for people must prioritize how we live our lives. If God prioritizes people over plants because people are eternal and plants are temporal, we too must prioritize people over things.

Every person is hardwired by God to worship God alone and there's no other name under heaven by which man can be saved. It's the name of Jesus. Jesus. And so, we've got to ask the question, are we elevating something of more importance than people?

[35:30] Or are we getting distracted? God's second thing, God's heart for all the Ninevites must form our heart for all people.

Jonah's mistake was believing there were some people outside the reach of God's saving grace. of His mercy. And we can't make the same mistake.

Last week we talked about some obstacles to sharing our faith. Fear, unbelief. So let me ask you, is there someone or a group of people who threaten you?

Or are distasteful to you? Or you just don't believe we'll be saved if they hear the gospel? So you run! You pull a Jonah.

we're more like Jonah than we think. And what God does is confronts us with Himself. He says, this is who I am!

[36:30] All who call upon my great name will be saved, even your perceived enemies, even those you think are distasteful, even those who you think right now would never respond. All who call upon me will be saved.

God's love. It has a way of softening our hearts. This forms our mission as a church. That's why we're here.

To make known the life-transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. The last thing I want you to see here is this. God's character is absolutely glorious.

worthy of eternal praise and adoration from as many lips as possible. God continues today to be a God who is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster.

Brother and sister in Christ, can I just remind you that you, by God's grace, because of what Jesus has done, you have experienced His relent of disaster over your head.

[37:42] He delivered you from the wrath of God. Jonah used God's character against him. He accused him. He came really close to cursing God.

He saw God's character as a liability. We in Christ, we don't see God's character as a liability. God's character as an asset.

We see God's character and we are like, who is like you? Gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster, my disaster, and so we don't accuse Him, we worship Him.

We glorify Him. So today, as you leave this building, there's already people lining up, I'm sure. You've seen all the chairs set up for the parade.

This afternoon, as you watch the participants of the parade and the spectators of the parade, can I just encourage you to see them as God sees them?

[38:50] Image bearers who are perishing and are in need of hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has entrusted us with the only message that will save them.

God has the book of Jonah is not about a big fish. The book of Jonah is about a big God with a big heart who offers a big salvation to a lot of people.

Salvation belongs to the Lord, our Lord, our Lord Jesus. Let's pray. God in heaven, we are freshly aware of your great heart for all people and we would pray that God you would make us as a church, a church that is bold in our witness and winsome, that as those who have been delivered from disaster, that we would speak of your saving grace to those who would hear.

I pray that God today, that as we leave this building and see people, hordes of people, crowds of people, that we would see them with new eyes.

Give us a new heart, your heart, for all people. In Jesus' name, amen.