

THE BOOK OF JONAH

the relentless pursuit of God's mercy

INTRO: Where I grew up in Northern Wisconsin, we cut down lots of trees. To this day, I enjoy “felling trees.” But you know what I don’t enjoy - digging out the stumps. That was always the worst. Shovels. Pick Axes. Axes. Chains. Winches. It was a long, dirty process to get stumps out of the ground. Truth be told - it’s just plain ole hard work to get that stump rooted out of the ground.

Saints - the book of Jonah has been doing some serious heart work on us (hasn’t it)? It’s not just “felling trees” — it’s going after the stumps in our hearts. I imagine God’s using his heavenly chain saw, pick axe, shovel, and maybe even a John Deere tractor to rip the stumps out of our hearts.

We have seen that we are Jonah — that rebellion is when we are obeying God in every area but one. We have seen that discipline is a mercy — that God loves His children so much that He will come after them, not to get them back but to bring them back. We have seen that we are Nineveh - a wicked people that deserves judgement but has received mercy. God has been using Jonah to go after the stumps in our hearts church, & today, he’s going to do it again in Jonah 4.

TEXT: Jonah 4

BIG IDEA: You have been Given Mercy to be Givers of Mercy

1. When You Forget that You Need God’s Mercy | **Jonah 4:1-3**

A. Jonah’s Self Indictment — *why he ran from Nineveh - Jonah 4:2*

- Jonah unquestionably knew (text: *for I knew*) the character of His God

A gracious God // A merciful God // A God who is slow to anger // A God who abounds in steadfast love // A God who relents from disaster for all who repent and believe

GOD IS THE GOSPEL: Brothers & sisters - the gospel is not something that God does for us, the Gospel is WHO God is. God’s very nature is good news! Just here for a moment - bask in the character of your God!

PONDER THIS: *relenting from disaster* - in that little phrase alone, it is implied that sinners deserve disaster from God. But for all who by faith repent and believe — they are spared precisely because this God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love! There is no God like our God saints!

- **Jonah’s Conclusion:** How dare God display His character to the arch-enemies of Israel!

REMEMBER: Nineveh has been responsible for butchering civilizations in Jonah's day (think war crimes) // Amos & Hosea have prophesied (in Jonah's day) that Nineveh will be responsible for judging Israel in the near future (so just maybe their destruction will prolong Israel's success)

B. You will be angry when God shows mercy, kindness, & favor to those who don't deserve it in your estimation - **Jonah 4:1 & 3**

- SCARY PLACE TO BE: when you *don't think they deserve mercy* — the moment you think someone doesn't deserve mercy, is the moment you have begun to think that you actually deserve it.
- ILL: The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is well known - a wicked son departs from his father's house, takes his inheritance, squanders it in sin, and then comes back begging for mercy. And if you know the story, the Father is waiting, eager for his son to return. But there is another in the story that is often forgotten about. The Older Brother — and you know what, Jonah and this Older Brother have much in common. The Older Brother is ticked - how dare the Father show mercy upon Him (**Luke 15:28-30**)! Instead of rejoicing in the mercy of the Father, the Older Brother is angry.

APP: If we are honest saints, the Older Brother is alive & well in us today! How many times does a spouse blame the other for all the problems in their marriage? I've done nothing wrong - it's all him/her! How often do you hold someone's repentance hostage because they have to pay for what they did? How often do you subtly hope God will "get em" because they need to pay for how bad they hurt us? How often are we unwilling to admit our sin, our part, our failures — just like the Older Brother? We are like Jonah & we are the Older Brother — we get angry at God when he shows mercy to our enemies!

NEVER FORGET: This happens when we forget that we need God's mercy just as desperately as badly as every other fallen sinner on the face of the planet!

SAD REALITY: Many followers of Jesus (like Jonah) forget that they still, today, are needy people - desperately needy people!

2. *When you Forget that You Need God's Mercy* God Will Expose Your Desperate Need for Mercy | **Jonah 4:4-9**

A. **REMEMBER:** Discipline is a mercy because God is not getting you back, He is bringing you back (this was the theme of Jonah chapter 2 & guess what — it is the theme of Jonah 4)!

B. The Questions from God are Designed to Expose You — **Jonah 4:4 & 9a**

- God asks Jonah — is it right for you to be angry (v. 4), to which Jonah doesn't answer God (yet).

- God is the Master Teacher & He will often use questions to prick your conscience (Adam & Eve // Jesus & Peter).

Like Jonah, we often know the truth. We don't need a sermon. We don't need a lecture. *We simply need a question to prick the conscience. We need a question to stir the soul.*

We need a question to remind us of the truth we know but are failing to apply!

For instance - a simple question like - does that decision best glorify God OR does that relationship glorify God in every respect OR if Jesus was sitting next to you, would you watch that/do that OR can you thank God for that movie you just watched. You get the point — questions bring conviction.

Like Jonah, we may not listen right away, but the question begins to bring conviction!

C. The Circumstances that God Brings are Designed to Expose You — **Jonah 4:5-8**

- God is going to work through Jonah's hardheartedness - **v. 5**

In rebellion, Jonah leaves Nineveh. In rebellion, Jonah goes out on top of a hill. In rebellion, Jonah begins to wait to see if God will torch this wicked city! In Jonah's rebellion - God is going to show up and meet Jonah right there! God is going to use the circumstances of Jonah's rebellion to get a hold of Jonah's heart (kinda like Jonah asking to be thrown into the sea... God had him right where He wanted him)

- **GOD GOES TO WORK:** God temporarily alleviates (i.e. appointed) Jonah's discomfort by providing a shade tree — **v. 6a**

REMEMBER: Jonah is in the midst of a temper tantrum with God!

- **JONAH'S HEART IS EXPOSED:** Jonah is exceedingly glad for the first time in the book because his momentary discomfort has been alleviated — v. 6b

Jonah has more joy over his felt needs being momentarily met than an entire city being spared the wrath of God.

DO YOU SEE IT: Jonah's refusal to obey God is selfish (all about Jonah) // Jonah's anger is selfish (all about Jonah) // Jonah's joy is selfish (all about Jonah) // When you are running from God — your responses to God will be entirely self-centered (i.e. rejoicing when you get what you want from god and angered when God is not giving you what you want)!

- **GOD GOES TO WORK:** God sovereignly removes (i.e. appointed) the source of Jonah's comfort & joy to once again reveal Jonah's heart — **v. 7-8a**

Similarly to what God did to Jonah in the belly of the great fish, *once again God is disciplining Jonah to reveal his heart. Discipline always includes a measure of discomfort* so that heart level issues can be revealed (**Hebrews 12:11**).

For Jonah — God's discipline revealed just how fickle he was at the level of his heart (i.e. Jonah had no care for God's priorities; he only cared for his momentary convenience and comfort).

STOP FOR A MOMENT: At this point saints, we need to let the Lord do some work in our souls! How often do we find ourselves **JUST LIKE** Jonah!

When God gives us what we want - we're happy.

When God removes what we want - we're ticked.

When God meets our felt needs (relationships // money // health) - we're happy

When God removes our felt needs (relationships // money // health) - we're ticked again

WHAT IF: God is removing your felt needs because He is after your heart! What if God is doing to you what God did to Jonah! What if God is so committed to you that He's taking away your comforts to expose who and what you really love?

- **JONAH'S HEART IS EXPOSED:** Jonah is so committed to his own carnal desires that when they are removed, he's angry enough to die (a play on words — exceedingly glad // exceedingly angry) — **v. 8b**

NOTICE: The insanity of sin — Jonah has zero care for the immediate and eternal discomfort of Nineveh. His only care is for his felt needs being met at the moment!

TRUTH: When our hearts are exposed saints — it's ugly! When we actually see what is going on inside us — what we love — what we value — it is painful.

D. God asks Jonah the same question again — **Jonah 4:9**

- **QUESTION:** Do you do well to be angry *for the plant* - **9a**
- **ANSWER:** Jonah has had enough with God — this time, Jonah let's God have it (*never a good idea*) - **v. 9b**

Jonah justifies his anger (*what all of us do in our sin*). Jonah has put up long enough with a God who is asking him to do the impossible. Jonah has had enough with God.

DON'T MISS IT: At the end of the day all sinful rebellion is always against God. Even if it's just that one thing you won't yet surrender - it's not about that thing. It's about you not actually believing that God is good. You not believing that God knows what He's talking about. When push-comes-to-shove, you don't want to submit to God.

TRUTH: When you FORGET that you need God's Mercy — God will expose your desperate need for HIS mercy!

3. You have been Given Mercy to be Givers of Mercy | **Jonah 4:10-11**

A. God exposes Jonah selfish, self-centered heart with crystal clarity - v. 10

- Jonah cares about fickle & temporary things that bring him momentary happiness (*let's not be too hard on Jonah — we love our momentary happiness too*).

This momentary plant was proving the fickleness of Jonah's affections. Jonah He valued that which was temporary and not that which is eternal! God knew that Jonah valued his own temporal comforts more than he valued the eternal comforts of all people.

God provided a temporal comfort for Jonah only to remove it — the removal of comfort was the powerful illustration that God would use to expose the true condition of Jonah's heart.

- **TRUTH:** The carnal man doesn't care about God's priorities but only about that which makes him immediately happy

This was Jonah but if we are honest, this is also us!

B. God declares His Mercy for All People - v. 11

- The ultimate rhetorical question - *should I not pity Nineveh (an argument from the lesser to the greater) — the answer is obvious*

The unnecessary reminder of Nineveh's size is another rebuke to Nineveh - that great city

A city with immense spiritual ignorance - more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left

- **WHAT'S THE POINT:** *God is declaring His commitment to show mercy to all peoples who call upon Him in repentant faith!*

God is contrasting His commitment to show mercy at all costs with Jonah's commit to comfort at all costs.

And this is how the story ends! With the addition of — *as well as many/much cattle...*All in all, the God of Heaven has compassion on a great & wicked city that had incredible

need for His mercy. But God's prophet only had compassion on a worthless plant. It leaves us asking questions like - how did Jonah respond...what happened to Nineveh in the future...did Jonah ever get right with God!

Yet, in divine brilliance, this baffling ending of Jonah makes it perfectly applicable to us today! It leaves us asking:

Am I more committed to my comforts more than the glory of God?

Am I more committed to my comforts than making disciples?

Am I more committed to my comforts than seeing God's mercy go to all people?

Am I more committed to receiving God's mercy than I am to proclaiming God's mercy?

Jonah is a rebuke - a rebuke to all who follow the one true God. A rebuke because we want God's mercy but we refuse to be conduits of that mercy for the sake of others.

WHAT DO WE WITH JONAH:

#1: What if we got serious about taking God's mercy to those around us?

#2: What if we actually lived as if all people were in desperate need of God's mercy (neighbors, coworkers, friends, sports team, play dates, class mates)?

#3: What if we began to pray for God to give us creative ways to show gospel compassion & take gospel mercy to those around us?

#4: What if actually moved towards need not comfort for the sake of the gospel?

#5: What if we look at all of life through God's lenses — all people are in desperate need of gospel grace & gospel mercy

TRUTH: Do you realize brothers & sisters, that there are roughly 3.5 billion people in the world who will go to eternity never even hearing the name of Jesus! Oh saints, are we more grieved, more angered, more stressed over the loss of felt needs and comforts than this sobering reality!

TRUTH: Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Paul wept for his Jewish brothers who rejected the Messiah. Our weeping is for lesser things because if we are honest, we value lesser things.

EGBC: Do not turn a deaf ear to the book of Jonah! Do not be a hearer of the Word only. Brothers & sisters - let God's Word do a mighty work in your soul. Let God's Word expose your love for comfort. Let God's Word expose the one area that you are saying no to God. And then - let's be like Nineveh. Let's repent. Let's cry out mightily to God. And let's get on mission with God taking His mercy & his grace to all people!

QUESTION (*ask the musicians to come up*):

Maybe today is our “repent in dust & ashes day?”

Maybe today is the day that we realize we have been like Jonah *in that* we have not taken God’s call to go seriously (because just like God command Jonah to go to Nineveh, God has commanded each every one of us to make disciples)?

Maybe today we realize that our love for comfort has kept us disobedient to the command to be conduits through which God’s mercy can flow to all people?

Let’s spend some minutes with God — let God “fell the trees” and “root out the stumps.” Get on your knees (right were you are) if you need to. Confess what God is revealing then rejoice that God’s mercy is meeting with you now. Then commit to getting on mission with God’s mercy to all people.