

Jonah 4
April 28, 2019
Jonah, The Prophet in Training
Communion Sunday

Main Point: The story of Jonah gives us the surprising account of God's mercy, compassion, and grace that subverts and overcomes many of our natural inclinations. God confronts Jonah, and us, in order to overwhelm us with His personal, specific, and uniquely applied to us grace.

SI: What is happening in Jonah 4? The end of the story of Jonah. Not as well-known as the part about Jonah thrown overboard and swallowed by a huge fish. I hope we will together see and marvel again at the God of Love AND Justice. The God of Mercy AND Judgement.
Read and pray.

Intro:

Jonah is familiar... oh yeah, that story about the man who got thrown overboard and then swallowed by a fish and spit up onto land... But this chapter is not as familiar. And it is a little more disconcerting.

You can be a Christian, even a Christian in leadership or in full-time ministry, and have anger towards God and longing for people to be destroyed. But God is good at working circumstances such that He excises such poison from His children's hearts.

God is the overwhelmingly gracious and compassionate hero who even surprises to the point of offending His prophet.

How to Pray With Anger (negative example)

Background of Assyria... Archaeology has found tablets celebrating Assyrian torture, beheadings, bloodletting. ... has been called a 'terrorist state.' ISIS, The Islamic State today would be a good comparison.

Jonah so angry that he wants to die.

(Anger in itself is not wrong or sinful. Anger comes when something you love is threatened.)

What is being threatened?

His national pride. His ethnic identity as God's chosen, as the only ones God really loves.

So fed up, so at the end of his anger that he only sees one way out: his own death. I can't take it anymore. I can't take this assault on righteousness, truth, justice and fairness. God, if you won't judge them, destroy them, give them what they deserve, then I don't want any part of life anymore.

Remember who Jonah is. A prophet – the office of the Word. He knows God's Word, He is a mouthpiece for God's Word.

And so this is how you pray with anger - Jonah's very good, very correct theology. Has not penetrated his heart. God is after your heart. His heart fortress must be penetrated.

His self-understanding and self-truth must be 'destroyed by grace' (phrase from Sinclair Ferguson).

ILLUS of situations where people are addicted to survival. Addicted to self-understanding, self-survival, self-knowledge of the way the world works or should work. They have the answer. So therefore, really, no need for God. They can save themselves. Felt needs and material assistance must always be partnered with the Word. Which is exactly what God does here. He gives him relief, and He gives him the Word of life.

The Ninevites need salvation, mercy, and compassion, and grace, and Jonah, so do you. Look at how miserable you are making yourself with your anger. Won't you admit to and surrender your racist hatred of people I created and love?

What happens when God's grace and compassion disrupt you, maybe even offend you?

Illustration of Prison conditions in the state of Alabama. Highest homicide rate in the nation within Alabama men's prisons. Severely understaffed. Broken locks, cameras don't work, built on a warehouse style of large numbers of beds in one large room.

npr piece interview... The U.S. attorney, Richard Moore, has said the failure to respect the rule of law by providing humane treatment for inmates in Alabama prisons is a poor reflection on those of us who live and work in Alabama. I mean, what does it say about the state that people in prisons have been mistreated like this for so long?

WARD: I think he's right. I mean, people in some of these state prisons - you treat animals at your house better than that. We pride ourselves on being a biblical state, very Christian state, but yet, you treat your fellow man this way, and that is clearly hypocritical. So it is a blemish on our state.

I can be fully Christian and blind to the plights of others. I can understand my own depravity and my own need for Jesus and His great grace (I mean, Jonah was rescued

from death through the miracle of being swallowed and spit out 3 days later by a great fish.) and it can all be self-focused so that I am angry at God having compassion on others.

Jonah's is self-justified anger. He is right in his own eyes. He is totally convinced that he is right to be angry. And if I can't be right, then I might as well die.

God directed anger. Jonah's anger directed squarely at God. What is behind this is his already completely writing off of the Ninevites as so bad that they are unworthy of God's care and compassion.

(Alabama prisons) God, they are getting what they deserve. They deserve, they have earned, this wrath! You want to excuse their behavior? Don't you see what they have done? Let them get after each other, let them kill each other, let them experience hell on earth. Look what they have done to me and to my family, to the world.

How God deals with our anger. He can handle it. He keeps smiling at us and stays for us, never against us. (illustration of how this works in marriage)
He handles it.

(Like a pitcher handles a line drive aimed back at his head. He expects it, he is ready for it, he prepares for it, he turns and faces the batter, then with his glove on, he reaches to just the right spot and catches the line drive. It could have done a lot of damage, but he catches it deftly, gently, covers it with protective thick leather mitt, right into the webbing. Turns what is dangerous and damaging and neutralizes it, smothers it with covering.)

God gives in order to give. Jonah gave in order to get

Vs. 2b - Jonah gave a message of repentance in order to get the Ninevite's judgment. -- He gave in order to get them! (vs. 3) - and now he wants to die! ... remember Nineveh the hated ones

Missionaries who go to a brand new culture, new language, new values, new cultural mores, and they are gung-ho until they realize that culturally their right arm is being cut off. They had no idea what irritable, intolerant, self-centered people they were until they went into missions!

What did God give? He gave mercy to the Ninevites. He gave a plant to Jonah... God "appointed"...

Why a plant? Why couldn't God just tell Jonah? Why the life illustration? But haven't you experienced the same thing? God is a God of experiences, not just head truth. In order to internalize the truth, in order to have it go deep down in our lives, we must eat of it. We must experience it.

ILLUS of Communion. What Jesus said in John 6, that we must eat of His flesh, and drink His blood, we must internalize His body and blood for us, we must deep down in the deepest part of our being, in our soul, we must swallow the truth so that it nourishes us on the inside.

So consider that whatever circumstances you are going through right now, they are uniquely designed by God to give you something that is for your ultimate good. Even a scorching east wind that stirs up deep resentment and anger towards God.

ILLUS of “The Strength To Let Go” Switchfoot –

What a beautiful sound

To lay your life down

Your forgiveness is where I am found

I am lightning, and you are the ground

I am lightning, and you are the ground

A reversal of metaphors of what we normally think about when we talk about God and lightning. But how appropriate to Jonah here. He has lightning anger at God. Hurling his anger, his fury, mad enough to die b/c he can't get what he wants. And God takes it.

... Some of you know what it is to see and feel this kind of lightning anger towards God, and towards others who have hurt you. Will you surrender it? Will you let the impact of your anger affect you? Will you receive God's grace to you in the circumstances of your life? The plant that shades you? The gifts that make your life better? Or will your anger and desire for vengeance keep you from experiencing God's destroying grace?

God deals with anger, with justice, with retribution, with deservedness.

He has a plan and He carries it out. Nothing can stop it.

Jonah could not see.

We see. Do you see?

God's anger would be poured out. His wrath would be made known. His destructive power at work, once and for all. It is His destructive grace. To destroy unrighteous anger, to destroy rebellion, to destroy unholy hatred, racism, injustice.

He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. So that those, like Nineveh, who respond to the warnings of wrath to come to the unrepentant, so that those do hear the warnings and are given grace to repent.

Who are they? We don't know. Will they repent? Not up to us. But if God's compassion and mercy do not penetrate our cold hearts, then we will not care for anything but our own earthly comforts that are here today and gone tomorrow, like Jonah's plant.

(trans to 3) Examine yourselves, as the Scriptures call us to do. What do you really care about? Look and see and touch and taste the sacrament so that it makes you hunger and thirst again for Jesus' blood to be applied to you personally, and to our church corporately.

B/c There is a strong sense here, that it is up to you:

How Will It End? / Choose Your Own Ending/ How Will Your Story End?

Jonah 4 ends a bit strangely. It's not nice and tidy. Kind of leaves us hanging.

God gives people time. God gives people space.

Remember at the end of the parable of the two lost sons from Luke 15 . Jesus ends with a question to the older brother who is angry, furious at his father for throwing a party for his prodigal brother: "Won't you come in to the party? Won't you join us?" And then it ends. We don't know how it ends. He is giving the Jewish leaders time, space to ask themselves if they will join the party of celebration of the God who forgives the worst of sinners and sins.

God leaves the question for Jonah to answer, for us to answer. Do you give people time? Do you give people space? Do you allow them to wrestle, to listen to themselves?

This is very hard to do, but a beautiful gift.

I think in evangelism one of the reasons we don't do it is because it's not easy or formulaic. It's not fast, quick, make a decision and come down front and then you're in and evangelism is over. There is a whole lot more listening needed. Not being quick to give answers, but being quick to listen. Listening and giving people time and space to hear themselves talk about their own need, their own doubts, and struggles.

God invites Jonah to see how happy God's grace makes him, and how miserable his anger at God's compassion is making him. You are happy for the plant, that grew in a day and died the next day.

Rescue the Perishing. 'Church open your eyes once more, and see what Christ died for. Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save. '

What do you deserve? How has God rescued you? Where has God sent you? Where does He have you living, working, playing? Who has He brought into your life? If you are truly His, God will get to your heart through those people.

Conc: Start with prayer, even if it is angry prayer. God can handle it. Because He ends it, He finishes it, with the cross on which our Savior bled and died.

Communion:

Communion is for taking into your heart God's mercy and compassion. But only if you see your need for it. If you are hungry, you will want to eat.

Communal – we are all prone to be like this.

Personal – You must be an active participant in your application of God's judgement and mercy.

Communion is how the story ended... Judgement did happen. Jesus' followers saw it happen – not to them, not to the hated Romans, but to God Himself. We are the lightning, He is the ground.

Small Group Questions:

1. What is your favorite part of the story of Jonah?
2. Jonah is so angry that he wants to die. What does it feel like to feel anger so strongly because something you love is being threatened?
3. What do you think of the phrase from Sinclair Ferguson, 'destroyed by grace'? What does grace have to do with God destroying something? Have you experienced God destroying something and then seeing later that it was a gift of grace to you?
4. What should Christians in Alabama do about the state of our prisons?
5. The statement was made in the sermon that God gives in order to give, and Jonah gave in order to get. (That Jonah gave his obedience in order to get what he wanted – Assyria's punishment.) Have you ever obeyed God hoping or believing that He would do something in response and then it didn't happen? How do you handle it when God doesn't do what you expect?
6. What do you think of the metaphor from the Switchfoot song, "The Strength to Let Go": "I am the lightning and you are the ground" ?
7. How could God be working your circumstances to help you see your own need for His grace and mercy? How could God be working to prepare you to better be able to listen to, identify with, and have compassion for lost people near you?
8. Could you think of some people that God has brought near that you could pray for? Whom you could just ask, what do you think about God, about Jesus, and just listen to them, seek to identify with them, and wait for them to ask you about the hope you have in Jesus and His work?

