

Jonah's Anger. God's Relentless Grace.

Jonah 4

MPS God confronts our rebellious heart with His relentless grace to invite us to trust His steadfast love and rest in His sovereign plan.

OBJ Every person should trust the Lord's sovereign will because He reveals His glory at three times.

INTRO

What causes anger with God? Can one live with tension with God? Does God still love us in our tension with Him?

READ Jonah 4:1-11

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ²And 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. ³Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

⁵Jonah 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. ⁶Now the LORD God appointed a plant 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. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸When 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." ⁹But 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." ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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?" Jonah 4:1-11

Chapter 4 clarifies Jonah's tension with God that has run throughout the whole story. God saving Nineveh was more than Jonah wanted, even though he knew God would do it. And that is what he tells God. The chapter begins with Jonah's reaction to Nineveh's revival; he is double angry. Jonah is on fire, burning with anger toward God because He did not judge and destroy Nineveh.

Jonah's anger is so great that he prays and asks God to kill him. But Jonah's reasoning is so absurd it's difficult to understand. He begins by telling God, "I knew you would do this. I tried to warn you about yourself." He admits that what he knew to be true of God, and what God would do in Nineveh, was the very reason he ran from God. Jonah knew God to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and that He would relent from disaster when the Ninevites believed. [Like I said, completely understandable. Who could possibly want to worship a God that was distinguished by these characteristics! (Sarcasm.)] So as a result, Jonah begs God to take his life because it would be better for him to die than to have to experience this travesty of relentless love, mercy, and grace.

The Lord responds with a probing question, "Do you do well to be angry?" Questions are often the best way to make a statement. And God makes a big statement here when He asks, "How is that anger working out for you, Jonah?" The question literally asks, "Are you righteous in your anger?" **The question identifies Jonah's tension with God because it recognizes that Jonah uses some standard other than God as his measure of righteousness.**

Jonah walks away after his most confusing tirade and sets up a tent to sit in its shade. And there he sat to watch what he hoped against, but what he knew God would do to Nineveh. But thank goodness that what Jonah confessed as true of God was right; God is gracious and merciful, relentless in love and patience, wanting none to perish but all to come to eternal life. (2 Peter 3:9) **And in His relentless grace, God pursued Jonah to turn his heart from burning rebellion to love.**



God provides an object lesson to teach Jonah of his rebellion. He appointed a plant to grow up over Jonah to provide shade for his head and save him from his discomfort. Jonah was exceedingly happy at the plant. But the next day God sent a worm to attack and wither the plant. When the sun rose, God sent a scorching east wind so the sun beat down on Jonah's head. The text literally says he was burning. This made Jonah so mad that he told God, again, that it would be better for him to die than to live. And God repeats His question to Jonah again, **"Do you do well to be angry?"** In other words God asks, **"Is your anger doing, or producing, any good in you?"** Jonah responds adamantly that in fact he is righteous in his anger. The Lord responds to Jonah to show him the error of his way. He says that Jonah pities the plant that he had nothing to do with growing, but that served his wants well. And yet, he is angry that God does not pity a city of more than 120,000 persons who do not know His righteousness, and all the creation therein. **Regardless of his indignant claim, Jonah is not righteous in his anger. But, and here's the glory of the gospel, God IS righteous in saving wicked people! And He delights in saving wicked, evil people, ALL wicked, evil people, even religious ones! HOW can a holy God b righteous in saving wicked people? Because in the gospel, Jesus bore the curse of sin and paid the debt of sin, so He could give us His righteousness.**

TRANS And the story ends. Though the reader is confident the story is not over. God's object lesson to Jonah becomes an invitation for us.

God confronts our rebellious heart with His relentless grace to invite us to trust His steadfast love and rest in His sovereign plan.

Jonah is a study of the person of God in salvation and learning to trust His sovereign plan. God is sovereign over all creation. He is relentless in love and grace and pursues people to draw them to salvation and in leading their life. Jonah shows us just how relentless God really is. The Hebrew word *ra'ah* is used in a wide range of meaning. Evil and wicked identifies the Ninevites(1:2), characterizes the trouble of the sailors(1:7, 8), qualifies the disaster God relented from bringing(3:10; 4:2), and labels Jonah's displeasure, anger, and discomfort(4:2,4,6). That seems like a wide array of meanings for a word. And yet we see, especially as we get to the root of Jonah's tension with God, how sin and the sinful nature of our heart manifests itself in so many ways through our life. When God served Jonah's felt needs, it made him happy. But when God did what Jonah did not like, it made him angry, greatly displeased, and even discomforted him to want to die. These are all manifestations of sinfulness in Jonah's life, as demonstrated by use of the same word. Yet in all of these ways, God remained relentless in His love and grace to save. **Jonah's relationship with God diminished to little more than how he felt about God or what he wanted from God above what he knew to be true of God, a terrible place to be.**

God is patient, merciful, and loving, both to the wicked, evil sinner and the rebellious saint. He calls all people to trust Him. But for God's children, we know God, that all these things are true of Him. There is nothing about God that is not fully trustworthy, yet our heart rebels when self-sovereignty is threatened. Contrary to so much "religious Christian culture", Christians don't live without tension with God. Jonah shows that our sinful nature in the flesh makes sure of this. Sin tempts us to believe that "we will be like" God, that we can be right without God. We want to be in control, the master of our life. And as long as we try to maintain control, we will not tolerate any attempt to claim Lordship in some area, way or manner that we do not agree with. This is why Jesus taught that anyone who wanted to follow Him must deny self and take up their cross daily.(Luke 9:23) **God calls us to recognize what we know to be true, that He is worthy, and submit our lives to Him.**

The essence of faith is that we trust God's Word is true, His ways are best, and His will most glorious. Therefore, we crucify the flesh that opposes Him, in every way, to any measure or extent, and at every manifestation, to walk humbly by faith to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why remembering the gospel at all times and regularly immersing ourselves in it, and surrounding ourselves in a fellowship of people that speak the truth in love, is so important. **The Biblical exhortation to "remember the gospel" means we fight to believe and trust that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is our righteousness, as the Word teaches.**

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OBJ Three times when tension with God tempts us to rebel, but in relentless grace God pursues to turn us to trust in Him.

1. When God fails to serve your self-will. 4:1-4

What pleased God angered Jonah. Jonah burned with anger because God did what he did not want him to do. Even worse, God made Jonah participate in what he didn't want to do. And all Jonah could do was watch. **Does this sound familiar?** Few things have the potential to cause us to burn in anger toward God than when His command lead in a way we don't like, didn't ask for, don't agree with. It may be that we don't get an answer to a question, an explanation to a conflict, a situation or relationship doesn't end the way we wanted it to. And often, like Jonah, it comes through someone else but we know God did it. Resting in God's sovereign control over your life is greater, even when it's harder; is more rewarding, even when it demands greater sacrifice; and is more fulfilling, even when it is completely opposite of what you thought or determined. **When God confronts your self-will, it's always because He holds more and greater glory for you.**

2. When God challenges your self-sovereignty. .5-9

Jonah went and set-up a tent and sulk. God followed him, and blessed him to make him glad, then blessed him to make miserable the little world he created. Both were God's blessing. But Jonah didn't like it because it disturbed his comfort and destroyed his control, the same way Jonah's story began. Jonah's anger with God boiled down to this, he was not God. And this is how our tension with God often starts too. When God's calls you to live in a way or with something that you don't like, don't understand, or don't agree with, our first reaction is so often to rebel, to question God's Word, His goodness and glory, all a sin-trained response pattern.

Consider moments when you were dis-comforted in life or something happened beyond your control.

God's command is more glorious than our comfort or control. He commands our life by His Word to reveal His glory. God created you for Him; He's not trying to destroy you. God loves you and wants goodness for you; He's not trying to steal some good from you. God pours His power into you to transform you; He has no interest in destroying you. **When God disturbs the comfort and control of your life, it's always because He has greater glory for you!**

3. When God confronts your self-righteousness. 4:10-11

Jonah's self-righteousness is on full display, and it's both ugly and convicting. Jonah claimed self-righteousness when he took issue with God's right to forgive others. He didn't want God to do for others the very thing he most wanted God to do for him. What supreme hypocrisy! Jonah claimed, "YES, I am right in my anger.", but in fact it was nothing more than a hardened, rebellious heart not wanting to make an honest admission of reality or truth. We do this same thing when we are angered by God showing His love to people that we do not love or like, whether in bringing goodness or withholding judgment, or when we get frustrated by someone else's success, or celebrate at their failure. Until we rest in God's righteousness for us, we will never become more like Jesus to rejoice in God's redeeming power wherever it may be found. God confronts our self-righteousness because it is killing us by our own anger. **God's righteousness releases us to become conduits of His love, mercy, and grace, by sharing the gospel so all can hear and believe in Jesus.**

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CLOSE What pleased God angered Jonah. God's mighty power to save that Jonah loved for himself infuriated him when others received it. God's sovereign control over all creation that blessed Jonah time and time again repulsed him when it blessed others. Jonah's wickedness and evil was not visible to the world, but neither was it hidden from God. The God who knows the heart saw Jonah's wickedness, and acted to root it out. **God is working by His power to confront all things in our life that thwart and threaten us from becoming fully like Jesus.**



Jonah ends the way it does because at the end of the story Jonah is no longer the issue, we are. Jonah writes NOT to convince you of his rightness, but to confront you and how you respond to God when tempted to run in rebellion.

Is your life surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? To say “yes” doesn’t mean that there are no areas or situations that you do not like, agree with, or want to have removed from your life. “Yes” does mean that trust to obey the Lord instead of exercising your will as dominant over His Word.

God is bigger than your tension with Him. God is more glorious than the promise of your temptation to run from Him. God is immeasurably and inconceivably more and greater, in every respect, than the rebellion of your heart wants to deceive you to believe! You can trust Him today and find that His relentless grace will prove sufficient for you!

