

What's wrong with Jonah
Jonah 4:1-11
GCF
April 5, 2020

I really like a good underdog story.

- A. If there ever was an underdog prophet, it would seem to be Jonah.
- B. I don't know about you but after reading the first 3 chapters of this book, I was really hoping Jonah had figured a few things out.
- C. I was really wanting to see that Jonah had turned the corner in his life, that he was about to embark on a new season of spiritual flourishing.
- D. I really wanted to yell at Jonah some encouragement, like I was his online fitness instructor yelling at him through the computer: "You got this Jonah. I believe in you. Don't give up. Don't quit."
- E. But then I read chapter 4...and I'm no longer cheering for Jonah. Instead, what I really want to do is ask him a question: "What's wrong with you? What's your problem Jonah?"

We find the answer to that question in the first few verses of chapter 4. (Jonah 4:1-4)

- A. The first clause here is literally "it was evil to Jonah, a great evil."
- B. This goes beyond mere irritation or the more common general frustration that he didn't get his way.
- C. Jonah is burning with rage – violent rage.
- D. He is a furious prophet and the reason he is so angry is because of the way that God acted toward the Ninevites in chapter 3.
- E. Jonah is angry that God did what He said to Jonah He would do. Jonah is angry that God was faithful to His plan.
- F. The real problem here is that Jonah also had a plan for the Ninevites. And his simple plan was interrupted by God's sovereign plan.
- G. God's sovereign plans always come to fruition – in this world, in your life, in mine.
- H. So what we have here is a prophet of God, angry with God, because God is God and acted as God.

In his furious rage, Jonah prays. (V2-3)

- A. It seems that Jonah's purpose here is not to pour out his heart in humility before God, confessing his need, asking for help.
- B. No, Jonah's purpose here is to accuse God, to use God's word against Him, and to justify himself.
- C. This is one of the shortest and ugliest prayers we will read in the Bible – and it comes from a prophet of God. Jonah is using the character of God to justify his sin, to justify himself.

- D. Jonah is a wayward prophet, an angry prophet...he's also a brutally honest prophet.
- E. Jonah again says the kinds of things that most Christians wouldn't – but sometimes think.

We would hope that this would be the occasion of great celebration for Jonah.

- A. God had already rescued him numerous times.
- B. God had spared the Ninevites. Time to kill the fatted calf and celebrate right?
- C. Yet Jonah is angry enough to die.
- D. If you are Jonah's friend at this point, you're probably frustrated with him. (Get it together man!...how can you not see God's goodness to you? What is your problem?)
- E. These questions are so much easier to ask others than to answer ourselves aren't they?
- F. It's humbling to discover that you might have more in common with a wayward prophet of God than you want to admit.
- G. Where did you fail to see God's goodness right in front of your face this week?

Jonah's anger blinded him to the truth. Our anger always has the same effect in our hearts. It blinds us to the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.

- A. What we need to do is exegete our anger. We need to inspect it, interrogate it, hold it hostage to the truth.
- B. Instead of denying it or giving in to it, we exegete it. We put our feelings – whatever they may be – to the test so that we are not ruled by them.
- C. If you really want to exegete your anger, take your heart to task and ask: Why?
- D. What am I not getting that I really want? What do I have that I do not want, according to James 4?
- E. These sorts of questions open you up to receive what you most need: mercy and grace from God.
- F. This is what God does for Jonah in V4. He asks him a question. It's a great question.
- G. This is an opportunity for Jonah to remove the blinders from his eyes, to exegete his anger in the presence of God.

What are you going to do with your anger this week?

- A. Perhaps it is not furious rage like Jonah...it's your frustrations, irritations, impatience, growing discontentment.
- B. Any plan you come up needs to be grounded in what God has already done for you on the cross.
- C. You need to know God loves angry people – He loves angry pastors, prophets, parishioners – so much that the greatest person to ever live must suffer the greatest injustice ever.

- D. Exegete your anger in light of the cross of Christ, where Jesus bore the full weight of God's anger on Himself, anger that you and I earned for our sins.
- E. God is His love for us clothes us in the perfect righteousness of Christ. This is a gift, totally undeserved grace.

We hope God's grace is beginning to change Jonah.

- A. It appears he doesn't really want to exegete his anger just yet.
- B. Anger is blinding – it's nearly impossible to care for anybody except yourself. This is where Jonah is.
- C. Notice what he does next. (Jonah 4:5-9)
- D. If I'm Jonah's biblical counselor....
- E. We don't need to psycho-analyze Jonah more deeply. He's angry at God being God and he's had enough.
- F. So he stomps out the city to watch what God would do next.
- G. What is most important here is God's action, what God does next.
- H. The Lord is not interested in killing Jonah. But He does need to break him.
- I. There was something of the mercy of God that Jonah needed to learn and the way God chose to do this was via an object lesson.

The point of any object lesson is to make a complicated truth easier to understand.

- A. Here God uses three very simple things to make His point to Jonah: a plant, a worm and a strong wind.
- B. God sees Jonah is miserable and acts on his behalf: V6
- C. Jonah was suddenly very happy. His circumstances had just changed, he finally has some comfort and relief. Unfortunately for him it was short-lived.
- D. God now sends a worm to kill the plant. There goes Jonah's temporary shelter and temporary happiness.
- E. God then sends a scorching wind to "beat down on Jonah's head."
- F. The result of God's object lesson was that Jonah was done. He had had enough. He wanted to die – again. (V9)

There are two practical lessons for us to learn from God's object lesson to Jonah.

- A. First, God shows His absolute control over His creation, even the tiniest aspect of it. God is graciously sovereign over the plant, the worm, the wind etc...
- B. God is mercifully in control of your life, your business, your friendships, your health, the economy, our church, our future.
- C. Second, God uses both the plant and the worm to reveal Jonah's heart.
- D. God uses both the things we are happy about and our hardships to reveal our hearts.

- E. Both joys and sorrows reveal whether we are on the same page as God, in sync with Him, learning to value and treasure what He does and learning to hate the things God hates.

Here is the point of God's object lesson for Jonah: (V10-11)

- A. The word pity here is often translated as compassion or deep concern.
- B. God's concern for Jonah is simply this: Jonah cared so deeply about a plant and wanted it spared, even though he did nothing to bring it into existence or to keep it alive.
- C. The Lord did work to create the world and everything in it and He does sustain it all every day. Doesn't that give God the right to show compassion, to display mercy on those He chooses to?
- D. This is the essence of God's question to Jonah in V11: Shouldn't I have compassion on evil people and spare them? Shouldn't I be merciful to sinners who deserve to be punished and who are spiritually dead?
- E. It's an important question to consider isn't it?
- F. Let's read Jonah's response, in v 12....there is no v 12.
- G. We don't know how Jonah responded to God. This question just lingers.
- H. What matters most this morning is how you and I respond to the Lord.

Do you recognize that at some level, Jonah's problem is also your problem? It is our problem.

- A. Perhaps God is in the process of breaking you. Don't resist Him.
- B. God is passionate about rescuing you and saving sinners. Do you share your Heavenly Father's concern?
- C. Do you grasp the greatness of God's love for you and are you eager to tell others about His love?
- D. The beauty of the gospel: Jesus did die on a cross out of compassion and deep concern for sinners like us. His grace changes us.
- E. It shapes the way we live and how we care for others.
- F. Our lingering question this morning: What do you really care about?
- G. It's a hard question to answer, admittedly, given Covid-19.
- H. But it is a place to start: begin to wrestle with these sorts of questions that reveal your heart, your desires, your passions.
- I. Wrestle with God's mercy for you and for others.
- J. Let's be moved to act with the same compassion and mercy of Christ.

Today is Palm Sunday, next Sunday is Easter. This marks the beginning of holy week.

- A. Our hearts are drawn to consider the last week of the life of Jesus Christ.
- B. This week changed the world forever!
- C. Our attention over the last few weeks has been fixated on breaking news in our world.

- D. Can I encourage you this week: Fix your heart on the good news of the gospel.
- E. This is a week to consider the greatness of God's never-ending, never giving up love for you.
- F. This is a week to humble yourself, confess your sins, and rejoice that God does not leave you in your sins.
- G. This is a week to praise God that though your sins they are many – just like Jonah – His mercy is more. God's mercy is always more than our sins, every single day. So yes, praise the Lord. Because His mercy really is more.