



**Resenting a Gracious and Compassionate God**  
The Gospel According to Jonah Series #5

Jonah 4:1-4:4

Pastor David Sunday

July 24, 2011

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We're going to continue this morning in our preaching series through the book of Jonah—the Gospel according to Jonah—in the Old Testament. Turn to [Jonah](#) in your Bibles. [Chapter 4:1-4](#) will be our text this morning but I'm going to begin my reading at Jonah 3:10 just to remind us of the context. Jonah has preached in Nineveh, that wicked city, and Nineveh has repented. Let's stand together as we hear God's Word beginning at Jonah 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. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"*

Let's pray.

Lord, we pray that by Your Spirit You would shine the spotlight of Your Word into our hearts and expose the Jonah that's in us. Melt our hearts with the gospel of Your grace so that we would rejoice not only in the grace we have received but in the grace You are extending. Not only to us but to countless sinners like us in our homes, in our neighborhoods and around the world. *["Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."](#)* Amen.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, Kate and I attended a memorial service for Tim and Rebecca Henry's infant son, Ellis. He was the grandson of Pastor John and Linda Sale. It was a service that was very glorifying to God and really full of encouragement. We listened to grandparents pray and express their gratitude to God for His goodness and the truth of His Word. We listened to the siblings of Tim and Rebecca read the Scriptures and give testimonies of God's grace. As the service was coming to a conclusion, Tim—the father of this infant child who died (it was their first child, their first son)—stood up to speak. After thanking

everyone for coming to this service, he said these words, “One of the things God has been teaching me through this is life isn’t fair. Life isn’t fair and that’s a good thing!” Then he began to trace all the blessings of God in his life; from parents who loved him and served the Lord (Rebecca’s parents the same thing), brothers and sisters who have been so supportive, people who had been praying for them all over the world, the blessings, the grace of God in his life. With every blessing he said, “I didn’t deserve that. That wasn’t fair. I didn’t have that coming to me. But that was good. God is good.” He kept driving this point home. “Life isn’t fair and that’s a good thing. It’s better than fair.” It’s full of God’s grace, full of God’s goodness to those of us who are in Christ.

The context in Jonah is different, but this is a lesson that Jonah needs to learn. He hasn’t learned it yet at this point in the story. All we need to do is walk verse by verse through the [first four verses of chapter four](#) to see that Jonah hasn’t laid hold of this lesson. It’s not about what’s fair. It’s about God’s goodness and God’s grace.

In [verse one](#), we see that Jonah is enraged. Look at what it says. “*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.*” What displeased Jonah? Well, Nineveh repented and God relented and Jonah resented it. That’s what displeased him. In fact, if you look at the footnote in the ESV Bible it says this word in Hebrew means, “*it was exceedingly evil to Jonah.*” What was exceedingly evil? The fact that God was gracious! That was an evil thing to Jonah!

If you are ministering in the jails in our community and in the mercy and grace of God hundreds of men and women would fall down on their faces before God in those prisons and repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ, and there’s a widespread revival and awakening throughout the prison system, I think we would rejoice! That’s a good thing. If, in North Africa, after sowing the seed of God’s Word for decades on hard ground, there’s this harvest of righteousness and praise that springs up for the Lord Jesus Christ and countless Muslim people turn to faith in Jesus, I think we’d say, “That’s a good thing.”

Our missionaries—[John and Meg Glass](#)—are serving in [Geneva, Switzerland](#) and France where Europe has become so secularized and so godless and unbelieving. If they suddenly saw an awakening, a revival in that part of Europe where hundreds and thousands of people are turning to faith in Jesus Christ, we’d say, “That’s a good thing.”

You would think Jonah would be elated that the Ninevites have repented but instead he’s disgusted. In fact, one of the commentators wrote that the word is so strong in [verse one](#), it’s as if Jonah said he hated what God had done. He hated that God relented from

sending disaster. It made him furious. And that is supposed to shock us. We're supposed to look at Jonah and say, "Jonah, I don't get it! What is making you so angry?" Jonah would say, "It's not fair! It's not fair that God would be so good to people who have been so bad! To people who have been enemies of God's people! They're wicked! It's not fair."

So what does Jonah do in his anger? In [verse two](#) he prays. That's a good start, right? But it's a prayer that's full of poison. It's a prayer of self-justification. He prays to the Lord and says,

- *"O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?"* In other words, "God, I told You so. You've got a problem, God. You are gracious to people who don't deserve it. And in this case, Lord, I just couldn't let You get away with it."
- *"That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish."* In other words, "That is why I went in the opposite direction because I knew what You were like, God."
- *"For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."* In other words, "That's not fair, God. That's not right."

As we come to [chapter four](#), we're finding that if Jonah was repenting in [chapter two](#), it was a pretty shallow repentance. Deep in the belly of that great fish in his desperation he's crying out for deliverance. Even in that prayer there was a bit of a red flag. If you look back at [Jonah 2:8](#), Jonah makes a statement that is kind of a moral of this whole book. *"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love."* If you worship idols, if you seek to find your rest in something other than God alone and your security and comfort is in other places and other people and things rather than in God, you're forsaking your *"hope of steadfast love."* You're missing out on the loyal, steadfast, covenant faithfulness of God. That's a very important point.

Notice what Jonah does in [Jonah 2:9](#). *"But I..."* (You almost think Jonah's saying, "You know, I'm not one of those people who pay regard to vain idols.) *"But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"* In other words, "God, I'm going to do what You've asked me to do." It's unclear in this book if Jonah ever recognizes the idolatry that's in his own heart. He clearly has a problem with idolatry. He's clearly worshiping things other than the One, True, Living God. He's clearly afflicted with the same sin issues that the Ninevites were. It expresses itself differently, but it's not clear whether Jonah ever really gets that.

My guess is—and this I can't prove—Jonah wrote this book and I think he did it to expose the folly of his own self-righteousness. Because I think later on in his life, God, in His grace, did convince Jonah of the truth. And Jonah, I think, did repent. And he's writing this book to say to us, "Look at what a fool I was and look at how gracious God is!" I don't know that but I do know that Jonah does not express a depth of repentance in this book. He seems blind to the idols in his own heart.

Here we are in [chapter four](#) and he's on dry land. He starts justifying again the rebellion that got him into the fish's belly to begin with. That's what he's doing in [verse two](#). He's going back to his fleeing from the Lord and he's saying, "God, I had a good point there. Knowing what I know about You, God, it made perfect sense for me to run away from Your assignment." That's what he's saying.

Notice why Jonah is angry in [verse two](#)? Because God is slow to anger. He's angry because God is slow to anger. He's immediately filled with intense anger because God is so slow to anger. [Proverbs 14:29](#) says, "*Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.*" Jonah has that hasty temper.

I wonder if you ever think of God that way, like God is just ready to pounce on the trigger to punish you, that God loves to get angry and He's quick to anger. I wonder if you've forgotten this wonderful attribute of God as it says throughout Scripture. [Psalm 103](#) says, "*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide...*" God's not always pointing out what's wrong with you. "*...Nor will he keep his anger forever.*" Even when He is angry, His delight is in mercy. The prophet [Micah](#) says, He delights to show mercy.

*"He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."*

[Psalm 103:9-14](#)

How grateful we should be that God is slow to anger. That when I close my ears to His Word, in His mercy He unstops them again and keeps speaking. When I run from Him, He often runs ahead of me and meets me afresh. When I land in the depths of despair, I discover with [Corrie Ten Boom](#), that "there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." When I fail to obey His assignment, He restores me again to His service like He did to

Jonah. How thankful I should be that He is *“a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”*

But for Jonah, that’s a problem. That’s a problem! Just look in your Bible at [Jonah 4:2](#) and draw a line in your mind around that statement about God. *“A gracious God, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”* If you are familiar with your Old Testament you know it’s a formula—it’s an expression that appears over and over in the Bible about the character of God. It started with Moses and every time you read it in the Scriptures (I looked this up), it’s always offered in a context of praise and worship!

This is good that God is like this! We should thank Him and worship Him because He is like this. These attributes of God are lifted up everywhere in Scripture except here in Jonah where, instead of worshiping God for it, Jonah’s mad about it. He’s angry about it. What’s going on in his heart? I think what Jonah is saying is, “God, it’s fine for You to act that way toward some people. People like me, of course. People in my own country because You know, people like us, we’re basically good. We’ve got a few issues we need to work out. God, I know we’re all sinners, of course, but there are sinners and then there are SINNERS. And I’m just a sinner. I deserve a God Who is *‘...gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,’* but if You are to be merciful to those wicked Ninevites, that would be a gross miscarriage of justice. It cannot be.”

That’s what Jonah’s is mad about. Then in [verse three](#), we see the absurdity of his anger. Look at verse three. *“Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”* Wow. Whenever you see *“therefore”* in Scripture, you’re supposed to ask, “What is it there for?” Why is he asking God to perform divine euthanasia on him? Because of God’s grace and mercy? Because He’s *“...slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”*? Because of these attributes that should be used to worship God? Jonah is saying, “I can’t stand it any longer, God. If this is the way You are, life is intolerable for me. If the Ninevites are in on your grace, God, then I want out. I’d rather die than live in a world where You are gracious to people who don’t deserve it. It’s not fair.”

Jonah thinks he deserves God’s grace. Do you know what that reveals? Jonah doesn’t understand God’s grace. You’ve probably heard these definitions before. Let me give you a good definition that I heard of grace, mercy and justice.

- Grace is God giving me what I don’t deserve. [“Withholding nothing You lavish Your kindness on me.”](#) That’s what we sang this morning. That’s grace. God giving me what I don’t deserve.

- Mercy is God not giving me what I do deserve, sparing me from what my sins really deserve. That's mercy.
- Justice is God giving me exactly what I do deserve.

Grace, mercy, and justice. Jonah thinks he deserves God's grace more than the Ninevites which shows that he doesn't understand God's grace. Grace is God giving me what I don't deserve.

Look at [verse four](#), God's response to this again demonstrates His slowness to anger. If I had someone working for me and I just did one of the most amazing acts of kindness and generosity that I've ever done and the person who's working for me comes and is angry about it and complains about it, I don't know how I would respond—probably not as patiently as God does in verse four. God is slow to anger. He responds with a simple, probing question.

God understands that we all misunderstand His grace. None of us gets it fully. So He comes to us in His mercy, in His patience. The Lord says to Jonah and the Lord says to us, *"Do you do well to be angry?"* "Do you do well to be angry? Yes, Jonah, I'll admit, it wasn't my fairness and justice that moved me to relent from sending judgment when Nineveh repented. It was My mercy and compassion and grace. I pitied them the judgment they deserved. That's not simple fairness. It's better than fairness. It's grace. Isn't that a good thing? Jonah, have you forgotten what I've done for you?"

The irony of all this is that out of everyone in this story, the person who most needs God's grace, mercy and compassion, is Jonah. No one has sinned against greater light than Jonah has in this book. No one has had more knowledge of God and yet rebelled more significantly against the knowledge he had than Jonah. The pagan sailors repented and feared the Lord when God sent that great storm upon the sea. The Ninevites, when they heard of God's judgment, repented. But Jonah has been experiencing grace and mercy and compassion from the very beginning. God sends a storm in His grace and mercy to Jonah and what does Jonah say? "Just throw me in. I'd rather die than repent right now."

Have you ever noticed how many times Jonah wants to die in this book? And it's going to happen again next week. In your life you may find yourself saying, "Oh, I'm just sick of it all! I just want to go to heaven! I want it to be over!" It could be a sign of self-pity. It could be a sign that you've become blinded to God's amazing grace and goodness in your life. Jonah keeps making these death wishes and God keeps being gracious to him,

sends a great fish that becomes like a divine submarine to keep Jonah safe in the belly of the sea for three days and three nights. God brings him forth, gives him another chance to preach the Word and Jonah seems blind to the great grace that's been extended to him and how much he's needed it.

This raises a question for us. What kind of God do you want? What do you want? A god who is meticulously fair, or a God Who is much better than fair? A God Who is gracious—marvelously gracious—and merciful? A God Who is *“slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*? A God Who does not send the disaster we deserve?

It was God's grace, not fairness, that moved the Father to send His Son to die on Calvary's cross. Jesus did not deserve that. It was grace that put Him on the cross. It was God giving us what we don't deserve and God sparing us what we do deserve—His judgment—precisely because the only One Who didn't deserve it bore in our place. He took exactly what you and I deserve—God's justice. Because of that cross, God can be *“slow to anger”* toward us. In His kindness He can lead us to repentance. Because of that cross, when Judgment Day comes for those who are in Christ, God will relent from disaster—the disaster we deserve for our sins. That's the message of the gospel. We believe it, we receive it and we enjoy this grace.

Why is it so hard sometimes to extend that grace to others? We love it when God is slow to anger with us but why are we sometimes so quick to become angry with others? We know the gospel, we believe the gospel, we enjoy the gospel, we embrace the gospel of God's grace, but do we ever resent God's grace? Ask yourself, “Is there anyone in my life today who is experiencing God's blessing and I'm jealous of him or her for it? I'm angry that he or she is being blessed.” Is there anyone like that? Ask yourself, “Is there anyone in my life or any group of people (maybe a nation, an ethnicity, a race or a particular type of people) that I think I'm more deserving of God's grace than they are or that they deserve God's judgment more than I do?” Is there anyone you can think of that if he or she never heard the gospel, if he or she never experienced God's compassion...would you be content?

You see, Jonah had lots of passion for God but little compassion for people. If what I know about God makes me passionate for principle but it doesn't make me compassionate for people, I'm out of sync with the heart of God. If I feel that somehow I deserve the grace of God more than someone else, then I don't understand God's grace. Let's face it, as we look at Jonah, we're also looking at ourselves. As we look at Jonah we realize we're all

recovering Pharisees at best. We're all happier to receive the grace of God for ourselves than we are to share it with someone else.

Sometimes we're downright resentful at how kind God is being to others in our lives. We start wondering, "Has He forgotten about me?" We're all blind to the [marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt](#), grace that has been poured out on my life every single day before I knew Christ and has been lavished on my every day since then. Even [when darkness veils His lovely face I rest on His unchanging grace](#). We forget that.

We look at someone else and we resent it. God says to us, "*Do you do well to be angry?*" "Do you do well? What do you want? Do you want Me to simply be just and fair with you? Do you want me to give you precisely what you deserve? Or are you glad that in Jesus Christ I am constantly giving you what you don't deserve? Sparing you from what you do deserve? All because He took exactly what you deserved on the cross?" God wants to take that gospel and massage it into our hearts. He just wants to rub it in there, in my heart, in your heart, until our hearts are melted with that gospel truth. Melted. And when that happens we will never say, "God, You're not fair." We'll never complain that life isn't fair. We'll know that's a good thing. That grace is a good thing.

Let's stand together and praise Him. We're going to sing, "[Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.](#)" As we sing, God, would You massage the message of Your grace deep into our hearts? Where we've become hardened and cynical, callused toward others, Lord, melt us with Your mercies. Where we're just passionate about truth but not compassionate toward people, God, transform us. Lord, we want to enjoy and embrace Your grace but we also need to extend it to others. So Lord, move us. Move us out of a self-centered way of thinking and living and give us great joy in sharing that good news, the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that Your Spirit uses to transform sinners like us. Glory to You alone, God, for Your amazing grace. Amen.

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