

Why Do Good Things Happen To Bad People

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[0 : 00] What Did you see him?

Thank you.

All right, how we doing? We good? Ready? All right, Jonah 4, if you got your Bible, Jonah chapter 4. Continuing our series, although we're getting close to the end of our series here in the book of Jonah, we did this kind of getting prepared for Easter and then spending the last few weeks working through the end of the book.

And we've looked at Jonah's rebellion and how he worked through God teaching him salvation again. It comes to Jonah with a second chance. Jonah then takes that opportunity, the second chance that's given to him by God, and he goes to Nineveh.

And as we saw last week, he experiences and is a part of what is really one of the greatest revivals in human history. As Nineveh believes God, they repent and turn to God.

[1 : 53] And now this evening, we're going to see Jonah's response to this greatest revival that's taking place here at the beginning of chapter 4. We're going to look this evening at just the first three verses of Jonah chapter 4.

And I'm going to ask you if you're able to stand, now that you are nice and comfortable, to please do so as we honor the reading of God's word. Jonah chapter 4 and beginning of verse 1 says, 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 this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish?

It's because I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful. That you're slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me. For it is better for me to die than to live. And the Lord said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry?

[3 : 03] Let's pray. Father, thank you for this time to be in your word tonight. Pray that you would come and that you would speak to us in these moments as we look to you. As we are open and honest about the struggles that we have in life.

The difficulties we face as we work through why things are the way that they are. And we just pray, God, that you would come and just speak to us in a powerful way through your word this evening. And I pray this in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen. You can be seated. What do you get when you combine a camera, a cucumber, and two monkeys?

The answer is a YouTube sensation. That is at least the way it happened for Franz DeWaal. Franz was a professor at Emory University where he studied and the focus of his research was on animal behavior.

But that's not what made him famous. What made him famous was several years ago, Franz did a TED Talk. And in this TED Talk, he showed a video of two monkeys that he had spent quite some time studying and doing research on.

[4 : 21] And my guess is many of you have seen that video because the video went viral. The goal of his research was to study how animals respond to fairness and equality.

And in this particular experiment, what he did is he took these two monkeys and he put them in separate cages. And each monkey had to do an activity.

The activity was simply to take a rock or a stone and hand it to the human. And every time they would do that, they would be given a reward. In this case, they were given a slice of cucumber.

And both monkeys, when they were given the slice of cucumber, were happy. They were thrilled.

They loved the cucumber. The problem arose when the human started giving one of the monkeys a grape.

And I don't know if you know this about monkeys, but they loved grapes. They loved grapes way more than they loved cucumbers. While the other monkey was still getting the cucumber.
[5 : 25] Well, as you can imagine, once the other monkey realized... And by the way, keep in mind, she was previously happy with the cucumber. But once she realized the other one was being given a grape, oh, she was not very happy.

So she gives a rock to us. That's the task. And we give her a piece of cucumber and she eats it. The other one needs to give a rock to us. And that's what she does.
And she gets a grape. And she eats it. The other one sees that. She gives a rock to us now. Gets again cucumber. Cucumber. She tests the rock now against the wall.
She needs to give it to us. And she gets cucumber again. That is one mad monkey.
Amen. Now, we laugh at that. I laugh at that video every time I see it. And we laugh, but let's be honest. We humans do the exact same thing. We respond the same way.

[6 : 52] In fact, there was a research study done at UCLA. And they studied how the human brain responds to fairness. And what they did is they put people in pairs. And they would give person number one a certain amount of money.

And then person number one could give whatever portion of that to person number two. And what they did is they studied the brain waves and the brain response in person number two.
And what they found is that there was an emotional response in the second person based upon what the first person offered. So, for example, if the first person was given \$10 and then they offered person number two \$5, the brain responded very positively.
However, if the first person was given \$25 and offered the second person the same \$5, the same amount of free money, the brain would respond negatively.
So, even when person number two stood to gain the exact same amount of money, they still only responded based on what they thought was fair.

[8 : 06] The research concluded, quote, The emotional firings that occur in the brain were fast and automatic. It appears the emotional brain is overruling the rational mind.

Faced with a conflict, the brain's default position is to demand fairness. And every one of us knows that's true.

There is not a person in this room tonight that likes to be treated unfairly. We shake the cage of life when we think things are not consistent.

And you know this. You get upset at the restaurant if the table next to you gets their food first when you were there before they were. The fan base is outraged if they do not think the game was called fairly.

They get upset if you've worked at the company for years and then someone gets hired and promoted over you when they didn't even deserve it. News outlets that don't cover all the candidates with a fair and equitable coverage.

[9 : 16] Our culture, everywhere you look, is obsessed with equality. We want gender rights and income, fair income and racial equality because all of us are like that kid that throws a fit when someone else gets a bigger piece of cake than we do.

We get upset because, say it with me, it's not fair. Now, it is one thing to feel that way about life. But tonight I want to ask you, have you ever felt that way about God? Have you ever felt God was not treating you fairly? That in His giving, His distribution of blessings, He doesn't know what He's doing?

That God is not an equal opportunity employer? And if you've ever felt that way before, and I know that many of you have, you're not alone. In fact, there are people in the Bible that have felt this tension, that have had this struggle with the fact that it just doesn't seem like life, and particularly the author of life, is being fair.

My good buddy, Koeleth in Ecclesiastes 7. Oh, how I love Ecclesiastes. In my vain life. Oh, tell us how you feel, Koeleth.

[10 : 33] In my vain life, I've seen everything. And here's what I've observed. Would you like for me to tell you what I've observed? Here's what I've observed. That there is a righteous man who will perish in his righteousness, and there's a wicked man who will prolong his life in his evil doing.

In other words, what bothers me is not why do bad things happen to good people. What bothers me is why do good things happen to bad people? This is not how things are supposed to be.

He goes on in Ecclesiastes 9 verse 11 and says, I saw under the sun. You want to know what I saw? Here's what I saw. The fastest or the best horse doesn't always win. The race is not always to the swift. The battle to the strong. The bread to the wise. The riches to the intelligent. The favor to those with knowledge. Here's what it appears like in life. That time and chance happen to them all. In one way or another, every one of us has felt this way. [11:43] Life's not fair, is it my little friend? While some are born to feast, others spend their lives in the dark, begging for scraps.

The way I see it, you and I are exactly the same. We both want to find a way out. If you have ever experienced the situation in life where you have felt yourself frustrated or even downright angry, listen, you know exactly how Jonah feels at the beginning of Jonah chapter 4. In fact, Jonah's response in these few verses is rather shocking to be honest. Jonah, after all, is a runaway. He has rejected God's call.

He's disobeyed what God has called him to do, only to be given a second chance. And in taking that second chance, he goes and experiences the most wicked nation you could possibly imagine have revival.

[12:52] Believe in God. And so you would think at the beginning of chapter 4, the reader would expect that Jonah would be, he'd be happier than a possum in a pants leg. We say that in the South.

You'll get that later, right? He would be thrilled. He'd be ecstatic. Like you're the one that hit the walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth. Your company is the one that just got awarded best in the Twin Cities.

But rather than being a happy camper, rather than being a thrilled prophet, he is a mad, monkey. In verse 1, look at it. It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was, say it with me, angry.

Now listen, I wish I could do justice in the Hebrew. The English does not capture the intensity that the Hebrew does. The literal reading of verse 1 would go like this.

It was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and it burned to him. Let me read that again. The literal reading would be this thing that he's so upset about, he considered an evil thing.

[14:04] It was evil to him, so evil that it burned in him. He is raging mad. Have you ever had one of those moments when you and God needed to have a talk?

No one. Okay, good. I guess I'm the only one. That was really awkward silence there. But that's Jonah. Jonah's like, God, you and I have got to have a talk. I am burning mad at you.

I am angry at you. And so the reader is left asking, like, what's happened to Jonah? What's changed within him? Because he had just kind of gotten back on track with obedience.

He's been doing well. And so why is he experiencing this? There's some clues in the text that show us this shift with Jonah.

Look at verse 2. You notice the phrase. It says, and he prayed to the Lord. Does everybody see that? Say yes. If you don't respond, I'm going to make you respond, right?

[15:08] So just say yes. He prayed to the Lord. Now, if you've been paying attention through the book, you're like, wait a minute. I've read that before. That's language I'm familiar with. And this is a very common literary way in the Hebrew to connect you to something previously.

In fact, if you go back to chapter 2, verse 1, this is where you see that same phrase. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord. And so we see these two things being connected.

And what the author is doing here is trying to get you to compare because there's two prayers.

Jonah 4, verses 1 through 3 is a prayer. And then Jonah 2 is a prayer.

And we're meant to compare them. Well, if you compare them, what you discover is the prayer in chapter 2 is one of thanksgiving. Jonah is thankful for God's grace.

In chapter 4, it's a complaint. He's upset. In chapter 2, he's rejoicing because God has remembered him. In chapter 4, he's angry because he doesn't feel like God has taken into account his feelings.

[16:18] In chapter 2, Jonah wants salvation. I mean, the very theme of the prayer is salvation belongs to the Lord. In chapter 4, Jonah wants to die.

In chapter 2, his prayer is one of hope. I was driven away, but I looked to God. In chapter 4, it's one of hopelessness and despair.

Jonah wants to die. In other words, if you compare these prayers, Jonah has shifted from one of adoration in chapter 2 to accusation in chapter 4.

To put it in a sentence, Jonah has relapsed. Jonah has gone back to where he was. His condition in chapter 4 is the same emotionally and spiritually as where he was in chapter 1 when he tried to run from the presence of God.

Now, what does this teach us about the Christian life? And I think this is something important. It teaches us this. The Christian life is not... You listening?

[17:22] It's not a steady climb up the spiritual mountain where then at some point you get to the top and you just enjoy the spiritual high for the rest of your life.

That's not how the Christian life works. The Christian life is rather one of an up and down cycle of fighting sin and unbelief and then experiencing God's grace anew.

Amen? We all relapse. We all... We take three steps forward and two steps back. That's actually reassuring to me and I hope reassuring to you is that here you have the prophet of God who struggled, got back on track, but finds himself struggling again.

I was talking to a man one time. This has been many, many years ago. His grandfather was actually a worship leader in the Midwest. He did a lot of revival meetings and conferences and he was a man that was pretty well known in the ministry, pretty loved and respected by those that knew him. And his grandfather passed and when he was going through his grandfather's basement, he discovered a porn collection. And the grandson was rather shocked to find this.

[18:42] And he said, you know, he told me, he's like, there was something I always was... couldn't make sense out of with my grandfather. And that is that as a worship leader, every time he would sing the song, Come Thy Fount, we sing that song here.

You know that song. And you know the lyric in that song that says, Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. He said, prone to leave the God I love.

He said, every time I saw my grandfather sing that song, he'd weep. And I never knew why until now.

And he said, you know what? My grandfather never told me or never told anyone about his struggle. And he said, the reason is, is because in our denomination, Christians aren't allowed to have basements.

Let me get one thing absolutely straight this evening. From the man on the stage to the person in the back. Look at here at 1 John.

[19:49] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Amen? All of us are like Jonah.

We are prone to relapse. We are prone to slide backwards. And this usually happens through trigger events. That is, something will happen and it will surface a desire.

It will surface a memory. It will surface something that can trigger us. Like Eric Church sings, sometimes a melody sounds like a memory. You know what this is like.

Like you hear a song and it triggers a memory. It might be a good one, but it triggers something.

Your mind goes back to something. Or maybe you see another person and encountering that other person triggers something in you.

It might be affection or it might be anger. Or maybe you have a conversation and then something gets said in that conversation and it resurfaces something from your past or whatever it may be.

[20:54] Every one of us knows what it's like to have something trigger certain thoughts or certain behaviors, whether they're good or bad. Amen? You know what that trigger event is like and you find yourself relapsing.

Listen to me. The same thing happens spiritually. That is that there are things that can happen in our life that trigger us to relapse spiritually.

That's what's going down here for Jonah. Something has happened and it's been a trigger event that has relapsed Jonah back to the spiritual condition of chapter 1.

The question is, what is it? What has triggered this relapse? What's triggered this in Jonah's life? Well, look at verse 1 again and say it, but, say it, it.

But, it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. So we should ask the question, what's the it? What's the thing that triggered this anger in Jonah?

[22:02] We'll go back to the verse before it, which is the last verse of Jonah 3, verse 10. This is, when God saw what they did, how Nineveh had turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not, say it, do it.

Do you see the it? God did not do it, and it displeased Jonah exceedingly.

In other words, here's what's happening. The it is God's grace. The it is God's relenting. Jonah, the whole time, Jonah, and you're going to see this even more next week in the following verses, the whole time that Jonah is doing ministry to the Ninevites, what he's hoping, hoping is that lightning bolts are going to fall on Nineveh.

This is his dream. This is what, like, man, Nineveh's finally going to get it! God is finally going to bring the justice that Nineveh deserves, but God doesn't do it!

Instead, He shows them grace, and He turns His anger away. Notice this on the screen. And it was God turning away from His anger that caused Jonah's anger.

[23 : 31] Does everybody see that? The it is God is gracious and it makes Jonah burn with anger. Jonah wanted the delicious grapes of wrath to be poured upon his enemies, and what he gets is a that blame cucumber.

I wanted the grape! I wanted the grape of wrath! I wanted the lightning bolts to come down, but what did you give me? You gave me a cucumber. You gave me your grace.

And I hate it! And I don't think you're right for doing it. In fact, God, I'm exceedingly angry that you would do such a thing.

Listen, listen, the unfairness of life can often trigger anger at God. We're getting real, aren't we? Sometimes the unfairness of life is the trigger event that makes us relapse to anger to God. After all, He's the director of this whole show anyways. I mean, if you don't like how the game's being played, blame the coach.

[24 : 46] Go after the director. And that's what Jonah's doing here. There's at least three things that Jonah thinks is absolutely wrong, completely unfair.

And the first is that God is not fair to Nineveh. God's grace to Nineveh reminds Jonah how much he hates Nineveh. He cannot stand the idea to see the wicked prosper.

It's more than this guy can take. Now, trust me, if the it were Israel, oh, Jonah would be fine. Listen to me, faith family. Jonah doesn't have a problem with God's grace in general.

He has a problem with God's grace specifically to a people like Nineveh. Jonah has no room whatsoever in his theology for forgiven Ninevites.

And who is that Ninevite for you? Who is that person in your life that got away with it? Who is that person in your life that didn't get what you think they deserve?

[25 : 49] They seem to prosper while you seem to suffer. And the injustice of it all makes you so angry, you want to just grab the cage of life and scream.

Come on, God. Don't you know this is not how things are supposed to be? Notice verse 2. Verse 2, not only does Jonah think that God is not fair to Nineveh, but it says, and when he prayed to the Lord, he said, Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country?

This is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. Here's the second thing, is Jonah thinks God is unfair to Jonah. Jonah's upset because pagans aren't getting what they deserve while prophets aren't getting what they think they do deserve.

Wait a minute, wait a minute. Why is it that Nineveh gets what they don't deserve, but I don't get what I deserve? Jonah is upset because he doesn't think that God is fair to Jonah.

Don't you realize, God, I'm your loyal customer? Don't you know I'm your biggest giver? Don't you know that I attend church more than anybody else does?

[27 : 03] I mean I have put in my time and this is how you treat me? It reminds me, remember the parable in Matthew 20? Oh man, this is so convicting and says a lot in terms of our culture and our view of fairness.

Where there's a master that hires day laborers throughout the day, do you remember that parable? And he hires some at the very end of the day and he hires some at the very beginning.

And look at what happens in chapter 20 verse 9. When those that were hired about the 11th hour, so this is towards the end of the day, each of them received a denarius. Now watch.

When those who were hired first, so these are the people that have been working all day, they've put in more time. What do they do? They thought they would receive, say it, clearly if they got a denarius, we're going to get a lot more.

Isn't that how you think? Well, of course I'm going to get a lot more. You know why? I worked a lot more. I put in more hours than they did, so clearly I'm going to get more. But each of them received the denarius.

[28 : 12] And they did just what you and I would do. They, upon receiving it, grumbled at the master of the house saying, well these last worked only one hour and you've made them, oh my, equal to us who borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat like so much for equal pay, so much for income equality, and you know, like can we just be honest here tonight?

We would react the same way, right? Sure you would. Imagine you've been standing in line for hours at a concert and you've been standing in line all day because you got there early and you wanted to get the best seat.

And then right when they open the door, someone walks up who literally just showed up and they get in before you, you lose your ever-loving mind. You're calling security, right?

It's not fair. It doesn't work that way. This is not how it should be. And the master says this, verse 15, am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

do you begrudge my generosity? The last will be first and the first will be last.

[29 : 40] What's the point? Listen, listen. Why would people, are you listening? Say yes. Why would people who don't deserve to be hired complain about their pay?

You don't even deserve a job in the first place. And you're going to argue about income equality? You're going to blame God that you're not getting what you deserve when you didn't even deserve to be hired?

Or do you begrudge the generosity of God? You don't like your lot in life? You don't even deserve life?

Or do you begrudge the generosity of God? It is why the older brother and the prodigal son is so furious. In fact, notice the exact same language in the story of the prodigal son that you see in Jonah 4.

Look at Luke 15, verse 28. But he was, say it, angry. In fact, he's so angry he won't even go in. And his father comes out to entreat him and he answers his father saying, look, look, look, listen.

[30 : 57] These many years I've served you, do you know what I've done? Do you know how many years I've served you? I've never disobeyed your command. You never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

Oh boy, but when this Ninevite, when this Ninevite comes home who's devoured your property with prostitutes, you kill the fattened calf for him.

Are you tracking with me? This is how Jonah feels. God, you're not only unfair to Nineveh, you're unfair to me. You owe me.

faith family, what is it that you think God owes you? A better job? More respect from your colleagues?

Kids? A spouse? Prosperity? Somebody say preach, preacher. This may hurt. A failure to see God's grace in your life will make you grumble at God's grace in another's life.

[32 : 07] Can we just rest on that for a minute? Our inability, my inability, your inability to see God's grace in our life will make us grumble or maybe like Jonah become exceedingly angry at God's grace in another's life.

It is His grace to give to whom He wants. Don't begrudge His generosity. You are unfair to Nineveh. You are unfair to me. But not only that, you are unfair to yourself. Look at verse 2. Look at verse 2.

Let's jump one more verse. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not why I said anyone was yet in your country, that this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish?

It's because I knew you were gracious and merciful. And you're slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. Can I translate what that means?

You may already have picked up on it. There's truth, obviously, in that. God is slow to anger and He is abounding in steadfast love. Amen? But Jonah just isn't reciting his correct theology.

[33 : 27] Okay? Jonah's doing something else. He's implying, God, I know this is the kind of God you are, but I don't think it's the kind of God you should be.

In other words, this is essentially what Jonah is saying. God, I know that you're merciful, but I think you should be wrathful. I know you're slow to anger. I think your anger in this instance should have been immediate.

I know you're bounding in steadfast love. I think your love should have run out a long time ago.

You're not acting how God should act. And quite honestly, if this is how you're going to be, God, I'd rather die than serve you.

It's better for me to die than to live. Jonah's having a bit of what you might call a God crisis, and if you follow the Lord very long, you're going to have one, two, probably several, where it's very difficult for you to wrap your minds around the ways of God.

Amen? It's almost like we can't understand Him. As Paul would say, who has known the mind of the Lord as though he needed a counselor?

[34 : 40] Jonah here is having a God crisis because the purposes of God are different than the purposes of Jonah, and what's the easiest thing to do in that moment is just to create a different God.

Because you're not acting the way I think God should act, I'll just create an idol. I'll worship a God of my own making. So Jonah here relapses.

He relapses back to this self-centeredness, this consumed in himself, and he thinks God is unfair to Nineveh, and unfair to himself, and unfair to God.

And at least some of the checkpoints that we see when this is happening in our own life would be things like anger, like Jonah is, despair.

I just don't care. I don't give a rip anymore. Like, what's the point? If this is how, listen, if this is how the game works, why even play it?

[35 : 42] Or even idolatry? Is I'll just create my own God that fits my own agenda? So let me ask you this. If this is your kid saying this about you, how do you respond?

If you're God in this moment, and Jonah's coming to you with this complaint, what is your response to Jonah? Here is God's response to Jonah.

It's remarkable. And the Lord said, Jonah, do you do well to be angry? Do you know how gracious that is, faith family?

It's gracious because this is what my response would be to Jonah. It goes something like this. You ungrateful, pathetic, arrogant, smug, little punk. I mean, something like that.

More or less, something like that. You want lightning bolts? I'll give you some lightning bolts zap.

Done with you, buddy. I've had enough of this complaining.

[36 : 46] Who do you think you are to come into my presence and make such accusations about me? Aren't you glad God isn't like you?

Aren't you glad that God doesn't respond to you that way in your little pouting Jonah? What's behind the question, do you well to be angry?

Listen, the patience of God. In other words, God not only gives Jonah a second chance, God shows patience to Jonah in his pouting.

This is how I would translate that do you do well to be angry? It would go something like this. Jonah, can we talk about your anger? Can we talk about your anger?

Where is that coming from? It's not zap, you're out, next prophet. It's the same prophet I gave a second chance to is the same prophet I still love.

[37 : 59] And I want to enter into where your anger is coming from. Because this is what God knows. This is what God knows about Jonah and it's what he knows about every single one of us in this room and it's this.

That anger at God is only going to be healed in the arms of God. So, come on in Jonah. Let it all out.

Say what you need to say. And then let's talk about your anger. that is the beautiful patience of God with us.

God's response to Jonah here once again as he has time and time again is a gracious patience with his prophet. Faith family, deep down every one of us wants to be treated equally.

We all do. It's why it's so easy for us to get angry when you feel like everybody in the world gets a grape and you're stuck with the dadgum cucumber. But here's what I want to leave you with tonight.

[39 : 13] I want to leave every single one of you, particularly every single one of you that calls yourself a believer in Jesus, I want to leave you with this reality. You've already been given the grape.

grape. You've already been given the grape. What I mean is you've already been given what you don't deserve. And how did you get that which you don't deserve?

You got it through the greatest act of human injustice in history. You got it through the one who knew no sin being made to be sin.

You got it through the one who knew perfection but was given your condemnation. You got it through the one who only knew life but for you tasted death.

And yet in the face of everything that was unfair about the cross, listen, Jesus did not shake his cage in anger. He endured his cross with joy.

[40 : 25] And so the cross tonight asks every Jonah in this room, do you do well to be angry?

And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray. Father, I'm so thankful for passages like this because you invite us into these real raw conversations that your people have had with you over the years of redemptive history.

We get to see inside Jonah's heart as he confesses his anger, as he acknowledges his struggle, as he relapses back to old ways of thinking and patterns.

And yet we see your grace in it all. And so, Father, I pray for those of us here tonight. There may be people that are dealing with something in life and they just think it is entirely unfair.

They want to shake the cage of life every time they see that other person, every time they think about that other situation, every time they see someone else with a grape.

[41 : 36] They begrudge your generosity. I'm thankful that in this place, that this is a space where Jonas can come and just be honest about their struggle and their hurts and their confusion about the way life works, yet find the truth of the gospel that we've already been given the ultimate gift of grace.

That in Jesus we have more than we could possibly deserve. so help us tonight leave grateful, not grumbling, satisfied in you, not discontent because of the world.

Come and meet us here in this moment of remembrance and help us remember the price that was paid for our eternal redemption. Father, we are not lacking in a thing, but we have been given in abundance the grace of your salvation.

May we celebrate and rest in that tonight, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. and and and and and