

A Heart Like God's

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, some years ago when the kids were little and complained about something, I'd often remind them how much they have compared to so many others around the world.

Have you ever done that to kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, something like that? One time though, one of our girls was in tears because the clothes outfit she wanted to wear to her friend's place was in the wash and no other outfit was working.

In fact, she said this is the worst day ever. Now, being a guide and understanding the importance of outfits and being a father and her overreacting, I wanted to put it into perspective.

And so I talked about how she has so much more compared to many others in the world. I even showed her this picture actually. I don't know if you can see it, but it's of the slums and talked about how they don't live in nice houses in nice suburbs.

And in fact, they don't even have taps with water. This little girl has to walk to get her water. And they're probably her only clothes. And they probably have hardly any, if any, toys.

[1:04] Now, after hearing all that, the one thing that horrified her was, you mean that's her only outfit? The point is, her reaction revealed something of her heart, what really concerned her, what mattered to her, which was outfits in this case.

Although on the positive side, it also led her to ask about sponsoring a child, which we've been doing ever since. But again, the point is, our actions and reactions often reveal our hearts, what concerns us, what matters to us.

And that's what we see with Jonah in chapter four today. But first, let me briefly remind you of last week, which Gwyneth helpfully did for us a little bit already. Jonah proclaimed the word of warning to Nineveh that 40 days they would be overthrown or punished for their evil deeds.

But we also saw Nineveh's amazing repentance and then God's amazing relentance. For when people repent, God loves to relent. That is to show mercy by refraining from giving the punishment we do deserve and by showing grace and giving us the forgiveness we don't deserve.

But today, when Jonah saw this, his reaction was one of anger. Point one, verse one. But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong and he became angry.

[2:29] 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 were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.

The God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life for it is better for me to die than to live. I think Jonah's reaction here is like a toddler who throws a tantrum, really, isn't it?

But it's an angry tantrum. It kind of reminds me of a little child who puts on her angry face. Actually, she looks pretty scary. I don't know if I want to mess with her.

Jonah has put on his angry face. And what's more, in verse one, he believes God's mercy towards Nineveh was very wrong. First line there.

In fact, the word wrong is literally the word evil. Jonah thinks God's mercy and grace are actually very evil, which is a big call, isn't it?

[3 : 32] Why does he think this, though? Well, presumably because he thinks Nineveh deserved judgment. And they did. He's actually right. After all, that's why God had sent Jonah to Nineveh in the first place, wasn't it?

Chapter one, verse two, because of their wickedness. And so Jonah was right to think they deserved judgment. He's even right about God's character. Halfway through verse two, God is gracious and compassionate, as Jonah said, which means God is slow to anger.

That is, slow to give punishment. And so he gives people more time to repent. And he is abounding in love, such that he loves to relent.

But Jonah was very wrong to try and stop God from being God. That is, from showing his character towards Nineveh.

At the start of verse two, Jonah confesses that is why he fled to Tarshish, to try and forestall, to try and prevent or put off God's grace towards Nineveh.

[4 : 40] You see, he tried to stop God from being God. He tried to limit God's grace. So Nineveh would be judged rather than saved. And so now that Nineveh has repented and God has relented, he's so angry, he says in verse three, oh, just kill me, which is rather a childish overreaction, isn't it?

It's kind of the reaction you get when you take phones off teenagers, actually, and they think it's the end of the world. But Jonah's angry reaction is also a selfish one. After all, didn't he just benefit from God's grace?

Didn't he disobey God and was rightly thrown overboard in chapter one? And then instead of drowning, wasn't he saved by God's grace in chapter two? But when he was, he wasn't angry at God then, was he?

Rather, he praised God instead, didn't he? And so is it right for Jonah to receive grace himself on the one hand and then try and stop others receiving it on the other?

Or to praise God for being saved himself on the one hand and then be angry at God for saving others? What's more, is it right for Jonah to try and stop God from being God, from being gracious and compassionate to whomever he chooses?

[5 : 56] I think this is what God is trying to get him to realize in verse four when he asks Jonah, is it right for you to be angry? This first question, the answer this time is no, it's not right, is it?

For God is simply acting according to his character, and especially when Jonah himself has benefited from that character. He's like the older brother in our second reading, who we were told was angry as well with his father for showing love and compassion to his younger brother, remember, even though his younger brother was undeserving.

And the older brother forgot all that the father had already given him, that the father was always with him, and the older brother had everything the father had anyway. Jonah has forgotten God's grace to him as well.

And so Jonah's angry reaction here reveals a heart that's really concerned to see others judged, not saved. And I wonder if we can sometimes share his heart towards certain people in our world.

I mean, take this guy, the supreme leader of Iran, who earlier this month massacred thousands upon thousands upon thousands of his own people.

[7 : 16] It's evil. There's no other word for it. And so it's right to want him, to want to see him punished, to want to see him brought to justice. Like it was right for Jonah to want to see Nineveh brought to justice.

But then the question is, would you want that so much so that you then try and stop him from hearing the gospel? Refuse to pray that he would repent so that he would end up being judged by God as well, rather than saved, even though we have been saved.

Now don't mishear me. Part of genuine repentance is a willingness to face justice in this world, like going to prison for the rest of his life. I mean, it's only fitting given that he has taken lives.

Yet being saved, sorry rather, but being saved from hell on judgment day doesn't mean we escape all the consequences for our deeds in this world today.

But even then I wonder if part of us prefers to see him both punished in this world and the next. You know, rot in jail in this world and then suffer hell in the next.

[8 : 27] Or if not him, perhaps the person that makes your life difficult the most these days. A fellow worker or that annoying neighbor or whoever. Is it part of us that prefers to see them suffer eternal death rather than see eternal life?

Now of course you might say, well actually this guy is way more evil than any of us have ever been. And that's true. And so hell will be more unbearable for him than it would have been for us.

But the thing is, we are all undeserving, aren't we? That's what grace is. An undeserved gift. And if it's undeserved, then we have no right to demand it ourselves or seek to direct it to see who else God gives it to.

I mean, it's grace. And it's up to God. And if he has shown it to us, then we especially have no right to stop him showing it to others. So yes, we should be concerned for justice in our world.

Pray that there would be justice in Iran. Pray that he would repent as well though. Because our concern for justice in our world is not to be at the expense of seeing people saved from hell in the next.

[9 : 43] Especially when we ourselves have been saved. And especially even more so when God is concerned to see all people saved. Which brings us to point two in God's gracious lesson.

So verse five. It seems after preaching those three days, remember it took three days to walk through Nineveh, Jonah built a shelter and waited the rest of the 40 days that God gave to come to pass.

Perhaps hoping that Nineveh's repentance might be short-lived and God would end up judging them instead. Either way, Jonah is not very good at making shelters because his head is still in the sun.

And so in verse six, 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.

Now where it says to ease his discomfort, it's literally to save him from his evil. Here is again God graciously saving Jonah. Jonah, this time not from drowning, but from the heat of the sun like yesterday.

[11 : 00] But by using the same word evil that Jonah used in verse one to describe God's mercy, remember, he called that very evil. I think God is really seeking to save Jonah from his attitude that calls God's mercy and grace evil.

How will God do this? Well, by teaching Jonah that God is right to be concerned for all people to be saved. So verse seven and eight.

At dawn the next day, God provided a worm which chewed the plant so it withered. And 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 said, it would be better for me to die than to live. I don't know if you noticed, but the word provided is repeated three times in three verses here.

Literally appointed. The narrator is reminding us that God is sovereign over his creation. He is the one who made it and rules over it. And so he can work through it to provide.

[12:04] Just as we saw in chapter one, where he sent the storm and provided a big fish to save Jonah. Why does this matter? Well, because if God is sovereign over his creation, if he is the one who made it and rules over it, then he has every right to be concerned for it.

Whether the people are an Israelite or a Ninevite. That's the big lesson that God now draws. Verse 9. But God said to Jonah, is it right for you to be angry about the plant?

It is, he said. I'm so angry I wish I was dead. But the Lord said, you have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people, which is quite large for that time, who cannot tell their right hand from their left and also many animals?

You see, in verse 9, God again asks Jonah, is it right for him to be angry about the plant that perishes? And this time he is right.

[13:17] Yes, he's wrong about his selfish overreaction. He's only concerned about the plant, really, because it gave him shade. That's selfish. He again says he wishes he was dead. That's childish overreaction.

But he's still right to be concerned for it. And we know that because in verse 10, God implies Jonah is right. But then he draws a comparison and teaches him a lesson.

That is, Jonah was right to be concerned for a plant he did not create. Then how much more so is God right to be concerned for a city he did create?

That's the point. It's kind of like when children make things. When one of our kids was in primary school, she brought home a project that she made on France.

Here it is. And because she made it, she was concerned for it. We had to put it up on the wall in the house and treat it like a priceless work of art.

[14:12] No one was allowed to touch it, but we were all supposed to admire it. You see, our daughter was concerned for her project because she made it. It was hers.

Of course, her concern wore off and the project ended up in the bin. But God's concern for people he has made never, ever wears off.

And so if Jonah is right to be concerned for a plant he did not make, how much more so is God right to be concerned for a people he did make, in his image no less?

And then you get that curious line right at the end of verse 11, including, he's concerned including the animals. People often wonder why the book of Jonah ends like that or why God includes the animals here.

And I think two reasons. First, because they're part of God's creation, so he's concerned for them. But more so, second, they're part of the city. And so what happens to Nineveh happens to them.

[15:14] If Nineveh is punished and perishes, then so too will they. Or as we saw last week, when Nineveh repents in sackcloth, remember? So too did they.

And just as Nineveh is saved, well, so too are they. The animals, I think, are mentioned because they're part of the city. And so they're included in the description of the city. Either way, God is concerned for all he has made, especially those who are lost.

Notice how in verse 11 he describes the people who cannot tell their right hand from their left when it comes to him. In other words, when it comes to God, they're lost, like the younger brother in our parable reading.

And so God is concerned they might be found, saved. Indeed, God longs to show grace and compassion to all who are lost. For this, remember, verse 2, is who he is.

He is slow to anger. He is abounding in love, such that he longs to relent. Jonah knew this. And we know it even more. Remember that famous verse, John 3, 16?

[16 : 21] Remember how it starts? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. That's how abounding God's love is. And as I said last week, God did this so that he could both show justice for our sin, which deserves to be punished, but then mercy to us.

After all, Jonah was right about Nineveh deserving punishment for their deeds, just as we deserve. But Jesus took the punishment our sins deserve so that we don't have to.

And at the cross, he suffered hell in our place so that we could be saved from it. That's how abounding God's love for us is. As we'll sing in our next song, how deep, abounding the Father's love for us, how vast.

He can't measure it. That he would give his only son to make a wretch like us his treasure. It was our sin that held him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life.

I know that it is finished. And so if you want to know this love and be saved from eternal death for eternal life, the first step is to believe in Jesus.

[17 : 33] And for us who have already, then the big lesson for Jonah is the big application for us. We're to have a heart like God's that's concerned to see all the lost say.

God was concerned for the great city of Nineveh with more than 120,000 people in it. And so are we concerned for the great city of Melbourne with more than 5 million in it? Many of whom don't know their right hand from their left when it comes to God.

Especially now that children don't automatically get sent to Sunday school as they used to years ago. And our government has removed scripture from the school timetable. People are growing up knowing even less about God.

And so they're even more lost. Are we concerned to see them saved? A friend of mine was flying, not into Melbourne, but into Sydney. And as he was coming into Sydney, he was telling me how he was looking out at all these houses below.

And it just hit him. How many? Thousands upon thousands are lost. And he actually confessed that tears started to well up in his eyes.

[18 : 46] You see, his heart reflected God's heart. That was concerned to see the lost say. Now, we're not God. And so we can't constantly feel that level of compassion for people at all time.

We're just not able to do it. We get emotionally exhausted. Plus, we all have other concerns in life that we're attending to. Whether it's work or study, health or family.

And it's right. We attend to those concerns. But we mustn't let those things, our lack of capacity and other concerns, stop us from sharing God's concern altogether.

Rather, we need to ask God for help to keep putting it back on our agenda. To keep putting his concern back in our hearts. And so, firstly, pray that God would help us to share his concern.

Pray that God would grow our hearts to be more like his. Pray that the mind of Christ would dwell in us from day to day. Indeed, Jesus himself came to seek and save the lost, didn't he?

[19:55] That we might share his concern for them more and more. And then, secondly, we're to then reveal those hearts by doing what we can to see people saved.

Remember, our actions reveal our hearts. What concerns us. And so, we're to do what we can to see others saved. Whether it's by supporting our evangelistic efforts this year or outreach ministries.

Or whether it's supporting our link missionaries. Praying for them. Giving financially towards them. Or whether it's making the most of opportunities we have ourselves to speak.

We're going to be thinking more about this next week. So, for now, let me finish with Florence. I can't remember if I've told you about Florence before. She was an elderly lady. And I was visiting her one day in hospital.

And she noticed, sorry, I noticed she had her Bible out on the meal tray. You know, the trays that sit over the hospital beds. And so, I just asked her what she'd been reading. And after discussing that, she added, I also like to leave it out so people see it and ask about it.

[20:59] I've already talked to two people about Jesus in the beds next to me. And she said, Andrew, the best thing is they can't run away. Now, she did do it sensitively.

But, you see, despite her many concerns, and she had many, and she passed away not long after that, actually, her actions revealed a heart like God's that was especially concerned to see the lost saved.

Let's pray that we would have that same heart. Let's pray. A gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder today that you are concerned for all whom you have made, especially those who don't know their right hand from their left.

And so, we pray that you would enlarge our hearts this year. We pray that you would help us to keep sharing your concern for the lost, doing what we can, working together to see more people saved.

Help us in this, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.