

## Running Ahead of God – Pouting

Jonah 4

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### **Prelude:**

#### **I. Although the Lord saved Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah,**

- A. the Book of Jonah did not end with chapter 3.
- B. The reason?
  - 1. Jonah needed some work.
  - 2. In fact, I wonder if he needed more work than the Ninevites did.

#### **II. Therefore, the last chapter is about**

- A. the prophet who ran ahead of God,
- B. pouting because God saved the people whom the prophet hated.
  - 1. You who Jonah reminds me of?
  - 2. The older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
    - a) Remember that after the younger brother returned
    - b) from his wild life with harlots,
      - (1) that his father received him,
      - (2) throwing a celebratory party for him.
  - 3. However, the older brother was not happy.
    - a) Jesus said about the older brother:

**28a “But he was angry and would not go in.”**

**– Luke 15.28a**

- b) Jonah and the older brother were cousins in spirit.
- C. Do you know who God reminds me of in Jonah 4?
  - 1. The father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

2. In the very next sentence,
  - a) after Jesus had said
  - b) that the older brother was angry and would not join the celebration,
    - (1) Jesus made this remarkable statement:

**28b “Therefore his father came out and *pleaded* with him.”**

**– Luke 15.28b**

- (2) The father in that story represented God the Father.
  - (a) Why is God so generous?
  - (b) Why is he so patient with us who should know better?
  - (c) Why does he continue to work with us after so many years?

### **III. I ask all those questions about God again**

- A. as we see him work with the angry prophet.
- B. God did not want to give up on Nineveh and
  1. he did not want to give up on Jonah, and
  2. the New Testament shows
    - a) that he does not want to give up on us either.
    - b) How then shall I speak on the endless love of God?
      - (1) How can I picture his longsuffering with us?
      - (2) What story can I recite that will show the wonders of our God?

### **Persuasion:**

#### **I. Jonah 4.1–3 • An Irritated Prophet**

**1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, “Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life**

**from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!”**

A. How could anyone be displeased with such a city-wide response?

1. In Acts 13, Luke revealed to us
  - a) that when Paul and Barnabas preached in Antioch of Pisidia,
  - b) the Jews had a similar reaction to Jonah’s.
2. After Paul finished his message, look at what the Gentiles did:

**42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.**

**– Acts 13.42**

- a) Was that not a good thing?
  - b) I am sure that I would rejoice if that happened to me!
3. Yet, watch what happened a week later:

**44 On the next Sabbath *almost the whole city* came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.**

**– Acts 13.44–45**

- a) Is it possible that sometimes we enjoy having enemies?
  - (1) After all, who are we going to lambaste if we don’t have enemies?
  - (2) Or perhaps we just like keeping our group as it is.
- b) Whatever the reason,
  - (1) if we cannot rejoice when others repent,
  - (2) we have a serious spiritual problem.

B. Jonah directed his anger at God.

1. He thought that he had a better way than God.

2. He claims that he knew God would be gracious, but
  - a) did not Jonah also know
  - b) that the Nineties had to hear of the grace of God?
    - (1) Did they not need to know of their sin and impending doom?
    - (2) Did he not realize that someone had to preach to them?

C. So, we have Jonah praying to God again, but

1. this time his attitude shows something different.
2. We saw him seeking God's mercy earlier, and
  - a) he praised God for it, saying

**9      "But I will sacrifice to You  
With the voice of thanksgiving;  
I will pay what I have vowed.  
Salvation is of the LORD."**

**– Jonah 2.9**

- b) Here in chapter 4, he showed his anger against God.

D. Verse 2 shows is how Jonah ran ahead of God:

1. He anticipated God's mercy.
2. He acted as though he knew that God would show mercy all along.
  - a) Jonah forgot that God uses human agents to proclaim grace.
  - b) If Jonah had not gone, Nineveh would have perished.
3. By the way,
  - a) how did fleeing to Tarshish
  - b) demonstrate Jonah's conviction about grace?

E. Listen again to Jonah's belief system in the Lord:

**4.2b "...I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."**

– **Jonah 4.2b**

1. Jonah spoke the truth.
    - a) However, such knowledge was only in his head.
    - b) It had not migrated to his heart, and because
      - (1) it had not migrated to his heart,
      - (2) it had not migrated into his life.
  2. What good is our knowledge if it does not change us?
- F. Look at verse 3, and see how his irritation led to irrationality.
1. He saw no point to his life,
  2. if God was going to forgive people like the Ninevites.

**II. Jonah 4.4 • Do We Have a Right to Be Angry?**

**4 Then the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”**

- A. Let us answer the Lord’s question?
1. Is it right for us to be angry?
  2. In Nineveh’s case,
    - a) Jonah had no right for anger, because
    - b) he did not create the sea and the dry land,
      - (1) which he said God did in 1.9.
      - (2) Jonah did not merely say
        - (a) that God created the land of Israel, but
        - (b) that he made the whole planet.
  3. Psalm 24 puts it this way:

**1 The earth is the LORD’S, and all its fullness,  
The world and those who dwell therein.**

– **Psalm 24.1**

- a) That means God created the land of Assyria and Nineveh.
  - b) That means further that he owned the people of Nineveh.
    - (1) If he wanted those people to have the opportunity to repent,
    - (2) he could give them that opportunity.
4. Who was Jonah to disagree?
- B. Man's anger conflicts with the purposes of God:

**20 ...the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

– **James 1.20**

- 1. Which Jonah in his anger demonstrated.
- 2. He wanted them wiped out.

**III. Jonah 4.5 • Running Ahead of God**

**5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.**

- A. Nothing should have become of the city.
- 1. God relented of the disaster that he was going to bring upon it.
  - 2. Also, Jonah spoke of God's graciousness, mercy, and lovingkindness.
    - a) What then did he expect to happen?
    - b) I think he expected God to destroy them anyway or
      - (1) he was hoping that God would.
      - (2) He truly did not know God fully.
- B. He could have stayed in Nineveh,
- 1. helping them to live godly lives, or

2. he could have asked God what to do next.

#### **IV. Jonah 4.6–8 • Personal Comfort**

**6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."**

- A. Jonah had already made his own shade (verse 5), but God made it better.
  1. Perhaps God sought to cool him down in more ways than one.
  2. God also showed Jonah the pettiness of his mind.
- B. However, Jonah discovered that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.
- C. Jonah did not realize how bad it was to be doomed before God.
  1. Being in the belly of the great fish should have taught him something.
    - a) Being lost you are in darkness.
    - b) Being lost you cannot escape.
    - c) Being lost you cannot save yourself.
    - d) Being lost you are desperate.
    - e) Being lost you are miserable or you will be.
  2. Since it seems that he still had not gotten the message,
    - a) the Lord brought the prophet as close to hell
    - b) as he could without actually sending him there.
      - (1) The Ninevites were headed for hell.
      - (2) Jonah was about to go there, if he did not repent.
  3. Think about who obeyed God and did not in this story:
    - a) The storm obeyed God.

- b) The mariners obeyed God.
- c) The great fish obeyed God.
- d) The Ninevites obeyed God.
- e) The sun obeyed God.
- f) The plant obeyed God.
- g) The worm obeyed God.
- h) The sun obeyed God again.
- i) The vehement east wind obeyed God.
- j) The prophet of God did *not* obey God!

**V. Jonah 4.9 • The Danger of Anger**

**9 Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”  
And he said, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!”**

- A. Was Jonah angry about everything?
- B. Nothing was going his way.
  - 1. The trip to Tarshish failed;
  - 2. his enemies, the Ninevites were not destroyed;
  - 3. he still had to be away from home;
  - 4. the sun was blistering hot;
  - 5. comfort was short lived.
    - a) Why live if you cannot have things your way?
    - b) However, as servants of God
      - (1) it is not about
      - (2) having things our way.

**VI. Jonah 4.10–11 • Personal Comfort vs Lost Souls**

**10 But the LORD said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.**



**11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?”**

A. Jonah’s esteem for a plant was a serious case of mixed-up priorities.

1. Why should so much of his attention be on the gourd?

- a) He did not labor for it.
- b) He did not make it grow.

2. Even if Jonah had,

- a) should he still be overly concerned for a plant
- b) over God’s grace shown to thousands?

B. Then God gave Jonah a number

1. that should have shown him

2. how heartless he was.

- a) The Lord said that in Nineveh lived,
- b) “more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left.”

(1) That was a reference to the children.

(2) How large was Nineveh?

(a) What Jonah wanted meant more to him

(b) than 120,000+ children!

C. Both the plant and the people were creations of God.

1. But which is greater?

2. The well-being of which really mattered in the end?

### **Exhortation:**

#### **I. What was Jonah’s problem or problems?**

A. He had not surrendered his will to the will of God.

- B. He ultimately did what God told him to do, but not from the heart.
- C. He was angry with God, and
  - 1. that led to selfish thinking
  - 2. rather than
    - a) thinking as God thinks and
    - b) feeling as God feels.
- D. His personal comfort meant more to him than lost souls.

## **II. The heart of Jonah's problem was the problem in his heart.**

- A. Think on the two prayers of Jonah:

**“He prayed his best prayer in the worst place, the fish’s belly, and he prayed his worst prayer in the best place, at Nineveh where God was working. His first prayer came from a broken heart, but his second prayer came from an angry heart. In his first prayer, he asked God to save him, but in his second prayer, he asked God to take his life! Once again, Jonah would rather die than not have his own way.”**

**– Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, page 1448**

## **III. Jesus said something about Nineveh**

- A. that all of us need to consider:

**41 “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.”**

**– Matthew 12.41**

- B. That is how the Book of Jonah lives for us today.
  - 1. The Ninevites heard Jonah preach and repented.
  - 2. Jesus has preached, lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended.
- C. The Ninevites, Jonah, and all of us will stand before Jesus at the Judgment.