

*Emotions Vs. Truth*  
Jonah Melts Down in Frustration  
Consumed Series – Part 3  
Jonah 4  
December 14-15, 2024

Introduction

- How many times has God done things different than the way you expected? The way you wanted? The way you assumed? Right.

God's WAYS are not Our WAYS

- The foolishness of us judging God -
- Where we left off in the story:
  - The Assignment, Rejection & Humbling - Jonah was called by God to go and minister to an enemy group of people that he hated. He refused and tried to rebel. God humbled him significantly and forced him to go.
  - The Result of the Preaching - He went and preached. There was a massive mass conversion of the city and they all humbled themselves before God and called for a fast. God relented from His promised destruction.
  - The personal part of this message – we are about to see a stubborn, immature, selfish, and prejudice man of God embarrass himself. The closer we look the more we see ourselves in him. Prepare to be exposed and embarrassed yourself today. This story is a highlight of the most embarrassing season of his life. What if we did that to the rest of us? What if we took our immature lashing out drama and put it on the big screen to study?
  - Temptation to make Jonah “different” – there is going to be a temptation in each of us to make Jonah out to be a terrible example of a believer. We want to believe that we aren’t like this and that we would never act like this.<sup>1</sup> We want to believe that we know better, and he was just the worst of God’s options of prophets at the time. But I think the truth is far scarier. I think he’s more normal than we assume.

Lesson

- A Too-Loving God
  - Jonah is Livid at God’s Mercy

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<sup>1</sup> “A Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whimpering his insidious message of smug prejudice, empty traditionalism, and exclusive solidarity. He that has ears to hear, let him hear and allow the saving love of God which has been outpoured in his own heart to remold his thinking and social orientation.” NICNT

- *Jonah 4:1-4 – “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” <sup>4</sup> And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”*
- But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. – when the Bible describes something twice: exceedingly displeased & angry, it means he was really ticked off. The doubling of the concept is an intensification technique. Jonah was out of his mind angry. And what was he angry about again? Oh, that’s right, that Nineveh repented, and it looked like God might not destroy them with fire from heaven. What the heck?
- And he prayed to the LORD – It’s funny that when we read the words, ‘he prayed to the LORD/Yahweh’ we are automatically thinking that he’s going to talk about something really spiritual and good. What we find out is that he just wants to blame God and vent about how frustrated he is about the Lord’s actions. In other words, it’s a complaint prayer session. There are a lot of those in the Bible and a lot that come from us, right?
  - The pros and cons of complaint prayers – I find those types of prayers fascinatingly good news/bad news. On one hand it’s complaining as if we are the authority, and I find that offensive. Clearly if we can complain to God we think we have the right to and we shouldn’t. We should be humbled enough to only address Him with respect and appreciation for all He does for us. But on the other hand it’s encouraging because it means that God allows such an intimate and loving relationship that complaining is allowed. He is not destroying us for thinking like that. He welcomes the processing and sharing of our hearts with Him. That’s beautiful.
- And said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? – This is a biblical version of, ‘I told you so.’ In a sense Jonah is rebuking God, telling Him that God was wrong and he was right. Jonah is affirming why he didn’t want to do this in the first place, that it was a foolish errand to be sent on.
  - When we tell God what to do – At the heart of this message is the issue of us trying to tell God what to do and judging His methods. Who are we to do that? Perhaps it’s because He has involved us in such intimate conversation and extraordinary revelation that we think we can do that. We think we know what’s going on, what He’s

thinking, and what's best. So we are giving Him correction or advice on how to handle the world. But what we do we now? I find that it all sounds rooted in arrogance. I feel like in Job's frustration he got close to crossing the line and God shut him down with a, 'where were you when I created everything?' Sometimes God has to do that with us too.

- That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; - Jonah is justifying his running away from God as if it was God's fault and that he was chased into rebellion. How absurd. God, the master, gave an instruction command to His servant and the servant rebelled. That's it. Period. No justification.
  - When we blame God for our bad choices – I wish that this was only a Jonah problem, but I see it in my life. We say things like, well if You allowed me to have a better marriage, I never would have cheated. If you would have given me more money, or the elevation at worked that I asked for, I never would have cheated. But the truth is that **we made the call to sin.** The Bible is clear that God will NEVER FORCE us to sin, but also clearly says that we will consistently be given the OPPORTUNITY to do so.
  - for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful - **What a weird thing to blame God for.** That He's gracious and merciful? Aren't those **some of the most beautiful traits** of God's nature? Of course they are. **Grace means extending something wonderful to someone who doesn't deserve it. And Mercy means not doing something to someone bad that they do deserve.** It's two sides of the coin of love and kindness.
    - frustrated by Grace – **have you ever thought through which bad guys could be saved? We want grace for ourselves but not our enemies.** Imagine thinking through the forgiveness and salvation for your abuser. Or Hitler being peaceful in heaven after all he's done. Or, the cleansing of sin for people who are predators and prey on others. It freaks us out because we think through the lens of bad and worse, when God looks through the lens of fallen creation as a whole.
    - Jonah just got grace from God in the fish – **how quickly we forget that we were once the bad guys.** The beautiful love and grace that rescued us has now become taken for granted and we don't think it should be given to others.

- The parable of the Unforgiving Servant<sup>2</sup> – Matthew 18:21-35 –  
*“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.<sup>23</sup> “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.<sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.<sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.<sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.<sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’<sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.<sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.<sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.<sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’<sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.<sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*
- slow to anger – God’s patience is incredible. We give ourselves all kinds of slack for the habitual bad things that we do, but if we looked at it from the outside we would be horrified to see that we are rebellious monsters. Yet, God consistently hears our prayers, loves us despite, cares for our needs while we are enemies, etc. God’s patience, His slowness to anger, is the only reason we are still alive today.
- and abounding in steadfast love, - this term ‘*steadfast love*’ is a very important term to the Jewish people (and to us). It comes from the Hebrew word *kesed* and it’s a special kind of love that God promised to His people in His covenant with them. Many scholars, for that reason, refer to it as a covenantal love. It means a patient, constant, uber-gracious, blessing, others-focused kind of love. It’s about devotion and commitment despite the other party’s behavior. It’s closest relative word in Greek is *agape*.

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<sup>2</sup> The NICNT commentary highlighted this and it was impossible not to mention.

- and relenting from disaster. – This means that God really doesn't want to destroy people and things He has created. He would have to be forced to do so (them being too dangerous to others around them). God wants to forgive. God wants to move on. God wants to return to blessing. What's so fascinating about this description is that many people have this idea that 'the man upstairs' is waiting with a hammer to bust anyone the moment they do something wrong. The reality is actually the opposite. God is looking for reasons and ways to forgive and extend grace. God doesn't want 'any to perish, but all to have eternal life.'
- How does Jonah know God's nature so well? – He's actually loosely quoting Exodus 34:6-7 where God tells Moses what He's actually like. We would do well to let God define Himself for us and not interpret our opinion of Him by how we view His actions with an imperfect perspective. God is who He says He is. If we think different, we are missing some pieces.
- Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." – Listen to the drama of this guy! He wants to die and step out of responsibility of life. He wants God to kill him. He won't even do it himself. This is such a self-involved thing to say. We are not here for ourselves; we are here for God. We aren't done until He says we are done. If our lives are still bringing glory to God we should be content with that. But unfortunately we aren't. Jonah isn't too different from us.
  - When we are hearing God but not listening – how many times have you seen Christians act differently than the God they serve? How often have you and I behavior out of alignment with our faith? Constantly. We say that we hear God but clearly we aren't listening and obeying.
  - When we revert back to old behavior – Jonah had been humbled, softened and reconnected to God in the belly of the fish, but once he got out he went back to the way that he was. Have you been through a scenario or experience of desperation and felt that you had truly changed only to find that when the tension let up you reverted back to the way you were?
  - When our emotions distract and harm – Emotions are created by God, and they are wonderful. It is an inappropriate Western concept to try to minimize emotion, see them as bad, like the Stoics did. God made us with emotions, and we need to use them for what they are for. Nevertheless, there is a danger when we trust them as fact. Emotions are secondary. Things cause emotions. It's our perception of an event or experience that determines the emotion that is released. If we love

roller coasters a coming drop is exciting. If we don't, it elicits fear. Therefore, the information that our emotions operate from will determine the accuracy of our response. What if we are wrong about something? What if we are afraid of a dog that isn't dangerous? It ruins the experience. The same thing happens when we believe things and feel things about God that aren't true. This is why our doctrine matters. We need to KNOW right things about God so we can FEEL right things about God. One of the most common and famous examples is when our poor relationship with our earthly father's makes us distrustful or distant from our heavenly father.

- And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry? – this is God bringing up a question to get Jonah to look internally and analyze his behavior. The point is an obvious, 'no' response.
  - What are the reasons for Jonah's anger? – Jonah seems really upset. Why? What's the main problems here? I'm sure that the main one is that he hated the Assyrians and wanted them to die and now it looks like they aren't going to. Even worse, they are now humbling themselves and finding themselves in the good graces of God. How irritating! But how about the fact that he just got embarrassed? He just preached a message that didn't come true. How does that make him look? It makes him look like an idiot.
    - Is God allowed to make us look like an idiot for His glory? – He should be. But we are so arrogant to believe that He doesn't have that right. We want self-protection even at the cost of His glory.
    - When God just asks questions to let us come to a realization – Counselors and therapist know a secret. They know that when advice is given it will tend to be resisted. BUT, if they can get the client to discover it themselves, and think it's their revelation, they will accept it. This is why most therapists work through questions to stimulate a client into discovery. They have simply caught up to God's method that He's been using since the dawn of mankind.
- Betting on Failure
  - Jonah Sulks and Waits for Destruction
    - *Jonah 4:5-6 – "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. <sup>6</sup> Now the LORD God appointed a plant<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> The narrator specifies the plant as a qīqāyôn; its identity is uncertain, but it is probably the quick-growing ricinus or castor-oil plant, which in hot climates grows like a tree and gives ample shade with its palmate leaves." NICNT

*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.”*

- Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. – When Jonah saw the city respond in a national fast, he realized his work was done. There was no more reason for preaching to the other 2/3 of the city (he only made it 1/3 of the way through so far and the mass conversion started). He had preached that they would all die in 40 days and he was going to see if that was going to be true. Sure, he saw their repentance but God never gave him the message to preach that repentance would change their outcome. So, at this point he’s still hoping they will all be consumed by heavenly fire. Sweet attitude. So, he made himself a little lean-to to kick back and watch the city from a hillside.
- He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. – wait for the 40 days to end and see if the city would blow it and turn back to their ways and get destroyed anyway. OR, see if the fast and humbling worked at all.
- Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, - meanwhile, since there was quite a bit of time remaining on the 40 days, Jonah was in the for the long haul. During that time God caused a plant to grow up really large and rise over Jonah to help provide cover over the holey shelter that was still letting the sun in.
- that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. – The benefit was that it provided necessary shade and Jonah had MORE COMFORT. How weird that Jonah was concerned about his own comfort awaiting the destruction of others. It’s like complaining about seats being too hard in the observation room of someone being executed for a crime. It’s weird and selfish. At first it seems like God is bringing him blessing in the midst of his bad attitude, but if we continue to read the story we see that this is not necessarily the case (although it’s important to note that God DOES continue to bless us in bad attitudes and bad behavior).
- So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. – This plant became the best thing going for Jonah. He loved this plant. It was providing a cover that he couldn’t do for himself. He was sick and tired of waiting and being so hot wasn’t helping. This plant was such a blessing.
  - Jonah’s unusual relationship with a plant – the way that this story unfolds reveals that Jonah didn’t just like the ease of the plant and consider himself lucky or blessed by it, he took it rather personally. It

was like his only friend in his bitterness. It was helping him and doing what he wanted UNLIKE God who was frustrating him.

- Poking the Bear
  - God Pushes Jonah to the Limit
    - *Jonah 4:7-9 – “But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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.”*
      - But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. – This is demonstrating God’s authority and power over nature. God can make plants grow (He’s the only One who does so), and animals move around. God does whatever He wants, whenever He wants. So, God causes a worm (who actually does His bidding without complaint, unlike Jonah) to eat the plant and ruin it.
      - 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. – What was once a blessing to Jonah now made it all worse as it failed. To add to it, God made a sand storm, or desert storm come up and increase the heat. Everything got more intense, and Jonah started to get faint. Ironically, Jonah was the one that put himself in that situation. God never told him to sit there and wait for destruction. Jonah didn’t put a whole lot of thought and effort into his shelter and now it was costing him.
      - Mad at Loss - Isn’t it interesting that we lament the loss of blessings that at one time we didn’t have AT ALL. Shouldn’t we be glad for the time that we did have it? But once we have it, we assume it’s ours and we have a right to it, so that when it fails we are disappointed and angry.
      - When God causes circumstances to teach us – we tend to learn better from experiences than from instruction. Often God will let us walk through something if we are not listening. When we interact with it, when we live out an illustration, it bypasses our intellectual resistance, and we are forced to face it. For example: If your parent tells you that you are being inappropriate with our finances and we give a rebuttal in frustration, it’s one thing. When we finally end up in debt and have to dig out, we learn.

- And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."<sup>4</sup> – Here we go again. Jonah wants to die. What a baby! Sure, it's how a lot of us operate emotionally, but how embarrassing?!
  - When God's soldiers keep wanting to quit on Him – Notice how many times that Jonah mentions wanting to die. He saying in essence, I would rather be put out of my misery and take the easy way out than to live here and serve You. Elijah said the same thing, although Elijah was far superior of a guy to Jonah. But notice how often humans want to quit on God.
  - But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" – Again, God pushes Jonah to look at his bad behavior and attitude. He also brings up the plant issue. Clearly Jonah was super attached to the plant and had made it special to him.
  - And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. – Shockingly, when faced with the absurdity of his attitude, Jonah doubles down and say, 'yes, I'm justified to act and think like this!' Of course he is incorrect, so this time God has to give him more information, more pieces of the puzzle to get him back to thinking appropriately.
- Preaching to a Wall
    - God Attempts to Re-rack Jonah's Perspective
      - *Jonah 4:10-11 – "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. <sup>11</sup> 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?"*
      - 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. – God is pointing out the absurdity of Jonah's perspective. Jonah was upset about the connection he had with this plant (which in that moment was a big deal to him – but sounds stupid to us thousands of years later). God explains that all of this emotional attachment was about something that was seemingly accidental and sudden to him. What about something that matters?

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<sup>4</sup> "He cannot tolerate the situation any longer and thinks he would be better off dead. By so thinking he does not advance his cause in the eyes of the listening circle. The words rendered wished he were dead occur in only one other place in the OT, in 1 K. 19:4, concerning Elijah's death-wish. Indeed Elijah was sitting under a broom tree when he said it, while Jonah had lately been sitting under the shadow of a ricinus. The narrator's echo of the Elijah story is here, as in v. 3, a deliberate anti-Jonah device. Jonah may mouth Elijah's words, but against that giant of a prophet this squirming victim of his own ideology cuts a pitiable figure." NICNT

- And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons – God is the God and creator of the universe. These are HIS PEOPLE! They are not people made by another deity that He is tending to. They are marked with His icon/image. They are ones who He has cared for day after day, moment after moment. His heart is with these people. Jonah thought of some people as important to God and some people as disposable. God thought in no such categories.
- who do not know their right hand from their left, - This is an important point. God points out that they are IGNORANT. They don't know what they don't know. Yes, they know that bad behavior is not good but beyond that, they don't know the big picture. They don't know God. They don't know what the universe is about.
  - The Ninevites didn't have the advantages of the Jews – God has to remind Jonah that the Jewish people have been spoiled by God. They know Him so well because He personally revealed Himself to them. They believed and had hope and faith because of the miracles, the miracles that Nineveh never saw. The Jews were not a better quality of people, but a people who had been drawn near to God and were changed in the process. If God would have treated Nineveh the same way, perhaps they would be closer to Him than the Jews were.
    - When we judge the world as if they are Christians – it stuns me that Christians judge the world around them morally, as if they see the world the same way. They don't. You know God. I know God. We've experienced God. We have a personal relationship with God. We talk to God. We learned the big picture. We believe in an afterlife. We have the Bible. They don't! How can they see the world rightly when they don't know what God has told us?
- and also much cattle? – This chapter is cows favorite chapter around the world, hands down...or hooves down, should I say. Look at the love and kindness of God toward all of His creation, including animals.

### Conclusion

- Did Jonah learn his lesson?<sup>5</sup> – the story doesn't say. It's intentionally left open-ended so that the reader, the student, would look at themselves.
- Would Jonah have had the same experience if he wasn't alone? – is it possible that Jonah was so easily driven by his emotions (like Elijah was) because he was all alone

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<sup>5</sup> "The story is deliberately left open-ended and the listeners are brought face to face with the existential challenge of the story, just as in the parable of the Prodigal Son the appeal to the Elder Brother was really addressed to the religious snobs of Jesus' day (Luke 15:2, 31, 32)." NICNT

and had no one to bring him back to reality? Who are the people in your life that keep you on track? Are you listening to them?