

God's Response to Jonah

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[0 : 00] Welcome to our services today and as we come together to worship the Lord we would seek that it would please the Lord to bless us, to bless his word to us and that our worship may be acceptable to him through the merits of his son Jesus Christ.

Let us join together in prayer. Eternal and ever blessed Lord, as we come together in this manner today, with a desire in our hearts to honour thy name, to worship thee and to acknowledge thee as our God and as our Saviour through thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We would seek, O Lord, that it may please thee to grant to us of thy grace to enable us to worship thee in a way that would be acceptable to thee.

For we acknowledge that we are dependent upon thy Spirit, for without thee we can do nothing.

And as we come to thy word, we seek that you would be pleased to enlighten our understanding through thine own Spirit, to lead us into thy truth, that we may benefit from thy word, that we may receive instruction and encouragement or even rebuke, if so be that we stand in need of rebuke, that thy word would be a living word for us today.

[1 : 59] We give thee thanks, O Lord, for the revelation that thou hast made of thyself through thy Son. For who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of thy people?

You retain not your anger forever, because you delight in mercy. You have compassion upon us.

Thou art the one who will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea, if we come before thee with a true confession of our sin.

And so we seek the help of thy Spirit today, that we would come indeed with a true confession of our sin, that we would acknowledge our sinnership, acknowledge our great need of that cleansing that thou alone can give, through the blood of thy Son, Jesus Christ.

Oh, we give thanks that thou art a God who delighteth in mercy. And so we come with that boldness and confidence through thy Son, and seek, O Lord, that we would receive that forgiveness for our sins.

[3 : 29] We ask, O Lord, that thou would bless our homes and our families. Bless those who are ill, those who mourn over the passing of loved ones.

We remember, O Lord, before thee those who are homeless, those who are slaves to drink and to drugs, and the many other vices that have come into the experience of mankind through the fall of sin.

O Lord, we pray that thou would liberate, that thou would set them free. And we pray, O Lord, for those who work among them, for those who bring the gospel to them, and pray that the gospel would be made effectual to many.

And we pray, O Lord, that as thy word goes out, that it'll go out in the power and demonstration of thy Spirit, in converting and in the building of thine own church here on earth.

Bless all thy servants who proclaim thy word through whatever means. We pray, O Lord, that thy word will be in accordance to thy promise, and that it will not return unto the empty.

[4 : 45] We pray, O Lord, that thou would watch over us for the moments that we are together in this act of worship, that our minds may not be distracted, that our thoughts would not be wandering away, but that our focus would be upon thy word, and what thou hast to say to us through thy word.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would meet with each one of us at our point of need. Remember the careless, the indifferent.

O, draw them to the power of thy Spirit, to embrace that mercy that thou hast worked out for sinners such as we are.

We ask, O Lord, that thou would be mindful of our needs, and that thou would meet them out of the riches of thy grace. And, O Lord, we ask for the forgiveness of our sins.

In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We shall now read from the Old Testament, from the book of Jonah, and chapter 3 at verse 10, and reading on to chapter 4.

[6 : 02] And God saw their works. That's the works of the people of Nineveh. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way.

And God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarsus.

For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseege thee my life from me.

For it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry? So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and they had made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

[7 : 15] And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad for the gourd.

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind.

And the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?

And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for that for which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night.

And should not I spare in any of thee, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons, that cannot discern between the right hand, and the left hand, and also much cattle.

[8 : 26] May the Lord bless unto us the reading of that portion of his word. And seeking the Lord's help and blessing, we shall turn back to verse 10 and 11.

Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for that which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night.

And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons, that cannot discern between the right hand, and the left hand, and also much cattle.

We shall obviously look at the whole of that chapter. Last week, we saw how the Ninevites, from the king to the least of the people, believed God and repented, and how God spared the city, and its people.

In those circumstances, as we come to the end of our study on Jonah, I am sure that you may be surprised at the manner in which the book ends.

[9 : 36] Would all expect Jonah to be rejoicing, over the repentance of the Ninevites, and mingling with them in their newfound faith, with joy, and eager to teach them about the things of God.

But instead, what we read is a most distressing report. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

What displeased Jonah, leaving him so angry, the repentance of the Ninevites. And the Hebrew here is extraordinarily strong.

It could be translated that it displeased Jonah greatly so much so, that he was burning with anger against God. We come here to witness the unthinkable.

Here is a man who has had a marvellous experience of God's grace and mercy in such an extraordinary way in his own life. And he was commissioned by God to go to the most wicked and violent city in the known world with God's message.

[10 : 49] A message which could have been so easily rejected. Jonah saw God at work in his own life, and now in the lives of the people of the wicked city of Nineveh.

And we read the unthinkable. And we read the unthinkable. That Jonah could not rejoice. Instead, he was displeased greatly with burning anger against God.

One would think that Jonah, a preacher of God's message, seeing the response of the people of this wicked and violent generation to that message, when they turned in repentance to God, would leave the messenger so full of joy.

Isn't that our own earnest desire? To see a people turning in repentance to God.

Would not that give us our greatest joy? To see our people turning in repentance to God. To see the Spirit of the God working so mightily in our communities, that the people repented and turned to God.

[12 : 16] There was rejoicing in the presence of the angels in heaven over the Ninevites of repentance. But the servant of God, who had brought the message, was seething with displeasure and with bitterness and burning with anger against God.

As we said last week, the attitude of Jonah on this occasion may be compared to that of the elder brother in one of Jesus' parables, known as the parable of the prodigal son, which is recorded for us in Luke 15.

The elder brother resents the mercy that was shown by his father towards his younger brother, who had squandered his inheritance with sinful living until he came to his senses and came back home.

The father had embraced him and clothed him with a rich robe, a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And his older brother resents the expressions of his father's love and mercy that were shown to his younger brother.

Well, that is comparable to Jonah's attitude that he expressed to God when the people of Nineveh believed and repented.

[13 : 39] He was exceedingly displeased with burning anger against God. We often see when tragedy occurs that people tend to get angry with God.

Even people who do not believe that God exists, they get displeased and angry with God. But can that be true of a person who is converted?

Can that be true of a man of God? Can that be true of a man used by God, that such a person can come into the situation where he is displeased and angry with God?

It may surprise some, but that can be true. And I think it may be safe to say that it's very rare that a truly converted person, a child of God, has not found in their own experience a time when they have been displeased and angry with God.

There is the story told in 2 Samuel 6 that tells of the time when David went to take the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem because in an early battle the Philistines had captured the Ark and they were soon to learn of its holiness when great multitudes of their people were put to death by God.

[15 : 10] Eventually the Philistines put the Ark on a cart drawn by milk cows together with golden offerings and sent it back to Israel. And the Ark came eventually to the house of Abunadab and remained there for many years.

But David, in going for the Ark to take it back to Jerusalem, he erred greatly in his manner of transporting the Ark. He places the Ark on a new cart and as the procession advanced suddenly the oxen that was carrying it stumbled and a man by the name of Uzzah, a good man, puts forth his hand and touched the Ark and immediately Uzzah was lying on the ground.

And upon inspection it was seen that he was dead. Now this brings before us many lessons which we shall leave for the moment. What I want to focus upon is David's reaction.

For we are told that David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah and he called the name of the place Perusa to this day.

You see, David was angry with God because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah.

[16 : 36] And David left the Ark and went back home. But after a period of time he went back to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem. But this time he brought it up in accordance to the procedures that was laid down by God in his word for transporting the Ark.

Obviously David had consulted God's word and realised his error the first time. But what I want to focus upon in this story for today is the fact that David became angry with God.

You see, the word of God does not hide the failures of the people of God. As David had to learn more about God's holiness Jonah had to learn more about God's grace.

This book was written by Jonah himself. It is his own autobiography up to this point in his life. And he hides nothing but tells it as it really happened.

And that is what is true of the whole Bible. The Bible never hides the failures or the weaknesses of the people of God.

[17 : 53] And in doing so, it obviously brings forth the graciousness of God. How wonderful and how gracious God is.

And that certainly is to be seen here in the end of this little book called Jonah. Jonah had to learn about God's grace.

Jonah's perception of God's grace was very narrow. Jonah did not reject salvation by grace, but he does not understand the extent of that grace.

And that is Jonah's great problem. It is a problem with the extent of the grace of God. God's grace would be no problem to anyone.

But you know, it can be. Just as much as God's justice is a problem to many. We can be all open to fall into that kind of attitude that Jonah was displaying.

[19 : 04] For instance, we can categorise sinners into thinking that they were sinners, and then they were sinners. What I mean by that is people will generally admit that there are sins in their lives, but they do not think that they deserve to be eternally punished for them.

And they will often point to a really big sinner, and they will readily agree that they deserve to be eternally punished. But what Paul says in his letter to Romans, it says, Jonah was a man who agreed with God's grace for Israel, but he just could not agree the grace of God for anyone else, for anyone outside the nation of Israel.

He was fine with God's grace for Israel, people. But to extend that grace to the wicked and violent people of Nineveh, those Gentile dogs, it was just too much for him.

Jonah has to understand, and you and I have to understand, the marvel and extent of God's grace.

We have to watch ourselves over this kind of attitude, because you can find it among churches, when God in his sovereign will blesses one judge with his grace in conversions, another judge becomes suspicious, that it is not the true work of God.

[20 : 56] And this often flows from the fact that they have a spirit of displeasure, a spirit of anger, that their judge did not experience the same.

Sometimes Christians can get displeased and angry with God when he may bless an individual out of a home that perhaps showed no inclination towards the gospel in comparison to their home and their family who may have been very faithful to the gospel.

These are lessons that we have continually to be taught about, that the sovereignty and the extent of the grace of God.

As Paul said to the church at Rome, hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lamp to make one vessel and to honour and another into dishonour.

If there is anything that may exonerate Jonah at this time is that he brought his resentment and anger to God. At the beginning of the book when he was fleeing to Tarshish we noted that among the things that were missing from his spiritual life was prayer.

[22 : 17] We found that he did not pray until he was thrown into the sea and inside the belly of the great fish. At least here in his resentment and anger he brings the matter before the Lord.

I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and repentest thee of the evil.

Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. You see, there is nothing wrong with Jonah's theology.

He knew, he says, that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. It is not his theology that is strong, but his conclusions or the way he puts his theology into practice.

Sometimes we may forget how merciful God really is or forget the extent of God's grace. We forget that he is able to save to the uttermost.

[23 : 36] Paul writing to Timothy says, this is a faithful say and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners of whom I am chief.

And to the church at Corinth he says, but by the grace of God I am what I am. And you know, that would be worth our while always to remember.

By the grace of God, I am what I am. There are times when things are not going the way we think they should go.

And we may also find ourselves giving out this extreme expression, I just want to die. This is where Jonah finds himself.

Jonah could embrace the grace of God for Israel, but not for pagans like the Ninevites. Again we come to this problem of Jonah and the problem is with the extent of the grace of God.

[24 : 45] The problem here is it's not with God. The problem here is with Jonah. See how God deals with this.

He asks Jonah the first question that we find in his dialogue with Jonah. Then said the Lord, doest thou well to be angry?

What the Lord is doing here, he is seeking to bring Jonah his servant to the point of self-examination. it is as if he is saying to him, is it right for you to be angry?

Jonah, think about how you have responded to this situation. Jonah, you are angry because of what I have done was not in accordance to your expectations.

You wanted this city and its people to be destroyed, but I had compassion and mercy upon them because they believed and repented. You wanted destruction and I have shown mercy.

[26 : 08] Jonah, is it right for you to be burning with anger and resentment towards me because things have not gone the way that you wanted them to go?

you know, my friends, I and you have to self-examine ourselves. We have to be honest. Have you ever been in the frame of mind where you have been angry or resented what God has done because it went beyond your expectations or it did not work out the way that you wanted it to work out?

Now, Jonah does not answer that question. Instead, we read, So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city and there made a booth and sat under it in the shadow till he might see what would become of the city.

In this instance, I think the proverb is quite right, which says actions speak louder than words. We are not told when he left the city, but I think we can assume that it was before the 40 day period was up, for we are told that he sat till he might see what would become of the city.

Oh, how unlike David, whom we have already noted, who was also angry with God, but who went home and consulted with the word of God and acknowledged that he was wrong.

[27 : 47] It would have been better if Jonah had stayed in the city and reflected on whether he ought to be angry with God, but instead Jonah just stormed off to the east of the city.

Outside Nineveh, we are going to behold the patience and the graciousness and the long-suffering of God towards his servant.

if we have beheld the graciousness of God towards Nineveh, outside Nineveh, there is a man and we are going to behold the patience and graciousness and long-suffering of God towards that man.

He does not give him up. He could have given him up when he first fled, but God sent the wind. He sent a storm. When Jonah was thrown overboard, that could have been the end of Jonah, but God prepared the fish that swallowed Jonah up, and after three days and three nights, the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land.

One would think that he is now mature enough, surely he has learnt his lesson. A man who repented in the belly of the fish and was so glad that God loved him and cared for him, that God commissioned him again to go and preach to Nineveh, and that he came and preached the word of God in Nineveh, and that Nineveh repented and is spared.

[29 : 21] And instead of finding a man rejoicing inside the city, what we find is a man who is burning with anger against God, sheltering outside the city.

Under the blazing heat of the sun, Jonah began to fume and felt ill. And we are told of three things that God appointed for Jonah.

First, he prepared a plant that gave Jonah a shade. And the Lord God prepared a gourd and made it to come up over Jonah that it might be a shadow over his head to deliver him from his grief.

God was exceedingly glad for the good. What is apparent immediately here is the contrast between Jonah's attitude to God and God's attitude to Jonah.

Jonah is displeased with burning anger against God and yet God is gracious to Jonah. As the sun beats down upon Jonah, God makes provision for him.

[30 : 43] He does not deal with Jonah as we would expect him to do so. Instead, we have one who feels for his servant.

Here, we have one who deals with his servant in faithfulness and grace despite the hard-heartedness and prejudice and burning anger against God that lies in the heart of his servant.

This is the God who said to his covenant people through the prophet Tolia, I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger.

I will not return to destroy Ephraim for I am God and not man. He prepared this plant to deliver Jonah from his grief and Jonah was exceedingly glad for the plant.

Oh, how often despite the failings of his people, God, out of his grace and mercy, provides provision for his people to deliver them from their grief.

[31 : 59] Jonah was glad for the plant, but he only had it for a truly short time. The second thing that God prepared was a worm. God prepared to wear him when the morning rose the next day and it smote the gourd that it withered.

The same hand that had made the provision of a plant, he now takes it away. That was his prerogative. He is sovereign.

He does as he pleases. Jesus. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. He has taken away the very thing that he gave so that Jonah would be able to see himself and to see the Lord more clearly.

And in taking away that provision that leaves Jonah exposed to the heat of the day. And the third thing that he prepared was an east wind.

When the sun did arise, God prepared a vehement east wind that the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted and wished on himself to die and said it is better for me to die than to live.

[33 : 22] And then the Lord puts the second question to Jonah. And God said to Jonah, doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said I do well to be angry even unto death.

You see, Jonah is angry again. He is angry about the plant to the point of death.

God's gracious patience in his dealing with his servant. The Lord is still patient. he's prodding and the Lord is challenging the thinking of his servant and patiently correcting the attitude of his servant's heart.

God's love. It is a reminder to us, is it not, that it is by the grace of God that any of us find hope.

For how many times God might well have given up on each one of us, us, but he does not. God bears with our weakness and never give up on our salvation.

[34 : 35] The amazing grace of God as he endures his servant's failings with loving, gracious patience. And here he is and he's prodding his servant.

He is challenging him. He is patiently correcting the attitude of his servant's heart. Oh, how many times has the Lord prodded me and you and challenged me and you to correct the attitude of our heart, to perhaps correct the attitude of our hearts against others.

like Jonah here with the Ninevites. How often the Lord has prodded and challenged you with the gospel. My unconverted friend, is it not true that the Lord in his grace and the Lord in his mercy have been prodding you time and time again with the gospel?

He's been challenging you with the gospel. And what we have here is the third question that the Lord puts to Jonah.

Then said the Lord, thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

[36 : 11] Jonah had loved his plant, for which he exerted no effort, and which arose over him in a single night and perished in a night.

He took pity upon the withered plant, and he was angry because of the plant, but where was his pity for the Ninevites? Yet there before him was a great city of many souls, and the Lord says, should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein had more than six score thousand persons, that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle.

Some say that the 120,000 that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand is a reference to children, but it is more likely to be a reference to the spiritual and moral ignorance of the whole population of Nineveh.

The point is that God has mercy on sinful mankind, who is trapped in ignorance and corruption.

Jonah thought it right to have pity on a worthless plant, and should the Lord not spare Nineveh upon their faith and repentance. God's answer to the book ends on a question, and it may leave us somewhat frustrated, because there is no answer given.

[37 : 48] We are not told what Jonah does. We are not told what was Jonah's response. I think that Jonah would have profited from God's dealings with him, but it may be just an open-ended for our own sake, so that each of us may give our response to the grace of God.

That we will examine ourselves and ask ourselves, do we resent God's grace for others? How do we feel about God's mercy for those who have wronged us?

How do we respond when we are perplexed at God's actions in the world? What do we do when things do not go the way that we expected or the way that we wanted?

How do we react when God does not meet our expectations? The book of Jonah would suggest that God is never the problem, but that he is always the answer.

The problem here is not with God. The problem here is with Jonah. And the answer is God. God's grace should ever be our chief delight, and whenever or wherever it is displayed, we should rejoice.

[39 : 21] You may ask, well, how wide is his grace? Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that he might be filled with all the fullness of God.

You know we adore what we cannot fully comprehend. We shall conclude with Paul's words to Titus.

Claudia said to Christ who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people sellers of good works these things speak and exalt and rebuke with all authority let no man despise thee or the extent of the grace of God and the extent of the grace of God should make us rejoice especially when we see that displayed in people believing God and repenting may we not have the attitude of Jonah who resented that the grace of God was displayed and given and shown to the Ninevites that pagan city instead of rejoicing he was angry with God oh may that not be my attitude and your attitude and as I already said and as we already noted today we can so easily fall into that attitude when we see God blessing where we did not expect when we see churches receiving the blessing of God and ourselves left where we are but let us rejoice for the extent of God's grace he is able to save to the uttermost may we have that attitude of joy and rejoicing and be pleased with the extent of God's grace to sinners because that is where our hope lies that is where we find life in the grace of God through his son the Lord Jesus Christ may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord we give thanks and to thee today for the display of thine own grace to sinners such as we are and we give the thanks O Lord that the grace of God that bringeth salvation salvation has appeared to all men through thy son the Lord Jesus Christ and we give thanks that that salvation is been proclaimed in the gospel and we pray O Lord that as people hear the word as people hear about this salvation that they may come to embrace it by faith that they would believe and repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we give thanks that that salvation has been proclaimed in the Gospel. And we pray, O Lord, that as people hear the word, as people hear about this salvation, that they may come to embrace it by faith, that they would believe and repent and turn to God, that we would see a mighty day of awakening in our midst, and that we would rejoice.

We ask, O Lord, that they would continue with us for the rest of this day and for the days that lie ahead until, if it had been accordance with thy will, we meet again in an act of worship.

[43 : 44] May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.