

Jonah

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[0 : 00] It is good to be in church with you this morning. We're coming to the end of January, which means hopefully you're starting to click out of holiday mode if you had the privilege of being in holiday mode.

I'm sure work is coming back, school is about to go back. Here at church, life is getting very busy, particularly if you work in the youth department, as we prepare to take our kids away for five days and four nights.

I know a few parents that are very appreciative that we're going to give them a relaxing week off, but it is busy and we're about to actually finish our Jonah series today and then we'll be launching into a very exciting series, not next week but the week after, wrestling with who our God is, wrestling with the question of the Trinity.

Now I wanted to warn you up front because that's sometimes a scary word, but it's an important thing for us to wrestle with and so we're going to spend quite a few weeks wrestling with that and what that means for us as followers of Jesus.

So please be praying for the staff who are going to be preaching in that series, that they won't just be talking over here and we'll all miss it, but pray that as we wrestle with who our God is, that that will shape us and change us.

[1 : 09] But that said, let me pray and then we'll get stuck into finishing up what we've been looking at through January and Jonah. Father God, we want to thank you for the opportunity this morning to gather.

Father, we want to thank you for the slightly cooler weather. We want to thank you for the gift that you have given us in your word that we might hear you speak, that you may work in us by the power of your spirit and we ask that this morning that that would happen, that it would not just be us sitting in the room together, but that it would be your will being done and that we would be transformed as a result of being here.

Amen. Just to quickly remind you where we've been in the last couple of weeks, two weeks ago we opened up Jonah 1 and kind of looked a bit beyond Jonah 1 as well, but we were reminded that God is sovereign, that God's will is unstoppable, that even disobedient Jonah and disobedient us can't stop what God is doing.

A week later we were reminded that God is a God who speaks and when God speaks, stuff happens and we were reminded that God speaks to us in his word and so when we gather and have God speak to us, stuff happens.

And so it is important that as we approach this morning that we're ready for stuff to happen. We're ready for God to do what he is going to do. And so today we're going to open up Jonah chapter 4 and we're going to look a little bit back into Jonah as well at one final thing about God that I think the story of Jonah teaches us.

[2 : 39] I don't know if you've noticed, but something that I think all people are born with is a sense of justice. I have the joy of seeing this in action in a 10-month-old at the moment.

It is amazing how even at 10 months old, Bailey knows when somebody has stolen what is his. If he has a toy that belongs to him and somebody else wants to play with it, he knows that he is entitled to that toy because it's his.

And so if they steal it, he is pretty quick to take it back or to go and find something of theirs that he can steal to balance the ledger. He met his cousins for the first time over Christmas and they're all still a little bit uncoordinated.

And so one cousin would push the other cousin over and Bailey would very quickly grab them by the hair and try and bang their head on the floor. I maintain it was good-spirited, but the reality is that even at that young age, he knows that when something is done, there is an equal reaction.

There is justice that is due. They say that the best way to split a piece of cake in half for two kids is to ask one to cut it and the other one gets to choose.

[3 : 47] You can be sure that it will be exactly down the middle. But funnily enough, we have the exact same sense of justice as we get older. We try and be a little bit more subtle about what we think we're entitled to, but you know that feeling when you're sitting in the car in traffic and somebody sneaks up the bus lane and there's just this anger and rage that makes you want to zip out at the last minute and have them jam on the brakes and you don't want to let them pass because you're doing the right thing and you're entitled to be in front of that person.

Maybe it's at work. You're being honest. You are making sure that you let the boss know what you're spending on what and you are not cheating in any way, shape or form, but for some reason the people who are cheating seem to be doing better than you.

They seem to have that little bit more money. They seem to be first in line for promotion and we have that sense in us that this isn't right. We know what we deserve and we want what we deserve.

We don't think that's unreasonable. It's not unrealistic. We just want what we have earned, what we are entitled to. But the problem is that we do the same thing with God.

We want what we deserve with God. We want Him to be loving towards us. We want Him to look after us. We want Him to protect us. We want Him to make us healthy and well.

[5 : 09] But is that what we deserve from God? Is that what we are entitled to? As we look at the story of Jonah, I want to show you the way God responds to people.

Look quickly with me at chapter 3, which we looked at last week. Jonah has arrived at the city of Nineveh. He has proclaimed that Nineveh will be destroyed because of how it has been living and then Nineveh repents.

Verse 7. The king gets up. He issues a proclamation by decree of the king and his nobles. Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth.

Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.

Does God have to forgive Nineveh at this point? They've repented. They've showed some obvious remorse.

[6 : 17] They're fasting. Even the king has gotten off his throne. He's put sackcloth on. He's showing that they know they did the wrong thing. He's showing that he knows he's accountable to God. But the question is, does God have to stop delivering the promised judgment that He had sent?

What about with Jonah in chapter 4? Jonah sits outside the city all frustrated and angry and God provides a vine to give him shade.

Does God have to provide that vine for Jonah? Does Jonah deserve that vine? Does Nineveh deserve God's forgiveness?

Now, Jonah might be an easier answer, but for those of you who maybe feel a little bit inside that maybe Nineveh does deserve God's forgiveness.

I mean, they're saying sorry. They're acting sorry. It's not even just words. They obviously mean it. I want you to imagine for just a second that somebody breaks into your house.

[7 : 20] You're home and so to steal the things that they want to steal, they have to physically restrain you, perhaps hurt you and they go through your house stealing things that matter to you, stealing family heirlooms, trashing your place and from that point on you will never feel quite as safe as you once did in your home.

Now, eventually the police manage to catch this person who has broken into your house, who has stolen your things, who has attacked you and throughout the trial it's obvious that this person is guilty.

It's obvious that they've done the wrong thing. When it comes time for sentencing, the robber says, I'm really sorry and really means it.

You can tell, somehow you just know that there is genuine remorse in what they're saying. Would you be okay if they just got let off? They're saying, sorry.

Is that enough? Of course not. It's not unloving for you to want justice in that situation. It's not wrong for you to want justice in that situation.

[8 : 32] That person has done something illegal. They have hurt you. They have harmed you. And so it is good and right that they face punishment for that. And the same is true with God.

It's good that Nineveh has apologized, that Nineveh is repentant, that Nineveh is remorseful. But it doesn't therefore mean that God must forgive them.

Justice still needs to be done. Their wickedness was at the point where God would decree that the whole city will be destroyed. And so sorry does not cover over what they've done.

Grace at its heart fundamentally is something that you don't deserve. God's goodness to Nineveh in holding his judgment back, God's goodness to Jonah in providing a tree, in providing a fish, is not what they deserve.

It is a gift from God that is very generously given. See the issue that we face in chapter 4 and verse 1, Jonah is greatly displeased because of God's grace.

[9 : 43] Jonah is angry that God is showing grace to Nineveh. He is frustrated because in his eyes Nineveh deserves punishment, deserves judgment.

I mean, if you can understand why Jonah feels this way, Nineveh is a city that has repeatedly attacked Israel, God's people, of whom Jonah is one, and will continue to attack.

And so Jonah looks at this city and he's like, God, what are you doing? They deserve your punishment. They're not like us. We're your people. They deserve to be crushed and destroyed.

He's sitting outside. He gets a good vantage point. It's like New Year's Eve fireworks for him. He wants to see how spectacular God's judgment will be because these people are wicked and they deserve to be crushed by God.

But can you see the problem? Jonah has gone from being somebody who has received this gift of grace, received this gift that he did not deserve, he's gone from being someone thankful to being somebody who thinks he's entitled, to somebody who thinks it's his right that God should forgive him, that God should love him, that God should protect him.

[11 : 00] And we do the same thing. When we first become Christians, there is not even a hint of, I deserve this. So it's not how it works.

Essential to becoming a Christian is realising we need God to do something for us that we can't do ourselves. But somehow from that point, slowly but surely, we become people who deserve God's grace.

And you can tell because just like Jonah, we start to look at other people who we think don't deserve it, shouldn't receive it, aren't entitled to it. Think of the way you respond to those who annoy you, those who hurt you, how would you feel if a rapist was to walk into church and say, I want to know God?

How would you feel if a murderer was to walk into church and say, I want to be forgiven, I know I've done the wrong thing? Would you have this sense of joy that somebody has come from such darkness to know the life that is in Jesus?

or maybe like Jonah, if we're honest, we would think they don't deserve to be here. They don't deserve God's forgiveness no matter how much they apologize.

[12 : 21] But me, I deserve it. This is mine. This is what I'm entitled to. We've got to understand like Jonah needed to understand we are sinful just like everyone else.

Jonah was a prophet, he was part of God's people, he was in a privileged position but he was still sinful and he deserved from God the same kind of judgment that God promised for Nineveh.

It actually doesn't take that much honest self-reflection to realize that all you deserve from God is judgment. We need to be very careful that in the grace that he has shown us that we don't stop seeing ourselves rightly.

God has been good to us but not because of who we are. God has given us grace which by definition is something that we don't deserve.

There is no pattern in Jonah or in life for the recipients of grace. Look again at chapter 3. Having just made their decree at the end of verse 9 the king says who knows God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

[13 : 44] There is no confidence that because they have repented God must or God will and in verse 10 when God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Have a look at chapter 2 verse 7 This is Jonah's prayer from inside the fish When my life was ebbing away I remembered you Lord and my prayer rose to you to your holy temple Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs but I with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will make good salvation comes from the Lord.

Now it feels like there is a bit of similarity Jonah admits that he has done the wrong thing and thanks God for grace but just look a little bit closer Nineveh repents hoping that God might forgive them Jonah has already been saved by God Jonah was thrown into the sea and rescued by God into the belly of a fish and having been saved he thanks God for his salvation Nineveh says sorry and pleads for help Jonah is still running away when God chooses to show him grace there is no commonality between the two that we can say this is what you must do to get grace from God this is who is worthy of God's grace Jonah is almost just like a spoilt child at this point I'm sure you've been in the shops and seen that child who is yelling and screaming and insisting that mummy buys another lolly or another toy or whatever it is and if mum gives in and gives that lolly or toy the child is ecstatic for at least five minutes before they've found something new that they want

Jonah is running from God and in chapter 2 having been saved he is overwhelmed with God's grace and salvation but by chapter 4 he is angry at what God is doing there is nothing in Jonah that makes him worthy of God's grace and love of the goodness that God has shown what we see when we look at this story what we see when we look at grace is that it's about the giver not the receiver grace is all about God last week we reminded that God's word is all about God it's always there to point us to God and this story of Jonah and the grace that God shows is to tell us that God is gracious and that he is compassionate there was a clue there in chapter 3 verse 10 when God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways he had compassion on them compassion is from within God it's something he generates it begins with him it ends with him it comes from him everything is generated by the giver when it comes to grace grace tells us that our God is slow to anger that he is abounding in love and that he forgives even unworthy servants like Nineveh like Jonah and like us

God's grace to us does not say that we are important God's grace to us does not say that we are good God's grace to us shows us his incredible love when we grasp for just a second that God sees us like he sees Nineveh that God sees us like he sees Jonah as sinful as disobedient as rebellious we understand that God's grace to us is about him it's not about us it's about his willingness to love people who refuse to obey him people who are running from him people who ignore him 95% of their lives grace grace is about the God who gives grace not about those he gives grace to God's grace to us is that instead of giving us the judgment and punishment that we deserve he gives us

[17 : 58] Jesus God's grace to us is put on display when you read a chapter like Romans 3 verse 10 of chapter 3 says there is no one righteous not even one no one who understands no one who seeks God all have turned away they have together become worthless there is no one who does good not even one that's the picture God sees that's the situation we're in we are unacceptable we are detestable and yet God looks and with compassion gives us Jesus we must understand the depths of our own sinfulness if we are going to understand the grace of our God when we confess like we did just earlier when Lindy led us and we do regularly here in our services we must be careful not to just mouth those words without actually reflecting on the fact that there are things in us today potentially in the last hour in the last 10 minutes that we need to confess because only when we recognise those things will we begin to grasp the depth and breadth of God's incredible love and grace to us in Jesus that like

Jonah we can sit angry outside the wall that God would show grace to another and yet his grace is so far reaching that that does not cancel out what God has done for us it is all because of God all because of what he has done and all because of the love that he has shown us God's grace when you begin to grasp it is overwhelming the last verse of Jonah is significant having challenged Jonah God says this Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well should I not be concerned about that great city God's grace is not dictated by how worthy the people in front of him are God's grace is dictated by the need for grace that he sees in front of him

I wonder how you look at people around you do you look at them based on how they treat you based on the things that they say the clothes that they wear the job that they have the things they do in their spare time or do you look at them as somebody who needs God's grace or knows God's grace they're the only two categories God has those who need God's grace or those who know God's grace for us who know the forgiveness that comes in Jesus for us who know the love that reaches us when we are still running that chases us down that does not fail there is no room for pride no room for entitlement what I deserve is a word that I let go of when I start to follow Jesus what I'm entitled to is something that I let go of when I follow Jesus because everything is now defined by what God gives me because of his great love not because of what I deserve there is no room for boasting and no room for pride only gratitude and thankfulness one of the things that we have started doing in youth ministry here at

St Paul's and that I also did in my previous church is we made a decision and if I'm honest I made a decision and told everyone else we decided that we would preach through the gospels through Matthew Mark Luke and John every week we did Mark for almost two years we have just begun John and we are working through that summer camp is going to help us make some progress forward and next year we will begin Luke and that will probably take us two or three years to get through we are just doing it a little bit at a time just working slowly but surely and sure enough after enough time in my previous church I was six years as the youth pastor and kids start to figure out what you're doing it takes them surprisingly long but eventually they figure out that we just been doing the same book every week that all we keep looking at is Jesus week after week after week after week and they're like can't we look at something else I need something a bit meatier than Jesus and that is the most concerning thing that any Christian can ever say but you'll be amazed at how often you hear it and not just from teenagers as soon as we stop looking at Jesus we have begun to treat him like something we own something we deserve something we're entitled to

I've got him now I'm ready for the next stuff that is never how following Jesus works the gospel says you deserve to be punished from God you deserve to be separated from God but because of his love because of his compassion you can instead know life and hope and a relationship for all eternity do you look at the people around you based on what they do how they dress what they say how they treat you or do you look with God's eyes and see only those who know God's grace and those who need God's grace God's grace to you is that you might show God's grace to other people God's love for you is to release you from this sense that you're better than anyone else and instead enable you to realize that his love is so incredible a gift for you that he's going to let you share that incredible gift with other people

[24 : 09] God's grace doesn't even stop when we take the step of following him when we make the decision to call ourselves a Christian and completely give our lives to his purpose and his glory his grace is new each and every day as he chooses to guide us step by step through situations and relationships as he places those in need of God's grace in our path that we might love them and share the gospel with them and speak of the hope that we have in Jesus grace is by definition something that we do not deserve we need to remember that grace exists not to make us feel special but to show us our glorious loving compassionate and majestic God and grace does not exist to just sit here grace exists to flow through you the people around you that need that grace too will you start looking with God's eyes and see the people who need to know what you know let's pray father god we want to thank and praise you that you love us even though we don't deserve it we want to thank you that in the story of

Jonah we are reminded that you alone have the power to forgive those who are unworthy that you alone have the love and compassion to forgive people who are disobedient and rebellious that you alone have the patience to bear with consistently disobedient servants like Jonah and like us father please forgive us for looking on other people as less deserving or less worthy of your grace instead open our eyes to see you clearly to see your love to see our own sin and to be reminded constantly that your love holds us that your love humbles us so that we may be exalted with you for all eternity father give us eyes to see those that you bring into our lives and across our path who don't yet know the hope that we have give us boldness to speak to them give us hearts that love them even if they are our enemies even if they hurt us help us to trust in the power of your grace to transform even the darkest heart god please let your grace overflow in us keep us from just holding on to it ourselves may we be a fountain that just waters the earth that you have placed us on that brings your love and your hope and your forgiveness to people who are desperately searching for meaning and identity god give us your eyes to see amen