

Jonah 4

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[0:00] I invite you to turn with me to Jonah chapter four, but not actually Jonah chapter four, Jonah chapter three, verse 10. We're going to start one verse back today from where we were to include where we were last week.

Jonah is a short book, only four chapters, four scenes. There are two action scenes, chapter one and chapter three, where the events of the book take place.

And there are two conversations, two prayers, two moments. We reflect chapter two and chapter four on the events of the book.

So Jonah has fled from the Lord's command. The Lord has disciplined him creatively. He has followed the Lord's instructions.

And as we see, he went to Nineveh, preached a message of judgment and justice. Nineveh repented. And then we see chapter three, verse 10. When God saw what they, that's Nineveh, what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them.

[1:14] And he did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly. And he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

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?

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

So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

[2:32] 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 I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

Friends, this is God's word. Now, when you come to the conclusion of a book, you tend to see its central idea, right?

It's at the end that the moral, the meaning, the center point comes into focus. And so the book of Jonah is not about a great fish. It's not about a storm.

It's not about Jonah's prophecy. It's not even about Nineveh. The book of Jonah is about the Lord and his prophet. And I pray that today it teaches us, the Lord's people, about his relationship with us as well.

[3:53] So let's pray to him and ask that he would open our eyes and open the scriptures to our hearing, that we might see what he would say to us today. Lord, I know that just like Jonah in chapter three, the power is

not in me and in my words, Lord, but in your word and in your spirit.

As a father, I pray that you would work in us by your spirit today, that you would quicken our hearts, that you would show us wonderful things in your word, would you be glorified in us as we are conformed to the likeness of God, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. If I got hit by a bus tomorrow, I know that's not how most sermons start, right? If I got hit by a bus tomorrow and Shoreline decided to hire another pastor and it wasn't one of the pastors currently serving, you'd probably begin a pastoral search, right?

And you'd get cover letters and resumes. How does this one sound? Bold minister of the gospel, missionary to a hostile nation, a powerful preacher, right?

God orchestrated a massive revival through my public ministry. An expert at cultural engagement has achieved this sweeping cultural change, societal transformation, right?

[5:46] And achieves results quickly, right? Produced these results in 24 hours. That's not a bad resume, right? Surely this is a man of God, greatly blessed and gifted.

But you know better. You've read the book of Jonah these last four weeks. This is Jonah. This is his resume. And I don't think you want him for your pastor.

I hope you don't. See, the point I'm trying to get across here by Jonah's resume, right, is that our outward success, our outward achievement, our outward giftedness, can hide major internal problems.

By the things we could measure outwardly, Jonah had a marvelously successful ministry and must be, you know, on God's good side right now.

But chapter four shows us that he is not standing on solid ground. He is not right with God. So friends, let that be a warning to us.

[6:52] Let us take heed and look at ourselves, right? By what standard are we measuring success as a church and individually as Christians, right?

As a congregation, how are we measuring success? We could double the size of our membership or we could construct a beautiful building.

We've been looking for a location for two, three years now, right? We could become a prominent church in our community or in our denomination. Is that success?

Perhaps. But it's those metrics, those measurements are not success if we become a church about those things, right?

If we become a church about a building or about our size or about our prominence. Not if it comes at the cost of focusing on something other than Christ and his gospel.

[8:00] Not if we love our, lose our love for the Lord, right? That's not success. What is success for a church? This is not going to go back.

What is success for a church? To worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. To preach the word truthfully. To receive the sacraments repentantly and joyfully.

To build one another up in Christ for the work of ministry. To encourage every believer, every believer, to be faithful, to live faithfully as a Christian in the circumstances, the neighborhood, the workplace, the community that the Lord has set you.

That's a successful church. Regardless of the size of a meeting place or their fame in a community. How are we that we are faithful Christians?

Spiritually successful if we are a prominent member of this congregation. Right? Just because I stand here each day. Right? Jonah haunts me.

[9:16] Because he shows me that a minister of the gospel can have incredible success. Right? I could stand here and preach the best sermons ever and be completely at odds with the Lord.

That's what he shows me about myself. So, famous in this group of people and totally in a wrong place with the Lord.

Are we spiritually successful if we are perceived to have it all together? Or if we have a lot of theological knowledge? Or if we advocate for the right causes?

Or if we keep a sufficient lid on our sin so that we look respectable? Right? Jonah had a remarkably successful personal ministry.

He probably greater in a visible way. He had probably a bigger visible impact in his ministry than any of the other prophets in the Old Testament. who largely were unheeded by their hearers. [10:23] The outward marks were all there. And chapter 4 shows us he was a spiritual disaster. It all stems from his anger over God forgiving Nineveh.

Chapter 3, verse 10. And make no mistake, he is furious. In the Hebrew of this, of chapter 4, verse 1, it is the strongest possible construction to convey anger.

Literally, it was bad or even it was evil to Jonah as a great evil and it angered him. Now, we, if you read the commentaries and whatnot, people speculate why did Jonah not want them forgiven? And there are lots of reasons that make sense for why he might not. But we're not told. He doesn't even bother telling God, explaining himself. And so, regardless of his reasoning, it's clear that he doesn't want them forgiven.

And that's what he's mad about, that God did forgive. And already, we see that something is very, very wrong. Right? That's what we see, verse 1, this expression of extreme anger.

[11:40] And so, what happens in verse 2? He prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not, or is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee for 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 for me, for it is better for me to die than to live. What has Jonah's perspective, his perspective that Jonah ought not be spared?

What did that lead him to believe? He sees God's character, his essence, as a liability, as a problem.

Right? He's quoting here Exodus chapter 34, where the Lord displayed his glory for Moses to see, proclaiming his name, his excellencies, his character. And it is this, it's God's goodness that Jonah sees as a problem.

A problem so great that is furious kindled against the Lord. Which leads us to see that our desires, friends, the desires of our hearts can overshadow everything else because he has right doctrine.

[13:18] He knows who God is. But because his desires, the attitudes of his heart are set differently, he's twisting that into something wrong.

right? It turns goodness to darkness in his eyes. And so too, the converse can be true, right?

The eyes of faith can receive blessing and trouble from the Lord with humility and trust. God. But here, Jonah's desire to see Nineveh overturn led him to call good, the greatest good, God himself, evil.

And as the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes. And friends, it is not just Jonah who can do this, right?

[14:24] This isn't recorded in scripture as simply a history lesson. We can do it too. We can have all the right answers. We can know the Bible backwards and forwards, and still we can disobey like he did in chapter one, and still dislike, be set against and at odds with the Lord like he is in chapter four.

Right? It's precisely because Jonah knows what God is like that he ran, that he's angry. Can you imagine being angry at God because you know he's good?

Well, there are plenty of people who who are angry that God is holy, who don't like that, or don't like that he is in fact a righteous judge, or don't like that he would forgive sin that I don't like, that I would find unforgivable, or sins committed against me.

This past week, in the midweek live stream, Tyler was talking about the study his community group has been doing off and on. What they ask each is how do you react to this, this facet of God's character and nature?

That's an important question to react to God's holiness. How do you react to the fact that he is indeed a judge? How did here, Jonah react to the fact of God's goodness and mercy and graciousness?

[16:36] Ozer once wrote, it's probably the most famous quote from him ever, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

When you call to mind the Lord, gracious and compassionate, does that excite you? Does it prompt your heart towards love?

Or do you look at people that you find, like Jonah, inexcusable for one reason or another and say, don't show grace to them? It is one thing to have a knowledge of the truth, and it is another thing to celebrate it.

right? James tells us that even the demons have a proper theology. They know all the things of God, and they shudder because they're set against him.

And Jonah shows us that so too can those who are named by his name be set against him. Jonah knew what the Bible was about. He knew what the Lord was about, and in this situation, he actually found that despicable.

[17:57] You can have the whole Bible memorized and still be far from God. That's why the great commandment is what?

Shall love the Lord your God. It's not enough to have a knowledge of Christian doctrine. God. The Bible has it.

Has the Bible. Has the gospel. Has the Lord himself captured your heart? Are you inclined to him? I'm praying, friends, that you, each of you here, may taste and see that the Lord is good.

Because the desires of our hearts can twist our knowledge of God and of his scriptures in incredibly devious ways, just like Jonah.

I read an interesting quote this week. There's a lot of conversation in our world right now about race and racism and things like that.

[19:11] There's this quote I read this week. New Testament Christianity promotes unity and diversity. unity which transcends differences and works within them, but never a unity which ignores or denies differences or necessarily seeks to erase them.

How does that sound to you? How does it sit with you? I hope it's beautiful to you. It's a doctrine built off of passages like Galatians 3.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, and you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Paul isn't saying there that there's no such thing as men or women or ethnic heritage and the like. he's saying that even though we are different, Christians are bound up in a greater unity, a greater story, a greater blessing than anything that this earth would group us in.

And that seems really appropriate for our cultural moment right now, especially as racial injustice is brought to the fore in our culture today. We are all one in Christ, and so when a Christian author writes that Christianity promotes unity and diversity, a unity which transcends differences and works within them, but a never unity which ignores or denies differences or seeks to erase them, we want to jump in and say amen.

[20:50] But here's the thing. Here's why that quote passed my path this week, and why it connects to Jonah chapter four.

That quote appeared in Christianity today, in March of 1957. The author who wrote it wasn't arguing for what you and I assume he wrote it for.

Right? They said Christianity has a unity which transcends differences and works within them, therefore, racial segregation is a good policy.

The sinfulness of our heart can take excellent doctrine and twist it. Right? Jonah knew that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster which led him to run away from Nineveh because he didn't want to bring that grace there.

What a tragedy. And that author in 1957 knew that the Lord is redeeming for himself a people of every tongue and tribe and nation for his glory and for his delight and for ours.

[22:21] but because of his commitment to something else. In this case, an enculturated distaste for people of other backgrounds, he twisted it into something grotesque and unrecognizable And completely contrary to the point of Galatians chapter 3, even though he wrote beautiful words about

it.

Right? So you can know Galatians 3 and you can believe it and you can correctly expound it and write excellent expositions about it, like that article, and all the while you can have your heart set precisely against the truth.

I'm not just talking about Galatians 3 or Nineveh. Those are just examples of a much broader thing. That our hearts can take what we know of God and of his word and twist them in every conceivable way.

And so friends, let us take heed and be careful in the way we approach the scriptures to read them on his terms, not ours. Because that doesn't just happen in the 8th century BC when Jonah was ministering or in 1957 with that article.

It happens today among people like you and me. Have you ever heard someone use scripture to justify their own sin? Have you ever done that? Have you ever heard someone use the Bible to justify their inaction?

[24:02] Have you done it? God's love you love you God? God? God? God? God?
There are ways in which we can, without saying it outright, subtly, call God's perfect character and his beautiful word bad.

Perhaps like Jonah, we don't like his mercy when he offers it to people that we disapprove of. God's we say that when we say that that person has to get their act together before they could ever come to Christ or stop this sin or that thing or stop supporting that platform before they could come to Christ.

Perhaps we don't like his good and holy character. Perhaps in our hearts, his holiness spoils our fun. In that moment, we're Jonah. perhaps his patience upsets us.

Perhaps we find that his missionary mandate is just inconvenient and who really cares about those people? One pastor said we can use theology to cover all manner of evil.

Right? We can twist scripture in all sorts of ways. When a man uses the idea of male headship to act as if he owns his wife or to justify abuse, or if we disguise our gossip under the cover of caring for one another and bearing each other's burdens,!

[25:47] Or if we speak in unrighteous or even self-righteous anger under the cover of commands to confront sin.

And so Jonah is upset because he prizes his own private judgment higher than God's character. And I'm out of batteries.

so I think that this thing's really on here good.

All right, hang out. I think that'll work. Okay. You have to really have this thing in your face. You have to be like right up in it.

This is going to be a little awkward. I'm sorry. Friends, when our desires run contrary to the Lord, he becomes an obstacle to us.

[26:51] Something that we have to overcome to get our own way. And then we end up praying prayers like Jonah does in verse three.

Take my life from me. It's better for me to die than to live. I love how one pastor put it. He said, this is a brattish, jaundiced, peevish, churlish, petulant prayer.

The Lord ends the book with a question. You notice he asks three questions, only gets one answer. The last one is also unanswered.

He ends up with a question. He's gracious and merciful to Nineveh and to Jonah. He's drawing him back. Do you well to be angry? Which could also be read, do you have a right to be angry?

he's shown Jonah that Jonah himself appreciates small things like shade and he asks, why can't he care for something so much more valuable than a shade tree?

[28:00] he's and the book ends without a resolution. We're left wondering about Jonah and I hope about ourselves. This book is designed to prompt us towards introspection, to look at our own hearts and our own lives.

because we can, like Jonah, look the part. We can attend church, learn the lingo, put on a show, and even do some great things like Jonah.

He was phenomenally successful out with and still not be drawn to the Lord. So when we get upset, that's a wonderful time to ask the question that the Lord asked.

So think yourself the last time that you got upset. Do you have the right to be angry? And also ask about the proportion of your anger.

Jonah's anger radically exceeds the circumstance, doesn't it? Angry enough to die over a plant. And if you, like Jonah, find yourself to be condemned by that question, ask yourself, why?

[29:15] what am I prizing in my heart above God's good providence and his good will?

And friends, my prayer is that by showing you this in Jonah and pointing to how it might take shape in our own lives and asking the Lord's same question to ourselves and finding the answer as we ask it of our own hearts, that that might shake some things loose in your mind and in your heart, and that the Holy Spirit might work through this to convict you of sin and cause you to truly sorrow over it.

How terrible is it to twist the truth, to despise the good, to be set at odds in our hearts against the Lord himself? that he might work in your heart to reshape your very desires so that you don't react, so that you don't end up like Jonah.

But if, what happens when we ask that question, do you do well to be angry? and the answer is yes. Right? You might answer, like, I am actually rightly upset about something. That's something that is a genuine problem. What's that? Right?

[30:56] This is a story of Jonah not getting what he wants. And what he wants is sinful. So he sets himself against God. But what happens when life brings us disappointment, not because we're set against the Lord.

What happens when we're sinned against? What happens when we experience the brokenness of this world, disease and poverty and loss, and we find ourselves rightfully upset?

God. And the reason I bring that up, I wouldn't normally even bring that up in a passage like Jonah chapter 4, but I fear that that might be the story of our congregation this week.

God is good and there is weighty sorrow among our church family in just the last few days.

The stories are not mine to share, certainly not publicly, but at least four families in our church family have had major disruptions and losses and have tasted significant, life-altering sorrow this week.

[32:13] And so when the question is asked, like, are you upset for a good reason? they rightfully answer yes. First, this is a great week to reach out to your brothers and sisters and see how they're doing and to listen and to encourage them.

And secondly, if you would like prayer, I'll be down here after the service and I would love to pray with anybody who needs it.

And third, I don't want them to come to this passage and feel condemned for their outrage at real suffering. Right?

Jonah's heart is set against God's good plan. His anger is illegitimate. But there is a kind of anger, a hatred of sin and of suffering and of the fall of this world that causes God's people to rightfully be upset.

So in the Lord, in his providence, doesn't orchestrate the world that seems wisest and best to us. When we are slandered, when a loved one dies, when you experience a major setback in a good thing, when you see injustice around you, when pregnancy ends in miscarriage, when you suffer an incalculable loss, when you can ask, do I do well to be angry?

[33:59] And you can say, at the very least, it is right for me to be upset. don't look at this passage and see Jonah's condemnation.

That's not the application for you right now. Instead, look at this passage and see God. Right? Look at this passage, at the whole book of Jonah, and see a God who cares about even his enemies and know that he cares for you.

The Lord's heart burns for good. Jonah isn't right in this book, right? His heart is foul.

His reaction to the Lord is dismal. He isn't right, but he is correct. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He is. So look back to Jonah and see this Lord. And know that he is the same, right?

[35:10] One of God's attributes, Tyler, is his immutability. He does not change. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. And so the good, gracious nature of our God is the same yesterday and today and forever.

And so we can look back to him and we can look to him today. And we can cast our cares on Christ who cares for us. And we can look forward.

Because this same God who loves his enemies and certainly loves his children, who he has bought and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, has promised good.

And we can know that that is true because we can look back and look up and look forward right to the cross. We look back to the cross where he showed his commitment to us and his love for us. Just listening to a song on the way here. We look to the cross and see the sin of man and wrath of God laid on Jesus Christ.

[36:26] That is the love of God for you. And we can look up because his tomb is empty. We don't look back to his death.

Our Lord is risen and he is ascended and seated on high where he rules and reigns over this world. And so friends, we look up to him. So in the midst of great sorrow and sadness, he lifts our eyes heavenward.

And friends, we look forward. He is going to consummate all things. And as I consider looking forward in the midst of great sorrow and sadness, I consulted one of my favorite commentaries, the Jesus storybook Bible.

The concluding chapter is a summary of the book of Revelation. It was written by the Apostle John as he was shown visions of glory.

Here's how the book acts. one day John knew heaven would come down and mend God's broken world and make it our true, perfect home once again.

[37:57] And I love this. He knew in some mysterious way that would be hard to explain that everything was going to be more wonderful for once having been so sad.

And he knew then that the ending of the story was going to be so great, it would make all the sadness and tears and everything seem like just a shadow that is chased away by the morning sun. Friends, let's pray. Lord, surely you are gracious and merciful and slow to anger and turning from disaster.

Lord, for those who might find ourselves at odds with you, at odds with you. Lord, would you work in our hearts so that we don't twist your word or twist your scriptures and end up in a place where we are set against you like Jonah, in a place of spiritual disaster.

And for Lord, those who are reeling today, who are genuinely and rightfully upset and angered at the fallen state of this world, Father, I pray that they would see in this passage that you are good and gracious and merciful and that you have good in store for them, that your heart is set in love towards even your enemies.

[40:02] Thank you that you've made everyone who has turned from sin, Lord, and trusted in Christ that you've set that same love on us and made us your own.

Lord, may we find comfort in your glory. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Amen.