

SUNDAY SCHOOL

H

A.P. 06-10-18

HIGHLIGHT: Jonah 3:10-4:11

¹⁰Then God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster He had threatened to do to them. And He did not do it.

4 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. ²He prayed to the Lord:

“Please, Lord, isn’t this what I said while I was still in my own country? That’s why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that You are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to become angry, rich in faithful love, and One who relents from sending disaster.

³And now, Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

⁴The Lord asked, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

⁵Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. He made himself a shelter there and sat in its shade to see what would happen to the city. ⁶Then the Lord God appointed a plant, and it grew up to provide shade over Jonah’s head to ease his discomfort. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant. ⁷When dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered.

⁸As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind. The sun beat down so much on Jonah’s head that he almost fainted, and he wanted to die. He said, “It’s better for me to die than to live.”

⁹Then God asked Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“Yes,” he replied. “It is right. I’m angry enough to die!”

¹⁰So the Lord said, “You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?”



EXPLAIN

Jonah is a short book, but a meaty one. It concerns a prophet of the Lord who was given a Word to deliver to a particularly evil people, so that they might have the opportunity to repent of their sins and be saved from oncoming destruction. Jonah eventually gets to them, after taking a dramatic detour, and sees the Lord's message accepted...and this fills him with anger. Today we will see how Jonah represents each of us who seek something other than God's heart so that we may redirect our focus to Him.

3:10 Some translations have rendered the verb in this “changed His mind,” which is not a theologically accurate way to understand what God does here. We know from Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, Numbers 22:19, etc. that God does not change His mind. More accurately, God *relents* from what He was going to do if they didn't repent.

4:1 The word for “anger” here could mean “to be hot about.” Interestingly, God is about to let him be pretty hot for the purpose of proving a point about Who He is.

4:2 Because of 4:5, it is difficult to say that Jonah knows that the people in the city have repented, so it is also difficult to exactly place his anger. One commentator suggests of his mindset: “Jonah is angry that the whole process is taking place. He will not be able to convert the Assyrians to a monotheistic belief in the Lord and has not been instructed to do so. But why should they be spared for such a superficial ritual, and for that matter, why should they even be warned?”

Whatever the particulars, what Jonah is struggling with are his preconceived notions of justice and his own belief of what he thinks God should be like. How often we do the same! It is important to make the decision every day between two options: our heart or God's.

4:6 “Discomfort” here is the exact same word used in 3:10 for “disaster.” This explicitly links Jonah with the city of Nineveh. The Ninevites have protected themselves from destruction by their response of humility (even if it is not a full, deep faith in Yahweh, they have shown repentance); Jonah protects himself from his discomfort by building a hut. But both of their attempts are not enough to fully protect them from their respective situations—God acts with compassion to complete the job for both of them.

4:10,11 God's rebuke of Jonah's emotional reaction to the plant was an object lesson for him and his disregard for the 120,000 spiritually immature people in the city. Almost as a final blow, God asks Jonah if he could at least feel sorry for the city's animals that were hot, starving, and miserable (see 3:8).



APPLY

1. What stuck out to you or challenged you in what you read in the text?
2. Talk about Jonah's motivation for running from the Lord. What have you always believed his motivation to be? Do you sympathize with his reasoning?
3. Read verses 2:8-9. Jonah's repentance inside of the fish seemed legitimate, but something seems different in Chapter 4. What idol does Jonah seem to be clinging to? What idols do you find yourself being drawn back to?
4. How is Jonah's anger hypocritical, especially considering what all he's just been through? What attitudes do you have that may be hypocritical, considering how much of God's grace you've experienced?
5. What is a worthless idol that you're clinging to that you can give up to the Lord?

RESPOND

- In a few minutes of silence, take stock of the attitudes of your heart. Are they you-focused or are they God-focused?
- Who is one person God is laying on your heart to reach out to in order to demonstrate the grace you've been shown by Christ?



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