

JANUARY 14, 2024

SERIES 2: GOD IS FAITHFUL

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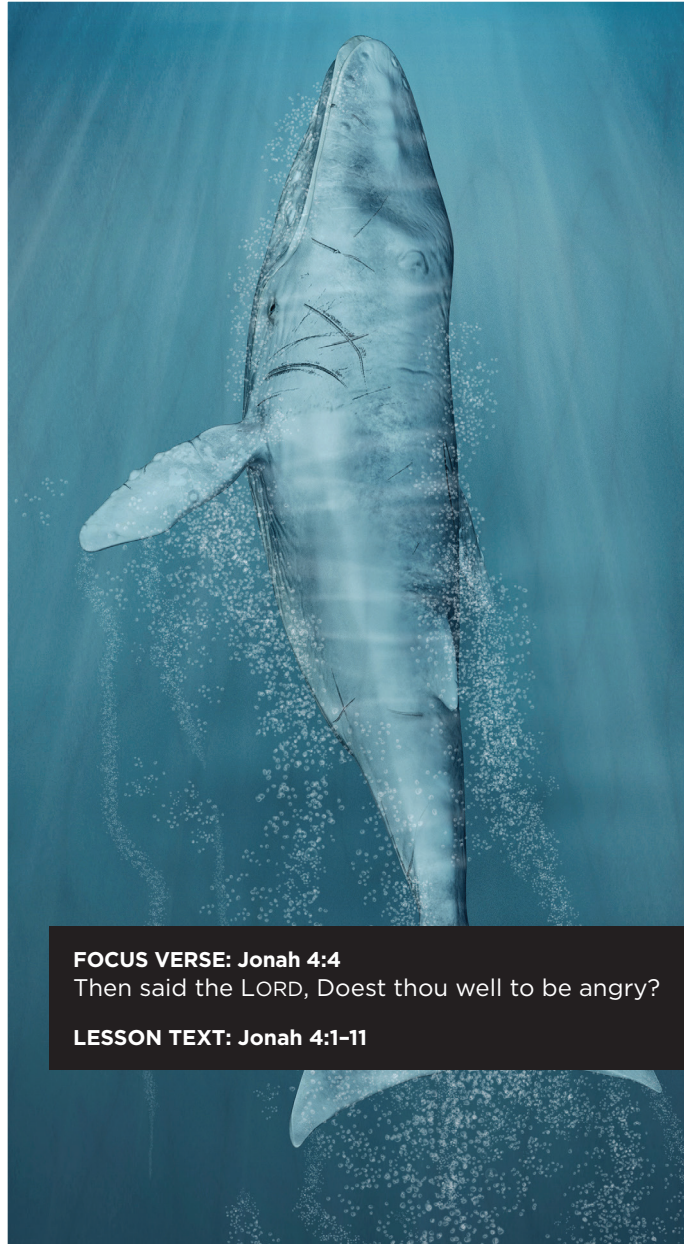
THREE DAYS IN THE DEEP

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's grace and mercy extend to everyone.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will rejoice in God's mercy to my enemies.



FOCUS VERSE: Jonah 4:4

Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

LESSON TEXT: Jonah 4:1-11



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah is one of the few people in history who witnessed a revival of 120,000 people being saved from their wickedness and sin. What a miracle! But Jonah's response was as unique as what he witnessed. Jonah was angry at God for showing mercy on Nineveh, the capital city of the pagan Gentile nation of Assyria.

As wrong as his response was, the larger historical context of the era in which Jonah ministered helps put his flawed response into perspective. Jonah prophesied during the era of King Jeroboam II in Israel during the period of the divided kingdom (II Kings 14:23-29). Jeroboam II was a wicked king, like many of the kings of Israel, and Israel lived in rampant sin. While Israel lived wickedly, Nineveh repented and received God's mercy. Such a merciful outcome could have been Israel's testimony as well, but they did not repent at Jonah's preaching. It is safe to assume that since Israel lived wickedly during Jonah's lifetime, Jonah's only success as a prophet came in his ministry to Nineveh. Jonah's anger can be partially explained by his desire for Israel to be saved and Assyria to be punished; instead, the opposite happened.

The Book of Jonah provides us with multiple lessons. First, God has mercy and love for all people, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, and He will graciously offer His salvation to anyone who cries out to Him and repents. What a joyous truth! The second lesson is found in the prophet Jonah, whose actions we should not emulate. Jonah was a begrudging, unwilling missionary who grew angry when sinners were saved.

Ironically, just as Israel remained in sin while Nineveh repented, Jonah willfully remained outside of God's blessing as it poured out on Nineveh. The city of Nineveh experienced revival, but Jonah sat on a hillside outside of Nineveh and yelled angrily at God. Jonah could have remained in Nineveh and continued to bless and edify the city and do the work of a prophet, but rather than rejoicing with the repentant sinners experiencing God's mercy, Jonah allowed his personal bigotry and selfishness to keep him separated. The Book of Jonah concludes with a happy ending for Nineveh but a tragic ending for the prophet, who is last seen on a desert hill overlooking Nineveh, wishing for death.

JONAH IS ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE IN HISTORY WHO WITNESSED A REVIVAL OF 120,000 PEOPLE BEING SAVED FROM THEIR WICKEDNESS AND SIN.

DAY 1

Jonah 4:1-2

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

² And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Biblical Insight

Jonah's angry response implied he avoided going to Nineveh in the first place because he knew God would save the Assyrians if they repented. As a prophet, Jonah was keenly aware of God's nature as being gracious, merciful, longsuffering, and kind. But Jonah didn't want Nineveh to experience any of those blessings of God. By admitting this fact, the prophet placed himself in direct opposition to God's will. God wanted Nineveh to repent and be saved, but Jonah did not.

Daily Devotion

During the 1929 Rose Bowl, the California Golden Bears were playing the "Ramblin' Wreck" of Georgia Tech. By the second quarter, the score was tied. Suddenly, the Georgia Tech running back fumbled the ball. California player Roy Riegels scooped up the ball and began running. After running seventy yards, Riegels was tackled on the one-yard line by his own teammates. As he sat on the ground in shock, Riegels realized he had been running in the wrong direction.

We may be able to run fast or run long distances, but if we are running in the wrong direction, it is all in vain. Jonah expended energy and resources trying to run away from God's plan only to find himself in Nineveh. Running away from God never ends well.

If God is pulling on your heart to do something, stop running from Him and run toward Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to prevent the root of Bitterness or Roots of Hatred in your life today?*

DAY 2

Jonah 4:3-4

³ Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

⁴ Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

Biblical Insight

Jonah's wish for death was an extreme and shocking response to seeing 120,000 people saved. Essentially, Jonah would rather die than share God's mercy with his enemies. Such a level of pettiness and bigotry is hard to imagine. The question God asked in verse 4 initially went unanswered: "Doest thou well to be angry?" This question can also be translated: "Is it right for you to be angry?" (NKJV, NIV), or "Do you have a good reason to be angry?" (NASB). Jonah's initial lack of response may indicate he already knew he was in the wrong.

Daily Devotion

During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, being Tutsi made a person a target. In her autobiography, *Chosen to Die, Destined to Live*, Frida Gashumba recounts the night her neighbors killed her family and looted her home. Thankfully, a Hutu neighbor rescued Frida and hid her for three months until the government was overthrown and the killing stopped.

While in hiding, Frida became a Christian. One day Frida found herself sitting in her neighbor's home where the cupboards were filled with her family's plates and cups. Frida was in the home of the neighbor who had looted her home. Frida declared to her neighbor, "I have come to make peace with you." Then she shared her faith in Jesus and prayed with the entire family.

Reflect on the last time someone hurt you. Do you desire for that person to know Jesus and know peace? Is there mercy in your heart?



Reflection and Prayer

» *Who in your life may need God's Mercy rather than your judgment today, how would you apply this principle today?*

DAY 3

Jonah 4:5-6

⁵ So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

⁶ And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

Biblical Insight

Jonah's curiosity over Nineveh's fate was undoubtedly morbid. He wanted to see them destroyed, so he went out to a hillside to watch and wait. However, just as God went looking for Nineveh—a people lost in a spiritual wilderness and needing God's mercy—God went looking for Jonah on the hillside as Jonah experienced his own internal turmoil. Truly God had compassion on both Nineveh and Jonah; He wanted both to experience His mercy. God caused a gourd (a "plant," probably a castor-oil plant, known for being leafy and growing fast) to grow miraculously to give Jonah shade.

Daily Devotion

On the evening of April 14, 1912, six ice warnings were telegraphed to the RMS *Titanic* from other ships. Yet the captain of the *Titanic* only received the first three warnings. In response to those warnings, he altered the ship's course to head farther south in hopes of avoiding ice fields.

The last three messages were never relayed to the captain because the telegraph operators of the *Titanic* were too busy to be inconvenienced. One hour later, the *Titanic* hit an iceberg. It began to sink at 2:20 AM on Monday, April 15.

God loves people. His will is for everyone to be saved. He has called us to warn others of the danger of sin, the hardship of vice, and the reality of Hell. We must not see our calling as messengers as an inconvenience. Do you prioritize sharing God's warnings and His message of salvation?

Reflection and Prayer

» *When has God's wanted you to show Mercy and it has been inconvenient for you to do for others and how can you change?*

DAY 4

Jonah 4:7-9

⁷ But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

⁹ And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

Biblical Insight

God prepared a worm to destroy the gourd. As Jonah sat near the dead plant under the beating sun, he “fainted” and again wished for death. However, Jonah’s suffering is ironic: he did not have to sit in the beating sun. He could have joined the Ninevites in the city, who likely would have gladly fed, watered, and sheltered the prophet who helped save them from certain destruction. Alternatively, Jonah could have started his journey home instead of waiting and hoping to see Nineveh destroyed. However, just as bitterness was destroying his heart, his stubbornness was destroying his body.

Daily Devotion

Herman Melville’s 1851 novel *Moby-Dick* depicts the travels of a whaling ship captain, Ahab, on a quest to kill the giant white whale known as Moby Dick. In the novel, Captain Ahab is described as a Quaker, someone who should have been a pacifist, choosing peace over violence.

When Moby Dick crippled him, Ahab became bitter and fixated with killing the whale. A man who was supposed to follow God chose to follow his maniacal obsession instead. In the end, all that awaited Ahab and his crew was destruction.

Bitterness is a poison that strangles joy, hope, gratitude, love, and faith in God. Bitterness also spreads to those around us. If you have bitterness in your heart toward anyone, call out to God. Do not let bitterness destroy you.



Reflection and Prayer

» *What Blessings are you missing out on in life because of you own stubbornness or unwillingness to let go and forgive? What are you really chasing in life?*

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DAY 5

Jonah 4:10-11

¹⁰ Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹ And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Biblical Insight

God chastised Jonah for feeling more compassion for the soulless gourd than he did for the 120,000 souls in Nineveh. Uniquely, the Book of Jonah ends without resolution. Nineveh's ultimate fate is not addressed, neither is Jonah's. Any speculation about his behavior or attitude after this point is conjecture. He could have repented of his bad attitude, or he could have died of heatstroke on the hillside. Regardless, the cliffhanger ending of Jonah serves to emphasize the book's primary message: God loves and has compassion for all people, even to the extent of showing concern for the cattle they own.

Daily Devotion

Paul Yonggi Cho, a South Korean pastor, was willing to go anywhere to preach the gospel, except Japan. Cho loathed the Japanese. This disdain reflected his country's unhealed societal wounds from colonization.

One day God called Cho to preach in Japan. He went, filled with bitterness. To an audience of one thousand Japanese pastors, Cho said, "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you." Then he wept openly. Soon all one thousand Japanese pastors knelt at Cho's feet and asked forgiveness for what their people had done to his people. When Cho spoke, he could only say, "I love you. I love you. I love you."

When God reveals hatred in our hearts toward a person or group of people, we have a choice. We can either be like Jonah, who was chastised by God, or we can allow God to transform our hatred into love.

Reflection and Prayer

» *Do not let unresolved biases and prejudices continue in your life? How can you show God's Love and Grace if you have not faced your own hatred? How do we transform our hearts into Love?*

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