

JONAH 4:1-11

LESSON: GOD'S ALL-EMBRACING LOVE —May 28, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Everyone in the city of Nineveh believed and put on mourning clothes and went on a fast from the greatest to the least. The king heard the Word of the Lord, got up from his throne, taking off his robe, and also covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He caused the Word of the Lord to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh as a decree of the king and his nobles saying man, beast, herd, and flock were to taste nothing, neither be fed anything or drink water. They covered themselves with sackcloth, crying with all their might unto God, turning from their evil way and withdrawing from the violence of their hands. While they cried out to God, they saw this window of mercy open and presumed that God would turn and repent, turn away from His fierce anger, and not allow them to perish. God cannot repent, but He can only be who He is. God saw Nineveh's inward works: that they had turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He said He would do, that is, He gave them a second chance. God chose to spare them from divine punishment. Of course, God knew what would happen before Jonah ever arrived. He's God!

In chapter one Jonah acted like the prodigal son but here in the fourth chapter he is acting more like the pouting of the elder brother.

LESSON: I. SURPRISING REACTION (response, answer, feedback) Jonah 4:1-3

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. The phrase "*very angry*" means that Jonah "*burned with anger*." He was burning mad at the holy, righteous, and perfect God because God did not kill the people of Nineveh! ¹Jonah was steamed...not at his enemies, the Ninevites, but at God Himself. Jonah had a problem. He was not completely yielded to God. His mind knew God's truth – His will obeyed God's orders – but his heart did not respond as being pleased. When the Lord takes the message of Jonah and saves a city, Jonah reacts in a very bad way. As God's displeasure and anger subsided, Jonah's displeasure and anger rose. There are other reasons. Here are a few:

1. One of the marks of a true prophet was that his prophecies always came true, (Deut.18:20-22). Jonah had said that the Ninevites would be overthrown, Jonah 3:4. If this did not happen, then Jonah would be looked upon as a false prophet.
2. His fellow Jews would be angry with him for preaching a message that brought salvation to their enemies. They might see him as a traitor.
3. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh! Nothing would have pleased him more than seeing them all destroyed by God!

(Note: Before we get too hard on Jonah, maybe we need to look at our own lives and examine how we have

¹ http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Jonah%203_10-4_11.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

responded to the Lord working out His Will in our lives! How many times have we reacted with anger when God did something that went against our plans? Perhaps we need to remember the counsel of the Bible, (Prov. 16:9; Ps. 37:23)

4:2 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. Jonah prays, *"O Lord was this not what I said when I was still at home?"* Well, this is what he knew and expected would happen because God acted consistently with His character. He said, *"...for I knew the Lord art the compassionate and gracious God, is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."* Jonah is angry and tells God that this is why he fled in the opposite direction from Nineveh in the first place—because he knew that God was a gracious God and merciful.

Despite having just personally experienced the mercy of God in his own desperate situation, Jonah begrudges that same mercy to the city of Nineveh. He doesn't want God to show grace to the Gentile Ninevites, but only to Israel. This is one of the reasons why Jonah ran away in the first place. Jonah represents Israel in the book.

- If we understand Jonah as a type for Israel we now see the jealousy of the Jews towards the Gentiles, due to the Gentiles having been brought into God's family apart from Israel.
- Also, Jonah, as a type of Israel, conforms to the attitude of the older brother who was jealous and angry over the fuss his father made over his reprobate brother (Luke 15).

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. To put it bluntly, Jonah wanted God to kill him! He wasn't the first. Moses and Elijah both prayed for the same thing, (Num. 11:15; 1 Kings 19:4). Jonah did not want to commit suicide; he wanted God to take his life. Because he didn't get his way and because he had to endure embarrassment, he wanted to give up on life itself. What needed to be changed in Jonah was that he needed to be taught the value of a human soul. As a prophet, Jonah should have been God's servant fulfilling God's command. However, Jonah did everything he could to avoid fulfilling the divine command. Jonah finally sank into a deep depression and grew angry toward God because of the compassion God had on the Ninevites. In chapter 2, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, but in chapter 4, Jonah prayed that God would take his life. Jonah wanted to die. And as God did not abandon Jonah, but still dealt with him, so does God not abandon the Jews, but still deals with them.

(Note: How many people have put their testimony to death and given up on serving God because He didn't give them what they wanted? I will just remind you again that obedience to what the Lord brings our way is better than anything else you can give Him (1 Sam. 15:22; Rom 12:1-2). Nobody likes life and what it brings all the time, but those who love the Lord are those who remember that God always knows best, and He always does what is best for His children, (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17). The safest and sanest course of action is one of humble obedience and submission to what life brings our way (e.g. Job - Job 1:20-22).

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

II. NECESSARY INTROSPECTION (self-examination; reflection, brooding) Jonah 4:4-9

4:4 Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?— *A Fundamental Question:* God's question to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry?" (v.4, 9) suggests that Jonah doesn't understand the nature of grace. "Is that your right?" Divine logic drives us to only one answer: "No, Lord, it is your right, not mine." Rather than answering the question, Jonah just ignored it. What you see here is a man throwing a first-class pity party! Jonah didn't get his way and he wants God to know that he's upset. His hurt and anger is so deep that he even attempts to take it out on the Lord!

(Note: Just in case you didn't know it, *your arms are too short to box with God!* Just because He doesn't order life like we think it should be ordered, we had better be careful when we decide to line up against God!

4:5 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. — *A Safe Vantage Place:* After Jonah is confronted about his anger, he does not change his mind. Instead, he climbs all the way up a hill outside the city, folds his arms, and sits down to wait. He is probably hoping the Lord will change His mind! When he reached an elevation where he was high enough to see all of Nineveh, he built himself a shelter, sat in its shade—something to shield himself from the severe desert heat, which was pretty much a necessity because the average temperature in that region was between 110 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit. In other words, it was not a good place to allow yourself to get hot under the collar! After putting up his little shelter, he sat in the shade awaiting judgment to fall on Nineveh. What a contrast to the king of Nineveh, sitting in ashes and sackcloth! God tested Abraham to reveal whether he had the heart of God in him or not, and Abraham passed the test. Jonah failed the same test. Jonah doesn't get his way about Nineveh, and he doesn't get his way about dying, so he just starts to pout!

(Note: There are lots of people just like Jonah in the church! For some reason life has not gone as they had it planned. Their response is not humble submission to the will of the Lord. No! They just quit on Him! It does not say much for their love for Him or for their devotion to His will when their disappointments translate into disobedience and desertion on their part. There is no place in spirituality to carry a wounded attitude. I promise you that if you decide to go to war with God over His will, He is going to win that battle every time!

4:6 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. Even though Jonah is angry at God, God still cares for him and demonstrates this by preparing a gourd (a plant) to grow up and provide shade for Jonah's head. The plant grew up rapidly and once again nature served its Creator's purpose. But Jonah was happy for the provision of the plant, though he apparently does not recognize it as having come from the hand of God.

4:7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. Once

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

again nature served its Creator's purpose. This time God prepares a worm. The plant was designated to serve God's purpose, not for Jonah's continued comfort. So, the morning rises the next day and the worm's mission is simply to attack the fast growing plant so that it withers and Jonah is deprived of its shade.

4:8 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. As the morning rises and the sun comes out, God now prepares a vehement (violent) east wind, while the sun bears heavy on Jonah's head causing him to faint and wishing to die. His desire is that *"it is better for him to die than to live."* The wind comes not for the purpose of drying up the plant, or of tearing down the shelter, but simply to intensify the physical distress of the prophet. It is effective, there he sits, neither praying for Nineveh or himself, nor resting to gather strength to continue his spiritual ministry, but in complete dejection and self-pity.

4:9 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. God in His faithfulness comes to the prophet with a gently rebuke in the form of a question. He asks whether or not the prophet's anger over the plant's destruction is ethically justifiable. Jonah, in complete self-pity and total disregard of the Ninevites, declares that he is justly angry. The phrase even unto death indicates that Jonah's anger had reached even to the very bottom of his soul, so that he despaired even of his life.

III. CONVICTING ARGUMENT (quarrel, disagreement, dispute) Jonah 4:10-11

4:10 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:— God tells Jonah that Jonah has pity on the gourd in which he did not labor to grow. Its growth came up at night without him knowing it and it perished at night as he slept. Jonah was concerned over a temporary, soul-less plant, but had no concern over the great city of Nineveh.

4:11 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?—God asks Jonah should He not have spared the great city of Nineveh in which there are more than 120,000 persons which cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and let alone their livestock? Jonah must have forgotten that God spared the men on the ship when they pleaded for mercy and threw him overboard. Jonah must have also forgotten that he was saved after he prayed from the belly of the fish and God spoke to the fish to vomit him out. And now Jonah sees with his own eyes that God spared the people of Nineveh because he saw their works; they turned from their evil way. Perhaps Jonah will quit thinking of himself and see God's point of view.

SUMMARY:

Jonah was distraught that God had spared Nineveh. He expected the ashes of destruction, not the ashes of repentance. Jonah didn't want them forgiven. He didn't want God to relent of His intention to destroy

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

them. Jonah was angry because God granted mercy instead of judgment to the Ninevites. Jonah was disobedient because of his own prejudice and hatred and his life was a paradox:

- A prophet of God, yet a runaway from God
- A man drowned, and yet alive.
- A preacher of repentance, yet one that repines at repentance.

He fled to Tarshish for he knew that God was a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents of the evil, but Jonah's prays to die, than to live (**4:1-3**).

God's question to Jonah, *"Do you have a right to be angry?"* suggests that Jonah didn't understand the nature of grace. After Jonah is confronted about his anger, he does not change his mind. Instead, he climbs up a hill outside the city, folds his arms, after putting up his little shelter, and sits down in the shade, hoping the Lord would change His mind; awaiting the judgment to fall on the city of Nineveh. Even though Jonah is angry at God, God still cares for him and demonstrates this by preparing a gourd (a plant) to grow up and provide shade for Jonah's head. Jonah was happy for the provision of the plant, but then God prepares a worm, and in the morning the worm attacks the fast growing plant so that it withers, and Jonah is deprived of its shade. By the time the sun comes up, a strong violent east wind also comes. While the sun beats upon Jonah's head causing him to faint and wishing to die, God asks *"Do you have good reason to be angry about the gourd?"* And Jonah answers, that he does have reason to be angry enough to die (**4:4-9**).

Jonah was more concerned over the gourd that he didn't labor over or make grow, which came up in the night and perished in the night, than the 120,000 persons of the city of Nineveh that can't discern between their right hand and their left hand, let alone their livestock. Jonah must have forgotten God's mercy! (**4:10-11**).

Observations from Jonah:

1. God desires for us to see the whole world as He sees it; to see that the people who don't know the difference between their right and left hand are the victims of the enemy, not the enemy.
2. God's desire is for us to be available so He can express His compassion toward those people through us.
3. God desires for us to be a sign in our generation. We're to be men and women who have the resurrected Jesus Christ living within us, and the resurrected Jesus Christ is the One who brings life out of death, and He is willing to bring life out of death to everyone around us if we are available and know the real enemy.