

JONAH | BACK TO THE CLASSROOM

INTRO:

"The Prodigal Prophet" — [Jonah 1](#) — God called Jonah to Nineveh and Jonah ran the other direction. A storm, a confession, and an overboard prophet later — pagan sailors came to faith in Yahweh, and a great fish swallowed Jonah whole. The lesson: God doesn't let his people go. He pursues them. And sometimes grace looks like the most uncomfortable thing imaginable.

"The Prodigal Prophet's Prayer" — [Jonah 2](#) — Alive in the dark with seaweed around his head, Jonah finally prayed. What felt like abandonment was actually mercy and discipline working together. He came out of it with one conviction that would define everything: salvation belongs to the Lord — not to the deserving, not to Israel alone, but to whomever God wills.

"The Reluctant Prophet and the Ready City" — [Jonah 3](#) — God recommissioned Jonah, Jonah obeyed, and Nineveh — a city God had been preparing through years of plague, famine, and fear — repented from the king down to the cattle. The greatest miracle in the book wasn't the fish. It was the saving of an entire city.

Which brings us to chapter 4. You'd expect the prophet to walk out of Nineveh rejoicing. He doesn't. And what we find next is one of the most uncomfortable portraits of a servant of God in all of Scripture. Jonah cared more about his comfort than God's compassion AND God patiently confronted him with that reality.

SCRIPTURE:

Jonah 4 ESV

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?" ⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God 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. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1: JONAH WAS ANGRY WITH GOD

A: HE THOUGHT GOD WAS WRONG FOR BEING MERCIFUL TO NINEVEH

B: HE CONFESSES THE MOTIVATION FOR HIS INITIAL REFUSAL

C: HE DESPAIRS OF LIFE

2: GOD BEGINS TO CORRECT JONAH

A: HE ASKS A QUESTION: DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?

B: JONAH DOESN'T ANSWER, HE BUILDS A SHELTER WITH A VIEW

3: GOD GIVES JONAH A LESSON TO REVEAL HIS HEART

A: HE SENDS A PLANT - JONAH REJOICES GREATLY

B: HE SENDS A WORM AND A SCORCHING WIND — JONAH BECOMES EXCEEDINGLY DISTRAUGHT AND SOUGHT DEATH

C: GOD ASKS ANOTHER QUESTION — JONAH DOUBLES DOWN IN HIS ANGER

D: GOD DROPS THE MIC — REVEALING JONAH'S IMMATURITY AND GOD'S GREAT MERCY

1: JONAH'S BAD THEOLOGY PRODUCES A DISTORTED WORLDVIEW

IMPORTANT TO NOTE: Bad/Wrong theology doesn't just stay in your head, it eventually shapes how we see people and respond to God.

- As a prophet, Jonah knew many true things about God, but he had narrowed God's mercy to fit his own preferences. His distorted view of God (and God's mercy) produced a distorted view of people (and their worth).

A: JONAH LIMITED WHO GOD CARED ABOUT

- **TRUTH:** God is the God of all nations
 - [Psalm 22:27-28](#) "27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations."
 - God's concern extends beyond Israel (and the church) to all people.
- **DISTORTION:** God's covenant mercy belongs to Israel, not to Israel's enemies
 - Jonah had no problem with God loving Israel, he struggled with God loving Nineveh
- **CONSEQUENCE:** Jonah resisted God's mission
 - This is why Jonah fled in the first place.
 - He did not want Nineveh to experience God's compassion

B: JONAH FORGOT HOW GRACE WORKS

- **TRUTH:** Salvation belongs to the Lord
 - [Exodus 33:19](#) “And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”
 - God gives mercy according to His will, not according to human merit
 - Jonah himself had been rescued repeatedly by grace
 - Grace in/through the storm (stopping his flight)
 - Grace in/through the great fish (rescuing him from death and back onto dry ground)
 - Grace in his restoration and recommissioning
- **DISTORTION:** Grace is for people like me, not people like them
 - Jonah was comfortable receiving God’s mercy
 - He was not so keen on extending it to those outside of Israel
- **CONSEQUENCE:** Jonah became angry when Nineveh received the very same grace he had received
 - Isn’t it interesting that the guy who wrote/prayed [Jonah 2](#) can’t rejoice in ch 3-4?
 - Nothing reveals whether we understand grace more than our response when God shows it to someone we think deserves judgment

C: JONAH MISUNDERSTOOD GOD’S WARNINGS

- **TRUTH:** God’s warnings are intended to produce repentance
 - [Jeremiah 18:7-8](#) “7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.”
 - [1 Kings 8](#) - Solomon’s temple dedication prayer
 - When they sin, If they repent, Extend mercy
 - Throughout the Scripture, God’s warnings function also as a call to repentance (and subsequent mercy/restoration)
 - This is God’s pattern:
 - With Israel and her prophets
 - The churches in Revelation
 - AND... Nineveh
- **DISTORTION:** Judgment is the goal rather than repentance (Prophecy = doom)
 - Jonah viewed the destruction of Nineveh as the successful outcome
 - God viewed repentance as the successful outcome
- **CONSEQUENCE:** Jonah becomes furious when God’s warnings accomplished its intended purpose
 - The city was ‘overthrown’ after all, but not by fire... but by repentance (the possible rendering of 3:4)
 - Jonah saw God’s relenting as a failure or possibly even a breaking of his word
 - God saw it as a victory

Jonah's problem was not ignorance of God's character.

- He knew God was gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.
- His problem was that he wanted/believed those truths applied selectively.
- Jonah loved God's mercy when it rescued him, but resented God's mercy when it rescued Nineveh.

Jonah's (poor theology) distorted view of God, salvation, and people produced disordered emotions and pitiful responses.

2: JONAH'S DISORDERED EMOTIONS REVEALS WHAT HE ACTUALLY VALUED

A: WHAT MAKES HIM HAPPY

- He rejoices in the plant *rather than* Nineveh's repentance
- The plant brought *him* extra shade and comfort
- Nineveh's repentance brought *the Lord* joy and produced his mercy
 - Thereby releasing God's mercy instead of wrath—saving a multitude of lives

B: WHAT MAKES HIM ANGRY

- He anguishes the loss of the plant, the end of his relief from the sun's heat
- He's actually mad at God for being merciful, not destroying Nineveh
 - The Hebrew wording is stronger than the English translation... Jonah thought it was a great evil.
 - Jonah is not only mad at God, he believes God is wrong in sparing them.
- He's upset at the death of a shade plant (his personal comfort) AND that God spared the lives of the people of Nineveh

NOTE: THE IRONY

- The things that delight God anger Jonah
- The things that delight Jonah barely matter to God
- I'm not saying that God doesn't care about what you want or need... but I'm pointing out Jonah's disordered and disoriented heart
 - He's not caring about the right stuff

C: HE DESPAIRS OF LIFE ITSELF

- V3: He wishes to die rather than live to see God's mercy to his enemies
- V8-9: He wishes die over the loss of the plant (the loss of his personal comfort—while he's raging)
 - This is absurd. Jonah's been out in the sun too long.
 - Also notice the volatility of Jonah's emotions
- Its worth pointing out that he's crashing out in two completely different directions, but both point to his self-centeredness

CONCLUSION: JONAH'S EMOTIONS AND HIS HEART ARE WRONG

- Jonah's heart told him his anger was a righteous anger over sinners not getting what they deserved
- [Jeremiah 17:9](#) "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"
- Note: you can passionately believe something with all your heart and be dead wrong
- Further: your emotions can be all consuming and very real... and be wrong

3: GOD IS A PATIENT AND PERSISTENT TEACHER

THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF JONAH AND ESPECIALLY CH4 WE SEE GOD'S PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE WITH JONAH

- Just because Jonah runs, God doesn't abandon him
- Just because Jonah is self-centered and angry about the wrong things, doesn't mean God is done with him
- God keeps working with Jonah up to and through the last verse
- Look at God's strategy:

A: GOD ASKS JONAH QUESTIONS

- God asks Jonah questions to point him to truth
- He's not yelling at him or regretting his choice of calling him
- Rather the questions invite Jonah to examine his heart and God's word—to discover the truth of the matter
- V4: "Do you do well to be angry" — are you right in your anger?
 - He actually asks Jonah the same question in v9, revealing his patience and persistence with Jonah

B: GOD GIVES JONAH OBJECT LESSONS

- God sends him 'divine appointment' lessons (the plant, the worm, the scorching east wind)
- Notice that Jonah never answered the question the first time he was asked, he just headed out of town and set up a shelter with a view.
- So God provokes him with a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind — all of it with the intentions of teaching Jonah
- God needed to expose what was in Jonah's heart to Jonah

C: GOD'S FINAL QUESTION CUTS TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- The book ends with the question and leaves not just Jonah to answer the question, but also the reader
- "Should I not have concern for the great city... 120k people who cannot discern right from wrong?"
- Honestly, I think this is where it all 'clicks' for Jonah.

- According to the traditional view, Jonah is the author of the book of Jonah, even though he writes in third person.
 - It's an interesting way to leave the book on this unanswered question
 - But I think Jonah is inviting all of us to see and understand what God has been teaching...
 - You see, Jonah wasn't the only Israelite who probably struggled with God showing mercy to Nineveh AND this book (this chapter) contains the all important gospel truth: PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD
 - God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him, would not perish but have eternal life.

ULTIMATELY: GOD IS THE HERO IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

- God patiently pursued the prodigal prophet
- God redeems Jonah's detour and reveals himself to pagan sailors
- God gets his word at just the right time and through just the right messenger to a pagan Nineveh
- And ultimately God saves every sinner who calls upon the Lord in faith.

RESPONSE:

IN SUMMARY TODAY: JONAH CARED MORE ABOUT HIS COMFORT THAN GOD'S COMPASSION, AND GOD PATIENTLY CONFRONTED HIM WITH THAT REALITY.

- Jonah's theology justified his self-centeredness
- Jonah's emotions revealed his misplaced priorities
- God's lessons exposed it all and invited Jonah into God's perspective and heart

1: ARE YOUR BELIEFS IN PROPER ALIGNMENT WITH GOD'S CHARACTER, WORD, AND HEART?

- Are there any gaps that the Lord has been trying to address?
- How can you ground yourself in Scripture and truth?

2: EXAMINE YOUR HEART: DO YOU DO WELL (TO FEEL THE WAY YOU DO) — ARE YOU RIGHT?

- Is your heart in alignment with God's heart?
- Do you love the things God loves? Do you hate the things God hates?
- Are the things that bring you joy the very same things that God delights in?
- Are the things that upset you also upsetting to the Lord?

3: ARE YOU PAYING ATTENTION TO GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS?

- Answer the questions the Lord puts before you, don't just ignore them and go about your way