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JONAH 3:10-4:11

Jonah Series

Let's come before the Lord and pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, today as we look at your word we ask that you would touch us and reveal new things to us about who you are and who we are and how we are to relate to you effectively. We thank you that your word opens up new ways for us to think and understand life. I pray for those who may be troubled today, that you'd give them encouragement from your word today. And for each of us, help us to center ourselves on you today as the Lord of our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

In the book of Jonah (and this is our last week in the book of Jonah), we have the story about how God wants to come and He wants to bring salvation to a people. It's an amazing story about them needing salvation, just like all of us need salvation, and God chooses a man to take that message of salvation to them.

The interesting thing about this book is that the book would only be eight verses if it was just about the salvation of the Ninevites. Eight verses long. But we have to have the other forty verses because Jonah has problems. The rest of chapter one takes on this detour, chapter 2 is him repenting, chapter 4 now he's got some other problems.

We're going to see some problems that Jonah has in a moment, but before we do, let's read. We picked off at Jonah 3:10 last week. So open your Bibles to Jonah 3:10 and let me read this beautiful verse in this chapter. It says – *When God saw what they did (that is the Ninevites who repented) and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

I want you to know this is the greatest miracle in the book of Jonah. There are several miracles that take place in the book of Jonah, but this is the greatest one that these people would repent and their hearts would change. They repented on the first day of Jonah's three-day trek into the city. The first day people responded. It's just a miracle that their hearts were changed and God did some amazing things.

There are people all around us who need to change their lives. They need to repent. Their lives need to be drastically different than the way they are now. We have a message for them and that message is so powerful. Nineveh is more than a city. Nineveh is people. It's those people that we experience all around us that are like the Ninevites that need help. It's the neighbor next door. That's the Ninevites. Or the teller at the bank, or the person at Walmart, or the person you bump

into at the store, a person driving down the road. It's a person that's very different than you. Maybe this other person is different than me and wears a suit all the time. Or maybe you wear a suit; maybe that person has tattoos and body piercings and they're different. But God works in everybody's heart and He loves them like He loves the Ninevites.

That's the message that God wants to bring to these people – He loves them and He wants to care for them. It's so powerful of a message. Nineveh is a target city of God's love. God wants to bless them. His compassion is so important and valuable. Wherever you find people you find this combination of Ninevites.

The Ninevites lived in Nineveh, which was a magnificent city. It had all kinds of beautiful things in it. It was an amazing city. But they were also people that had a lot of problems and wickedness. That's the people we see all around us. Sometimes we don't get to see past them into their inner hearts. But God wants to do amazing things in their lives. It's just a beautiful thing that God wants to do.

The story could end right here in verse 10. What an amazing miracle. They changed. They repented. People who needed Jesus, needed God, came to Him, found Him, and it changed their lives. That could be the end of the story except it isn't in the book of Jonah because chapter 4 is all about a guy who has problems. He's a God-fearing guy, but he's got anxiety problems, he's got anger problems inside of Him, and it's really bothering Him.

So I'm going to take you into chapter 4 because I think there are some nuggets in chapter 4 that help us deal with challenges that we face in our lives.

Look with me at Jonah 4:1. The first word says *but*. So all these people got saved, good things are happening, they're coming to know the Lord... *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.*

Jonah's reaction to the situation is different than I would have imagined. I would think he would say, "Wow, these people are coming to God. I'm just so grateful. This is amazing. This is powerful." We'd expect him to be leaping for joy. But he doesn't. He goes into the worst blue funk that you can imagine. He gets depressed. Bad things are happening, all kinds of stuff is going on in his life. He's not interested in what's going on in these other people's lives. He's not interested in the good things that are going on in their lives. He's only interested in himself and the bad things (as he perceives it) that are going on for him. As far as he is concerned, this is not good news that these people came to know God and they're getting whole in their lives and good things are happening. He's just focusing on his own self.

Here's what's happening in his heart. He has expectations and he has desires that were not in line with God's. So as God is orchestrating life events, for him bad things are happening. Good things are really happening, but for him it appears very wrong. Do you see that in the verse? It says *to Jonah this seemed very wrong* that this should happen.

Now here's a problem that happens in all of our lives. When life starts to happen and things start moving around, if we're rigid and inflexible then we succumb to these emotions – anxiety,

disappointment, sadness, and anger. If things don't go our way, that's what happens. Those things throw us for a loop and bad things start happening inside of us and they mess with our hearts. We feel so upset about that.

I would suggest that one of the greatest ways to be emotionally healthy is to be flexible. To be able to allow God to move you in a particular way that says, "Okay, the circumstances are different. I'm going to live in this different way." It's the rigid people, the inflexible people that get all upset inside continually about things that are going on.

God gives two pictures in His word (at least I found two pictures this week) about what this flexibility looks like so that we can all learn from this. I think it's very valuable to see that one of the illustrations is a wind. You know how a wind blows through the trees and the trees are flexible and they are able to move? We need to be able to do the same thing.

Jesus describes this to Nicodemus in John 3. He says, "*You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*" So that's not an option because being born again means you're translated or your life inside becomes different. Your heart then becomes more flexible. He describes what that looks like. He says, "*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*"

When you have Jesus Christ living in your life there's something that happens that allows you to be more flexible and move with life so you're not devastated when something happens that is frustrating for you.

The second illustration comes from that one kind of illustration of "this world is not my home, I'm just passing through." I'm going to show you one verse that illustrates that. Those are the song lyrics, but this is a verse that illustrates that. It says – *Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.* This is the key. Their talons of life are embedded in earthly things. They get embedded in those earthly things, and then it's saying *our citizenship is in heaven.* We need to have our citizenship in heaven so that we're not tying our earthly things into the present life.

That is a problem. See, when you're a Christian you live differently. You're able to move with life experiences because it's an adventure of where we're going. God is taking us on that path. Amazing things happen.

Jonah was inflexible, and notice what it says in verse 1. Just take that by itself. *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong.* Notice God's the one who's making the decisions and Jonah is evaluating God. "God, you're wrong in doing this." So it seemed very wrong to Jonah this was taking place, *and he became angry.* He's going AWOL. Not absent without leave, but angry without love is what's happening here.

Now you have to understand that anger at its root has to do with something is wrong in the world. I'm angry because something's wrong. Now we don't know if the something wrong is something inside of our own hearts or it's something that's out there.

So let's say you go to the refrigerator and you want to get that food that has your name on it. You go there and the food is gone. Somebody else ate it, probably from your house, instead of an intruder. It's your food. You put it there and you're mad. So if your name is on it and you put it there then you're mad because somebody else did something to you and that was wrong.

However, let's say you had in your mind, "I want to get the leftovers from yesterday, I'm looking forward to that," and you open the refrigerator and it's gone, somebody else ate it. There's no rule about that. Now the anger is inside of you because of something that is wrong inside.

We don't know whether the anger is outside or inside. It's just anger. So we always have to be asking the question what is this red light flashing on the dashboard mean? It's anger telling me there's something wrong. Now there's something wrong here. The something wrong isn't out there with God doing the wrong thing or life doing the wrong thing. It's wrong inside of Jonah and that's what he needs to see.

So let's see what he says in verse 2. He talked to the Lord about it. *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."*

I think that the thinking in Jonah's mind was something like this: "God, I think you're being too hasty in forgiving these people. You don't really know these people, God." One of the things that I think Jonah is misunderstanding here is this whole concept of grace. God is a God of grace. He wants to give grace to people, which is something they don't deserve. So we're going to see that message demonstrated throughout this book and God is going to try to help Jonah make some changes in His life.

I think anger can be rather unreasonable. So look at verse 3. He's so upset, he's so anxious, he's so sad, he's so disappointed, he's so angry about this that (verse 3) he continues his prayer – *"Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."* Wow. Despair. The despair is so great for him that just "I'm going to die."

That's a really sad place when people come to that place in their lives when they are so despairing of even life itself. It's just an indication of an internal problem that they aren't moving with what's going on. They've got their roots in a place where they shouldn't be and they're not a citizen of heaven, allowing God to do their work and allowing God to take them on a new adventure. It's just a really sad place to be for them.

Now God is going to be the counselor here to deal with the pride and the arrogance and the selfishness of Jonah. But sometimes when someone is so despairing and angry it's hard to just come out and say, "Would you just straighten up?" So God doesn't do that. God is going to ask

three questions and He's going to give him a life experience to lead him to a place where hopefully he's going to make an adjustment in his thinking about these things. So let's watch how God is the counselor so that Jonah can see more. Jonah is only seeing it from his side of the situation. He's not seeing it from the other side. He just is looking at it selfishly. "I don't like what's happening and I'm upset."

I like this because the way the Lord works with Jonah is He takes Jonah's black and white thinking (it's right and wrong) and He uses that with Jonah. *But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"* Let's just ask the question of right and wrong here. Are you getting angry because you think something's wrong? I'm going to ask you the question, is it right for you to be angry? That's the question. I want to talk to you about right and wrong." He's trying to prompt Jonah to think outside of himself, not just think about himself. There's a bigger picture that He wants him to see. God's primary goal is not justice. His primary goal is mercy. He is compassionate to these people.

Now there are some people who have a hard time coming to God for this very reason. "How could I come to God when there's so much evil in the world? That's so wrong." And so then they say, "Well I can't come to God." Or "I lost something valuable in my life. Because I lost something valuable, God must not love me. If He did, He would make me happy," is the kind of thing they're thinking. "If God exists then bad things wouldn't happen." I think there's an inadequate picture of God in those moments.

Let's see what happens when someone gets angry in turmoil inside of their hearts. Look at verse 5. It says – *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.*

He was supposed to be on a mission going through the city and he didn't even get through the mission. He's just like, "I'm depressed. I'm going to go sit on the side of the mountain." He builds himself a shelter, isolates himself, and he sits there and waits to see what's going to happen. He's just pouting. God could have punished him. God is so gracious and merciful, but God could have punished him and said, "Alright, you're out of here."

I'm working with a dad right now who is learning the difference between punishment and discipline. Here's what he does. His son messes up and he says, "Okay, you owe me thirty push-ups right now." So that's his approach to correcting his son. "Give me thirty push-ups." I'm saying there's another way. I'm not saying push-ups are bad for young men. All I'm saying is there's another way that can reach the heart that's much more effective and I'm going to show you some of those things. So he's learning those things and he's interested.

God is interested in Jonah's heart, not just in punishing him. He's not just interested in justice.

Verse 6 says – *Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant 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.*

This is the first time that Jonah is very happy in the whole book because he gets something for himself. People who are selfish and self-focused are in trouble. One, because their emotions are

tyed to circumstances. They're up and down all the time. If things are going well they're happy, and if things aren't going well they are anxious, upset, disappointed, angry or whatever. So finally he's happy here because God provides this plant. Now remember he already had a shelter. Jonah made a shelter, but now this plant comes up and it's like this insulated blanket over the shelter that gives him like the best place he could be. It's just this cool tent that he's living in. He's enjoying this shelter and he's happy about it.

Let me just point out that notice in verse 6 it says *the Lord provided a leafy plant*. If you'll look through the passage you'll see how God's orchestrating the events. He provided a storm in chapter 1, He provided a fish in chapter 1, He provided a plant here. He's going to provide a worm. He's going to provide another hot windstorm coming in a little bit. God is orchestrating situations here and we see God's sovereignty at work.

We recognize the power of God in our lives, each one as individuals. It's like that song we sang that Jesus is interested in leaving the ninety-nine and going to the one person who needs a heart change, needs how He's designed them. That person needs the lordship of Jesus Christ. So He goes to that person and He brings them on His shoulders and cares for them in that special way.

Verse 7 – *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."*

When you start thinking that way – *it would be better to die than to live* – it means there's something wrong going on inside of the heart of a person. Their values or all the things that are important to them are tied into something that's not eternal. God would have us to be tied into who He is. When we're there we don't have to be so shaken that we're ready to die because of the problems that are happening in our lives.

So the second time he says, "I'd rather die; just kill me." It's interesting that when things don't go the way we expect we start having these internal panic attacks or waves of total despair. "I can't go on living." Now some people do that physically like this and say, "Oh I can't go on living." Other people get involved in damaging relationships, yelling at people and harming the relationship. Other people get involved in substance abuse and hinder themselves that way. So not everybody responds to despair the way Jonah did – "I'm going to die." Somebody would just start hurting themselves in other ways and damaging them.

That's why when we understand that God made us, that He created us a particular way, the only way that we could have emotional health in our lives really is to rely on Him. We have Him living in our lives because He organizes our lives and we live for Him. That's the changes that take place inside of us.

The book of Jonah is helping us see the whole picture from God's perspective. That's one of the beautiful things here because what needs to happen is for us to care more about people than about the things that are around us. That was one of Jonah's big mistakes. He wasn't thinking about other people or thinking of the benefits of other people or their well-being. He was just

thinking about what he might lose or he was thinking about the injustice that he was seeing. It seemed wrong to him.

So God provides this worm to destroy the plant, then He provides this sirocco, this windstorm that's hot that comes over the east somewhere. Jonah is just upset about all that kind of thing. I think he's upset in part because he's seeing his own selfishness. I think that's what God wants him to see. He wants him to see that he's investing in himself, he's not investing in anyone else, and life experience is teaching him that. That's a very important thing for him because he has control issues. Anybody who has control issues has emotional challenges. So Jonah is having those emotional challenges and seeing where his affections lie, that he needs to change his perception.

He's self-centered. He's arrogant. I think he's an idolater in what he's doing. He's not valuing what God wants and it's just amazing that here are these bad people in Nineveh are coming to God and understanding and repenting in their lives, and he is still worshiping himself as the most important thing.

Verse 9 – *But God said to Jonah the same question, "Is it right?"* He starts with that question because Jonah is in this right-and-wrong thing and has black-and-white thinking in his mind about some of the things he shouldn't have. So God said to Jonah with the second question, *"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"* It's just a plant. That's the point. It's only a plant and you're angry about it and you want to die because of a plant.

If we start looking in our lives, we start seeing the things that are going on and we make a bigger deal out of the things that are happening and we start ending in emotional turmoil because of that. What God would have for us to do is to understand who He is and rely on His guidance and strength.

We get to this verse in the Bible in Psalm 91. It says – *Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

So the person who is a believer, when they're feeling despairing what do they do? "Oh life is terrible, I'm going to go kill myself." No. What they're going to do is they're going to run to God because they know that God is this fortress. We all need that. God has designed the human heart to need this fortress of God to be there for us so that the human heart can be protected when it's upset. It's just a beautiful picture of what happens.

God says in verse 9 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."* So he's still bucking this whole thing. This is the third time he says this *"I wish I were dead."* He's not seeing the world as God sees it and he's just upset about this whole thing. God is trying to provoke his thinking to help him change.

How do you change the human heart? That's part of what I like to do anyway is be involved in what God is doing in the human heart. So I'm watching God work in his life to challenge the human heart. How is he going to change?

God brings him to an experience that's similar to an analogy of the Nineveh experience. God cares about the Ninevites. Jonah is caring about the plant. It's ridiculous that he's so invested in a plant when all these people that God cares about are so important. The things that sometimes we focus on in our lives are petty. But God want to do miracles in the lives of the Ninevites. That's why I like this motto: "Everyone is welcome, nobody is perfect, and anything is possible." It just describes our willingness to come before God and allow Him to do miracles in our lives. We're not anything. We just come before the Lord and do that.

Verse 11 now comes to the final punch line or the final question that God is asking Jonah to prompt him to look at himself and make the change. He says – "*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?*"

The 120,000 are probably children. They can't tell their left from their right. He said, "Shouldn't I have mercy on them? There are a bunch of kids there too. You just want to destroy that city, Jonah? I have mercy. I have compassion on them." And that's how the book ends.

I'm just intrigued. What happened to Jonah? What did he do? I don't know.

The message of the book of is one that's challenging us, I think, that says where are our values? The interesting thing to me about how God or Jesus approached people in the Bible is they know exactly where to go in their lives.

You remember the rich young ruler? He comes to the Lord and he wants to get into heaven. Jesus says to him, "I'll tell you what you need to do. *Go sell everything you have, give it to the poor. Then come, and follow me.*" The Bible says that the man *went away sad, because he had many things.*

It's the same problem of Jonah. When we get our heart wrapped around things then we miss out on the most important thing, which is trusting the Lord and allowing Him to work in our lives. So Jonah knew that message. That was the message that he needed.

In the story of Nicodemus, he's a religious guy. He comes to Jesus at night. He doesn't want people to see him. He comes to Him at night and he's a righteous guy, religious, but he's missing something. He comes to the Lord and Jesus talks to him about being born again. Look at what it says. Jesus says to this religious guy, "*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*"

I just want to challenge you today. Where are your affections? Where are your values? Are you able to move with the Spirit?

If you've not been born again, that's what Jesus says – *You must be born again*. Being born again simply means that you recognize that you are a sinner. A weak person who sinned, violated God's commands, and that sin has wreaked havoc inside of your life, and you need a Savior. That Savior is Jesus Christ. Not the things that are around you. Not the circumstances. The Savior is Jesus Christ. We accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He comes into you. That's what it means to be born again. That's what it means to be saved.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to invite you to do that today. It changes your whole life. It's amazing. God has a whole plan for your success and for you to be whole in your heart. It starts with salvation. So I want to invite you to come to know Jesus Christ today.

We're going to sing a song in a moment and while we're singing that song if God is speaking to your heart and you want to accept Jesus Christ into your life, then come on up here. We'll pray for you and help you come to a personal intimate understand of what that looks like for you in your life.