

Heart Storms Jonah 4:1-4

People are most familiar with Jonah because of his encounter with a fish which tends to monopolize any telling of Jonah's life. But there is so much more to the book and to Jonah. His story has one of the most overlooked, underrated and under-expected endings in all of the Bible

The storm Jonah endured before entering Nineveh is just a symbol of the storm raging in his heart against God. Why is Jonah angry with God?

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?"

Not too long after the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, Jonah came onto the scene in the northern kingdom of Israel during the rule of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). The word of the Lord came to Jonah: *"Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up against me"* (Jonah 1:2).

In response to Jonah's preaching –

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.

Jonah was a hyper-nationalist. He did not want to go to Nineveh because he knew God would have mercy on his enemies. He did not want their repentance; he wanted their doom. Quite contrary to the spirit of Jesus, he did not have good will toward his enemies. He was not about to bless those who used to curse him. He was a hard liner, and God was too soft. So, he goes outside the city to sulk and our text continues the narrative tension that exists throughout the book.

The book of Jonah has revealed a series of paradoxes.

- God is showing mercy to Gentiles
- God is showing anger to Israel
- In Jonah's greatest failure he prayed "Let me live."
- In his greatest success he prayed, "Let me die."

and this is another interesting paradox in the book:

- The city of pagans is happy.
- The prophet of God is sad.

Jonah is the patron saint of angry, miserable Christians who fail to trust God in all the circumstances of life.

How did we get here?

First: Jonah's Story

- a) God calls him to go to Nineveh
- b) Jonah rebels and flees to Joppa for Tarshish
- c) God sends a storm
- d) Sailors are saved
- e) God sends a fish
- f) Jonah repents
- g) Jonah preaches God's judgement in Nineveh
- h) Nineveh repents
- i) God relents
- j) Jonah is angry about God's mercy to Nineveh

We're not sure how Jonah philosophically interpreted the storm or the God's salvation of Nineveh is a great evil to Jonah.

4:1 – "displeased" = HB / *it was evil in the eyes of...*

He was fine with mercy when he received it, but he couldn't handle it when God showed mercy to Nineveh. Jonah has forgotten God's mercy to him and is ill-equipped to appreciate God's mercy toward Nineveh.

*We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There is no place in heaven for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.*

- Jonathan Swift, English satirist and cleric (1667-1745)

Jonah is angry because God is kind toward Israel's enemies and unkind to Jonah and soon to Israel. God doesn't make sense.

The bottom line is that Jonah loves his own people and his own life, more than he loves God. And he's not sure God is trustworthy. In fact, he fears Nineveh more than he fears God.

Second: Jonah's Anger

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?"

How unlike God, Jonah is here

3:10 – *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented*

4:1 – When Jonah saw what God did, *“it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry”*

Verses 1-2 provide us with the little ‘bubble’ above Jonah’s head of the internal debate he has had with God ever since chapter one.

Liam Goligher at Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia titles this section “What Lies Beneath.”

At this point in Jonah’s frustration, we don’t have to ask what lies beneath the surface of Jonah’s rebellion. He tells us.

4:2 - ... *is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?*

Jonah isn’t the first person to blame God for his goodness

Genesis 3:12 - *“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”*

Adam has set us all up for blaming God for his misinterpreted goodness.

God has been teaching Jonah that he can trust him with Israel and Nineveh because Jonah fears Nineveh’s wrath more than God’s grace.

He has demonstrated that in his discipline and care of Jonah. God hurled a storm at Jonah, saved sailors, awoke Jonah to his disobedience, hid Jonah in a fish moving toward Nineveh as Jonah came to the conclusion of –

2:10 – *Salvation is of the Lord*

God’s work in Jonah’s life is a microcosm of God’s greater work in Israel. God is going to use Nineveh to discipline Israel, just as he used a storm and fish to discipline Jonah. But just as God saved Jonah from the storm and fish, he will save Israel

- a) God sometimes uses ‘awful’ means to save us
- b) God knows what means are necessary for each of us

Some of us will endure storms, some of us will endure fish.

You might say, “Yes, but Jonah’s storm and fish were the result of his disobedience.” This is true but the storm the disciples endured in Mark 4 was not punitive but wholly instructive –

Mark 4:41 – *And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

God taught the disciples to fear him more than a storm because another storm – his crucifixion – was looming on the horizon.

God wanted Jonah to fear him more than Nineveh. He wanted Jonah to trust him; his grace, more than Nineveh's might.

Big Storm. Bigger God.
 Big Fish. Bigger God.
 Big Plant. Bigger God.
 Big Nineveh. Bigger God.
 Big Jonah. _____ God.

When we began the book, Jonah was asking, “*What is God going to do about Nineveh?*”
 At the end of the book, we are asking, “*What is God going to do about Jonah?*”

When we began the book, Jonah was asking “*Will God save Nineveh?*”
 Now we are asking, “*Can God save Jonah?*”

PICTURE: Read the *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne*

“The seed of every sin known to man is in my heart”
 Robert Murray McCheyne (Scottish Minister, 1813-1843)

This is a complex book about a complex God or people living a complex world (and I am thankful, as your pastor, you are willing to think deeply about real issues that face us all and the real issues about which we and others want answers to life's storms, fish and Nivehehs)

Third: Jonah's Accusation

2b - for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Jonah cries out against “Yahweh,” the name for God last used by the Phoenician sailors who threw Jonah overboard. It is the personal, covenantal name for God. In using it, Jonah is trying to remind God of his promises to Israel – to preserve, protect and prosper the nation. And, of how he ought to deal with Israel's enemies.

Jonah has a deeply imbedded theological complaint against God.

Crises often cut away our polished exterior and what is in our heart comes out of our lips

We often complain that God is wrathful, but Jonah's complaint is the opposite. He complains that God is

- Gracious –
- Merciful –
- Slow to anger –
- Abounding in steadfast love –
- Relenting from disaster –

Exodus 34:6-7 – *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,*

God’s self-declaration and Jonah’s revelation both attest to who God is and what God is doing in the world. He is moving salvifically in the world and everything he does is to that end.

But Jonah has left out part of the text –

Exodus 34:8 - *but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”*

Why didn’t Jonah want to quote that part? Because Israel was guilty and deserving of judgement

Will I trust a God who will work all things together for my good even though many of those things may not be inherently good?

After all, I like God as long as God fits in my box. I like God as long as God is tame. And if he isn’t....

3 - Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

Conclusion:

We think in the book of Jonah, God is exposing Jonah’s heart but he’s really exposing his heart...and our hearts.

God is a missionary God. He is reconciling all things to himself and is working in our own lives to accomplish that. He is teaching us to love and fear him above all things so that our lives joyfully reflect that fear and love so that others want to love and fear him also.

That sounds simple.

But Jonah is a complicated figure with a complex story because our lives are complicated and complex. God is not hiding the reality of a fallen world or his infinite character.

We can’t always rightly interpret what is happening in the world and even God can surprise us at the way he treats his own people and others. This is where faith in God, not circumstances or our own knowledge saves us. Our trust is in God. Our fear is of God. And we are, sometimes in the most unpredictable ways, saved.

Can I give you a more appropriate response to God’s work in our lives than anger? Here it is -

*Depth of mercy! Can there be
 Mercy still reserved for me?
 Can my God His wrath forbear,
 Me, the chief of sinners, spare?*

*I have long withstood His grace,
 Long provoked Him to His face,
 Would not hearken to His calls,
 Grieved Him by a thousand falls.*

*Whence to me this waste of love?
 Ask my Advocate above!
 See the cause in Jesus' face,
 Now before the throne of grace.*

*If I rightly read Thy heart,
 If Thou all compassion art,
 Bow Thine ear, in mercy bow,
 Pardon and accept me now.*

*There for me the Savior stands,
 Shows His wounds and spreads His hands.
 God is love! I know, I feel;
 Jesus weeps and loves me still.
 Charles Wesley*

Community Groups:

- 1 – Why did Jonah rebel against God’s call to Nineveh?
- 2 – What things might modern American Christians prize before God?
- 3 – Why was he displeased with God’s mercy toward that city?
- 4 – How does God’s grace eliminate “we’re better than you” thinking?
- 5 – Why does Jonah fear Nineveh more than God?
- 6 – What fears can drive us to distrust God?
- 7 – What fears assail your faith in God?
- 8 – How can we effectively battle unbelief?
- 9 – How is “the seed of every known sin” in our hearts?
- 10 – Why would anyone be angry with God’s grace, mercy, patience or love?

11 – How do Christians demonstrate the thought, “I’m for God as long as God is for me?” or “I like God as long as he fits in my box?”

12 – How does the story of Jonah reflect God’s missionary heart?

13 – What does the cross tell us about God’s missionary heart?

14 – With whom are we presently, either in a people group or a person, sharing the gospel?

15 – Conclude the morning with a time of intercessory prayer for particular lost people.