

Jonah

**“Jonah’s Anger at the Mercy of God!”
March 14, 2004**

Jonah 4:1-11

This is lesson number Six in our exposition of the Book of Jonah.

Please open to the Book of Jonah Chapter Four.

INVOCATION FOR THE MESSAGE

Do you know anyone like Jonah?

There is so much more to the Book of Jonah than I ever realized before. Don't I say that about every book of the Bible that we take up to study?

In Jonah we have, of course, the sign of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have in Jonah, one of several of the prophets who were from Galilee, as the sign to the enemies of Jesus who said, “No prophet comes from Galilee.” We have in Jonah the sign to the Ninevites. We have in Jonah the rebuke to the Jews who utterly failed in their responsibility to be a “light unto the Gentiles.”

We especially have in the Book of Jonah the **sufficiency** of the preached word of God to bring about God's sovereign purpose in the salvation of sinners.

But here in Jonah Chapter Four, as one old man said, “Preacher, you done stopped preaching and gone to meddling.” We will see, if the Holy Spirit speaks to us, that we are all “Jonah's”. That's what I meant when I asked, **“Do you know anyone like Jonah?”**

Let me make my usual disclaimer about originality. My approach to any message is to meditate and make the text part of my daily thoughts for several days or weeks depending on how much time I have before I attempt to explain the text. Then I write down my own ideas from the text and try to organize an outline for the sermon. Then I read several commentaries and flesh out my thoughts and “steal” the good ideas from other men. In Jonah I have used J. P. Boice and Hugh Martin who in turn call on Calvin and other writers.

Jonah

If I were to give the theme of the Book of Jonah it would be:

Men may try to quit God but if they belong to God He will not quit them.

Let me emphasize the “if”. I have known many religious people who have quit God. We do not want to be successful when we try to quit God!

Read 3:10 for the bridge to Chapter Four.

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Jonah 4

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?"

Jonah

May God be pleased to apply this message to our hearts, yes even to the heart of this preacher.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

Why was Jonah displeased exceedingly? Why was Jonah so very angry?

Jonah would have been pleased if not a single Ninevite had been saved and now God has shown His mercy to an entire city of Gentiles. God was not at all interested in Jonah's prejudice and his petty anger. Here we have a **very angry prophet** who is **exceedingly displeased** at the mercy of God.

Jonah's sin should be condemned and so it is. But let's be fair to Jonah. At least Jonah is honest. If Jonah had not written about his disobedience and his anger how would we have ever known about it and the great mercy of God toward the Ninevites?

One of the evidences of the inspiration of Scripture is that the writers of Holy Scripture do not leave out their own worst sin. When a secular man writes about himself he rarely tells the worst. He rarely tells us what he is most ashamed of in his life. He may confess a few "shortcomings" to sell his book, but he usually tries to not make himself to look to be so awful.

But Moses, and David, and Saul of Tarsus, and Jonah, et al do not fail to tell of the worst of their sins.

Here in Chapter Four Jonah seems to repudiate his repentance of Chapter Two. **How much sin remains in a believer?**

But Jonah is not an enemy of God!

Jonah is a sinner and he has these awful feelings about what has happened, and he is honest to tell God what he is feeling. Jonah is a child of God. Jonah still prays to God although he is very angry at the outcome of his preaching to Nineveh.

Jonathan Edwards, I believe, has a sermon from Job, "Will you always call upon God?" The idea is will you get so angry at God that you stop praying?

Jonah

2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Jonah is angry about several things. Jonah has done what God told him to do, "Go preach the message that I tell you." "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" But God has not done what Jonah wanted Him to do. What is our attitude when things do not go the way we want them to go?

Jonah tries to justify his disobedience by a misapplication of the Scriptures.

Jonah refers to Exodus 34:5-7:

5 Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Jonah is angry because God had told him to go and preach a message of destruction when God knew all along that He was going to grant repentance.

I feel sorry for the so-called theologians who read in Jonah "God relented" and actually believe that God changed His mind!

God told Jonah that Nineveh would be overthrown but God never intended to destroy Nineveh. So Jonah throws this Scripture from Exodus at God, "You knew all along that You were going to spare Nineveh and yet You still sent me to preach destruction!"

"God you told me to preach that Nineveh would be destroyed and instead of destroying them you granted them repentance."

What will the people think about you God? People will think that you are a changeable God! Why would You say one thing and do another?

Jonah

And besides that, God, what will they think about your prophet? Is not the test of a true prophet that everything he prophecies come to pass?

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' — 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

The test of a prophet of God was very simple; one hundred percent accuracy! And Jonah is very angry! Now my kinsmen will think that I am a false prophet!

Does God have the right to humiliate a man? That is what happened to Jonah, he was humiliated! Well I thought of Hosea whom God ordered to marry a harlot to teach Israel about spiritual adultery. What humiliation for a prophet of God!

See how disappointed is Jonah:

3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Jonah attempts to use God's own Word against God.
You threatened destruction and you had mercy. What is going on?

Did not Satan twist God's word to deceive Eve? "Did God really say that?"

Did not Satan twist God's word when he tempted our Lord in the wilderness? "If you are the Son of God prove it to me!"

Satan was using the Bible to justify evil. Here Jonah is trying to "proof-text" God. Jonah needed to learn to be a Biblical Theologian.

Don't decide what you want to be true and then find a Scripture that you can twist to prove your point. Compare Scripture with Scripture and come to the truth. Use the Analogy of Scripture to learn the truth.

Jonah

As we saw in Chapter Three that while God cannot change, He sometimes uses accommodating language and the story of Jonah is told from the viewpoint of Jonah and not from God. Certainly God knew that He would spare Nineveh before He sent Jonah to preach destruction. And that is one of the reasons that Jonah is angry. God did not tell Jonah what He planned to do and Jonah was not at all happy about it.

Once more Jonah asks for death. He commanded the sailors to throw him into the raging sea and so they did but God had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.

What is wrong with Jonah?

Jonah is not **reconciled** to the will of God.

It was fine with Jonah for God to show him mercy. Jonah should have drowned in the sea. Jonah should never have escaped from the belly of the great fish. But Jonah does not appreciate the mercy of God.

God asked Jonah three questions. Boice says God likes to ask questions so we will have to face the truth about our actions.

Genesis 3:9-11

9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"

10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Genesis 4:9-10

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"

He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 And He said, "What have you done?"

1 Samuel 13:7-11

As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

9 So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

Jonah

11 And Samuel said, "What have you done?"

2 Samuel 12:7-9

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!

9 Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?

Luke 22:48

"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

And so the LORD asked Jonah the **first** question.

4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

How gentle! The LORD does not reproach. The LORD speaks calmly to an angry Jonah. One way to interpret the question is:

“Jonah am I right or are you right?”

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

Jonah would rather be dead than for God to be right! Jonah sits down and pouts. Jonah is obsessed with his anger at the repentance of the Ninevites.

Hugh Martin points out **three errors** that Jonah made.

First, he should have stayed in Nineveh to teach the Ninevites more about the true God.

Second, he built a shelter for himself. Was there no place in Nineveh that would offer him shelter from the sun and the wind? He did not want to have anything to do with the Ninevites.

Third, Jonah is a spectator. Jonah was not called to be a spectator any more than Christians are called to be spectators of the ills of the world. Christians are called to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ!

Jonah

6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

The plant that God prepared is so much better than the rude shelter that Jonah was able to cobble up from branches and scraps. The vine filled in all the cracks and kept the burning sun off of Jonah.

qiyqayown (kee-kaw-yone'); the gourd (as nauseous): KJV - gourd.

Jonah is the only place in the Bible of the use of this word.

Jonah was very grateful for the plant. **This is the first time in the story of Jonah that he is happy about anything.** He did not like the LORD'S first commission, he did not like the storm, he did not like the fish's belly, he did not like the second commission to preach, and he surely did not like the outcome of his preaching. **Nothing pleased Jonah!**

But now he finds something to be happy about. Compare the comfort of the shade of the plant to the repentance of the Ninevites.

There is rejoicing in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents but Jonah is about as happy as the elder brother of the prodigal son who was lost but came home to a waiting father.

Jonah is about to hear from God what he has so far refused to understand.

7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

We have a WORM, a WIND, and too much WARMTH!

towla` (to-law'); a maggot (as voracious);
KJV - crimson, scarlet, worm.

Now Jonah is angrier than ever. Back when the storm kept getting worse we wondered how much worse could it get. How much angrier can Jonah get?

Jonah

The first time God asked Jonah, **“Who is right, you or Me?”**

The **second** question is, **“Jonah do you have the right to be angry about the plant?”**
The question exposes the pettiness of Jonah.

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

Wait! Stop and think about what makes us angry!

A computer hangs up and stops working! What about all the hours that it works correctly? Our car won't start! What about all the miles it does run?

Our spouse does something that we don't like. What about all the things they do that we do like?

Jonah, look at what your anger does for you. Do you want to spend the rest of your life swearing at annoyances?

10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?"

God asks Jonah a final question, number three.

Jonah, if you so loved the plant that you had nothing to do with, why can't I, the sovereign God, so love whomever I choose? What is that to you? What is it to you to whom the LORD shows mercy?

We can look back into history and see that God spared this generation of Assyrians in about 780 –760 B.C. God would later use the Assyrians in 722 B.C. to chasten the Northern Kingdom of Israel who refused to repent. And then in 612 B.C. the Assyrian empire would fall to Babylon. But God did not choose to explain all this to Jonah!

The LORD spared Nineveh for His own purpose and He was not obligated to explain Himself to Jonah. Neither is God obligated to explain His dealings with us.

Jonah

I have often said that the question to ask when calamity comes into your life is not “Why me Lord?” The correct question is, “Why not me?”

Christians are not exempt from sickness and suffering.

Ignore the false teachers on TV who only want your money and tell you the lie that you are not supposed to be sick or in debt.

The Bible is the honest word from God.

In this life you shall have tribulation. Tribulation works patience.

So God asks Jonah this final question and there is no written answer for it.

Neither are we told how Jonah responded to the LORD’S rebuke. We can only hope that Jonah got over his anger and was able to rejoice in the mercy of God.

There are yet some more lessons for us in this last question to Jonah.

Is there anything in my heart that is not reconciled to the will of God?

Jim, is it right for you to be angry? Is there anything in your life that you are angry with God about? You better get over it.

God may shade us with a “plant” of pleasant times. But do I love my circumstances more than the God who gave them to me? Do I love the “plant” more than the God who gave it to me?

And God may prepare a voracious “worm” to destroy my comfort. God may send a searing “vehement wind” into my life. Does that make me angry with God? **Who is right, God or me?**

Notice also that God does not mention the adult population of Nineveh who were surely candidates for the wrath of God. But God brings up the cattle and the small children that were innocent.

Jonah, are you angry with God for sparing them too?

Jonah

The reason, I believe, that God does not answer this last question is so that each one of us will ask himself or herself the same question.

Is God not right?

Is not the mercy of God great?

Jonah is not only the sign to the scribes and Pharisees and to the Ninevites; Jonah is the sign to all of us.

There are times when even believers run away from God.

The theme of the Book of Jonah:

Men may try to quit God but if they belong to God He will not quit them.

God will discipline His dear children.

God is sovereign over men and nature.

But I believe the main lesson of Jonah is found in Romans.

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:

**"For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."**

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jonah

How can we, the objects of the mercy of God not wish for others to be saved? Don't let the repentance of the Ninevites be a sign to you.

Luke 11:29-32

And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

The message is the invitation.

The invitation is to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of sinners.

The elders of this church are available to counsel with you at any time. If you are troubled about your soul do not suppress what may be the drawing of the Father to show you your need for Christ.