

How Do You See God?

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[0 : 00] Jonah chapter 4. There's only four chapters in Jonah and today we're on the last chapter. We're preaching through the gospel according to John. We finished all the way through John 16, but once a month or so we pop back to the Old Testament and we've worked through the book of Ruth. Now we're working through the book of Jonah. And it's been a delight and it's also amazing to see the same gospel, the same message throughout all of God's word. So we're going to read all of Jonah chapter 4 as our sermon text today. We'll really begin one verse before that.

As I read God's word today and as you follow along, remember this is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and sufficient word. This is God's very own word for you who are his people.

If you receive his word today in that way, then when I'm done with the reading of the word, I'll say this is the word of the God and we'll respond, thanks be to God. Jonah chapter 4, but let's start one verse prior. So Jonah chapter 3 verse 10.

When God saw what they did, that's the repentance of the Ninevites, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them and he did not do it.

Jonah 4 verse 1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry and he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was in my country?

[1 : 34] That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

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, do you do well to be angry?

Verse 5. Jonah went out of the city and sat on 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 grow 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.

[2 : 42] 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. And the Lord said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow.

Which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. The Bible says that the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

[3 : 53] Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how do you see God? How do you see God? As I pray for illumination that the Lord would speak through his word, ponder that question.

How do you see God? Let's pray. Oh God, you are the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything.

You are eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in your power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice and truth. And nothing happens except through you and by your will, as the catechism says.

I pray, Lord, today that by the power of your spirit through the ministry of the word, you will open our eyes to see you, God, for who you truly are. That you will be glorified in our lives, we pray.

Amen. Amen. In the Chronicles of Narnia, Lucy is learning who Aslan is. Lucy is the little girl.

[5 : 11] Aslan is the great lion, the creator, and the king over Narnia and over the whole world. And Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are the ones who get to introduce Lucy to the idea of who Aslan is.

Lucy is curious, so she asks, is he safe? The beaver says, of course he isn't safe. He's wild, you know, not like a tame lion, but he's good.

He's the king, I tell you. Great literature has two types of characters. One is called a flat character. The other is called a round character.

They're set up to be contrasts one with the other. A flat character can be summed up in one to two sentences. A flat character has traits that are consistent.

And a flat character is stable and more predictable. The flat character serves to point a flashlight or a spotlight at a different character. And that's the round or the complex character.

[6 : 22] So with Narnia, you have Lucy who's a flat character. She's spotlighting Aslan. Lucy is consistently kind toward her siblings.

Lucy consistently rests, putting her hope in Aslan to come and save them. But Aslan is not a tame lion, you see.

But he is the king and he's good. We know from all of scripture that God is unchanging. All of his attributes are unified in his essence.

But God does not reveal himself in a flat way. Jonah seems to want a flat God. The book of Jonah shows us God is so much bigger, Jonah.

God cannot be summed up in one to two sentences, can he? Many of God's attributes are paradoxical. And God often surprises you.

[7 : 29] How do you see God, dear Christian? How do you see God? I believe as we walk through this last chapter of Jonah, when you see God for who he truly is, something will happen to you and to me.

As we see God for who he truly is, the true condition of our heart gets exposed. This was true for Jonah. When God shows you who he truly is, the true condition of your heart is exposed.

When God shows you who he truly is, the true condition of your heart is exposed. A couple observations on this. The Lord revealed to Jonah, in redemptive history, these events actually happened in a real city, a real capital of the Assyrian Empire.

God used those events in redemptive history to reveal to Jonah who he truly is. So God acts in history to reveal himself. So we read in Jonah 4, verse 1, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

The verb displeased, it displeased Jonah exceedingly. That verb is used in the Bible in connection to the eyes. One example is Proverbs 15, 3, the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

[9 : 16] So you're seeing it, you're taking it in, and you're determining, is this pleasing or not? We see here two things that Jonah saw that displeased him greatly.

Number one, Jonah saw the Ninevites turn and repent. Number two, Jonah saw God show mercy by withholding punishment.

So what displeased Jonah is really a reference to chapter 3, verse 10. Take your eyes there in your Bible. Jonah 3, 10, when God saw what the Ninevites did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

And so we get the reaction of Jonah in response. In the Hebrew, the literal translation, according to the experts I learned from, is this.

Jonah determined that it was evil, and it burned in him. That's his response. That's what God revealed was inside of Jonah.

[10 : 25] God forgave the Ninevites. Jonah could not. God displeased Jonah. From Jonah's perspective, Nineveh is evil, God.

And if you are just, how could you not punish evil? So Jonah thinks that God's mercy is evil. Now this little story has so much irony.

Irony is another literary device. So kids, irony is when a character's contradiction or you could say in this case, their hypocrisy, it's very obvious to us, the reader, but the character himself is blind to it.

It's ironic to everyone else. We see it. God put the right words in the mouth of Jonah, even though he's angry at God. Look at what Jonah says in verse 2.

God says the right things about God. God is a God that is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

[11 : 33] So Jonah's words are the correct theology, and Jonah is quoting what God has told his people in numerous places. One of those is Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. But Jonah does not like who God truly is.

That's the real problem here. Jonah is displeased with who God truly is. How do you see God?

It doesn't get any easier for us in the New Testament, does it? One example is Romans 9, verse 18, which says that the Lord has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

How do you see God? The Lord revealed to Jonah in redemptive history who God truly is. The Lord reveals to you and me in redemptive history who he truly is.

Second observation is that Jonah's response to who God truly reveals himself to be, it exposes the condition of Jonah's heart. So Jonah's response exposes the condition of his heart.

[12 : 48] In verse 2, Jonah prayed unto the Lord and he complained, saying, this is what I said when I was back in my country. It's why I fled earlier to Tarshish.

Verse 3 says, I beseech you now, O Lord, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. Well, in Jonah chapter 2, Jonah prayed, thanking God for sparing his own life.

Now in chapter 4, Jonah prays, asking for God to take his life. God, if you're a God who tolerates the sin of this wicked people, how can you be just?

Jonah can't handle what God has revealed himself to truly be. Well, we have to ask the question now, who has the right to be angry? whose honor is so great to show wrath and whose judgment is so perfect to be able to be displeased in this way with what they see.

I searched the prophets and I searched this time period in the Old Testament for the words angry and anger. And it's very limited to God, the Lord seeing sin and having a response of anger.

[14 : 07] And it's also limited to kings. The kings get angry. So you see what Jonah is doing. He's putting himself in the place of a sovereign king. He's making himself God.

One example is Isaiah 57, 15. Who is it that can be angry? In Isaiah's words, it's the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

That God says, I was angry and hid my face at sin. But you can almost picture that serpent, just like the worm that slithers to eat the plant as it did in the garden.

The enemy, God's accuser, slithers in and says, Jonah, how could you love a God like that? How could you want to live as a prophet for that type of a God?

The accuser wants to always put God in the defendant's seat. And to puff Jonah up as the judge. A creature angry at the creator.

[15 : 17] See, from the outside, there's no judgment coming. There's not going to be a great show. Jonah goes up to the hill to watch this happen. There's nothing to see on the outside.

What God is revealing is something on the inside of Jonah. He has a sickness of the heart. And God saved Jonah's life physically.

Now he needs to save his soul spiritually. And maybe that's the case for you and I. Maybe it takes discomfort or an unmet expectation for God to show that we have some internal bleeding going on.

That the great physician, God himself, needs to operate and to restore and heal you on the inside. Charles Spurgeon said, Many a man has died from internal bleeding and yet there has been no wound whatsoever to be seen by the eye.

We know that God doesn't look at the outward appearance like man. God looks at the condition of my heart, the condition of your heart. So this is gracious of our Lord.

[16 : 25] When God shows you who he truly is, he's revealing to you the condition of your heart so that he can operate on it, so that he can heal you.

We've seen how when God shows you who he truly is, the true condition of your heart is exposed. Next, I want to show how God reveals the true condition of your heart for a purpose.

He does that in order to minister to you. That's what he does with Jonah the rest of the chapter. So God shows you the true condition of your heart in order to minister to you.

Notice how God responds in turn to Jonah. Jonah's there angry as if he were the God. But God is not angry at Jonah. The Lord meets Jonah with patience and with fatherly instruction.

I've got four observations on how God ministers to angry Jonah. Number one, God ministered to Jonah through personal counsel with a soul-searching question.

[17 : 34] Isn't this God's pattern? He comes to his people and he asks you the questions that make you search in your soul. Look at verse 4. The Lord said, Doest thou well to be angry?

Jonah, you're determining what is good and bad. You're determining what should be pleasing or displeasing. Now look at your heart, Jonah.

Is this good? Is this pleasing? There's no response. There's just followed by action. The action shows the stubbornness of Jonah's heart.

Look at verse 5. So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. That's the far side of the city. He made his way all the way across all of Nineveh.

And there's nothing to buffer him from the elements that lie in the desert beyond. And there Jonah made for himself a booth and he sat under it in the shadow till he might see what would become of the city.

[18 : 40] One person described Jonah's condition as he sits under this little tent he made for himself to watch as sulky despair. Jonah's negotiating with his own life before the Lord.

Destroy them or destroy me. He's pouting in protest. He thinks maybe my anger will stir up some anger in God to do what I think is right for God to act justly.

The beauty of God's word is we have even more situational irony here. His hypocrisy is just exposed and set up as the main theme here. He goes up to the hill and what does your Bible say he builds for himself?

What's it called? A booth. He builds himself a booth. That's a temporary dwelling, a little tabernacle. What we saw in the Gospel of John, do you remember what we saw?

The Feast of the Booths. And this is what God has told his people to do. Booths were these temporary little tabernacles that God had instructed his people to build on one of their annual feasts.

[19 : 49] And it was to symbolize how God dwells with his people and how his people are sojourners. They should be nimble. They should be able to stay on the move. And it was a symbol of God's gracious covenant coming to a people who were slaves and now he dwells with them.

He tabernacles among his people. Now there's more to the Feast of Booths. It actually got a second name. And this comes from Zechariah 14, 16 and other places. Listen to this.

All the nations that have come up against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the king who? The Lord of hosts and to keep the feast of booths.

All the nations were to gather and worship the God the Lord of hosts. It was the feast of the nations. Do you see the irony? God's heart for the Ninevites, the Assyrians, the bad guys.

That's what God is showing Jonah with his little booth that he set up. Jonah, I'm speaking with you. I am with you. Those who you view as your enemies, the feast of booths is for them to come and worship me.

[21 : 04] The second observation is that not only did God minister to Jonah through this personal counsel of a question, the Lord also ministered to Jonah through his providence.

God appointed physical means to teach Jonah. Notice how back in chapter 1, Jonah 1 verse 17, the Lord appointed a great fish.

And now in chapter 4, we get three other things that the Lord appointed. In chapter 4, verse 6, the Lord appointed a plant. In verse 7, the Lord appointed the worm.

And in verse 8, the Lord appointed that vehement east wind. A couple insights to really paint this picture for us. What was this plant perhaps?

Well, Jerome in the 300s thought most likely this is a castor oil plant. He wrote that it's still cultivated in our gardens today. It is quick-growing, beautiful, tall, with broad leaves and a soft, succulent stalk, and only a slight injury of which will cause the plant to die.

[22 : 11] And the Lord appoints this vehement east wind. The Hebrew word is hiroko. It's a hot wind coming out of those deserts, and it can get up to 60 miles per hour.

And this is northern Iran. It's similar to those winds that many of you have come from California or Nevada. You know those winds that have caused those wildfires to spread almost exactly the same conditions.

In the book of Nahum, who was a contemporary of Jonah, that Sirocco east wind, it was used as an image of God and his coming judgment upon the people of Israel.

In Nahum chapter 2 verses 1 through 8. Do you see the situational irony? And do you see how the Lord is appointing all the means to show Jonah, Jonah, I'm the one who is bringing judgment on all who rebel against me.

Just like I brought this wind upon you, I can bring my judgment to Nineveh. I can bring my judgment to Israel. Just as you had comfort because of a plant that I made to grow, I can remove your comfort and I remove the comfort of Israel.

[23 : 18] I am God, I will save whom I will save. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Is this how you see God? The songwriter got it so right when he said, What e'er my God ordains is right.

He never will deceive me. He leads me by the proper path. I know he will not leave me. I take content what he has sent.

His hand can turn my griefs away. So patiently I wait his day. The Lord appointed all of these physical things to teach Jonah a spiritual reality.

Before we move to the next point of ministry, I want to point out that the Lord has given us physical appointed means by which he shows us grace as well. He has given us his word.

Our Bible translator last week challenged us we need to read God's word. And he prays God that we are a congregation that loves to read God's word. The sound of God's word in our language coming in through our ears ministers to our mind and our soul in ways that we can't even explain.

[24 : 36] It is a means that God has appointed and he ministers grace. When we pray, we're told in the Bible to pray for one another. These are physical things we do. We actually go into one another's living rooms or front porches and we pray for one another.

This is a physical action we do in response to our covenant God and he ministers as we pray for one another. When we take the Lord's supper or we get to see a baptism, these are physical means he's appointed that proclaim a spiritual truth.

We're going to eat these with our bodies, with our tongues, we're going to taste and smell and be reminded of the spiritual reality. You see how God has always appointed means to teach his people and to minister to us.

So what's on us is to make the most of what God has appointed and provided. Make the most of that. Well, number three, not only did God minister through those appointed means, but God ministered to Jonah with a lesson from the lesser to the greater.

God's glory as the biggest heavy thing we can possibly conceive of.

[25 : 48] God used this plant to teach Jonah, who God truly is as well, to open his eyes to a clearer picture of the true God. God. The Lord basically says, Jonah, these people have an eternal soul.

This plant, I made it grow and I can take it away. Now these souls are eternal. This plant grew up and died in the night. These souls, they will be condemned unless I bring my salvation to them, Jonah.

So your response, Jonah, take your eyes off the lesser. Put your eyes on that which is greater. That's what he's calling his people to do through the lessons. And Jonah remains hard-hearted.

We see that in every response that Jonah gives. He pushes himself lower and lower again and that's how the book ends. But it's revealing to us that what God is looking for is the heart response.

In chapter two, Jonah was thrown into the troubled seas, the waters were what were troubled. Now in chapter four, it's his heart that is troubled.

[27 : 04] As someone wrote, look on thyself as in a mirror and you will see what a boisterous sea the soul is. And God's word, it does that for us. It becomes like a mirror, as James wrote.

When we see our reflection in the mirror, we see how troubled we are. And only the presence of the Lord can steady our souls and bring that peace that we need. Notice how the Lord applies this lesson to reveal himself to Jonah in verse 11.

The Lord says, should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein there are more than 120,000 persons. What's more is that these persons cannot discern their right hand from their left, and also much cattle.

see these people, God said in verse 11, they can't discern. That term means to distinguish or to discriminate.

That term is used in Ezekiel 22 and also 44 to describe one of the tasks of priests, which was to teach the people to discriminate between clean and unclean.

[28 : 17] These people need the law of God. They are lost. It doesn't mean the Ninevites are morally guiltless before a just God. Judgment is threatened to them unless they repent.

But it does mean that they are trapped in their sin. They are helpless unless God will initiate their salvation. The Lord is telling him, Jonah, in this great city there are souls.

These souls don't know what they're doing. Don't you see my heart for these souls? And even the cattle, I'm the great creator, God says, and I desire that none should perish.

How do you see God? Well, one last way that God is ministering is to the people of Israel by giving them this book of Jonah.

God ministers through the life of the prophet Jonah. God taught Jonah through the plant. The plant was a little picture lesson. But Jonah's life was like the plant.

[29 : 27] Jonah himself was the picture lesson for all of Israel. Jonah stands as a representative of the people of Israel in this story. It's to get their attention.

Do you remember how Ezekiel had to do all the different sign acts? Like dig holes in his walls of his house? Like we're trying to escape exile? You know, shave your head because you're going to be kicked out of the land?

Well, Jonah's life is a sign act for the people of Israel. Why does the book of Jonah end this way? It's purposeful. The Holy Spirit did this for a purpose.

Why do we end on this click finger which is, I don't know how Jonah responded. And it's to teach us. But what's the lesson? Before I tell you what I think, let me tell you this other insight.

Yom Kippur is the name of the great day of atonement. The great day of atonement, it ends with the reading of all things the book of Jonah. And the lesson is this, people of Israel, God has provided through the scapegoat, through the sacrificial goat, he's provided a picture of your atonement.

[30 : 35] But finish with the book of Jonah, which calls you to respond with the heart of God, not only to save you, but to save all the nations. From those fishermen on the coastlands, to the Ninevites, the most wicked, despicable people.

This is who atonement is truly for. There are only two books that end with a question that just hangs there. And it's interesting how both of those have to do with the Ninevites.

It's Jonah, and the second one is Nahum. Nahum ends with a note of judgment. For example, the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

Nahum's a contemporary of Jonah, and he's calling God's judgment on the Ninevites. And though God spares the Ninevites in this story with Jonah about 40 years later, so not 40 days, but 40 years later, the Ninevites are conquered by the Medes and the Babylonians.

So God is just, and his justice never fails. But Jonah ends with a note of compassion upon this great worldly city.

[31 : 44] And so you, the reader, and I, we must ponder the meaning. We must decide now what action to take. We don't get Jonah's response to be able to sit at a distance and analyze him.

We are the ones who are called upon to respond. How do you see God? We want to know, did Jonah learn this mercy from God?

Brian Estelle, who helped me so much through this book, a Hebrew scholar, he wrote, quote, in some respects, that question is moot because it puts you and me, the current readers, as well as Jonah and Israel of old, in the position of having to respond to God.

Will you, my people, learn my mercy? This lack of closure teaches us that I am Jonah, and you are Jonah.

The question lingers for you and me today, will you learn God's mercy? Not only does the Lord minister to Israel through this wonderful little book of Jonah, and not only was Jonah a representative of hypocritical Israel whose judgment was coming soon, Jonah is also a contrast or a foil for the great prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 15] How do you see God? If we go back to Narnia, one year of time passes in London time, which is 130 years in Narnia time.

Lucy's back in Narnia now, a year older, and when she sees Aslan, she says, Aslan, you seem bigger. Is it because you have gotten older?

And Aslan says, no, because I don't age, but it's because you have aged. Aslan tells Lucy, every year you grow, you will find me bigger.

The book of Jonah reveals to you and me that God is so much bigger, and it points us to the biggest, greatest, most clear revelation of who God truly is.

We saw in the book of Jonah how God appointed a great fish. The Lord appointed a plant. The Lord appointed a worm. The Lord appointed a vehement east wind.

[34 : 20] And we read in Hebrews 1, verse 1, how at many times and in many ways God spoke by the prophets, but now he has spoken to us by his son.

Listen, whom he has appointed, the heir of all things. He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the radiance of the glory of God.

He is the exact imprint of God's nature. How do you see God? God. God. Acts 22, verse 14 says that God appointed you, believer.

God appointed you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear his voice. The Lord revealed to Jonah in history who he truly is.

God. And the Lord reveals to you who he truly is by sending his own son, God the son, in the flesh, into human history so that you can see God in Christ.

[35 : 31] Jonah was to take the word of God to the wicked world, but instead he traveled far away. But our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the word of God, he traveled into the wicked world to dwell close by among you.

See God in Christ. Jonah felt no pity, we're told. But over and over and over, nine times I counted in the Gospels, when Jesus saw the people, he had compassion.

And the word is to be moved from the depths of his being, with deep compassion for those souls. Jonah's disobedience earned death for himself in deep hellish darkness at the bottom of the sea.

But Christ's obedience earned for his elect from all the nations, eternal life in his kingdom of life. See God in Christ.

God's justice. Jonah went outside the city to watch the condemnation of the wicked. Jesus went outside the city to be condemned in the place of the wicked.

[36 : 53] See God in Christ. Jonah was unsubmitive to God's showing grace. Jesus submitted himself as the substitute to show God's justice.

Jonah, whose name again ironically means dove or peace, he prayed death for enemies. Jesus, whose name means God saves, he prayed, Father, please forgive them.

See God in Christ. God's Jonah did not remember God's mercy to him. Jesus remembers your sins no more.

Hebrews 8, 12. See God in Christ. Jonah dishonored God as though the just and merciful creator did not know what he was doing.

Jesus honored his father to save you and me, his killers, praying, Father, they don't know what they are doing. Jonah said, God, if you don't destroy these sinners, then let me die.

[38 : 17] Jesus said, let me die that these sinners may live. love. I love the hymn.

I was listening to it this morning and the connection is perfect. Jesus, I am resting, resting. You are the brightness of my father's glory, sunshine of my father's face.

I am finding out the greatness of thy loving grace more each year. God reveals your great need and his great grace so that you will see God in Christ.

Respond to who God truly is by confessing what Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish. Salvation belongs to you, Lord, alone. God will save whom he will save and see the depth of God's mercy to save you and me.

Ask him to put more of that same mercy, compassion, pity inside of you. We need it. We can only love if he first loves us and fills us with that kind of love.

[39 : 34] Our Lord Jesus Christ, he is the full revelation of the true God. Respond to God's mercy today. See God in Christ.

Let's pray. From Acts 14 38. Lord, we trust the promise that as many as were appointed to eternal life will believe.

And when we believe, we will rejoice and we will glorify you, God. You alone are worthy. Thank you, Father, for sending your Son that we can see who you truly are, to see your grace and your love lavished on sinners like us.

Help us to receive, Lord, once again today, your great gift of love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.