

Rage

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[0:00] Have you found yourself asking the question, why God? Why is this happening?! Or have you found yourself actually shaking your fist in anger at God?

! Maybe actually physically or metaphorically in your head like I'm really angry with you God right now. We've been looking recently at the book of Jonah and we're in the last chapter and we've got a couple more weeks left and this is a surprising chapter. As we know God has called Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and he has to go there and preach, turn to God, destruction is coming.

And almost everyone knows the part of the story where Jonah flees in the opposite direction, is thrown overboard in a storm, swallowed by a big fish. God reclaims him and points him in the right direction and it's a complete U-turn.

Then he goes to Nineveh in chapter 3 and he preaches a call to repentance and we're told there was a massive turning to God. They repented and they turned from violence and their evil ways. This is amazing. This is a Billy Graham crusade on steroids. One of the great cities of the ancient world, a city like Sydney, and there was large-scale change.

[1:18] But the equivalent is actually something more like an American evangelist going to Afghanistan because they're kind of enemies.

And that American evangelist preaching and speaking to the people of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and everyone in Kabul turning to Jesus.

That's the equivalent. It's pretty hard to comprehend. So this is a real God moment. Jonah called the people of Nineveh to repentance and there was complete cultural transformation en masse. They turned to God. Then we get this crazy surprise in chapter 4, verse 1. We're told, What's Jonah on about?

James 1, verse 8 gives us a clue. The double-minded person is unstable in all their ways. They are like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind.

[2:39] This seems to explain Jonah's mood swings and emotional instability. Able to praise God in one breath and a few days later, essentially shaking his fist in anger at God.

Why is he like that? The answer, he's got a divided heart. In other words, Jonah believed in and served the true God, but he also believed in and served a rival God.

And because of that, his heart's divided. Worshipping two different things, we're told in James 1, a person will find constant emotional turmoil, tremendous instability, praising God one day and virtually cursing him the next.

In fact, wishing they were dead. This morning, I want us to look at our own hearts and ask this question. Do I ever experience what Jonah is experiencing?

Feeling unstable, bitter, angry at God? What about the fact that sometimes, like Jonah, we have this sense of feeling like, what is there to live for?

[3:50] Why is it very often our belief in God is no comfort to us in hard times? Is it possible that our own instability is due to a divided heart?

Divided hearts between more than one God creates instability. They create the kind of behaviour we see here in Jonah. Today, I want us to consider, what is a divided heart?

And secondly, how can we heal from a divided heart? So what's a divided heart? Jonah 4, verses 1 to 3. But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord, Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? This is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, who relents from sending calamity.

Now, Lord, take away my life, for it's better for me to die than to live. Jonah's heart is divided. The first reason is actually because he is, of all things, he's a little bit racist.

[4:59] Remember, Jonah was a Jew. God had come to Israel and he'd shown Israel his grace. He'd chosen Israel. They were to be set apart and he poured out his steadfast love and favour on Israel, slow to anger, abounding in love.

And now Jonah's prejudice comes through. It's like he's saying, I was afraid this might happen, that you might give your grace to these Assyrians. I know that you're a generously gracious God. I was afraid you might forgive them. That's what I'm mad about. This is originally why I left in the first place. I didn't want them to have your grace. The grace that you've made clear is for everyone. On the surface, we see racial prejudice, but this could easily be justified. Jonah dates around 780 BC and the Assyrian Empire is right there, a threat constantly.

And in fact, around 720 BC, the Assyrians just sack and destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and taking 10 tribes. And so, the Assyrians were enemies of Israel and so there's an entrenched hatred.

[6:10] Why should our enemies experience God's grace? And we say, well, yeah, that's what Jonah's sin is, but there's something deeper going on in here.

Because in verse 3, we see that not only did, not only he didn't want them to get the grace of God, now that Nineveh has repented, he's so distraught at the result, he'd prefer God to take away his life, convinced it would be better to die than to live on at that point.

We've now got a picture of what a divided heart looks like. When a person says, I would just as soon as die, they're saying, something was in my life that gave me meaning, and now it's gone, so I've got no purpose left.

Whatever that was for Jonah, that has become his preeminent God. It had to be something he got his identity from, his life reference point, something that gave him meaning and purpose, something that gave him a reason for being.

And now it's gone. That's why he's able to say, it's better for me to die than to live. Look at who Jonah is saying this to. Jonah is talking to God and telling him, I've got no meaning in life.

[7:34] Jonah is looking at the only source of meaning in life and saying, I've got no meaning in life. Jonah is looking at the only reason to get out of bed in the morning and he's saying, I've got no reason to get up in the morning.

Something has been more of a God to Jonah than God. So Jonah is saying, I have no reason, no motivation. Why even get up? Why even get up? Philosophically, Jonah is experiencing existential despair, a sense of feeling like, meaningless.

What on earth am I really here for? If you haven't felt like Jonah, what on earth am I here for? What is the point? I can guarantee one day you will ask yourself that question.

Life is now meaningless to Jonah because he's lost sight of the one true God. There was some other God at play in his heart. And what is that rival God?

It seems to be the national security of his people, their identity. We know that Assyria eventually does sack them and the ten tribes are removed, never to return.

[8:42] So Assyria is a tremendous international political and military threat to Israel. Jonah knew that. He also loved his people. He's patriotic, carrying enormous national pride.

But his heart is self-righteous. He doesn't consider his own sin and how actually his self-righteousness can leave him estranged from God.

He's happy to point the finger and he actually judges the evil, idolatrous Assyrian pagans. And so he believes, he's almost playing God here, he believes that they deserve God's punishment.

His love for people, his people, had become a God substitute without him even realising. When he recognised that Israel's national interest had not been secured, he lost all his meaning and he got angry at God.

It shows us in Jonah's heart there was a true God and there was a rival God. And here's how it works. As long as that true God enables him to serve his rival God, everything's fine.

[9:51] But on the day that to serve the true God, meant he had to stop serving his rival God, the national security of his people, his own pride, his ethnic pedigree and religious respectability, on the day in which he had to choose between the true God and the rival God, he turned on the true God.

because he was using the true God to serve his rival God. He was making the true God be a means to the end. So let's take a moment to examine our own hearts.

Do you see this in yourself? Do you see why Jonah was full of instability when he could praise God one day and the next day he could turn and curse because he had more than one God in his heart? If we're talking about ourselves, do you have anything in your life that you simply must have apart from God to be happy? So we can say we're Christians and express verbally what it is we believe. We can say the statement from Philippians 2 at the start of the service. But what is our real religion? What are you really living for? Who or what is your functional master in your day-to-day life?

[11:09] It's those things we must have. If we don't have them, we're driven to despair. To get them, they drive us in our goal setting and in our schedules. Whatever controls us is our Lord.

The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance or prestige always controlled by wanting to please others. The person who seeks to accumulate controlled by financial security and success.

We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by whatever has preeminent lordship in our life. If Jesus is Lord, he is the one who controls. He is the ultimate power.

And there's no room for rival gods. There's no negotiating with God. I just want this alternative bit of some God on the side. And Jesus made this very clear in Matthew chapter 6.

No one can serve two masters. Either you'll hate the one and love the other or you'll be devoted to one and despise the other. So how do you know who your functional masters are?

[12:16] You make time for them. You make sacrifices for them because they've captured your heart. They occupy your thoughts and time and preoccupy your life.

And when they don't satisfy, you respond like Jonah, angry enough to die. Existential despair. Nothing to live for and no reason to get up in the morning. And yet at that point, if you're called to God, the only one in the universe who can offer you security, you may well be a bit like Jonah and say, I have no security.

Where does your security lie? The gospel is clear. If Jesus is not your security, if he is not your meaning in life, then yes, you have no security and yes, you have every reason to despair.

In James 4 verse 14, what is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. So salvation is from the Lord, we see in Jonah.

Christianity is kingdom power to topple the gods that drive you. Christianity is a whole new approach to life. The Christian person recognises that they can't be their own saviour and rival gods will crush and bring us to despair.

[13:39] Those gods that are in your life that are driving you, we all need to turn from them and turn to Jesus. promises. And he promises in Matthew his burden is light.

If you know yourself, if we know ourselves, we know there are rival gods in our heart competing for attentions, we know what it means to have a divided heart. So the second question is how can we heal from a divided heart?

The short answer? We can't. God does all the work. The long answer? On the surface, Jonah carried racial prejudices but underneath he had a divided heart.

In our own case, we actually may need spiritual discernment to look beneath our superficial problems and see our real problem is a divided heart with rival gods to God.

Our heart is a battleground. So what's the solution? Three ways that God helps Jonah. The first thing we need to see is that healing from a divided heart is a process.

[14:49] In the Bible, whenever you see the word pure, we're not talking about a perfect heart but talking about a singularly focused heart.

Healing for a pure heart. The opposite of a pure heart in the Bible is not an impure heart, it's a divided heart. So how do we heal and get a pure heart? It's very important that repentance, change and transformation is a process.

Scripturally, it's sanctification. Beginning by recognizing you have rival gods so you can take steps to throw that idolatry out. Jonah's heart is that rival god prioritized over the true god.

Jonah's heart was like that again and again. Jonah had to hit rock bottom to realign his heart with God. Jonah thought he'd hit rock bottom in the storm.

God had other plans. Things got a little bit worse so he's thrown overboard into the ocean. Thinks he's hit rock bottom now. Things get a little bit worse again. He winds up as dinner for a large fish.

[15:56] God was saying there's more work to be done here. God breaks us down to build us up. In Isaiah chapter 64 verse 8 it reminds us God is the potter and we are the clay.

God wants to work through our surface layers and go deeper so that we can realign our heart with his and rid ourselves of our rival gods. The mature Christian is someone who recognizes God is at work with us and in us.

Anyone who's done any kind of growing in the Christian life will look back and realize that the original reason you became a Christian was probably a little bit selfish. I'm worried about where I'm going to end up so I've got to get my ticket to the right place.

Or maybe they were lonely and some Christians included them. Or maybe they were unemployed and they needed work. maybe there was a problem or a disaster and they called out to God to solve it.

In those early days you can even bargain with God. Okay God I'll clean up my act now. I'll fix up my situation. If you would just do this for me. Despite our bad motives God says I'm not your personal ATM or your vending machine or your heavenly matchmaker.

[17:13] You can't bargain with me. You've got nothing to bargain with. I created you. Love me and serve me for who I am. It's immoral it's foolish it's unreasonable and impractical to worship anything more than me.

Or make anything else in all creation more important in your life than me. I know you personally and only at the infinite cost of my son can your sins be dealt with and forgiven.

Our hearts are built for a higher object to worship the true and living creator God. If you find yourself worshipping a rival God you'll find yourself giving that God excessive amounts of your time you'll make sacrifices for that God and spiritually you will grow stagnant your faith will not flourish.

God comes to us even in our bad motives and says I love you. I didn't give you my love so you could use me. I'm God you're a human being and have nothing to offer me.

I love you for who you are. Love me for who I am. I love you love me for me I came to you. See how reasonable this is?

[18:35] We need to come with open palms recognising we have nothing to offer God ever and maybe we have to hit rock bottom to finally find out how generous God's grace is for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus.

We are a work in progress. I was speaking at Discipleship Explored on Thursday night I was saying how my son will when there's a sign on the road it says road works ahead and so we read that sign road works ahead and he always says gee I sure hope it does but then I applied it to us that it's under repair.

There's road works ahead like we're all it's a process as God works through us to change us. Don't think you're there yet. The struggles you've had in the past you may have overcome but then you'll find new struggles as God seeks to mould and shape us into the image of Christ.

Be very careful if you're holding on to rival gods for security and don't be shocked if something comes like a wake up call in your walk with Jesus because change is a process which segues now into the second point of how he heals our heart a divided heart is that he might take away comforts so we don't rely on them.

Steve I think is addressing this a bit more next week anyway don't be too presumptuous about that but basically Jonah's given shade in the Middle East and heat and then the shade is taken away from him and he rages against God again.

[20:12] Think also of Job Job's a prosperous man he's got a wife and children and friends a successful business he's wealthy big real estate portfolio everything's going well in his life and what happens when God allows this to be swept away all his comforts?

Job is angry he wants to die but Job eventually gets perspective and he sees who he is in relation to God he says I see who you are the living God and I'm nothing and I repent in dust and ashes Job and Jonah both had to hit rock bottom to see God sometimes the only way God can get through to us is by taking away a comfort that we're holding on to a God substitute that we think gives us security lastly a divided heart is only healed when we finally grasp the grace of God in Jonah chapter 4 verse 4 the Lord replied is it right for you to be angry?

Salvation is completely of God it's by grace alone we are saved remember Jonah 2 verse 9 those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs I will say salvation comes from the Lord grace is for everyone and salvation is all the work of God whether you're an evil pagan like the Ninevites or a self-perceived respectable moral person like Jonah we all need the grace of God we remember when Jonah finally saw that he was free free from trying to earn his own acceptability and then he was empowered to preach but here in chapter 4 he's forgotten about that and he's

angry with God and God asks is it right for you to be angry?
didn't I rescue you? didn't I save your life? can I save who I choose to save? who do you think you are to get angry when I don't discriminate to save lives?
like Jonah we don't have any right to be angry with God on the contrary it's God who has every right to be angry with us our constant disobedience irreverence double-mindedness self-righteousness!
[22:43] holding on to other gods and idols in our divided hearts this is the bottom line if you want a pure singularly focused heart we must see we can't ever earn salvation through our own performance we must see idolatrous pursuits will crush and only trusting in Jesus absorbing God's anger anger at our sin on the cross can our divided hearts be made clean and healed until we hear God coming to us in the gospel other voices other gods will be demanding our attention in Romans 5 we read this you see at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly those with divided hearts those with rival gods but God demonstrates his own love for us in this why we were still sinners why we were still enemies of

God like the Ninevites like Jonah Christ died for us that is amazing grace are you raging against God is it right for you to be angry is it because your heart is divided God's grace is generous grace and it's for everyone no human being is so good they don't need grace and no human being is so bad they can't find grace God breaks the stranglehold of rival gods lay your deadly rival gods at Jesus feet have a singularly focused heart salvation is of the Lord we're actually going to celebrate that very thing I've spoken of then the gospel right now in the Lord's supper there's some people going to come around now and hand out the bread and the juice this is a great opportunity for us to examine our hearts to recognize the rival gods we are serving that we have divided hearts and leave everything at the cross we see the bread representing

Christ's body broken for us on the cross absorbing God's anger for our sin because he has every right to be angry unlike us and the red grape juice representing Christ's blood shed for us so that we can receive forgiveness this celebration is a physical representation of the gospel Jesus gave his life for us and took God's judgment in our place because he really does love us hear these words of encouragement from psalm chapter 51 the words of David have mercy on me oh god according to your unfailing love according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from sin create in me a pure heart oh god and renew a steadfast spirit within me do not cast me from your presence or take your holy spirit from me restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me before we come to a prayer of confession together let's spend a moment with our eyes closed a quiet moment bringing aspects of our lives where we've had a divided heart we've been harboring rival gods in our hearts and let's lay them all before

Jesus please share in the words of this confession together on the screen merciful God our maker and our judge we have sinned against you in thought word and deed our hearts are divided and as a result we have not loved you with our whole heart we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves we repent and are sorry for all our sins father forgive us wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others bring forth in us the fruit of the spirit that we may live as disciples of Christ sharing the hope we have in Jesus this we ask in the name of Jesus our saviour amen gracious

God who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith pardon you and set you free from all your sins strengthen you to do his will and keep you in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord amen to you in prayer merciful father we thank you for this bread and this wine and we pray that we who eat and drink them in remembrance of Jesus's death and passion may be partakers of his body and his blood!

[28:02] who on the night he was betrayed took the bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and he gave it to his disciples saying take eat this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after supper he took the cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying this is the new covenant in my blood!

do this whenever you drink it in remembrance for whenever you eat this and drink this cup you proclaim the death Lord's death until he comes so let us come now and take this sacrament of the body and blood of Christ take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart with thanksgiving drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful let's pray gracious father we thank you that you feed us who have received these holy mysteries with the spiritual food of the body and blood of our saviour Jesus Christ we thank you for this assurance of your goodness and love and that we are living members of his body and heirs of

his eternal kingdom accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience that with all your saints we may worship you forever praying together on the screen father we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord send us out in the power of your spirit to live and work to your praise and glory amen