

For God So Loves the World
Jonah 4

Jonah, as you well know, is angry with God because God has, according to Jonah,

- a) Acted inconsistently with his character
- b) Been unfaithful to Israel
- c) Shown kindness to Nineveh, Israel's #1 enemy
- d) Called Jonah to a 'different kind of life' than he desired

One of the aspects of the book that we have not fully developed is God's missionary heart and God's creator heart; neither of which Jonah possesses?

V 4 – (About Nineveh) *And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"*

V 9 – (About the plant) *But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?"*

Which brings us to our focus text this morning, vs 10-11

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?"*

And particularly, that portion of v 11 that reads, *And should not I pity Nineveh*

First: God's Creator Care. 1:9 & 14:16; 3:7-10

- a) The sailors called on Jehovah

LORD = Jehovah is the covenantal, saving name of God

1:9 & 14-16 - *And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*

- b) Nineveh called on God

God = Elohim, the Creator name of God

3:7-10 - *By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." 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 2:1 - Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

The sailors entered into a covenantal, saving relationship with the God of Israel. Nineveh did not.

But...God nonetheless relented of the disaster he promised to inflict on the city.

What's going on?

a) God cares about all his creation even those people who are not Christians

v 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?"*

Not knowing their right hand from their left speaks to spiritual blindness. If God gave them directions, they could not find him.

- a) "Great" = (same word in 1:2; 3:2,3) = large in number, proud,
- b) "do not know their right hand from their left" = spiritual ignorance
- c) "also much cattle" – God cares for all of his creation

b) God is concerned about kindness, fairness, justice and evil

Nineveh may not have been saved but for a while, they ceased from their "evil way and from the violence" (3:8) and the people enjoyed a reprieve from the temporal and felt effects of their sinfulness

Second: God's Creator Compassion. 4:11

V 11 - *And should not I pity Nineveh*

Pity = compassion

We find the same language of broken-heartedness in -

Genesis 6:6 - *And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*

Grieve = to be in pain

God's "feeling" for his creation and the church did not begin with Jesus in Hebrews 4:15.

God 'felt' and 'feels' this way about Israel.

Hosea 11:8 - *How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.*

Luke 13:34 - *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

This is an OT reference and may be speaking to the multiple times God would have done this for Israel in the OT

Luke 19:41 - *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.*

Scripture records Jesus weeping twenty times for every one time it mentions that he laughed (B.B. Warfield in *The Emotional Life of our Lord*)

Jesus was not depressed. He was connected to his fallen world.

Isaiah 53:3b - *...a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*

IMP: We generally love things involuntarily and selfishly. We love them because of the feeling we feel when we see them, are around them, etc. But God loves his creation voluntarily and intentionally and not because of what it adds to him.

What happens to Israel affects God. But what happens to Nineveh also affects God. He has voluntarily and intentionally attached his affection to his creation even when it is not returned –

Third: The Value of the World to God. Matt 10:29-31; Gen 2:15; Ex 34:6-7

We often use -

Matthew 10:29-31 - *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

- to speak to our value as humans

And it is true – Jesus says it is true – that humans are the apex of God’s creation and have a distinct place in it as well as relationship to God. We are “*of more value than many sparrows.*” But sparrows, by virtue of their being sold, are not valueless. God is concerned about all of his creation and all people, believers and unbelievers.

The fact is, God knows that sparrows are of a different value than humans, but he still knows what they cost and when they die. (He’s not like a President who doesn’t know the price of a gallon of milk or gas).

Nineveh’s blindness is no excuse for their sinfulness, but God is aware of their blindness and, in the most amazing of ways, treats them accordingly.

We are God’s co-regents, image-bearers stewarding God’s creation.

Genesis 2:15 - *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

But Jonah acted “very inhuman” (Calvin’s words) toward Nineveh.

Fourth: The Goodness and Justice of God for All. Exodus 33:18; 34:6-7

In Exodus 33:18 – God promised to show Moses “*...all my goodness...*”

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, 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.”*

This means that “*mercy, grace, slowness to anger, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiving iniquity, not clearing the guilty, visiting iniquity*” are all part of God’s goodness.

We don't think mercy and unforgiveness

We want a God of 100% love and God is.

We want a God of 100% goodness and God is.

How could God be loving or good and not judge evil?

How could God be loving or good and not discipline Jonah?

How can God be loving or good and not seek out best goodness?

God is wholly, equally and simultaneously what he is. He does not change. All of it who he is, is a part of God's re-deeming work in our lives.

Moses saw only the back side of God and not his face (Ex 33:23).

I would suggest the Bible tells us – just as God did Jonah concerning his initial command to “*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it*” (1:2) – everything God deems fit for us to know but that there is more to God than the Scriptures reveal or that we will ever know in this world. The Lord has revealed himself. At the same time, there is much mystery to his infinity.

Fifth: Thoughts Worth Remembering About This World and the Next

- a) Scripture begins in Genesis 1 not Genesis 3
- b) Genesis 1 details a world of beauty and perfection that is “very good” (1:31)
- c) Jesus was born and raised in a physical body giving value to a physical world
- d) We will also be resurrected with physical bodies for a physical world (1 Cor 15:20, 23)
- e) God has entered into an eternal covenant with the physical world (Hosea 2:18)
- f) The world's destruction by flood did not obliterate it but made it new
- g) The world's destruction by fire will also renew it (2 Peter 3:10)
- h) We hope for a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1)
- i) God is committed to this earth now and forever
- j) Christians are created in God's image to have dominion and steward the earth (Gen 1:26-27).

Rather than, like Jonah, running from this present fallen and evil world, we should invest in it.

God's salvation is holistic, not only spiritual but physical. Sharing the gospel means telling the good news of how life now can be more fruitful, fulfilling, joyful and peaceful when people surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. This includes people, educational structures, governments, social entities, etc. and the church leads the way as a demonstration of what that looks like. God has been teaching Jonah not to be afraid of Nineveh; to fear him more than Nineveh. The church should mirror that fear of God and love for the world. Christian communities are commended for the way they bless the places where they live (Phil. 2:15; Col. 4:5–6; 1 Thess. 4:11–12; Tit. 2:9–10). If our lives are transformed by the power of the gospel, our workplaces, families, marriages, friendships, and world will be impacted. God is concerned for this physical world.

Conclusion:

God is constantly tugging at our lives, redirecting us toward himself and conformity to Christ. We may often resist this spiritual formation. But God is committed to what is best for us. It may be a ‘best’ we can't see or understand but God is still committed to it.

1. Why is Jonah angry with God?
2. What did Jonah know about God that made him worry about preaching to Nineveh?
3. Why was Jonah concerned that God would show Nineveh mercy?
4. What has God been trying to teach Jonah throughout the book?
5. What does 4:11 say about God's care of the unsaved?

6. What does it say about God's care of the world?
7. If Nineveh was not spiritually saved, how did their reprieve from sin, benefit them?
8. How did God's relenting of disaster, benefit His timetable to use them to judge Israel in the next generation?
9. What Scriptures are used in the sermon to demonstrate God's compassion for the world?
10. What does Matthew 10:29-30 teach us about us?
11. What does that text teach us about sparrows?
12. What does Genesis 2:15 teach us about our responsibility to creation?
13. How does Exodus 34:6-7 show us God's wholeness?
- 14: Review and discuss point 4: *Thoughts Worth Remembering about this World and the Next*