



**Sunday, July 21, 2024**

## **Jonah 4**

Today as we head into the last chapter of the book of Jonah I wanted to take a few minutes to remind us where we are at so far and bring us up to speed.

In chapter 1, we learned that Jonah, who was a seasoned prophet, was called by God to deliver a hard message of pending judgement to Nineveh. To which Jonah responded by running in the opposite direction, not because he was afraid of what the people of Nineveh would do to him, but because he was afraid that they would actually get saved, and therefore be spared of the pending judgment. So, Jonah hopped onto a ship and headed to Tarshish but could not escape the presence of the Lord and ended up at the bottom of the sea, where he finally cries out to God, and the Lord sends a giant fish to swallow him. Jonah spent the next three days and nights in the belly of that fish, where at some point he finally conceded and repented to the Lord. Subsequently, Jonah, and everything else that was in the belly of the fish got vomited out on to dry land, and he then makes his way into Nineveh where he proclaims their pending judgment and then the people repent. The whole city - even the king. Because of their repentance, God stays their judgment which brings us to the end of chapter 3. In chapter 4, we see the response of Jonah to the repentance of the city of Nineveh and there is full expectation that Jonah would be in his glory....but he's not...

### Jonah 4

*'But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"*

*5 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. 6 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. 7 But when dawn came up the next day,*

*God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 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." 9 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." 10 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. 11 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?"*

So, to sum up this last chapter of the book of Jonah, it's quite simple: Jonah speaks, the people get saved and now Jonah wants to die.

And no matter what angle you look at this through, the results are always the same - it simply does not make sense in any way, shape, or form how Jonah, who is a prophet of God, and this is his job, could react so strongly to the sheer success of his work. I mean, this is the dream. To break it down, that would be like me, at our Labour Day event, in a month and a half, standing up, as I always do before the fireworks begin and preaching the Gospel, and then everybody falls on their face in repentance. To which my response would be well, this is just the worst possible outcome....I'm done....I think my life is over. That's insane - this is literally revival and that's the ultimate dream - to see all people respond to the Gospel with acceptance and repentance.

But it's not the dream for Jonah - it's a nightmare because deep, deep down even though he is being obedient to God, Jonah is still dealing with a personal vendetta against Nineveh - so much so, that he would still rather see them judged instead of saved. And even though he is obedient to speak to the people of Nineveh we can clearly see that his obedience is only reluctant and partial because the message that God asks him to deliver and the message that he actually delivers are not quite the same. I want you to see something here:

There are two times that God specifically tells Jonah what to tell Nineveh. If we go back to:

Jonah 1:2

*'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.'*

Jonah 3:2

*'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.'*

Jonah 3:4

*'Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"'*

Jonah 1:2 we see God specifically say: *'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.'*

And then again in Jonah 3:2 when he is finally out of the belly of the beast and God says:

*'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.'*

And then a few verses later we see the message that Jonah preached:

Jonah 3:4

*'Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"'*

In all three verses, the Hebrew root 'qara' is used: when God says to, 'call out against it,' 'preach' and when Jonah 'cries out.' The root 'qara' simply means to proclaim and so it would seem that there is congruency throughout all three verses.

However, it's important to note the subtle differences. The term used by God in chapter 1: 'cry out against it,' is 'qara aleha' in Hebrew. This phrase means more than just to proclaim; it means to 'proclaim against it,' and in this context is better understood as to 'preach against it.' That's why in Jonah 3, when God calls Jonah again, He makes it implicitly clear that He intends for Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh.

Preaching involves both the pronouncement of judgment and a call to repentance. The purpose of preaching is to acknowledge sin and offer hope through repentance. The two go hand in hand. Without repentance, it's merely a proclamation of judgment, not true preaching. John the Baptist exemplified this by calling people to, 'repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.'

And if we look at Jonah 3:4, we see that Jonah did not in fact preach - like God instructed him to - he simply cried out, '40 days and you will die.'

Jonah did not preach.

Jonah only proclaimed.

He simply told them that the judgment of God was on its way. He never told them to repent nor did he have any intention to because he still hated the people of Nineveh and thought that judgment was a better fate for them than salvation.

Do you see how dangerous this is??

Jonah was trying to play God. He was trying to act like he was God by controlling the message that came out of his mouth. Theologians suggest that Jonah thought that by controlling the message to that of only pending doom without even suggesting repentance, that they would likely either kick him out or live their remaining days in fear of what was coming. But either way, in Jonah's mind, they would get the judgment that they had coming to them.

Yet somehow, the people of Nineveh only did what their spiritual minds would have naturally led them to do in response to such a grave warning: they realized the message was true and had come from God and then upon this realization, repented in hopes of staying the judgment of God. They proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth and ashes, and turned from their evil ways. This demonstrated genuine remorse and a desire for change. And so, like Jonah knew all along, as God saw that their repentance was genuine, He indeed stayed the pending judgment, showing His mercy and compassion and ultimately love for these wicked, wicked people.

And of course Jonah was furious. He had tried to play God and failed. He had tried to control God's message and failed. He had tried to push his own way and failed.

Jonah was a complete and utter failure.

And that's why at that point he said to God, 'If you won't kill them, then kill me.' Jonah was so angry that he would rather God take his life than have to sit and witness the scene of repentance before him.

And so, interestingly God's response to Jonah is a lesson in compassion and perspective. God responds to Jonah graciously and mercifully as he asks Jonah - not once, but twice - if he has good reason to be angry.

Jonah doesn't answer the first time and ends up running away to the outer regions of the city, but God isn't finished with him. Notice, He now provides a plant/tree to grow up over him and provide shade.

Based on the climate and vegetation in that current region, historians suggest that it was likely the Castor Bean Plant that God commanded to grow over Jonah. Jonah likely would have been familiar with the plant and I don't think it was an accident that God chose this plant instead of others. Back then, the castor bean plant was a significant plant and useful for two main reasons:

It is where they got castor oil from

It is where they got ricin from.

Castor oil has medicinal properties and has been used for centuries in traditional medicine due to its healing properties. Ricin on the other hand is toxic and is a potent poison derived from the seeds of the plant. Even in small quantities, it can be lethal.

One plant - two natures. One promotes life and the other pronounces judgment. Do you see what God is doing here? Even in the choice of the plant to cover Jonah, God is reminding Jonah that His mercy and judgment are not mutually exclusive but both are part of His divine nature. That He cares for His creation and desires repentance and restoration rather than destruction - but that He is the only one that can pronounce judgment when He sees fit. And clearly Jonah's heart needed to understand and embrace this truth.

And so, in the very next section, we see that God causes that plant to wither and die, exercising his judgement upon it. He then asks Jonah a second time why he has reason to be angry. This time Jonah responds by saying because you killed the plant. The point being, that while Jonah was angry about a plant that he did not labour for or grow, he lacked compassion for an entire city filled with people and animals that was about to face the same fate.

But notice how the plant withered and died. Notice that God did not command it to wither and die. No, it was infected with a worm and the worm had its way, eating right to the core, and caused that plant to wither and die. God was strategic in this example - showing Jonah that just like the plant, a worm had infected Nineveh - a worm of sin and wickedness. And if not dealt with, then just like the plant, the worm of sin and wickedness would bring them to destruction and because God is a God of love and compassion, He wanted to give the people of Nineveh the chance to repent and be saved from their impending doom.

And so, the plant acts as a mirror to Jonah, reflecting his own heart. Jonah's anger over the plant's death reveals his selfishness and misplaced priorities. He mourns the loss of a plant that provided him temporary comfort, yet he lacks compassion for an entire city facing destruction. God uses the

plant to expose Jonah's inner attitudes and to teach him about divine mercy and compassion. The book ends there and we don't really see what happens with Jonah but we trust that he learned the lessons and moved forward with integrity. And through this lesson, God calls Jonah—and us—to value what truly matters: the redemption and salvation of human lives.

Points to consider:

Like Jonah, some of you here may be angry at God. And the question for you is the same question that God asked Jonah: Do you have good reason? For some of us, that anger stems from a place of an incorrect assumption that God is against us. But we need to understand that God is actually for us, not against us. If he is willing to extend Grace and Mercy towards the most wicked of cities, then how much more will he be able to care for you?

Jonah struggled with his expectation that God should bring judgment to a wicked Nineveh, but God's nature was to extend an opportunity for repentance instead. Some of us also struggle with the fact that our expectation of who God should be isn't aligning with who God actually is. When we face these moments of disillusionment, it's essential to remember that we submit our wills and desires to God. Because it's what Jesus did. You see, Jesus struggled with the same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane. Before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to the Father, asking if the cup of suffering could be taken from Him. Yet, despite His anguish, He ultimately submitted to God's will, saying, 'Not my will, but Yours be done.' And so, we too should follow His lead and pray the same prayer. Not my will, but Yours be done. You see, the great mystery of the gospel is that we don't actually have to understand everything that happens in the heavenly planes. Ultimately, our finite minds will never truly be able to comprehend the infinite mind of God, and so understanding should never be the end goal. Submission to his will should be. This is exactly why the Lord offers us a supernatural peace. In Philippians 4:7, the Apostle Paul calls it a peace that goes beyond our understanding. Because, in seasons and situations where understanding is not granted, His peace can restore our souls.

God's heart is always for the city. Is yours?

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

[www.kingsviewchurch.com](http://www.kingsviewchurch.com)

<https://www.facebook.com/KingsviewCommunityChurch/>