

Does Mercy Make You Mad? | Jonah 4

Jonah resents God's mercy toward Nineveh and is angry when God spares the city. The chapter shows God asking Jonah whether he has any right to be angry and uses the plant to teach about compassion.

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Automatic Shownotes

Chapters

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Long Summary

Jonah 4 | God's Mercy and the Greater Jonah YYYY-MM-DD • Erik Raymond • Jonah 4 Main Point: Jonah is angry that God shows mercy to Nineveh, and the chapter exposes a heart that struggles with mercy when it is given to others. Outline: 1. Jonah is triggered by mercy (vv. 1–4) - Jonah is deeply displeased and angry when God relents from judging Nineveh. - He says this is why he fled to Tarshish, quoting God as gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. - The issue is not only Nineveh's repentance but Jonah's resentment toward God's mercy. 2. God gives Jonah an object lesson (vv. 5–8) - Jonah sits outside the city, waiting to see what will happen. - God appoints a plant to give Jonah shade, and Jonah is very glad. - Then God appoints a worm and a scorching east wind; the plant withers, Jonah suffers, and he again wants to die. - The contrast shows Jonah's concern for his own comfort and his anger when mercy is shown to others. 3. God questions Jonah's priorities (vv. 9–11) - God asks whether Jonah does well to be angry. - Jonah insists he does, even to the point of death. - God contrasts Jonah's pity for a plant with God's pity for Nineveh, a great city with many people and animals. - The chapter ends with the question of whether God should not care for the city. 4. Christ and application - Jonah is contrasted with Jesus: Jonah would rather die than obey, while Jesus obeyed by dying. - Jesus grieves over cities and rejoices over repentance. - The sermon emphasizes that God's mercy and justice meet at the cross, where Jesus bears sin and gives righteousness to sinners. - The chapter calls readers to receive mercy, show mercy, and care about God's mission to others.

Brief Summary

Jonah 4 | God's Mercy and the Greater Jonah YYYY-MM-DD• Erik Raymond• Jonah 4 Main Point: Jonah resents God's mercy toward Nineveh.

Tags

Jonah, God's mercy, Greater Jonah, Nineveh, resentment, mercy, Main Point, Erik Raymond, Jonah 4, judgment

Transcript

[0:29] And we're going to be in the fourth chapter, the conclusion of the book.

Jonah's Angry Mercy

[0:33] I'm going to go ahead and read the text. If you have the Pew Bible in front of you, that's on page 775. I'd like you to read along with me as I read it. Look at the words here and think about what we have before us. Jonah chapter 4. Let's hear God's word. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly. And he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I meant when I said that I was yet in my country, that this 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. Therefore, now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it's better for me to die than to live. And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? 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 a shade till he should see what would become of the city.

[1:55] 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. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. 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. But God said to Jonah, do you do well to be angry for the plant?

[2:47] And he said, yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. 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. 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? This is God's word. So we come into Jonah chapter 4, and obviously, Jonah's got some problems. Long list of problems, but his problem right here is his problem with God. We're going to walk through the passage in three movements. The first, in verses 1 through 4, he's triggered by mercy. What do I mean by that? Well,

we'll see. We are introduced here in verse one to this this angry prophet it says in verse one it displeased jonah exceedingly and he was angry verse four the lord said do you do well to be angry, and later on he asks him again the lord asks him again if he's angry this is this is angry this is Jonah getting really upset.

[4:14] You might say he's crashing out a little bit at this point. He's not okay with what's going on. It's not just this little anger. He's very upset. Well, what's he upset about? Well, he tells us right in verse 1, but it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. Well, what's the it that he's talking about? It is referring to what happened in the previous chapter. What happened in the previous chapter? The last words 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 that he would do to them, and he didn't do it. God turns his hand of judgment back from Nineveh, doesn't punish Nineveh. He relents from the judgment. They repented at the preaching of Jonah. That's the it that he's so upset about. This is what's got him so angry. He's mad at mercy. That's his problem. He's upset that God was merciful to Nineveh. That's his issue.

[5:26] So he's mad because of mercy. So that's the what. What he's mad about is because of the it, mercy. But there's a who he's mad at, isn't there? Who's he mad at? He's mad at God. He's mad at God about mercy to Nineveh.

[5:49] Let's just be clear, that's the issue. He's got a problem with God. Specifically how God acts in his mercy. And then he justifies his disobedience. He's building an argument now against God, and he's going to show why he's so upset. He's substantiating it. You see in verse two, he said, Lord, is this not what I said when I was in my country? He's in that argument. I'm sure you've been in the same thing. When something happens that you didn't like, you say something like, that's why I said such and such. Remember when I said that? I told you this is why. This is why. And this is what he's doing. This is what I was saying when I was in my country. This is why I didn't want to go in the first place. Back in chapter one, when you told me to go to Nineveh, I said, I don't want to go to Nineveh. And I went to not Nineveh, 2,500 miles the other way. Got on a boat and left this whole thing because I knew that this is the kind of God you are. This is what you do. I knew. Well, how did he know? Well, he quotes scripture. I know from the Bible that this is exactly the kind of God you are and I didn't want to go. I was afraid you might just do this type of thing, this mercy thing.

[7:18] Look at verse 14.

[7:22] Two, he says, this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. I was quick to get out for I knew that you are, Exodus 34, a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. I knew this is exactly who you are. This is what you tell us in the Bible. This is what you've done throughout history. This is who you are. And I didn't want to go. You know what's interesting? Jonah knew this not only in his mind from reading the Bible, he also knew it experientially, didn't he? His story is being a recipient of mercy, so he knows this. He knows it because he read the Bible, but he also knows it because he's experienced this mercy.

[8:12] And he's got a problem with it. It's also interesting that he conveniently left out parts of Exodus 34 when he quoted it. Did you notice that? We have it on the bulletin on the front of it. He left off, but who will by no means clear the guilty. He highlighted all the things connected to covenant love and mercy and tenderness of God. I know that you are a merciful God, a loving God, a gracious God. And he leaves out the judgment stuff. And he said, this is who you are. And I am upset. He's got big problems with God. That's his issue. And it's cool. He doesn't approve of the way that God's conducting his business. He wants God to do something different. It is interesting that he was okay with mercy when it was to him. But when it's to Nineveh, you can't take it. That's his problem.

[9:19] It's also interesting how quickly he goes back to what he was upset about in the beginning of the book. He's able to quickly go back. He's actually going back real fast here, and then he's going to go back forward again. He's jerking all over the place. I think by way of application, you and I should beware of simmering resentment toward God. The kind of simmering resentment that you might not realize, where you have an issue with God and his word, or maybe you have an issue with God's character or maybe you have an issue with God's providence, how things have worked out in your life. And you might not articulate that to your friends, your spouse, your friend, your pastor, but in your mind, you're thinking about it. And it's kind of this low boil frustration with God. Why are you like this? He knows it. Because when it got bad, Jonah just went right back to it and said, this is why you are like this. This is why I am angry with you because you're like this. And he's frustrated. He doesn't approve of the way God acts. He wants a God that acts like him and looks like him. Kind of sounds like Jonah wants to be God, doesn't it?

[10:45] We see this in the New Testament happen on the page of Scripture just over and over again. As Jesus comes and walks the earth, how many times Jesus is doing amazing things and you just get the story interrupted because people are grumbling and complaining and trying to stop the miracle, trying to stop the care. So he's healing a leper. He's healing the blind. And they're trying to stop the guy like Bartimaeus from getting to Jesus. Don't bother him. Stay back. Jesus carving out some time to talk to the children and to bless the kids. His disciples like, stop, stop. No, get back. Unimportant people, get away. He needs to get on with the important business of us, not you, pushing him back. The Samaritan woman, Jesus lingered and talked with her and then talked to the town afterwards. People thought it was crazy. Demon-possessed guy in Mark chapter 5, over and over again, it's the marginalized people Jesus is spending time with, and people get frustrated with that. Like, what are you doing? Because those people don't look like the people that are getting mad. And they get frustrated.

[12:09] Like Jonah, thinking that he's entitled to his mercy, but other people don't qualify for it. That's dangerous, isn't it? So he's triggered by mercy. So the Lord questions this. Verse 4, bit of a rhetorical question. The Lord said, do you do well to be angry? Is this a good response, Jonah? Obvious answer, no. Horrible response. Jonah's missing it.

The Plant Lesson

[12:42] Let's move to the second movement, an object lesson. How kind of God to give an object lesson to Jonah. Grumbling, angry, idolatrous Jonah, he gets an object lesson. God's kind to him. This is verses five through the first part of verse eight.

[13:03] So Jonah goes outside of the city and he's sitting to the east of it and he made a booth and he's watching. Is he watching to see if God might change his mind? Is he watching to see what's gonna happen with Nineveh? We're not sure. Maybe he's holding out hope that perhaps God might just destroy this city like Sodom. Maybe that'll happen, I don't know. But he's overlooking the city and he's watching and he made himself a booth, a kind of a tent to sit in, in the shade, so you could see what would happen. Now, here's the Lord's lesson. As Jonah's sitting over there, simmering in his anger, he made a plant. He appoints three things here. First, a plant in verse 6. He appoints a plant, and it comes up over Jonah. Evidently, quickly, a plant comes up and makes wonderful shade over Jonah, as it says, to save him from his discomfort. And what's Jonah's response to this? Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. We're meant to see a contrast from verse 6 and verse 1. Verse 6, when the plant grows, Jonah's exceedingly glad. Verse 1, but Jonah's exceedingly angry when God does something else. You see the contrast? When Jonah's saved from his discomfort, he's very happy. When Nineveh is saved from their discomfort, he's very upset.

[14:30] He goes from excited in chapter 2 from mercy to chapter 3 and to chapter 4, exceedingly angry. And then he gets mercy and he's exceedingly happy. Do you see how he's all over the place? That quick move is supposed to show us that he is unstable. It's a satire. It's irony. The prophet is not supposed to act like this. He's pressing this in so we can see it. So God appoints a worm, and then the plant withers so he's appointed a plant it comes up he's very happy the next day the Lord verse 7 appoints a worm it attacks the plant and it withers and then after the plant withers so the shade's gone, then he brings the Lord brings an east wind he appoints the east wind, scorching east wind and the sun beats down on the head of Jonah and he's faint he is Now he's upset. Verse 8, he'd rather die. It's better for me to die than to live. So he's back to this again. I'd rather die than deal with this. Continuing.

[15:45] This Jonah is frustrated and angry with God over and over again. So, that's the object lesson. What's the point? Well, let's consider what the point is.

Questions to Ponder

[15:55] This is the third movement, questions to ponder. This brings us to the point of the object lesson, seeing what's going on with Jonah. Jonah ends up wanting to die. It's better for me to die than to live. So, then God is going to ask some questions. And again, he asks him the same question. Verse 9, do you do well to be angry?

[16:19] Do you do well? Is this good? Is this right for you to be angry? Look at Jonah's answer. He answers, yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. He's ready to die. He's confident that his conclusion about the way God is acting and his response to it is right. He's saying, yeah, I'm ready to

go, ready to die. Again, he's gone from angry to happy. Now back to angry. And what's the issue? This is a microcosm of the whole book. In chapter one, he doesn't want to obey God. And God ends up rescuing him out of the sea, brings this fish, giant fish to swallow him up, saves him out of the belly of this giant fish. He comes out onto land. He's praising God for all of this that has happened. He receives this mercy.

[17:18] Praising God. Chapter three comes along. He goes to Nineveh out of obedience. He preaches the sermon. Sure, it was only six words, but miraculous response. The town from the king all the way down to the cattle, walking around in sackcloth, repenting of sin. It's a glorious day. And Jonah is angry. So then God gives him this plant and he's happy again. Then he takes the plant away, and he's ready to die. So what's the point? Well, like God says, verse 10, you pity the plant for which you didn't labor, nor did you make it grow. It came into the night, and it perished in the night. Shouldn't I pity the city of Nineveh, the great city, comparatively greater than a plant, older than the plant, with actual people in it, not just a plant, who don't know their right hand from the left and also musk cattle. He's saying, Jonah, you didn't labor to grow the plant. There was no labor involved. I grew it. And it was just here for a minute, gone one day after it was here. Shouldn't I pity Nineveh, a great city?

[18:34] That's the issue. So, he saves Jonah from his, quote-unquote, evil, this crisis that he's in, just like he saves Nineveh from their issue. When Jonah looks at Nineveh, he gets angry. When he looks at his situation, he's rejoicing. That's the problem. So, what's the big issue? The issue is, he's got a problem with mercy. This is the main point that I think is coming out of this passage. Is that you will have a problem with God's mercy if you think you're entitled to it. You're going to have a problem with God's mercy if you think you're entitled to it. Now, you're not going to have a problem with it shown to you because you're entitled to it. But as soon as it goes to somebody else that maybe doesn't look like you or fit your criteria of who should get mercy, then you begin getting angry. So what's the answer? Well, you'll rejoice in God freely showing mercy to other people when you realize how desperately you need it.

[19:55] If the reality was Jonah knew that he was an absolute wretch, selfish idolater who deserves God's judgment just as much as the Ninevites, and God saves him from sin, and then saves others who are just as guilty as him, he would rejoice. But the fact is he thought that they were far worse than him and therefore not worthy. By implication, if they're far worse than him, he's better than them. And the mercy that he gets, he's entitled to. That's not mercy at all. And that's his issue.

The Greater Jonah

[20:46] So many times in Jonah, we're instructed to look to a greater Jonah because Jonah is so, by contrast, so poor. And this is one of those times where Jonah serves us by being a foil, a contrast to Jesus. Think about it. Jonah would rather die than obey God. He says it here, He says at the beginning of the book, he's going overboard, like jumping overboard because he'd rather die than obey God. So he'd rather die than obey God. But Jesus obeyed God by dying. He loved obeying God.

Jonah sat looking over the city with tears of anger. He's so upset, seething as he looks over the city. But Jesus also looked over a city with prayerful tears of compassion. Remember Jesus looking out over a city and seeing people who were distressed and dispirited, hurt and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd? He prayed for them, looking out over Jerusalem, knowing that destruction was coming?

[21:59] Jonah, he felt entitled to his position, whether as a prophet or as a recipient of mercy, he felt entitled to his position. But Jesus, while God, who is entitled to the position of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and became a man, a servant, and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For us.

[22:30] And Jonah, Jonah's angry about repentance. But Jesus rejoices over repentance, as does heaven and all the angels, according to Luke 15. Jesus is far greater than Jonah. When Jesus says something greater than Jonah is here, He was right. Not just as a picture of the resurrection, but in every way Jonah fails, he highlights and shows the greatness of Christ. In fact, Jesus actually solves the riddle that Jonah's hanging on to that he doesn't like. That is how God can be merciful to sinners. I mean, think about it. Let's just be honest for a second. You got your bulletin. You can look at the front of this. How can all this stuff fit together? How can the Lord be merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and at the same time, not clear the guilty?

[23:43] Put any of those words next to clear the guilty and it doesn't make sense. How can God be merciful and not clear the guilty? How can God be gracious and not clear the guilty? How can he be slow to anger and not clear the guilty? How can he show love and faithfulness and not clear the guilty?

[24:04] How can he be a forgiver of iniquity, and not clear the guilty? How does this work? How can God forgive sinners and judge sinners? It doesn't make sense. Is God compromised? Does one day he just say, well, today my love's going to carry out, so none of it gets pardoned. Does he change? He used to be really angry, and now he's really happy. He used to be really just, and now he's really loving. What goes on? God doesn't change. God doesn't grade on a curve. He grades on a cross. That's how it works. Listen. On the cross, Jesus took the place of sinners.

[25:03] Jesus was perfect. He fulfilled God's law perfectly. He obeyed God perfectly, loved God 100%, loved neighbor 100%. Everything was perfect. And then he goes to the cross to pay for the sins of people like you and me, people who don't deserve it, people who are not entitled to mercy. And there on the cross, God, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5, God made him, that's Jesus, to be sin on our behalf. Our sin is charged to Jesus. Our iniquity, our transgression, our sin, our guilt is imputed. It's charged to Jesus.

[25:48] And his righteousness, his obedience, his perfection, all of his good is charged to us. It's the divine exchange. He takes all of our sin, all of our lawbreaking, and we, by faith, receive all of his righteousness, all of his law-keeping, all of his holiness, all of his perfection.

[26:14] The law keeper is counted on the cross as the law breaker.

[26:22] And you and I, the law breakers, are counted as the law keepers. That's how he can be Exodus 34. Or as Paul says in Romans chapter 4, that he may be, or Romans chapter 3, at the end of the chapter, that he may be the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. He can be just. He doesn't compromise his righteousness. He's perfectly righteous, and he can be the justifier. He can declare sinners righteous in his sight because he compromises his righteousness. No, because he secures righteousness and gives it to us through Jesus. Jesus earns our place. He earns righteousness. He does that because God is abounding in steadfast love, in mercy, in grace, and slow to anger. That's who he is. Jesus solves the problem that, of course, Jonah didn't understand for various reasons.

[27:37] But Jesus harmonizes what might seem like contradictory attributes of mercy, and justice and holiness, and love and righteousness and forgiveness he harmonizes it.

[27:55] And it's only Christianity, only the gospel of Christianity, that maintains a God who is transcendent and doesn't need us, but comes down and saves us. It's only the God of the gospel that actually maintains that there's nothing you can do to earn your way to heaven. There's no partnership between man and God. It's all God. And he comes down for us. and saves us. So he gets the glory and we get the pardon and we rejoice in what he's done. If you're here today and you've not yet trusted in Christ, and maybe some of the reason why you've not trusted in Christ is because of the accounting of how sin works and it doesn't make sense to you.

[28:50] Trust in Christ. He forgives sinners like us. That's good news. Or maybe you haven't trusted in Christ and you see something like this passage where God is coming to pursue rebels like the Ninevites to save them from their sin. You can be forgiven of your sin if you trust Christ. Or maybe you're a religious person like Jonah. Look at God's heart to pursue Jonah, even in the hardness of heart, to continue to pursue him and say, do you do well to be angry?

[29:27] He comes for him. He comes for sinners like us. Let's bow the knee to him in faith. He's good and just. So faithful.

Jonah in the Mirror

[29:43] You know what's interesting? The way this book ends. One of two books, it ends in a question. That's interesting. Why is he doing that? You know, we started this book and many of us talked after this first sermon in Jonah and throughout, and you guys are having conversations and we're talking through this. And one of the main things that we say is like, Jonah's a mess, right? Chapter one, this guy running away from God. You call yourself a prophet. You're running away. I mean, who would ever disobey God like that? I'd rather die than obey you. I mean, what a guy. Who talks like that? Who lives like that? And we get going into chapter 2, chapter 3, and we ask who would ever put their interests first, above God's, and we begin to feel a little bit of a pinch, don't we?

[30:51] Who would ever, chapter 4, grumble, pout, complain, be angry at God? Now suddenly it's not what a mess Jonah is.

[31:10] It's, I kind of look like Jonah. I think that's why it ends in a question mark. He's asking us to look in the mirror. We might be like the people that Jesus talks about in Matthew 18, the unforgiving servants who have been forgiven much, but then turn around in exact damages from people who owe us. Not showing mercy to one another while experiencing great mercies to God. May God forbid that. May he forbid that. May we be people who receive mercy and show mercy. Give in grace, give grace. been loved, love one another. Look in and see Jonah and say, don't want to be like him. Also, he invites us in to think about the mission. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. Many of us don't want to go to our neighbors. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he didn't like the Ninevites. He hated them. He didn't love them. Many of us don't talk to other people and our family or friends or neighborhoods about Jesus because we don't love him.

[32:30] We don't love him. And we should realize that. Because Jonah's lack of heart for the mission of God is indicting to us. It should cause us to pray that we would see the gospel advance around us in New England and to the nations. I think Jonah helps us to see selfishness, a disordered life, entitlement. Self-abundance rather than engagement in the mission. Sacrifice and service, whether that's by prayer, actually going into mission work, or supporting those that do it, or laboring hard for the gospel to advance in our own community. Jonah could be very helpful for us as we lean in and look.

[33:32] And as we ponder our own lives this week and think about Jonah, we look to the greater Jonah, and we're so aware and cognizant of the fact that we don't deserve mercy. It's all a gift. So, brothers and sisters, we will rejoice in God freely showing mercy to others when we realize how desperately we need it. May God help us to rejoice in the goodness of Christ and his plan and learn from even a guy like Jonah.

[34:09] Let's pray.

[34:19] Lord, we thank you for the gospel, for we have no hope without it. We thank you for Jesus, the greater Jonah, who came down for us, who loves us and is compassionate, merciful, and full of love. Help us to reflect upon Jonah, not just a book with interesting turns of events, but with indicting motives upon us and our own lives as well. Help us to not quickly close the book on Jonah but spend time reflecting and thinking and meditating upon it. That you might do work on us.

[35:09] That we would be people who love you more and steward our time as we are on the clock now in our lives. Aiming to glorify you with the short, ever-shortening time we have left until we see you face to face. And so would we be faithful and serve you with zeal and integrity, truth, devotion, and sacrifice, all the while longing for your mercy to be shown to whoever you desire to give it to, knowing that you can save anyone from anything in any way, any time according to your glorious gospel. We rejoice in you and ask for your help. In Jesus' name, amen.