

Jonah's Too Compassionate God

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[0 : 00] So we've got Jonah chapter 4 coming up on your Bibles. Jonah chapter 4, we are continuing, concluding our series on the book of Jonah this morning.

It's been about a month since we've been in the text, so I thought I would give you a quick recap of what's going on in the book. Remember chapter 1, Jonah, prophet of God, is given this message by God to give to the Ninevites.

Jonah, not wanting to give it, flees to Tarshish on this ship. God appoints a storm to come upon Jonah to stop him from getting to Tarshish.

During that storm, which was tearing the ship apart, the men discover that he is the one why the storm is happening. So what happens?

They throw him overboard and God appoints a fish, a whale, to swallow him. Chapter 2 begins with a prayer that Jonah prayed while he is in the belly of this fish.

[1 : 16] And then he is finally, eventually spit out on land three days later. And he's given the task once again. I want you to go to Nineveh and I want you to prophesy against the Ninevites. So Jonah doesn't argue.

He heads out. Chapter 3, he goes into the city. He offers God's word. He preaches. They hear. They believe God. They repent. And chapter 4 starts off with Jonah so excited.

He's in the city celebrating with the Ninevites that they have all been saved and are rejoicing in the glory of God. Right? We wish.

So let's look at what the text actually says about chapter 4. I'm actually going to start in verse 10 of chapter 3. When God saw what they did, that is the Ninevites repenting, turning away from evil, 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. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly. And he was angry.

[2 : 36] And he prayed to the Lord and said, Oh Lord, 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 know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, oh 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.

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 come over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

[3 : 40] 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. 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.

For should not I pity Nineveh, the great city, for which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle.

[4 : 53] Now before we get into looking at the words that Jonah speaks, I think it's very important for us to understand the scenario that we have before us.

All too often when we read this text, we think it's a chronological sequence. But Jonah, who wrote this text, put the words in a specific order to drive home a specific point.

As you notice, remember when we were back at chapter 3? It's kind of like movies today or TV shows. There's different camera angles, right, coming in. Remember that show 24?

That was one of my favorite shows when it was coming out. You know, everything had this linear. But they had to use different camera angles at different times to record what other people are doing. Chapter 3 is the Ninevites are being focused on.

And even when you read that text, you see them, oh, they heard the word and they repented. But if we remember, God gave them 40 days. So there was this time frame that was stretched out.

[5 : 53] Chapter 4 kind of switches to what was going on with Jonah, what he was doing. So when we look at this, scholars and those who read from the text, and I think when we read it, we understand verse 5 kind of fits better as the first thing that happened, right?

Jonah went out of the city, 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 happen of the city.

So basically what it is, he pronounced, we don't know how many days that he pronounced the word. I don't know if he was bitter. He just said it once and got out of the city. Or he made sure he went to all the different neighborhoods, pronounced God's word, but then he left.

I think it's safe to say that Jonah had no great love for the Ninevites. So it's not like he stuck around. Hey, you know what? I'm in Nineveh. Let's check out some of the local cuisine.

Let's go visit some of the war museums. You know, do those kind of things. This is a person who had an anger and bitterness towards the Ninevites, the Assyrians, who had been Israel's enemy.

[7 : 11] So what he does is he just heads out east, and he creates a booth, which is a common thing that they would have done at this. Many of you will remember in the Gospels, they talk about the Feast of Booths, that when all the people would come to Jerusalem for the celebrations, they would build like kind of a lean-to.

And remember, this is the desert. It's not like there's a whole bunch of logs like there is here in Squamish. We're going to go to the local mill. Hey, I want the best cedar that you've got. We're going to put together a little...

No, it doesn't work that way. You're scavenging. You're trying to find some sticks, perhaps some big leaves from plants, and then you make yourself kind of a lean-to, anything to help you in this desperate, hard heat.

So obviously, it would have been close enough to water, or if he wanted needed food or whatever, you know, he could take a quick jog into the market, grab something, head back, and wait.

Now, it's important to understand what his attitude would have been when he was waiting. Perhaps you stay-at-home moms might understand what this means.

[8 : 27] You remember, you're staying at home. Your kids are out of control. They're crazy. Just wait till your father gets home, right? Anybody experience that as a child? Exactly. Pretty much looks like all us bad guys.

Okay. Right? We knew that fear when dad's coming. Punishment's coming, right? So that's what he's waiting for. He knows God's coming back, and God's going to deliver his judgment on the people.

So he's sitting there, and he's waiting, and he's waiting, and he's waiting. But something is happening, something they didn't expect.

All of a sudden, if you were in the market for sackcloth and ashes, guess what? Business was booming. Right? All of a sudden, all these things are happening that you're starting to see. Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm seeing visual representation of people repenting and turning from their ways.

And God does show up. God shows up and forgives. God shows up and brings mercy to this people of Nineveh.

[9 : 38] And instead of hearing cries of judgment for the judgment that he was expecting to be poured out on the city of Nineveh, he's beginning to hear cries of joy, thanksgiving, and worship.

Do you remember chapter one of Jonah? When the mariners were saved from the storm, and how it actually says that they worship the Lord, covenant God of Israel.

They are now worshipers of God because of God's great mercy. So how did Jonah feel?

Let's take a look at verse one. It displeased Jonah exceedingly. And he was angry.

The literal translation of this text is it was evil to Jonah with great evil is how it is pronounced.

[10 : 43] If you will forgive me for using a sometimes common vernacular, but Jonah was damn angry. He was fuming nostrils, flaring angry.

Jonah literally hated what God had done. In fact, he believed it was evil, what God had done. So you'd think at that moment of probably the most successful evangelistic crusade the world had ever seen.

Billy Graham had nothing on this guy. There'd be rejoicing, celebration, worship, adoration. How many of you know the joy of seeing a family member come to Christ that you have been praying for for years?

Friends, you're excited, you want to party, celebrate. But there wasn't any of this. There was just anger and hatred.

[11 : 52] Now, many scholars offer different reasons why Jonah felt the way he did. Perhaps it was because he feared that the Ninevites would replace Israel as God's chosen people.

Maybe that was one of the reasons. Maybe, perhaps if Nineveh now survived, they were even a greater threat to Israel, right?

Like, if God wiped them out, that's an enemy we don't have to deal with anymore. Maybe when he goes back to Israel, hey guys, I had this great evangelistic crusade.

What happened? What happened, Jonah? Oh, I saved all the Ninevites. Right? There would be no praising in Jerusalem for that. You mean you're the cause for this problem, Jonah?

Thanks a lot. Or, perhaps Jonah knew, understood that Israel, and we remember at this time, Israel is no faithful nation to God at this moment, that judgment might come upon them as well, and knowing them to be a stiff-necked people.

[13 : 14] And the fourth, or the fifth reason, we'll get to that. Verse two, And he, Jonah, prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, 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 know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

What this is in modern-day parlance, that is prophet speaking, for I knew it, I knew it, I knew it, I knew this is what you would do, God.

Remember at the beginning, we asked the question, perhaps he feared the Ninevites. Maybe that's why he wanted to go to Tarshish. No, that wasn't the reason. He knew, in his theology, which was perfect theology, he knew that God, being who he was, would have to dispense mercy, grace, and salvation.

He didn't fear the Ninevites. He feared that God would be true to himself. The God who is gracious, the God who is merciful, the God who is slow to anger, the God who is abounding in steadfast love, the God who relents from disaster.

[14 : 41] He feared that the God who is all these things to Israel, would now be all these things to Nineveh. Remember that God, Elohim, in the Hebrew, the supreme God, the creator of God, the God of all, is actually the same God to the Ninevites.

God created these people as well as my people. The God who has no other gods before him. And it never occurred to Jonah that God might actually care and love people that aren't God's covenant people.

Now, for those of you who know your Bible will recognize that Jonah was using the exact words that God himself used to describe himself.

Remember Moses? He's befriending Moses. He takes him out. We're going to put out these tablets. We're going to put these Ten Commandments. And, you know, Moses has got all these questions.

[15 : 59] And then God appears and says, the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression in sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.

This is who God has always been from the time of Exodus that he's revealed himself to Moses. God continues to be that same God and Jonah knows this.

But what you need to understand here, when Jonah says this prayer, he does not do so in a graceful way.

He does it in a way that demonstrates that he is angry. And the object of his anger is God.

He's saying, God, you did a despicable act by saving Nineveh. Verse 3, Therefore, now, O Lord, my covenant God, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

[17 : 27] Now, personally, I don't believe he's actually asking God to do this. Remember, he's been out in the heat 40 days. It's beating down on him.

I'm betting he's not eating the best, richest foods for himself. He's exhausted. He's been expecting someone. And what we are reading here, it is what scholars call a temper tantrum.

He is having a prophetic temper tantrum. He is upset. He is not getting his way. You parents know what it is.

When your kid decides to have a temper tantrum, you know it's really not just anger. They're trying to manipulate you into something.

It looks bad on a child, but it looks horrible on a prophet. It is the, I know better than you do God.

[18 : 31] Listen. How Jonah is responding is a story that we have heard many times.

Matthew 20, which Dave read this morning. The servants. Right? You get called up in the morning. You go to work. I'm going to make my denarius.

The owner grabs someone at mid-afternoon or mid-morning break. Then he grabs a few guys at dinner time. Grabs some more in the afternoon. And just before the end of the day, he calls some more workers.

And he pays them all the same. I'll be honest with you. When I was younger, when I read that story, that is the one story that I refused to believe was right.

It just doesn't seem fair. Right? You guys know the other story. It's found in Luke 15. The prodigal son.

[19 : 32] Right? Guy has this inheritance. He takes it. Runs away. Blows it. High living. Horrible living. Living with pigs. Finally realizes, even my father treats his servants better than this.

I'm just going to go home. His father throws open the feast. The open doors. Gives him the ring. The best robe. Loves on him. And who should be bitter?

But the big, horrible, bad brother. Right? Haven't I been with you, father? It's the same kind of anger that existed then.

We see over and over and over in the pages of Scripture. Jonah feels that this is wrong.

Over and over, Jesus Christ, right? He's hanging out with the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, the outsiders, the unclean, those that are righteous, the Pharisees.

[20 : 45] Aren't you supposed to be wanting to hang out with me? You, God, haven't we done everything to please you?

We've done this all for you. You see, this is the tale of the insider versus the outsider. The insider is the one who thinks they do everything right according to the God that they love.

The outsider is the one who realizes there's not anything he can do to become an insider. So he just trusts in God. Often, he feels so dirty, he doesn't even want to come to God and God has to go to him and pull him in and said, you are welcome.

God's response, verse four, and the Lord said, do you do well to be angry? Have you guys ever felt this way?

angry at what was God's mercy but you didn't really think so?

[21 : 52] Did someone deserve the portion of the fattened calf that you thought you deserved? Are there areas of their life that you blame God for?

Do you ever get angry with God because your life is not like so-and-so's life? Maybe your crypto didn't skyrocket like someone else's.

Your investments aren't like the neighbors. Maybe your marriage doesn't, your spouse doesn't seem as understanding as the spouse next door.

Your kids, maybe they're not the great major league hockey players that you hoped they would be. your job.

Why was I overlooked for that promotion? I have a real life story like this. My friends and I were all confronted with this truth one day.

[22 : 53] We grew up in the college years with a friend born of a, he was a pastor's kid, great guy, exuberant in his charismatic attitude. His father was well-known, had written a, a very well-known book.

He had three sisters. All sisters went on to marry pastors, godly hosts. He absolutely rebelled. In fact, he rebelled far worse than any hedonistic person I'd ever met.

He went to the deep ends of disaster. We were convinced he was hell-bound. In his disarray, he decides to go on a missions trip, gets saved, comes back, marries a very pretty girl, and at the

wedding, he's given a new BMW and a house for a wedding present. And we're like, what have we done wrong? My buddies have all lived a righteous life. We have pursued God with all our hearts. And yet, of course, we're all at the singles table, right? Nobody's paying any attention to us. And this guy gets married, and we were angry.

[24 : 17] You see, every time we complain that things aren't the way they are supposed to be, we're being a bit like Jonah. we're telling God, hey God, I know better.

We don't use that word angry, but that is what our complaints signify. That is what our murmuring signifies. You know, when you're cleaning up after your kids or your husband or your wife or some other thing in your life.

Remember the people of Israel. they escaped slavery and they murmured in the desert. They complained, maybe it would have been back to be under the slavery of the Egyptians rather than live in the unknown of this wilderness.

So serious was this murmuring that God did not allow them to go into the promised land. There's a point there for us, friends.

when we complain and we murmur that God isn't doing things the way we should do them, I believe there's a line that we can get to when we cross where we have to live with the consequences of that.

[25 : 42] The fact of the matter is God hears us, not just our beautiful words of adoration and worship to him, but I also believe he hears our complaining and murmuring heart.

And often in God's loving kindness he brings discipline to us. Verse 6, now the Lord God appointed a plant and 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. You see the booth only worked so long it only held out so much wind and the heat that is coming down it is brutal.

Now I want you to pay a couple attention to some of the words that are used in this text. First of all it says the Lord appointed this plant was no accident. God appointed that for a reason to drive home a point as we are going to see.

Much like the fish that he used to swallow Jonah he appoints this plant. The other thing we need to take away from this is this is God's soul doing.

[27 : 06] And notice the words that he uses so Jonah was exceedingly glad because the plan. Look back at verse four or verse one.

Jonah was exceedingly angry. The same exuberance he had in his anger the same exuberance he has in his joy.

Verse seven but when dawn came up the next day God here's the word again appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose here we go again God appointed a scorching east wind.

Have you guys ever experienced the desert and what a desert wind is? It's brutal. I lived in LA for a couple years and in the fall the winds come off the desert and blow into LA as they head out to the ocean and they call it the Santa Anna winds.

And at first when I first moved there I had an old black Nissan car with black leather interior because you know what northern Ontario big deal right? There's no air conditioning why do I need air conditioning?

[28 : 19] So one day driving home it is hot I blow I turned down the windows the wind made it worse that I almost passed out and had to go park on the side of the road because the heat was just brutal in that temperature in that climate this is what he has experienced but it is so much worse and he is angry he's miserable but God said to Jonah in verse 9 the same question do you do well to be angry for the plant and Jonah said yes yes I do well to be angry angry enough to die you see what God did to the plant is what Jonah wanted God do to the Ninevites what does he have another teenage meltdown 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 a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle the end what are we supposed to do with this ending right right but notice what God does to Jonah he demonstrates to him that you care more about this plant than you do about these people yet you never planted it you never watered it you never caused it to grow you

had no involvement in this plant's life at all what about me

Jonah God who caused all things to grow these people he cared for and notice the form of argumentation that God uses he's actually using the argumentation from the lesser to the greater you cared for the plant but there's cattle and there's humans here as well people are more important than animals animals are more important than plants so if Jonah is to be upset by the death of one single plant how off is his compass if he's not even mad at one single death of a person you want to know something we don't change very much do we we're like this over and over and over if you were to look back at

Jonah 2:9 you would hear him praying but I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay salvation belongs to the Lord if you were to see that person today what is the word that you would use hypocrite right hypocrite but one thing that I want you to understand from this incredible book of Jonah is that Jonah is not the focal point the whale is not the focal point the Ninevites are not the focal point the focal point of this small simple book is God see the fact the matter is we always think we're special when we're on the inside right we're elected that means we must be elite we have the knowledge they don't

God must love us more than he loves them you see Israel lost their way they were chosen by God brought out to be a light to the world and how they live with their God ruling them instead Israel persisted in wanting to be more like the world than like God had designed for them what did they do they withdraw from the world they became more religious but become became less God focused have any of you ever felt disgusted with this world ever find yourself judging the world wishing that God would burn it all well you'd have Jonah as one of those in company with you ever look at somebody else with disdain those that might be obvious sinners and say

[33 : 36] God will judge them well Jonah did too do you ever find yourself distrusting people from different countries different nationalities maybe it's a different accent maybe it's a different skin color maybe they're from Brackendale but we all have those right someone who's just not like us and we find ourselves not really trusting them and thinking they aren't like us see this is the sad thing we don't change much it existed in the time of Jonah it existed in the time of Jesus and it still exists in our day today we are a prejudicial people just like this prophet was a prejudicial prophet but I have good news for you even though we don't change

God doesn't change either you see the same God who revealed himself to the Ninevites to the ultimate outsiders to God's people the God who shows mercy and grace the God who is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love the God who is faithful and forgives iniquity and transgression and sin yes that God he is still the same God that reigns today and you and I have the ultimate joy of knowing and worshiping that God maybe today is the day for you maybe today is the day that you turn away your prejudicial thoughts your prejudicial heart maybe today is the day you put away your false idols those things that you think make you acceptable to God whether it's the language you speak the parents you have the country you live in or the skin color that you have and maybe and maybe today is the day that you confess that

God is real you believe him you commit to him and you will repent of your wicked ways maybe if you're willing to do this you too will experience the grace and mercy that God dispensed poured out lavished on the Ninevites this day many years ago you know today we are supposed to be a culture of understanding a culture of compassion you know what we judge today we judge history right we judge those who own slaves we judge those who supported residential schools we judge those who were in war and sent millions to their death during the great wars of our times yet and this is the weirdest thing that

I've experienced this past week talking to several different pastors that are dealing with several different issues in their church there is a war on and a hatred for those who either were vaccinated and who weren't vaccinated no joke hatred disdain gossip hurtful words us thinking we know everything there is to know about what's going on and this is happening in the church of God how messed up are we cetera that is today in this self righteous cancel culture by group of people who think they know everything by reading the internet I'm going to read a prayer for you. And in this prayer, it's written by the Puritans. And this is a prayer that is meant to prepare us for the communion table. So as you know, with COVID rules, we're going to do communion a little bit different.

[38 : 22] In case you're unfamiliar with the communion table, this is one of the acts that we hold to be sacred for us. It is what Jesus Christ did when he got his disciples together the day before he

was crucified.

And he said, hey, I want you to do this, to have this shared meal amongst the believers. Be thankful for what I have done for you on the cross.

And at that time, they knew not what was going to be happening that night as Jesus Christ would go and sacrifice himself on the cross. So what we're going to do is I'm going to read the prayer.

Then I'm going to ask Dustin and Brent to come up. And they're going to play. And Dave. And then we're going to come up on the sides. We're going to ask you to go on the sides. Line up one at a time when you're ready to come.

We're going to take off the cover and just grab your piece. You're going to go back. And after we're done singing, we'll do communion together. So one more time, we're going to go on the side. You know, try to stay a little bit distant from one another.

[39 : 24] We still want to abide by all the rules that are placed before us. And when you're done, when we're all seated down together, we'll pray. And we'll give thanks. And we'll take this communion before the Lord.

Are you guys all right with that? Everything's simple? All right, let me read you this Puritan prayer. That was written over 500 years ago.

400, actually. God of all good, I bless you for the means of grace. Teach me to see in them your loving purposes.

And the joy and strength of my soul. You has prepared for me a feast. And though I am unworthy to sit down as guest, I wholly rest on the merits of Jesus and hide myself beneath his righteousness. When I hear his tender invitation and see his wondrous grace, I cannot hesitate, but must come to you in love.

[40 : 28] By your spirit and alive. By your spirit and alive in my faith rightly to discern and spiritually to apprehend the Savior. While I gaze upon the emblems of my Savior's death.

May I ponder why he died and hear him say. I gave my life to purchase yours. I gave my life to purchase yours. Presented myself an offering to expedite your sin.

Shed my blood and blot out your guilt. Opened my side to make you clean. Endured your curses to set you free.

Bore your condemnation to satisfying divine justice. Oh, may I rightly grasp the breadth and length of this design.

Draw near. Obey. Extend the hand. Take the bread. Receive the cup. Eat and drink. Testify before all men that I do for myself gladly in faith, reverence, in love.

[41 : 39] Receive my Lord. To be my life. Strength. Nourishment. Joy.

Delight. In the supper I remember his eternal love. Boundless grace. Infinite compassion. Agony. Cross. Redemption.

And receive assurance of pardon. Adoption. Life. Glory. As the outward elements nourish my body, so may your indwelling spirit invigorate my soul.

Until that day when I hunger and thirst no more. And sit with Jesus at his heavenly feast. Christ. The fact of the matter is none of us deserve to be at this communion table.

But because of the great love, mercy, steadfast patience that we all enjoy through Jesus Christ, we can. We don't come from the crumbs.

[42 : 48] We come for the choices. Fruits, meats, and foods.