

God's Message to Jonah

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[0:00] I'll open your Bibles to, guess where?

Jonah. Jonah. Jonah. And find chapter 4. Jonah chapter 4. I'll be reading it here in just a minute, reading the entire chapter.

In fact, I'm going to read, starting with verse 10 of chapter 3. A little bit later. But first, a little bit of an introduction.

What have we seen so far? As we draw now to the very close of this book. We have seen, in chapter 1, Jonah running from God.

Right? That's pretty clear. That's what chapter 1 is all about. Primarily, Jonah running from God. We have seen chapter 2 and Jonah running to God.

[1:16] In repentance. In obedience. Last week, we looked at Jonah chapter 3. And I guess we could say, there we have Jonah running with God.

Right? And we saw the greatest revival in all of history. And now we've come to the final chapter. And I guess we could, maybe, if we were to continue the same kind of thought pattern.

We have Jonah running ahead of God. Now, my approach to preaching this final chapter in the book of Jonah, this small little book, is going to be somewhat different than the way that I normally would deal with a text of Scripture.

It's going to be different in a number of ways. Now, first, as always, we are going to look at the text itself. That is, verse by verse. And walk our way through each verse.

Though the style of it is going to be more in kind of a narrative way this morning. But that would be the first thing we're going to do and need to do. And to draw out of the chapter some significant truths, elements of meaning.

[2:35] We want to find out what chapter 4 says. And says to us. That will be the first thing we need to do. Now, that is not so different.

But second, we shall also consider the book as a whole. We've come to the end of the book. And now, I'm going to have us look back at the broad sweep of the book.

The book as a whole. And to learn a couple of significant reasons why the book of Jonah is in our Bibles. I mentioned, I think, a few weeks ago that the moderates and liberals say it does not belong there.

But it does, of course, for a number of reasons. And so, we're going to look at the book as a whole. And discover why it's there. And then finally, we're going to bring all of it together.

Bring all that to bear on our lives today. And the primary truth that is taught in the book of Jonah. Now, I assure you to accomplish all of that in one sermon is a tall order.

[3:45] In fact, I would say to you, it's an impossible thing to do. And so, we're going to look at this over the next couple of Sundays. This morning and next Sunday. Now, here is the way I want to organize this two-part message.

All right? So, you can go ahead and just get ready. You'll know where we're going even next Sunday. This is how I'd like to organize it. I'm going to answer three questions. Have us consider three questions and hopefully give you the answer.

Looking strictly at chapter 4, here's the question. What is God saying to Jonah? That's pretty obvious.

I think that would be a good approach to take dealing with any text of Scripture. What is God saying to the people there? What is God saying to Jonah, the prophet, and, of course, through him to us? That's where we'll camp out today. Okay. But then, considering the entire book of Jonah, I'm going to answer this question. What is God saying to Israel?

[4:57] Because we're going to discover that the book of Jonah really is a prophecy to Israel. Not so much to Nineveh, particularly, but primarily it's a prophecy to Israel.

And if it is, and we'll talk about this next week, then what is God saying to Israel, even today? And then, finally, applying all of that to God's people today, one could argue God's true Israel.

What is God saying to the church? Those are three very important questions to answer. What is God saying to Jonah? That's chapter 4, here. What is God saying to Israel, the book as a whole, and, therefore, giving us the answer to why the book is in our Old Testaments?

And then, what is God saying to the church that is to the church today? All right, that's where we're going over the next two Sundays. This morning, what is God saying to Jonah?

What is God saying to Jonah? Now, I would be willing to say that for most readers of the book of Jonah, when we come to chapter 4, we're a little bit confused.

[6:16] I don't know when it was for you when you first read the book of Jonah. And I don't really know whether you had this thought, had this feeling, or had this kind of reaction in your heart and mind.

But when you come to chapter 4, it just seems like it should not be there. In fact, if we were writing the story and wanted it to be a great story, chapter 3 would be a great ending for it.

Don't you think? I mean, in chapter 1, we certainly have that amazing story about Jonah running from God and getting on the ship and God bringing a storm. And then them throwing Jonah overboard and the great fish coming along and swallowing him up.

And we're very familiar with that part of the story. We like that part. Interesting. Interesting. And then when we get into chapter 2, we have Jonah in the belly of the great fish.

And Jonah is repenting. And he is committing to obey God. That's a great part of the story. And then in chapter 3, Jonah hits the ground running.

[7:16] And he goes to Nineveh. And he preaches what God told him to preach. And we have this entire city repenting and being saved. And what a great way to end the story.

And then we have chapter 4. And so we might find ourselves being just a little bit bewildered about that and think, well, this just doesn't make much sense.

But chapter 4 is not complicated. It's not hard to understand. It may be a little shocking to us. And I think, and it should be a little appalling to us as readers.

But it's easy really to understand why it's there. Why we have chapter 4. It's not complicated. In fact, I'm going to suggest to you, and this will become more clear next week, that as a prophetic book, and that's what Jonah is, one of the minor prophets, as a book of prophecy, it would be incomplete without chapter 4.

God's intent in the book of Jonah would not be realized without chapter 4.

[8:30] And that will become more clear next week. But don't be appalled by chapter 4 or think, you know, I really kind of leave that off. And don't think it's kind of complicated.

It makes perfect sense. All right, so let's walk through it verse by verse. Verse 1, chapter 4.

Look there in your copy of God's Word. It begins this way. But. But.

That's how it begins. And here comes a major turn in the story. I tell you, the book of Jonah has more unexpected turns than an Arkansas highway.

Have you ever driven through Arkansas? At least this side of Arkansas. Another turn. Another expected turn. I mean, every few verses, it seems, we are confronted with an unexpected turn in the story.

[9:38] And here it happens again. But. It displeased Jonah exceedingly. Who knew that was going to happen?

Of course, we. Familiar with the book of Jonah. And so we already know about this. But. Try to imagine. This is the first time you've read it. First time you've heard it.

Who knew this was going to happen? But. It displeased Jonah exceedingly. I mean, right after chapter 3. We have the Bible saying, but.

It displeased Jonah exceedingly. What is this? Now think about it in these terms. Jonah proclaimed the word of God to the Ninevites.

And Ninevites believed. They believed God. And they repented of their sin. This is chapter 3. And then God relented.

[10:44] He relented. And He spared all of Nineveh. He withheld His judgment. The destruction that He promised them. God relented.

And in the very last verse of chapter 3. God saw their repentance. He saw them turning from their sin. And He relented the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them.

And He did not do it. There's my favorite line in the book of Jonah. He did not do it. 600,000 plus souls repented of sin.

That's a lot of people. All of them repenting. And giving visible sign that the repentance is true. And an entire city is saved.

This is incredible. But more incredible, the Bible says, but it displeased Jonah exceedingly. What's this?

[11:53] What do we make of that? Now, listen. Jonah was not just a little disappointed. The Bible is very clear with extra words here to describe what was going on in Jonah's mind and heart.

He was displeased exceedingly. And also, it says, not only was he displeased, but then what does it say next?

He became angry. Now, don't get the idea that Jonah just got a little ticked. There's much more than that.

Jonah was hot. In fact, the Hebrew word is *korah*. And it means to be hot. It means to be burning. And used in this sense, in this context, it means to be burning with anger. That's what the word means.

[12:57] He wasn't just a little upset. He wasn't just a little bit ticked, as I said. He was hot. We would say it this way. He was burning mad.

He was steaming. He was furious. That might be the best way to describe it. Furious. So, Jonah was exceedingly displeased.

And he was furious. At whom? And for what reason? Well, it's pretty obvious he was furious at God. Right? Who else would he be mad at? He was furious with God because he was displeased with what God did.

Or, really, technically, what God did not do. I mean, this is unexpected, isn't it?

[14:02] And Jonah explains this in the next verse. Verse 2. Look at it. So, he prayed to the Lord. Here's Jonah praying again. And he said, Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?

Now, we don't have any record of this, of Jonah saying this to God. But apparently, because Jonah is saying it here, apparently God, or rather Jonah, said this to God.

Didn't I tell you this while I was still back in my country? Didn't I tell you that I knew this was going to happen? Didn't I tell you that I knew you were going to spare Nineveh?

Didn't I tell you that way back there? And he said, therefore, and this is the reason why he said, I fled previously to Tarshish. That's why I bought that ticket.

That's why I went down to Joppa, the opposite direction. And why I bought that ticket to get on that boat to sail off to Tarshish, to the very end of the world, so that I could remove myself from any possibility of you using me.

[15:03] Didn't I explain this to you, God? It's like Jonah is scolding God. He certainly is lecturing God, it seems. And didn't I tell you about this, God?

God? For I know, he said, look at it. For I know something. I know you, God.

What do you know about God? He said that you are a gracious and merciful God. Slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness.

One who relents from doing harm. That's what Jonah knew about God. It's kind of ironic. That Jonah knew the heart of God, but he didn't know his own heart.

And what a contrast between the two. The heart of God. The character of God. What a contrast between that and Jonah's heart.

[16:10] But I'm getting ahead of myself. Jonah knew this about God. He knew that he is a gracious God and a merciful God.

And that he is abundant, overflowing with loving kindness. He's one who relents. Withholds his judgment.

Graciously. And by the way, Jonah experienced that firsthand, didn't he? Jonah. So I think Jonah knew it before. And that's why he said, didn't I tell you, God, I knew this was going to happen.

But then he knew it firsthand. Because that's the way God treated Noah. I mean, Jonah.

Wednesday night I kept calling Noah Jonah.

And tonight I'm calling Jonah Noah. Jonah. Jonah knew this firsthand. Verse 3. He says, therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

[17:17] How ridiculous. Ridiculous. No. What are we to make of this? Jonah keeps having a death wish.

I mean, doesn't this seem strange to you? I mean, what kind of reaction is that? Jonah says, I know, God. I knew. Didn't I tell you?

Didn't I tell you I knew this was going to happen? That's why I tried to get away. And now it's happened. Just let me die.

I mean, isn't that strange? Maybe I'm the only one. I think this is pretty strange. But listen, we need to understand something. Nineveh and the cities in close proximity to Nineveh.

In fact, I think I may have explained that it's very likely that Nineveh represented a trinity of cities there in the very heart of the Assyrian Empire.

[18:17] In fact, Nineveh represented the seat of government for the Assyrian Empire. That's key in our understanding, if nothing else, in our understanding of why Jonah reacted the way he did.

Because Assyria was a powerful empire in this day. And the Assyrians, the people of Assyria, were cruel, cruel people.

And their leaders were cruel. And they were a warring people. And not only that, but Assyria was imperialistic in this day.

That is, they were seeking to conquer the known world of Jonah's day. And they had Israel in their crosshairs.

And Jonah knew that. Jonah knew that. And so, the destruction of Nineveh would have effectively meant the end of Assyria as a world power.

[19:20] I mean, you don't totally annihilate the seat of government of a nation. You don't totally destroy three major cities in a country.

And that country continued to be as powerful as they were before. I mean, this would have greatly diminished their threat as a conquering nation. Did Jonah know that?

Oh, sure he did. Sure he knew that. You see, Jonah feared the Assyrians. Jonah feared Nineveh.

As did all of the Israelites. And Jonah hated them. Hated them. With a passion. He hated them.

And all of Israel hated them. And Jonah did not want to be the prophet responsible for God sparing Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. And apparently, not only did Jonah know all of this, but he explained all this to God.

[20:30] Didn't I tell you, God? And that's why in chapter 1, Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh.

Remember, that was the first time we see his death wish. He told the sailors, just throw me overboard. This is the way you'll be saved.

But I'm not going. Throw me overboard. He'd rather die than go to Nineveh. And that's why here in chapter 4, Jonah, again, would rather die than see Nineveh spared by a gracious God.

See, we just need to get into the heart of Jonah, into the psyche of Jonah, to find out why he's thinking the way he's thinking. And it seems unrational to us, but I guess if we had been Jonah, or if we were Israelites in this day, we might have, and very likely would have, the same kind of outlook. And so Jonah says, just let me die. Jonah, here's the important thing that we need to get from all of this, though. Jonah had no compassion for the Ninevites whatsoever.

[21:43] None. He hated them. All right, so that's Jonah. Now, how does God respond? Well, first, God responds with a probing question that Jonah was not ready to answer yet.

That's what we have in verse 4. A probing question. And then God follows that up with an object lesson intended to help Jonah see his sinfulness and to see it in stark contrast to the greatness of God and the graciousness of God.

An object lesson. That's what we have in the next few verses. And so verse 4, here's God's question. Then the Lord said, is it right for you to be angry?

That's the question. Very simple question. Is it right for you to be angry? Now, what's missing here, though, from my perspective and probably our perspective, is any kind of admonishment from God. Any kind of scolding from God. I mean, here's Jonah lecturing God on the one hand. Greatly displeased and angry with God. And God does not issue any word of rebuke.

[22:55] Instead, he just asks a question. Is it right for you to be angry? Now, Jonah does not answer the question, does he?

Not this time. There's no response from Jonah. And I do not really think that God expected one. Because Jonah, quite frankly, is not ready to answer that question.

But he's going to be. Because next, in verse 5, we have the object lesson. This is how we need to understand chapter 4. God's in charge of all of this.

He's leading things and moving things in a certain direction and teaching things. Teaching his prophet Jonah. And so here's the object lesson.

Verse 5. So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. Just went out there and sat down. He didn't stay inside the city and rejoice with the people there.

[23:58] I imagine there would have been some great worship services going on in Nineveh. He went out of the city to the east side of it. Further east of his home.

I'm not sure if there's any significance there. But went out to the east side of the city and he sat there. And he made himself a little shelter. The Bible says. Kind of a lean-to, I guess, we might imagine.

And he sat under it in the shade. Till. Till. And this is important. Till he might see what would become of the city. So what's he doing?

It was pretty clear. He had just preached the message 40 days. And so I think Jonah is going out there to the east of the city. Building a little shelter.

Sort of a shelter. It's somewhat inadequate. But apparently for that moment it worked alright. And he sat down and he just waits. Waits to see what's going to happen.

[24:56] To see if this repentance is real. To see if it's going to last. To see more importantly what God is going to do.

He's just going to go out there for at least 40 days and find out what happens. And the Lord God prepared a plant.

Now here is another miracle. By the way. In fact the word prepared appears in the book five times. We've already seen it twice.

First you remember in chapter 1 God prepared a great storm. That was a miracle. God did that. And then a little bit later in the chapter we have God preparing a great fish.

And so here he prepared a plant. Now it's variously translated. Actually the Hebrew word is a word.

[25:57] We just don't know what it means. I know I think in the King James says gourd or vine or something like that. And we've all kind of picture kind of a vine growing up over the lean to and providing some shade.

But really the word is most likely in reference to a tree with broad leaves. And this is a miracle because it just pops right up.

All this is happening very quickly. And it pops right up. And it's broad leaves spread out over this little lean to whatever it was where Jonah is sitting.

And so God prepared the plant and made it come up over Jonah. That it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. The son.

And so Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God performed another miracle. He prepared a worm.

[27:02] Now I hope the worm wasn't as big as the fish. I don't know. I've seen pictures that suggest that. It was just a worm and God prepared it. And the worm went to work on the tree.

And short work because this is a supernatural thing. Because the Bible goes on to say. And yet this worm that God prepared so damaged the plant that it withered.

It died. And it happened when the sun arose that God prepared a vehement east wind. Here's another supernatural event.

God prepared this strong, dry, hot wind. Something we're pretty familiar with around here. At least we were this past summer. But this was even worse. I would suppose.

And what does the Bible say? And the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself.

[28:04] And said, it is better for me to die than to live. Here it is again. So God's doing all this. Here's the object lesson. God asks the question.

I mean first, Jonah's angry. He's hot. He is furious with God. And he's greatly displeased about the outcome. And Nineveh's been spared.

And he's mad. Burning mad. And God asks the question. Do you have a reason to be angry? And then comes this object lesson. Now God does not explain the object lesson yet.

He's going to. Jonah apparently did not get it. Not yet anyway. But before God applies the object lesson. Explains it to Jonah.

He re-asks the question. The question he asked back in verse 4. Do you see? Verse 9. Is it right for you to be angry?

[29:06] And then he adds about the plant. Do you get that? Do you get that? God is so wise, isn't he?

He knows how to ask just the right question. In the right way. Is it right for you to be angry about the plant, Jonah?

I mean before. Now get this. Before, Jonah wishes death because a city lives. God spared the city. And now, Jonah wishes death because a plant died. God did not spare the plant. Spared the city, but did not spare the plant.

And Jonah wishes to die in both instances. Jonah says, and I'll just paraphrase it this way. Verse 9. You bet it's right for me to be angry about this dead plant.

[30:11] I liked the plant. I love this plant, God. What do you mean? Of course I have a right to be angry.

Just look what this plant was doing for me and now it's dead. Just let me die. Do you get this?

Now understand that God was just simply baiting Jonah here. I mean this is an object lesson for him. Real life thing. Here Jonah, we give you a picture here.

Get the picture and then you'll know how to answer the question. And God is just baiting him. And now God has Jonah right where he wants him.

Jonah is caught. He's caught. Not by a great fish this time. But by a great truth. A great truth.

[31:10] He better get it. And here's the truth. Verse 10. But the Lord said, You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored.

Nor made it grow. Which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city? Man.

Man. See, God is saying to Jonah, Jonah, just like the plant, I planted this city, Nineveh.

You didn't do that. I did that. And just like the plant, I labored to grow it. You didn't do that, Jonah. I did that. But unlike the plant which came up in a day and died in the same day, I have been laboring over Nineveh for many thousands of years.

Did you know that Nineveh was mentioned way back in Genesis chapter 10? Nineveh was founded by Nimrod, the great grandson of Noah. Nineveh had been around a long, long time.

[32:26] Nineveh. The plant came up in a day and died in a day, but God has been laboring over Nineveh for many thousands of years.

And not only that, but God says in verse 11, Nineveh is a great city. He says it's a great city in which are more than 100, 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left.

I mentioned last week, I think that God's not talking about stupid people here. Ignorant people.

He's talking about children. Small children. He's identifying the number of small children in this city, and there are more than 120,000 small children who don't know their right from their left.

They're innocent. Should I not have mercy on them? Do you see what God is saying to Jonah?

[33:40] Should I not have mercy upon them? Jonah, now God didn't say this, not directly, but this is exactly what He's saying to Jonah's heart. I don't know if Jonah got it because we don't have another response from him.

But God is saying to Jonah, how in the world can you prefer a plant over people? How can this be possible, Jonah? How can you care more for plants than you do for people?

Jonah? Jonah? Or really, more specifically, He's saying, how can you care more about your personal comfort than you do about the lost and doomed souls of Nineveh?

How is this possible? Jonah, should I not pity Nineveh? That great city. And the book just ends there.

Just ends there. As far as I know, and I didn't really go back and check, but I can't think of another book in the Bible that ends with a question mark.

[34:58] It asks a question, and we have no record of the answer. It just ends there. Ends with a question mark.

And I would suggest to you, after thinking about this, and really, it's quite obvious that this is a powerful way to end it. Just kind of open-ended.

Did Jonah answer the question? It's not in the Bible. We don't have any record of Jonah answering the question.

But, let me use my sanctified imagination. I think Jonah either if he answered it verbally or just answered it in his own heart, I think he likely said, God, when you put it that way, there could only be one answer.

Yes. Yes. You should have pity. And so should I. Isn't that the obvious?

[36:25] I mean, how else could you answer the question? When God frames the question in such a way, right after this object lesson that is so clear, what else would we answer it?

The answer, of course, is yes. Yes, God, you should have pity on 600,000 souls who've repented. You should have pity.

And so should I. See, the book of Jonah ends with a question mark. Not just for Jonah, but for us. Don't you think? It ends this way for us because we must answer the question. We must answer it. And there is only one answer, isn't there?

The answer is God. Yes, you should have pity. In reality, it's not a real stretch for us to relate to Jonah and connect ourselves to him.

[37:44] we're just like him. And it seems that we care more about a lot of things more than we do for lost souls.

Don't we? We care for personal comfort more than for people?

Care more for personal interests than we do for people? Sometimes, if we're not careful, we'll care more about our own doctrine than we care for people.

I mean, we have to compromise on doctrine. No. But a doctrine should never keep us from passionately caring for lost souls and pleading with them to come to Christ.

We care more, now listen to me, for the people of our own color than we do for lost souls that have a different color.

[39:21] Whether they live here or anywhere else in this world. We care more for people who have the same kind religion we have than we do for lost souls who are caught up in a false religion.

We'd rather not deal with that. We'd rather not be put in that position. We care for a lot of things more than we care for lost souls.

And God says, should I not have pity? Yes, you should, God. And so should I.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

[42:29] God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

[47:29] God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you.