

- Today we come to the end of our series through the Book of Jonah.
- Next week, we are going to begin a short, five week series in the final month of summer through passages from the Book of Psalms!
- The Psalms should be a regular diet in the life of the church. It will also be fun because we have a few guests joining us, one of them will be Pasto Bijan who took my role at Reality Church London!
- But today, we end the Book of Jonah, not by focuses on what is revealed about Jonah, but the God that pursued him. For he is the same God who pursues and reveals himself to us.

Jonah 4:5-11 NIV 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ 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." ⁹ But God said 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." ¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ 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?"

- Which is more important: What we think about God? Or What God thinks about us?

A.W. Tozer once said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

- But another well-known contemporary C.S Lewis disagreed...

C.S. Lewis “Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us.

- Well, it's a false choice. Both questions are absolutely vital, and how we answer them shapes how we view ourselves, and how we view and treat others.
- Our example is been the Book of Jonah. Jonah is a prophet in ancient Israel whose mistaken assumptions about God, led to a warped understanding of himself and others. He couldn't understand that the true and living God of Israel could show mercy wicked pagans. As a result, he thought about God as more of a tribal deity, he took pride and security in his national identity before all else and despised the pagan city of Nineveh. He needed to be changed. For it was not only his life that would be affected, but the lives of many others.
- In reading Jonah, we must ask the same questions: Does what we think about God and what *we think* he thinks about us need to be changed? Both are important questions. And it's not only our lives who will be affected by these answers, but those around us.
- For, like Jonah, all believers are called to represent God to a needy world. And the good news is that this book, like the rest of the Bible, is about God revealing who he truly is, and what he thinks about us. If we grasp this, it will change absolutely everything about how we live our lives. And there are few better summaries of who he is and how he relates towards us than the end of the Book of Jonah.
- And from this text I would like to point out 3 characteristics of God, how they relate to us and how it shapes our view of others. And the first attribute is this: We learn in the Book of Jonah that:

1. God is Patient (Jonah 4:5-8)

- a. We have seen this demonstrated toward the prophet Jonah in different stages. As the book opens, He rejects God's call to deliver a message of mercy to his enemies, the Ninevites and boards a ship heading in the opposite direction.
- b. But when God sends a storm to stop him, Jonah asks the sailors of his hired ship to throw him overboard, for he recognizes the storm is a consequence of his sin. Yet God, in his grace, keeps pursuing Jonah and provides a great fish to save his life. And during those three days, as his life is being preserved, it seems that he has this conversion experience and decides to obey the voice of God and preach his word. But when he preaches the judgement of God to the wicked city of Nineveh, they repent, and no judgement comes. Jonah is left furious. He has forgotten the mercy he was shown and is now ungrateful and unwilling to show mercy to others.
- c. Yet... despite all of this, God is patient with Jonah. Once again, God engages with Jonah to teach him. He pursued Jonah in the storm, saved him in the sea, sent to the city and now continues to engage with Jonah by providing a lesson for him.

Jonah 4:5-8 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. ⁶Then 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. ⁷But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸When 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."

- d. God is patient with this broken man named Jonah...
- e. And that means he is patient with you**
- f. Therefore, we must be patient with others**
- g. There is something both *challenging* and *comforting* about this. Sometimes, as Christians, we give the impression that once you are saved, everything is pretty straightforward! You

obey God's call wholeheartedly, you reject sin and temptation gladly, and reach out to others effortlessly.

- i. But that is not the case. It is true that through faith in Christ, we become saints. *But it is also true that we continue to be sinners.*
- ii. When you put your faith in Jesus, you have a new heart! You are given the Holy Spirit! You have a new nature!
- iii. However, you still have your old nature! And you will quickly discover the war between the two!
- iv. This is spelled out in the New Testament, but it is illustrated in the life of Jonah. Jonah went from willingly obeying God's word in one chapter, to being so angry he wants to die in this final chapter. As we learned last week, his self-righteousness and self-centeredness, his national idolatry warped how he viewed God and others.
- v. So, this means that your Christian growth is not going to be a nice straight line! Don't be surprised by it!

C.H. Spurgeon "I asked a young girl who came lately to join the church, 'have you a good heart?', she replied 'yes sir.' I said 'Have you thought over the question? Have you not an evil heart?' 'Oh yes!' she answered. 'Well, how do your two answers agree?' 'Why' responded the girl 'I know that I have a good heart because God has given me a new heart and a right spirit; and I also know that I have an evil heart, for I often find it fighting against my new heart!' She was right and I had sooner feel that a minister had two hearts than that he had none at all."

- i. Why does he say this? Because recognizing the battle is a sign that you are alive! And recognizing this is key to our maturity!
- h. So, that fact that it is necessary for God to be patient with us is challenging because it reveals our need for growth.
- i. But... his willingness and ability to bear with us is wonderfully comforting. **Our struggle does not exhaust his patience.**
- j. Maybe you need to hear this! ... But you also need to show this
 - i. God is both our standard and our source when it comes to how we treat others. We should be like him in bearing

with one another! But we get the power to do so from how he bears with us!

Col. 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

- ii. Will you endeavor to be patient with others? Or will we be like the parable of the unforgiving servant?
- k. When you think about God, do you think about his patience toward you and others? We must.
- l. But why is he patient? That leads to the next attribute.

2. God is Compassionate (Jonah 4:9-11)

- a. As Jonah sits and waits in the hot arid climate, we discover this random detail: a plant/vine grows up quickly, as some do down in that region. Jonah loved this plant; it gave him shade and cool... and then it died. It's a teachable moment to shape what Jonah thinks about God. And what he thinks about others.

Jonah 4:9-11 But God said 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." ¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ 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?"

- b. He uses this word compassion. And It's a word that describes being attached to something so that you grieve for it. It basically means to weep!
- c. God is saying to Jonah "You got attached to this plant, so much so, that when it died, you were greatly affected.
- d. Then, surprisingly, God says "You had compassion on the plant, but I have compassion on this city!"
- e. God is saying I have attached myself to the sinners of Nineveh
- f. This is a remarkable insight into the heart of God for lost people.
- g. Now, some clarification is needed. Sometimes as people, we attach ourselves to people out of commitment for their good.

But other times, we attach ourselves to people out of need.
You know what I am talking about. Co-dependency.

- h. But here is what we need to know about God. He needs nothing. He depends on nothing! He created everything!
- i. So why would he be attached to the sinners of Nineveh?
- j. It's a choice. It's a voluntary attachment!
 - i. Often times, we think that God is obligated to love us. Or, that there is something that we have done to earn his love or compassion. "You deserve it!" we often say.
 - ii. But that is not Christianity! Christianity says we deserve eternal separation from God because of sin. And that God loves us, attaches himself to us out of his own character, his mercy, his grace and compassion.
 - iii. Jonah is furious. Because of his own self-righteous and religious heart, that's what he expects from Nineveh! "They have done nothing to earn this!"
 - iv. Compassion is highly offensive to those who don't think they need it, but is glorious to those who know they do
- k. His attachment is voluntary. And what moves him is not our merit, but our condition. He says:
 - l. They do not know their right hand from their left!" v 11
- m. Look at the character of God! See, on the one hand, he does not turn a blind eye to the wickedness of Nineveh. After all, he sent Jonah there in the first place to warn them!
- n. But he also shows great compassion for them! He is saying, essentially, yes, they are responsible for what they do. But they are also spiritually blind and morally bankrupt. And my response to that is grief because I long for them to be rescued.
- o. God is Compassionate
- p. And that means he is compassionate toward us.**
 - i. *Do you know that is how God sees you?*
- q. Therefore, we must be compassionate toward others.**

- r. This is very different than how we often look at people who because trouble do to their own blindness. If it's a person from another political party, we mock them. If it's a public personality we disagree with, and they get into trouble of their own making, we celebrate their downfall!
- s. It's all a way of **detaching** ourselves from them. It's as if we are saying "I thank God I am not like them!"
- t. But not with God. He is absolutely honest about their condition. But also, absolutely heartbroken for them.
 - i. What is your attitude? (Pharisee and tax collector)

John Newton As to your opponent, I wish that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. if you look upon him as an unconverted person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace, he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger. If God, in his sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, you might have been as he is now...You were both equally blind by nature.

- ii. GET INVOLVED. Yes, it will make you weep at times, but do not separate yourselves.
 - iii. Wait, aren't we supposed to be separate? Yes, in how we behave, but not where we belong.
- u. Now, we see that God is patient with us and compassionate toward us... but what is the result of this patience and compassion? Well, lastly the Book of Jonah helps us what to think about God, and what God thinks about us, it teaches:

3. God is Gracious (Jonah 4:11)

- a. The whole story has been one of God working on Jonah to bring about change. He works in the storm to wake him up, He works in the depths of the sea to save and send him out. He works through his counsel to Jonah, gently but powerfully working to change Jonah. ***God is a God of grace!***

b. And that means he is gracious to us

c. Therefore, we must be gracious to others.

- d. But it ends with a total cliffhanger. It ends with a question from God, though challenging is also inviting, welcoming Jonah to engage with what God has revealed.
- e. God not only waits patiently, and weeps compassionately over sinners but he actually does something about it and invites us to respond. To put it another way: By his grace, God has made a way for sinners to receive and respond.
- f. Many writers suggest that the book intentionally ends this way because we are meant to answer the questions posed to Jonah.
- g. Will we yield to the word and grace of God? Or will we continue, like Jonah, to be blind, prideful, self-centered?
- h. God makes it absolutely clear what we should think about him. And he is absolutely clear what he thinks about us. Sinners on whom he has compassion. But in inviting a response from sinners he reveals that he has made provision for sinners to be changed. And what it hinted at in the Old Testament is made crystal clear in the New Testament.
- i. God's character is revealed throughout the Book Jonah but is ultimately expressed in the coming of Jesus Christ.
- j. And when Jesus came, he did not detach himself from lost people, he wept over them.

Luke 19: 41-42 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

- k. But unlike Jonah who went outside the great city and waited for its condemnation, Jesus went outside the great city for its salvation! His patience with sinners and compassion for sinners lead to him graciously giving his life for sinners so that they, so that we could be forgiven, accepted and made new.
- l. And in doing so, resolves a tension that Jonah struggles with, and many of us struggle with How could he both be brutally honest about our sins and also totally accepting of sinners?

- m. Modern people want to accept everyone as they are. But what about justice? Evil? What about the need for change? Do we just turn a blind eye? Are morals all relative? It doesn't work.
- n. On the other hand, other people, religious people, call everyone to change their ways, they recognize right and wrong. But they don't acknowledge the inability of the human heart to change on its own! You act as if you could save yourself and expect others to change themselves.
- o. See, only the gospel deals radically and realistically with the problem of sin by calling it for what it is! But, by grace, the gospel makes provision for sinners to be forgiven and changed
- p. In the gospel, Jesus, got involved and attached by substituting himself on the cross to make payment for sinners, so that sinners could be saved and changed from the inside out.
- q. What should we think about God? And what does God think about us? He is a God who is patient, he knows our sin and willingly bears with us. He is a God of compassion, who voluntarily attaches himself to us, grieved over our sin, longing for us to be changed. He is a God of grace, who has acted on our behalf and made provision through Jesus Christ for us to be saved and invites into relationship with Him.
- r. This changes everything. It can change you. It can change a Jonah. Did Jonah change? Tim Keller gives a reason why the answer to that question is yes. How else would we know he was so defiant? How would we know what he prayed inside the fish? How would we know his petulant speech before God? The only way we would know these things is if Jonah told others. And what type of person would tell and show others what a fool they were? Only someone who came to know how sinful he was while at the same time knowing how gracious God had been in accepting them by grace. *We know what he thinks. And now, he invites you and empowers you to live like it!*