

Jonah 4

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[0 : 00] Let us turn back to the book of Jonah, Jonah chapter 4. We saw, we looked at chapter 3 last time, and verse 10 there in chapter 3, it says, When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

And chapter 4 begins, But displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry, and he prayed to the Lord and said a really angry prayer of Jonah's.

As we come to conclude this short but amazing book, I think the overriding message that comes out of it is God's grace, God's mercy, God's love, God's compassion.

And it's one of the wonderful themes that runs throughout Scripture, where so often we see the mercy and the grace and the compassion of God.

And we see the Lord giving people so many opportunities, and we see God in the business of restoring people. You look at Peter as a classic example of somebody.

[1 : 25] He himself had actually thought that he had gone so far over the edge that God could not forgive him. He thought that denying Jesus with oaths and curses, with a vehemence, with an anger, publicly would have brought to an end any usefulness and service that he had for Jesus.

And yet Jesus still had a place for Peter, not in the background, but he took Peter to the very forefront, and he became the major or the main player in the growth of the early church.

And so the life of Peter, along with so many other lives, is such a great encouragement to us to see how God deals with people. We can be very harsh in our dealings with people, but the Lord isn't.

The Lord is gracious, and he is compassionate. And that's one of the great messages that comes through from this. Of course, side by side with that, it is imperative that we own up to what we are, that we confess our sin, that we acknowledge our sin.

The worst thing that we can do is to try and hide our sin, or cover our sin, or pretend to ourselves that we're not sinners, or that our sin isn't too bad. The most important thing is that we confess our sin.

[2 : 48] We're told that he who covers his sin will not prosper. And that's a great truth in the Word of God, that if we try ourselves to cover our sins in whatever way, whether we try to justify them, or excuse them, or pretend it didn't happen, or that it's no big deal, we will not prosper.

That's what the Word of God says. But the Word of God also tells us that if we confess our sin, that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And that's one of the great themes that comes through from this book, because we see how God dealt with this fearful city. We've already looked at Nineveh, this great city.

It was great in wealth and great in power, great in idolatry, great in cruelty, great in every way. It was one of the leading cities of the world of its day.

And yet, its wickedness was so great that it was like the cup of the judgment of God's wrath was ready to fall upon it.

[4 : 01] It had reached a place and a point where God said, enough is enough. And God has sent His Word through His prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and to tell Nineveh, your time is up.

God is going to destroy this city. And yet we see the wonder of it, that God has mercy upon the city. Now, some people will say, because it actually uses the Word there in verse 10 of chapter 3, when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did it not.

So some people have this idea and they say, well, is this not God changing His mind? I thought the Word of God said that God didn't change His mind.

Is this not showing an inconsistency in the nature and the character of God? And some people will say, well, this is a strange thing.

But God is not being inconsistent, because if we go to the Word of God and we read what it tells us in Jeremiah, this is what the Lord, the message of the Lord gives. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, if that nation concerning which I have spoken turn from its evil way, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

[5 : 39] So that is God's revealed mind concerning anything, where God is saying, this city, if there's a city or a nation that I am going to destroy because of their evil, if that people, if it's a kingdom or a nation, repent of their evil, turn from their evil way, I will relent.

I will not do as I said I would do to them. So you see, God is consistent with Himself. So that that message that He had given a long time before through the prophet Jeremiah, we find that here, or that had been given before, we find that God is absolutely consistent to His own nature and to His own character.

But, you know, when we come to chapter 4, in a sense, if there was no chapter 4 in the book of Jonah, we would say to ourselves, you know, Jonah is one of the most remarkable prophets.

He's still, even though there's a chapter 4, he's quite a remarkable person. But we would say of Jonah, if it only took us up to chapter 3, we would say, what a man, what an amazing prophet.

This is one of the most amazing people of God that you'll find in the Scripture. But when we come to chapter 4, it shows a really dark side to Jonah.

[7 : 11] We saw something of that dark side at the very beginning, and there's been sort of moments of it throughout. But then, in chapter 2, we saw Jonah's great faith, and even in the belly of the fish, how he's turning, and even praising God.

And then we see his faithfulness in delivering the message in chapter 3, and we'd say, wow, Jonah, the Lord's done a great work in you. You're a great man. But chapter 4 brings us back to see what Jonah's really like.

And that's one of the wonderful things about the Bible, that it displays its characters, its heroes, and its heroines, warts and all, so that there's not time to gloss over and make the characters in the Bible, as it were, whiter than white.

They are shown, yes, for their faith. They are shown displaying many great qualities, but they're also shown displaying their faults and their failings.

And Jonah had many of them. And so we see his reaction, because Jonah has really, he's displaying some very horrible characteristics, really.

[8 : 23] Because, you see, when Jonah had finished preaching, he went to watch. That's what he did. He came out of the city, and he went to the east side of the city, and he sat there, and he says, right, I'm going to watch.

And I'm going to wait. I want to see the destruction of this city. What Jonah wanted more than anything was that God would come, and he would obliterate Nineveh.

Nothing would have given the heart of Jonah greater satisfaction and pleasure than to see God rain down, like as he did upon Sodom and Gomorrah, fire and brimstone, and wipe Nineveh off the face of the earth.

That's what Jonah would have loved. And so he sat down to watch. And he waited, and he waited, and he waited, and he waited.

And of course we know that that's not what the Lord did. And of course we then find Jonah's reaction. That he's really angry. In fact, the language is quite amazing.

[9 : 31] It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. It's an amazing thing. Zeal for the Lord's cause is a wonderful thing.

But you know, zeal without love can be dangerous. And Jonah, to a certain extent, was a man who had loads of zeal.

As somebody said of Jonah, Jonah had passion, loads of it, but he was short on compassion. And that is true, and we've always got to be careful. Zeal for the Lord's cause is a wonderful thing.

But that zeal must be married to love. Otherwise, we can be harsh, and we can be condemning, and we can be hurtful, and we can actually end up causing chaos.

So we've really got to be very, very careful. And Jonah is somebody who had loads of zeal, but he seems to be void of love.

[10 : 36] And so Jonah, as we hear what he's talking, what he says here, it's very obvious that, yes, he's a good man, and he knows the Lord. That comes out very clearly in verse 2.

And he prayed to the Lord and said, Oh, Lord, is not this what I said? I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

My word, Jonah really knew the Lord. He was absolutely spot on in what he was saying. Jonah was somebody who knew what he was talking about, and he knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Jonah himself was living proof of that. He had the scars. He had the acid from the whale's belly. He had all the disfiguration that lying in the stomach of that great fish would have brought on to him.

And he knew what he was saying. And here's the problem with Jonah. Good man and all the way is, having discovered God's grace for himself, he didn't want God's grace to be shown to others.

[12 : 14] You know, that's quite an extraordinary place to be. But that's really where Jonah is. And in a sense, we get to the heart of the problem is that when he says in verse 2, and he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

See, this is a problem. We kind of mentioned that before. Jonah was a real nationalist. He loved his place.

He loved his country. He loved his people. Nothing wrong with that. Don't get me wrong. Nothing wrong with having a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, and loving your people and loving your place. We should.

But not at the expense, not to develop in that a sense of, this is us, we deserve the favor of God, others don't.

If we're ever in that place, we're in a dangerous place. We're far removed, really, from understanding what the favor and the mercy of God is. None of us deserve God's mercy and grace.

[13 : 21] Grace is an unmerited favor. And if we have ever received God's grace, surely we want that God's grace will be extended to others as well.

But Jonah, that wasn't his thinking. That wasn't it. It's really quite extraordinary the way he is. And so we find that Jonah has no heart going out to others.

You know, it's an awful thing if we build up resentment to others within our heart. It will block. I believe that there are various strands to the spirit of Jonah that can come into our heart and into our life.

If we look out at other people and we have problems with other people, say even with other Christians, and we find within our heart we have grudges, that we have maybe resentment, we have, it's going to be a huge barrier spiritually to our spiritual walk.

You will not enjoy the favor and fellowship of the Lord if you are walking with heart, a heart full of grudges and with anger and bitterness and all sorts of things.

[14 : 35] It will be a block to your prayer life. You cannot have freedom in prayer and a heart that's closed up with grudges and with anger and with bitterness.

Remember, Jesus said, when you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone. It's not a challenge.

If you have anything against anyone, forgive them. There's no point. That's really what the Lord is saying. You're just not going to get anywhere in your prayer life if your heart has got things against others.

Because he says that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your trespasses.

So then we find Jonah in verse 4 after he's speaking to the Lord like this. The Lord asks the question of Jonah, do you do well to be angry? Jonah says, yes.

[15 : 48] That's what Jonah is. Jonah believes that his anger is right, that he's justified in this anger. And you know, we find here, this man Jonah is really quite an extraordinary person.

Because I think there's so much, there's so much sometimes about Jonah within ourselves. You know, if we ever, if we ever look on other people and are jealous of God's favor upon them, have you ever felt, have you ever thought of that?

When you see that God is blessing someone and you're saying, you feel something in your heart against that person because of how God is blessing them.

That's got something of the spirit of Jonah. Jonah didn't want to see God's blessing on the Ninevites. This is a very subtle sin.

But you've got to, we've got to dig deep and we've got to be honest with ourselves and we've got to ask ourselves, have I ever been resentful of God's blessing in any shape or form being upon any person?

[17 : 02] If I have, then I am equally guilty of Jonah's sin. Because when you strip it down, that's exactly where Jonah was. Very subtle. Sin, remember, is very, very subtle.

And so we find that Jonah, he goes to the east side of the city and he made a little shelter from the scorching heat. And you know, Jonah's a real conundrum.

Here, when you think about it, when you see Jonah in the blazing heat and he's suffering in this heat, here's the prophet who in the first place wouldn't go to the city to deliver God's message.

And now that he has delivered God's message, he won't leave the city. The man is full of contradictions. He's just, he's a walking contradiction.

He's somebody who is, and the way you see him is, he's actually somebody who's utterly miserable. Jonah is, and what's the problem with Jonah?

[18 : 06] Well, I believe the problem with Jonah is very simply this. He's out of step with God's will. And you know, you and I will be miserable if we are out of step of God's will.

You know, we can actually, it's amazing, we can go for a long time on pride, on anger. You know, there's various things can motivate a person.

Certainly, we don't realize it. But resentment can motivate, can push a person on. Trying to get one over another person, that can motivate a person for quite a long time.

Pride can keep a person going, can fuel you, as it were. But eventually, these things give out. And when they give out, you're kind of exhausted, and more than, not just exhausted, but you're miserable.

And that's exactly where Jonah was. Because he was going on the wrong fuel. He wasn't going, as it were, on the Spirit of the Lord. He wasn't depending upon the Lord.

[19 : 15] He wasn't getting his energy and his vitality and his strength to keep going on what God is giving him. He's going on his own. He's going on his anger. He was an angry man.

He was, you know, I believe that he loved going through Nineveh. And he was kind of, as he was preaching judgment in his heart, he would be saying, God, bring it on. He was wanting to see God just come down.

He was filled with anger. And that anger propelled him. My friends, that's why the Word of God keeps saying, examine yourself.

Is it possible that anybody here today is being propelled by something other than faith and service and love to the Lord? That there are other subtle factors working in you, pushing you on?

Well, if so, you're out of step with the will of God. And you're going to be miserable. You won't enjoy things. Because that's where Jonah was.

[20 : 21] And so, here's Jonah. He's made this little shelter and he's in a really bad mood. But, you know, this is where we see the wonder, the mercy, the patience of God.

God isn't finished with Jonah. If you and I were dealing with Jonah, I think a long time ago we'd have said, right, Jonah, that's it. You're on your own. I've done everything.

I'm leaving you. I'm washing my hands of you, Jonah. But no, the Lord is still at work. And you know, that's what he's like with you and me as well.

Because there's many a time in your life and my life, if the Lord had, and he could so easily have said, that's it. I have spent so much, I have put so much effort in, I have given so much of molding you and shaping you and pointing you, and yet, look at where you are.

Still the same old ways. But the Lord doesn't give up with us. The Lord doesn't walk away. Praise his name.

[21 : 28] And so he's still working away with Jonah. And so we find that the Lord, it's amazing what the Lord does here. And it's very interesting as well, because it tells us at verse 6, now the Lord God appointed a plant.

And when we have the two names here, we have Yahweh, for the Lord God, and we have Elohim, the two names, Yahweh, which speaks to us of the covenant-keeping God, the God who has entered into covenant with his people.

Elohim speaks of the God, the creative God, the God of power. So you have the two names, it's a God who is in a covenant relationship with Jonah, who's not going to let him go, who is the God of power and might and glory.

And this is a God who's at work. And we see what he does. The Lord, it tells us, in verse 6, the Lord 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.

And of course, we find now that Jonah was exceedingly glad. I think Jonah, it must have been almost like, there must have been a touch of almost bipolar in this man because it's not just, his reactions are extreme.

[22 : 52] He's, one moment, he's exceedingly glad and it's little things, a plant. And he's almost jumping for joy. He's euphoric.

A plant has come. And at the same time, he is so angry. He's angry with God. He's angry with the city. He's angry with the Ninevites. Anger is burning in his heart.

Complex. Complex character. But you know what's amazing here as well is, it tells us here of how God appointed, God appointed this plant.

But then, verse 7, but when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. We find in the prophecy of Jonah, and in fact, that's another bit as well, verse 8, when the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun be down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

So, it was almost like he had kind of sunstroke. God appointed. That's one of the things we find throughout this book. God appointed. Remember God, God appointed, he appointed a fish, he appointed a plant, he appointed a worm, he appointed an east wind.

[24 : 14] Isn't that extraordinary? This great fish huge monster of the ocean. God appointed it, set it in a particular cushion, and appointed it to swallow Jonah.

But he also appointed that little worm. See that wee worm on the ground under the soil? Nobody can see. God appointed that worm in the very same way as he appointed the great fish to go and nibble away at that plant.

Some people think it was a good or a castor oil plant. It's a plant with huge leaves, so God had appointed this plant, just it was miraculous, by the word of his power, brought it up in a day, overnight.

But he appointed this, and then he appointed the east wind. See how God is in control of everything? The great things, the movements in this world, and the little things.

God's appointments for us are many and mysterious. Some of his appointments we understand and we're so thankful for them.

[25 : 19] Some of his other appointments we cannot understand and they break out hard. There are so many different ways in which God works. But we must never lose sight of the fact that God is ultimately sovereign over everything.

Jonah was to discover that. And that's one of the things that God is showing him. And then, of course, the plant withers. And Jonah again is just, he's beside himself with sorrow.

It's better for me to die. Do you do well to be angry for the plant? Yes, I do well to be angry. Angry enough to die. My word. Here's a man who knows how to overreact.

Because a plant is taken away. He's suicidal. Jonah, as we said, is a man of extremes. But what is God showing Jonah? Jonah, your heart has gone out to this plant.

This plant that you had nothing to do with. You didn't work at it. You didn't do anything to the ground. You didn't sow it. This plant.

[26 : 30] And here you are, heartbroken, that that plant is taken away. Get real. Do you not see that city there? There's 120,000 people there who don't know the right hand from their left.

They have no idea. They have no moral compass to their life. They have no abilities to make the right or the wrong decision. They are all at sea.

You're pitting a plant that you had nothing to do with. These are people who have been brought into this world, who I have authorized.

God, remember, is the one who is author over all life. Should not I pity these people with precious, never-dying souls?

Jonah, get real. And you know, sometimes the Lord is saying the same thing to us as well. because sometimes we're caught up with our little plants and things here and there and we lose sight of a big picture.

[27 : 38] And sometimes there are little, almost insignificant things within our lives that have become obsessions and we're so caught up with them that we cannot see anything else.

my friend, we need to see the big picture. We don't know the answer. The book closes and we don't know the final answer.

We don't really know how Jonah, but I tend to believe that because the Lord is working in Jonah and the Lord has invested so much time in this prophet, I believe that the end result will be a good result.

Because even in the belly of the great fish we see a change taking place in Jonah. It didn't last too long, but I believe that these deep-rooted experiences would have burned down deep within his own heart.

As we said, one of the great messages out of this book is the compassion of God. And if we are seeking to become more and more like Jesus Christ, we need to have his compassion within our heart.

[28 : 49] Pray for it. Lord, make me more like yourself. That's what we need in this world. We need to become more like Christ. We need to become ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

Ask the Lord to deliver us from ever having the spirit of Jonah. Would we ever look down on anybody? Where it's possible for us to even not want God's grace for somebody?

Our hearts are far harder than ever we realize. If God were to show us just now how hard our hearts were, I think we would be frightened.

There is a level within us. There are so many layers within. Layers that deceive. That's why it tells us in the Bible, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? You don't. I don't. I don't know my own heart. And every so often we get a shock at just what we're really like. But the Lord knows.

[29 : 55] And that's why sometimes he has to work. Sometimes the lessons are sore and difficult. But all the time the Lord has an end in view for us. May we have our right focus.

of course there are things in our life. Not for one moment am I suggesting that all the things in our life are insignificant. I don't mean that by any stretch of the imagination. There are major things within our lives.

And of course that is so. And the Lord is involved in all these things. But sometimes we can really be sidetracked by little things. And sometimes as time goes on we realize oh man I was so stupid.

May our focus be upon the Lord. And if it is he will show us he will guide us in the right way. Let us pray. Oh Lord our gracious God we pray that we might have a soft tender heart.

We pray to deliver us from the hardness to which we are so prone naturally. We pray that the grace of God will work within the hard heart that we possess.

[31 : 03] so that we will reflect more and more the mind and the love of Jesus. Watch over us all here today and keep us all safe. Keep us all looking unto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith.

Bless us we pray and take away our sin in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.