

A Compassionate God

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[0 : 00] Turning back together to the book of Jonah, we can read again in chapter 4, the words of verses 1 and 2. Jonah 4 at verse 1.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Then he asks in verse 3, therefore, now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

And among the many wonders of God's word for which God's people are most grateful is how throughout the scriptures we have repeated accounts of, well, in relation to Jonah, maybe the unwitting or the unintentional honesty with which he speaks to God.

[1 : 12] We might go through things in our own lives where we find we have no control over what we're feeling or over what we're thinking. And we might feel quite guilty for that.

And we might, because we feel guilty, think that we should keep that all to ourselves. But when we look at what is happening here in this section of the short and yet full book of Jonah, we ask ourselves how is it that God deals with this man for his honesty.

It may correct some of the ways that we think, not least of which is this way in which Jonah, being expressive of his frustration and his anger, that in response to that God comes and deals with him so very graciously.

When on two occasions he vents his anger, the Lord says to him, verse 4, chapter 4, do you do well to be angry? Then verse 9, do you do well to be angry?

God so often comes like that, does he not? You and I, we confront people with accusations. If something's wrong, you think even if you're a parent, and this isn't in any shape or form to undermine your authority as a parent, but let's be honest, sometimes when we try and correct or try and show where there's error or mistakes, we often go about it in a way that somewhat vindicates ourselves or is maybe expressive of our own frustration, rather than having at that moment the best intention of the child at heart.

[2 : 48] Of course, it's mixed. It's mixed and the two things are going on. But what we often find throughout Scripture from Genesis right through here in Jonah and elsewhere in John, there's three occasions where sin is taking place and the Lord is wanting those to whom he's speaking to seriously think about what's taking place.

He approaches the issue not with accusation but with question. He comes, does he not, in the Garden of Eden and speaks to Adam and to Eve. By questioning, he turns to Satan with accusation.

He comes here to Jonah with questioning. And then with John 4, the woman at the well, our Lord speaks to her with a series of questions. He creates a conversation where he comes to point the finger at the glaring problem in that woman's life that she doesn't realize to be the cause of her sorrows and dissatisfaction.

But by pressing on it the way he does, he doesn't come down on her. He doesn't condemn her. But he approaches the point of her life and the crux of the situation in a very gracious and kind way. I mean, what would you do with Jonah? What would I do with Jonah? If we were in a situation where you have this man, you have a prophet, you have a man who is called and commissioned and sent to proclaim the message of God.

[4 : 09] He turns his back and he runs the other way. Well, we'd think he's finished, wouldn't we? And if that was you or I who were in Jonah's shoes, taking flight and running away from God without

even being a prophet, let's be honest with ourselves.

How many times have we taken flight from the path of duty, the path of privilege, the path of obedience? How would we deal with one in that situation?

Well, we would maybe deal with ourselves a lot lighter without saying anything, but in terms of how we think and how we feel. Have you ever found it in your own life? But at one point you looked at what someone said or did or failed to say or do, wrong in both instances.

And at that point, looking back on it now, you had such a critical, judgmental response. How on earth could they do this? How on earth could someone in that situation not do this?

How could such things come out of their mouths? Or how could they fail to speak when the opportunity came along? Then time goes by, does it not? Maybe it's weeks, maybe it's months, maybe it's years. And then what happens?

[5 : 15] We find ourselves thinking and speaking and maybe even doing the very thing we judge someone else for doing before. In Jonah's life, as you know very well, there are so many complications.

One level, it's straightforward. What God is calling him to do, his duty, his obedience, the objective of his mission, it's all very straightforward in one sense. But it's very complicated in another sense. And the complication is with Jonah. He is a complicated person. But even there, when we think about how complicated he is, it's because of a determination in his own mind and heart that he knows what's right, even when God tells him otherwise.

You have a New Testament parallel, don't you, with someone like Simon Peter, one of the 12. And he, on more than one occasion, thought he knew right, even when the Lord told him otherwise. He knew right.

But Jonah here and also Peter in the New Testament, and you and I with them, we have to learn sometimes the hard way. We want to try looking at, and briefly, may the Lord help us to do this and to benefit from us.

[6 : 23] Firstly, to notice God's compassion for Jonah, part one. Second thing is God's compassion for Nineveh, which is astonishing as well. The third thing is God's compassion for Jonah in a second way.

So God's compassion is what really stands out. The book of the prophet Jonah isn't really about Jonah. In a sense, the Acts of the Apostles isn't about the Acts of the Apostles. At one level, of course, it is about Jonah.

And like in the New Testament, the book of Acts is about Acts. But above, beyond, and through all that takes place on the pages of these accounts, it is the God of heaven and earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord himself, and the Holy Spirit, who really stand out.

And it's trying to trace these steps of God's dealings with both Jonah and Nineveh that we hope to see some connection with all of this for ourselves. I mean, how are you feeling today?

Any of us, if we were to try and answer that question. When we're asked the question, we're fine.

When someone asks us, and I'm sure you would ask this coming in, or you ask someone else, and we're fine.

[7 : 32] And deep down, we know we're not fine. Sometimes even coming out of church, if someone was to ask you or ask me afterwards, how are you doing? How are you? Or how was that? Or did you benefit? If we're going to be honest, we might say, no, we didn't.

We may this morning be very frustrated. We may be confused. We may be angry. There may be factors and situations in our lives over which we have no control, for which we haven't asked, and from which we cannot free ourselves.

And because of that, we feel hemmed in to a situation that is not of our own choosing, in terms of health, in terms of family, employment, whatever it might be. And we may find ourselves very frustrated, asking the question, why is God doing this?

Why has God done this? Or why is he not doing this? Or has not done that? Now, how do we deal with this? Well, let's tell God about it.

And let's be able to trust one another to, when we're asked the question, how are we, to tell one another. Even if the problem we have is sin. James, in his New Testament letter, says that, does he not?

[8 : 39] Coming to conclude and wind up his letter, he says, to confess your faults to one another. Pray for one another that you might be healed. When there are issues and difficulties, of course, we

need to know who we can talk to.

And if God provides that someone or those people that you feel closer to than others, there's the outlet. If there are struggles and if there are difficulties, if there are frustrations and complications, don't keep it to yourself.

Ultimately and above everything and everyone, of course, we need to pour our hearts out to the Lord, even when it's a great difficulty that we've got. Let's say the situation you're in, or I'm in, or any one of us, or all of us, as it will happen at times, is that we're so greatly frustrated with ourselves. That we are the problem. That our own failings are the things that are holding us down and holding us back. And we might feel, how can I make any progress? How can I ever come through or get beyond the situation that I've put myself in?

Well, look at Jonah here in this instance. And notice God's compassion to him, how it shows itself the first time. The word of the Lord, we're told, this is chapter 3, verse 1, came to Jonah the second time.

[9 : 52] You know we talk about turning over a new leaf, starting all over again. Do you believe it's possible for that to happen in your Christian life? Do you believe it's possible for, irrespective of what you may have done or failed to do in your relationship with God or with other people, do you think it's possible for things to start afresh in a sense?

Yes. Well, maybe these words, the word coming to Jonah the second time, gives us hope to believe that. We might have written this man off. How more disobedient to God's call could he have been? Well, he might have gone and said a different thing from what God told him to say. That would be bad enough. But when this man turns and runs away completely, well, you'd think, well, this man can't be trusted anymore.

He's a liability. And what's he going to do the next time if you let him loose? Well, God doesn't deal with us like that. We maybe think he will or does. And Satan on our backs, when we're down, he'll definitely want to kick us and tell us, you're finished.

You've burned all your bridges. There's no way back to God out of this, never mind being of any usefulness in his service anymore. So you're as well to forget it. Keep your head in the sand and your mouth in the dust and just get on with it.

[11 : 04] God doesn't like that. Even think of Peter in the New Testament. The Lord announcing to Peter that he was going to deny three times that he even knew him. Peter denied that he would deny.

Of course, he did deny eventually. But what the Lord said in announcing the denial, predicting it, he said, I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. And when you turn back or when you're converted, which doesn't mean that initial coming to faith and repentance.

It isn't that initial expression of the new birth. But where someone who is a believer already and has backslid in and sinned and fallen, is restored and comes back to the right path.

The Lord is saying, you're coming back, Peter. And when that happens, strengthen your brothers. In order for Peter to be a blessing in people's lives, he needs to be broken first.

He's going to be broken in pieces. That pride and that self-confidence and that arrogance, you know all about Peter yourselves. We know the details of it. And maybe it's becoming translated into our own lives.

[12 : 06] That prior to usefulness, we may be asking, why have I done this? Why am I in this situation? What is God doing with me? Why do I feel this way? Well, it may be that he's taking you into pieces prior to putting you back together in order to use you to become a blessing in another's life or in the lives of more than just one.

You find the second letter to the Corinthians. Now what the Apostle Paul says in writing in the first chapter about the comfort that he's able to minister to others. It's only because he has himself experienced comfort from God in his suffering that he's able to minister comfort to others in their suffering.

So if he didn't suffer, he wouldn't be of any use to comfort those who are in suffering around him. Who knows what God may have in your life? Even, let's be honest, this is an excuse for any one of us.

And we think right about this. We know it's not an excuse. Even in our failings. Even in our shortcomings. Even in the mistakes. I mean, we might write a Jonah off, but God doesn't write a Jonah off.

God sends him out the second time. God is able to, and you know, what do you think about this? And this has maybe been on the go for years, the thought, and maybe different opinions about it. When people will say that God forgets our sin, well, is that possible in one sense?

[13 : 28] When we say that he cast our sin into the sea or depth of his forgetfulness, well, at one level it's wrong. In another level, it's right. How?

It's wrong in the sense that when we think, and some of us are very bad for this, and both hands up here on this account, of forgetting things, or forgetting sometimes the most easy things to remember.

And in that regard, talking about forgetfulness is a defect. It's a negative. Any use of that word. To transport that word onto a God and a being such as God is, who is perfect in every respect, including his knowledge.

He's omniscient. He's all-knowing. There can be no defect possible in that regard. And for that reason, forgetfulness is a constitutional impossibility with God.

He cannot forget. But in terms of choosing to never hold the thing against us, well, maybe forgetfulness is maybe not the most accurate, but it certainly may be a helpful word to bring to bear on this.

[14 : 35] God is able to deal with you and with me in forgiving our sin in a way that's as though we had never done it. Now, that isn't to say that he forgets it and as though the thing is no longer there in any shape or form, because as we're trying to say, that is an impossibility at one level.

God does not hold it against us. The blood of Jesus, someone else has said, removes the condemnatory memory of past sin.

God takes that away. God is able. And as we read in 1 John, because he's faithful and because he's just, God will forgive sin.

It's because of who he is. As God, he is true. He is faithful. He is just. He forgives. He cleanses. And that's the assurance that we need to hold on to ourselves today.

And you know, there's that word in number, the words of Balaam. And people often think, now try to get these words right just now. It's where people will say the quotation that he sees no sin in Jacob, nor iniquity in Israel.

[15 : 43] Words to that effect in the AV. And some have come to the conclusion that God doesn't see our sins. God doesn't see our sins. That looking on us in Jesus, God doesn't see the sins of his people.

That isn't actually correct. When you think about it. If that were correct, why would there be any need for us to be taught by our Lord in the Lord's Prayer for forgiveness?

See, what we confuse sometimes is justification and sanctification. I don't want to go off on one on this just now. But if it's something to explore and look further into. When we come into the presence of God and when we confess our sin.

We coming as those who are justified. Meaning all our sins, past, present, and future. Have, because of the substitutionary death of Jesus in our place, been dealt with.

The guilt has been dealt with. We are no longer condemned. We're justified. But that doesn't mean we're no longer sinners. Or that our sin is no longer sinful in God's eyes.

[16 : 45] That is why in the Hebrews 12, 13 context. That he chastises us. He deals with us. In order that we may partake of his holiness. That is, in other words, obvious sin in our lives.

That God is refining and taking away. So he does see our sin. It's this idea, this concept. Of not holding the guilt of our sin against us anymore. And that is so that in our relationship with God. When we have made a mess. God is able to deal with us. And take us into a position in life. To, as it were, say, let's deal with this situation now.

As though the previous one didn't happen. What about you? How do you think on the human level? How completely different we are? You know all that's going on. Whatever you think about this.

Whatever any of us think about this. In terms of politics.

What a minefield it is. All of its own. But the situation where any of you think about this. Our own prime minister at the present time. And everyone is doing everything, rightly or wrongly.

[17 : 44] To drag all the dirt up that they can. Whatever their intention or motivation. The skeletons in the cupboard. All the rest of it. There it is. That's the kind of person he is. How can you trust this fellow to do this, that or the next thing?

That's the human way of dealing with one another, isn't it? And let's be honest. Isn't it true, even in our Christian lives. That we hold grudges in our heart. We do. And it could be something from years ago.

Done maybe not to us, but someone close to us or loved by us. And when you go into a place, it reminds you of things. Or you see someone, it reminds you of the situation. And then up it comes again.

And that shows we haven't actually dealt with the problem. We haven't actually forgiven. But to be able to forgive. And by being able to forgive, we mean that enabling, God giving us that grace. And that enabling that spiritual strength to actually put the thing forever to sleep. So that we're able to love as though the thing didn't happen.

[18:42] That's nothing short of miraculous in a way. Because it doesn't come to us naturally. So let's, when we're trying to work out our relationship with God.

In a context maybe of failure. Shortcoming and sin. Let's not impose upon God. Unintentionally. Let's not impose upon God. A view of and relation to failing.

That is purely human. That belongs to us. God can deal with us in a way we can't deal with one another. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.

We'd wipe him off. We'd write him off. We'd write ourselves off. We maybe have today. God isn't. God is saying, come and do this again. Jonah himself is going to become a living sermon on the message of forgiveness.

His very presence in this great city is a testimony all of its own. To the grace, the forgiveness of God. The second thing, God's compassion for Nineveh. Isn't it amazing to see the change that's come over Jonah?

[19:47] It's a partial change. And again, there's encouragement in this. You know, isn't it the case that sometimes you and I, if we're Christian people today, we have recurring problems with the same things.

And maybe for a time we've come through a situation. And the problem that was present or the sin that was there or the situation that was there, we were brought through it to a point.

We worked our way through it. And then we thought, well, that's past. We thank God for that being the case. And then what happens? But the thing rises with a renewed vigor and raises, as we say, its ugly head.

And here we are all over again. Well, here's Jonah. He's called and recommissioned second time. He goes the second time. But his heart doesn't change properly.

Well, what's going on then? Well, one thing that he doesn't want to happen is to end up at the bottom of the Mediterranean a second time. And it's possible for you and for me, and now coming back into the path of duty and obedience, for us to do it on the very basis that we don't want to suffer the way we did for disobeying last time.

[20:55] That our motivation could be self-centered, in other words, rather than God-centered. See, his heart isn't fixed because he doesn't want the message God's sending him with to have any positive effect.

He doesn't want God's objective to be realized, in other words. His motives are mixed, self-centered and rebellious still. But anyway, he's sent, and how mysterious is this, that here he is sent into this great city.

Nineveh is a great city. We're told in verse 3, chapter 3, it was an exceedingly great city, or otherwise could be translated as a great city to God either way.

It was a big city in and of itself by its own right, but it was also a big city in terms of its view in the eyes of God. He had a lot of thought and a lot of intention towards this place.

Jonah goes in. He proclaims the word. Yet, verse 4 says, 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. People sometimes ask, where did he get the message from? Well, that's obviously the message that God sent him with.

[22:02] But amazingly, Jonah is happy to go with this message, prophet that he is, hoping, believing, expecting that that is the very thing that's going to happen, that the city will be overthrown.

He is a prophet of doom. He's only going to give one half of the message. We're like that too, aren't we? I mean, some churches are built on this kind of approach, and we've maybe seen it, maybe been part of it.

You can have one that is imbalanced, and the emphasis is all on judgment and blackness and negativity and gloom. And to be a Christian, you need to be austere and serious, and everyone looks at your face and your whole approach, outlook, appearance is so negative and gloomy and miserable.

And because there's this one-sided emphasis of the character of God in our teaching and in our reading and in our believing, the danger is likewise present in other places on the opposite end of the scale.

We're believing, as Jonah does, that God is merciful, gracious, abounding in steadfast love, and turning away from disaster, that we become somewhat liberal and light and all that comes along with that, making laws for ourselves, our own rights, intentions, all the rest of it, and just do what you want, it's up to you, and no one's going to tell you otherwise, rather than having the difficult balance between both of these extremes.

[23 : 26] The biblical balance, walking, as it were, upon the tightrope, where we're not swinging like a pendulum, and we do this throughout life. One extreme one day, another extreme the other, and then hopefully finding the equilibrium at some point.

Jonah's a doom and gloom fellow. In one sense, in one sense, we need to be careful about what we say. You know, some would look up on Jonah and say, look, he's behaving like a child behaves when they're spoiled and not getting their way.

You know, and some of the commentators will say just that, not maybe in these words, but that's the emphasis that they make, and that's the impression that they give. But, and this isn't to say it hasn't happened to them, for you and for me, it may be the case that we looked upon, or even do still look upon Jonah with that emphasis too.

Until we find ourselves in a similar, although different, but a similar situation. And then we come to understand that Jonah is a sinner.

And he's giving expression to his heart, and he's giving expression to the distorted, twisted view he has of God. It's imbalanced, we'll see that in just a minute.

[24 : 39] It's imbalanced, it's distorted. And the view he has also of God's purposes, they're also imbalanced and distorted. And the view he has upon the whole message of the prophetic word, it is distorted and it is imbalanced.

We get into that mess too though. When we're in places where nothing looks right, our view about self, our view about God, our view about everything and everyone is blurred, it's distorted.

Now, some of you here need to wear glasses, some maybe need stronger lenses than others, and others of us don't need to wear them. But for those who do, it may ring through that when, if you're in a situation where you need to wear them all the time, and you don't wear them the way things go. Well, also in terms of the level of light where things get dim, and even when you're driving and it's that twilight, and you think you're seeing, because of shadows, all the rest of it, you don't know, are you seeing a deer on the side of the road, whatever it might be.

Our vision, our perception, is something we mustn't follow all the time. We have to follow the word, we have to submit ourselves. Sometimes we're not reading and we're not praying because of what's going on.

[25 : 50] We find it hard to read, we find it hard to pray. And when we're in that situation with other factors in it, things get blurry, things get distorted, and we start to think things that aren't even there, things not hallucinating, but in terms of the context we're in, we misunderstand what's going on, we misunderstand what people mean, we misunderstand maybe what God is saying.

Certainly Jonah is in a position where he's imbalanced and he's distorted, and that's what's giving expression to, that's what's behind his giving expression to the anger.

He isn't, well, you may want to differ on this, but find maybe with passing of time, being very cautious and being judgmental or critical of an approach like this.

Who knows where we may find ourselves in, and our own hands will go in our own mouths and say, well, I'm worse than Jonah, and I totally understand where he was. To be in that state of mind, to think that it is right to argue with God, not asking God to please explain what's happening and where's this going and will it ever end, but to argue with God and be angry with God and say, I would rather die than see your will being done.

It's frightening. But why is this written for us in the scriptures? For us to tut tut and judge and criticize and condemn Jonah? Well, I don't think so. It's to emphasize God's compassion and God's dealings with such a man in such a state.

[27 : 18] As it were, as someone else has put it, draping his arm round him, taking him aside and saying, Jonah, is it right for you to be angry? See, verse 1 highlights something.

Chapter 4, verse 1. Jonah is displeased exceedingly and he is angry. Why? Because the people of Nineveh repented. They turned to God.

They sought forgiveness. They cried for mercy. Now, people differ as to whether this was actually a moving of the Holy Spirit and a turning of the city to God. Well, our Lord says, does he not, that the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah.

What does that mean? Well, it means what it says, surely. Our Lord saying these words, for example, Matthew 12, 41, explaining that the people turned in the times of Jonah and a greater than Jonah, a greater than Solomon, meaning the impenitence or the failure of his generation or the first century generation of Jews, their failure to repent at his preaching of Jesus is being contrasted with the repentance of the people of Nineveh.

So, it has to be repentance that he's actually talking, not a show of repentance. And people argue from subsequent history among the Assyrians and so on and so forth, how could it have been a genuine conversion among these people if X, Y, and Z resulted?

[28 : 38] Well, we can say what we may wish and be inclined either way, but surely what our Lord is saying in his interpretation is final. They repented at the preaching of Jonah.

What a thought that is. We shouldn't be surprised at this. We shouldn't be surprised when the, pardon the expression, the worst of sinners, well, who's the best of sinners?

You know what we're saying. The worst of sinners in a community is converted. We're maybe not even looking for them to be converted today. And you can be sure that person maybe isn't looking for themselves to be converted either, but we shouldn't be surprised.

Isn't this the gospel? Isn't this the God of grace? That he'll take a people like the people of Nineveh, renowned for their violence and brutality, and he'll forgive them. And his grace will come into their hearts and they will turn en masse to himself.

That's what verses six to the end of chapter three emphasize. The king proclaims a great fast. And he has this hope in verse nine. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish.

[29 : 44] And verse 10, again, this is one of these conundrums some people find unnecessarily. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented. You may have in front of you, God repented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them.

And he did not do it. Did God change his mind? People come up. Well, God is all-knowing. God is omniscient. He is omnipresent. He is immutable. He doesn't change.

So a God who doesn't change, how can he be said to repent? Well, you know, we can tie ourselves in knots. This isn't emphasizing a constitutional reality in God's being.

It's a relational reality. God's dealing with sinners like us. For example, just read this. We're nearly finished. Jeremiah 18 and verse seven.

And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I've spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intend to do it.

[30 : 43] And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I intended to do to it.

Could it be any more straightforward? We miss the point sometimes by, well, descending isn't the right word, or maybe going off is a bit more like it because descend, that's maybe a negative turn of phrase.

There's nothing any way negative about exploring these aspects of biblical teaching, but in our way of thinking, it could be a descent, where we tie ourselves in knots, or someone tries to tie us in knots, by saying, how can your unchangeable God be said to repent?

And we said, because he said he would change his dealings if we complied with his terms. If we do what he says, he will bless us, and he won't bring the judgment that he announces.

And if we don't turn to him, then he won't bring our way the blessing he announces. It's quite straightforward. Don't worry about being tied up in knots by these things. So when God turns from the disaster he said he would do, it isn't second thoughts, in the sense that, oh, well, I didn't expect this, or what am I going to do now?

[31 : 54] Where, for example, in the account of the flood and the buildup to the flood, we have similar language. I don't think it's exactly the same, or our understanding is to be exactly the same, where God says it repents me that I have made man on the earth.

In that instance, God is speaking, let's say, in human terms, speaking in the language of accommodation, speaking as though he were one of us in order for us to understand something of what he's saying.

God isn't sorry that he's done what he's done. He cannot be. It's an impossibility. But he's speaking in that language of accommodation so that we could look upon what he's done. But one thing it is showing us is certainly that it, as we're told, it grieves him to his heart.

God hates sin. It grieves him. Oh, well, we talk about passions or feelings or emotions within the divine being. And again, we tie ourselves in knots.

New Testament, we're told, in the letter to the Ephesians, not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Our view, our theological understanding of the character of God, the unchangeableness, the immutability of God, we can mean it's being confined to some sort of box that leaves God immovable in every possible sense.

[33 : 12] the idea of love and compassion and delight and grief. Scripture attributes to God. How we would understand that or square that without theological persuasions, that's another matter altogether, is it not?

But for you and for me today, the chief of sinners, the greatest, first in the line, there is hope for us. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter how you feel about yourself or what you fear others think about you.

What matters for you and for me is that God is ready, God is willing, and God is able to take you as you are. These notorious Ninevites, God sends his word, God sends his prophet, and despite his prophet's mixed motives and his bad intentions, God blesses his own word.

He'll always do that. Not as we want, how we want, where we want, that his word will not return void. It won't. So take hope, take courage, take heart. You're not the lost case you might think or feel that you are.

God turns from what he promises he's going to do. He announces he's going to do. And you know, if these people hadn't turned, the judgment would have come. It would have come. It would have come.

[34 : 19] The reason it didn't is because they turned and sought forgiveness. The second time God shows his compassion to Jonah, we're very brief here, is there in chapter 4, verse 1, it displeased Jonah exceedingly.

Now, what that really means is this was evil to Jonah. It's that strong. It's not just that he was displeased exceedingly. It's that God looked at, Jonah looked at God forgiving the Ninevites as an actual evil thing.

He looked upon God's actions as evil. Now, how distorted can you get? Christian people, in their thinking, you and I, could, may, maybe have, ended in the situation where we think about what God has done as evil.

Now, all we can see sometimes about what God may do is, in the, remember this, remember a situation, and we're allowed to say this, a situation, a previous congregation, where a young woman who, who had, a family already, she tragically died in giving birth, and, it was a young woman in her congregation, remember her saying, you know, the Romans 8, we know that to those who love God, all things work together for good, and she shudder, when she said, I can't see how any good can come out of that, and, so would say all of us.

We cannot see how any good, there is a, a husband, and there is a young family now bereft of their mother, and a newborn child bereft of, of his mother. How could we see good coming out of that?

[35 : 59] The tragedy in all of this, added on top of that, within a short number of years, the woman who said that, lost her own life, and we stand back and look on and think, what is our interpretation of good?

What is our understanding of good? It certainly isn't any of these two things. Either that family and that husband losing the mother and wife, or that young woman who, in fact, it was, it was, it was a series of choices that she'd made in her own life that ended to her losing her own life, and there in both of these instances, you have two church families bereft in different circumstances, and you look on in, in helplessness with no answers, and you do, you, how can, and it takes time, doesn't it?

Maybe it takes years. In some ways, we will never see the good in it. We'll never see it here and down below in all that we struggle with. We'll never maybe understand or fathom or get our mind, and it may be for our whole lives that it all looks wrong, and that can trouble us.

It can cause us no end of difficulty, and these comments are not intended to discourage, but hopefully, in seeing something with Jonah, we can see how far this can go.

Anger. So angry that he's saying, God, in effect, you've done something evil in my sight. What's that? You've forgiven a whole city the sins that they've committed against you.

[37 : 26] What on earth is going on, you think, what's going on with this man's mind? Well, that's the point, isn't it? The fact that he went there, the fact that he was thinking like that, should make us stop.

Maybe we've never gone there or been there. Now, this is a different slant, maybe. Other slants, we're not justifying or it's not our place to do that anyway, but sometimes we can be heavy on Jonah, but other times from a different angle and particularly God's approach to Jonah.

God, as it were, puts his arm around him and deals very gently with him, very gently with him.

Doesn't condemn him, simply asks him twice, is it right for you to be angry?

Both instances, Jonah saying, yes, so much so, he wants to die. He would rather die than live in the experience of God's will for his life. What a place to be.

What a place to be. But God isn't going to leave him there. You know the way the story unfolds.

See, Jonah had this great fear that seeing the ascendancy of the Assyrians and the descent of the Israelites, Nineveh being central to the Assyrian ascendancy, Jonah could see there was trouble ahead for the people of God.

[38 : 43] But by getting rid of the Ninevites, you get rid of that threat and God's people will be safe. What's the situation? Well, it almost looks like Jonah wants to take God's work into Jonah's hands and Jonah will fix it so that the problem won't happen.

If these Ninevites are forgiven, Israel is going to be in trouble and he doesn't want that. See, the distorted reasoning he's got in verse 2 of chapter 4, this is why I made haste to flee.

He wasn't scared of the Ninevites. He wasn't any of these things. It's that he knew the kind of God he believed in and the kind of God he was sending him. He had the right view of God and a wrong view of God at the same time.

Isn't the mind frightening sometimes? He had the right and wrong view of the same God at the same time. He had the right view in what sense? Chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, he's saying, I know that you are this kind of God.

This is the God you are. He was wrong and it was partial in terms of he saying, you could do this, but he's wrong by saying, how could you do this? I know this is the way you are and I know this is the way you work, but how could you do it?

[39 : 53] Well, the answer to the second is in the first. He can do what he does because he is who he is. But Jonah doesn't find the point of connect and that causes him all the problems.

Someone has put it something like this, he, his thoughts, his hopes, his expectations came in between who God is, what God is like, and what God was doing.

And that can happen for us. Whoever, whatever it might be, we can put in the place unintentionally of what God is doing, what God is like, what God is saying.

And it's something of an idolatrous approach where God may be saying to us, put that out of the way. That thing, that person, that place, that hope, whatever it might be, is it getting in the way?

Is it becoming a barrier? Is it becoming a hindrance? And God may say, that has to move on for this blessing to come. Maybe that's the case, but how God teaches so very kindly.

[40 : 58] Jonah goes and he sets up his wee booth and he waits these 39 days waiting for the judgment of God to fall upon the city. He's hoping, hoping against hope that this place is going to be destroyed.

You know what seems to have happened? He's had a massive memory lapse, hasn't he? How much this comes into play as well. He seems to have forgotten that he has been forgiven himself. Isn't that shocking when you think about it?

He's been taken from the seaweed at the bottom of the Mediterranean, swallowed by the fish, vomited on the shore, recommissioned a second time. God is saying, let's do this as though the first failure didn't happen.

And here he is fighting all over again, judging these people, criticizing these people. And he seems like we can as well. He seems to have forgotten the mercy he's received also.

So he sets up the booth. God sends the plant, sends the worm, sends the wind. Notice the presence of God. God appointing this, God appointing that, or providing, whatever the word may be, the way it goes.

[42 : 09] God provides cover. God takes the cover away. God sends the wind, the hot wind. It burns Jonah, and he's in agony, and he's angry all over again, and he prays.

And God is asking him, is it right for you to be angry? He says, yes, I'm angry enough to die. Things couldn't get any worse. Why are you doing this? And God says to him, comparing Nineveh with this plant that became a shade over his head that God provided and took away, said, Jonah, did you work for that plant?

Did you plant it? Did you nourish it? Did you tend to it? Is it yours to give? Is it yours to take? Do you have the right and prerogative to prolong its existence, to keep it in place?

And the answer to all of that and many other things, Jonah would have to say, no. I have no right. I have no claim. It isn't mine anyway. And God is saying, exactly, I have the right to give it to you. I have the right to take it from you.

What about Nineveh, Jonah? What about this massive city? If you have such feelings about a plant you didn't create and care for, what about me and my thoughts about this great city?

[43 : 26] Not only that, all of these people and even the animals. It's quite shocking, isn't it? God's compassion is incalculable.

None of us can fathom the depths of the way God is able, ready, and willing to deal with any of us. He will give us a second chance and a third chance, but we don't provoke Him.

We're just about to sing as we finish from Psalm 85 where God is saying that, I'll hear, verse 8, I'll hear what God, the Lord will speak. To His folk, He'll speak peace unto His saints, but let them not return to foolishness.

Let's not go back. Let's not presume on the fact He got us out of that mess, gave us another start, that will say, well, I can do it again and He'll do the same again.

No, let's seek to be faithful and honorable and honest, every one of us, that we may rejoice in the compassion of this God to people just like us.