

Jonah 4
"Jonah, Meet God"
09/04/22

Introduction

Tim. **Jonah 4. Pray.**

Waffles + Peanut Butter. Well it has become somewhat of a Friday morning tradition in our house to have waffles with dad. As a pastor I work a Sunday-Thursday work week, so typically Fridays are our family's sabbath - our day of rest to enjoy God and each other - so I spend Friday mornings getting some extended time with our two girls, so Lindsay can go kind of catch her breath from being a mom a little bit, get some alone time, read her Bible - drink a coffee and actually enjoy it, all that stuff - amen moms? And so I try to make it fun and we do at home waffles with dad.

Now, I don't know if you know this or not...but **toddlers tend to have strong preferences.** The milk cup has to go in the right spot, the pants have to start on the right leg THEN the left leg. And if you forget or do something wrong it's not like - "oh that's ok dad. Thank you for loving me and caring for me and providing for my every need." IF ONLY. No - it's full on meltdown.

So a few weeks ago, I made a mistake as a dad. You see, it was Lindsay's birthday. And there are a few things my wife enjoys more than cake for breakfast. She's got an incredibly strong sweet tooth. And so she's sleeping in. I'm up with the girls and I'm thinking this is going to be great, here's what we'll do - We've got this peanut butter chocolate cake from Publix, her favorite. We'll cut off a piece, with a little candle, and I'll have Harper bring it to her in bed - win husband of the year points because I'm awesome.

So we take her the cake, Harper helps her blow out the candle, all good - come on girls let's let her eat in peace. We get back to the kitchen, Harper looks at me and..."I WANT CAKE TOOOOO!" Full on toddler meltdown.

Now, I wish I could tell you that my response in that moment was one of kindness, grace, and mercy. "Oh come here baby girl. I love you so much. I understand you're sad and because you're 2 you have little to no control of your emotional impulses. It's ok. I'm here."

No. I wish. My response (at least internally) was more like...

- I've already been gracious to you. I've already given you so much.
- I have freshly made, handcrafted waffles and peanut butter!
- I even gave you a little piece of frosting from the cake - because I love you so much and I'm not only husband of the year, I'm dad of the year.
- And do I even need to mention that all of this was taking place at 7am in the morning.
- Or should we discuss the 40-50 hours a week I work to earn a paycheck to pay for said waffles and peanut butter and cake, pay the electricity bill by which the house can stay a moderately cool 72 degrees, pay the mortgage so we have a roof over our heads, buy the crib you just slept in, etc. etc. fill in the blank...I'm fine.

Eventually we calmed down, and she forgot about it and we moved on with our day.

Why did I want to start tonight with that story? One for your pity. But two, because my Friday morning with Harper is a little bit like what we're about to see in Jonah 4.

After all of God's kindness and generosity and grace and mercy to Jonah, when that mercy extends to someone else - Jonah will have a full on toddler meltdown. AND YET, unlike me God responds with even more kindness and grace and mercy, once again, to Jonah.

Let's look at it together...

Walkthrough of Jonah 4

Jonah 4.

By way of recap...

- **Ch 1** - Jonah fled, God pursued.
- **Ch 2** - Jonah was prideful, God was merciful.
- **Ch 3** - Jonah gave the Ninevites a half-hearted sermon, God gave the Ninevites full-hearted forgiveness.

Chapter 3 ends this way:

3:10 - 10 When God saw what they did [the repentance of Nineveh], how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

How wonderful. God has used Jonah to lead an entire city to repentance, turning to Him. You would think the story would end with rejoicing and repentance from Jonah right? You would think the story would end with gratitude → YES! My enemies have repented! They've turned from their wicked ways and turned to God!

Right? Wrong...Jonah throws a temper tantrum. He has a meltdown. Look at how Jonah responds to God's mercy to Nineveh...

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

Nineveh repents...God has mercy...Jonah could not be more angry. The text says "it displeased Jonah exceedingly" it can also be translated → "It was exceedingly evil to Jonah."

We're drawn back to the original heart of Jonah. We're drawn back to what first went off in his heart when God said - "Arise, go to Nineveh!" that he would "arise, and flee to Tarshish." It was not simply fear of what the Ninevites, this brutal and angry and violent people might do to him. It was hatred.

Look at what he says to God in vs 2...

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.

Jonah turns back again to quoting Scripture. This time Exodus 34:6, God's very words about Himself that He spoke to Moses as He was giving him the 10 commandments for God's people. God says about Himself:

Ex 34:6 "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."

Jonah takes God's very description of Himself, but doesn't receive it as wonderful, instead he turns it back around, points a finger and says → "I knew you were that guy! Merciful and gracious. I knew you were who you said you were!"

And now we get to the heart of the matter. You see... **Jonah didn't run because he was nervous that his trip to Nineveh would be *unsuccessful*—he ran because he was nervous that his trip would be *successful*.**

He didn't run because he thought something bad might happen to him. He ran because he thought something good might happen to Nineveh.

He knew deep down in his heart that the gracious and merciful God would find a way to show grace to a group of people that Jonah didn't want him to show grace to.

Jonah takes issue with how *gracious* God chooses to be. He's not just angry - He believes it is exceedingly evil. According to Jonah's worldview and standards of right and wrong, it was exceedingly wicked for God to relent and show mercy to the Ninevites. To Jonah, God's grace should only go so far - the Ninevites didn't deserve it.

So Jonah is angry. Apparently, angry enough to want to die.

3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Now, to put it in some perspective it's easy to dog on Jonah here - you want to die because some people repented and turned to God? But remember - these people are his enemy. A constant tormentor of God's people. The ones who for years have threatened to take the Israelites captive, to kill them. And Jonah just became the person God used to lead them to repentance and spare their lives.

But let's look at how God responds to Jonah...

4 And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

"Is it right for you to be angry Jonah? Is this a valid emotion? Let's think about emotional health Jonah - is this the right emotion at the time with the right amount for the right duration for the right reason (namely love)...Jonah??" NO. It is not. He is not right to be angry with God for God's mercy to this city.

Both because God is God - and He will have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy.

But also because God has been nothing but merciful to Jonah despite all of his own wickedness and evil and rebellion up until this point.

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.

Jonah went into the middle of the city shouting - "40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" But now it seems like they're repenting. Jonah's angry. He goes outside the city, sets up a little makeshift tent and he's going to wait it out and see what happens.

Maybe he thinks it's going to prove to be a false repentance and that God will still destroy them? We don't really know - just know that he goes, sets up a tent and is going to wait and see.

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.

Once again, the God that Jonah knows to be merciful and gracious, quoting the very words of God back to Him - is merciful and gracious to Jonah. Though Jonah is sitting outside the city, angry, bitter, throwing a pity party, wanting to die because God was gracious to his enemies...God sends a plant.

And the text says Jonah was *exceedingly glad* because of the plant.

It's an intentional parallel from the author:

- He's *exceedingly angry* that God was merciful to the Ninevites.
- He's *exceedingly glad* that God is merciful to him.

Hold that thought we'll circle back to it.

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."

Jonah once again is in despair. God has taken the plant from him - sent a bitter wind and scorching heat, another severe mercy designed to get his attention - and Jonah once again wants to die.

It's hard to miss the pride and selfishness of Jonah in relationship to God here. Do you see it?

He wants the providence and goodness and might of God to only be turned in one direction → whatever Jonah wants.

- He wants a God who rules over all and does what he pleases - as long as what God pleases benefits Jonah.
- He wants a God that is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love - as long as that mercy, grace, and love is directed towards Jonah.
- He wants a God that gives people what they deserve for their wickedness - as long as those people aren't Jonah.

God gives Jonah a tiny tiny sliver of what Jonah wishes he'd give the Ninevites - and Jonah's immediate response is - "Can I just die now?"

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."

You're mad about a plant? You want to die because I took a plant away from you and you've had to sit in the sun for a day?

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 did nothing to plant this plant, grow this plant, tend to this plant - and yet he's overwhelmingly angry at it's demise. And yet God says - I grew this city. There's 120,000 people in it who are made in my image, bear my imprint. And yet you have no compassion Jonah?

You're angry because I destroyed a plant? And yet angry that I didn't destroy a city?

See Ourselves in Jonah → Open-ended

And that's how the story ends. Jonah, alone, under the scorching sun, angry at God for his mercy to Jonah's enemies.

No conclusion. No resolution. Left open with a question from God to Jonah - asking if after all that he's been through - he has yet to understand the mercy of God.

And I would argue, as many scholars and theologians do, that the ending of Jonah is left unresolved on purpose.

The story of Jonah is meant to be like an arrow.

That for 4 chapters gets pulled back and back and back - this constant question → Will Jonah ever grasp the overwhelming, never ending, constant and forever grace of God for sinners?

And with each chapter as the bow draws back you're meant to ask - does he get it yet? Does he get it yet? Does he get it yet?

And with this open ended question left hanging in the arrow we see - the story shoots an arrow at Jonah and hits us.

Do we get it? Do we grasp the fullness of the mercy of God? Do we understand his patience? Do we dwell in His steadfast love?

Sinclair Ferguson - **"Jonah is a true story, but it is also a parable. It is shaped in the same way that our Lord's parables are, not only as a fascinating piece of history, but to force us to contemplate our personal destiny. It carries no conclusion because it summons us to write the final paragraph. It remains unfinished, in order that we may provide our own conclusion to its message. You are Jonah; I am Jonah. We recognize ourselves in the story of this man's life. We stand together in need of the mercy of God to enable us, from this day on, to be obedient to his commands, and to live to the praise of his glorious Grace."**

The story of Jonah makes us wrestle with our own realities and our own hearts → Do we grasp the mercy of God? Have we been changed by it? Do we love it, long for it, rejoice in it, both for ourselves and for others?

Main Question

And that's the question I want us to wrestle with for just a few minutes tonight in light of Jonah 4.

Last week we asked → **Do you believe the mercy of God is great enough to save sinners?**

This week, I want us to ask something slightly different:

Do you want the mercy of God to be great enough to save sinners?

The story of Jonah makes us wrestle in a multitude of ways with the mercy of God. First, do we think God *can* save "sinners"? Then → Do we want Him to?

How will we respond when God shows grace to people we don't want him to show grace toward. When he forgives people that we don't want him to forgive. Or to use the language of chapter 1 - when God pursues people we'd rather Him not pursue.

You see, the problem with Jonah is that he **wants to be the grace gatekeeper**.

He wants to be the one deciding who gets grace and who doesn't. He wants to sit there and say "this person? Sure, God can show them grace. Me getting grace? I'm all for it. But this person? Are you kidding me? Never. They deserve what's coming to them." Jonah wants to be the one who determines who God judges and who God forgives.

And we said week 1 that Jonah is a microcosm of the hearts of God's people, the Israelites. Jonah is just a glimpse of what's happening in this larger group of people.

You see, from Genesis 12, God's call to Abraham the message has been the same - through God's people, God wants to bless and love the nations.

But it's something the Israelites never quite get. You see them wrestling with this throughout the Old Testament and even into the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - does the grace of God really extend to the "outsider" or to our "enemies"?

Ingrained in their hearts is that because they were Jewish, they were deserving of special favor and blessing and mercy of God. This is why years and years later, even after Jesus has died and rose again, the Holy Spirit has come and the church is born, Jewish Christians, even leaders in the church like Peter, have such a hard time with the "available to all-ness" of the gospel.

That salvation - forgiveness of sins and a place in the people of God - would be available to all who believe. Free by God's grace through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus.

Not based on standing, not based on works or deeds or religious acts or nationality...

Even the Gentile? Even the Roman, the Galatian, the Philippian? Even those not born of Jewish descent? Even our enemies? Why would God invite "those people" to be in the family of God?

It's a question burning for centuries in the hearts of the Israelites, and if we're willing to be honest, a question in the dark parts of our hearts as well - Why would God invite "those people" or "that person" to be in the family of God?

So Jonah makes us wrestle with this question - **Do we want the mercy of God to be great enough to save sinners?**

Or to put it another way - **Who have we become the grace gatekeeper for?**

Who have we decided we don't want the mercy of God to be able to reach?

- That person from your past who hurt you? Took advantage of you? Who slandered you and never apologized. Never seemed to care that you were hurt. Never seemed to notice the way their actions and words hurt you. Do you want God to have mercy for *that* person?
- That family member. The one who the very thought of makes your skin crawl from years of pain and hurt and abuse. Who you are actively working to never see again in your life. Do you want God to have mercy for *that* person?
- That boss or coworker who you think ruined your career because they took advantage of you, belittled you, lied about you? Do you want God to have mercy for *that* person?

- That whole entire group of people who because of your own prejudice towards their skin color, political beliefs, socioeconomic status, home country, or any other factor - you've just kind of looked at and said "eh, no thanks." Do you want God to have mercy for *those* people?

Take a minute and think about it - who is that person where if you found out tomorrow that God got a hold of their life, they repented from their sins, turned to Jesus - and you knew that means that what is true of all Christ followers is now true of them - they are forgiven, washed clean, made new, filled with the Holy Spirit, and invited into the family of God forever.

Would you celebrate and rejoice with the angels of heaven?

Or would your first thought be (like Jonah) - that's evil. That's not fair, now they won't get what they deserve.

And this is an incredibly difficult question to wrestle with because we've all been hurt by others. And it only gets more difficult and more tempting to caveat our way out the greater the pain and the greater the reason we think we have to hate or to write off or to reject.

Love Your Enemies

But here's the deal...not getting what we deserve is the shocking, beautiful message of the gospel, right?

That all of us who trust in Jesus have not and will not get what we deserve.

- Because of Christ, we're not punished by God, we're welcomed.
- Because of Christ our future is not despair and destruction, but hope and reward.

So the only way we can learn to love our enemies is to soak in the depth that Christ died for us when we were His.

I love the way Jesus Himself says it in Luke 6. It's his teaching on enemy love where he talks about you know don't just love those who love you, anyone can do that - love your enemy. If someone hits you on the cheek, turn the other also. If someone steals your jacket, give him your shirt.

Just countercultural, shocking enemy love in the face of pain.

But he grounds it all in the end with this..

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

God is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. He is merciful to those who do not deserve His mercy. He is merciful to us when all of us do not deserve His mercy.

That's the point God is trying to get across to Jonah and to us in chapter 4 – I've done EVERYTHING for you - consistent and constant mercy. Is it right for you who have received nonstop undeserved grace to be angry when I do the same for your enemy?

Church - Do you want the mercy of God to be great enough to save sinners?

Do you want God to pursue your enemy like He's pursued you?

Do you want His mercy for them like you've received every day of your life?

Do you want God to look at them like He's looked at you, and through their faith declare - "not guilty, but righteous!"

Is the cross enough for their sins too?

Jesus = True and Better Jonah

To help us sit in the gospel and be able to say "yes" to that question, let me close by doing what we've been doing each week - and go back to the mercy of God for us on display through Jesus, the true and better Jonah.

Turn over with me to Matthew 12. We've gone here a couple of times in the past few weeks, but I just want to close this sermon and this series sitting in this text.

Matthew 12:38-41

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Here is Jesus, some 750 years after Jonah, talking to a group of Scribes and Pharisees - the religious elite. Teachers of the Law, religious authority. Who time and time again are barring people from the love of God. They are "worthy" because of the religious knowledge they have, or the laws they say they follow...but these other folks are not worthy.

The Pharisees create stumbling blocks, barring people from the grace and mercy of God. And yet they come to Jesus - show us a sign.

And Jesus says - you'll get no other sign but Jonah. For the Ninevites repented when Jonah preached an 8 word sermon, and yet here am I, the true and better Jonah - declaring the kingdom of God to you, and you still won't be changed by my mercy and grace.

So Church, let us not miss the warning signs of Jonah, the sign to us of the grace of God. But let us also not miss Jesus, the true and greater Jonah - the ultimately display of God's unending enemy love.

Jesus is the true and greater Jonah.

- Just like Jonah, Jesus was sent by God to preach to wicked, corrupt, and sinful people. But whereas Jonah ran, Jesus obeyed.
- Just like Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish - condemned for his sins - Jesus spent three days in the grave - condemned for our sins.
- Jonah preached a message of repentance without hope, Jesus preached judgment with hope, as he himself is the hope.
- Jonah considered it evil when Nineveh repented, Jesus rejoiced at each and every lost sheep who returned to his fold.
- Jonah wished for death when he saw his enemies receive God's mercy. Jesus willingly chose death so his enemies could receive God's mercy.
- Jonah went outside the city, waiting and hoping for its condemnation. Jesus went outside the city to a cross on golgotha to accomplish our salvation.

“Only when we read the rest of the story in the New Testament do we see what Jonah was pointing us to all along—a greater Prophet, a greater Preacher, a greater Savior. One who not only had the power to forgive sins but the desire to save any who would come to him in belief and repentance. The heart of God seen in the story of Jonah is the heart of Jesus.” - Adam Carrigan

The God who longs to be merciful to sinners.

Communion.

Pray.