



Answering a Gracious and Compassionate God The Gospel According to Jonah Series #6

Jonah 4:5-4:11

Pastor David Sunday

July 31, 2011

Please turn in your Bibles to the book of [Jonah](#) this morning. We're going to have our last message in this series from this book. I trust as we reach the end of this story, we agree with [Herman Melville](#): "What a pregnant lesson to us is this prophet! How billow-like and boisterously grand!" Jonah is not just a story about an Old Testament prophet. It's the story of ourselves. [Charles Simeon](#) was right. "We know little of ourselves if we don't recognize much of our own character in that of Jonah."

Jonah is also a signpost pointing us to One Who is infinitely greater than ourselves. In Jonah we see largely by way of contrast the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. So as we close this narrative this morning, I want to read the last several verses of the book of Jonah and also read from the life of Jesus in the gospel of [Luke](#).

"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. 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. 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.' But God said to Jonah, 'Do you do well to be angry for the plant?' And he said, 'Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.' 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. 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?'"

[Jonah 4:5-11](#)

And now, turn to [Luke 19](#). The writer of the [Hebrews](#) said, "[Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets...](#)" The book of Jonah is a very unique way of God speaking to us through a prophet's life. But then [Hebrews](#) says "[But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things,](#)

[through whom also he created the world.](#)” Jesus is the last prophet of God. He is the living Word of God. He is the One after Whom He speaks. There is no other word that God has to give.

I want you to see an episode in the life of Jesus that happens on [Palm Sunday](#) as He’s coming into Jerusalem. And just notice the contrast between this episode in Jesus’ life and the episode we just read in Jonah’s life.

*“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 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. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

[Luke 19:41-44](#)

Let’s pray. Lord, we need Your Holy Spirit to help us to listen, to receive, to preach and to be transformed by the gospel. Help us to see Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ and may we increasingly become like Him Whom we behold in all the Scriptures. They’re pointing us to Your Son. Lord, give us eyes to see Him and through Him to know You, our Father. Holy Spirit, illuminate our hearts and minds and empower my preaching, I pray, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

What a stark contrast between Jesus and Jonah. Both of them are messengers from a gracious God to a sinful people.

- Jesus went willingly and joyfully while Jonah went kicking and screaming.
- Jonah fled from God’s calling in rebellion, running away from his enemies. Jesus embraces God’s call in wholehearted devotion—running toward His enemies, knowing full well we would reject Him and crucify Him.
- Jesus relished God’s mission with joyful abandon. Jonah resented God’s mission with bitter derision.
- Both were sacrificed in order that others could be saved.
- But Jonah was thrown into the sea with a hardened heart. Jesus willingly threw Himself into the flood of God’s wrath when He hung on the cross and He did so with a heart of love and compassion.

In the two episodes we read this morning we see Jonah and Jesus, both on the outskirts of a great city, both looking in on these cities, except their response to these great cities is strikingly different from one another. Jonah is waiting with bated breath—hoping that perhaps the repentance the Ninevites expressed in [chapter three](#) would not hold and God would indeed bring judgment on those wicked sinners after all. Jesus, on the other hand, is standing outside Jerusalem, knowing that many in that city are about to experience God's judgment. And Jesus' heart is broken.

Jonah is staying as far away as possible from Nineveh, not wanting to experience contact with those he deems unworthy of God's mercy. Jesus, on the other hand, is moving resolutely into the city where not only will He have contact with sinners, but He will so closely identify Himself with their plight that He will allow Himself to be hung on the cross as the sacrifice for their sins. What a contrast. Jonah looks out on Nineveh and on what God is doing for Nineveh, and Jonah is whining. Jesus looks out on Jerusalem and about what God is going to do to Jerusalem, and Jesus is weeping. Jonah whines. Jesus weeps.

In [verse 41 of Luke 19](#), Luke tells us that Jesus wept over the city when *"He drew near and saw it."* And the word that Luke uses to describe Jesus' weeping is a very strong word. It's the word that is used when [King Herod massacres the infants](#) around the time of Jesus' birth. And we read of [Rachel weeping](#) with loud lamentation for her lost children. Imagine the scene as Jesus looks out on the city and He stops with the praises of the throng ringing in His ears, ["Hosanna to the Son of David!"](#) They're praising Him and suddenly tears flow from Jesus' eyes and His chest begins to heave with convulsive sobs as He weeps with all His heart and His voice wails in lament over the city of Jerusalem.

As we behold our Savior weeping, I want to ask three questions this morning. Number one: Why is Jesus weeping? Number two: Why is Jonah whining? And number three: Who more closely reflects your own heart—Jesus or Jonah?

1. Why is Jesus Weeping?

Why is Jesus weeping? Why does Jesus weep? Weeping can be a window into a person's soul. It reveals what your heart is attached to—what you most desperately dread to lose. I learned to weep in a whole new way last year in 2010 as I realized how attached my heart was to my wife and how much I dreaded to lose her as she faced this battle with cancer. We know that Jesus often wept in private before the Father. [Hebrews 5:7](#) tells us that *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and*

tears...” But only twice in the Gospels do we see Jesus weeping in public. Once in [Lazarus' tomb](#) (at the death of His dear friend) and here, weeping over Jerusalem, the city. I wonder, why is He weeping? What can we learn about His character at this point in the scene?

Jesus is not weeping because He's afraid. Sometimes just sheer fear and terror of what lies ahead can bring us to tears. Jesus knows the cross is on the near horizon now. It's coming up in just a few days and He has set His face resolutely to go to that cross and He has not once turned back. He's not afraid.

Jesus is not weeping either because of frustration or a sense of failure. Sometimes we get to the end of a project or end of an ordeal and we feel that we have failed in what we wanted to accomplish and we weep over that. But Luke takes pains to communicate throughout this Gospel that everything is under the sovereign control of Jesus. He's moving forward on a mission. The acquisition of the donkey to get Him into Jerusalem was under His sovereign control. The praises of the throng that surround Him are praising Him for His kingship—His sovereignty. Jesus is in such sovereign control that He says in [Luke 19:40](#), *“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”*

Jesus isn't weeping because He's afraid. He isn't weeping because He's fearful, frustrated or sensing failure. He's sovereign. He's in control. He's reigning. He is mighty. Why then does He weep? [John Piper](#) says that these are tears of Sovereign mercy. Sovereign mercy. Jesus is merciful and mighty. What a wonderful combination that is. If He was sheer in might, we would be totally afraid of Him. But He is merciful and mighty together. And so we are drawn to Him. We are attracted to Him. And the tears that He's shedding over Jerusalem are tears of sovereign mercy. He's weeping in [verse 41 and 42](#), because they have rejected the terms of peace. He has come as an ambassador from heaven to bring *“[peace on earth and goodwill to men](#),”* and they have rejected those terms of peace. Now they are standing at the brink of ruin under God's judgment. He is reflecting the heart of God by weeping over those who are about to face the judgment of God.

We see this reflected in the prophet Ezekiel as God says in [Ezekiel 33](#), *“Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”* This is the heart of God! Of compassion! A God Who identifies Himself with wicked sinners. A God Whose heart is designed to show mercy and redeem—to show love and ready to forgive—if we would turn from our wicked way. And Jesus

reflects that heart of God's compassion. He weeps over Jerusalem. He weeps in the presence of a lost and dying world.

But not Jonah. Jesus weeps. Jonah whines. Jesus is a compassionate Savior. Jonah is a pouting prophet. Jesus makes Himself nothing—dying to all His own interests. Jonah is consumed with self-interest. We need to ask ourselves this morning, “Which of these prophets more clearly reflects my own heart? Am I weeping with Jesus or am I whining with Jonah? Am I more like Jesus or am I more like Jonah?”

2. Why is Jonah Whining?

Let's turn back to [Jonah four](#) now and ask the question, “Why is Jonah whining?” We heard the question that God asked him last week in [verse four](#), “*Do you do well to be angry?*” Jonah hasn't directly answered that question yet but we do know that Jonah has already expressed to God that it would be better for him to die than to live. “*Please take my life from me,*” he says in [verse three](#). We find out in [verse five](#) that Jonah doesn't really want to die. He loves himself too much for that.

He makes a booth and sits under the shade like the Israelites did in the [Feast of Tabernacles](#) to remind themselves of their traveling in the wilderness and God's provision for them. Instead of being filled with gratitude at the surprising grace of God to the Ninevites, Jonah is filled with rage. The ESV study Bible remarks about [verse five](#), “Jonah is hot both emotionally and physically.” He's there in this booth and sitting under it in the shade until he should see what would become of this city. “Maybe,” he's thinking. “Maybe, just maybe God will judge those wicked sinners, confirm the word that I preached: *'Yet, forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'*”

Tension is rising at this point. If you're paying attention to God's dealings with Jonah, you've got to be thinking, “How patient will God be with this recalcitrant prophet? When will God finally say, ‘Jonah, enough is enough! I'm through with you!’” We should be amazed at the astonishing patience that God shows His servant. As He comes to Him again as a Wonderful Counselor, He's engaging in this counseling session with Jonah.

Have you ever been in a season where you were just being worked over by God's Word and the questions were just honing in, doing a surgical exposure of the sinful cancers of your heart? God has been doing this with Jonah. He's been counseling him. Now He says, “I'm going to bring you an object lesson, Jonah. I'm going to move the forces of nature to show you the point that I've been trying to make.” In [verse six](#) we read, “*Now the*

Lord God appointed a plant.” We saw that word “appoint” back in [Jonah 1:17](#) where *“the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”*

Now the God of all nature appoints a plant. [Jonah 4:6](#) says He does it *“...to save him from his discomfort.”* That phrase is very important. The word for “discomfort” is the Hebrew word for evil—a word that has appeared nine times throughout this book and it has a double meaning. *“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 [evil].”* God’s not just concerned about the discomfort that Jonah is feeling on the outside, but God is concerned about the evil that is seething out from Jonah’s heart. God is going to use this nature object lesson to show Jonah—to surgically expose the heart of darkness that’s lurking inside this prophet.

God sovereignly appoints this plant. His intention for bringing the plant is not just to comfort Jonah physically, but His intention is actually to turn up the heat on Jonah. Jonah doesn’t know that yet. Look at the last phrase in [verse six](#). *“So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.”* Do you realize that this is the first time Jonah’s been happy in this whole book? Jonah hasn’t been glad about anything so far. It never says he was glad when God brought that fish to swallow him up and to protect him under water. It never says that Jonah was glad when God released him from out of the fish onto dry ground again. It never says that Jonah was glad when the Ninevites repented and [“more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left”](#) were spared from disaster. No. We’ve never seen Jonah happy until now.

What makes this great prophet so happy? He’s got a little shade over his head. He’s comfortable. Life is good. He’s *“exceedingly glad.”* It’s the same grammar that’s used in [verse one](#) when it says, *“...it displeased Jonah exceedingly...”* He was exceedingly unhappy in verse one about the repentance of the Ninevites and God relenting from disaster. He resented that. But now that he’s got a little shade over his head, he’s a happy man! How appalling. This is God’s prophet? This is someone who knows the Lord—[“a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster”](#)—and this is what makes him happy?

[Paul David Tripp](#) says that one of the most incisive indicators of what’s really going on in your heart is to ask yourself, “What brings me the greatest joy? What produces in me a glad heart? Are my greatest moments of joy attached to moments of comfort, moments of ease, moments of personal success? Or are my deepest and fullest joys attached to the work of the gospel—the work of the Kingdom of God? What brings me joy?”

If we're really honest about our hearts, I think we have to see that sometimes we can be standing at the threshold of this great outpouring of God's grace! We can be looking at ["fields that are white for harvest"](#) for the gospel and ministry opportunities! And all we're thinking about is, "Oh, I would love to just go home to my air-conditioned house, sit in front of my wide-screened TV, and tune it all out." We can be so out of touch with what's in the heart of God.

[Francis Schaffer](#) has said that the great challenges facing the evangelical church at the end of the 20th Century, were the twin idols of personal peace and affluence. We just love to have our comfort. We just love to have it easy. And that's what God is working on here as He appoints this plant and it shades Jonah's head. Jonah is so very happy because *"when dawn came up the next day"* ([verse seven](#)), God attacks that idol of personal peace and affluence.

Look at verse seven. *"But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant..."* If you have any doubts of the absolute sovereignty of God, just underline those words in your Bible and meditate on them for a while. *"God appointed a worm."* God is the Lord of the worm-kingdom! God is sovereign over a little worm! God sees His prophet seething with self-pity, out of sync with God's character, and God says, "Hey, worm down there on the outskirts of Nineveh. I want you to move over to that little booth, find this nice leafy plant and worm, I'm going to free you up all night long to munch away at that plant." And the worm obeys. Isn't that something? The worms obey God. The plant kingdom obeys God. The people of Nineveh obeyed God. The king of Nineveh obeyed God. The pagan sailors in chapter one feared God. The only person in this whole story who is really struggling to render immediate obedience to God is God's prophet.

Do you ever think to yourself, "Do you know what? The sinners are out there. We're the good people. We're the upright ones." God comes to us in the book of Jonah and says, "No, we need the grace of God just as much as the people out there." We are just as sinful. And sometimes our religion and our knowledge can blind us to the disobedience of our own hearts.

God turns up the heat. He appoints the worm. Then He appoints a scorching east wind. These [Sirocco winds](#) comes in from the mountains of Iran and blows with 120 degree heat along with fast desert winds—60 miles per hour or more—and makes life miserable for those who are in the wake of this wind. So the sun rises, the scorching wind comes, the sun is beating down on Jonah's poor little head, dehydration is setting in, and he's faint. He

says, “God, if this is how You run Your world, I’d rather not be part of it. If this is how You treat Your prophets and You start showing Your grace to people like them, well then I’m going to write a new worship song, ‘Your Grace Still Enrages Me.’ God, I’m done.” It’s his third request for divine euthanasia in [verse eight](#).

God, in His mercy, continues to pursue His servant. Just like He pursues Jonah, sometimes God’s grace and kindness comes to us in uncomfortable ways. Sometimes God turns up the heat in our lives to show us what is really in our hearts. Listen to this poem by [John Newton](#). I think it describes well the experience of a child of God.

*I asked the Lord that I might grow,
In faith and love and every grace,
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.*

*Yes, more with His own hand, He seemed,
Intent to aggravate my woe.
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.*

*It was He who taught me thus to pray,
And He I trust has answered prayer.
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.*

*"Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried.
Will You pursue Your worm to death?"
"This is the way" the Lord replied,
"I answer prayer for grace and strength."*

*I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He'd answer my request.
And by His love's constraining power,
Subdue my sins and give me rest.*

*"These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set you free;
And break your schemes of earthly joy,
That you may find thy all in Me."*

*Instead of this, He made me feel,
The hidden evils of my heart.
And let the angry powers of hell,
Assault my soul in every part.*

That’s what God is doing here. He’s breaking Jonah’s schemes of earthly joy to show Jonah the hidden evils of his heart so that Jonah, by God’s grace, will find his all in Him. I love God’s patience. In [verse nine](#), He doesn’t say to Jonah, “Jonah, you just don’t get it. You’re just an idiot.” He doesn’t say that to Jonah. Instead He probes some more. He asks a question gently, but penetratingly. “*Do you do well to be angry for the plant?*” And Jonah audaciously answers, “*Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.*” But God is going to get the last word here. “*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.’*”

This is the first time Jonah has cared about something that is perishing. This is the first time Jonah has been concerned about [rescuing the perishing](#). The problem is it’s a

plant, not a person. He cares more about the plant than the people. God says, “That’s not My heart. I look at the city. I look at *‘more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left.’* They are people who do not know where they came from. They don’t know where they’re going. They don’t know what their purpose in life is. They’re groping around in the darkness. They need a Savior and I have compassion on them! Jonah, *‘should I not pity Nineveh, that great city?’* You care about that plant but what about those people? *‘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?’*”

God is the God of all creation. [Psalm 36](#) says, “*Man and beast You save, O Lord.*” God is renewing His whole creation. He cares about everything that He has made. He is kind and merciful to all—even the cattle in Nineveh. “This world belongs to God, and He’s in the process of gaining it all back, not giving it all,” up says [Tullian Tchvidjian](#).

3. Who more closely reflects your own heart—Jesus or Jonah?

So we’re left here with a question—kind of a cliff-hanger. There are only two books in the Bible that end with a question: Jonah and Nahum—both of them dealing with Nineveh. How will we answer this gracious and compassionate God? Is it possible that a servant of God could care more about his own personal ease and comfort than he does about a whole city of lost and perishing sinners? Apparently it is. Is it possible that someone who has experienced amazing grace could be so out of touch with the compassionate heart of God? Apparently it is.

God is holding up a mirror to my heart—to your heart—in the book of Jonah. God is saying, “Whose reflection do you see in that mirror? Jesus’ or Jonah’s? Who do you more closely resemble, the heart of Christ or the heart of Jonah? And through the way God tells this story, He’s also shining a spotlight into our hearts and He’s saying, “Do you know what, my children? I still see a lot of Jonah in you. I see it.”

I think the greatest miracle of this book is not that God rescues Jonah from the belly of the fish (as wonderful as that is) and not even that the Ninevites repent and God relents (as amazing as that is), but I think we’re at the climax of the story here in [chapter four](#). And the most amazing demonstration of God’s grace is that God still has not given up on Jonah. God still loves him with a [love that will not let him go](#). And God is saying to us—His children—that He is more patient, more compassionate toward us than anyone we know.

And God is demonstrating that patience and that compassion to melt our hearts so more and more we start weeping like Jesus instead of whining like Jonah.

Weeping over this Fox Valley region where there are well over “120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left”—who are lost and without hope in this world. Instead of standing at a distance and throwing stones and saying, “What’s wrong with that world out there?” God is calling us, like Jesus, to draw near; to engage; to go into the city; to identify with those who are sinful, knowing that that is what God has done for us in Christ.

Lord Jesus, may Your [love fill us as the waters fill the sea. You exalting, self-abasing, this is victory](#), Lord. We pray, God, that You would teach us to weep over what You weep over. We pray, Lord, that You would break up any hardness that’s in our hearts, any apathy, any lack of love and compassion toward a lost and dying world. We thank You, Father, that You continue to pursue us, Your servants, with a love that will not let us go. You are patiently, persistently, conforming us to the image of Your Son—our Savior—and You will not let up. We love You for that. We thank You for that.

I’m going to pray something that I have written on my bulletin board in my study at home. If this is what you want to say to the Lord, would you just be echoing this back to Him from your own hearts?

*Lord, I am willing
To receive what You give;
to lack what You withhold;
to relinquish what You take;
to suffer what You inflict;
to be what You require;
and to do what You send me to do.*

Make us willing to be conformed to the image of Your Son. Let our hearts beat, God, with what makes Your heart beat. Fill us with Your love and compassion we pray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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