

“The Rest of the Story”

Jonah 4:1-4

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“And now the rest of the story...” From 1976 until his death in 2009, millions of Americans would listen each day to Paul Harvey recount the not so well known endings to many well-known stories. The Paul Harvey archives site has over 3000 of these 3 ½ minute episodes that you can download and listen to. This morning is kind of the rest of the story for the book of Jonah. Most people know how Jonah, after being thrown into the sea, was swallowed by a big fish and survived. Quite a few folks also know that he then went to Nineveh, warned the people of God’s impending judgement. In response, the entire population repents, turns to the Lord, and the city is spared. But then, in Jonah 4, we have the rest of the story. Not many folks know it and even fewer have really thought about it. Yet, God has important things to say to us through this portion of His word. Today we will be exploring the first four verses of Jonah 4. If you have your bible you can turn there, otherwise the verses will be on the screen. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear and heed His word today.

Okay, we already mentioned that Jonah’s missionary journey to Nineveh was a great success. The entire city had heeded his message. There had been good reason to think the people there would not listen to what Jonah had to say and would kill him. Yet, the Ninevites response is the opposite. I would assume Jonah would celebrate this. A musician is pleased when the audience gives him a standing ovation. Tom Brady loved it when the fans cheered after the Buccaneers won the Super bowl. Missionaries are thrilled when people they speak to, turn to the Lord. But Jonah is not really a missionary.

Jonah 4:1 **Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious.** Why?? Because...

Jonah 3:10 **God saw the Ninevites actions-that they had turned from their evil ways-so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with.**

This infuriates Jonah because he wanted Nineveh destroyed. He wanted every person in that city to be wiped out. Remember these were enemies. Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Empire. For decades they had been harassing and requiring tribute from Jonah’s people of northern Israel. A

few years after his death the Assyrians would invade and conquer that kingdom. Having Nineveh destroyed would seem to be a very good thing. I am not sure what is a good modern analogy, but I suspect many people in Israel today would shed no tears if a great earthquake swallowed the city of Tehran, the capital of Iran. Jonah felt it was in the best interests of his country and even his religion for Nineveh to be destroyed. When the Lord had commanded him to go preach there Jonah thought it was his patriotic duty to refuse to obey. And when God shows mercy to the Ninevites, Jonah thinks it is his patriotic duty to be angry.

Jonah expresses his thinking in a prayer in **Jonah 4:2a** **Please, Lord, isn’t this what I said while I was still in my own country? That’s why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place.**

Jonah claims he did not try to run from God because he was afraid the Ninevites would kill him, but because he was afraid God would show mercy and spare the Assyrian capital. Jonah then makes this accusation against the Lord: “God you are too soft. You are this kind, loving God, that gives everybody another chance, no matter how often or badly they goof up. That doesn’t work. You have to be tougher on bad people or they would just be badder.” Jonah actually quotes scripture to God...

Jonah 4:2b **I knew that you are a gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.**

That is a quote from **Exodus 34**. Jonah, however, conveniently neglects to include the next sentence.

Exodus 34:7b **But he will not leave the guilty unpunished.** Jonah’s wrong. God’s love is not indulgent. It is a righteous love. Though God relented and did not destroy Nineveh that day, there was no guarantee about their future. If they returned to their wicked ways, which they apparently did, they would certainly face God’s judgement.

And then Jonah says: **Jonah 4:3** **And now, Lord, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.**

Okay, I am not sure what Jonah is saying here. Is he really so distraught that he doesn't want to live anymore, simply because God is not destroying a certain city? Maybe. I suspect there was a suicide or two in Wisconsin a few weeks ago when the Packers lost the NFC Championship game. People become distraught over, what I think are strange reasons. Or maybe Jonah is being very dramatic and exaggerating his level of despair. I can imagine God rolling His eyes and saying, "Oh, come on." The Lord instead responds with a pointed, rhetorical question: **Jonah 4:4 Is it right for you to be angry?**

Jonah's initial response, "Yes,...You bet." But upon further reflection, I think he would realize, "No, I have no right to be angry." We will explore that more next Sunday.

So what does all this mean for us? Well, I am afraid the theme is kind of negative because I think this passage is basically a warning: "Don't be like Jonah." Yet, because many of us can be like Jonah sometimes, it is important that we recognize his mistakes, and by God's grace, seek to avoid them. I want to focus on three things Jonah does that we should seek to avoid.

Number 1: Don't twist and misuse the bible. Frankly, the author of Jonah doesn't really focus on this. Yet, I find it totally appalling, that Jonah twists scripture, conveniently leaving out an important sentence, to try and make an accusation against God. Now, in the book of Psalms we see David and others quoting the bible to "remind" God of his promises. That is not really necessary, but is permissible. Jonah's choice to misuse the bible is on par with what Satan does as he tempts Jesus. In Matthew 4:6 Satan is tempting Jesus to misuse His power and leap from the pinnacle of the temple. He quotes from **Psalms 91 "God will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.** There Satan rips a couple bible verses out of context and pretends they imply something they are not saying at all. Folks, the bible is a precise gift the Lord has given us. God did not have to reveal Himself to us, but He graciously does this through His word. The bible instructs, guides, encourages and warns us in so many different ways. It is God's word through which He speaks to us. To twist and misuse these words is like spitting the God's face. But we do it sometimes. It happens on both sides of the

spectrum. Probably the most misused verse in the bible is **Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged.**

People pretend Jesus was telling us we have no right to determine or declare that any particular behavior is right or wrong. That is silly because the bible is full of declarations that certain behaviors are wrong. It tells us it is wrong to have a judgmental attitude where you pretend you know someone's motives for a particular act. It is wrong to try to give God advice on how he should punish a particular sinner.

But there is abuse of scripture on the other side as well. Someone may quote **Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.** Now, it is okay to quote that verse as a joke, but to argue that this verse teaches that wise people are political conservatives is really misusing the bible. Whenever we start using the bible prove a point or bolster an argument, we often are misusing it. Whenever you point to a verse in the bible and say, "See, I'm right," you are on thin ice. The bible is not meant to pump up our self-righteousness. The bible should be used not as a window to look out and see what is wrong with everyone out there, but as a mirror which reveals how we fall short apart from Jesus. When we read and understand the bible correctly we will be humbled, admonished, and encouraged by God's gracious love for us, despite our flaws. Or I could put it this way: when we read and understand the bible correctly, the Holy Spirit will use it to produce spiritual fruit in our lives... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It seems that even back in the 1950's, Westerners would often portray a religious character as someone who quoted the bible and was angry, self-righteous, and harsh. Those are not the fruit of the spirit. And frankly, if you are reading the bible and finding yourself becoming more angry, self-righteous, and harsh, you are not reading it the right way.

Friends, at Chisholm Baptist Church, we strive to be a truth driven church. That means we are people of the book, this book. The bible plays a central role in almost everything we do. That is part of our reputation. Yet, I also want our reputation to be that we don't twist and misuse God's word. Yes, the bible is a sword of the spirit and has an important place in spiritual battles we may be called to fight. But it is not a club for

beating those who disagree with us. More than anything the bible is a tool that the Lord uses to shape us to be the people he calls us to be. That is the best way to use the bible.

Number 2: Don't let patriotism become an idol. I think that was Jonah's problem. I don't think he despised the people of Nineveh simply because of their ethnicity or because he didn't like their football team or something. The Assyrians were a real security threat to Israel. It was in the national interest of Jonah's country for Nineveh to be destroyed. So when it comes to a choice between what Jonah understands to be in the best interests of the nation of Israel, or obeying the Lord, Jonah chooses his patriotic duty. Israel first, then the Lord. Now, it was not wrong for Jonah to be concerned about Israel's national security. But when the Lord told him to go preach to Nineveh, he needed to trust that God knew what He was doing and that ultimately He, the Lord, was Israel's only sure defense. Now, I admit this is a part with which I am not real comfortable. Even though I never served in the American military, I am a patriot. I wore an American flag on my lapel long before it was popular to do so. I get choked up almost every time I sing the "Star Spangled Banner," or "America the Beautiful," or "My Country Tis of Thee," or "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". I consider the U.S. Constitution one of the most important documents ever composed, and believe it established what is perhaps the finest form of government in the history of the world. I love this country.

But I understand it has to be America second and God first. I must never allow my loyalty to a nation to interfere with my loyalty to the Lord Jesus. One of my favorite movies ever is "Chariots of Fire," the film that tells the story of Eric Liddle. He chooses not to run in the 100-meter dash in the 1924 Paris Olympics because the trial heats were held on Sunday. He believes participating in the race would violate the Lord's Sabbath. Plenty of Britains thought he was letting their country down. After Liddle meets with the Prince of Wales and still refuses to run, Lord Cadogan says, "In my day it was King first, and God after." The Duke of Sutherland replies, "Yes, and the war to end all wars, meaning World War 1, bitterly proved your point." Friends, no matter where or when some lives, it needs to be God first, then King or country.

It is important to remember, as Tim Keller says, "Good things make the best idols." Love of country, patriotism is a good thing. Love of family or spouse is a good thing. Love of achievements or success is often thought of as a good thing. Yet, these can all become idols. And when a good thing becomes an idol, it is no longer a good thing. In fact, it becomes a very dangerous thing. So what does it look like when someone makes patriotism an idol? Well, whenever you start ignoring certain parts of the bible because it doesn't fit with you national or political agenda, that reflects a patriotic or political idolatry. For example, we are in a time of lots of political tension. Many churches and Christian organizations are struggling to maintain unity in the midst of the divide. That is no surprise. I admit, I have a hard time understanding why some folks have the political views they do. And it is easy to get frustrated. Yet, the bible is clear, our relationships to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, trump our political differences. No pun intended. **1 John 4:20 (NLT) If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?**

Folks, that is a tough verse, period. I struggle with loving people who have the same political views I have. But if you ever find yourself thinking of someone as a political enemy first, and fellow Christian second, you have fallen into the trap of idolatry, putting politics or patriotism ahead of the Lord.

So, let me be clear. It is a good thing to be patriotic. It is a bad thing if your love for your country supersedes or even equals your love for the Lord.

Number 3: Don't reject gospel missions. The number one motive of what we call missions ought to be concern for the glory of God. I think this was true in the Old Testament as well. It should have troubled Jonah that the people of Nineveh were pagan idol worshippers and not giving the Lord the glory He is due.

Psalm 96: 3-5 Declare God's glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples. For the Lord is great and is highly praised; he is feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Again, we know the people of Nineveh repented of their evil deeds. Whether they stopped worshipping idols and become worshippers of the Lord, we don't know. But they certainly make a move in the right direction. God was pleased with their response. If something makes the Lord happy, no prophet of God should be unhappy. When the Lord is honored it should cause God's people to rejoice. Jonah's despair comes partly because he is only thinking about himself and what he perceives to be his best interests. He is not thinking about the glory of God, as he should be.

Folks, the same thing is true today. It should trouble us that there are people all over this planet who do not worship the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we are called by the Lord to declare His glory among the nations, to go for the sake of His name to another part of the world and call people to turn to the true and living God, we should be willing to do that. If he doesn't ask us to do that, but calls others to do so, we should be willing to support their efforts. That includes financial, emotional and prayer support. And that is true even if the called missionary goes to a place that we consider to be an enemy. Chris and Steph have been sent by Chisholm Baptist Church to a place which is not a traditional ally of the United States. Some people have asked them, "Why would you go as missionaries to a Muslim country? Those people hate us." Well, that is not true. Not all Muslim people hate us. But Chris and Steph's answer is this: "Our primary reason for going in not because those folks are wonderful people who deserve God's grace. We are going because those people are not glorifying God...and we want to see Him glorified by those people. We are going for the sake of the name of Jesus.

And we are also going because we care about people who don't know Jesus." Sure, some of them hate Americans. They are enemies. But Jesus commands us to love our enemies and how can we claim to love someone if we don't make an effort to tell them about Jesus. That, friends, is the second motive for missionaries: compassion for those who don't know the Lord. We will talk about this more next week, but Jonah doesn't really have any compassion for the Ninevites. God has compassion for them. God has compassion for Jonah. But Jonah's heart is empty and hard. Friends, we should have compassion for people who don't know the Lord. This is true no matter what their religious or political beliefs are, no

matter what their ethnic background is, no matter if they are "like us" or not. And it doesn't matter if these people live on the other side of the street or the other side of the world. I am always grateful for the English monks who went to Sweden and Norway and told my savage Viking ancestors about Jesus. The monk's compassion for people who treated them so brutally shows they had a clear understanding of the great commission that some Christians have today. When our enemies become believers in Jesus, they become our spiritual brothers and sisters, and they are no longer our enemies. Thus, telling these folks about Jesus is not just good for them, but for us as well.

Friends, the answer to God's question in verse is, "No, it was not right for Jonah to be angry." Yet, as I think of this portion of Jonah, I am reminded what the apostle Paul said about the people of Israel in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:11 These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age. Jonah's anger is an example that warns us, do not misuse the bible, don't make a good thing like patriotism an idol, don't reject or ignore God's plan of gospel missions. Friend, if any of those three things are happening in your life, or might happen in your life, ask God for the grace you need to heed those warnings, make changes if necessary, and avoid the traps into which Jonah fell.