

Jonah: Still A Disobedient Disciple

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[0 : 00] Well if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Jonah and chapter 4, the last chapter in this short book, the book of Jonah, chapter 4, and if we just read again from the beginning.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry, 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, unmerciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? Do you do well to be angry? As we've spent time studying the book of Jonah, we've been reminded that the story of Jonah is about much more than a man who ran away from God and was swallowed by a big fish.

Because as we've discovered in our study, the story of Jonah is actually about Jesus and the message of the gospel. Because as we've said before, Jonah is a type of Christ.

[1 : 41] Jonah, he went, as we've said before, he went down, down, down into the belly of the great fish. And Jesus, he went down, down, down from glory to Golgotha to the grave.

And Jesus, as we've said before, Jesus compared his death and burial to Jonah. When he said, 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.

But it was after the three days and three nights that Jonah was delivered. He was delivered from the belly of the fish. As he described himself, he called it the belly of Sheol or the belly of the grave.

Jonah was vomited out of the grave. He was resurrected from the grave. He was brought from death to life. Jonah was brought up, up, up. Just like Jesus on that first Lord's Day morning.

Jesus was resurrected from the grave. Jesus was brought up out of the grave from death to life. Jesus was brought up, up, up. And so Jonah, he's presented to us in this book as a type of Christ.

[2 : 53] And the story of Jonah is all about Jesus and the Gospel. But what we must understand when we say that Jonah is a type of Christ, it doesn't mean that Jonah was Christ-like in all his conduct.

Just like Joseph or Moses or David or even Solomon. They were all types of Christ. And they were types of Christ in different ways.

But they weren't always Christ-like in their conduct or their character. And that was certainly true of Jonah. Because as we've said all along, even though Jonah was a type of Christ, we've always called him a disobedient disciple.

Jonah was a disobedient disciple. Because when the Lord called him and commissioned him and even commanded him to go to Nineveh, he ran in the opposite direction.

And what we see here as we come to this closing chapter is that Jonah is still a disobedient disciple. Jonah is still a disobedient disciple.

[3 : 59] Because Jonah, he not only ran from the command of the Lord, Jonah is now raging with a compassion against the compassion of the Lord. So Jonah, he not only ran from the command of the Lord, but Jonah in this chapter, he's raging against the compassion of the Lord.

Jonah was still a disobedient disciple. But like the Lord does with all of his disciples, the Lord teaches Jonah here. And the Lord teaches Jonah that his grace is far bigger than Jonah.

The Lord teaches Jonah that his grace is far bigger than him. And I just want us to consider this closing chapter under three headings. Jonah's unnecessary anger, Jonah's undeserving appointment, and Jonah's unmistakable application.

Three simple headings. Jonah's unnecessary anger, Jonah's undeserving appointment, and Jonah's unmistakable application. So first of all, Jonah's unnecessary anger.

We're told in verses one and two, we're told, Now, you know, when we read these opening verses from a 21st century perspective, and when we read these verses, knowing that people are converted, in our day and age, it's so few and far between.

[5 : 46] And, well, we look at the day and age that we live in, the church is in decline. And when we read these verses, you know, well, for myself, do you not wonder, why is Jonah displeased at the conversion of sinners?

Why is Jonah so angry at a whole city, a city the size of Glasgow? Why is he angry that they're repenting and turning to the Lord?

Why is Jonah so against the Lord's grace and mercy being shown towards the people of Nineveh? Surely Jonah should have been rejoicing.

Surely Jonah should be praising and thanking the Lord that people are being saved, people are being converted. Surely Jonah should be standing in awe that there's this mass revival taking place in a city that was once so ungodly, and yet now they're praising the Lord.

And we're left wondering, well, why is Jonah so angry? Because in our eyes, it seems like unnecessary anger. And that's the point. Jonah's anger was unnecessary.

[6 : 50] It was unwarranted. It was even unhelpful. But Jonah here, he had to relearn that salvation is all of the Lord. Of course, Jonah, he had confessed that salvation is of the Lord.

He confessed that when he was bellowing in the belly of the big fish. But it seems that that experience in the belly of the fish, it's now a distant memory. Because Jonah here, he's displeased and angry that the people of Nineveh have repented when he preached a message of judgment to them.

In fact, the anger of Jonah was so severe that when you read verse 1 literally, we're told that the revival in Nineveh was evil to Jonah.

It was a great evil. That's how he described it. It was evil to Jonah. It was a great evil. And what we have to understand is that Jonah is not just displeased or irritated about this.

Jonah's furious. Jonah is raging. He's foaming at the mouth. You could almost say he's spitting fire at what has happened in the city of Nineveh.

[8 : 05] But what's remarkable is that Jonah is so angry. And he's angry all because the Lord has shown compassion towards sinners. And you look at it and you think, well, that's unnecessary anger.

But as Jonah confesses in verse 2, he says he never wanted to go to Nineveh in the church place. He says, Jonah confesses that he was reluctant to follow the Lord's call upon his life.

And he fled to Tarshish all because he never wanted Nineveh to repent. He never wanted to preach to them this message of repentance.

And Jonah, he didn't want to go. Why? He didn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew that the Lord is gracious. What a strange thing to say. He knew that the Lord was gracious and Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh would repent and be converted.

Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he didn't want the people of Nineveh to be saved.

Because as a Jew, Jonah didn't believe that the ungodly people of Nineveh deserved to be saved.

[9 : 30] Jonah didn't believe that the heathen people of Nineveh were worthy of the Lord's salvation. In fact, as we said before, Jonah's mindset was a national mindset because all the Jews thought like Jonah.

all the Jews who were from the seed of Abraham and called to be the children of Israel and they were all living in the promised land. They all thought that they were the only people in the world who were worthy of the Lord's salvation.

Because you'll remember when the Lord brought the children of Israel up out of Egypt. He saved them by his mighty hand. He made them a people for himself. They were a chosen people.

They were his treasured possession. But as his people, the Lord commissioned the Israelites to be a light to the Gentiles. They were to be a light to all the surrounding nations in order to draw these nations to the Lord.

That was the missionary vision. That was what we were singing about in Psalm 100. That all people that on earth do dwell would sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. But as we know, instead of being a light to the nations, the Israelites hid their light.

[10:48] They veiled their light. They kept their light to themselves. They kept the light of salvation to themselves. And it's as if they just put up all these mirrors around them and they kept the other nations out and they just looked at self and just ignored everyone else.

And of course, the result was that the Israelites, they became a proud nation. They became self-obsessed. They viewed themselves as the Lord's people, which they were, but they saw themselves as a cut above everyone else.

And like Jonah, the Israelites, they had forgotten that salvation is all of grace. They'd forgotten that salvation is all of the Lord. And the Israelites, they became proud and insular as a people.

And instead of being outward-looking towards the other nations, they were inward-looking. Instead of being open-minded and willing to fulfil their commission, they were narrow-minded.

And that's why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh weren't Israelites. They weren't descendants of Abraham. They weren't the children of Israel.

[11:59] They weren't part of the covenant promise. And with that, Jonah didn't believe that the ungodly people of Nineveh deserved the Lord's salvation. Jonah didn't believe that the people of Nineveh were worthy of salvation.

He didn't think, and this is what's mind-boggling, Jonah didn't think that what the Lord was doing was right. Jonah didn't believe that salvation is of the Lord.

Jonah believed that salvation was all because of the fact that you were a Jew. Jonah believed that salvation was all because of the family you were brought up in and the privileges you were given and the opportunities that were afforded to you.

In other words, Jonah believed that there were only certain types of people who could be saved.

And that's what Jonah confesses here. Jonah complains against the Lord for being so gracious.

He says, 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 were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

[13:10] Jonah confesses and even complains against the Lord because the Lord is so gracious.

In fact, when Jonah describes how gracious the Lord is, when he makes that description in his prayer, Jonah's actually quoting what the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 34.

You'll remember back in the book of Exodus, Moses pleaded with the Lord. He said, Lord, show me your glory. Lord, show me your glory.

And we're told that Moses, he went up back onto the top of Mount Sinai and the Lord descended in a cloud and stood with Moses and the Lord proclaimed his name to Moses.

And the sermon that Moses heard, it was clear because we're told that the Lord said, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

That was Israel's God. That was Jonah's God. He's the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[14:22] But you know, what Jonah had forgotten and even what the Israelites had forgotten was that when Moses first of all pleaded to see the glory of God, the Lord said to Moses, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.

The Lord affirmed that he will show his glory to whomsoever he wills. It's not just confined to one people and to one nation.

And you know, looking at it, it's actually hard to get your head around why Jonah was acting the way he was. But Jonah was just acting like the nation of Israel at the time.

They had been given this glorious gospel and they were keeping it to themselves. And the sad reality was that Jonah and the nation of Israel, they were withholding the gospel from those who were lost.

They were hiding and veiling the message of salvation to those who were on a highway to hell. And you know, my friend, it should be a warning to us that we are not guilty of Jonah's sin.

[15:38] and that we're not acting like the Israelites by hiding the grace of God and veiling the gospel of Jesus Christ. You know, that's what Paul, the apostle Paul, he warned the church in Corinth.

He said to them, if our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost. If we are veiling the gospel, he says, we are only veiling it to those who are perishing.

And you know, sadly, we can veil the gospel not only by keeping it to ourselves and saying nothing to those whom we come into contact with, but we can also veil the gospel by the way we live our

Christian life.

Because if our Christian character, conduct, or conversation, if it is not worthy of the gospel, then it will be veiling, hiding, or even hindering the gospel to those who are lost.

And you know, it's a great sin. This is the warning of the book of Jonah. It's a great sin to hide the gospel from those who are lost. It's a great sin to hide the gospel from those who are lost.

[16:52] But like every disobedient disciple, Jonah had to learn. And the Lord was going to teach Jonah. In fact, the Lord was going to teach Jonah about his grace.

And that's what we see, secondly, with Jonah's undeserving appointment. So Jonah's unnecessary anger and then Jonah's undeserving appointment. We'll read in verse 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. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah.

There might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

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.

[18:00] When Jonah walked out of the city of Nineveh, he walked out in a rage. He was raging because of the Lord's grace towards the people of Nineveh.

And Jonah was, having walked out of the city of Nineveh, he's actually walking into the Lord's school to be taught an important lesson about God's grace.

But you know, looking at the last chapter in the book of Jonah, by this point in the story of Jonah, you would have thought that Jonah had learned his lesson.

You would have thought that Jonah would have learned about the Lord's grace. Because when Jonah ran away from the presence of the Lord, we saw that the Lord was gracious with him.

Jonah survived the storm in the ship. Jonah didn't drown when he was thrown overboard. Jonah lived in the belly of a whale for three days and three nights. The Lord was gracious with this disobedient disciple.

[18:58] He was so gracious that the Lord even used him again. He recommissioned him to go back to Nineveh. And when Jonah reluctantly preached a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh, the Lord was gracious.

Because the Lord used Jonah. He used Jonah in bringing about repentance and revival in the city of Nineveh. And when Jonah was still a disobedient disciple who was displeased and angry with the grace of God, the Lord was still gracious with his disciple.

Even when Jonah arrogantly said back in verse 3, Therefore now, O Lord, please take away my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. The Lord was still gracious with Jonah.

Because the Lord comes to Jonah and says, Do you do well to be angry? And you know, my friend, what's remarkable about the way in which the Lord dealt with his disobedient disciple is that the Lord didn't punish Jonah.

The Lord was patient with Jonah. He was even gracious with Jonah. The Lord didn't cast him off. The Lord didn't let him run away or drown or do his own thing.

[20:13] The Lord graciously and patiently taught his disobedient disciple. And you know, that's how the Lord deals with us too. He graciously and patiently teaches us and he directs us in the way that we should go.

But you know, far too often we aren't gracious or patient with ourselves or with other disobedient disciples. Far too often we want to punish rather than being patient.

We want to act like gods rather than being gracious. Far too often we don't deal graciously and patiently with other people. But you know, the Lord deals with us graciously and patiently just like he dealt with Jonah.

Because when it came to Jonah, the Lord gave Jonah an object lesson on the grace of God. We're told in verse 5, Jonah went out to 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. So Jonah, he angrily walks out of the city of Nineveh because the Lord has been gracious towards the people of

Nineveh.

[21 : 26] And Jonah, we're told, he builds this shelter. He makes this makeshift shelter. Why? Just to sit and watch the city of Nineveh. Jonah wants to see how gracious the Lord had been to them.

Truth be told, Jonah doubted the genuineness of their repentance. And he was waiting and watching for the people of Nineveh to fall. He was waiting and watching for them to turn back to their old ways.

And you know, thinking about it, well, sometimes we can actually be like Jonah. I don't know about you, but sometimes we can have a cynical attitude towards those who are newly converted.

Where we can say in our heart or even to other people, I wonder how long it will last. I wonder if it's genuine. Is it just going to be a phase? And we can wait and watch for them to fall or to stumble or go back to their old ways.

But you know, my friend, the attitude of a cynical Christian, it's an awful attitude to have. Because as we're reminded here, it's not Christ-like and it's not a Christ-like characteristic.

[22 : 38] And it certainly doesn't honour the Lord. But as we see here with Jonah, it completely undermines the grace of God. It does. It's a warning to us not to be a cynical Christian.

But as we said, Jonah, he was walking into the Lord's school to be taught this important lesson about grace. And we're told about Jonah's undeserving appointment in verse 6.

We're told there that 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.

So just like the Lord graciously appointed a big fish to swallow Jonah as he drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, the Lord graciously appointed a large plant.

to protect Jonah from the hot sun of the Middle East. Now, the leafy plant, it's in different versions, it's a gourd, some think it's a vine.

[23 : 39] In any way, it was a plant that would have had broad leaves that provided shelter from the sweltering heat of the Mediterranean or the eastern sun.

it doesn't really matter what plant it was because the purpose of the plant was to teach Jonah about God's grace. Because when the Lord was gracious with Jonah, we're told that Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

And what we have to notice about the chapter is that that's a play on words because we were told back in verse 1 that Jonah was angry and exceedingly displeased with the Lord for being gracious to the people of Nineveh.

But here Jonah, we're told, he's exceedingly glad when the Lord was gracious with him. So, Jonah was exceedingly displeased with the people of Nineveh when the Lord was gracious with him, but he's exceedingly glad when the Lord is gracious to him.

It's hypocrisy. Because Jonah, he didn't think the people of Nineveh deserved the Lord's grace, but Jonah thought that he deserved the Lord's grace.

[24 : 49] Jonah was making a distinction between him and everyone else. But Jonah's object lesson, it came to the fore in verse 7. We're told that when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

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.

So, after only a day of enjoying the Lord's gracious benefits of this leafy plant, the Lord provided a worm to eat the plant so that it would wither.

So, just like the Lord graciously appointed the big fish and the leafy plant, the Lord graciously appointed a little worm to carry out his will. And his will was to teach Jonah a lesson.

But with the worm eating Jonah's only form of shelter from the hot sun, Jonah finds himself aggravated. He finds himself angry again. And Jonah is so angry, we're told, that he wants to die.

[25 : 56] And Jonah, he repeats the phrase of verse 3 when he says, it's better for me to die than to live. And again, the Lord comes to Jonah. The Lord questions Jonah.

He questions Jonah's anger in verse 9 just like he did in verse 4. 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. And you know, this repetition here, it emphasizes the link between Jonah's anger and the revival in Nineveh with Jonah's anger and the withered plant.

There's a link, the passage is making a link between the two. And what Jonah was boldly but foolishly saying in both cases was that the Lord was wrong.

He was boldly but foolishly saying in both cases the Lord was wrong. Jonah was saying to the Lord that he was wrong about Nineveh and he was wrong about the plant.

[27 : 02] Of course, as we said, Jonah's anger is completely unnecessary. It's unwarranted. It's unhelpful because even he has experienced the undeserving grace of God and he's still angry.

Jonah's still this disobedient disciple because he's telling the Lord, you're wrong. And you're looking at it thinking, who do you think you are, Jonah?

Who do you think you are saying to the Lord that you're wrong? But as the book of Jonah comes to its conclusion, the Lord gives Jonah an unmistakable application.

That's what I want us to see lastly and very briefly. Jonah's unmistakable application. So Jonah's unnecessary anger, Jonah's undeserving appointment and Jonah's unmistakable application.

Look at verse 10. 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.

[28 : 06] And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 Persians who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle.

Again in these verses, these just two closing verses, there's a play on words as the Lord speaks to Jonah and teaches him what grace really is. Because the Lord says to this, you could say, moody and morbid prophet, the Lord says to Jonah, you would have compassion towards one plant that you didn't know anything about and you had nothing to do with and yet you're prepared to die with anger because it withered.

And the Lord says, and you question me because I had compassion towards the city of Nineveh. And there's a play on words there because at the beginning of verse 10, the Lord says, you pity the plant.

And then at the beginning of verse 11, the Lord says, should not I pity Nineveh? You pity the plant. Should not I pity Nineveh? You had compassion towards one plant, therefore should I not have compassion towards the city of Nineveh whose number is 120,000.

In fact, the 120,000 was said to be only the children in the city. If you included the adults, it would have brought the population up to about 600,000.

[29 : 36] Therefore, Nineveh had the same population as Glasgow today. Unlike Glasgow, well, there were many in Nineveh were told that had much cattle and they didn't know their right hand from their left, which is, you could say, a euphemism.

It's a phrase that was used to mean that they were wealthy, but they didn't know the Lord and they didn't know the direction and the leading and the guidance of the Lord. They were lost.

That's how he described the city of Nineveh. They were lost. Like Glasgow, there were many in the city of Nineveh who were lost and yet the Lord is gracious towards them.

But what we ought to notice is that the book of Jonah ends in a very unusual way. It ends with a question. It ends with a question where the Lord says to Jonah, you showed compassion towards a plant, but should not I show compassion towards the lost people in the city of Nineveh?

You showed compassion towards a plant, but should not I show compassion towards the lost people of Nineveh? And that's how the book of Jonah ends. It just ends with that question.

[30 : 53] We're not even told how Jonah responded to the Lord's question. We're not told if Jonah agreed with the Lord. We're not told if Jonah was still angry with the Lord. We're not told how Jonah responded to the Lord's question.

But to be honest, it doesn't matter how Jonah responded. What matters is, as the book wants us to do, what matters is how we respond.

What matters is that we are grasping the greatness of God's love and compassion towards sinners. What matters is that we understand that the gospel is a gospel of grace.

What matters is that we see that salvation is all of the Lord and it's all a gift of God. It's not of works lest any man should boast. What matters is that we tell people that the Lord is so gracious that he's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

What matters here is that we present to lost sinners the message that there's no one beyond hope and there's no one beyond redemption.

[32 : 00] The Lord's arm is not too short that he cannot save neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But you know more than that as we conclude the book of Jonah what matters is that we

realise that it's a sin.

It's a sin to withhold hide or veil the gospel by our Christian character conduct or conversation. It's a sin to veil this glorious gospel of grace because my friend we are disobedient disciples if we act like Jonah by lacking compassion towards the lost.

We are disobedient disciples if we lack compassion towards the lost. We're disobedient disciples if we don't emulate and imitate the grace of God in our lives.

That's what the book of Jonah is all about. God's grace towards lost sinners. That's what we've seen Jonah's unnecessary anger, Jonah's undeserving appointment and Jonah's unmistakable application.

So the book of Jonah is about much more than a man who ran away from God and was swallowed by a big fish. The story of Jonah is all about Jesus and all about the gospel.

[33 : 23] this gospel of grace. Grace towards lost sinners. And for us you could say that the unmistakable application that arises out of the book of Jonah is what the Lord said to Moses.

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy. So may the Lord bless our study and these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Heavenly Father we give thanks to Thee that the Lord of God who is so gracious merciful long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth and Lord help us as Thy people to be ambassadors for Christ help us Lord to emulate and to imitate this gospel of grace to live it out in our lives and to present it to those who are lost.

Lord we realise that we faint and fail in so many ways that we stay silent when we should speak and that we speak often when we should stay silent but Lord we pray that all that Thou would use us use us Lord in this dark and lost world this world that needs the gospel of grace that Thou Lord has given to us this gospel to be a light in the world that even as Jesus reminds us that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth help us then we pray to serve thee aright and to not be disobedient disciples but even dedicated disciples determined Lord to present the knowledge of Jesus Christ to those who need him.

Lord bless us together we pray and keep us Lord we ask remember those Lord who need thee in a special way this evening that thine hand would be upon them for good bind us together keep us and go before us taking away our iniquity and receiving us graciously for Jesus sake Amen we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 103 Psalm 103 page 369 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 103 and we're singing from verse 6 down to the verse marked 12 God God righteous judgment executes for all oppressed ones his ways to Moses he his acts made known to Israel's sons now it's interesting that Moses is mentioned there because it was Moses as we mentioned he was the one who heard the Lord's sermon where the

[36 : 23] Lord the Lord God merciful and gracious slow to anger abounding in steadfast love and straight after verse 7 you have exactly what Moses heard David is repeating it this covenant God the Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous so Psalm 103 from verse 6 down to the verse marked 12 to God's praise rhythm words his but his wisdom motions in his arms made known to Israel's sons.

The Lord our God is merciful, and He is gracious, long-suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous.

He will not shite continually, nor keep His anger still.

With us He dealt not as we sin, nor did we quite our hell.

For as the heaven in its height the earth surmounted far, so great to those that do Him fear, His tender mercies are.

[38 : 52] As far as He's distant from the west, so far has He.

From us removed in His love all our iniquity.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.