



gracefellowship

Series: Summer Shorts
Date: July 16, 2023

Title: Angry With God
Passage: Jonah 1-4

Scripture: Jonah 1-4

We are in a series we are calling Summer Shorts. We are looking at short books in the Bible that have big messages. Last week we tackled the book of Habakkuk and looked at complaints leveled at God for the violence and injustice that was seen by the Prophet. God's answer to his complaint was basically, wait and see what I will do! A day of justice is coming for the wicked- it just won't happen in the timeline you desire. We saw God's sovereignty and His patience as we learned that God is much more interested in salvation than condemnation and destruction.

Today we are going to look at the book of Jonah. Just in case the only way you have ever thought about this book before came from your Sunday School class as a child or from watching the VeggieTales movie, there is more going on here than you may be aware!

Here's what I want to do today as we begin: we are going to read the entire book of Jonah together and get an idea of the full narrative before we explore the things God is doing. If Habakkuk was a Prophet who complained to God, Jonah is a Prophet who is angry at God. We're going to see how Jonah's anger leads him to rebel against God's command to take a message of repentance or destruction to his enemies.

Read Jonah 1-4
Kyle / Mandy / Joel / Nathan

:: Jonah 1

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. **5** All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. **6** The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. **14** Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." **15** Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. **16** At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

:: Jonah 2

1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. **2** He said:

"In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

4 I said, 'I have been banished
from your sight;

yet I will look again

toward your holy temple.’

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me,

the deep surrounded me;

seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down;

the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, Lord my God,

brought my life up from the pit.

⁷ “When my life was ebbing away,

I remembered you, Lord,

and my prayer rose to you,

to your holy temple.

⁸ “Those who cling to worthless idols

turn away from God’s love for them.

⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise,

will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

:: Jonah 3

³ Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth.

Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

:: Jonah 4

4 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant^[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

¹⁰ But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

This week I read a commentary that kept calling Jonah a “reluctant Prophet.” But he’s not reluctant- he’s rebellious! In fact, Jonah is just the worst Prophet ever!

- He ran from God
- He complained against God
- He hated his enemies

But does Jonah have a case? The whole reason God wants to sent Jonah to Nineveh in the first place is because He says, “their wickedness has come up before me.” Things had gotten so bad in Nineveh that God had to intervene personally. Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian empire. These were brutal people. The Assyrians would rape women and children; they impaled people’s bodies and lined the streets with them, they would skin people alive; ² Chronicles tells us when they captured Jerusalem they marched King Manasseh 300 miles back to Assyria dragging him by a hook in his nose.

By the time Assyria had conquered Jerusalem, there was obviously no love lost between these two nations. Jonah is approached by God and told to go to his greatest enemies and carry a message. But instead he runs away!

Jonah charts a boat and sails to Tarshish. We don't have a lot of information about Tarshish, but historically it's believed this was the farthest point on earth people traveled by boat. Jonah is going as far away from God's call as he possibly can.

This is the part of the story you're all probably really familiar with- God sends a great storm, so powerful that boat threatened to break apart. The sailors start throwing things overboard to lighten the load and they begin to cry out to their gods, but nothing changes. Meanwhile, Jonah is asleep in the bottom of the boat. The Captain wakes him up and tells him to cry out to his God, but Jonah knows that he is the reason God has sent the storm. Jonah tells them the way to get the storm to cease is to throw him overboard. I kind of wonder if Jonah thought this might be an answer to his dilemma- if they throw him overboard he will just drown in the sea and won't have to worry about going to Nineveh.

But God has different plans. He's not done with Jonah. When Jonah is thrown into the water God provides a great fish to come and swallow him, carrying him in his stomach back to the mainland.

From inside the belly of the fish Jonah has a mini personal revival. Chapter 2 is a prayer to God that Jonah utters from inside the fish where he shows thankfulness for being saved; he recognizes God's sovereignty; he promises to speak of God's salvation.

:: Jonah 2:8-9

**⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God's love for them.**

**⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.**

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

This sounds like a guy who is reformed and ready to act in obedience to God. The prophet who ran from God and was rebellious is now in a spiritually healthy place.

Then we are told that God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah up on dry land. Now, we aren't told where on land Jonah was vomited, but anywhere along the Mediterranean coast would still require Jonah to travel 300-500 miles to Nineveh.

The first verse of Chapter 3 says:

:: Jonah 3:1

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

That's such a beautiful picture of God's grace! When we run from Him, when we disobey Him, God is patient with us and offers us second chances! God doesn't cancel us! Jonah gets a second chance to do what God originally told him to do.

But somewhere along the way of that long journey to Nineveh Jonah's anger returned. He's going to go and he's going to do what God said, but it's not with a heart of love and concern!

:: Jonah 3:3-4

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Jonah gets into the heart of this great city and gives an 8 word sermon to everyone who will listen to him: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

It's not poetic; it's not compassionate; it's not illustrative. Jonah is blunt and maybe even excited to deliver this message to his enemies! But here's the crazy part...the message brought the people to a place of repentance!

- A fast was proclaimed and the people put on sackcloth.
- When word got to the king of the city he decreed that even the animals not be fed and that people and animals should be clothed in sackcloth.
- Then he decreed that everyone call on God and give up their evil ways and their violence

Then the king said:

:: Jonah 3:9-10

⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

And Jonah was exceedingly happy that God had won the day, the wicked people of Nineveh had a change of heart and he went home joyful, excited to tell everyone in Israel what God had done. Not so fast! Jonah's anger is about to be shown in full force.

:: Jonah 4:1-3

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is

what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

There are a couple interesting things for us to be know about Jonah as we look at these verses:

Jonah's name means dove. In Chapter one we were told his Father's name was Amittai, which means truth. Jonah is supposed to be a dove of truth. But instead he is angry about God's grace and compassion. In fact, he quotes Exodus, when God reveals His glory to Moses. God places Moses in a cleft in the rocks and has His glory pass by Moses, then allows Moses to gaze on the back side of His glory. As God passes by Moses He proclaims His Name:

:: Exodus 34:6

⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,...

Let me put these verses side by side for us this morning: ***(Nelson, please put these on the same slide)***

Exodus:

“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...”

Jonah:

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love...

Let's assume that Jonah, as a Prophet, knows the Hebrew text really well! Do you see anything different about what Jonah says and what God says about Himself? There is a word Jonah leaves out- faithfulness (NIV), which can also be translated as truthful. But when Jonah raises his angry complaint against God he says, I know what you are; you're gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. But here's what you're not: You're not committed to truth; because if you were committed to truth, you would deal with our enemies.

Throughout the book we see things called “great.”

- Nineveh is a great city
- God sends a great storm
- There is a great wind
- There is a great fish

The one thing you expect to be great is God's judgment- but it isn't!

And that bothers Jonah.

So Jonah throws a pity party and says, “Just kill me now- it would be better to be dead than alive.” (my translation)

Jonah doesn't even want to live in a world where his enemies are given grace and a second change. He seemed fine with receiving grace from God and being given a second chance by God, but his enemies shouldn't get the same grace and it makes him angry!

This leads God to ask a huge question: “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Now, let's allow that to marinate with us for a little while. Who are you angry with?

Ask yourself this question: **Is it right for me to want the destruction and judgment of others?**

I don't know with whom you're angry and blame your problems:
Democrats / Republicans / LGBTQ Community / Gun lobby / Billionaires / Terrorists / Christians / Your Ex / the person who abused you

Is it right for you to be angry? Let's be certain, there is righteous anger! Then there is anger that's bent on violence and destruction. And God's asking us to consider if it's right to want our enemies to be destroyed and not lean into grace?

We often attribute our human emotions to God, I think Jonah is one of those places where God says, “Why are you angry? I'm not angry, so do you have any right to be?” Which may lead us to ask: “God, why *aren't* you angry?!”

And to answer that question we have to look at the end of the story and see God's final interaction with Jonah.

We've already read the story, so I'm going to recap:

Jonah goes to a place east of the city and builds a shelter. In Scripture the eastern direction is typically associated with God's judgment, so Jonah is going to get a front row seat for the destruction of Nineveh, even though God has relented and spared the people.

Jonah has a shelter, but God causes a vine to grow and give him shade. This is a way of showing God's grace on top of grace. Jonah has shelter, but God provides even more shade. But a day later God provides a worm to eat the vine and so that it withered- then God sent a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head. And again he voices his displeasure and says he wants to die and that death would be better than living.

A second time God asks: “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

Jonah's response: "It is. And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

Now, here's the truth about God's anger and our enemies and Jonah wanting to die.

God is absolutely angry about sin. And someone would die to pay for sin. But it wouldn't be Jonah- it would be Jesus. God can show grace to our enemies because He poured His wrath for sin out on Jesus.

Someone had to die for sin and injustice and violence. But it isn't your enemies. In fact, here's how the book finishes- it's a total cliff-hanger.

:: Jonah 4:10-11

¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

God looked at the Assyrians and saw a people who couldn't tell their right hand from their left...translation: they didn't know what they were doing! They didn't know the God of Israel, the One, True God, so how could they be expected to follow His ways?

The world around us is not Christian, yet somehow we expect them to behave as if they were and we get angry when they don't hold our values and do things like we want them to. How can they act like a follower of Jesus if they don't know Jesus? And how can they come to know Jesus if we are angry at them and don't tell them about His grace and love and compassion?

What would it take for us to take the gospel to our enemies? I wrote that question down this week and then it was like God spoke to me and said, "You don't even take the gospel to your friends!" We live in a country where we have the freedom to share the gospel without fear of punishment and most of us never share Jesus, even with our friends and family members.

This week I was reminded of the story of 5 missionaries who went to South America to take the gospel to tribal people who lived in the jungles and didn't have contact with the outside world. After working to making contact with the tribe the men went in person to the tribe where they were murdered by having spears driven through their bodies. Do you know what the response was of the surviving family members of these men? They moved onto the island and went to the tribe extending forgiveness. They went to their enemies who didn't know their left hand from their right and they introduced them to Jesus. Two tribes in the jungle had been at war, killing one another and kidnapping children from

each other. After the tribes met Jesus one of the things they said was that Jesus took their anger toward one another away.

Romans 5:8 says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In fact, on the cross Jesus prayed to God and said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they do."

We can be angry at anyone we call an enemy, or we can be conduits of God's grace to show them His love. Who is God calling you to go to in love this week? Give your anger to God and let Him replace it with divine grace and love.

Prayer Team Reminder