

When mercy meets brokenness

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[0 : 00] Morning everyone, I'm reading from Jonah chapter 4. And the Lord said, Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there.

He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.

[1 : 35] And the Lord said, You pity the plant for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons, who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle.

Good morning. My name is Bo. I'm one of the elders. I'm going to bring you the message this morning. Father God, it's so blessed for us to know that our sins, not in part, but the whole, has been nailed to the cross, and we bear it no more.

We thank you for the privilege of being your people today. May you help us now, as we hear your word, that you might see your glory in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For in his name we pray. Amen. Okay, so today is chapter 4 of Jonah, so the last chapter. Just a recap, we know that Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh, and then he ran away, he didn't want to go.

But God hunted him down, and he was in the stomach of the fish for three days, and then he sort of repented, and then God recommissioned him, and he went to Nineveh, and he told the Nineveh that in 40 days, their city will be overturned, will be destroyed.

[3 : 19] And the Nineveh, from the kingdom, repented of their evil ways, and then God forgave them.

And I suppose God was somehow telling these Nineveh that they were forgiven, because the king's edit was that they shouldn't eat or drink until they were forgiven.

So they couldn't have waited for 40 days, I suppose, to not have eaten and drank. It would be maybe a couple of days. Somehow they knew that, and then Jonah also knew God could have used Jonah to tell the Nineveh that they were forgiven.

So in chapter 4, we were very surprised to read that Jonah was exceedingly displeased, and he was very angry with the outcome of the whole event.

And he asked God to take his life away. Have you ever been so angry that you want to kill yourself? I think this is not, doesn't make sense, does it?

[4 : 36] I mean, if I'm angry, I won't kill myself, I will kill whoever offended me if I want to kill someone. Isn't it true? So the fact that Jonah wanted to end his life is telling us a lot of things we shall consider that.

When we are angry, we were offended by something or someone. On the other hand, if we want to end our life, we don't think life is worth living.

that's because we become so broken inside us that we don't think we can recover from it. So these two things are happening to Jonah at the same time.

We want to consider why is Jonah complaining about the outcome of the whole event.

I mean, consider Jonah, we can see that Jonah could be the most effective prophet ever. I mean, imagine if we want to preach to the people in Newcastle or even Glendale and everybody suddenly repented of their sinful ways.

[5 : 57] How would you feel? Definitely, you would be thankful to God and for the people being safe. But not for Jonah because he when you remember that when he told the Linniwai, he didn't say that if you don't repent, you will be destroyed in 40 days.

He simply said that you will be destroyed or overcome in 40 days. There is no option for repentance. I suppose Jonah didn't want them to repent and didn't give them the option for them to repent and therefore their repentance was not what Jonah would expect and then even worse, God actually just forgave them and didn't carry out the threat that God was telling Jonah to tell the Linniwai and so Jonah was very angry and we know that Jonah's anger is not only because God had mercy on the Linniwai his anger is also because God's generosity was at his expense that means Jonah had lost something in the process he has lost his identity at least things that make Jonah who he was that is his identity let's consider what

Jonah was living for that is we can consider ourselves we will be proud for whatever we do like our profession or our look our family background our education our possessions all those are things that we identify ourselves with now in Jonah's case there are at least three things that we can consider he lost in the process of God forgiving the line wise the first thing is his profession so he is a prophet he will be proud to be a prophet and he prophesies that the line will be destroyed in 40 days now if this didn't come true how would

Jonah feel about that God tell him to warn the line wise he did and then the warning didn't come true so that means he's a false prophet he will lose his identity as a prophet okay that's one thing the other thing is line why Jonah is proud to be a Hebrew a Jew his nationality okay I think we are as Australians proud to be Australian and so we say that this is an un-Austrian way of doing things so this is our identity so that if you consider yourself an Australian you should do things this way and the Americans the same Trump wants to make Americans great again and so that's what he's doing things to do that just to be great that's very important for our identity as a nation we know that Jonah in chapter one told the sailors that he was a Hebrew and that is what he's proud to be and Jonah knew that the Ninevites would attack and conquer Israel sometime in future if they continue to be stronger and that's why he would expect God to destroy Nineveh so that Nineveh would not destroy Israel or Jerusalem in time to come and so if God doesn't do it then he would if Israel was destroyed then he would lose his identity as a Hebrew and so that is a threat to him and that's why he wanted Nineveh to be destroyed you might think that isn't it better for the evil

[10 : 42] Nineveh to repent and so they don't then go and conquer other people for that generation is but for the next generation may not be just that while the Nineveh were fighters they like to conquer and plunder people they also fight among themselves and so they are not united people so while they are a threat they were not immediate or big threat but once they repented of their evil ways that means that they can start to organize themselves as a country and become strong so the Assyrian will come up from that and then they would become a threat to other countries and so I think Jonah would be thinking further ahead and so the profession nationality the third thing would be his righteousness or religiosity because

Jonah is proud of being someone who is religious he kept the law of God he was circumcised circumcised he did all the right things and so he he thought that he deserved God's mercy because of what he did and when he saw that God forgave those evil linivites I mean those linivites didn't even keep God's law they didn't become circumcised repentance may not be long term could be just at that time because of fear and that's why Jonah think that I have worked all my life I worked so hard to be a good person and yet these people who have been doing bad things and God just simply forgave them how is it fair so his effort to be righteous didn't seem to matter if you understand that it's like

Psalms 73 verse 13 when I I'm envious of the arrogant when I see their prosperity in when have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence that is why are those bad people have such a good time and I work so hard to keep God's law and I don't seem to be any better than those people so these are the three things at least I think that is making Jonah angry and his identity has been broken you see since the time of Adam and Eve we humans have been feeling ashamed of ourselves Adam and Eve they needed to fix leaves to cover themselves but we all want something

to cover ourselves to make ourselves great again we know that we have fallen short of the glory of God and we want to make ourselves to be somebody and we want to heal our brokenness and God seems I mean Jonah worked very hard to make himself someone but God is taking away all that he relies on for his identity and that's why he is so angry I would like to in the third point about the righteousness I think I should expand a bit deeper there's the idea that Jonah was thinking himself more righteous than the Levites and therefore God should have treated Jonah and the Israelites much better than the Levites but it seems that God has treated them the same in terms of forgiving their sins so there is the idea that the bad people don't suffer anything after they confess their sins

I think especially in eastern culture from the culture I came from in the olden days we do not have any problem to believe that God will punish the bad people and reward the good people but we do have problem to believe a God who would just simply forgive bad people because we believe that bad people should be punished so the presumption is that after you confess your sin and you got forgiven and there is no consequence so the presumption of no consequence is not actually true just like if I was a glutton I just simply eat anything I like and then after I came to know God and I changed my way I was forgiven for my gluttony but whatever

[16:37] I have eaten in the past has destroyed my body I might get diabetes for me and it doesn't mean that after I become a Christian my diabetes would automatically be reverted so there's consequence or if I offend somebody a damaged relationship after I am forgiven the relationship that has been damaged will take years to heal or may not even heal in this lifetime so there is consequence for the bad things that we all do or the Ninevites have done they have to live with it and repent or just be something that they will be troubling their heart for a long time as well especially the more for us the more we know God the more things that we have done trouble our hearts things that we did foolishness

I remember about 40 years ago as a uni student I was a joker I tried to tell jokes and so my friends I was with the overseas christian fellowship people one day we have a workshop and the teacher was asking us to pair up to get to know one another and then getting us to tell the group about what we observed about the other person or what we get to know about that person I was making jokes throughout and so the teacher picked me to be the first one to tell about the sister that I was talking with and I make a joke out of that and say something quite bad about the person but the other friends knew that

I was telling jokes so they were not surprised but the teacher was very surprised and she looked at me sternly and I am thankful that she did that she didn't laugh with me but that thing since then has been in my heart for the 40 years that I did not take the opportunity to say something encouraging and building up to that person instead of just wasting it on a joke and a bad joke as well so even last month I was reminded about that when I was doing gardening I lost contact with that sister since uni day but surprisingly three weeks ago when they and I were in Singapore another couple invited us for dinner from the same group of people and that sister turned up to join us for the dinner I was so glad that she turned up the first thing I told her was I want to apologize for what I said 40 years ago and she said I didn't remember anything you said she didn't even remember the whole event so for her it was nothing but for me it was something over the 40 years I still lost that opportunity I should have said something encouraging and building up I lost that forever and so there's consequence for us for bad people for bad things that we do the other thing is that it's unfair for God to forgive both the Israelites and the Ninevites the Jonah didn't know that in God's side he is also like the Ninevites who was not seeking God he was only seeking for his own identity for his own comfort so in

God's side he is as lost as the Ninevites God and so if Jonah wants fairness then everybody would not be forgiven everybody would end up in hell so fairness again in God's side we can't ask for fairness because we all of us are recipients of God's mercy so we should ask ourselves when we are angry why it is so what idols or what things that we are relying on that is being disturbed being devalued being disregarded that we are not happy with and why is and then we dig deeper and why is Jonah so broken in terms of he's trying to mend himself building up his identity with all these things now

[21:54] God seems to take them away and Jonah is telling God to his face that take my life away so can you see that that means God is not Jonah's joy God is not Jonah's life because if God is Jonah's joy he wouldn't have seen God and feel angry and tell God to end to take his life away he

will be joyful when he faces God regardless of the circumstances of his experience and so the deeper problem is that Jonah didn't actually have a personal relationship with God he can serve God but God is not his friend or not his joy and that is why he is struggling with and he cannot simply just go away from

God actually instead of committing suicide wanting to end his life for most of us we can if we are angry with God we can just not come to church and not associate with Christians anymore just do our own things but Jonah couldn't do it we have a friend again from 40 years ago she was very committed during that uni years but after she finished studying her father died and her brother also died in quick succession and since then she was so angry because she just gave up she didn't want to go to church they wanted to associate with us but just the last few years we managed to catch up with her and hoping that she would know God's grace again and yeah we can run away but Jonah is hard because Jonah is a prophet he if he stops serving God he can't face his friends and family and say you are a prophet how can you not believe in God now and that is something he couldn't face either and so for Jonah he could think the only thing he can think of is to just die and his life he's got no way out that is again for he's just become so broken but we know that even in Jonah's brokenness God was actually changing him looking him into someone who really can relate to God and enjoy God's presence we can see God's compassion not only on the lineage but also on Jonah so first of all God commissioned Jonah to do this task knowing that Jonah would have such a reaction but God still selected Jonah to do the job and then when Jonah ran away God hunted him down God didn't just let him run away and then God asked Jonah for the second time to go to Linnei and then when Jonah was angry and went out to the hill to wait for the 40 days to see whether God actually would destroy Linnei God provided him a plant and give him some comfort and after that God removed that plant and removed the comfort that is to show Jonah that all the comforts in the world only transient and insufficient and that is still

God's mercy upon Jonah letting him to learn not to rely on things in the world for his comfort for his identity and then God showed Jonah God's heart and Jonah's heart God asked Jonah twice do you do well to be angry that is the time when God wants Jonah to think about his anger why he's angry and God will ask us the same thing again God is showing Jonah his heart Jonah's compassion on the plant was because the plant was useful to Jonah so that's why Jonah was compassionate to the plant but God is showing Jonah that I have compassion on the lindyvice not because the lindyvice were useful to me not because they were keeping the law because God said these people 120,000 of them they don't know their left hand from their right that means these people are ignorant they don't know anything about even their own life not to mention about

[27 : 14] God and God's compassion God's mercy is without any such condition because with condition we all would not receive any mercy from God and the fact that it's called mercy is unconditional otherwise it won't be called mercy so and then even as Jonah was angry with God and rebellious God was actually using him to fulfill his plan of salvation so Jonah become part of the plan of salvation because he would point to the greater Jonah that was to come and both Jonah and Jesus share the same thing that is both of them fulfill God's plan and suffer loss in doing that so Jonah lost his identity identity and Jesus lost his life and Jesus is the greater

Jonah because while Jonah was reluctant to lose his identity as a prophet or as a Hebrew Jesus lost his status as equal being equal to God Jesus lost his life Jesus basically lost everything to fulfill God's plan of salvation and Jesus also was willing to empty his glory to be to save his people and so that's why Jesus is the greater Jonah and so with knowing that we have a greater humanity here we have we can be comforted even from chapter 4 of Jonah we we can take some comfort there are at least four things we can take comfort from first is that we can be angry with God if we want if we are just like

Jonah the best thing is to trust God and give thanks for all our encounters but then I know all of us do have I mean at times we just become angry for all that why will they go through the worst thing is to murmur or grumble about God behind his back just like the Israelites were in the wilderness so we can learn from Jonah and the Samis or even Jeremiah just to tell God and we can tell God to his face I'm angry because of this and that even though my anger may not be justified but at least tell God and God will help us to go through our anger and hopefully from there we learn and learn to trust God in the future so the first thing is we can be angry with God but tell him to his face not talk behind

God's back second thing is God's forgiveness is easy and without burden as we see from the lineage that they were not required to be circumcised or to keep the law or keep the suburb or God didn't give them a proportional period before they were forgiven we were just simply forgiven we can put a lot of condition on ourselves when we confess and think that God would forgive us straight away or put it on other people one of the the person that I baptised three weeks ago in Malaysia he had been wanting to be baptised for a number of years the church didn't want to baptise him because he is a loud mouth he offends he offended everyone so he didn't have any friends except his wife which remained faithful to him it's very hard to talk to him he just tend to boast about himself identity for himself is very important and put out with everybody else he had a rough life as you can imagine and so he tried to have his identity as a person and so he put down everyone else and he was talking so the church wanted him to go to the baptismal class he said I know all those things he just would not negotiate two years ago then I went back and we spent four weeks each week we spent time with him going through the gospel he understood that and so this time he requested me to baptize him I said I can baptize you but it's not from the church the church was happy for me to do the baptism in his house so that's what he attended my sermons on Good Friday and Easter Sunday and on Easter Sunday I preached on Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 8 and the Lord says that those who thirsty will be given the living water to drink so I said Jesus condition is you are thirsty for him and

[33 : 35] I sent an invitation anybody who is thirsty want to identify yourself just stand up and he stood up and that's why I baptized him in the afternoon and I told on Monday I told a couple of the leaders in the church about if this man called Tommy comes to church next week how would you treat him would you be friend with him yeah it's very hard to be friend with would you see that he is also a smoker he would go out of the service now and then to smoke how would you treat this man I encourage them to not to put conditions unnecessary conditions on people to become a Christian God's forgiveness is easy and without burden the third thing is that our adversities are usually

God's way to heal our brokenness adversities bring up or challenges us in terms of what we actually rely on in life for our significance for our validity those things are challenged when our children disregard our not listening to us then our status as parents has been challenged but is that important that we must keep that status and there are all these things that we go to when we ask ourselves we would know that God is bringing us back to him to rely on him to be whole so the fourth thing is we can know God personally during Jonah's time it's more difficult because God is considered as someone higher above a master but not a friend but you know our time is so much easier because

God has become a man and in Jesus Christ we can relate to God in a personal way a lot easier than Jonah's time so while we can look at Jonah and hope that he would know God in that way we can look at ourselves and know that God already provided the Lord Jesus Christ for us to know him in that way and so these four things at we can learn that if we are angry with God we can talk to him God's forgiveness is easy and without burden our adversities are usually God's way of healing our brokenness even though he may break us more so that we can be fully whole and the fourth thing is that we can relate to God personally in the Lord Jesus Christ so in chapter three of Jonah he is the Ninevites are repentant of their sin in chapter four of Jonah God is leading Jonah to repent of his righteousness so that's what Sam has talked about the son and the brother so we need to learn to repent of our sin and our own righteousness otherwise we will not receive the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ may the Holy Spirit help us and convict us of our sin and our righteousness that we might truly repent and behold again in the Lord Jesus let us pray God may you free us that we are not only free from our sins also free from our own righteousness that we may not rely on worldly things for our validity our significance our identity

Father we want to be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ that we can all say that it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me the life I live by the Lord Jesus Christ who loved me and died for me thank you Father we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.