

Jonah in Biblical Perspective
A Pouting Prophet And A Persuading God
Jonah 4

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We will be looking at these concluding verses in Jonah 4 but before we do I want to relay something to you that was quite an experience for me. This incident happened recently after Cindy and I had been married. I was a new believer in the Lord. One of the deals I had to make with her dad for us to get married was I had to commit to putting her through school before I'd go back to school. Well, first of all I had to commit that I'd go back to school and I know her mother probably never believed that until I actually got my diploma that I was actually going to accomplish that. But secondly, was that first I was committed to putting her through school and making sure that she finished. So we did that. One of the jobs that I was able to do in order to save up money for me to go back to school and to also pay for her education was to work for United Parcel Service. I was one of those guys in the brown uniform and we used to have to wear a hat and a black plastic bow tie. I remember my training and the guy who took me out to train me. He told me, "You're doing a good job, you're just not doing enough of it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "To work for us there is something I think you have to learn how to do." I said, "What is that?" This is where I got my first introduction to the phrase "multi-tasking." He said, "You have to do more than just one thing at a time. That's what we are paying you for, to do more than one thing at a time." So I had this job where I drove 125 miles day, made 98 stops, 16 pick ups and I was supposed to get it done in 8 hours. If I didn't get it done in 8 hours then I was the one that it costs. So I learned how to multi task, to do more than one thing at a time. Now that's not always easy for us and of course there are times when we shouldn't multi task.

When we get to the series in the Seven Essentials I want to talk about the fact that we need to do a little less multi tasking and a little bit more simplicity but there are times when we do have to multi task. The amazing thing is that God does not have the same limitations that we do and He is constantly multi tasking. It made me think of the times when our elders and deacons meet and we pray through the congregation at our session meetings. We divide the congregation up and we are at our tables with 5 to 8 at a table and we're praying, calling upon the Lord. This last week I was thinking take what happens here in this room and multiply it through out all of the world and the Lord God is receiving those requests. He is addressing each one of them. He is handling us personally and individually and yet He is weaving all of it together in His perfect plan and for His glory and our good. He is accomplishing it all and it is no task for Him to great.

I would like for you to put this in your mind as we bring our study of Jonah to a conclusion. Very seldom is the thing you see God doing, the only thing God is doing even in that thing that He is doing. Is that clear? Very seldom when God is doing something, the obvious thing is seldom the only thing. In fact, I'm sure it never is the only thing. Our habit is when something is happening and we see it, particularly if it is related to us we get consumed with it and of course we give glory to God as God is

impacting us through it but what I want you to know is when that thing is happening that's not all that God is doing. So it is in the book of Jonah.

What a glorious thing, the greatest revival recorded in history is in this book. The great awakening of the city of Nineveh, a pagan, evil, wicked city is turned to the Lord. Yet that obvious thing is not the only thing that God is doing. In fact, God is doing multiple things at the very same time. All of which are a part of His providential work for His glory, the salvation of His people and the expression of His grace even to those who don't know Him as Savior and Lord. We call that common grace where God is allowing blessings to flow even upon those who do not know Him. It's all happening around this thing that we've been studying out of the life of Jonah. So let's look at Jonah 4.

This great awakening has occurred. All of these people have turned to the Lord. The Lord has said, "I will not bring judgment at this time upon Nineveh." He relents of the promised judgment and now that He relents of the judgment God's grace and mercy flow through the ministry of Jonah. There is a great response. There is all of this wonderful news of revival and awakening and so what happens to the preacher?

Jonah 4:1 says, "*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.*" I was trying to put myself in this position where somehow I would preach a sermon, and it wouldn't have to be a great sermon like "Yet 40 days and God will overthrow Birmingham" and the word goes out in Birmingham. People repent. The mayor writes a proclamation. The town and the city begin to give praise to the Lord and then it would make me mad. Jonah gets upset because God's grace and mercy has sovereignly, effectively, powerfully with transformation, fallen upon a wicked city. Now let's see why this is true.

Jonah 4:2-4 says, *2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"* Let me translate that. God is basically saying in verse 4, "Jonah does this make sense that you are mad, angry and displeased with Me because I have been gracious, merciful, slow to anger, relenting of judgment and have extended the hand of blessing to these people? Does this make sense for *you* to respond this way, to My graciousness? You whom I called but you didn't listen but I called a second time, you who would have made your company among pagan sailors but I sought you out, you who would have fled from me and perished in a storm but I saved you, you who would rebel against Me but I prepared and appointed a great fish through which I have graciously moved in your life and changed you, Jonah. Does this make sense that *you* would be angry and displeased at My grace to others in light of My grace and mercy that has stayed with you?"

Here is an enormous revival in the city of Nineveh and two completely different responses. One is the response of God's graciousness upon this city and the other is the response of Jonah's anger against the God who has been gracious to them. So there was one event and two responses. That is what the pouting prophet looks like in Jonah 4:1-4. Now let's watch the persuading God begin to go to work on Jonah.

Jonah 4:5-11 says, *5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 6 Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." 10 And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"*

What an interesting statement. In this text where the Lord is dealing with Jonah there is something behind Jonah's anger that you can't miss here. One is Jonah has paraphrased from the books of Moses where Moses reports the goodness of God. When God declares, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy. I am the Lord Thy God. I am the sovereign God." Paul himself will quote that same text in Romans 9 speaking of the Lord who is the Potter and we are the clay and His absolute right to make vessels of use and vessels of judgment. It is that of course that Jonah is well aware of but Jonah is also well aware that God has made a covenant promise to His people, that He would bring judgment against the nations that rebelled against Him and who cursed His people. So is Nineveh.

Nineveh, that city of Assyria, is a city of paganism and rebellion against God and hatred upon God's people. Basically what Jonah is saying is "God You are contradicting Yourself. You show grace and mercy but You have not fulfilled Your promise to bring judgment upon those who curse You. You said You would bless those who bless us but You also said You would curse and bring judgment against those who would curse us. I have called upon You for the imprecatory judgments upon them. Instead You have called me to be an instrument whereby You have blessed them."

It is in the midst of that of course that Jonah has also though conveniently forgotten another promise that God when He established His people, while He declared that He would bring judgment upon those who would destroy His people to protect His people, also has said this to Abraham. I am going to raise up a seed from you and in you I will bless the nations of the earth. He has already showed that Israel exists from their father Abraham to bless the Gentiles. He has given a little taste like Rahab. He shows it by reaching Gibeonites, by His graciousness to even nations that are under judgment like Moab but as He has shown it in measure He now shows it in an extraordinary way to Nineveh. With Nineveh He gives just a small taste of Pentecost that's coming and the Gospel will go to the nations. He gives a small window and view of what He is about to do from which we have been brought into the Kingdom of God. We, who our fathers and mothers were pagans were rebellious against God. Jonah of course has dismissed that of being apart of what the Lord is doing here.

Now the Lord begins to teach Jonah. As the Lord begins to teach Jonah, Jonah has left his call again and gone outside the city instead of in the city in ministering to it.

Instead of ministering to the city he is sitting outside the city waiting to see what will happen to the city and certainly calling upon and seeking God's judgment upon it and not the furtherance of this enormous awakening that is taking place that has gone all the way up to the king, who has given an edict of fasting, prayer, repentance and worship of the most High God. Then the Lord causes a plant, in the Hebrew it is a very fast growing plant, a castor oil plant which grows up and has a lot of leaves on it. It provides this wonderful shade for Jonah as he sits and looks out over the city. It was much better than the shelter he had built and God now appointed a great plant.

Have you ever wondered how many things God's sovereign providence appoints for us? God has done a lot of appointing for Jonah. He appointed a storm to chase him down in a ship. He appointed the finger of identification of him through the sailors. He appointed and made a great fish to deliver him, discipline/judge, develop him and to make him a type of Christ by being in the fish's belly three days and three nights. He has now appointed a great revival in a pagan city. He has now appointed a plant to grow up and shade him. Then God appoints a worm who destroys the plant. This plant that so wonderfully came about in such a miraculous way has now been removed by the worm and Jonah starts getting faint. The sun rises and God does another appointment. This time He appoints the sirocco wind, the east wind that comes off the Sahara desert and it arrives and blows across causing Jonah to feel faint.

If I have ever seen a man with a death wish it is Jonah. He was willing to go to Tarshish. He was willing to die on a ship. He was willing to be thrown overboard to die and now he would rather die than serve the Lord as the preacher of the great awakening to this city. Now he is ready to die again. Then the Lord begins this wonderful way that He loves to teach and that is He starts asking some questions.

He asks him, "Why are you angry? Is it because the plants not here anymore?" Jonah says, "You better believe I'm angry that the plant's not here anymore. Look I'm faint and I'm about to die." God says, "Jonah did I appoint the plant for you? Why would you be angry about the plant that you had nothing to do with, but I graciously and mercifully gave it to you? Why would you be angry about that? Why would you not embrace the worm that I appointed from which discipline and judgment has now come upon you?" Then He says, "If I would do that with a plant for you and if that would bless you, why would My blessing not be upon that city?" Through this question He has now explained something more as to why He blessed that city.

That city was on the verge of judgment because it was wicked and God was about to bring judgment. Then God sent the preaching of the Message and the wind of revival blew. Because the wind of revival blew God's hand of judgment was removed and not only was there a blessing of revival but now the extending blessing upon the children. When He says, "Those who don't know their right hand from their left" means He is speaking of children. Because He has done that think of the graciousness and mercy now to these children. God's common grace is not only that God cares for us made in His image and that in His glory He saves some of us and in His kindness He shows His grace and mercy even to those who are undeserving and helpless but He even cares about all of His creation even down to the cattle. Because He has done this, instead of judgment falling and consuming all of them, which God could rightly do for His glory, now repentance has occurred and God's withholding of judgment now extends with blessings

to the children that are in that city and to the elements of His creation, even the dumb beasts. The Lord cares for it all and is concerned about it.

What are the things that you and I need to learn here along with Jonah? I want to give you three things. Here's the first thing. An absence of joy in the mercy of God ultimately reveals a heart of self righteousness in our lives. Look at what He says to Jonah. "Jonah, I have been gracious to you. I called you. You disobeyed but I pursued you. You were in dire straits upon a storm that I had sent but I saved you. You were thrown overboard and could have died but I prepared a fish for you. I then disciplined you in the belly of that fish. I then brought you to your ministry. I then blessed you and even now when your anger is against Me, I am graciously working with you. Does it make sense for you to have distaste, hatred and anger for My mercy upon others? The only way it makes sense is if you think you deserve what I have been giving you." A heart of self righteousness will always eventually reveal itself with a lack of patience, a lack of forbearance, a lack of forgiveness and a lack of rejoicing when God is gracious to our enemies.

Not long ago I received a letter inviting me to engage in the praying of the imprecatory Psalms which are the Psalms the psalmists declare of bringing judgment upon others who have rebelled against the Lord. Let me say, I have no problem praying for God's judgment to accompany sin because I hate sin but when I have been invited to pray the imprecatory Psalms I have to stop and think. It's not that I don't think there is ultimately a place and a time for it but when I look back at the sinfulness and the evil in my life and in my heart that would call for God's imprecatory acts of judgment upon me and yet He was gracious to me, then as much as my heart hurts so deeply at the work of the pornographer, the abortuaries, at the work of those who would deconstruct and de-civilize my nation where God has blessed in the past, then I cannot easily arrive at such a place, because I am fully aware that I am only what I am by the grace of God. Without Him I would be lost and in my sin.

I know I still have sin in me, there is no need to remind me. The Holy Spirit reminds me. I have a wife. I have others that do so regularly but I could still be in my sin. But God was gracious. I believe that whenever you and I begin to lose patience, forbearance and particularly when we can't rejoice in God's good, gracious acts among those who would even be our enemies and even those who are His enemies, then it is a pulling back of the shade to show some seed so Pharisee-ism that we think we are where we are because of who we are and what we have done, instead of we are where we are because of what He has done freely for us. He has been gracious and kind to us.

The second takeaway is we can acknowledge the sovereignty of God verbally, but we can still deny it actually. We can confessionally be accurate by saying "I believe that God is sovereign" but then when the sovereignty of God is declared and expressed in Scripture and in life we can deny it actually because it impinges upon what we think are our sovereign rights before God. Tomorrow morning at 6:30am I'll be teaching on the doctrine of God and the decrees of God and the most amazing thing that is stated so simply in the confession is that God's sovereign decrees never nullify second causes and the acts of men and women in their choices of life, on the contrary it affirms them and uses them. I will tell you right now that eventually when I run up against that I have a very difficult time wrapping my brain around that where God is sovereign and I'm not a robot and that God has declared the end from the beginning and He has predetermined all

things freely after the counsel of His own will yet what I do I really did. Or to go to the other side, if I'm really doing what I'm doing then God's sovereignty must be limited until I allow Him to do something by my choices. The fact that God is fully sovereign and I am fully a free moral agent is something that is so difficult to grasp but I do know this. As I am dealing with the free moral agency of my will and the supreme sovereignty of God's will, when my will meets His will I know who wins.

I am thankful and I am grateful because the Lord my God is good and wise. There are many times that I'm like Lot where I think I'm choosing green valleys but actually I am choosing Sodom and Gomorrah but God intervenes to keep us. God knows what needs to happen in my life. It is amazing what He does as He works all these things together in His sovereignty and this brings me to the third takeaway.

The third takeaway is the providence of God is sure. What God has declared and purposed for His glory and the good of His people, and you can rest assured of that, yet not all things are good but all things work together for good for those who love God and those who are called according to His purpose. You can be sure that God has promised that all of these things will be worked together for our good and everything will be for His glory, even the destruction of Satan and hell will be for the glory of God. As one preacher said, "As Satan gets cast into hell on his heels you will see written 'To God be the glory, great things He has done.'"

God is even able to take the sins that we author and order them for His own glory. He took the sin of a rebellious Judas and turned it into an opportunity for my redemption. He took the sin of Adam and used it to manifest attributes of God that I would have never known except for that sin that plunged us into a sin record and a sin nature. Now I know of His grace that is greater than my sin. Now I know of His patience, His kindness, His lovingkindness, His mercies and I would have never of know that. God even took that sin of Adam, of Judas and God takes those sins, while He takes no delight in the death of the wicked or sin and He is never the author of sin, He is able to order it all for His glory and ultimately for my good. So I believe fully and totally in the doctrine of divine providence. It is sure.

I also believe it is multifaceted. God is doing so much in any singular event that we certainly won't know it all until we get to heaven and to be honest with you I don't think we're going to know it all when we get to heaven. I think that's why we'll have eternity. There will be a lot of things to learn. I think we'll be amazed at all that was going on. God Your providence is almost as complicated as my pastor's sermon outlines. Man, it's amazing all the things that You're doing. It is overwhelming. We have no idea of the things that He is doing.

I compare the providence of God to a trip that my family used to make every October. The changing of the leaves would happen up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. So we would go to church and my mom would have a picnic basket prepared. Then we would go right up highway 16, up by Lincolnton, I can see it now, passed the apple orchards that were being harvested and then right up into the mountains to see all of the beautiful colors. We would sit on the side and have a picnic. We did this every year, one Sunday afternoon as a family, after church and the reason I remember it is because that was the only Sunday night we would ever miss because we just couldn't get back in time for that Sunday night service. My mom and dad wouldn't miss Sunday night for the

Wizard of Oz or even Peter Pan. I'd say, "Can't we stay home and watch..." They'd say, "Nope we're going to church." However that was the one time we would miss.

We would ride along the roads and you would see these side stores. As you rode by them, these mountaineer ladies had their crafts out. I think the right term for these crafts was needlepoint. Periodically we would stop, get some apples and look at some of these needlepoint crafts. Very seldom would we buy because it cost money and our family didn't believe in spending money like that but we would take a look at it. I still remember going up to those needlepoints. When the wind was blowing these needlepoints would turn around and all those threads were sticking out on the back side. When you looked at it you could tell there was a pattern there but I couldn't tell exactly what the pattern was. There was enough there to know there was a pattern and then the wind would shift and it would turn around to the front and I'd say, "Oh that's what it is."

That is the best way I can explain the providence of God. Most of my life I'm looking at the back side. I know God is doing something and I can vaguely see the pattern. Every once in a while, and I will give you an illustration in closing, God will flip it around to the front and I will see so many of the threads of God's providence and say, "Oh my goodness, is that what You were doing? Wow and that's what You were doing and that's what You were doing and because of that You were doing this and with that You did this." Every once in a while He will do that. I can't wait to see how much of it I will get to see when I get to heaven, in the new heavens and the new earth. God is capable of multi tasking and He is doing it all the time.

Here He is saving Nineveh with a great awakening but before He gets there He has some pagan sailors He's going to save back here in the ship through the rebellion on Jonah. By the way, when He is doing that with Jonah, He will start teaching a lesson to Jonah. And when He does that and Jonah gets thrown into the sea and appoints a great fish, He is also setting up a type that will be used in the New Testament to prophesy of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And while He is doing all of that He is showing the fullness of the grace and mercy that will come through that resurrected Christ that will not only save wicked pagans but the Gospel will go to the Gentile nations and the pagans of this world just like it would to Nineveh. And all along the way God keeps using preachers that He is working through and yet He is working on them as He is working through them, like Jonah. Praise the Lord, He is still able to work through them while He is working on them and while He is working on them you would think they weren't fit for Him to work through them but He can still get it done because the power is in Him and not in them.

In the midst of all of this He is really telling us through Jonah what was wrong with Israel. Israel thought they had been set up as a reservoir of God's grace instead of a river of God's grace to the nations. Jonah was not only a preacher that needed work, Jonah represented where Israel as a nation was. We're not that interested in being an instrument to bless the nations, we would prefer just to be Your nation and You bring judgment upon all of it but that's not why God called His people. Through them the river of life was to flow and not be damned up as a reservoir with self righteousness and arrogance. Through all of those things God is working. I'd love to give you many illustrations on this but I will just give you one.

I've mentioned before that I was converted through a death of a 39 year old woman of a 40 year old elder at Faith Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

This woman had a cerebral hemorrhage on Christmas Day and their 4 little girls asked that Cindy and I come and keep them. It was through the witness of that church and the witness of her husband, Jimmy Elliot, when he told me that I needed to understand that He wouldn't bring her back because of what she had. When he told me it wouldn't be that long until he would be with her and he didn't know what it would be like raising 4 girls he also said, "I know one thing God never promised that all things are good but He promises they will work for good and God has a plan in this Harry. You need to hear this." When I heard that I went in the other room and talked with someone who told me, "This is the hand of Christ. You've been to church. You need to come to Jesus. We're glad you came to church but it's not church that gives you a heart at times like this. It's Jesus." I did commit my life. I went into a hallway and committed my life to Jesus.

I went back into the hallway and said, "Now Lord if there's anything else you want me to do will You just let me know?" I had no idea where that P.S. to my prayer was going to lead me but off it was back to East Carolina. I was called to the ministry and I realized that religion and philosophy at East Carolina was not going to prepare me. I went on to Covenant College and on to the ministry. I started work at a little independent church then into the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) under the gracious influence of men like Henry Krabbendam, Dr. Frank Barker, and Jim Baird. There was also Dr Sproul and Jim Boyce who were very patient and gracious with all of my many questions because I had so much I needed to learn and still do. Then the first church I pastored was in Miami, Florida where the average age was 69. I think that was a joke because the lady who figured that out had been 59 for ten years. The Lord turned that ministry around.

Then I got a phone call from Terry Gieger and I was brought up to meet with Dr. Barker about sending me to Charlotte to plant a church. We started with 38 people meeting in a modular unit. It was no pressure, just go plant that church and by the way we expect you to plant an entire Presbytery too. So no pressure, Harry, that's just what we're kind of expecting, a whole Presbytery. I thought what a challenge that is but God was gracious and did a lot of things there. Then it snowed the first Sunday I was to preach in that modular unit which is not real conducive for attendance but we got started anyway. The advertisement was that our new pastor who has come to help us plant this church from which we are praying that God will allow us to plant a Presbytery, will give his testimony tonight. So I gave my testimony that night.

While I was giving my testimony I saw a young lady who kind of kept hiding from me. There weren't that many people in there but she was doing a good job of hiding from me every time I tried to look at her but afterwards I caught her. She said, "I didn't want you to see me because I was crying. Do you remember me?" I said, "Yes I do but please help me." She said, "I'm Jane, I'm the third daughter of the four daughters. I am Jane Elliot and for 15 years I have hated God for taking my mother. I know there's a God and I know He died for my sins but I have hated Him for taking my mother." Then the tears began to flow again as she looked at me and said, "But I did tell God this, if you could ever show me one thing that made my mother's death have meaning then I will come home. Tonight I heard hundreds of things that the Lord did with my mother." Not only did she come home to Jesus but she started coming to that church. It began to grow and she was our single's ministry. Then we began to reach out and it didn't take one young man very long to find out that this was a fine young woman. They got

married and they helped us plant one of the first churches of that Presbytery. Isn't God's providence amazing?

God's providence is multi-faceted. The saving of an unbelievably, immoral, ungodly man, then calling him into ministry and then working all kinds of things all over the place, not the least of which is coming back into the life of one of those daughters to bring her to saving faith in Christ from which a Godly marriage, church planting and I have no idea where these threads of providence are still going on today but I know Who does. It is the Lord God. When He does something, very seldom is that the only thing. He is doing many things for His glory and it would be well with me that I would rejoice when the enemies of God as I was, now are saved by His hands. I can have joy that the same grace that came to me through multiple providences has now gone to others. O how great is our God, let's surrender to Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time that we have been able to spend together. Thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word. We rejoice in You! Father, wherever the seeds of self righteousness appear please remind us that we are what we are because of Your appointed providences and so God may we rejoice in Your hand of blessing to others. May we plead for it and may we labor for it. Would You give us great confidence that Your providence in our lives is sure, never failing and is doing much more than we could even imagine, in Jesus' Name, Amen.