

Offended by Grace

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[0 : 00] Let me add my welcomes. Welcome to Jordan's. My name is Aaron. Jordan and I look after the service. It's wonderful to have you here. If you are new, I'd love to meet you. So just come and say hi if you're new. I'd love to just chat with you.

Right. Jonah chapter 4. Isn't it just wonderful? Were you surprised when it sort of ended there? It just kind of ends right there, doesn't it? At the final verse.

Yes. We have children, so we have a number of children's Bibles in our house. And we read to our kids stories in the morning for breakfast on really good mornings.

And Sadie loves the story of Jonah because it's, you know, fish. That's positive. Big fish in there.

But often, I don't know if any of our, we've got lots of children's Bibles.

I don't know if any of our children's Bibles include chapter 4. I don't know if they do. We read one the other day and it just stopped. It stops at chapter 3. It's like Jonah, he preaches a great sermon and, yeah, kids, go out and be positive about life.

[1 : 07] So they finish it, they finish it chapter 3. If you remember the movie The Sixth Sense, that was with Bruce Willis and that little kid. And, you know, I see dead people, right?

Okay. That movie only made sense right at the end. The last kind of five minutes of the movie, looking back, it made sense of the whole movie. It's the same with Jonah.

You need chapter 4. It's essential for working out what the whole book's about. So what do we see in this final chapter, in the climax of the book? Well, we see the heart of Jonah completely revealed. And to be honest, it's pretty ugly. And we see the heart of God revealed and it's beautiful. So I think that's how we'll look at this chapter. We'll look at it in two sections. The heart of Jonah and God's heart.

So first, the heart of Jonah. That's mostly sort of verses 1 to 5 there. Did you know, here's a fact, that in Jewish synagogues in Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement, every year they read, it's sort of the holiest, probably the most solemn of the Jewish days, special days, high days.

[2 : 20] Every year at Yom Kippur, they read the book of Jonah. And the congregation responds at the end of the reading with the words, We are Jonah. And they're right to do that because what Jonah does, there's a book here, as the book exposes Jonah's heart, we need to know it's talking about us.

That this story is a mirror in which we're supposed to see ourselves. We are Jonah. So bear that in mind as we hit it now.

Okay, so you know, so end of chapter 3, Jonah preaches this sermon to the Ninevites. The Ninevites repent, God stays his judgment. And then verse 1, chapter 4, and this displeases Jonah. And actually the Hebrew is, the translation kind of softens it. In the Hebrew, it was evil to Jonah. A great evil, it says literally.

And in verse 2, Jonah, he gets, I think the word is, I think the best word is strop. If you use that word, he gets really strop with the Lord.

[3 : 24] He says, in effect, I knew this would happen. It's like I feel like my wife says that to me sometimes. I knew this would happen when I left you with the kids. You know, I knew that would happen.

A blowtorch? Seriously? Children? But this is like, but Jonah says these like things that are like, I knew you'd forgive them.

I knew you were forgiving. I knew you were gracious. I knew you were merciful. And that's why I fled. I mean, it's actually remarkable how honest he is. Now, why was he so against the Ninevites receiving grace?

That's probably a very important question because it's visceral. I mean, it sounds crazy the way he's talking. Well, most of the scholars agree that Jonah, he knows enough about Nineveh to know that it's a growing state and at some point will likely try and conquer Israel, which incidentally they do later on.

And Jonah doesn't want God to preserve them. He wants God to crush them, to destroy them. That's why Jonah hates God's grace here. Because he's a nationalist.

[4 : 35] Now, you might think, Aaron, I know you said we are all Jonah Blum. But this guy's a monster. I'm not like that. Look, though, I think we are.

I think modern Christians, like ancient Christians, like Jonah, we have the same problem. You boil it all down and it's this. Because we just generally prefer our own ways to God's ways. We can even have great theology.

Remember what Jonah said. For I knew you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. This is one of the most incredible creeds ever spoken in the Bible.

It's beautiful. It's profound. It's wonderful. These words come out of the mouth of Jonah. And yet there was such a blindness in his own understanding of them. He cannot cope with the fact that God wants to save these Ninevites.

It's how dare God. How dare God do that? We can have great theology, but our hearts can be a mess because we just want what we want.

[5 : 46] Often this wackiness, the spiritual dysfunction that is in our hearts, often this is driven by idols, by idolatry. Now, if you haven't heard a sort of talk about that before, an idol is basically just anything that is more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart or your imagination more than God does, anything you seek to give you what only God can give you.

And Jonah's idol, I think, was his nationalism or his pride and his chosenness, and that trumped God's plan for him in terms of his own heart.

I prefer this than what God wants. Now, the litmus test for an idol, if you're thinking, do I have idols in my heart? The litmus test is this. You have to ask yourself a question.

You ask, okay, what is the one thing in my life that if it was taken away, you'd think my life is not worth living? Now, idols can be good things. They can be things like education, jobs, relationships, looks, money, sex.

And it can be a really good thing, but something that's so important that you'd think, oh, if I didn't have this or couldn't do this or couldn't experience this, or people didn't think of me in this way, then my life, I would feel like my life is a bit worthless, like it's not worth living.

[7 : 06] Let me remind you of what Jonah says in verse 3. He was so committed to the destruction of Nineveh, this potential overthrower of Israel, he'd rather die than see them forgiven.

So absorbed in his nationalism that he thought his life was not worth living if Nineveh survived. There's two or three times in our chapter he says, I just want to die, it's not worth it.

So that was Jonah's idol. Verse 5 is very interesting. Jonah went out of the city, and he sat on the east of the city, and he made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city.

He was so committed to this idea that even when God did forgive the city, he set up a little shelter for himself up on a hill overlooking the city, hoping that God would change his mind and just wipe them out anyway.

Above all, Jonah, he just wanted what he wanted, didn't he? He just wanted what he wanted. Leslie Allen, this commentator, wrote this about 30 years ago.

[8 : 22] He said this, it's quite full on. He said, a Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whimpering his insidious message of smug prejudice, empty traditionalism, and exclusive solidarity.

So there you go. How's everyone doing? Pretty good. Woo, glad I came to church tonight. So that's Jonah's heart.

That's Jonah's religion. It's creedal. It's theological. And it's really awful. What a terrible mix that is, isn't it?

Now let's look at God's heart in the passage. Of course, God is the real focus of this book. God's the hero. It's not the fish. It's not Jonah. The real hero in the book of Jonah is God in his heart. Jonah really is just a foil to show the inexhaustible, inexhaustible. Oh, no, how do you say that? English is not my first language. Inexhaustible, is that it? Is that how you inexhaustible?

[9 : 34] Inexhaustible. Grace of the Heavenly Father. This guy's an idiot. You just sort of think, go Jonah and go away.

No, God just pursues him and pursues him and pursues him. I find that very encouraging. I hope you find it encouraging. So God's heart. So we see in the second half of the chapter, what's God's desire of his heart?

His desire is to teach his stubborn children. And his desire is to teach us his heart for mission. For mission. So what happens?

So Jonah's up on this hill. He's overlooking the city. And Jonah's super comfy. In fact, it says he's exceedingly pleased. It's the same word used when he was exceedingly angry.

And God appoints a worm. There's a lot of appointing, actually, in the book of Jonah. God appoints a fish. Now he appoints a worm to kill this plant that has grown up to shade Jonah.

[10 : 39] So he's super comfy. And then a worm comes. And then God appoints a wind. It's not any old wind. It's this Middle Eastern wind called a Sirocco. Right? So it's super, super hot. And it's super, super dry.

Very low humidity. Apparently I read it can drive people mad. That when they're punishing people outside back in the days, if it was an outside punishment during a Sirocco, they'd do less punishment because Sirocco would drive you crazy.

Now it's all too much for Jonah. And again he says, I just can't cope with this. I can't cope with this. I want to die. Then God says, are you right to be angry that the plant died? So we're talking about a plant.

Remember this? We're talking about a plant. Okay. Are you right to be angry that the plant died? Jonah, yes. Very, very angry about the plant.

And God's come. I mean, we'd said at the start of this book, it's satirical. Jonah is historical, but it's very satirical, right? God says, okay, so you're sad about this plant. I can see that you're very sad about this plant.

[11 : 40] But you didn't make it. You didn't make it. You didn't grow it. And then God says, shouldn't I have pity on Nineveh? Shouldn't I be sad about Nineveh? It's 120,000 people in the city.

It's interesting that they name it. 120 plus animals. They're lost. They don't know their left hand from their right hand, which is the Bible's way of saying they're in spiritual darkness. You're sad about a plant, about a plant, Jonah.

And I'm sad about a city full of people, people, real people, people who are the crown of my creation. God is saying this to Jonah, whose major concern in his life right now is that he's really uncomfortable.

It's windy and it's hot. He's having a yucky day. God loves Jonah, even though he's awful.

He's awful. God doesn't give up on him. He loves Jonah. He loves this city. That's why he's going, come on, Jonah, come on.

[12 : 53] Think about what's going on here. Think about my grace for you. Think about how much I love this city. Let that override your nationalism. Okay, let me try and land the plane here.

I'll finish shortly. The final word in the book of Jonah is a question, as you hear, and it's kind of a shock when it happens. It doesn't resolve. In fact, isn't it interesting, at the end of the book of Jonah, the only person that doesn't repent is Jonah.

Jonah. And the book ends with a question, why? Because it's a question that just echoes through the generations. It's God saying to Jonah, saying to us, you should have pity on this city.

I know they're your enemies, but you should have pity on this city. But you are so caught up in your own plans, in your own privileged life, in your own goals, that you're blind to it.

You should be saddened about the spiritual state of the community that you exist in.

[14 : 04] That's what God's saying. So sad that we want to cast out the idols in our hearts that stop us from doing anything about it. Auntie, I mentioned Tim Keller here.

I do like Tim Keller too. And I want to read quite an extended quote from him, from a short essay called, Why God Made Cities.

It's online, you can find it. It's quite an extended quote. Here we go. Your attitude toward the city is one index of whether or not you know you're a sinner saved by grace. If you know you're a sinner saved by grace, you can no longer feel paternalistic towards people who don't believe or live like you do.

You won't be so absorbed in your own comforts and all the things that keep you from loving the city. God says to Jonah, Look, I don't think you have my heart because if you understood my grace and if you understood my nature, when you look at a city, you would love it instead of hating it.

120,000 people. What does it mean to bless the city? Here's what it means. Follow Jesus. We're told in Revelation 21 that Jesus will live in the center square of the city of God.

[15:17] He's going to live downtown. The lamb will be on the main street that leads to the throne of God. Jesus has built this new city for us to live in. How did he do it? He went to an earthly city.

He wept over it. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, he said. You who kill the prophets and stone those who sent you, how often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing and you were not willing.

That's Luke 13. He is saying, if only you knew the things that pertain to your peace, but now they're hidden from you. He wept over that city. He identified with the people. He preached the gospel in that city.

He sacrificed himself for it. In doing that, he has built a city for us, a city whose foundation, whose builder and architect is God. Jesus built a heavenly city by coming and dying in an earthly city. You too can be a part of Jesus' city building program. By going into an earthly city, weeping over it, identifying with it, preaching to it, and making the sacrifices that inevitably happen there.

[16:16] Are you ready to join Jesus' work in the cities of the world? Folks, God loves you. He loves you. And I hope you know that he's incredibly patient with you as well and wants to see your heart changed.

And one of the ways he does that is in books like Jonah. And what Jonah does is it invites us to see the hypocrisy that sometimes exists in our own hearts so he can deal with it.

And how does he do that? Is that that we would see the love God has for his world. The love that God has for our city.

Now if this is working for you, this is doing something in your heart, and you're thinking, okay, that's great, practical, what can I do? Folks, I would just say, start thinking and praying about what Auntie A said.

Go and talk to her afterwards. Email Jordan and I. Let's activate the small groups in our church to practically think about ways that we can show our love for this city and share the gospel through that.

[17:28] Amen. Amen.