

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace-Part 14

Jonah 4:2-5

1/13-14/2016

If the book of Jonah ended with chapter 3, we'd have an incredible story with a happy ending
But it doesn't, and chapter 4 reveals, along with the first two chapters its true purpose
This is not really about the greatest revival in history, this is about Jonah
And by focusing on the only Israelite in all of Nineveh, it proves it is really about Israel
Israel was chosen by God to be a missionary people, and Jonah's attitude reveals that of his
country, and God will be dealing with that as chapter 4 progresses

PP 1-Jonah did not love what He knew about God

We saw previously that Jonah had a disconnect between his theology and the way he lived
Yet he had studied God, and knew His ways

***"I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."* Jonah 4:2**

These five attributes are identical to those which the prophet Joel lists, and they are found in
Exodus 34 as well from Moses

I have mentioned twice in this series that there were schools for prophets in those days,
functioning very much like our seminary colleges do today

And it's common to come out of seminary with knowledge of God, but not a love for God

In fact, I've had men tell me that seminary dampened, even damaged their love for God

Certainly that is not always or usually the case, but it can happen, and it can happen to any
Christian who reads the bible and loves to learn

I might know the form of God, His shape, loving to learn another tidbit of knowledge of Him

But the aim of the knowledge of God is that I love Him and experience the power of a
transformed life that walks in obedience to Him

Jonah knew God's form, His attributes, but didn't love what he knew

PP Yes, God is '**gracious**', He gives His favor to the underserving, always attentive to the
helpless, His heart always motivated and ready to pardon and drop charges

PP God is '**merciful**', meaning *compassionate*, a word that described a mother's compassion for
the child in her womb

If you can picture a pregnant woman with her hand soothingly, attentively and softly on her
swollen belly, then you can understand what it means that God is merciful

PP God is '**slow to anger**', not quick-tempered but long-fused, what it means to be patient

PP God is '**abounding in steadfast love**', which has the sense of his boundless, exceeding mercy

While grace is God's willingness to redeem us from our sins, and His compassion His pity for
our distress that sin has caused, His steadfast, unrelenting love produces His actions He
takes to relieve us of that distress and restore our broken lives

PP Finally, Jonah knew that when sinners repent, God will '**relent from disaster**'

Parents, I'm sure we have all experienced that moment when one of our children comes to us in
tears of repentance, asking for forgiveness for a wrong they have committed

Whenever that happens in my family, the anger and disappointment I was feeling toward that
child evaporates in an instant, and my heart moves toward them in mercy and love

It is an instant and complete change of my attitude, my mindset, and my actions

Our heavenly Father does this perfectly, never being angrier than the sin deserves, and always immediately relenting from judgement the moment there is repentance

Theology, knowledge of God, functions like a mirror showing us His Excellency and Perfection
But then that mirror changes angles and when it does, it reflects what is in the heart of Jonah

PP 2-Jonah did not live what He knew about God

Have you ever been severely disappointed with what God has allowed in your life?
You're rolling along in life when all of a sudden you encounter that bend in the road
A job you thought was made for you is given to someone else...so close but again, denied!
Your business that has been in the family for years fails under your watch
That wedding you so enjoyed has turned into a marriage you no longer want to endure
That baby born with an illness or your child who walks angrily away from faith in Christ
When we are plunged into the deep end of the pool of pain, a coldness toward God can begin to creep over your soul
It darkens joy, destroys worship, blocks prayer, extinguishes your testimony and crushes hope
This is the place we find our struggling prophet, a believer in God like many of us
Jonah is no different than us, he struggles as we do, and he found himself to a place where he no longer even wanted to live

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

Friends, Jonah shares some high-powered company with many who no longer wanted to live
Recall Elijah, who served God so obediently, but when the wicked queen of Israel did not repent with the nation, he walked into the desert by himself, laid under a broom tree and asked God to take his life

PP Moses, enduring a faithless, grumbling Israel yet again, said to God, ***"I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once..."***Numbers 11:14

PP Job, in his unimaginable suffering said, ***"Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'"*** Job 3:1-3

This isn't a suicidal intent to take his own life, but the utmost desire that life here would end
Suffering can be so terrible-*emotionally, physically, mentally*-that a person gives up on life
Sorrow and pain have overshadowed the desire to get up and keep going

Notice who the focus is squarely on: ***'it is better for me to die'***

This is what disappointment with God often does: it moves our eyes on ourselves
But not only does the self become paramount, of greatest importance, it leads to a self-deceptive thought that I alone know what is best for me

God, if you will not do what I know is best for my happiness, I no longer want to live
We'll soon see this is the trump card that Jonah throws down to get God to do what he wants, which of course is the destruction and removal of this Assyrian threat to Israel

PP 3-Jonah needed to learn what God knew about him

I want to share with you a secret blessing that many Christians have the privilege of receiving
 For many, God opens up the curtains over their hearts to expose what is inside
 Picture a contractor opening up your shower wall and showing you the mold growing there, now
 helping you understand the reason for your constant health problems
 Or a dentist back lighting your X-rays showing you the infection causing your tooth ache
 Or a mechanic putting your car on the lift and inviting you to come see the hole in your catalytic
 converter robbing your vehicle of its power
 One of God's most common ways to expose our hearts, is by asking redemptive questions
 They have surgical precision, ground penetrating sonar, getting to the depths of us
 The living and active Word of God is a bunker buster bomb, and His delivery systems are
 preachers, teachers, counselors, and godly friends
 Sometimes He uses the B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber, and you don't even see it coming, like King
 David never saw the Prophet Nathan's bomb drop into his heart
 Other times He uses the F-22 Raptor approach that is fast and precise like He did with Peter
 asking him 3 times if he loved Him...that divine echo
 Sometimes God uses the Abrams and Bradleys of the ground attack, crushing our defenses and
 justifications, like He did with Job
 God knows exactly what questions will open up our hearts so we can see what is inside us
 Here He goes with Jonah: *"And the LORD said, 'Do you do well to be angry?'" 4:4*
PP The NIV words it differently... *'Have you any right to be angry?'*
PP The NLT says, *'Is it right for you to be angry about this?'*
PP The NASB says: *'Do you have good reason to be angry?'*

First of all, why would an all-knowing God need to ask questions?
 Has it ever dawned on you that the first person to ever ask a question in the bible is Satan?
PP *"Now the serpent...said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" Genesis 3:1*
 And the devil's motive was to cause Eve to doubt the Word of God, *'Did God actually say...'*
PP The number one strategy of Satan is to undermine and attack the Word of God
 Satan has waged an overt and covert war against the Scriptures
 Twist it, re-imagine it, whittle it away, file parts into antiquity, over-emphasize other parts, take
 it out of context...it is an all-out war on God's Word, and he's been disturbingly effective
 The questions of Satan are engineered, crafted, and intended to cause you and I to doubt God at
 His Word
PP *"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
 and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5*
 The question led to an outright attack, it's the classic one two punch, the setup to the punchline
 Undermine the authority and credibility of God's Word and you can cause faith to fail

Now look at the second Person to ask questions

PP *"the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" 3:8-13*

God's questions bring what is hidden out into the open so it can be dealt with
Picture a sci-fi movie where the explorers are standing on the lip of a dark and deep hole in the
ground, and one lights a flare and drops down into the chasm
That flare does what the questions of God do as He drops them down deep into our hearts and
lights up what is there
His questions lit up their hiding, rationalizing, blame-shifting hearts

Let's return then to God's question to Jonah: ***'Do you do well to be angry?'***, ***'Do you have good reason to be angry?'***

God asks Jonah if being this angry was doing anything good for him

Was it accomplishing anything, is it improving your life?

Was it resulting in glad salvation of those around you?

PP ***"for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*** James 1:20

So how we do know when our anger is righteous, or unrighteous, pure or sinful?

The Puritan pastor Thomas Brooks helps us discern between the two and I offer them to you

PP i-Anger is sinful when it rises up against God

PP ii-Anger is sinful when it disturbs our ability to reason and make right judgments

This is, at the core, what is wrong with Jonah's anger.

He truly felt he had the right to tell God what He should do about Nineveh

He felt fully righteous, and justified in sentencing Nineveh to death for their sins

We do the same thing when we do not let go of someone's offences even when they have asked
for forgiveness...we hold them under our unforgiving, unmerciful judgment

PP iii-Anger is unrighteous when it leads to sinful words or actions

PP iv-When it is greater in measure than what the cause warrants

PP v-When it prevents or stops us from loving God or others

Jonah does not even answer God, he ***"went out of the city"***

To not answer someone's question, especially one in authority over you, utmost disrespect

He realizes he has no defense, no grounds for his anger, God had simply done nothing wrong, He
was absolutely true with His character, perfect in His actions

Haven't you ever noticed that the most miserable people are those who are angry at God?

PP The word ***'angry'*** in God's question means *burning up as with fire*

Miserable people are unloving people

PP vi-When it persists longer than its effectiveness

PP vii-When it is used as a means to a selfish end

It is this last one that we see in verse 5: ***"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."***

Have you ever wondered why Jonah went 'east of the city'?

East in the bible is often the place of God's judgment

He cast Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and barred its entrance on the east side

He drove the murderer Cain from His presence and he settled in the east

The metaphorical river of Ezekiel flows east from the temple into the dry barren world in need of
God's salvation

Israel traveled across the Jordan river from East, the place of judgement and wandering, to the
Promised land

Jonah goes directly '*east of the city*', where his sulking heart hoped to see the mind of God
changed, '*till he should see what would become of the city.*'

His is an anger that is completely wrong and God loves him too much to leave him there

We'll see what God will do for this prophet that He loves

Let me end with three very brief points

PP 1-Will you learn to discern the nature of your anger, knowing that most of it is wrong?

PP 2-Will you let go of charges and accusations that you may have against God?

Despite what your emotions may say otherwise, they have no basis in truth.

Until they are confessed out of your heart, they will move you away from His presence into the
barren east and you will find yourself wandering in a circle of despair and misery

PP 3-Will you learn to trust that no one will ever love you like God already does?

Amen?

Pray