
Disgusted with God

Jonah 4:1-11

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And they lived happily ever after...not! ¹Movies don't always have happy endings.

Have you ever seen *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*? I know for some a 1969 American Western film is about as alluring as a section in a library titled Ancient Mediterranean. But when I was growing up, this movie was really cool. You might remember it as the film that made stars of Robert Redford and Paul Newman or the film that popularized the song “*Rain Drops Keep Falling on my Head*”. But most probably, you'll remember it for the devastating ending. Our likable cowboy heroes are actually villains, and they're finally surrounded by hundreds of soldiers. Butch and Sundance storm out of their hiding place to face overwhelming odds. A shower of shots rain down upon them. Dozens and dozens of rifles ring out all about them. And then...the credits roll down the screen. The End. **A memorable ending? Yea. A happy ending? No.**

It's the same with the book in the Bible we've been studying for the last 4 weeks – Jonah. Why does Jonah end in tragedy? Open your Bibles to Jonah as we ready ourselves for the forth and final message from the book of Jonah. <pray>

This morning we conclude a month long series called *two hearts one story*. The two hearts in the story are obvious. 1) Jonah's self-focused [an egocentric / self-centered and ethnocentric / nation-centered] defecting heart and 2) the Lord's universally gracious heart.

Now Jonah represents are larger group called the Israelites [perhaps more accurately; the Hebrews (1:9)]. This book has been exposing a false notion that the gospel has man-made limitations [Remember: gospel message is exclusive but its scope is inclusive]. There seemed to be an ethnocentric (that is, centered on “my people”) nationalistic zeal that made the LORD exclusive property of Israel (a “my god” mentality). Their outlook sounded something like this: “We as a people group / a nation are unwilling to except who God really is; namely a universally gracious God who takes in Gentiles. We want God for ourselves; to hell with the nations”. Even though their forefathers passed down the promise that the LORD's grace would make them into a great nation **so that** they would be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen.12:1-3;cf. also Ps.67; Isaiah 42:1,4,6) they thought about the LORD as their own personal god. Sharing with their enemies would be a threat. Caring for their enemies would not be necessary. They were living in the 8th century B.C., a time when the Israelites experienced an increase in societal prosperity but a decrease in personal fidelity. Sin metastasized and had spread everywhere. They had forgotten that as chosen people one of the reasons for their election was the great commission. How this gracious and compassionate God brings back His people **in order that** through His people He will reach more people (i.e. the ends of the Earth) is the theme of the book.

The primary aim in this series, therefore, has been not so much “to see Jonah's heart” and thus notice the similarities with us. This certainly is a part of the series. But it is not the essence of it. My aim in my preaching and praying this month has been to assist Clearcreek Chapel in becoming more missional

- by helping believers rediscover the vitality of the gospel
- and to help unbelievers discover the vitality of the gospel

To experience the vitality of the gospel we must pay close attention to the closing of this message.

¹ The following paragraph has been adapted from “Full of Promises”; p.73, a *matthiasmedia* workbook over the big picture of the Old Testament. A Bible study worthy of your attention. Copies may be purchased at Clearcreek Chapel Bookstore.

Picking up the story where we left off last week turn in your Bibles to Jonah 4:1 and listen as I read the last section of the book, v1-11.

[4:1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [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?"

[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?"

(Jonah 4 ESV)

Disgusted with God

v1-11

Last week we saw the prophet begrudgingly obeying God. This week we notice him being disgusted with God. We witness this as we follow the arrangement of events in chapter four. As we do so we will notice once again a central conflict that needs to be resolved. Notice with me how verse one sets up the conflict.

Setting up the conflict

v1

In verse 1 we see Jonah disgusted with God.

An intolerable circumstance

As the story unfolds the camera (so to speak) zooms in on Jonah. As was the case in chapter 3 we see him out of sorts. He is not happy with the LORD. That the Lord should withdraw his awful judgment from Nineveh and not destroy them was unbearable for Jonah. How will Jonah respond? Why would that even be the question? For Jonah, the Lord's decision is an exceedingly great evil (a literal translation of "it displeased Jonah exceedingly).

This scene demonstrates clearly that Jonah's objective in following the commission of 3:1-2 was not the objective the Lord had. Rather, Jonah had an objective that was just the opposite. His desire was to see the Lord rain down destructive wrath upon the Ninevites. Since Jonah did not get his wish he must choose to do something about his intolerable circumstance.

Building up the conflict

v2-7

His response parallels chapter 2:1. Jonah prays. To see the building up of the central conflict we must notice how this scene functions.

A flashback

v2a

It is a flashback. Jonah asks a question about an incident of which the reader is unaware. We have not encountered this exchange. We are simply told of what Jonah said (or thought – the phrase “what I said” could be rendered “what I thought” an un verbalized opinion) when he was still in Israel. As we hear Jonah speak, we see more of Jonah. We get to know him better. Jonah expected the Lord to be gracious and merciful to His enemies all along. The outcome of 3:10 is hardly a surprise for Jonah.

A contorted quote

v2b

In the second sentence of v2 much is exposed. We now know why he fled initially back in 1:2ff. Though the reader still isn't quite clear over the reason for his flight we are confronted with motives. Why the Ninevite conversion was so reprehensible to Jonah surfaces. He demonstrates a “I knew it all along” denouncement of the Lord by quoting Exodus 34:6 – a quote that if in a scripture memory contest would have brought out applause. But the quotation is twisted from its original purpose in such staggering ways the reader is caught by surprise (if this is even possible in light of all the oddities the reader has endured to this point in the book).

A passionate petition

v3

Following his bad use of the Bible is his passionate outburst with a petition. “Kill me! Given Your disposition my death is better than my life”. Oh my, oh my!. What other response could we possibly have but to recoil from this man Jonah? What is Jonah actually saying with this petition? He remains thoroughly opposed both to Nineveh and to the Lord.

An x-ray question

v4

Amazingly now we come to the very first dialogue between Jonah and the Lord in the whole book. You may recall in Chapter one – The Lord said...and Jonah fled. Then in Chapter two – Jonah said...and the Lord said nothing. Then in Chapter three – the Lord said...and Jonah said nothing. Now in Chapter four the pattern breaks as the two of them exchange interaction. God challenges the rightness of the request. He uses a question to draw out a response – a response that can only be given by a self-exposing, self-incriminating answer. This puts the responsibility back on Jonah. How will he respond?

To the east

v5

Jonah responds to the Lord's initiative the very same way he responded in chapter one – he leaves without saying a word. And he goes eastward (talk a bit on geography as a statement of theology). East in the narrative world of the Bible is most clearly associated with bad circumstances. For example, prior to the Fall in Gen.3 east was good being in the direction of the garden of Eden (2:8). But after the Fall east represented alienation/banishment. Adam and Eve are driven east after their rebellion. After Cain kills Abel in Gen.4 we see him going east for his “exile”. The troublemaker Lot chooses east for his portion (13). Isaac stays west while his non-elect brother goes east (25). Examples could go on and on. The point in citing samples is to say something about what the narrator tells us about Jonah. The central conflict is building. Going east of the city is just one more step in the wrong direction. For the book to end in the east is thus a most unacceptable setting. For Jonah to move east, build a booth for himself and refuse to face the reality of God forgiving enemies is quite telling.

Action without interaction

v6-7

As we move our eyes on to v6-7, we see much activity. We see God's grace overshadowing Jonah's life. But we do not see Jonah responding to Him. The point I believe here is seen in all the action with no interaction: “went out, sat down, made, sat, appointed, overjoyed, caused it to arise, appointed a worm, chewed, dried up, appointed, blazed – a lot of action with no interaction is a sign of growing conflict.

Taking the conflict to the top

v8-11

We come now to the peak – the peak of the chapter and the peak of the book. Here in the final scene we come to a scenic change. The dawn of the next day (in Bible imagery one expects newness, hope, life, joy, humility, change, etc. when the dawn breaks. But keep in mind that in a writing chock full of irony what the reader expects he/she does not get. He/she gets just the opposite). We find the Lord turning up the heat – through sun and wind. Joy reversed by circumstances. Now Jonah is back to wanting death. Jonah sizing up his unbearable situation does something.

Stalemate broken

v8-9

He breaks the stalemate. He talks to God (hint: a parallel to chapter 2 and its vomit). Jonah repeats verbatim his last spoken words. God speaks the same as previous but with one addition. He tacks on “for the plant”. This addition will expose the real issue of Jonah’s heart. The first death wish in v3 looks like it is based on a high standard of justice. Now reflected in the second death wish in v8 we see his high standard...not for justice but for personal comfort. God said, “Do you do well to be angry FOR THE PLANT”. When Jonah heard these words he blurted out “YES”. The verdict comes in. No more further questions Your Honor. For Jonah the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart. He longed not for converts but for comforts. Ease, relief, no pain, convenience, release, escape, a break, man-made rest = these for him are of highest value.

Lord’s lesson

v10-11

The Lord has been listening (v1-4), he has been comforting and confronting (v5-9) now we see him teaching (v10-11). The Lord’s response provides the climax of the main storyline. It has been all along a plot conflict between Jonah and the Lord. The Lord challenges Jonah’s right to be angry over a plant (that was a gift given to him and a temporary gift at that) while affirming His pity over human and animal life (which He made) and which was turned from evil – unlike Jonah.

For Jonah to preach God’s favor over the N. Kingdom of Israel (see 2Kings 14), for Jonah to pity a mere plant; all this was acceptable. But for God to extend mercy to Nineveh (to love the unlovable, to grace the ungracious, to help the helpless, to mercy the merciless, to pity the pitiless, to give to the ungrateful, to save the lost – well this is intolerable.

Conclusion – The gospel

The story ends. Jonah’s capacity for compassion exposed as small and self-serving. The Lord’s scope and power of grace reaching to the ends of the earth, reaching the least likely candidates for pity – extending His glory throughout the globe – this is the redemptive narrative. Two hearts one story. The End.

But we are left with a haunting sense that the story doesn’t end. It stops ...just stops. There is no conclusion. No resolution to the fundamental conflict to which we were introduced in 1:3. We are led to think that Jonah’s test was simply about his willingness to carry out the commission. But it is only until we get to chapter four that we come to see that Jonah’s test concerns something much deeper than carrying out a duty. It concerns his heart – the recognition of and rejoicing over God’s extensive and free grace. What do you make of this?

All of us will respond in some way. We will all do something with Jonah. My plea to each of you is this: Don’t try to prop him up. Don’t do an extreme make-over on him so that he does not look so bad after all. Don’t make excuses for him. Don’t try to pretend he is not as bad as he is. Don’t do these things because he looks so much like you. We do not need to rescue him from this exposure. Let’s face it – he failed. He did not go through the water, come out on dry land with a new identity and then pass the test. Jonah failed the test.

Just as Adam in the garden when tested failed (Gen.3:1ff), just as Noah and his family went through the judgment water and came out on dry land with a new identity failed the test (Gen. 9:21), just as Moses and the Israelites went through the Red Sea water and came out on dry land with a new identity failed the test (Ex.14-16), just as Joshua and the Israelites went through the Jordan water and came out in the promised land failed the test (Josh.7:1; Judges 1) Just like all the other characters in the Bible, just like you and me...Jonah failed the test.

But there was a ray of hope in this dark day of Israelite history in 750 BC. There was a hint of hope for God's people coming back from exile in 500 BC. All these "heroes" in the Bible failed yet prompt the on-looker to hope in the midst of dim days – hope for God's surprising grace shining through God's supreme gift. For the Israelites it was to prompt them to look forward to a new Adam, a new Noah, a new Moses, a new Joshua, a new Judge, a new King; to a person who will never fail, who will faithfully bring God's word into God's world to rescue God's people from God's enemies into God's love by God's grace for God's glory.

You see, the entire Old Testament points to a Person and the entire New Testament presents that Person. His name is Jesus. He is the Christ who went through the waters of baptism (hearing the words "this is my son in whom I delight. Listen to him) who went into the wilderness for 40 days and past the test demonstrating that he was the faithful prophet, the faithful son who would carry out His Father's mission. This Jesus...

²God's promised rescuer and ruler who lived the life we could not live and died the death we should have died and rose again in triumphant vindication as the first fruits of the new creation to bring forgiven sinners together under God's sovereign rule. This is the gospel.

- Turn from your personal sins you've seen this month in the book of Jonah.
- Trust what God has done for you on the Cross in Jesus Christ.
- Be baptized and come out of the water with your new identity (if you have not already done so by faith)
- Be zealous for His mission.

The two hearts are before us. A selfish heart and a gracious heart. The story is one. It is the gospel. Do you find your heart turning toward His heart? Is desire stirring and delight stimulating your will to work hard in the purpose, vision and mission of the Church?

With your ears open and your eyes closed hear the mission of the Chapel. May it resonate with you. May your desire for obedience grow. May your choices with what God has given you reflect the great mission. May our lives together reflect this mission:

By God's grace and through His Word
we aim to cultivate in the hearts of God's people
a passion for the supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ
magnified in love for Him
manifest in love for one another
multiplied in love for the lost

² This summary sentence of the gospel was given by Steve Timmis at one of his seminars.