

Rebuked Jonah 4

Jonah forfeited his happy ending. He chose anger, bitterness, and selfishness, and it cost him joy. Avoid his example by asking yourself: Do I wish mercy upon everyone, even those who've hurt me? Do I choose to love that which lasts - that which has eternal value? Do I care more about other people than about my own comfort?

Turn to Jonah chapter 4

My brother loves British movies - British spy movie on BBC

- spy framed for a crime he didn't commit
- intricate plot - everything seemed to go from bad to worse
- suspense built to a final battle between good guy and the real bad guy
- good guy accidentally kills friend, bad guy escapes
- with all hope lost, he kills himself... and the credits roll

Pretty disappointing movie experience for me!!

- bad guy gets away & good guy commits suicide?!!
- maybe that works in England, but not in my house! Refund!
- movie doesn't have to end happy - but it can't end like that!
- I want my entertainment to entertain me, not depress me!
 - o Why I never watched Titanic - come on, you know what's going to happen!

Like most Americans I like my stories to come with happy endings.

That's what we expect.

So as we look at the end of Jonah... how would we expect it to end?

- Review from last week:
 - o God showed Jonah grace - gave him a 2nd chance
 - o Jonah courageously obeyed God and preached to Nineveh
 - o Nineveh repented - the greatest revival in history
 - o God responded by withholding His wrath
 - o So Jonah 3 records one of the most successful days of ministry ever!
 - incredible triumph for God & His prophet
- So how would you expect the book to end in chapter 4?
 - o If Hollywood's writing it... meets a nice girl
 - attractive, witty, out of his league
 - Jonah: 3 days in fish - funky - thought he'd never find love
 - but she loves his bravery - overlooks the fish smell
 - they embrace - share epic kiss
 - hop on horse and ride off into sunset with "Happily Ever After"

I wish that's how Jonah ended!

**But this isn't Hollywood - this is the Bible and it's real life
and real life doesn't always end with "Happily Ever After"...**

Read 4:1-3

chapter 4 begins with...

Jonah's shocking anger at God (v1-3)

- **In English, easily miss the intensity of Jonah's raw anger**
 - v1 - lit: "but it was evil to Jonah with great evil and he burned with anger"
 - repeats word "evil" - no stronger way in Heb to express anger
 - as angry at God as he could possibly be - anger "burns" in him
 - v3: so angry that he'd prefer death to life
 - The intensity of Jonah's anger is meant to be shocking to us.
- **Now why is Jonah so angry?**
 - context – v1 "it" greatly displeased Jonah – what is "it"?
 - points us back to 3:10 [read 3:10]
 - **Jonah is furious because God has spared the Ninevites**
 - **Now why does that make Jonah so angry?**
 - Background: Assyria & Israel not on friendly terms
 - During Jonah's lifetime: Assyria forced Israel to pay **tribute**
 - absurdly high taxation designed to crush a weaker nation
 - if Israel didn't pay, Assyria would invade - pay or die!
 - kept them poor, weak, humiliated
 - But that's not all... **Hosea & Amos prophesied...**
 - God planning to use Assyria to punish Israel
 - happened just 30 years after Jonah
 - Jonah had legit reasons to hate the Ninevites
 - like the ancient version of the Nazis - oppressing & killing Jews
 - **So not surprising that Jonah would have such visceral reaction** to seeing God give grace to Nineveh
 - they were the enemy / bad guys!
 - like seeing God give grace to members of Al Qaida
 - how could God give someone like that grace?! made Jonah sick!
- **In fact v2 reveals that this is why Jonah rebelled back in ch 1...**
 - re-read v2
 - quotes Exod 34:6-7 – words spoken by God to Moses
 - **gracious**
 - give someone something good they don't deserve
 - withhold deserved punishment or give undeserved blessing
 - we learned in ch3 - God loves to give grace!
 - **compassionate**
 - Heb: related to the word for a woman's "womb"
 - = "womb love" – compassion of a mom for her child
 - that's how God feels towards people - all people
 - **slow to anger – literally: "long of nostrils"!**
 - takes a long time for God's nose to turn red with anger!

- what a contrast to Jonah - instantly burns with anger
- **abounding in lovingkindness**
 - *hesed* “loyal/faithful love” – love that is not momentary
 - love that is unlimited and permanent
- **relents concerning calamity**
 - exactly what God did in 3:10! He loves to relent!
- **So in v2, Jonah’s theology is perfect**
 - he knows Exod 34 by heart, just like any good Israelite.
- **he accurately understands God’s character...and he hates it!**
 - hates that God would show mercy to his enemies
 - hates it so much that he ran the other way
 - knew that sending him was an act of grace
 - prophecy invited repentance and deliverance
 - Jonah would have no part in that
 - help your nation’s enemy = treason!
 - loved his nation more than his God
 - rather disobey God than give grace to his enemies
 - So back in ch1 he tried to force God’s hand
 - no prophecy - no repentance - no mercy
- **That’s his point in v2**
 - “I disobeyed because I knew you would mess everything up - you’d give grace to our enemies & make me a traitor! But you dragged me back and forced me to preach to Nineveh and now everything I feared has come true. You’ve ruined my life. I wish I was dead!”
- Jonah sounds like a **rebellious teenager** slamming the door on his parents.
 - His anger is intense - it’s shocking
 - He’s not politely asking for death - English makes it sound too polite
 - furious! raising his fist & railing against God
 - “death better than life in a world run by a god as horrible as you!”

Those are serious words!

- *all of us struggle with anger at times, even towards God*
- *but these are fighting words - openly challenging God*

So how does God respond?

- *fortunately for Jonah, God is indeed “long of nostrils”!!*
 - *what does Jonah deserve? punishment!*
 - *he’s slandering the Creator and Sovereign Lord - bad idea!*
- *but God is patient towards his rebellious prophet*
 - *chooses to graciously teach him & help him grow*

The rest of chapter 4 = God’s patient, gracious instruction of his bitter prophet...

God's patient instruction (v4-11)

- **Step 1: God starts by asking the key question (read v4)**
 - will be repeated in v9 – this is the question of the chapter
 - meaning: “**Jonah, do you have a right to be so angry with Me?**”
 - “Which of us is right, you or me?”
 - “If my mercy is right, then your anger is wrong”
 - “But if your anger is right, then my mercy was wrong”
 - “So which is it, Jonah”
 - God doesn't force an answer. He'll wait for it.
 - First, it's time to teach Jonah an object lesson.

- **Step 2: Uses creation to set up a lesson for Jonah (read v5-8)**
 - **v5: setting**
 - God has already spared Nineveh
 - But Jonah is still holding out hope for Nineveh's destruction...
 - So builds a shelter East of city to see if God will come to His senses
 - Nineveh was located in Mesopotamia = Iraq - VERY HOT!
 - probably the hot season - daily high temp ~ **110 F**
 - so he builds a shelter to protect him from the sun
 - but, there's not a lot of wood in the deserts of Iraq!
 - made of stones, mud, and scrub
 - little or no roof
 - So Jonah would have just been baking in the sun
 - And so, in v6...
 - **v6: God gives Jonah grace**
 - What does Jonah deserve from God at this moment? A swift kick!!
 - Instead, God gives Him grace in the form of a plant!
 - “appoints a plant” to grow up over Jonah and give him shade
 - “appoints” used 4 times in Jonah
 - = God's sovereign control over some part of nature
 - fish (ch2), plant, worm, wind (ch4)
 - each time, creation obeys God far better than Jonah!
 - God uses creation to teach his rebellious prophet a lesson
 - in v6, He appoints a “plant”
 - Heb - lit: “a small plant” - just enough for shade
 - God causes it to grow up supernaturally fast - 1 morning
 - And Jonah's response: he was “extremely happy about the plant”
 - lit: “he rejoiced with great rejoicing”
 - same construction in Heb as v1!
 - Jonah is as happy as he could possibly be
 - He loves this plant!
 - No - that's not exactly accurate, is it?
 - He's not a botanist!! no intrinsic love for plant life.
 - **What does he really love? HIS COMFORT!!**

- He loves the plant because the plant provides comfort
 - The plant is grace - a gift from God he certainly didn't deserve
 - On day 1, God gives grace. But on day 2...
 - **v7-8: God gives Jonah justice**
 - Jonah didn't deserve the plant's comfort! He was openly rebelling!
 - So God gives him justice by removing the plant
 - "appoint" again
 - worm destroys the plant which he loved
 - the hot wind and sun beat down on Jonah and bake him
 - he grows faint and longs for death
 - So for Jonah, what was the result of getting grace? Joy, happiness
 - And what was the result of getting justice? Pain, suffering
 - That sets up the lesson - so now God returns to the question...
- **Step 3: Returns to the question (read v9)**
 - "Jonah, do you have a right to be angry about the plant?"
 - "Which of us is right, Jonah?"
 - "Is your anger right, or is my treatment of the plant right?"
 - **This time, God let's Jonah answer**
 - "Yes, God, I'm right, you're wrong. I have a right to be so angry with what you've done to my plant that death would be better than life in a world run by such a horrible God as you!"
 - **Pause: How is Jonah looking at this moment? Not so good!!**
 - You want to die because you're getting a sunburn?!
 - Total loss of perspective!
 - **Jonah's anger and bitterness have led him to play the fool.**
 - And with Jonah's folly exposed, God steps in to teach the lesson...
 - **Step 4: God reveals the lesson (read vv10-11)**
 - God argues from the lesser to the greater
 - **v10 – Jonah, here's what you care about...**
 - a tiny plant - not even a tree or a bush, but a tiny little plant
 - which you did not create, which you did not cause to grow
 - which lasted only 1 day
 - **v11 - Now Jonah, here's what I care about...**
 - a great city
 - "great" because it had been the capital for centuries
 - "great" because of its massive population
 - 120,000 people in it, Jonah
 - whom I created – I made them - they are my people
 - people who've not had the benefits in life that you have had, Jonah!
 - "can't tell their right hand from their left"
 - not literal! A metaphor for spiritual ignorance
 - didn't have Law, Word, temple

- didn't grow up in a godly home
- all they knew from childhood was violence & immorality
- that doesn't excuse their sin - they knew they were wrong
- but their ignorance made God long to show them grace all the more!!
 - God cares deeply about those who don't grow up in godly homes - loves to show them special mercy
- But Jonah could care less about their ignorance
 - To him, they were simply sinners who deserved death.
- And so, God doesn't end with the Ninevites...
- **and Jonah, what about all the animals in Nineveh?!**
 - God's not saying He values animals as much as humans
 - God is driving home the foolishness of Jonah's anger
 - "Yes, Jonah, they are guilty... but their animals are not!"
 - "You have compassion on 1 tiny plant but deny me the right to have compassion on 100's of thousands of innocent..."
 - "Jonah, how blind are you?!"
- Animals = one last nail in the coffin of Jonah's argument with God.

So who's in the wrong, God or Jonah? Clearly, Jonah! No doubt left

- God demolished Jonah's argument - showed him how foolish he was being

God has identified 3 errors in Jonah's thinking... errors that we make, too

Why was Jonah wrong?

- **1) Because he insisted on mercy for himself and justice for others**
 - Jonah was exceedingly happy when grace was given to him
 - but exceedingly angry when grace was given to others
 - We call that **hypocrisy**
 - he was just as guilty as them - maybe more so given his advantages!
- **2) Because he loved that which had little value**
 - "tiny plant" vs "great city" - absurd!!
 - Jonah was a **fool!**
 - his anger had blinded him to reality
 - he'd lost perspective on what's truly valuable in life.
- **3) Because he loved his comfort more than he loved others' lives**
 - Ultimately, that's what Jonah's love and hate are all about
 - He loves the plant – that which gives him comfort
 - And he hates the Assyrians – those who threaten his comfort
 - We call that **selfishness**
 - cared more about his physical comfort than about 120k people!
 - That's just ugly!

God convincingly demonstrates that Jonah is in the wrong.

But He doesn't do it to shame Jonah - He does it to rescue Jonah...

Think about it: Who's suffering in chapter 4?

- **Not the Ninevites!** they had repented & now enjoyed God's grace

- **And certainly not God**
 - Lk 15:7 – “I tell you in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.”
 - 120,000 people repent – HUGE PARTY in heaven!!
 - God was rejoicing during chapter 4 - He wasn't suffering...
- **Jonah was - Jonah's the only one suffering in ch4**
 - his anger and bitterness didn't hurt anyone but himself
 - No happy ending for Jonah – not God's / Nineveh's fault! Jonah's fault!
 - His selfishness and his hatred cost him his joy
 - Ironic - mountain-top experience - but he misses out
 - Anger & selfishness locked him a prison of bitterness - robbed joy
- **How often do we make the same mistake?!**
 - when life doesn't go our way, we get angry and bitter and selfish
 - think we have a right to those feelings
 - fail to realize - we're just poisoning ourselves!
 - anger, bitterness, selfishness
 - poison pills
 - will rob you of joy & make you as foolish & pathetic as Jonah
- **Don't be like Jonah! Don't ruin your life like he did.**

Let us avoid Jonah's mistakes. Take a moment to ask yourself honestly...

1) Do you desire God to show mercy to everyone?...

- including...
- I know that's hard. I don't pretend it's easy.
- **But let me encourage you with these two truths...**
- **First... remember we are all sinners who deserve punishment**
 - not a righteous person in this room
 - God has offered us forgiveness & eternal life... as grace - a gift!
 - how can we not extend that same mercy to others?!
 - we are no more righteous than any other person on this planet
 - let that truth inspire you to share mercy with others
- **Second... remember when you choose the path of hate rather than the path of mercy - you are the one who suffers!**
 - not God and not the person you hate. You!
 - hatred is a poison that kills you from within
 - God wants you to know the joy that comes ONLY through mercy
- **The best example of this I know... Corrie Ten Boom**
 - hid Jews during WWII
 - arrested by Nazis & sent to Ravensbruck - Betsie dies slow, painful
 - 1947 - Corrie's ministry brings her face-to-face with guard
 - trusted in Christ after the war
 - asks for Corrie's forgiveness
 - she couldn't give it - hated him for helping kill her sister
 - but she knew: in God's eyes, she was just as guilty - needed grace as much

- prayed for strength, and with heart still screaming in anger, said...
- *"I forgive you, brother! With all my heart!"*
- And then something remarkable happened. In her own words...
- *"For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."*
- When you hold on to hate, it makes a prisoner of you
- When you show mercy, it sets you free!
- As Lewis Smedes so eloquently put it, *"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover the prisoner was you."*
- **Are you willing to extend mercy to everyone - even your enemies?**
- Don't make Jonah's mistake. **Choose mercy.**

2) Do you love that which has eternal value?

- **Jonah** cared more about a plant than about people made in God's image
- **sounds ridiculous - but we do the same thing all the time!**
 - we fall in love with insignificant things: possessions, \$, entertainment
 - end up caring more about them than about God, His Word, people
- **So how do you know if you have fallen in love with a possession?**
 - ask, **"How do I react when that possession is threatened?"**
 - when someone wants to borrow it: generous or stingy?
 - when it gets scratched or dinged: at peace or furious?
- **I have certainly been guilty of this myself - for example, with my car...**
 - my kids get it messy inside, and I have, at time, gotten angry
 - kids do need to learn to be more responsible...
 - but my anger shows what I really care about...
 - not my kids' growth in responsibility... my car!!
 - Foolish!! Because my car will not last - break down, rust, landfill
 - But my kids are eternal! made in God's image!
 - I can be as foolish as Jonah when I choose to love insignificant things
 - I pray that God will break me of my love of things
 - I want to be a good steward of my possessions - not love them!!
 - love God & people - not cars, houses, gadgets, cloths.
- **So what do you love more:** people who are eternal, or stuff which isn't?
 - **When your roommate borrows your cloths...**
 - do I care more about my roommate - who is eternal
 - or my cloths - which will be out of style in 3 yrs / 3 weeks!
 - do you respond out of love for your roommate, or your clothes?
 - **When a neighbor needs to borrow your car...**
 - are you generous with it?
 - when it comes back scratched, can you let that go?
- **Let us be people who love what God loves**
- Don't make Jonah's mistake - **love that which lasts for eternity.**

3) Are you willing to sacrifice your comfort for the good of others?

- **This one is hardest!**
 - by nature - we love our comfort
 - why babies scream when they're hungry or wet - born loving comfort
- **Unfortunately we live in a broken world**
 - **often must choose between our comfort and the good of other people**
- **When you are forced to make that choice, how will you respond?**
 - I'll confess: this week, I did poorly
 - love a good night's sleep - great comfort!
 - sick kids ruin a good night's sleep - woke me up at 3:30 Wed
 - sinfully I allowed that to make me angry & bitter
 - threw a pity party for myself Thursday
 - chose to be grumpy towards my kids
 - demonstrated that I cared more about my comfort than my kids' needs
 - that was selfish and foolish of me!
- Ask yourself...
- **"Am I willing to lovingly sacrifice my comfort for the good of others?"**
 - Money buys comfort - **are you willing to sacrifice your \$**
 - Do you give generously to those in need? missions? church?
 - Or do you hoard your money, spend it only on yourself? = Selfishness
 - **How about your free time?**
 - our most precious commodity - necessary for comfort
 - when someone needs us, are we willing to sacrifice our free time?
 - or do we make excuses / make ourselves unavailable / get bitter?
- **Selfishness made a fool of Jonah, just like it makes fools of us**
- Don't put your comfort above the good of other people. **Choose to be selfless.**

If you're anything like me... you realize you need to CONFESS

- **Close your eyes & confess the times you've acted like Jonah...**
 - chosen anger over mercy
 - chosen to love that which has no eternal value
 - chosen to prioritize your comfort over the good of other people
- **Silence**

With your eyes still closed... think of 2 people who you can either...

- forgive, if they've done something wrong to you
- or who can show undeserved kindness in some way

What exactly will you do to show them grace this week?