

Is It Right?

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or by going to our FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But thank you so much for tuning in to this audio broadcast today. And I just pray that God will take His Word and use it to mold and shape us in the power of His truth more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, as most of you know if you've been listening to this broadcast for a while, I love sports. And the teams I root for are not always the typical for around here.

Yes, I am a Purdue fan that you IU fans love to pick on. I root for the Colts. Those are both pretty typical. But I'm also an Atlanta Braves fan surrounded by you Reds and Cubs people.

I root for the St. Louis Blues in a state that could care less about hockey. I'm kind of a quiet Duke fan surrounded by too many Kentucky fans.

[1 : 02] But one other team I just started rooting for in 2015 was the University of Tennessee Volunteers. That's the year my family moved to East Tennessee to take a ministry.

We were there for three years before coming back home to Greensburg. And I'll just tell you, they wouldn't even let me cross the Kentucky border until I swore allegiance.

No, I got down there and I just fell in love with that beautiful orange color. The song that epitomizes everything UT sports. Good old Rocky Top. I also got the chance to go to two UT football games.

And I'm here to tell you, there is no sports atmosphere around here that compares to the pure pandemonium and excitement of SEC football in the South.

It is a religion down there. But I want to take you back to 2016. We were living in Tennessee. I'm down in our basement watching the UT Georgia game, which is always a big deal.

[2 : 05] The game is back and forth. It looks like Tennessee is going to win. And then somehow Georgia scores at the very end to take the lead. And my heart sinks.

The game's got to be over. It looks like it is over. And then Tennessee gets the ball. Just a few seconds on the clock. Down three, but not close enough to kick a field goal.

And Tennessee throws what we call in football a Hail Mary. Over 50-yard pass to the end zone. It's just a last prayer, last attempt, and they rarely work out.

But this time, in a red sea of dogs, with a big pile of guys jumping for the ball, somehow Tennessee comes down with it in the end zone.

Touchdown, touchdown, and the game is over. And as they say in UT country, I said it's good to be a Tennessee Vol. Now, I'd tell you that story to say that's not quite the ending that I expected to that game after Georgia scored at the very end.

[3 : 14] Or, have you ever watched a movie or read a good book to get to the end and say, wow, that's not the ending I expected? Or what about when Rocky fought Apollo Creed the first time and didn't win?

That's not the ending I expected. Well, that's exactly what we see here in the book of Jonah. And if you want to go ahead and turn to the Old Testament book of Jonah, we're going to be there in just a few minutes here.

But we've had a lot of fun in this series. This is the fourth and final week. We've been going through a chapter at a time. And we've just gone deeper in this very familiar story.

See, God calls a prophet named Jonah to go to a wicked city and preach to the Ninevites. But Jonah's way too patriotic and prejudiced to do that. And so he gets in a boat headed 2,500 miles in the opposite direction.

And just when he thinks he can run from God's perfect will over his life, the wind picks up and Jonah and a bunch of pagan sea voyagers find themselves in a storm like they've never been in before, a God-sized storm.

[4 : 22] And when Jonah admits that it's his fault for running from God, he demands that they throw him overboard. They don't want to do it. But finally, reluctantly, they agree to throw him overboard to save their own lives.

And it works. When he hits the water, the sea immediately becomes calm. But for Jonah, it's not quite the ending he expected either. Because he's now in the belly of a great fish, prepared just for this occasion by a God of second chances.

And it's in the most unexpected of places that God does a work on his heart. And this wayward prophet repents and is ready to trust and follow the Lord's leading.

Then comes the holy vomit, where Jonah ends up back on the shore, ready to go preach to Nineveh. And he makes that tough journey several hundred miles in the desert sand.

He enters a city known for their wickedness, a city that celebrates violence and cruelty to their enemies. If you study history, some of the things they did to their enemies were just plain wrong in every way.

[5 : 31] And he preaches a message to these people of judgment, just as God called him to do. And even more shocking than a successful Hail Mary throw, these people actually stop and they listen.

They abandon their false gods. They repent and turn from their wicked ways. And the whole city, including their king and all their nobles, decide to follow Yahweh, the God of all creation.

And if I were writing this story, I would end right there with chapter 3. Chapter 3 would be the last chapter. I might even add a line or two at the end of that chapter that says, And Jonah rejoiced that 120,000 people came to know the salvation of the Lord.

He went on to be used by God in many powerful ways as he learned his lesson. And now he simply wanted to be faithful to a God who redeems.

But you know what? That's not quite the ending that we get. And that's what I love about God's word. See, if I were writing a holy book that I was going to try to convince people was from God when I knew it wasn't, I'm not sure that I'd paint the characters in such a raw and honest way.

[6 : 50] I don't think my heroes would be so jacked up, okay? I wouldn't show their faults and their failures and their fears the way God does through his word that is inspired by the breath of God as he breathed it out to us.

I'm not sure that I would include chapter 4 in this story. But I'm glad God does because it shows that we're human and just how desperately we need his power and his presence in our lives.

See, instead of rejoicing in possibly the greatest revival the world has ever known and even the humility that God could use you, Jonah, in that kind of way.

Instead, Jonah heads outside of the city. After preaching probably the greatest sermon he's ever preached, seeing all these lives changed, he heads outside of the city still hoping to see Nineveh destroyed, hoping to see the fireworks.

Now, a few minutes ago I asked you to turn to Jonah chapter 3, so you should be there with me. Jonah 3 verse 10.

[8 : 00] We're just going to look at the last verse of 3 from last week to give a little bit of context, and then we'll jump into chapter 4 that we're going to talk about today. So chapter 3 verse 10.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction that he had threatened.

Verse 1 chapter 4. But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. Not quite the ending we expect.

And yet I still believe Jonah was completely repentant in the belly of the fish. I still think he preached sincerely to these Ninevites. And yet this is what we often do in our human nature.

That prejudice, that overzealous patriotism, are now back with Jonah rearing their ugly heads. And here's the guy who has received the Lord's mercy and grace as much as anyone.

[8 : 58] And now he's upset that other people are receiving the Lord's mercy and grace. And while we're tempted to be like, Jonah, dude, what are you doing? You know what? I've done the same thing.

Maybe you have too. Because after our greatest spiritual victories, that's when we can be the most vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Let me say it again. After our greatest spiritual victories, that's when we can be the most vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

You know, I've been in too many roundtable discussions with preachers saying, I just don't get why Monday is so hard on me when I've had the privilege to see the Lord do such great things on Sunday.

And I feel that too. Or when someone surrenders their life to Jesus and they seem so sincere in their desire to truly follow Him, and then you never see Him again. I've had that happen so many times.

Or that fire dies down just as quickly as it started. Why does that happen? It's because that spiritual victory, we can't rely on that because Satan will come attacking right after those victories.

[10:10] And here's what 1 Peter 5.8 says. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Or even the first part of John 10.10, we're kind of given Satan's mission statement.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. He doesn't want you walking intimately with God. He doesn't want you growing in spiritual maturity and actually shining the love of Christ into His darkness.

He doesn't want your faith to go outside of these walls, whatever the walls are for you. Maybe you're sitting in your home or when you go to church. He doesn't want us to go outside the walls and actually affect how you live or how you treat your spouse or how you parent your kids or how you spend your time or your money.

Satan wants us to look like Jonah here in chapter 4, walking in this religious facade and yet living with hearts that are full of anger, pride, and resentment.

No joy, no peace, no hope, no contentment. See, being religious is not the same as knowing and walking in the fruits of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

[11:24] In fact, religious people are the ones who killed Jesus. So let's ask a question that comes from the Lord as He wrestles with Jonah's rebellious heart again.

Then, is it right? That's the question. Is it right? And we see that twice in this passage. Is it right?

And if you got your outline, and don't forget, if you'd like to kind of be able to see our outline in a digital form, you can always go to the YouVersion, YouVersion, Y-O-U version Bible app.

It is absolutely free, put on by a great church. YouVersion Bible app. Go to the menu. Go to events. Click on our church, First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and you'll be able to see the outline that way.

But here's the first question I have for you today. Is it right to hold that grudge? Is it right to hold that grudge? Man, this is hard stuff.

Because you and I have done this. And maybe we felt justified in it. But as a follower of Jesus, is it right to hold that grudge?

[12:34] Okay, so let's pick up in Jonah 4, verse 2. And here's what it says. He prayed to the Lord. Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home?

That is why I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live. But the Lord replied, Is it right for you to be angry? Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city.

There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade, and waited to see what would happen to the city. Okay, so counselors have understood the power of asking the right question for a long time.

Because questions, while they can be non-threatening, they can still get to the heart of what's going on. But we've got to understand that for Jonah, these Assyrians have caused real issues for him and for his people.

[13:42] Jonah's probably witnessed their raids and their attacks on his land. Maybe he has personally known people they killed in the process. Maybe he was one of the leaders who had been targeted. We don't know this for sure, but we know that there is some deep-seated stuff going on in Jonah's heart here.

Possibly like people who maybe were in Hawaii, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Could you imagine right after that happened, if you lived in Hawaii and you witnessed just the awful

situation there and the hurt and the pain and people you love, could you imagine then being told to go to the heart of the capital city of that country of Japan to preach while truly loving and forgiving these people?

Listen, we're talking spiritual maturity today. We're looking different than the world looks. And whether it's a struggle we have with sin or even someone we believe who wronged us deeply, just because you have victory once or you forgive once doesn't mean that it's not gonna try to come back to visit you.

And you know this because you're human just like I am. And right now, you may have a face that is popping in your mind that makes you angry instantly. And you may even have the same attitude as Jonah.

Not a chance I'm forgiving them. Yeah, I'll punch him in the face, but I'm not gonna forgive them. I'm not gonna show them grace. Not this time. Not for what they did. For Jonah, it was the face of an Assyrian.

[15:14] And if I'm honest with you, I have a face that comes to my mind too. And yet that person, as God constantly reminds me, is made in the image of Almighty God just as much as I am.

Not what I always wanna hear, but hashtag truth, right? See, you thought you were coming to hear this for marshmallow cream today. You thought you were coming for fluff.

But this is real life stuff where you and I are called to be daily transformed into the image of Christ in a very hurtful world. And while I've shared this before, it's possibly one of the most powerful sentences that I've ever heard.

So let me share this quote again by a guy named Louis B. Smedes. He says, to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

So hear my heart for a second. I in no way am trying to make light of your hurt. I'm not trying to say it's no big deal. I'm not trying to say get over it. There are people who are listening to this message who have been hurt on the deepest levels.

[16:26] And I'm so sorry for what you've gone through. But what the Lord is saying is that he wants to come into that hurt and teach us how to forgive so that that hurt doesn't keep us from being conformed into the image of Christ.

So that hurt doesn't turn you and turn I into a person who hurts others by our words and by our actions. I want to take you to the New Testament to Matthew chapter 18 starting here in verse 21 where Jesus tells us a story that's been called the parable of the unmerciful servant.

And for time's sake let me just kind of talk us through this. But it all starts when Peter comes to Jesus and he asks him how many times should we forgive someone who sins against us?

And Peter says up to seven times. In other words he thinks he's trying to be pretty generous in his ability to forgive seven times. And that was actually a teaching of their day that you would forgive up to seven times.

And he's basically like Jesus look at me I can forgive people seven times. And yet Jesus says nah I don't think so.

[17:46] It's 70 times seven which equals 490 but that's not the point. The point from Jesus was to say I'm not worried about a number but to say as a follower of Christ who's been forgiven much you got to keep on forgiving.

And Jesus tells us a story about a king who goes to settle his accounts with his servants and one of the servants owed him 10,000 talents.

Now I think Jesus is being crazy with his number on purpose and it's going to make sense when it comes back to our own hearts. But just this is an unheard of amount of money probably in the hundreds of millions of dollars if not more.

And the servant just cannot pay it back. And so the punishment is that he and his family will be sold to pay at least a little bit of the debt. But he comes and bows before the king and begs him to give him more time.

But the king feeling merciful takes it a hundred steps further. He shows him mercy. He cancels his debt altogether and he lets him go free.

[18:53] And after receiving this insane mercy you would think it would change a guy. But here's what he does. This servant goes out. He finds a guy who owes him money.

Not hundreds of millions of dollars but we're talking more like thousands of dollars in our culture. He grabs the guy, chokes him, and shows him no mercy as he has him thrown into prison.

Word gets back to the king and the king is furious. He basically says, I showed you mercy for an amount of money that you could never repay and you refused to show it to another for such a smaller amount that they owed you.

So the master handed him over to the jailers until he could repay his debt. See, Matthew 18.35 says, this is how, this is what Jesus says, this is how my heavenly father will treat you unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart.

Paul even says to the Ephesian church, Ephesians 4.32, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as Christ, in Christ God, forgave you.

[20 : 04] See, the point of Jesus' parable is to say to those who belong to Christ, who walk in his redeeming power, who have been transformed by his grace, whose sins have been forgiven as great as they are, he's saying, how can you be forgiven millions and millions of dollars of debt and not forgive less?

How can you receive my grace over every sin you've ever committed that is so deserving of punishment and yet not show that same grace to others?

And you know what? He's right. But it's still hard. And just like with Jonah, who had already worked through this once before it came flying back out again, it is a daily choice for us to forgive as we walk in his grace and his mercy.

So is it right to hold that grudge? Absolutely not. It's hard though. It's hard for us. So Lord, help us to surrender that to you every day because you have forgiven us all of our sins more than we could ever be wronged by someone else.

Help us to forgive others and to show grace and mercy. And here's the second question. Is it right to place comfort before souls? Is it right to place comfort before souls?

[21 : 30] Now go ahead and look back at Jonah 4, verse 6 with me. Jonah has built a small shelter. He's sitting in there pouting because God won't destroy the Ninevites.

And then here's what it says, starting in verse 6. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort. And Jonah was very happy about the plant.

But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

He wanted to die and he said, it'd be better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, is it right for you to be angry about the plant? It is, he said, and I'm so angry I wish I were dead.

But the Lord said, you have been so concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or you did not make it grow. It sprang up overnight and it died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great people of Nineveh, the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and also many animals?

[22 : 43] By the way, Bible trivia for you here. There are only two books in the Bible that end with a question. Jonah and Nahum. Man, I had no idea of that.

So that's a really hard Bible trivia question, which is also, Nahum is also about Nineveh. So it's really cool. The two that have questions are about the city of Nineveh.

Kind of an odd story here, though. Let's kind of keep going. Kind of an odd story to us in 2023. That makes a little bit more sense if you understand 700 BC, Middle Eastern context.

But Jonah, he is stubborn, just like most of us. That's not changed through time. He has planted his feet in the sand and he's not budging. He is angry.

His hatred, his prejudice have flared up and he's okay with it. And he just wants to dwell in that anger. And I wonder if there's anyone listening to me today who's doing the same thing.

[23 : 39] Maybe you haven't voiced it to God, but by your actions, you made it clear that you're not giving in to the Lord. Well, I hate to give some bad news here, but we're not going to win that one, okay?

Because while we often chase so hard after the temporary, God cares so much about our hearts that he's always trying to draw us back to the eternal. The Holy Spirit is always molding us as believers into people of godly character.

And when we walk constantly in anger, which by the way, can manifest itself differently based on your personality. It's not always these big outbursts. It can be anger that's internalized that maybe comes out as fear and different things.

But when we allow our hearts to dwell in that desert, it's a miserable place to be. It's a place of depression. It's a place of resentment.

It's a place of hatred. And I think we all know that. And yet when we are walking in obedience to Christ, growing in his word, chasing after the heart of God, seeking to be his hands and his feet, allowing him to rip off chains of sin off of our hearts, that's when we'll see the promised fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

[24 : 50] Because hatred and fits of rage, if you look at Galatians chapter five, and we're getting ready to read about the fruits of the Spirit, but right before that passage are the fruits of the flesh.

And two of those are hatred and fits of rage. But here's what Galatians 5, 22 and 23 says about what it looks like to walk in the fruits of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things, there is no law. And here Jonah has built a shelter that I'm guessing didn't block him very well from the hot sun or the blowing sand. And he's in a fit of rage.

So God makes a plant grow up quickly to provide him some shade, some relief. And he's really happy about it. But as quick as it came up, God sends a worm to destroy it and it's gone the next day.

[25 : 48] And Jonah tells God he wants to die. He's that angry, that miserable in the hot sun with his resentment just stewing inside of him. But God has a big lesson.

He wants to teach Jonah and he wants to teach us today. God asks him, he says, is it right for you to be angry about that plant? And here's the setup.

God allowed the plant to go away to say to Jonah, you care more about the life of this plant than you do about 120,000 souls that if I were to judge them would be in hell for eternity.

And instead of you still being in that city teaching these people what it looks like to follow the God of creation, teaching them God's truth, teaching them God's righteous laws, which were a part of what a prophet was called to do.

Jonah, don't you remember? Don't you remember the storm and the big fish and the lessons you were taught and the mercy and the grace that I have shown you through it all when I could have removed my protection and a heartbeat over your life and you could have been the one and eternal punishment?

[26 : 56] And here's the thing. We don't know what happened to Jonah. Jewish tradition still holds him in high regard, so it's likely that his heart did change, but we don't know that.

And we're left with an ending to the story that's not what we expected. But our ending can be better.

While Jonah chose his reputation as a prophet over obedience, while Jonah chose comfort over souls, we have to be careful not to choose our own way or our own comforts over God's will.

And in the words of Billy Graham, God doesn't comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters. See, when the church of Jesus Christ stops fighting over carpet or food or musical preferences or other silly things that really don't matter in the grand scheme of eternity, when the church stops being so concerned over her own well-being and her own selfishness and starts to peek outside of the stained glass windows at a lost world, when we realize we've been given the greatest mission on earth to reach the lost, to grow together to spiritual maturity, when that's the church's heart cry, a heart of compassion and mercy to see people come to know Jesus that's more important than the song that's being sung, that's when the ending will be what God's word tells us to expect, to be used by Him to impact our world and to someday stand before Him washed clean by His blood and to hear those words that we all who follow Jesus long to hear.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you for these words of life that you've spoken to us today.

I just pray that you will stir our hearts and you will make us more and more into the image of Christ. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Hey, if you are listening to this today and you have questions about your faith, you would like to talk about what it means to follow Jesus, I'd love to sit down and study the scriptures with you and show you what God's word teaches so you can reach out in a couple ways here at First Christian Church of Greensburg.

[29 : 21] My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. But you can call 812-663-8488 or you can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you. We pray you have a great week.