

Jonah Chapter 4 v 1 - 11

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Jonah, Jonah chapter 4. Jonah chapter 4 follows from that amazing turning to God in that wicked city Nineveh.

You think that Jonah, as a successful evangelist, would be absolutely leaping for joy, but we don't read that. So, Jonah chapter 4.

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home?

That is why I was so quick to flee 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.

Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.

[1 : 33] But the Lord replied, Have you any right to be angry? Jonah went out and sat down at a place to the 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 vine and made it grow over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort.

And Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn, the next day, God provided a worm, which chewed the vine 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. But God said to Jonah, Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?

[2 : 50] I do, he said. I'm angry enough to die. But the Lord said, You've been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow.

It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.

Should I not be concerned about that great city? I think probably most of us at one time or another have been alongside children, and you know how it is that sometimes children fall out.

Occasionally, a child, usually a girl, will come to their teacher and say something like this, Elizabeth, I hope there's no Elizabeth here, Elizabeth is no longer my friend.

Now, if you're like me, you smile inwardly, knowing that by the following day, everything will change, everything will become normal, and the two children that refuse to talk to each other, well, you'll see them walking around the school, playing field, everything quite happy again.

[4 : 30] But it's not always like that. They don't always come to see eye to eye, and that poses quite a problem to a teacher.

How do you intervene in such a situation when things become more serious? Now, the book of Jonah reminds us that believers do not always walk with the Lord.

Sometimes very glib when we say, oh, I'm walking with the Lord. Well, in Jonah chapter 4, we find that Jonah was not walking with the Lord.

In fact, right at the very beginning of the book of Jonah, right in the very first chapter, we read that Jonah ran away from the Lord. So he certainly wasn't walking with the Lord then.

And when we come to Jonah chapter 4, we see that Jonah is still out of step with the Lord. So how did the Lord, our shepherd, go about bringing Jonah back to walking with him?

[5 : 48] Or should I ask, how did he set about restoring the soul of Jonah? Are you like Jonah in any way?

If you're not walking with the Lord, how is he working in your life to bring you back to himself? Are you listening to him?

So first of all, are you like Jonah in any way? Well, let me say at the outset that Jonah was someone who knew the Lord.

If we go back to 2 Kings, we see that Jonah, what was a prophet, blessed by God, but we won't go there just for the moment. In fact, we won't go there at all to say that Jonah had a track record of serving the Lord.

And even within Jonah, the book of Jonah itself, we see that Jonah knew what it was to call upon the Lord. When he was thrown into the sea in chapter 1, he was swallowed by that enormous sea creature.

[7 : 05] He descended into the depths. What did he do? He called out to the Lord, and the Lord delivered him. Jonah was so like the psalmist who cried, Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand.

But with you, there is forgiveness, and therefore, you are feared. Well, the psalmist and Jonah knew what it was to cry out to the Lord from the depths.

They knew the forgiveness of the Lord. And does that remind you of the preaching of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost? Remember what Peter said?

He quoted Joel, another prophet, and said, Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[8 : 14] Jonah was a saved man. If he lived today, you would call him a Christian. He was a believer, and a Christian is someone who calls upon the name of the Lord.

So, are you like Jonah in that sense? Now, Jonah had a track record of serving the Lord, and he had a dramatic spiritual experience recounted earlier in the book.

Perhaps you too have served the Lord for years. Perhaps you too have got a story to tell about how the Lord dealt with you.

But again, I ask you to go to chapter 4 again and see that Jonah was not walking with the Lord that he'd served and that he had an experience with.

The problem was he thought he knew better than the Lord. He didn't agree with what the Lord was doing. That's why he wasn't walking with the Lord.

[9 : 28] The prophet Amos, Amos 3.3, wrote, How can two walk together except they be agreed? And Jonah was out of step with the Lord despite all his previous experience and behaviour.

and don't we learn from this a very important lesson your experience in the past does not guarantee your present spiritual health.

Your usefulness in 2014 does not automatically make you as fruitful as you might be in 2015.

So how is your walk with the Lord now? Today? Tonight?

Are you walking with the Lord? Are you of one mind with the Lord? Now Jonah had repented of his earlier disobedience and chapter 3 tells how he had gone to the Ninevites and he preached to them and there had been a mighty revival.

[10 : 50] Jonah had been spectacularly brave and fearless and effective as a preacher. He'd been outwardly obedient but there in chapter 4 we read he was angry with the Lord.

Look at verse 1. Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord oh Lord is this not what I said when I was still at home?

That's why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. It wasn't because he was scared silly of the Ninevites that he fled to Tarshish. It was something else and this is what it was.

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God slow to anger and abounding in love a God who relents from sending calamity.

What a tremendous statement about the character of God. Jonah knew the Lord. He had the light but he wasn't walking in the light.

[12 : 12] He disagreed with God. He didn't want the Lord to relent and forgive the Assyrians. He thought the Lord ought to have brought about their destruction.

He himself had preached that God is just and holy and punishes disobedience and that disaster was to fall upon the Ninevites and he wanted judgment to fall on those wicked, violent, idol-worshipping people of Nineveh.

And they were known throughout the world at the time as being a violent people, a people that you don't mess with. Their cruelties were renowned and they deserved the justice of God.

sin always deserves justice and Jonah wanted that. But God was gracious to them.

What made it worse for Jonah was that people back home in Israel were impenitent. They didn't respond to the preaching of Jonah but here this wicked city, this violent city, this idol-worshipping city repented but not Israel.

[13 : 44] They hadn't been given the heart to repent but these foreigners to Israel had. they were a potential threat to Israel and in time they attacked Israel and treated them cruelly but for now they listened to Jonah.

They repented. They humbled themselves before the Lord and the Lord heard their cry and he relented. But Jonah was angry.

It's a bit like a Sunday school worker who was very successful in teaching her class and some of the naughtiest of the boys, objectionable boys, were converted but her own remained hard.

That's how it was like with Jonah. Israel, his people, the covenant people remained hard.

But these Gentiles, despised by Israel, were saved. They repented. There was joy in heaven but anger on earth.

[15 : 10] So are you angry with God or have you been angry with God because he hasn't done for you what you think he ought to have done?

Are you angry with God because he's let you down? All seems well to others. They only look on the outside but within your own heart you know there's bitterness, there's anger.

I think we probably all pray for revival and he sends it and he sent it in China, in Africa, in South America but not England.

How do you feel about that? Jonah was like the older brother in the story of the prodigal son.

The younger son left home, squandered all his family wealth and then came to his senses. The father gave him a royal welcome when he returned home.

[16 : 30] But the elder brother sought. It didn't seem fair to him. Perhaps you think that the Lord is unjust.

You can't understand how a thief dying on a cross for his wrongdoings can be forgiven freely during the last few hours of his life. You can't understand why it was that Jesus said to him today.

You shall be with me in paradise. It all seems so wrong to you. You've not lived like that. But the Lord accepted the thief on the cross.

Now could it be that you've got the same problem that Jonah had? You've not fully accepted how gracious God is. you haven't seen that the Lord forgives those who have no merit, only demerit.

Now if you struggle with this, let me ask you a question. It's a very personal question and you can answer it deep within your own heart. God, if you were to leave the world tonight and face the Lord as you are, what would you say to him to plead with him that he should let you into heaven?

[18 : 07] would you remind the Lord that you were brought up in a Christian home and that you went to church, that you were a loyal churchgoer?

Would you tell him what a good family person you are? Would you tell him how hard you had worked within the church? Would you tell him that you're not like the many sinners around in the world today?

People that everyone despised. Are you thankful that you're not like them? Do you sometimes thank God? I thank you Lord that I'm not like those people.

Jesus told a story about a proud, self-righteous, religious man who went to worship God and prayed with himself and thanked God that he wasn't like other men, particularly that well-known swindler at the back of the service.

The latter simply asked that God would have mercy on him and he was justified rather than the religious man. This was the problem with Jonah.

[19 : 28] He hadn't understood the free, amazing grace of God. he wanted justice.

So what would Jonah say today if he heard about the violent members of Boko Haram or ISIS and so on and then heard that some of their leaders had become Christians.

They'd been forgiven by God and they now preach what a wonderful, gracious God the Lord is, the Lord Jesus Christ is. How would you feel about that? Now, Jonah wasn't by himself in wanting divine justice immediately.

Luke chapter 9, verse 54, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He had to go through a Samaritan village and he sent messengers ahead of him, but the Samaritans welcomed neither him nor his disciples because he was heading for Jerusalem.

The disciples, James and John, asked Jesus, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them? They wanted justice.

[20 : 47] justice. But they were rebuked by Jesus. Like Jonah, they had much to learn. James and John wanted justice for those who got in the way of the Lord.

So, are you bitter with those who have had a negative influence upon the church? are you so angry that you expect instant judgment to fall upon them?

Are you distressed that it doesn't happen? Perhaps it's made worse in that the Lord prospers them in some way. Now, you're not going to be happy if you like this.

Jonah wasn't happy. He was depressed as well as been angry. Oh, Lord, take away my life for it's better for me to die than to live.

Life had become such a burden for Jonah. Life didn't seem to make sense to him. if only he knew the Lord more fully at this point of his life.

[22 : 17] Remember Jesus said in Matthew 11, 28, come unto me all you who are weary and burdened, and Jonah was burdened, and I will give you rest.

Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Jonah hadn't found that rest.

He had no peace. So are you like Jonah? How is the Lord going to bring you round to his way of seeing things?

How is he going to make you conformed to the image of Christ? Jonah was still a work in progress.

He repented earlier, went to Nineveh, and did exactly what the Lord said. We would say he got into the work of the Lord in a big way, but he had done this out of constraint.

[23 : 25] He took a storm, been thrown overboard, and a trip to the bottom of the Mediterranean in the belly of this huge sea creature to bring him round to outward obedience.

But he hadn't gone to the people of Nineveh with compassion in his heart. On the outside, fine, perhaps, but on the inside, he did that work without compassion.

And in chapter 4, the Lord is dealing with his heart. And if you're like Jonah in any way, if any one of us are like Jonah in any way, we can expect that the Lord will deal with us.

And the Lord dealt with Jonah for his lack of grace, his un-God-likeness, and perhaps you're conscious of the Lord dealing with you too.

The Lord spoke to Jonah. He reasoned with him. Jonah, chapter 4, verse 4, have you a right to be angry?

[24 : 45] You who have experienced my grace, you who have been delivered from the depths, have you a right to be angry?

You who have been forgiven for your disobedience, have you got a right to be angry? If you've experienced the grace of God, why aren't you delighting in others who experience the grace of God?

If there's joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, why isn't there joy in your heart? Now, the Lord didn't just reason with Jonah.

He's a sovereign Lord, and is able to call upon all manner of things, good and bad, in order to get Jonah to think like him. He can and does provide all things that are necessary to change us, to mould us.

Verse 5, Jonah went out and sat down in a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen in the city.

[26 : 04] Then, here's a key word, the Lord provided, the Lord provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head and ease his discomfort.

And Jonah was very happy about the vine. The Lord dealt graciously with Jonah. He was kind to Jonah, kindness that Jonah did not deserve not deserve kindness like the people of Nineveh experienced.

Now, is the Lord dealing graciously with you even though you're angry with him and bitter in your heart? The goodness of God, Paul wrote, is meant to lead us to repentance.

repentance. The problem with Jonah was he was unresponsive. And then the Lord provided a small creature and a change in the weather to help bring Jonah around.

We read this, at dawn the next day, God, the sovereign Lord of all the universe, who upholds all things by his power, who works all things according to his will, his pleasure, provided a worm, a little thing, which chewed the vine so that it withered.

[27 : 31] When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

He used the weather to bring Jonah around. He used a small creature to bring Jonah around. And earlier in the book, when Jonah was boarding a ship with the aim of running away from his call to go to Nineveh, the Lord sent a storm, which got rougher and rougher, as we read in chapter 1, verse 11, and chapter 1, verse 13, the sea grew wilder than before.

Chapter 1, verse 17, the Lord provided a great sea creature that swallowed Jonah. What an amazing God we have, Lord over all.

He used a severe storm at sea to bring the highly disciplined clergyman, John Wesley, to see his need of knowing the grace of God, knowing peace with God.

John Wesley thought all was well with him as he went across the Atlantic to try and convert the Indians, but he hadn't found peace with God himself.

[29 : 02] And then he used another storm to turn a slave trader that dissolute John Newton to himself, a very different person from John Wesley. And one of those men became a powerful preacher of the gospel, and the other a wonderful hymn writer and pastor.

So has the Lord been providing a severe storm in your life in order to get you to pay attention to him? It might be that he's brought a big problem into your life that threatened to consume you so that you realize just how helpless you are and how much you need the Lord to save you.

But equally it might be something else that just gnaws away at your comfort, like the little worm that consumed the vine. He uses small things, he uses large things, all things, anything at his disposal to bring you to listen.

Are you listening to him? Have you come to think the same way that the Lord thinks? In Jonah's case, it was one thing after another.

I mentioned the hymn writer John Newton a moment or two ago. He wrote of his own experiences and it's here in our hymn books actually, it's in the form of a poem, a hymn. This is what John Newton said, he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part.

[30 : 36] Yes, more, with his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my woe, crossed all the fair designs I schemed, blasted my goods and made me low.

Now I've got no doubt at all that John Newton was thinking about the experience of Jonah here. The authorised version translates the word vine as good and John Newton was talking about the Lord blasting his goods and making him low.

So has he been doing that with you? We sometimes mistake the intention of the Lord when things go wrong.

We sometimes think that the Lord is against us when he isn't. As a parent against his child when he warns the child, when he reasons with the child, when he withdraws the privileges from the child, when he chastens the child.

The compiler of the book of Proverbs writes, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

[32 : 06] Quoting this proverb, the writer to the Hebrews says, Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons.

For what son is not disciplined by his father? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good that we might share in his holiness.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those that have been trained by it.

Jonah was addressed by the word of the Lord, and he was disciplined by the providence of the Lord, and it was all for his good, that he might be changed, that he might be fruitful.

people. But the book of Jonah wasn't written for Jonah. It was written to correct Israel that had the same bitter attitude in their hearts, the same self-righteous, we are the people of God sort of attitude.

[33 : 23] It was written for them, and it was written for you and I. that's why it's there. It's not there for Jonah's benefit, it's for our benefit, that we might learn from it. So are you walking with the Lord?

Are you going the way that the Lord wants you to go? Or are you still hardened? King David in Psalm 32 commented on how hard it was for him when he refused to confess that he'd sinned.

And so he urged others, do not be like the horse or mule which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they'll not come to you.

The prophet Jonah lacked understanding. He needed to look at things the way that the Lord looked at. So do you, do we need our minds to be overhauled by the word of God?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, be transformed by the renewing of your minds. That's what was going on there.

[34 : 48] Chapter 4 verse 8, 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 live.

But God said to Jonah, do you have a right to be angry about the vine? There's certain repetition here in chapter 4.

Jonah was asked, do you have a right to be angry about the vine? I do, he said. I'm angry enough to die. Seems that nothing really is changing with Jonah.

He's still angry, still full of self-pity, still hard. Are you still angry with the Lord because you think you know what is best, what he should be doing in your life and in the lives of others?

You can't understand why it is that the Lord isn't responding to you. Could it be that the problem is that you're not responding to him?

[36 : 03] As you read the passage, two things stand out to us. One is the unwillingness of Jonah to change and the other is the gentle patience of the sovereign Lord.

The Lord continued to reason with Jonah. Look at verse 10. the Lord said, you've been concerned about this vine, though you didn't tend it or make it grow.

It sprang up overnight and died overnight. A relatively trivial thing, but Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well.

Should I not be concerned about that great city? the Lord said, the people of Nineveh mean something to me.

Jesus exhorted his disciples, exhorted you and I, to be like our Father in heaven, who made his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

[37 : 09] So what should our attitude be to those that we think deserve the judgment of God? As he's being crucified, Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they do. The people of Nineveh didn't know their right hand from their left. They're in darkness compared to Jonah and his fellow countrymen of Israel.

Jonah needed a lesson from Jesus. He was so unlike Jesus. And perhaps this is the great lesson of the book of Jonah.

Jesus is anti-Jonah, the opposite to Jonah. And if you think of all the bad attitudes of Jonah, well just delight in the grace and the kindness and the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus. He was full of grace and truth. Jonah had lots of truth, but he wasn't full of grace.

[38 : 21] So what about you? Are you angry, bitter, or depressed because you don't agree with the ways of the Lord?

Do you still want the Lord's justice to fall on others that you judged beyond the pale? Jonah found more pity for the vine than he did for the thousands of men, women, and children of Nineveh.

What do you grieve for the most? Suppose you're a gardener. would you grieve most for a sick plant in your garden, or your spiritually lost neighbour next door?

Did Jonah repent? It doesn't say. We're left in suspense. How do you respond to the grace of God? How do you respond to his reasoning, his kindness, his patience, his discipline?

Is there any change? That's a big lesson there at the end. Are you, are we going to remain unchanged when the Lord speaks to us, when he reasons with us, and he brings things into our lives that we find hard, to bear?

[39 : 55] Let's pray. Gracious God, we find the lessons of life to be very hard to learn, and we pray that you would forgive us when we remain hardened, and we don't listen to you.

We pray that each one of us here might have a heart and mind that's willing and able to respond to what you'd say to us.

Help us to be humbled by you, help us to learn from you, help us to grow in a knowledge of you, for we ask it in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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