

Jonah 4

- It's been two weeks since we last met to study Jonah, so it's probably good that we take a moment and review what we were covering when we ended Chapt. 3
 - Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, underwent a miraculous response to the tepid preaching of Jonah
 - A reluctant prophet to this Gentile nation, the enemy of Israel
 - When presented with the opportunity to bring this country a message of repentance, Jonah had first run away, then attempted suicide
 - Finally, relenting in the stomach of the fish, Jonah went to Nineveh
 - And He preached God's word, though without much enthusiasm, knowing that God is faithful to save those who repent and seek His mercy
 - As we learned last time, Jonah's lack of enthusiasm was due – at least in part – to his awareness that Assyria was the nation Amos said would eventually destroy the nation of Israel
 - Yet despite Jonah's lack of enthusiasm, we find at the end of Chapter 3, this giant city repenting
 - A city that spanned a distance equal to the distance between San Antonio and Austin
 - From the text, it appeared that only a fraction of the city actually heard Jonah's voice, yet his message spreads like wildfire
 - Clearly, it was a supernatural result
 - A Gentile city responding to the true living God seeking mercy, hoping to avoid His fierce judgment
- That brings us to the beginning of Chapter 4
 - And before we even read the verses for tonight, let me just prepare you
 - If you had assumed that our stubborn Jewish prophet had learned his lesson in the stomach of that fish...

- Well, I'm sorry to say that though Jonah may have become obedient to God's word, he has yet to accept it
- To prove my point, I want to begin Chapter 4 by reading the last verse of Chapter 3 and moving forward

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Jonah 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Jonah 4:3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

Jonah 4:4 The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

- Jonah is upset at God, clearly
 - The Hebrew in verse 1, if translated perfectly literally, would say
 - "It was evil to Jonah with great evil."
 - And why?
 - Well, consider the facts
 - Jonah, the evangelist, just witnessed the largest single conversion moment the world has yet seen
 - Somewhere around 120K people came to faith in the span of a day or so
 - All on the basis of one man's preaching
 - Their conversion was most unlikely
 - A group of committed pagan worshippers, enemies of Israel
 - They hear a hard, threatening message spoken by a citizen of that hated nation

- And the result is the entire nation agreeing with the prophet and choosing to seek mercy from this foreign nation's God
- So, in response to this miracle, Jonah gets upset at God
- There's a phrase we can use to describe what's going on with Jonah here
 - It's a pity party
 - Jonah is feeling self-pity over his circumstances
 - He feels like the one who has single-handedly destroyed Israel by rescuing their enemy
 - And when he expresses his anger to God, he does so with remarkable honesty, nevermind hubris
 - Jonah says didn't I tell you this would happen?
 - That's why I fled to Tarshish, to forestall this, to prevent it
 - Now what does this tell us about Jonah?
 - He says what he says almost as if to justify running away
 - He feels that since he was correct in guessing that God intended to save these people
 - Now that it has happened as he predicted, he feels it justifies his previous behavior
 - Which simply tells us that Jonah's willingness to go to Nineveh may have been the form of obedience, but it wasn't the substance
 - The body obeyed, but the heart was still in rebellion to God's plan to save the Ninevites
 - Even more telling is the way Jonah lists God's character traits as if they were negatives
 - In verse 2, Jonah says that I knew you were a kind and good God
 - I knew you were patient and I knew you were forgiving and I knew you would receive those who repent
 - That's why I had to run...it's all your fault
- Where do you begin with someone who thinks like that?

- I want to spend a moment examining the consequences of Jonah's statement
 - There's so much irony in his statements, that it's difficult to know where to begin
- And actually, God Himself gives us the big picture in his single, simple response in verse 4
 - God's response nails the issue
 - God asks, Do you have good reason to be angry?
 - Another way to express it is "Are you right to be angry?"
 - It's a rhetorical question
 - He's really saying two things at once
- First, let's start with the most obvious observation
 - We can't fault God for being Who He is
 - His nature and character defines good in the absolute sense
 - Nothing God does nor what He refrains from doing is bad
 - Nothing He commands nor anything He permits is wrong
 - Nothing He upholds nor anything He brings low is unjustified
 - Nothing He speaks is in error and nothing He purposes is other than as it should be
 - For any man, God's creation, to stand before the Creator and to make accusations that God's perfect nature is somehow imperfect is the definition of blasphemy
- Jonah tells God that His graciousness and mercy were reasonable justification for Jonah to oppose Him and to work to thwart that plan
 - If you've ever had one of your children react with anger because you dared show mercy and grace to a sibling because of some offense, then you know a little of what God felt in this moment here
- But the irony deepens
 - If Jonah could have his way, God wouldn't have shown Nineveh grace

- Based on Jonah's comments, the only way he would have been happy would have been if God turned a deaf ear to the Ninevites' repentance
 - Jonah's preferred God was a god that turned a deaf ear to cries for mercy and forgiveness, at least in the case of these people
 - Now, there is probably not another a person on earth in this moment who was less qualified than Jonah to make such a demand of God
 - Jonah was the man who prayed to God from the belly of the great fish, seeking God's mercy
 - Praising God because He was a God who heard his prayer
 - The God Who Jonah declared was the one responsible for salvation
 - It's this same Jonah who is now complaining because God is doing the very same thing for others that He had done for Jonah just a few weeks earlier
 - How quickly he forgets
 - The irony is that the only reason Jonah was able to stand before God in this moment and make these complaints was because God has been willing to hear him earlier and respond to him in mercy
 - And how ironic that Jonah would criticize God for doing the same thing for the Ninevites
- And then the final irony
 - Why is Jonah so angry that God saved the Ninevites after they repented?
 - Well, principally because the Ninevites were one day destined to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel
 - But why did God assign Israel that terrible future?
 - Because the nation hadn't repented of their sin before Him
 - Yet Jonah is angry at God because God is orchestrating the destruction of his country and his people by sparing the Ninevites

- You can see Jonah's emphasis even in his language in verse 2 – own country
- So Jonah's demand that God not show mercy, is designed to save Israel from destruction
 - But if God were the kind of God to overlook the Ninevites' pleas for mercy, then how would He have responded to an Israel that wouldn't repent?
 - Remember the prophet Amos, Jonah's contemporary who prophesied to the nation of Israel about their coming destruction while Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh
 - Here's what Amos had to say about what would happen to Israel in the end

Amos 9:3 "Though they hide on the summit of Carmel,
I will search them out and take them from there;
And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea,
From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them.

Amos 9:4 "And though they go into captivity before their enemies,
From there I will command the sword that it slay them,
And I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good."

Amos 9:8 "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,"
Declares the LORD.

Amos 9:14 "Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel,
And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them;
They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine,
And make gardens and eat their fruit.

Amos 9:15 "I will also plant them on their land,
And they will not again be rooted out from their land
Which I have given them,"
Says the LORD your God.

- Ultimately, God was showing Israel mercy by bringing the nation of Assyria against them
 - Preventing worst outcome which would be their ultimate demise
 - Were God the kind of God Jonah wanted, it would have not only meant the end of a repentant Nineveh but also of Israel

- Compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, abundant lovingkindness
 - They were the very same traits that God ultimately plans to draw upon in saving Jonah's beloved Israel
- In verse 3, Jonah asks to die again
 - This guy has a real death wish doesn't he?
 - First he asks to be thrown overboard in the storm
 - And now he asks God directly to kill him
 - If you've ever wanted an example in scripture of why it's good that sometimes God answers our prayers with a no instead of a yes, here's one
 - God graciously ignores Jonah's request for death
 - And Jonah's reason for asking is more of the pity party
 - He's playing the martyr
 - He says I would rather die than live
 - Which refers to the prospect of seeing these heathens saved only to live long enough to destroy Israel
- Then God gives His response, which we have already discussed
 - And then watch Jonah's reaction

[Jonah 4:5](#) Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

- So what's Jonah doing?
 - Well, at first glance it seems as though Jonah's just sitting up on the hill pouting over his circumstances
 - And there's probably some resentment mixed in here, to be sure
 - But the text itself suggests another motive as well
 - In verse 5 we're told that Jonah went up to a hill so he could see what would come of the city

- For a guy who's pretty hard to please, why is he so excited about a little shade?
- In fact, he already had some shade, so it makes his excitement all the more puzzling
- Now the text doesn't tell us this specifically, but I think there's more to his excitement than the fact that a little shade has come up
 - First, how often do you see a huge plant large enough to shade a man grow out of the desert in a matter of minutes or hours
 - Without rain, without seed, out of nowhere?
 - Obviously, it was supernatural
 - The text even tells us that God made the plant grow
 - So, from Jonah's perspective, what did he see and what did it make him think?
 - Well, he's already heard God say that he doesn't have a reason to be upset
 - Then as he sits on this hill to see what God plans to do with this city, he witnesses this amazing sight of a huge plant appear out of nowhere next to him
 - He immediately recognizes it to be a miracle sent by God
 - And God didn't send a lion or bear, he didn't send a plague or hail storm
 - In other words, God sent something comforting, something that seemed to be an encouragement to wait and watch
 - So if we put all these things together, from Jonah's perspective it seemed as if God was affirming Jonah's hope that something is going to happen
 - Something as in something Jonah will like to see
 - So when Jonah sees the plant, he grows very excited because he believes it's a sign that perhaps God is preparing to destroy the Ninevites after all

- After all, why send Jonah a comforting plant in such a miraculous way unless it was a sign that his waiting was going to lead to a satisfying conclusion?
- But there is another reason to send this plant
 - To teach a lesson that Jonah dearly needs to learn
 - So exactly one day after receiving the plant and enjoying its company, God brings the second half of the lesson

Jonah 4:7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.

Jonah 4:8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

- On the very next day, God appoints a worm
 - The word for appoint means destined or ordained
 - We've seen God appoint a fish, then a plant, now a worm and soon a scorching wind
 - And in the preceding verse there was an important switch in the name given to God in this story
 - In verse 6 there is an occurrence of the term Lord God
 - *Yahweh Elohim*
 - The term is a formal term, reserved for times when scripture is emphasizing God's supreme authority and divine sovereignty over all His creation
 - You see it commonly in the first four chapters of Genesis
 - Or when God is making covenants or showing His power in Exodus
 - Why is it being introduced here?
 - Well, you get the sense that the narrative is building toward a point where God's sovereignty and Jonah's selfishness are going to collide

- So it's time to begin reminding Jonah and the reader of whose perspective matters most
- Just as quickly as God brings the plant up, He takes it down
 - It's just as supernatural to see a large plant like this one brought down entirely in a single day, as it was to see it rise up
 - In other words, everything about these circumstances has been orchestrated by God to make clear to Jonah that it's God behind the scenes making it all happen
 - Jonah is not the least bit confused by it
 - He's not thinking that it's bad luck, or coincidence that these things are happening
 - He is fully aware of how God is working here
- And as the plant withers, God takes yet another step to communicate with Jonah
 - He sends a scorching wind, we're told
 - This hot east wind is a well known phenomenon in the Middle East even today
 - It's called the sirocco
 - Here's a description I found of that wind and its effects on those who experience it

"During the period of a sirocco the temperature rises steeply, sometimes even climbing during the night, and it remains high, about 16-22F above the average . . . at times every scrap of moisture seems to have been extracted from the air, so that one has the curious feeling that one's skin has been drawn much tighter than usual. Sirocco days are peculiarly trying to the temper and tend to make even the mildest people irritable and fretful and to snap at one another for apparently no reason at all."

- There are days in my home when I think we're experiencing a sirocco
- This was the experience that Jonah had in the hill that day
 - And then Jonah reverts to his natural state – anger and disappointment
 - First, he's just upset over the uncomfortable conditions

- But it's probably also apparent to him that what he had hoped to see happen in Nineveh wasn't going to happen after all
 - The plant hadn't been a hopeful sign but rather it seemed to mock him
 - As the plant withers and the hot wind blows, Jonah realizes that God wasn't planning to destroy the city
 - And now he's not only mad, he's miserable
 - And again, Jonah's death wish re-emerges
 - God, just kill me
- Why does this keep coming up for Jonah?
 - Who wishes to die but someone who believes that death leads to something better than what's on earth
 - Those who believe that death leads to something scary don't generally wish to die
 - They fear death
 - But Jonah keeps asking to die because it's better than living under these circumstances
 - Why is it that Jonah can feel comfortable asking God to kill him?
 - Only his trust and dependence on God's mercy
 - Were God not merciful, then Jonah could never have asked for death with positive expectations
- God's response mirrors perfectly His earlier statement
 - He asks again if Jonah had good reason to be angry
 - And now the question just frustrates Jonah
 - Jonah didn't answer God the first time, but now he answers back sharply that He was right to be angry to the point of desiring death
 - In other words, he was right to seek death rather than live through the consequences of seeing the city saved
- And then God turns the tables

Jonah 4:10 Then the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

Jonah 4:11 “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

- God makes a comparison designed to get Jonah to see things from His perspective
 - First, God says Jonah had compassion on the plant, but really the word doesn’t communicate well what God intended here
 - Rather than compassion, God is reminding Jonah that he felt justified to be angry in the face of the plant’s destruction
 - Why?
 - First, because the plant was useful
 - It served a useful purpose, so Jonah had compassion upon it
 - Second, it was a sign to Jonah of hopeful things to come
 - To Jonah it meant that he could expect a positive outcome in his waiting and watching over a sinful culture in the city before him
 - Then when the plant died, hope was lost
 - All that remained was disappointment and the discomfort of the hot wind
 - But Jonah had no investment in that plant
 - He never asked for it, he didn’t plant it, he didn’t water it
 - And it was just a dumb plant God gave him as a matter of pure grace
- Then God asks Jonah to see the world with the same eyes – the way God sees the world
 - Why doesn’t Jonah have the same anger over the destruction of Nineveh?

- So God is the author and perfecter of our faith
- He gave His word to men through a prophet to carry out this plan
 - So God is actively communicating to His creation
- He commanded the sea and wind to obey His purpose
 - So the weather and physical elements respond exactly to His desires to suit His purposes
- He controlled the outcome of lots (dice) on the ship
 - Even the smallest events will play out according to His will to ensure the outcomes He determines
- He commanded the fish to swallow Jonah
 - So even the animals obey God's will
- Yet Jonah survived the experience
 - So our physical life is under God's control
 - Our eventual death is merely a part of God's larger plan for the creation and it happens at a time and in a manner prescribed by Him
- The city of Nineveh responds supernaturally to a simple phrase spoken by Jonah
 - So even the response by men in faith to God is a supernatural act of grace under God's control
- Finally, many of these same displays of sovereignty come together in the end as God uses plants, animals and weather to reinforce a point to Jonah
- If you come away from Jonah with nothing else, let it be a renewed respect for God's sovereignty over the world and everything in it
 - And we can't allow our limited understanding of God's purpose in a given situation define what is right or good
- The second theme is the compassion of God upon the undeserving should bring us cause for hope, not anger or resentment

- First, it was the reason we can look forward to heaven as Jonah obviously did
- Secondly, it was the compassion of God that even allowed us to be witnesses and perhaps participants in His divine plan of redemption
 - How can we take that privilege and turn it into a liability by complaining over who God may show His mercy to?

Rom. 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE **MERCY** ON WHOM I HAVE **MERCY**, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."