

When God's Grace Makes Us Angry [Jonah 4]

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Big Idea: *We want to be God's favorites, not God's servants.*

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// INTRODUCTION

Here we are, the final chapter of Jonah. As we've been walking through this story, hopefully, you now realize this isn't a children's story about a man in the belly of a whale. ***It's a brutal and honest look at what happens when God's mission collides with our own prejudices.***

- We've seen Jonah run from God's call.
- We've watched him preach the most reluctant and short sermon in history.
- We've witnessed an entire city, known for brutality and violence [Nineveh], repent and return to God.

And here is God's response, the last verse in chapter 3...

¹⁰When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened. [Jonah 3:10]

Now, we come to chapter 4, and here's where it gets uncomfortable. In this chapter, we discover the villain of the story isn't the whale. It isn't even Nineveh or the Assyrian Empire. ***The villain is the prophet Jonah.*** And if we're honest, really honest, we'll see ourselves in him.

¹This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. ²So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. ³Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." [Jonah 4:1-3]

Did you catch that? Jonah is angry. Not at his own disobedience. Not about being swallowed by a fish and vomited up on a beach. He's angry because God showed mercy to his enemies. A historical revival just happened, 120k people repented and turned to God, and Jonah wants to die because of it.

// GRACE TO "THOSE PEOPLE"

Here's what we could easily miss... Jonah wasn't just having a bad day. ***His anger reveals something deep and dark in his heart.*** Something he's been holding onto this entire time.

^{2a}So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish!" [Jonah 4:2a]

Remember where the city of Nineveh was located and who these people were. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and the Assyrians were the terrorists of the ancient world in the 8th century BC. From Israel's and Jonah's standpoint, the Assyrians of Nineveh were to be hated. Understandably so because of their violence and brutality.

So, when God said, "Go to Nineveh," **He essentially is saying to Jonah, "Go preach to the people who are planning to destroy your nation, murder your family, and erase you and people from history."**

Do you grasp the weight of this now?

This is a great opportunity for us to be honest about what's deep in our own hearts.

Who is your Nineveh?

Who are the people that, if God showed them mercy and saved them, you'd be secretly disappointed? [Very personal and real examples.]

- **POLITICAL ENEMIES**

- Imagine seeing the political figure you really can't stand coming to faith in Jesus. Imagine them sharing their testimony, quoting the Bible, and Christians celebrating their conversion.
- ***What's your honest first reaction?*** Joy? Or would your stomach turn? Would you think, "if they really got saved, they'd change their politics to match mine. Yeah, right, it's probably just for more votes?"
- Would you celebrate or feel like God was just being played?

- **YOUR EX-SPOUSE**

- The one who had an affair, who destroyed your family, who took you through a painful divorce, and the one who turned your kids against you.
- ***Maybe 10 years later, you hear they "found Jesus."*** They're attending some church and now sharing a great testimony about how God restored them.
- Meanwhile, you're still picking up the pieces. Your kids still have trust issues. You're still in therapy.
- Do you rejoice at their salvation? Or does your heart still think, *"where's MY restoration?"* They destroyed everything, and now they get to be the hero.

- **THE ABUSER...**

- ***Maybe the person who abused you, and no one believed you.*** They went on to live a great life, but you've carried the pain for years.

- Now imagine they get a terminal disease and before they die, they commit their life to Jesus and are “*saved*.” They never had to face justice. Never had to make it right. They just got grace at the last minute.
- Would you feel peace? Would you think, “*that’s not fair, I’ve been following Jesus my whole life and have suffered because of what they did.*”

• THE SINNER WITH “THE WRONG KIND OF SIN”

- The person who performs in drag or the individual identifying as transgender. A same sex couple who walk in here to our church. ***They hear the Gospel and genuinely give their life to Jesus.*** They’re weeping at the altar, and they want to be baptized.
- Here’s the question... would you celebrate? Or would there be whispers of, “*well, they need to stop doing THAT first?*” Would you question whether it’s a real conversion? ***Would you feel uncomfortable with them being here?***

*Some of you just felt your blood pressure rise.
Some of you just thought, “Yeah, but that’s different.”*

If you’re feeling defensive right now, lean into that; that’s the Holy Spirit working in your heart. These reactions are normal. They’re human. Jonah felt them too. But Jesus calls us beyond them.

The real scandal of grace isn’t that God loves our enemies. We can accept that God is God; He can do what He wants. ***The scandal is that He loves our enemies and then commands us to love them too... with the same forgiveness we’ve received, the same mercy we’ve been shown.*** That doesn’t just make us uncomfortable; it makes us angry. Because deep down, we want our pain to mean something. We want our suffering to count for something. We want to be right about who deserves judgment.

// WHY WE STRUGGLE WITH GOD’S GRACE

^{2b}I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. [Jonah 4:2b]

Jonah here is going back and quoting one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, Exodus 34:6, where God reveals his character to Moses: “*Gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.*”

Jonah knew theology. He could quote Scripture. He knew who God was. But he hated that about God. He essentially says, “*God, I knew You were like this, and that’s the problem!*”

What’s stunning about this is that Jonah is angry at the very attributes of God that saved HIM! Think about this...

- *Who rescued Jonah from drowning when he was thrown overboard?*
- *Who gave Jonah a second chance after running?*
- *Who relented from punishing Jonah for his rebellion?*

But Jonah wanted God's grace for himself and judgment for his enemies.

Here's what's really going on. **Jonah believed that he and Israel DESERVED God's grace, but Nineveh didn't.** He had created two categories of people...

- US – the deserving, the chosen, the righteous
- THEM – the undeserving, the evil, the condemned

We do the same thing. We create hierarchies of sin and hierarchies of people.

- *"Sure, I struggle with pride and gossip, but at least I'm not like **THEM** – those people are truly evil."*
- *"Yes, I need grace for my moral failures, but **THOSE** people? They know better. They chose evil. They don't deserve forgiveness."*

But here's the crushing truth of the Gospel... None of us deserves grace. That's what makes it grace.

Romans 3:23 doesn't say, *"all have sinned, except for the decent people."* It says, *"**ALL have sinned and fallen short.**"* That includes Jonah. It includes Nineveh. It includes me and you.

// THE OBJECT LESSON [The Plant]

God doesn't give up on Jonah. He doesn't abandon him. Instead, He gives Jonah an object lesson.

⁵Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

⁷But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn, the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. ⁸And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. "Death is certainly better than living like this!" he exclaimed.

⁹Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?" "Yes," Jonah retorted, "even angry enough to die!" [Jonah 4:5-9]

Jonah goes outside the city, builds a shelter, and sits there hoping to watch Nineveh burn. He's literally waiting for God to change His mind and destroy them. So, God provides a plant that gives Jonah shade from the sun. All this makes Jonah happy, but then God sends a worm that destroys the plant. The hot sun is beating on Jonah, and he's now miserable and angry.

God asks Jonah, *"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"* Jonah responds by saying, *"It is. And I'm so angry I wish I were dead!"*

Then God speaks, and these are the final words of the book of Jonah...

¹⁰Then the LORD said, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. ¹¹But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?" [Jonah 4:10-11]

What's the lesson God is trying to teach Jonah and us?

"You feel sorry about the plant..."

- Jonah felt more sorry for the plant that died than the 120K who were going to die before God relented. His own comfort meant more to him than 120K human souls.

"Though you did nothing to put it there."

- Jonah had no relationship with this plant. He didn't plant it or nurture it. But God created every single person in Nineveh. They are his creation, all of them are His image bearers.

"Nineveh has more than 120K people living in spiritual darkness."

- The people of Nineveh were spiritually ignorant. They were raised in spiritual darkness and didn't know any better. God is asking Jonah, "Shouldn't I have compassion on them? Shouldn't you?"

"Not to mention all the animals."

- This last line might seem strange, but it demonstrates God's concern for ALL His creation. His compassion extends even to the animals of this wicked city.

And then the book ends. We never hear a response from Jonah. ***The story closes with God's question hanging there in the air, waiting for an answer.***

Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?

// WHAT THIS REVEALS ABOUT US

This is where the book of Jonah gets really uncomfortable, because it's not just ancient history, it's a mirror. *God is asking us some uncomfortable questions like...*

“Do you care more about your own comfort than human souls?”

- We'll drive across town for a good cup of coffee, but we won't cross the street to share the gospel with our neighbor. We'll binge-watch hours of Netflix, but we won't spend 15 minutes praying for the lost. We get more upset when our Amazon package is delayed than when people around us are heading toward eternity without Jesus.

“Do you want justice for others but mercy for yourself?”

- We want God to give us unlimited second chances while giving our enemies exactly what they deserve. We want our own sins covered by grace, but THEIR sins exposed and punished. We read passages in the Bible about judgment and think, *“I hope they're listening,”* while reading passages about mercy and think, *“Thank God for your grace.”*

“Do you secretly hope some people don't get saved?”

- Let me ask this carefully and sincerely... ***Is there anyone, be honest with yourself, who, if they got saved, you'd feel like God was being unfair?***
 - The person who hurt you?
 - The politician you despise?
 - The people group you've been taught to fear?
- If your honest answer is yes, you have a Jonah problem.

Here's what Jonah and WE struggle with.

We want to be God's favorites, not God's servants.

We want to be the chosen ones, the insiders, the ones who matter most. And when God extends grace to *“THOSE people,”* it feels like He's betraying us. It feels like He's devaluing us. Like our special status means nothing.

But the Good News destroys this way of thinking. ***There are no favorites in God's kingdom, only the forgiven.***

// JESUS: THE BETTER JONAH

Here's what we can't miss today...

Jesus is the Jonah that Jonah should have been.

- Jonah ran FROM sinners; Jesus ran TOWARD sinners.
- Jonah was ANGRY at God's mercy; Jesus EMBODIED God's mercy.
- Jonah RELUCTANTLY preached to his enemies; Jesus WILLINGLY died for His enemies.
- Jonah WANTED Nineveh destroyed; Jesus WANTS NO ONE to perish.
- Jonah was SWALLOWED by a fish for three days and spit out alive; Jesus was BURIED in a tomb for three days and was raised to life.
- Jonah COMPLAINED about suffering for others; Jesus EMBRACED suffering for others.

Jesus didn't just talk about loving enemies; He did it.

- Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, and it was the religious people who criticized Him.
- When Peter cut off the ear of a soldier arresting Him, Jesus healed the man.
- While his enemies mocked Him, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."*
- While they crucified Him, He was providing salvation for a guilty thief hanging right next to Him.

⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. [Romans 5:8]

We were Nineveh. ***We were the enemy.*** We were the ones who deserved judgment. And Jesus gladly went to the cross because He wanted us to be saved.

And now Jesus says to us, ***"As the Father sent me, I am sending you."***

He sends us to our Nineveh. To the people we'd rather see judged. And He says...

⁴⁴But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. [Matthew 5:44-45]

This isn't a suggestion. This is the call. ***This is what it means to be a Jesus follower.***

// LIVING THIS OUT

How do we move from Jonah's heart to Jesus' heart?

1. Identify your Nineveh.

First, you need to be honest with yourself. ***Who do you struggle to love?*** Who do you secretly hope God doesn't reach? Write it down and pray about it. Don't spiritualize it away, name it.

2. Confess the truth about yourself.

Remind yourself, *"I was Nineveh. I was God's enemy. I deserved judgment, and Jesus saved me anyway."*

Every time you're tempted to look down on someone, remember where you came from. Every time you want justice for others, remember the mercy you received.

3. Pray for your enemies daily.

Jesus didn't suggest this; He commanded it. ***Start praying by name for people you struggle to love.***

- The family member who hurt you.
- The coworker who undermines you.
- The political leader you despise.
- The people group you fear.

Pray for their salvation. Pray for their flourishing. ***You'll be amazed at how prayer changes YOUR heart.***

4. Look for opportunities to show love.

Remember James' words from last week, *"faith without works is dead."*

- If there's someone you need to forgive, do it, even if they never apologize.
- If there's someone you've written off, reach out.
- If there's a group you've avoided, find a way to serve them.
- If there's a conversation you've been avoiding, have it in love.

5. Remember, changed hearts change the world.

Think about what happened to Nineveh. God's mercy transformed the most violent empire of the ancient world, at least for one generation. ***God overthrew their hearts, which changed their behavior, which changed their city.***

What if God wants to do that through you?

What if your willingness to love your enemy becomes the catalyst for their transformation?

// CLOSING/REFLECTION

Who is your Nineveh? [Give time to reflect]

I want to go back to how the book of Jonah ends. With a question from God.

Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?

// PRAYER & CLOSING SONG