

## 005 The Selfish Missionary

Jonah 4:1-11

January 29, 2023

This morning will be the last time we study the book of Jonah.  
That is NOT because we are concluding the story.

Namely because the story has no conclusion.

It is not hard to see all the parallels between the book of Jonah  
And the story of the Prodigal son which Jesus gave in Luke 15.

One might even refer to the book of Jonah as “The Ballad of the Older Brother”.

The stories are nearly identical.

THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT

- Where the story of the prodigal focuses on the rejoicing of God when a sinner repents,
- The story of Jonah focuses on the anger of the self-righteous at the mercy of God.

BUT THE SETTING IS THE SAME.

It is fitting then, that like the parable of the Prodigal son,  
The book of Jonah also has no end.

We don't know how the story of the Prodigal ends.

- The story ends with the father pleading with the older son
- To come in to the banquet and celebrate at the return of the younger brother.
- We aren't told in that story what the older brother does.

And the same is with the book of Jonah.

- It ends with a question.

(11) “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

But we are never told how Jonah responded.

And while I think we have enough information to  
Make a pretty accurate assumption as to what Jonah decided,  
Jonah's response is NOT the point of the story.

You don't need to know how Jonah responded  
In order to learn what God is seeking to teach you.

Well let's quickly walk through how we got to this point.

1. Jonah was a prophet and God told him to go and cry against Nineveh because their sin had offended Him.
2. But, as we learned, Jonah hated the Ninevites, he hated the mercy of God, and he hated the gospel that offered that mercy to them.
3. So Jonah fled from God and set sail for Tarshish.
4. God then sent a storm on the sea to prevent Jonah from escaping.
5. The sailors cast lots to find out whose fault this storm was and the lot fell to Jonah.
6. When they asked him what to do, he told them to throw him overboard.
7. Jonah would rather die than see the Ninevites warned of the coming judgment.
8. So Jonah was thrown overboard and as he sank, God taught him about the importance of mercy.
9. Jonah cried out to God from the depths of the sea, and God showed Jonah mercy by sending a great fish to swallow him and save him.

10. Because of God's mercy Jonah sensed an obligation to fulfill his vows to the LORD and Jonah agreed to go to Nineveh and deliver the message.

11. When Jonah got to Nineveh he did as pathetic of a job of preaching the gospel as we've ever seen.

The entire message was, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown"

- No explanation why
- No explanation how
- No explanation of how to respond
- No offer of mercy

And yet, God's word was enough and the entire city repented of their sin.

And we ended chapter 3 with

This amazing demonstration of the mercy of God.

Jonah 3:10 "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."

We have seen God's mercy on display in many situations,  
But this one may be the most remarkable.

- This cruel and pagan and bloody city
- Possibly 600,000 of them
- They repent and God forgives them all.

If the story had ended there

We would be expected to simply rejoice in what occurred.

It's like when you read the story of the prodigal son.

We read:

Luke 15:22-24 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

And if that story ended there we would also simply rejoice.

But that story continues

- By telling us that the older brother who was working in the field,
- Heard all the commotion and grabbed a servant for an explanation.
- When the servant told him about the father's mercy WE READ:

Luke 15:28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him."

Well, in like manner, the story of Jonah continues as well.

We have called our study of the book of Jonah, "A Heart Out Of Rhythm"

We have said that Jonah's heart was out of rhythm with God's heart.

And now as we come to the final chapter of the book,

It is time for you to begin to ponder

Just exactly what Jonah's problem was.

- You could read chapter 1 and say: A LACK OF OBEDIENCE
- You could say: A LACK OF MERCY OR COMPASSION
- Maybe you would say: RACISM
- Maybe you would say: HALF-HEARTED

All of those things are true of Jonah,  
But none of those things are the root problem.  
All of those things are merely symptoms of the real problem.

Let's look at this final chapter and learn about the heart of Jonah.

3 things  
#1 JONAH'S SOUR PRAYER  
Jonah 4:1-4

We read the words right off the bat that remind us of that older brother.  
"But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry."

The implication is that Jonah is unhappy at their repentance  
Because he knows that God is a merciful God.

He doesn't want the Ninevites saved.

That should be obvious just from his preaching.  
Never was there a leaner gospel presentation than the one Jonah gave.

- He had purposely withheld information about repentance.
- He had purposely withheld information about God's mercy.
- He gave them the bare minimum.

But as we saw last week, God's word has so much power,  
THE NINEVITES REPENTED ANYWAY.

And Jonah is angry.  
He is angry because he knows God and he knows what God will do.

(2) "He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD..."

Have you ever asked God "please"?  
He must really really want it.

What does he want?  
"Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."

- Jonah is certainly upset that the Ninevites responded to the message.
- He is certainly upset that God has shown them mercy.

So what is it that Jonah wants God to do for him?  
(3) "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

THERE HE IS AGAIN.  
For the second time Jonah chooses death over the salvation of the Ninevites.

- (The first time he opted to simply be thrown into the sea)

So here is Jonah, so displeased with the saving work of God  
That Jonah would rather die than see the Ninevites receive mercy.

It is so much like that older brother in the parable of the prodigal.

And just like in that parable, we have God rationalizing with Jonah.

(4) "The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

There's the question we all love when we are being irrational.

God simply asks Jonah for the evidence.

- Where is the evidence that you'd like to present which proves I was wrong in extending to mercy to these people who humbled themselves before Me?

Of course you'll notice that Jonah had NO ANSWER.

In verse 5 he simply WALKS AWAY.

But what we see here is that Jonah's sour heart  
Never really departed.

He went to Nineveh out of obligation to God,  
But he has totally missed the point of missions altogether.

Jonah hates that God saves sinners.

When I was a kid there was a boy named Donnie who lived next door to my grandparents and we hung out every day. He also got a ride with me and my grandpa from school every day. One day we got in a fight at school and I told him, "You're not getting a ride with us today." And when my grandpa pulled up Donnie ran up to him and said, "Hey Bobba can I have a ride?" And my grandpa said, "Sure, hope on in." I was infuriated. I was mad at his audacity to think he deserved a ride, I was mad that my grandpa didn't even ask my permission. I was mad that I had to ride home with Donnie.

That is Jonah.

God, if You're going to let them live, then just kill me  
Because I don't even want to share the same earth with them.

And so he offers that sour prayer that God would just take his life.

Jonah's Sour Prayer  
#2 JONAH'S SELFISH POUT  
Jonah 4:5-8

I don't know if we have any certified pouters in the audience this morning,  
But I know exactly what pouting looks like when I see it.

God asked Jonah if he had a good reason but Jonah couldn't answer.

And when reason is not on your side  
The only tool you have left is manipulation.

So Jonah is now going to manipulate God.

(5) "Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen to the city."

This is interesting.

- God has already said He was not going to destroy the Ninevites.
- Jonah already knows about the compassion of God.

But, maybe if I pout, and God sees how unhappy this has made me,  
Maybe then He'll go ahead give me what I want.

So Jonah leaves the city and sets up a camp east of it

- And has decided to wait and watch for God to annihilate them.
- I guess he's planning on waiting for 40 days.
- He's just going to sit there with his arms crossed and his bottom lip pooched out until God gives in and bends to his will.

Now I do think there is something WORTH DISCUSSING right here.

You are all aware of Lance's situation and have been praying for him.

One of the things I have been discussing with Amy is something God taught me during the days when Carrie was really sick and that is to pray boldly.

I was most convicted by the passage where Jesus says:

Matthew 7:7-11 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

- I'm evil and even I know how to give good gifts to my kids.
- God reminded me that He is good
- And when I ask I should believe that He will answer and grant what is good.

Of course we could go from there to the Persistent widow in Luke 18

- Who keeps going in front of that unrighteous judge wanting justice
- And eventually because of her persistence he grants her request.
- We are told that that particular parable is to teach us that we "ought to pray at all times and not to lose heart."

Jesus talks about that widow and then says:

Luke 18:6-8 "And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

We notice that persistence was a sign of that woman's faith.

And when Jesus gave that parable

He asked if He would find that kind of "faith on the earth?"

We think of the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15

- Who had the demon-possessed daughter.
- She came to Jesus and He ignored her
- So she started shouting at the disciples.
- Then Jesus basically told the woman "No" saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- She still won't stop
- So He gets even more direct saying, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"
- And she still won't stop.

And in response to her persistence Jesus says:

Matthew 15:28 "Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once."

And you see again an example of persistent prayer.

Jesus doesn't call that woman arrogant or selfish or obnoxious.

He says her "faith is great".

And so we learn that when we have a request before God

We should be bold and persistent and full of faith.

I bring that up because one could argue that

This is what JONAH IS DOING.

- He's certainly persistent.
- He's certainly bold.
- And he's going to sit right here until God gives him what he wants.

NOW MY QUESTION IS:

What is the difference between that widow or that Syrophenician woman and Jonah?

HERE IT IS:

- The widow and the Syrophenician woman both prayed according to the nature and character of God.
- Jonah prayed contrary to the character and nature of God.

Those two women called on God to be who He has revealed Himself to be. Jonah wanted God to break character and be something He is not.

JONAH WANTED GOD TO BE LIKE HIM.

WE ARE most certainly called to boldly approach the throne.

WE ARE given examples of relentless prayer.

WE ARE told that persistence in prayer is a picture of faith.

But that prayer must be consistent with God's nature and God's will.

You cannot manipulate God to be something He is not

Or to do something against His nature

Just because you want Him to.

BUT WHEN YOU PRAY ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

Then by all means pray with boldness and persistence.

Jonah is off the mark here because

- He is totally out of touch with who God is
- And He is ignoring what God has revealed that He will do.

Well, God has a lesson to teach Jonah.

This, by the way, is object lesson #2 for Jonah.

LESSON #1 involved sinking in the water and being swallowed by a fish.

- That lesson was to teach Jonah THE VALUE OF MERCY.

LESSON #2 involves a weed, a worm, and a wind.

- This lesson will be to teach Jonah THE REASON FOR MERCY.

Jonah learned how good mercy feels

When that fish saved him from the depths.

Now Jonah is about to be taught why we are called to offer mercy.

So you see God's intervention again.

GOD APPOINTS A WEED

(6) "So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant."

- Apparently Jonah wasn't any better of a carpenter than he was a missionary because the shelter he built didn't offer him much relief from the sun.
- So God causes this plant to grow and cover that shelter and make a nice little shady oasis out of the place.

“And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.”

(He has to think God is bending to his will)

#### GOD APPOINTS A WORM

(7) “But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.”

- No sooner does Jonah get accustomed to his new shady life then does God move in to annihilate it.
- God sends a worm to eat that plant and the plant withered and died.

So now Jonah is back to square one.

And perhaps he would have just ignored this and let it go,  
BUT GOD WASN'T FINISHED.

#### GOD APPOINTS A WIND

(8) “When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, “Death is better to me than life.”

The “scorching east wind” referred to here is also known as a Sirocco.

- It is a wind that originates in northern Africa
- And picks up moisture as it crosses the Mediterranean sea.
- It is hot and humid and incredibly strong.
- It was known as an annihilator of crops.
- One website says it can reach hurricane speeds during the summer.

And again, in our story, this is quite interesting.

Jonah has been sitting here east of the city  
Waiting for God’s judgment to fall on the city,  
But the only natural disaster that has occurred is hitting Jonah.

(Nineveh hasn’t been punished yet, but Jonah has been punished twice)

Jonah is facing the elements with no relief.

“and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, “Death is better to me than life.”

Well this is now #3

You have to see God’s mercy there even for Jonah  
Because at this point we’d be tempted to say, “Fine, just die already.”

But God has a lesson for Jonah.

- So Jonah has voiced his discomfort and asked to die.
- Jonah then resorts to pouting
- And when that doesn’t work he wants to die again.

Jonah’s Sour Prayer, Jonah’s Selfish Pout  
#3 JONAH’S SPIRITUAL PROBLEM  
Jonah 4:9-11

God comes to Jonah with yet another question.

(9) “Then God said to Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?”

- When God asked him that about Nineveh, Jonah had no response.

- BUT THIS TIME, Jonah is armed and ready.

He says, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

- Yes, God, as a matter of fact I do have a good reason.
- I loved that plant.
- I needed that plant.
- That plant benefited me.

Those are all selfish reasons,  
But we understand where Jonah is coming from.

AND THEN COMES THE LESSON.

Now, before we get to it,  
When we started this morning I told you it was time to begin to consider what Jonah's problem was.

Obedience? Compassion? Racism? Effort?

What is the problem of Jonah?

Well let's look at GOD'S RESPONSE to Jonah's anger.

(10-11) "Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

- So Jonah you loved that plant.
- You had compassion on that plant.

Let's examine your involvement in the existence of that plant.

- Did you create that plant? No
- Did you plant that plant? No
- Did you cultivate that plant? No
- We know you didn't protect it from worms.

So your effort towards that plant was ZERO.

Ok, well, let's consider the significance of that plant.

- Was it at least a plant that made a huge difference in the natural created order?
- I mean, was it a plant that had long provided shade for an entire civilization?
- Was it plant that provided food for many people?
- Was it a landmark like one of those Giant Sequoias that should just be preserved?

NO!

It "came up overnight and perished overnight."

It was absolutely and totally insignificant.

And yet, you are upset that I poured out judgment  
On that insignificant plan which you had no hand in producing.

NOW, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

You see the contrast.

- The plant was insignificant – the city was great



- The plant was one – the city held 120,000 children (600,000 total)
- There was no intimate knowledge of the plant – God knew everyone in that city
- Jonah did nothing to create the plant – God created every single one of those people.

And so God has brought a matter of justice to Jonah.  
If you have the right to have compassion for a plant,  
Do I not have the right to have compassion for a city?

Here we are back to the PRODIGAL SON story again.  
Can you see the father pleading with that older brother?

Luke 15:31-32 “And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ‘But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”

DO YOU SEE THE POINT YET?  
DO YOU SEE THE PROBLEM YET?

Jonah and that older brother have the exact same problem.  
THEY HAVE NO LOVE FOR THE FATHER

Listen, I’m NOT going to tell you that “It’s ok not to love people”.  
Clearly it is the second greatest commandment.

- We are called to love people.
- We are called to lay down our life for our friends.
- We are called to love the lost.

But I also understand that we are fallen creatures  
And sometimes that is a hard thing to do.

There are people in this world who are difficult to love.

You know people right here in this town who are hard to love.

- They are people that maybe offend you or irritate you
- Or people who you see as bringing no value to the society,
- Maybe they are even a corrupting influence.

And if truth be told, if you found out that they died today,  
Your heart would not grieve.

There are people across the world that perhaps you feel the same way about.

- Maybe it’s a nation that houses terrorists like Isis.
- Maybe it’s a people like politicians or Hollywood whom you blame for the degradation of our society.
- Maybe it’s godless people who have done vile things.

And again, if God saw fit to utterly judge them  
You might even rejoice in their fall.

And it is incredibly difficult then to say that you love those people.

- We think of abortion doctors...
- We think of sex traffickers...
- We think of drag queens who read stories to children...
- We think of people who engage in mass shootings...
- We think of drunk drivers who kill people...
- We think of people who call to tell you your car’s extended warranty has expired...

YOU GET THE POINT.

It is people who run up against our values of right and wrong.

And it is hard to go to people like that and offer them mercy.

SO IF THEY ARE HARD TO LOVE  
HOW CAN YOU BE EXPECTED TO GO TO THEM?

BECAUSE GOD LOVES THEM

This is why I showed you that sermon excerpt from “Ten Shekels And A Shirt” this morning before the announcements.

As Paris Reidhead spoke of going to Africa and being frustrated because the Africans loved their sin and wanted to stay in it and he found his message was ignored and he wanted to come home.

But God reminded him, “I didn’t send you out there for them. I sent you out there for Me! Do I not have the right to receive the reward of my suffering?”

And Reidhead said that moment “changed it all and righted it all for no longer was he now serving man, he was serving the living God”.

Do you understand this about missions?  
So often we treat it like it is our mission  
And we employ God’s help and God’s power  
To make our mission a success.

But God is not on our mission, we are on God’s mission.

And God has His children, His elect scattered all over this globe.

- We don’t know who they are, but He does.
- And He has ordained that the gospel we preach would be the means that would awaken His children and call them home.

And so the mission has been given.

Our God

Our Savior

The One who shed His blood for us on the cross

- Has commissioned us to go into the whole world and preach His gospel that we might locate and call His children home to Him.

Do you love God enough to search for His lost children?

Paul gave insight into his missionary zeal:

Romans 15:15-16 “But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

- Paul remembered “the grace given that was given to me”
- He understood his own debt before God.
- And so he goes out to minister the gospel, “so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable”

What was Paul hoping to give to God as an offering?

He was hoping to bring home His lost children.

- What an offering!
- What a gift!
- What a present to the Father!

THIS IS THE REASON FOR MERCY.

- We show mercy because our Father is merciful.
- We show mercy because it pleases God.
- We show mercy because we love God.

This is the second time some of us have studied Jonah in the last year.  
Our Sunday School class sent through it a few months ago.

And when studying Jonah then my heart was convicted by a passage  
That I had never really thought of before.

It's actually Jesus' teaching on the end times.

Matthew 24:9-14 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Jesus is talking about the end.

And you know that the closer we get to the end THE WORSE THINGS are going to become.

- False prophets will arise...and they have.
- Evil men will grow more bold...and they have.
- Societies will grow more corrupt...and they have.

GOD SAID IT WOULD HAPPEN.

But there's a verse in there that stopped me in my tracks.

It is verse 12, which says, "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."

That hit me between the eyes

Because that is what so easily happens to me.

AS I WATCH SOCIETY

- The commitment to the church becomes less and less.
- Commitment to marriage is less and less.
- Parents no longer know how to raise children and children are allowed to run wild without discipline.
- Husbands don't love their wives and wives don't submit to their husbands.
- Men become effeminate, feminism is on the rise.
- Marijuana is legalized, gambling is glamorized, alcohol is routine, sex is just something people do.
- Kids lie and cheat in school, the culture loses it's work ethic, people quit taking pride in their work, rudeness abounds, politicians are corrupt, the media lies.
- Foul language is more and more common

You get the point – "lawlessness is increased"

To the point you don't even want to be around these people any more.

Now CERTAINLY a lawless culture

Will pay the penalty of the wrath of God for their lawlessness.

But that wasn't the problem God wanted to deal with me about.

Jesus said, "because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."

And I'm here to tell you that this is what was happening to me.

MY LOVE WAS GROWING COLD.

BUT LISTEN, it's not just a lack of love for those in sin.

When you fail to obey the great commission to share the gospel with the lost, it reveals a lack of love for God.

Jonah's love for God had grown so cold

That he actually rooted for the destruction of God's children.

How far out of rhythm can a heart become  
That our love for God can become so cold  
That we no longer care about those whom the Father loves?

Church the DRIVING FORCE of our missionary involvement  
MUST BE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

And anyone who says,

- "I won't share the gospel with my neighbor..."
- Or, "I'm not going to that nation..."
- Or, "I'm not giving to that mission..."
- Or, "I'm not praying for the lost..."

Anyone who says that must answer the question of God to Jonah:

"Should I not have compassion on \_\_\_\_\_."

And if you can give God a good reason

- Why He should not have compassion on His children
- Then you have just found an acceptable excuse as to why you don't have to be involved in the great commission.

We call Jonah The Selfish Missionary  
Because the opposite of love is self and that was Jonah.

The missionary who didn't love God.

And yet, this terrible missionary has many of us beat  
Because at least he went and shared the message.

How many today don't even do that.

So before we condemn Jonah as a terrible missionary we first have to ask, "Have I even shared the message?"

SO THIS MORNING church I am challenging your love for God.  
I am challenging my love for God.

And the measuring line will be our mercy toward sinners.