|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A picture containing object, thing, clock  Description generated with very high confidence | God Loves Your Nineveh More Than You |
| MATT BLACK, Wed, Aug 23, 2017 |
| [livinghopechurch.net](http://www.livinghopechurch.net/) | Jonah 4:1-11, “Into the Storm” series |

Introduction: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are continuing a series in Jonah called “Into the Storm.” Tonight’s study is the final study for us in is entitled: “God Loves Your Nineveh More Than You.”

I doubt if there ever has been a story of God’s dealings with men that should give more cause for rejoicing than the story of Jonah. Jonah’s story is a story of God’s mercy. First, there had been mercy for Jonah, who had been given a great commission. Even though he rebelled at the idea of preaching to the pagans of Nineveh, God persevered with him to turn him from his folly and brought him at last to that great capital city of Assyria. God’s mercy to Jonah involved the storm, the great fish, and the repentance of Jonah within the fish, and then God’s recommissioning of him after he had been cast up on the shore. We read at that point that “the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time” (3:1).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Angry with God?**

If there had ever been a cause for rejoicing, certainly those three evidences of God’s mercy—first to his prophet, then to the sailors, and eventually to Nineveh—should provide it, and we should expect Jonah himself to be literally leaping with joy and thanksgiving. Instead, when we come to the fourth and final chapter, we find Jonah in the worst “blue funk” imaginable. In fact, he was angry about what had happened, violently angry. He was angry with God.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Holy Scripture**

**Jonah 3:10; 4:1-11**, “3:10 When God saw what they did, 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. 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?”

We are often like Jonah. We want to choose those who are worthy of saving. Jonah is a prophet, and he needs to grow in God’s grace. Three things we often don’t understand about grace.

* God’s grace is a display of his patience.
* God’s grace is a miracle.
* God’s grace is not fair.

1. God’s grace is a display of his **patience** (3:10; 4:1-3).

**Jonah 3:10; 4:1-3**, “3:10 When God saw what they did, 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. 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.”

Anybody who is following this story along would expect there to have just been a Jonah 3:10, and that should’ve said, “And Jonah returned to his own land rejoicing.”

**Angry Enough to Die**

But instead, we have a Jonah 4:1 that says, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.” and he says, “I am angry, ‘… angry enough to die.’ ” Come on!

Jonah is mad that God is such a God of grace. I mean it’s fine if you are gracious to my beautiful people in Israel, but not to the crummy Assyrians! Jonah is not only self-righteous but racist as well. He says, “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (4:2), quoting God’s description of himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6.

**Getting Mad for Playing Carnegie Hall?**

Wait a minute here! Do artists get exceedingly angry when their art is chosen for display at the Louvre in France? Do musicians get exceedingly angry when they’re asked to do recitals at Carnegie Hall? Do ball players get exceedingly angry when they’re promoted to the majors? Well, why would a preacher get exceedingly angry when, as a response to his preaching, he’s actually turned a culture away from violence, oppression, and wickedness to the living God?[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The Incredible Collapse of Jonah**

Jonah basically says in verse 2, I don’t understand your love, God! He says (4:2), “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.”

What is he doing? He says, “God, I do not understand how your love operates. I don’t get it. It doesn’t make sense to me.” God sets out in this chapter to teach Jonah how his love operates, so the whole chapter is about love, and the incredible collapse of Jonah is because of a misunderstanding of God’s love.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**God’s Patient Love**

The only thing keeping Jonah from oblivion at this point is the patience of God. It’s ironic because this patient love of God saved in four situations:

1. Jonah running from God
2. The sailors
3. The Ninevites
4. Jonah in chapter 4

What do we learn about the patience of God? Simply this: The key teaching of the book of Jonah (at least in this chapter) is that *fruitful Christians, prominent Christians can fall back into old patterns of sin and self-deception so that only the patient love of God stands between us and oblivion*. God’s patient love is such that he will always bring us back. We’re taught about the patient love of God here because Jonah is a perfect example (and this is the teaching).

Christians (at first) are no stronger than other people, except in one thing: *They are strong enough to admit their weakness*. They’re strong enough to admit their weakness. Let me show you. They are strong enough to admit they are too wicked to actually come to God without a Savior.

Do you think that those old patterns of anger, and of fear, and of dishonesty, and denial are all gone away? All those bad habit patterns? No. They’re under a death sentence, but they’re still there. The condemning power of sin is gone forever, but the actual power of sin, though under a death sentence, is still present. Therefore, it can erupt. In fact, I don’t know if you realize this (this is another thing a lot of us don’t do much of anymore), but an animal is not terribly dangerous unless you mortally wound it.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**God is Not Willing that Any Should Perish**

“In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ … But… , dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (**2 Pet 3:3-4, 8-9**).

**It Takes Time to Understand God’s Patient Love**

When you first become a Christian, you say, “I know I’m saved, simply because of God’s love.” But you don’t believe it. It takes a number of years. When you see how often you’ve broken his promises, how often you’ve fallen down and you begin to hear a voice in your heart that goes like this, “And you call yourself a Christian! Why should he ever talk to you again? Why should he listen to you again? Why should he hear your prayers? Why should he ever accept you?”[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. God’s grace is a **miracle** (4:4-11).

**Jonah 4:4-11**, “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?”

**The Irony**

The irony here is that Israel had far more light than Nineveh, but repented with so little of a message and no promise of redemption, even though God spared them. Yet Israel had so much light and revelation from God and were hardened.

Why did God choose Israel? “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (**Deut 7:7-8**).

At this point of the story we rightly ask ourselves, “But what is wrong with Jonah?” He should have been happy; he is unhappy. He had been instrumental in the gift of spiritual life to thousands; he prefers death. He claimed to be cognizant of God’s grace and mercy, which he himself had experienced; he resents God for it and says that he would have preferred wrath for Nineveh.

One thing wrong with Jonah is that he is not understanding of the miracle of God’s grace and love.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**The Miracle**

Here’s what God tells Jonah. Grace is a miracle. In other words, the regeneration of sinners is an act of almighty God. Eph 2, Eze 36 and 37. God has to do the work. God has to raise the dead. God has to give the increase (1 Cor 3:6).

You know that plant that gave you shade? I made it grow. Everything you have is a gift. That’s grace!

1. God’s grace is a not **fair** (4:9-11).

**Jonah 4:9-11**, “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?”

**A Reason for Anger?**

Jonah thought he had a reason for anger. It’s just not fair. God your grace is good enough to save good sinners. That was Jonah’s narrow theology. Believe this false theology is alive and well hurting the church of Jesus.

Listen the truth is, God’s grace is not just good enough for good sinners, but for the worst of sinners. In other words, **grace is not about what’s fair**. If we want fairness, then we all go to hell. Grace is outside the realm of God’s justice. It’s in the realm of mercy.

**Prodigal Son & His Older Brother**

The truth is, the fountain of Jonah’s anger is self-righteousness. It’s not fair! He thinks he’s better. A good illustration as to why Jonah is angry is the parable of the prodigal son & the older brother in Luke 15:11–32.

The younger brother asked for his part of the father’s inheritance before the father died. It was very unusual, but it was possible.

He said, “Look, Father, when you die, the older brother will get this much of the estate, and I will get this much. I want my part now. Sell off whatever part of the land you have or draw out of the bank whatever assets you have that you’ll give me. I want it now.” Think about that. The father gave that to the younger son. The younger son goes off and squanders it on wine, women, song, gambling, and that sort of thing, and as we all know, he comes back absolutely empty-handed, absolutely impoverished.

What does the father do? The father comes back like any father. A father accepts. A father gives access. A father protects, and a father is wealthy and bestows his riches on the child. The son is on his way back, and he wants to confess his sin. The father won’t even let him do it. The father sees him coming from afar. He cuts across the field. He pounces on him. He begins to kiss him. The son said, “Wait! Let me confess. I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and I’m not worthy.” The father said, “Shut up.”

He says, “Come,” to his servants. “Put my robe on his back. Put my ring on his finger. Kill the fatted calf. We’re going to have a party. My younger son, I thought, was dead, and now he’s alive.” That’s the father’s love. It’s not conditioned on your perfection; it’s conditioned on his perfection and is an expression of his perfection. Here is the thing you have to remember: When he gets back in, the elder brother is very angry. Do you know why?

Because, you see, since the younger brother has squandered all of the wealth, everything the father is giving to the younger brother is whose? The elder brother’s. See, the elder brother now owns every robe. The elder brother owns every ring. “Every robe is mine,” he says. “Every ring is mine, and every fatted calf is mine. I’ve worked my fingers to the bone and what thanks do I get?”

**Jesus the Real Older Brother**

But Jesus puts the elder brother in there when he’s rebuking the Pharisees, and if you look at the context, you’ll know what Jesus is actually saying is, “I am the true elder Brother. I am the real elder Brother.”

What would a real elder brother have done? The real elder brother would have gone out there and found the younger brother in the pigsty and would have lifted him up and would have brought him home and said, “Little brother, here’s *my* robe. Here’s *my* ring. Here’s *my* fatted calf. It’s all at my expense, and I freely give it to you. Enter back into the joy of the father. Let’s have a party.” The true elder Brother is Jesus. Do you know why you can enter into the fatherhood of God?

Because Jesus “brothered” you. Jesus treated you as a brother. Jesus spent his wealth on you. Because he brothered you, God is now your Father and not your boogeyman and not your Creator. You were built for family love. Will you stop being so upset about the meanness of your family? No human family could possibly meet the needs. *This* is the family you have to have. All other models are penultimate. Jesus Christ has brothered you so God, the Creator, can father you. Come home to him.

Say, “Father, I have sinned.” Go to him and say, “I need your Fatherly love,” and you’ll get it because you got the brotherly love of the true elder Brother. It’s *his* robe on your back. It’s *his* ring on your finger, and he says, “I can’t wait to have a party.” You were built for this family love. Live as a dear child. Think of yourself that way, and you’ll be able to imitate him and live this life of greatness.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Plants and People**

As we conclude this book, we see that Jonah loves a plant far more than the people of Israel. So it is with us: we love our A/C sometimes more than the souls of those perishing around us. We love comfort more than conversion. However you want to say it, we are all a lot more like Jonah than we’d like to admit.

**Concluding Thoughts**

* Jonah has far more light than the Assyrians. Therefore God is showing his patience just as much with Jonah as the Ninevites.
* You would think after being miraculously given a second chance after near death in the belly of a fish, Jonah would be more in line with God’s will. This shows the nature of progressive sanctification and gives hope for us all. God is patient with us!
* Ultimately, God uses Jonah to tell the story of Jesus. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights and rise again.
* If God can use Jonah, he can use you!

1. Boice, J. M. (2002). [*The Minor Prophets: an expositional commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/boicecm28ho?ref=Bible.Jon4.1-11&off=1506) (pp. 301–302). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Keller, T. J. (2013). [*The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tmkllrsrmnrchvj?art=sermon.9.2.1990.aboundinginlove&off=3325&ctx=+expects+a+Jonah+4.+~Anybody+who+is+follo). New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Keller. Jonah 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Boice, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Keller, Jonah 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)