

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace-Part 16

Jonah 4:5-9

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Illus Karl Menninger once shared the story of President Jefferson, riding horseback cross-country when he and his group came to a river. A traveler waited until several of the party had crossed and then hailed Jefferson and asked if he would carry him across on his horse. Jefferson pulled him up onto the back of his horse and carried him to the opposite bank. "Tell me," asked one of the men, "why did you select the president to ask this favor of?" "The president?" the man answered. "I didn't know he was the president. All I know is that on some of the faces is written the answer 'no' and on some faces is written the answer 'yes.' His was a 'yes' face."¹

Our eyes will never settle on a face more full of yes than that of God's, revealed in Jesus Christ Many have said of God, *'If only I could really know what He is like'*

PP But we do: ***"[Jesus Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature"*** **Hebrews 1:3**

It was the 'Yes' face of Jesus that allowed the dregs of Jewish society to boldly approach Him And that same face of relentless grace was lovingly looking at the city of Nineveh, while the face of His prophet Jonah was resolutely stuck in a 'No' face

Jonah wanted God's wrath, not His grace, poured out onto the city of Nineveh!

He was off mission, out of step with God's plan to save Nineveh, his compass pointed at him And like Jonah, he is no different than any of us who find that we are living self-directed lives

PP But thankfully, Jonah will show us **The Symptoms of a Self-Directed Heart**

PP 1-Loveless Separation

"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." **4:5**

He went out of the city, ***'made a booth'***-not a shack of lumber and plywood-but a few leafy branches

PP ***'Booth'*** here is the word *sukkah*, which the Jews would build during the Feast of Tabernacles This joyous festival was timed after the final harvest was gathered and the storehouses were full It was the only one of the festivals where Gentiles were included, centering on the God Who *provides* for His people and longs to be *present* with them

But, like all Jewish festivals, it was fulfilled in Christ who would Himself come to dwell in a booth of flesh, to save His people

It was on the last day of this feast that Jesus said, ***"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and***

PP ***drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*** **John 7:37-38**

God dwelling in flesh to save humanity; Jonah in a booth hoping God will destroy Nineveh

Jonah forms for us the picture of a Christian who separates himself from those who desperately need to hear the good news of a God Who loves them

This is the one who lives in a Christian subculture, safely separated from the evil world, ignorant that Christ commissioned every Christian to go to the nations and make disciples

¹ Menninger, Mayman, and Pruyser, *The Vital Balance*

PP Jesus prayed to His Father, saying, ***“As you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”***

We are the sent ones, on mission to our neighbors, co-workers, friends, classmates
The church is not your mission field, it is the locker room where we encourage each other, get our game-plan and enjoy brief times of rest
Too many Christians never leave it, and their self-made booths of loveless separation give evidence just how like Jonah Christians can be

Jonah should have been with the people of Nineveh, sharing in their worship, teaching them about their new faith in God

It's why he went to school and studied, yet he wanted nothing to do with these new believers
He was content in his own salvation, and discontent in the salvation of Nineveh
He stayed in the locker room, ***‘till he should see what would become of the city.’ 4:5***
But there are more symptoms of a self-directed heart that we must see

PP 2-Misplaced Affections

I love what our relentlessly gracious God does...He shows kindness to Jonah
But His kindness proves to expose Jonah's selfish, self-directed heart
“Now 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.” 4:6

The first time we ever see Jonah happy in this book,
But he is not happy because of God, but because of the plant...misplaced affections
He loved the blessings more than the Blessor, his heart was mired in selfishness
What we see is a heart that is incapable of praise, the result of a self-centered life

PP ***‘to save him from his discomfort’*** literally means ***‘to save him from his wickedness’***
What wickedness??...Jonah's angry, merciless, graceless and loveless, self-centered heart
Do you see what God is doing for Jonah?

His grace is meant to lead Jonah off that illicit throne that only God should occupy

PP ***A self-directed Christian is always on a collision course with a sovereign, loving God***
And now we will see the collision take place between our sovereign God and rebellious Jonah

PP 3-Unguarded Heart

This is God's masterful lesson for Jonah, the divine exposé of His prophet's heart
“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.’ Jonah 4:7-8

The word ***‘appointed’*** occurs 4x's in Jonah, 3 of them in verses **6-8**, another in **1:17**
God ***appointed*** the great fish, the plant, the worm and the wind, and repetition demands notice
The lesson is clear...God ordains all things according to His sovereign will

PP That God is *sovereign* means He is utterly independent, free from any other power, exercising supreme and absolute power over all creation

And as Jonah wrote this book as an historical account, he intentionally shows this sovereignty
‘God’ appointed the worm, **‘God’** appointed a scorching east wind, **‘God’** said to Jonah **verse 9**

PP God is *Elohim* in Hebrew, the name that reveals that He is the sovereign Creator of all things
But when we see **‘LORD’**, (4:4, 10), we are seeing His name, Yahweh, which became Jehovah

PP **‘LORD’** is God’s name revealing His eternal existence and unchanging faithfulness
To the nations of the world He was God, or Elohim, but to His people alone He gave Jehovah
It’s a private password into His faithful, eternal blessings, and He only gives that password to
His people, or more accurately, only His people can use it

PP Yahweh is the most personal name for God, while Elohim is the least personal of His names

Sometimes the two are combined as they are in **verse 6** in **‘Lord God’**

PP **‘Lord God’**, *Yahweh Elohim*, is the unchanging, faithful sovereign Creator God

It was God’s personal, sovereign hand that created that plant for Jonah’s comfort

Notice it was Yahweh as **‘LORD’** that asked the first question (4:4)

But it was Elohim as **‘God’** that asked the second question (4:9)

God was exerting His sovereign authority because Jonah forgot his place, it wasn’t on the throne
And the clear message is that God is disciplining His servant Jonah to rescue him from himself

To show Jonah his self-directed arrogant heart, God brings him two trials

Trials dredge up what is deep down in the depths of our hearts

1st a **worm** ate through the plant, leaving Jonah nothing but his own booth for protection

2nd, God sends a **scorching east wind**, a scirocco, a deadly wind so hot it blights crops in hours
It shriveled and swept away Jonah’s self-built sukkah, leaving him completely exposed

Now, why would a relentlessly gracious God do this to Jonah?

One might first ask, why would a sovereign God even let His rebellious, unloving servant live?

God loves Jonah, but selfish people must arrive at brokenness

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” Jesus said, meaning happy are those who recognize they have no
spiritual assets to barter God with, and so rely on His grace

Jonah must come to the end of his own self-righteousness

Interestingly, heat stroke has several progressive symptoms

The body temperature rises rapidly the sweating mechanism fails and the body cannot cool down

The skin turns red, becomes hot and dry, and the heart beat is strong and rapid

Throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion, then unconsciousness and finally death

Jonah **“was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’”** 4:8

The exceeding gladness of a few hours before, evaporated like the moisture in his mouth

And God’s second question reveals this exact heart condition

“But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry for the plant?’ 4:9

His question is asking Jonah how he could be angry for the plant that he didn’t create

It was given to him as a gift, not something that he earned, or deserved

If he earned it or deserved it and it was taken away then he had a right to be angry

But it wasn't earned, it was a gift of grace given from the hand of a loving God
The progression of a self-directed saint moves in unguarded heart toward the loss of the ability to
judge between right and wrong

Jonah answered God's question, '*Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.*' 4:9

PP Harry Ironside explains the lesson in this: "*Jonah's was the callousness that comes from allowing sin to go unjudged until all capacity to discern between right and wrong seems gone.*" H.A. Ironside, Expository Commentary – The Minor Prophets.

Early in his career, C.S. Lewis, the author The Chronicles of Narnia was a staunch atheist, and once said that he was angry with God for not existing

Atheists always seem to be so angry with God

Studies in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* released their findings that proved atheists/agnostics are angrier with God than those who claim to believe in God²

God angers atheists, and grace angers throne sitting, both for the same reason ...it is the hateful loss of control!

PP It rattles self-made people when they understand that "*Grace is unconditional acceptance granted to an undeserving person by an un-obligated giver.*" Tullian Tjividian

Jonah's self-directed heart has put him in despair yet the Great Physician knows what He's doing
He takes Jonah into heart surgery, His questions cutting deep to the tumors of pride and hatred
As we approach the end next week, it would be good for us to ask ourselves some questions

PP Have you **separated yourself** from the ones in your life that need to hear the good news?
Have you cocooned yourself away from unbelievers, climbing into a Christian subculture?
Does your heart break for the lost, evident by constant, pleading prayer for their salvation?
Are you moving toward unbelievers, telling them of what Christ has done on the cross?
Do you have a 'Yes' face to the lost, ready to put them on your horse and get them safely to Christ?

PP Have you **misplaced your affections**, building your own comfortable booths in this world?
Are you living life, sacrificing what you could have had, for the blessings of eternity?
Are you more excited about reading the latest novel than the Word of God?
Do you choose your hobbies and pursuits intentionally to get on board the mission of God?
I love riding my bicycle but am I riding it as a way to show people the redeeming love of Christ?
Which brings me the greatest happiness: the things of God, or the things of this world?

PP Do you have an **unguarded heart** pulsing and beating for your own selfish desires?
Does it deep down bother you to think of God as sovereign, utterly independent from any power, exercising supreme and absolute power over all creation, including you?
Do you examine your words and actions and decisions, asking God to search your heart and test your thoughts showing you if there is grievous way in you?
Do you automatically view trials as God's loving surgery on your heart?
Jonah has one more question coming to him, and the story will end in thundering silence
I encourage you to make sure you are here next week as we conclude this series

Pray

² Julia Exline and Alyce Martin, "Anger Toward God: A New Frontier in Forgiveness Research