

Gleanings from Jonah Chapter 4 – Will Lowery 01/09/2022

Background to Jonah

- Jonah begins with God calling him to go to Nineveh and preach against it.
- Nineveh (in modern day Syria) is an evil, wicked city. It was known for the brutal ways they would conquer cities and nations around them. They were known for committing what we would now call war crimes and crimes against humanity. And they took pride in it.
- For example, Sennacherib's palace walls were decorated with carvings of his armies impaling their enemies, skinning them alive and spreading their hides across the gates of a conquered city as a warning. And the king blinding a prisoner with a spear while pulling another who is leased by a fishhook in his nose.
- There are reports of the Ninevites taking average people captive by putting a fishhook through their nose/mouth and pulling them out of the city into exile.
- This was an evil nation.
- Meanwhile Amos was prophesying, warning Israel that this nation was going to attack and destroy Israel.
- So, God tells Jonah to go and preach against them.

Jonah Runs the opposite direction.

- He gets in a boat to travel to the opposite side of the known world away from Nineveh.
- God appoints a storm.
- God appoints a fish.
- Jonah prays and repents, and the fish spits him onto dry land.
- Finally, Jonah listens and begins to preach against the city.

Read Jonah 3:3-10.

Big Idea: People don't join in God's mission, because they don't know God's character.

Jonah 4:1 – But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.

- Jonah was one of the few "successful" prophets.
- A more direct translation "This was evil to Jonah, this great evil, and he burned with anger."
- Jonah is saying in his heart "God you have acted wickedly by committing this great injustice of showing mercy."
- The bible doesn't say why he found this to be unjust, but three ideas are often proposed.
 - Jonah wanted to decide who was worthy of mercy and judgement.
 - He took God's place in judging.
 - "Those people will never change."
 - Don't we do this all the time? ... "That person won't listen." ... "They don't deserve it."
 - Jonah thought he knew better than God.
 - He likely thought his anger was righteous indignation.

- He had a strong conviction about what should happen, and it conflicts with God's desires and plan.
- Misplaced patriotism
 - Idolized his own wellbeing and the wellbeing of his nation. He desired to see his enemies destroyed.
 - "But there are problems here."
 - We are plagued with American exceptionalism, ideas of superiority, and Christian nationalism, and other national idolatries.
 - There is no "America First" in the Church or in God's kingdom.
- Ultimately, He is angry with God, because he didn't know God's Character.

Jonah 4:2 – "He prayed to the LORD, 'Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.'"

- We finally learn from Jonah's own mouth why he fled from God's calling. Not because he was afraid for his own life, but because he knew God is gracious and compassionate.
- He didn't want to go because he knew God would relent from destroying Nineveh.
- Jonah Directs his anger to God and shows an incredible disdain for human life, for those who receive God's mercy, and for God himself. He basically says, "God I knew that you are too soft and weak to do what needs to be done."
- But here is the thing: Jonah was orthodox (his theology was correct, he had good doctrine, he was biblically accurate).
- Jonah's prayer is a direct quote from Joel and is part of an ancient creed/confession found in many places, but beginning in Exodus.
- After the golden calf episode, we read in 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, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...'"
- Jonah's anger is that God acted exactly according to his Word. And Jonah knew his word

You can be orthodox/biblical/doctrinally pure and not know God's character.

- Trust me I know. I went to seminary, I know creeds, confessions, many theologies, and Hebrew. But that doesn't mean I know God.
- Yet it is easy to be deceived. I easily fall here where I think knowing about God is the same as knowing God.
- It was Jonah's "good" theology that kept him from God's mission.

Jonah 4:3 – “Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

- God’s mercy didn’t fit with Jonah’s ideas of justice, so he would rather God kill him than spare thousands of people.

Jonah 4:4 – “But the LORD replied, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’”

- God’s satire is great.
- Notice Jonah doesn’t even dignify this with a response.

Jonah 4:5-8 – “Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant^(e) and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’”

- God appoints many things in the book of Jonah: storm, fish, plant, worm, and wind.
- When God appoints, Nature obeys. Only people ever refuse God’s call.

Jonah 4:9 – “But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ ‘It is,’ he said. ‘And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.’” Here are some ironies to consider:

- God shows mercy to a repenting city, and Jonah is disgusted. God removes a plant from unrepenting Jonah, and he is distraught.
 - Like a child that would rather have no toy, than share
- The evil king thinks “Who knows? Let’s trust in God’s compassion!”
- Jonah says, “I know you are compassionate, so you can’t be trusted!”

Jonah 4:10-11 – “But the LORD said, ‘You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?’”

- Jonah 4:11 can be translated two ways:
 - “Should I not have compassion?”
 - “I will not have compassion.” –
 - Consider what God did to Nineveh 100 years later – See the book of Nahum.

Jonah left out part of the ancient confession.

- **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, 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.**”

Exodus 33:19 – “... I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.”

I hope you can agree with me that the reason Jonah fled God’s call was because he didn’t know the Character of God.

This is true of us all. **People don’t join in God’s mission because they don’t know God’s character.**

Yet, Jonah teaches us that God’s purpose will prevail... either to your praise or your detriment.

Missions aren’t about the missionary or the presentation.

Missions are about the character of God amidst obstinate and sinful people.

God calls us to go out to all nations and make disciples of every people, nation, tribe, and tongue. (See **2 Peter 3:9-10.**)

People need the word of God in Christ. (See **Romans 10:9-15.**)

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”