

Jonah 4

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[0 : 00] Imagine a professional musician who didn't like music. Imagine a former one mechanic that didn't like cars. Imagine a baker who doesn't like cakes. Imagine an athlete who doesn't like running.

Imagine a Canadian who doesn't like ice hockey. Imagine a prophet that doesn't like God's grace. That's Jonah 4. That is Jonah 4. Can you imagine a prophet making a case against God's mercy? Well Jonah is so upset. He is so upset that he wants God to give him his P45 to fire him. He wants out of a prophet. He's so depressed that verse 3 he wants out of life.

Therefore O Lord please take my life from me. For it is better for me to die than to live.

Apparently that's the only way that he can get out of being a prophet. Grace has ruined Jonah's ministry.

[1 : 31] And so what God does in chapter 4 is God opens a school and he begins to tutor Jonah one on one. And the message of Jonah chapter 4 is really summed up in the words of Exodus 33 verse 19.

These are the words of Exodus 33 verse 19. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

That's the theme of Jonah chapter 4. And I want to show you three scenes in the chapter. First of all the disgusted servant.

And the key part of scene 1 is the character of God. The disgusted servant. Look at verse 1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly.

And he was angry. A better translation of that is it displeased Jonah greatly. And he was angry. One of the things that you notice as you go through the book of Jonah is you've got to keep an eye on the grids.

[2 : 39] I've only seen that I think this week really. But all the way from Jonah is there's lots of grids aren't there? Chapter 1 you've got a great wind. You've got a great storm. In chapter 1 verse 17 you've got a great fish.

In chapter 3 you've got a great city. And then you've got great distress. In chapter 4 and verse 1. And notice the expression of disgust that Jonah makes. But before you jump all over him and kind of as lots of commentaries do kind of give Jonah a bit of a kick in.

Look at verse 2. He's greatly displeased. And he is angry. Verse 2. And he prayed to the Lord. And he prayed to the Lord.

The thing I really like about Jonah. Is that there's really refreshing candour about him. He's really straightforward. He's a very open character.

[3 : 44] And this disgusts him. What God has done. It disgusts him that the disaster that was going to come on the Assyrians has been avoided. Nineveh is going to get off.

And he is upset about that. But notice that he takes it to God. He doesn't moan over coffee and tea to his friends.

He doesn't send an email. He doesn't unload it on unsuspecting prayer partners. He takes it to God. You take your problems with God to God.

And that's where he goes. And so I do think we have to give Jonah some credit. So what was the reason for his disgust? Look at what he says in verse 3. He prayed to the Lord and he said.

Oh Lord is not this what I said? Is not this what I said when I was yet in my concern? And I think it helps us to see behind the book. And it certainly helps us to explain chapter 1 in verse 3.

[4 : 45] Where Jonah ran away from Nineveh to go to Tarshish. Why was Jonah so angry? Jonah was so angry because Nineveh was going to be spared. And Jonah did not want Nineveh to be spared.

You can say that on the basis of the text. But why didn't Jonah want Nineveh to be spared? And there are all sorts of reasons given.

If you read the commentators. What do we know about why Jonah doesn't want Nineveh to be spared? That's the cause of his anger.

But why? And I think that's quite a difficult question. I'm not sure that we know. And there are some proposals. Jonah is kind of suffering from a narrow exclusivism.

That wants to withhold God's blessing and God's covenant from the nations. He's representative of Israel. Commenting to say. And they don't want the blessings of God to go to anyone else.

[5 : 45] He's a selfish man and he's a bigot. I think there's some strength for that case. It's very common to hold that behind. But I'm actually not sure about it. It's when you study Jonah 4.

Nineveh kind of representing the pagan nations. So one theory is that the book of Jonah is all about world mission. How God will take his message of grace to the nations.

And again I've got somebody with that view. But I'm not totally convinced. And the reason why I'm not totally convinced of that is. If the focus was mission.

If the focus was all on getting the word of the gospel out to the other nations. And mercy to the nations. Why didn't God just use someone else? Why didn't God just use someone else?

There would be other prophets. There would be other people that could go. Why does God pursue Jonah even after he'd run away?

[6 : 48] And it seems to me the book of Jonah is about Jonah. And the book keeps focusing on the prophet.

The book is concerned with Jonah. It's so obvious isn't it? But actually we missed the obvious thing. Other reasons that people give.

And for Jonah not wanting the service to be saved. Jonah is going to appear to be a false prophet. He's gone to Assyria and saved six weeks and you're done. Six weeks and you're cooked. And he said they think that God's reputation will suffer.

Because God promises to do one thing. And God doesn't do it. And so Jonah is annoyed about that. In Jonah 4. Another view is that their political motivation. Assyria might crush them.

It was an opposing country. One last one is that Assyrian repentance might not last. Look at one more. Assyrian judgment might cause Israel to wake up to the Lord.

[7 : 53] Now again I think all those positions have got some strengths. But we've got to focus on what is clear. What is clear in Jonah 4 is Jonah is exceedingly angry.

Over God's mercy to Nineveh. But we don't know exactly why that is. We don't really know. Despite what people tell you. The straightforward claim of the text.

Is that Jonah did not like God's way. Of being God. And here's where the rub is. Notice the irony of his disgust.

Can you see that? In verse 2. He quotes that creedal statement. That we talked to the children about. He says. For I knew.

That you are a gracious God. And merciful. And slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love. Relenting from disaster.

[8 : 57] What Jonah does there. Is he goes back to Exodus chapter 34. Verses 6 and 7. They're great verses. Just come back there with me. Keep a finger in Jonah 4. But come back to Exodus chapter 34.

And what you have. Is that proclamation by the Lord himself. Exodus 34 verse 6. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed to Moses. The Lord. The Lord.

A God. Merciful and gracious. Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love. Keeping steadfast love for thousands. Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But who have by no means cleared the guilty.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers of the children. And the children's children. To the third and fourth generation. It's a creed. And in many ways. Jonah goes back and quotes that.

But not only that. Exodus 34. 36 and 7. They are like the source passage of the creed. That's where the creed is given in full. But it's also given in eight other places in the Old Testament.

[10 : 00] I've written the references on your sheet. Numbers 14, 18. John 2, 13. Nehemiah 9, 17 and 31. Psalm 8, 6, 15. 103 verse 8. 145 verse 8.

And probably 2 Chronicles 13 verse 9. So there's eight or nine uses. Of that creed. From Exodus 34. In the rest of the Old Testament. And Exodus 34.

Verses 6 and 7. That is the Fountain Text. Now what is important. For you to understand. For me to understand. Is that. Exodus 34. Comes after Exodus 33 and 32.

Alright. It's one section. And Exodus 32. You know. You know that section. Because it tells you about the golden calf. And then in chapter 32 and 33.

You've got this really. Arduous. Straining. Intersection of Moses. Moses is speaking to God.

Pleading with God for the people. And finally you get to Exodus 34.

[11:00] And you understand. God is going to renew the covenant. It's not all over. Yahweh will renew the covenant. And so when you hear those words in Exodus 34. You hear that he forgives iniquity.

And he's slow to anger. And he forgives rebellion. And sin to a thousand generations. And what you've got to understand. Is that he's speaking there to calf worshippers.

That shouldn't be. What a God is he. It's the miracle of his own nature. That is the root. That he is a God who forgives.

And the Old Testament picks that up again and again and again and again. And the interesting thing. When the Old Testament picks up that creed. It applies it in certain definite ways.

So it's made to the basis of an appeal in prayer. So in Numbers chapter 14. And in Psalm 86. That creed is taken.

[12:02] And it's used as a basis of prayer. Lord this is what you've revealed yourself. This is what you're like. And so I pray that you would do this. Or it's made material for praise.

So Nehemiah 9. Or Psalm 103. Or Psalm 145. Saying this is what you are like. You are the Lord. The Lord merciful and gracious.

And we praise you. And we worship you. Or it's given as an incentive for repentance. Joel 2 verse 13. And 2 Chronicles 30. Saying this is what you are like Lord.

And so we repent. We turn from our sin. But Joel chapter 4 verse 2. Is really unique. Because it's a complaint. It goes against the way that the text should be used.

It goes against what God was intending for Moses to understand. It goes against the intended use of the text. It is not for praise. It is not an appeal to prayer.

[13:03] It's not a call to repentance. It's a complaint. Why is God that way? It's not for praise. It's not for praise.

Jonah is doing. It's like. You come around my house. And I'm hammering a nail into the wall. But I'm hammering a nail into the wall with a shovel. It might work.

It might not. If you hit the nail in the right place with the shovel. But that's not what the shovel was intended for. You might just get the nail into the wood. But it's not what the shovel was intended for. And so Jonah uses this creed complaining about God. But that's not what it was intended for. It's an ironic sort of thing. He's using that truth from Exodus 34 in a way that God never intended it to be used.

Now the other irony of verse 2. Is that it shows you and I that Jonah wasn't deficient in his theology.

[14:07] Jonah had quite a good theological mind. He knew doctrine. His doctrine is correct. It is good theology. But he doesn't like where his theology leads him.

And so often if you read sermons on Jonah chapter 4. They will say the problem is Jonah needs a heart for people. Lots of sermons say this. He needs a heart for people.

Not this sterile theology and doctrine. But they're not actually reading what it says. It was his theology that scared Jonah. It was his orthodox doctrine about God that made him uneasy.

Because you can see where it led him. If God is like this. If he is gracious and merciful and slow down. And abandoning in steadfast love.

And relenting from disaster. If God is like that. He's going to act in a certain way for people like Eve and Nineveh. And I don't like it.

[15:13] It was what he knew rightly of God that disturbed him. He knew what the implications were for the way you should think of people for instance.

His doctrine is correct. His doctrine is correct. And it makes him uneasy. So what's the problem? The problem is.

With his doctrine. Is that it hasn't reached his attitude. Has it? All theology. Should be trickled down theology.

All truth about God. Should be trickled down. It should come down to the pores of your soul. And it should infect you. It should never just stay up there.

And there was a gap wasn't there. Between what he knows of God and his attitude. And the problem is. His doctrine has not created delight in him. It should affect his thinking.
[16:12] All theology. Should affect your thinking and your doing. I saw this cartoon this week. Linus and Lucy.

You know in Charlie Brown. Linus and Lucy. They are looking out of a window. And it's shutting down with rain. And Lucy says. Wow. Look at it rain.
What if it floods the whole world? And Linus says. It could never do that. Because in Genesis chapter 9. God promised nowhere. That would never happen again. The sign of the covenant. Is the rainbow. Lucy says. Wow. You've taken a great load off my mind. Linus says. Sound theology should do that. In other words.
In theology. What we believe about God. Who God is. Must affect. And it must make an impact. And Jonah has short circuited.
[17:14] Like a lot of our thinking does. And the result of his disgust. Is in verse 3. He asks God. To take his life away. And I think.

Chapter 4 verse 3. Is just another version. Of chapter 1 verse 3. Because when Jonah ran away. To Tarshish. He found out.
That it wouldn't get him. Out of profiting. And so he wants Jonah. To take away his life. He wants Yahweh. To take away his life. It's the only way. He's going to get out of this.
Any other way. God will go after him. And so he wants God. To take his life. Do you think. We notice. It's very interesting.
Jonah realises. That he doesn't have. The right himself. To take his life. Suicide is not an option. Suicide is never an option.
[18:12] Only the giver of life. Can take his life. And he pleads for him to do it. And that's how far. His disgust goes.

How do we apply this. Let's come back to. What is the central issue. In Jonah chapter 4. Jonah does not like.
God's way. Of being God. And he's angry with God. For acting in a way. That Jonah. Didn't understand. Or approve of.
Have you ever. In a situation like that. Not liking God's way. Of being God. Angry with God. Because he's acting. In a way.
That you don't approve of. Or understand of. So at root. Jonah was finding fault. With God. For being the way he is. God has not lived. Up to his expectations.
[19:10] The creed. In Exodus chapter 34. Is fine. But not when it comes. To the Assyrians. And so we need to ask ourselves. The question I think. In Jonah chapter 4.

Am I content. With the character of God. Or am I actually. Disturbed by God. For taking my life. In a direction. That I want to go. And am I eager. For the character of God. To mould my mind. And to shape my attitudes.
And God's sovereignty. And freedom. In grace. Ought to soften us. And not harden us. So in my case.
It doesn't really matter. If my ministry. Is a visible success. Or not. As long as I enjoy. The God of all grace. There's a scary thing.
[20:15] Isn't it? It's obvious. That God is not that concerned. Whether I'm successful. As a preacher or not. That doesn't bother God at all. But that I would be sanctified. And so for you.

In your life. It doesn't really matter. If you are successful. Whatever that means. In your life. But it does matter. That you are sanctified.
In your life. Let's go to see. To the patient. The patient teacher. The patient teacher. And the focus here. Is on the consistency of God.
The consistency of God. The patient teacher. And the consistency of God. So. If you just look at the text with me. God deals with Jonah. And there's one question.
That is asked twice. There's one question. That's asked twice. And there's one verb. That's repeated three times. The word repair. Or anoint. So God's question.
[21:12] If you look. It just comes in verse four. Do you do well to be angry Jonah? Verse nine. Do you do well to be angry? Jonah? Are you right to be burned up?

Are you right to be incandescent with rage? And in between those two questions. The Lord gives Jonah. Basically a children's talk. An object lesson.

He appoints a plant. A worm. And a wind. But I want you to just notice the manner. Just notice the manner that God deals with Jonah.

Jonah is still petulant. Isn't he? He's still throwing his toys out of the pram. And at the end of verse nine. God does not call him a sarcastic idiot.

Does he? Yes. Yes. I do well to be angry. Angry enough to die. God is so gracious. He questions. And he acts. And he extracts.

[22 : 12] And he exercises immense patience. To this obnoxious servant. Which simply shows. As what? It shows us verse two.

Doesn't it? Can you see verse two? For I knew that you are a gracious God. And merciful. Slow to anger. God shows himself gracious and merciful towards Jonah.

And he deals with him. In that kind of manner. Even when Jonah is obnoxious. The consistency of God. He is just as Jonah had confessed in the creed.

The Lord. The Lord. Merciful. Gracious. Full of steadfast love. And that's just the way God treats Jonah of all people. And so last week.

I said to you that the real miracle of the book of Jonah. Wasn't the rest of the fish. It was the repentance of Nilever. But that isn't right. The real miracle. In the book of Jonah.

[23 : 11] Comes in chapter four. And it's not the rest of the fish. And it's not the repentance of Nilever. The real miracle of the book of Jonah. Is that God. Still cares about Jonah.

And that's why I think the book is all about Jonah. He's still pursuing him. He is long suffering. And compassionate over him. And he seems to think that what we think about God.

Is very crucial. And he doesn't mind you leaving you under a tree. To think about it. So what is the lesson that God wants us to learn from this? The way that he consistently treats Jonah.

And I think it's this. He wants Jonah. And you and I to know. That Jonah. And we. Only stand. By his grace.

Now look at the grace. Okay. Look at verse six. Now the Lord God. Planted. The Lord God. Appointed a plant. And made it come up over Jonah.

[24 : 15] So that it might be a shade over his head. To save him. From his discomfort. That is an act of God's grace. I've got one commentary that spent.

Three paragraphs on whether Jonah was bald. Which is an astonishing thing. Isn't it? I don't know. Whether Jonah was bald. And neither did the commentator.

But that isn't the point of verse six. The point of verse six is that it's an act of God's grace. This plant. The shade. You just see. Again in verse six.

You've got another great. Yes. Who misses it. But Jonah was greatly glad. Exceedingly glad. Jonah is ecstatic. About this. Verse seven.

When dawn came up the next day. God appointed a worm that attacked the plant. So that it withered. There is judgment. And then verse eight and nine.

[25 : 14] Jonah is really cheesed off. Isn't he? When the sun rose. God appointed a scorching yeast. When the sun beat down on the head of Jonah. Bald or not bald. So that he was faint. And he asked that he might die.

And said. It is better for me to die than to live. God said to Jonah. Do you do well to be angry for the plant? He said. Yes. I do well to be angry. Angry enough to die. He wants out of it.

He's devastated. What's happening? Well clearly. What God gives. God has got the right to take away. You see that in verse 10.

And the Lord said. He put in the plant. For which he did not labour. Nor did he make it grow. Which came into being in a night. And perished in the night. You've got no investment in the plant Jonah. This is a gift of grace.

So if I give a gift. Or if I give grace. And the worm comes and destroys it. You shouldn't have any complaints about that Jonah. I have the right to take away my gifts.

[26 : 15] I think again. Suddenly we find ourselves in Jonah chapter 4. It's all to hang over our lives. That if you have reasonable success.

In your life. And in your studies. If your job is good. If your marriage is okay. If your family life is warm.

And affectionate. And your nearest and your dearest. They are walking with the Lord. And if you've not fallen. Into scandal and sin. Which wrecks your life. And wrecks the lives of others.

You have it only. By the grace of God. Who can justly. Remove any of it. Or all of it.

At any time. With one leg. All that I am. I owe to thee. Thy wisdom Lord has fashioned me. I give my maker grateful praise.

[27 : 16] Whose wondrous works. My soul amaze. The same grace. That keeps the Assyrians. From perishing.

Is the same grace. That keeps you on your feet. This night. And you and I. Stand. Like Jonah. Only by grace.

And every single. Good thing. That you have. In your life. Is only by grace. Scene three.

The last word. Focuses. On the freedom of God. Last word. And it focuses on the freedom of God.

Verses 10 and 11. So this plant.

I think. Is pretty significant. The reason I think. It's significant. Is because. All the way through. The book of Jonah. God preserves. Do you see that? Chapter one.

[28 : 16] God preserves the Assyrians. Chapter two. God preserves Jonah. Chapter three. God preserves Nineveh. Chapter four. God destroys a plant. And now.

God applies this. Plant. And wind. And storm. The situation of Jonah. And there's. There's clearly. A contrast intended. Just look at the emphatic way. He speaks.

In verse 10. And the Lord said. You. Pitied a plant. For which you. Did not labor. Nor did you. Make it grow. Which came into being.

In a night. And perished in the night. You had. Pity on a plant. Which you didn't. Toil over. It's such a. It came up in the night. And it perished in the night. And then verse 11.

And should not I. Pity Nineveh. That great city. In which there are more than 120,000 persons. Who don't know their left hand from their right. And also much cattle. So it's taken.

[29 : 13] Isn't it? Verse 10. 11. Is normally taken as a contrast in values. I think that's right. You have a plant Jonah. Over which. Over which Jonah is ecstatic.

And then you have people and livestock in contrast. You've got a plant. That Jonah is really ecstatic about. But then there's people. And cattle. Living beings.

In verse 11. That God is more concerned about. But I. I'm not sure that that is the big contrast.

Because I think the big contrast.

Is here on. Is freedom. Throughout chapter 3. God's threat against Nineveh. And they get a reprieve from judgment. It is delayed. It is put off.

God's threat against Nineveh. A reprieve. But now in chapter 4. With the plant. You have. God's gift to Jonah. And then you have a retraction. That's the contrast.

[30 : 12] A reprieve. And then a retraction. So there's a contrast. Between chapter 3. And chapter 4. And I think the Lord is saying. Both these are proper. Both those are fine.

Because God can do. As he pleases. As he said to Jonah. Do you see. You've got no claim on this plant Jonah.

It's sheer gift. Here's the object lesson. But it's sheer gift. Jonah you didn't put any work into it. You didn't plant it. You didn't water it. You didn't put miracle grow on it.

You've got no claim on it. It was God's plant. And because it was God's plant. God is perfectly right for him. To withhold it. Or to give it. As he pleased. And when he pleased.

And so. Is God not free. To do with living. As he likes. God's. And so I think the point. At the end of Jonah chapter 4. That is being emphasized.

[31 : 10] For you and I. Could be summed up in the words. Of Matthew 20. 15. You know the parable. The vineyard owner. Where the vineyard owner says. Am I not allowed to do what I choose. Am I not allowed to do.

With what I choose. With what belongs to me. Or Exodus 33. I. Shall show grace. On whom I want to show grace.

And I will have compassion. On whom I will have compassion on. And I think the freedom of God. Is something that if we let it.

Sink into the dark corners of our souls. The freedom of God. Actually lifts. A great burden. Off us. I've tried to give an illustration.

I've tried to think of an illustration. But the best illustration. Is in the Bible. Of this. 2 Samuel 15. 25. 26. David is on his way. Out of Jerusalem. Because his son Absalom.

[32 : 14] Is coming into Jerusalem. And they're going to get out of the city. And they're vacating. The city of Jerusalem. Probably because they want to know.

Who's going to be on their side. And so they get out of Jerusalem. Before Absalom gets there. And on their way out. Zanoth and Ebiath. The high priest. Come up. With some men. Who've got the Ark of the Covenant.

With them. And they're going to take it off. With David. It's as if they're saying. We may be going to the wilderness. But we'll have the Ark of the Covenant. We will have the sign of God's presence. With us. And so on. And really surprisingly. David will have none of it. He says. Take the Ark of God.

Back to the city. Take it back. I don't want it. And then he says this. If I find grace. In the Lord's eyes. He shall allow me back. To see both it.

[33 : 10] And its residence. But he says. If I do not. But if he says. I do not delight in you.

If the Lord does not delight in me. Let him do to me. As seems good to him. That in.

If I do not. If the Lord does not delight in me. Let him do to me. As seems good to him. You might hear that. Nathan. That's just fatalism. Isn't it? Ke sarah sarah.

But I think it's liberty. I think it's freedom. I think it's a radical acknowledgement. Of God's grace. I think it's the teaching of Jonah 4.

That everything I have. Everything I have. Rests on God's grace. And if the Lord shows me grace. And he is willing to bring me back.

[34 : 06] And restore me. Well I will be able to worship. Where the Ark is. And so on. And if he says. God doesn't delight in me. He can do what's good in his eyes. And David is saying.

I'm not going to try and manipulate God. I'm not going to try and steer God. Where I want him to go. I'm not going to have any of this gimmick.

Or manipulation. As if I can kind of direct his way. It's just an expression of sheer freedom. And how much freedom there is. How much relief there is.

When we don't try to bear. God's heavy burden. And it is very heavy. And we cast ourselves upon him. And his grace.

For him to do what he pleases with us. To do what he pleases. With what belongs to him. And Jonah.

[35 : 04] Like most of us. Is prone to want to be God. Genesis chapter 3 and verse 5. Is true in your heart and mine.

Wanting to determine. What is fitting to God. But this God of Jonah chapter 4. He must be the real and living God. Because we would never have concocted. A God like this.

A God whom I don't control. So he must be the real one. And we must remember. That when we speak of the freedom of God.

We speak of the freedom of a God of all grace. And so what is the response of. Jonah.

What does. The book of Jonah. Want us to do. It may be that it wants you to go to Nineveh. And all the ends of the earth. It may be that.

[36 : 02] And my opinion. I don't think that is the response. That the book of Jonah is calling for. I think when we understand. Something of the freedom of God.

All you can do is go back to chapter 1. And verse 14. And you fall on your knees. On the deck of that ship. Alongside those pagan sailors.

And you join them in worship. And you say. For you God. You oh Lord. Have done.

As you please. Let's pray.