

NOT THERE YET, JONAH 4

A Man, a Fish, and the Grace of God #4

◆**Intro:** Is there a street in town you prefer not to drive down because someone lives on it that puts a bad taste in your mouth? Are there times when you are glad that you and a particular family member do not reside in the same house, or even the same town for that matter? Do you feel content to leave such folk to whatever miserable lives they can design for themselves? Have you ever felt slightly soothed inside when your brother was getting punished by your father, or your sister was getting chewed out for her disobedience? Do you get a warm, satisfied feeling when the villain in the movie finally takes his last breath and dies? Have you ever seen someone reaping the consequences of their bad choices and thought, "Ha! You got your's! You had it coming!" Do you like revenge? –Then you and Jonah could be good friends.

◆What concerns me about all this is that these momentary feeling are deeply satisfying. We truly enjoy putting one in his place. But my God tells me this is not pleasing to him. This is not his way. And though it truly feels like a really good thing at the time, it is not a really good thing at all. This is cause for alarm. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne put it, "The seeds of all sins are in my heart, and perhaps all the more dangerously that I do not see them." And we might add, "Or feel them." Theme today? Our title. We have not arrived. There is further to go in our spiritual journey.

◆A quick review of where we've been in Jonah:

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- ◆ Chapter 1 taught us to not be complacent about holiness or about witness to the world.
 - ◆ Chapter 2 showed us that hitting bottom reminds us of how all good things are grace to begin with, and of how long the reach of God's arm is.
 - ◆ Chapter 3 urged us to repent for the practice of repentance unlocks grace
 - ◆ Chapter 4 is today and we're going to learn that
- ◆ **One reason God blesses me is so I can bless others.** If this is not my impulse, I am not there yet.
- ◆ *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, NIV.*
- ◆ **A.** This of course suggests that I need to think about, and desire the blessing of the lives of other people. It's really **not difficult to want to be blessed**, honored, respected by others to assert ourselves, to revenge an offense. But the more difficult thing is to desire this *for* the other person. This is the call of love. We have finally hit the crux of Jonah's problem (v2). Jonah did what God said, eventually, but Jonah did not feel what God felt. God wants me to delight in the blessing of others as he does.

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◆“But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” Jonah 4:1, 2, NIV.

◆Jonah didn't want these people to receive any grace. He didn't want them in on God's goodness. He wanted vengeance, fairness, payback. We read verse two and something feels amiss, doesn't it? "*See Lord I told you you would be too good.*"? You thought Jonah ran away because he was afraid of the dangers in Iraq (Assyria). Nope. Was it fear of these ancient Nazi's? Nope. It was anger and hatred. Pure, finely filtered and distilled, spring-fed hatred.

◆**B.** Now before you pat yourself assuringly that you don't hate anyone, hit the pause button and ask When am I guilty of the Jonah syndrome? Jonah is the guy who's mad at a friend for not buying from his company when he needed **supplies**. Jonah is the woman who turned around in the **hall** to walk the other way from someone she doesn't want to be friendly to. Jonah is the employee who avoids his **boss** because he expects him to work hard. Jonah is the resident who shoves a little of his **dogs** business onto the neighbors yard just because the neighbor plays his radio too loud in the evenings. Jonah is the ministry team member who would rather quit than do a project he didn't **vote**

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for. Jonah is the church member careful to never **smile** at the someone who once offended them. Jonah is the person who cannot make herself be kind to or love **mean** people. Jonah is you, and Jonah is me. We have not arrived even when we think we have. We are still in need of grace.

◆**C.** Jonah is a shock to the reader, but not to himself. God's agenda was not his agenda. The story does not resolve like a good TV show: "And Jonah stayed in Nineveh joyfully teaching them the ways of Yahweh, and many lives become obedient to the Lord..." Nope. Jonah leaves the biggest Billy Graham rally he's ever seen to sit on a nearby hill hoping it will all disperse! And what does that suggest about you and me? Look!

◆1) He contrast **God**: God is compassionate to Jonah repeatedly. Provides a fish to rescue him. Provides a plant to rescue him. God is compassionate to Nineveh. Jonah isn't.

◆2) He contrasts the greatest prophet, **Moses**: Moses famously prayed, in Exodus 33, for the rebellious Israelites when God said he was going to destroy them for their evil. Jonah is not praying for Nineveh. He *wants* God to wipe them out. He knows the story. He quotes Exodus 34!

◆3) He contrasts **Elijah** the second great prophet: Elijah is the only other biblical person recorded to have said in discouragement that he wanted to die. But Elijah said it because he thought he was the only believer left, and he

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was weary when his ministry doesn't seem to change the people. Jonah wants to die because his ministry *did* change people and he *wasn't* the only one left! How do ya like that for weird?

◆4) And finally he contrasts **Nineveh** itself: Nineveh repents of their sinful hearts. Jonah does not repent. In fact he forgets the grace shown him in the sea, and on the desert.

And he re-submerges himself in the sea of hostility.

◆And this, Jonah's character, as we saw earlier was an indictment of the nation of Israel. They were complacent about holiness, uninterested in witnessing to lost people, soaking up their current prosperity as though they had it coming. Remember from our study in chapter one that the economy was up, the borders were slightly expanded (a prophecy Jonah had foretold). The pagans nations were not on their radar of concerns. They were feeling blessed and content to stay right there. But do you recall why God created the nation of Israel? Do you remember why he called their father Abraham to follow him?

◆*"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2, NIV).*

◆ I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6, NIV).

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◆ Later in history, the descendants of these folks in Jesus day would resent that Jesus ate with criminals, low-lives, and ladies of the evening. Those Israelites were the **Older Brother** in the Prodigal Son story; angry that the Father was happy when the wayward son repents and comes home. Jesus told another parable to those folks, this one about an **unmerciful servant** (Mt.18) who was forgiven a great debt, more than several life-times could repay, only to throw his buddy in jail because he owed him a fist full of dollars. These are church people, and there are still inside them seeds of every sin, more dangerous because they will not see them! This mens I need humility before the agenda of God on my life. God's agenda needs to be my agenda. God is sovereign and God would be sovereign in your life as well. God is sovereign over the fish. He "provided" one for Jonah. God is sovereign over the vines. He "provided" one for Jonah. God is sovereign over the worms, and God is sovereign over the wind.

◆ Do we see it? GOD is first place. Not patriotism. Not democracy. Not savings plans. Not economy, though these are all good things! Take wars like Vietnam for example. The US historically would step into wars around the globe because it was right to defend people and their freedom from oppression. But then our politics and personal benefit became of more importance to our masses and we bowed out. The urge to fight for the underdog is Christianity supported sensibility. Where a dedication

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to God's agenda flourishes, so does willingness to put your self out, or into harms way.

◆**D.** Jonah's story asks me, "How do my priorities reflect God's agenda?" Jonah cared more about a plant than people. Do we care more about our camper getting messy than our brother's family having the opportunity to use it? Do we care more about our safety than about standing up for someone being abused in the school yard? Do we care more about our retirement comfort than we do about people in the Philippines worshiping Buddha? What do the statistics of our giving, praying, or going say about our value of the cause of Christ? See, God's agenda, that of giving and loving, will inevitably mean sacrifice for me. Just as it means sacrifice for him. God's love for humans could not be at the expense of his perfect justice against evil. So he "spent" his Son. He sent Jesus, to satisfy his perfect justice vs sin, and to demonstrate his perfect grace to mankind. It costs God to forgive human beings. And it costs you and I to be intent on blessing others.

◆This is a beautiful thing when it happens in the church. We started using more and more contemporary music in my previous church and an older gentleman told me that while he doesn't really like it much, his grandchildren do and enjoy worship more - so it was all right with him! That's sacrifice for blessing. When you take a week off to go work on someones house down south, that's sacrifice for blessing! When you don't buy Hulu, Netflix,

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Cable, and Disney Plus every month so that you can give to God's work, that's sacrifice for blessing. When you sign up to stand in the cold at the Christmas parade just to offer a smile and hot chocolate and the message of "Merry Christmas, Christ came for you!" or "God's love is as free as this Hot Chocolate." to someone you may never see twice, that's a sacrifice for the sake of blessing.

◆ **Conclusion:** Listen Sunrise, God has blessed you to bless. He has called you to call others. He has loved you in order that you may pass his love on. (Our Christmas series will look into this further.) In anything Jonah's story shows us that.

◆ *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:36, NIV.*

◆ "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13, NIV.

◆ "and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Ephesians 5:2, NIV.

◆ And it also shows us we ought to have a healthy disquiet in our own souls about how well we're doing at being merciful as we have received mercy. Jonah had a momentary realization and understanding of grace in the belly of the fish. But like us, Jonah had all but forgotten it by the time he got to Nineveh. Which shows that being changed by God's grace is a **long journey** with

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successive stages. As the Heidelberg Catechism points out when it asks what conversion is: “It is the dying away of the old self, and the coming to life of the new.” This is part of being God’s on a daily basis. Jonah’s story is left unfinished. We don’t know if he ever got it or not. There’s a reason. We are to contemplate how we are going to finish our story. How are we writing our final paragraph? We are not yet to where we are going in our walk with God. As long as there is something more important to your heart than God’s agenda, you will be like Jonah: fragile, self-righteous, flip-flopping between happiness and despair. But **Jesus** has! But when we are writing the chapters of our lives as a mirror of the grace we receive daily, we also lose anxiety and hopelessness. We are able to return good for evil without resentment. We are able to hope even without comfort. Be people of the blessing!