

Series: Having a Heart for Nineveh

VBC

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Jonah 4

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“The Ugliness of Small-Minded Grace”

INTRO

I've always like stories of dreamers—people who imagine

- one of my favorites is about a man who was a high school drop out—who bounced around from one job to the next

- and then, one day, sitting in front of a rather unimpressive restaurant run by two brothers

- he noticed that people kept coming for burgers and shakes—and they were genuinely happy when they left

- and so this man, Ray Kroc, began to imagine—began to dream of entering into a partnership with them

- even though he was already 52, with arthritis and diabetes—long since without his gall bladder, thyroid glands

- without money—but with a dream that his wife thought was crazy

But he did it anyway—started his own hamburger joint halfway across the country in Des Plaines, IL—and called it McDonald's

- and the rest is history

All of us have some imagination

- but some of us keep this gift locked away in a prison, held in check by voices that say you can't—you shouldn't—it won't work

- but there is something even more confining--a stunted vision*

- that refuses to peer beyond the veil and see what God may be up to*

- what He is calling us to do*

Few have demonstrated this failure like Jonah

- who lived in a small minded world

- that prevented him from seeing the astounding things God was doing right in front of his face

- reckon with what God was doing and wanted to do through him

- instead-a veil of ungrace obscured his ability to see—

- that grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it

- that grace does not depend upon what we have done for God—but what He has done for us

- all of which is underscored in Jonah chapter 4

1. At this point in the story—Nineveh had responded to Jonah’s message and repented

-Nineveh has gotten right with God—and Jonah is angry (read verse 1)

The translation is much too generous

-Jonah is not displeased-HE IS WHITE HOT!!

-literally--“And it was a wrong to Jonah—a great wrong—AND HE BURNED IN IT!”

-the sight of godless people turning to God pushed Jonah to the boiling point

One would think a prophet of God would be filled with amazement

-sending out prayer letters—letting supporters know how God has used him to reach a pagan culture

-signing book contracts—getting on the religious lecture circuit

Instead, Jonah was embarrassed to be associated with what was happening

-he hated what was taking place

-it’s the role of a prophet to predict the future

-Nineveh will be overthrown in 40 days

-but just the opposite happened—Nineveh was saved—in one day

-it turns out—Jonah was a false prophet

-but it was worse—people were getting right with God

-who had no business getting right with God

-did not deserve to get right with God

-it all came to a boiling point

2. so Jonah vented his anger towards God (read verse 2)

Like an attorney—Jonah made his case

-“See—the evidence proves my point—justifies my actions!”

-this is why I was so *quick* to head for Tarshish

-I could see, anticipate—I knew how things would turn out if I came here

-I KNEW—BASED UPON WHO YOU ARE--THAT YOU WOULD DO THIS!!!

-I knew, based upon the fact you are love—that you would love people

-I knew, based upon the fact you are merciful, you would show mercy

Anger often lays bare what's really in the heart
-Jonah's anger had exposed the real issue

-it's not *what* God did in Nineveh that bugged Jonah
-it's *who* God is—this is what Jonah could not stand

And maybe—for some of us
-our argument with God is less about what He has done
-and more about who He is—this is what we can't handle
-that God is more merciful than we think He should be
-or it might be a hundred other things

3. and not liking who God is—Jonah asks--why live? (read verse 3)

Line by line-we see Jonah at his worst
-small minded, petty, petulant, temperamental, Pharisaic
-dividing the world—as religious people are prone to do—
-into the righteous and the sinful
-when the world is really divided into—
-sinners who admit sin
-and sinners who do not

4. Again we see God's grace extended to Jonah (read verse 4)

-rather than take Jonah up on his offer, God graciously entered into
Jonah's small, sulking, griping, self absorbed world and challenged him to
reconsider the value of his anger
-is it lit "resulting in anything good, reasonable"?

-should you be angry that I am acting according to my nature?
-aren't there other more important things to be upset about than people
turning from their evil ways?!!!

5. But Jonah wasn't interested in answering the question

-any more than we are when we are angry
-anger has a way of saying—don't confuse me with logic
-when we're angry—we often enter into a state of temporary insanity
And we remain stuck because it feels good
-the adrenaline starts pumping and a wave of infallibility comes over us
-we sense we are on to something that matters—that really counts
-that's morally right—at least according to our morals
-Jonah believed he was on to something (read verse 5)

- regardless of what was happening—Jonah remained convinced he was right
- waiting for God to see it his way
- so Jonah sat outside of the city—waiting to witness a Sodom and Gomorrah type event
- much like scientists awaiting the results of their planned nuclear tests—Jonah anticipated something both devastating—and satisfying*

6. But it wasn't Nineveh about to be cursed—it was Jonah's world that was about to be rocked (read verses 6-8)

- for the first time in the whole story—Jonah was happy—deliriously happy (lit-it was a great pleasure)
- a reaction that seems a bit absurd
- Jonah, the chronically depressed, who seemed to take no pleasure in anything
- no pleasure in being called of God
- no joy in being delivered from death
- no thrill over receiving a second chance
- no excitement over being part of impacting a world
- was ecstatic over a gourd plant!!

- but this sovereign God who sent the storm (1:4), appointed the fish (2:1), made the plant (4:6)—sent the worm (4:7)
- and the plant was history
- and then He appointed a debilitating wind
- and with this—Jonah again screamed for death—everything had gone wrong

- and God again in grace responded (read verse 9a)
- and Jonah—now snappish, irritable, grouchy, ill-tempered—shot back (read verse 9b)

- one can hear words bordering on the expletive—Damn right!
- revealing, like our anger often does—that something was deeply wrong on the inside

- what is it about religious people often being the most graceless?
- you would think we would be the most generous

7. So now it was time to teach Jonah—and teach us! (read verses 10-11)

- the contrast could not be more stunning
- here is Jonah-feeling mercy, compassion over a plant
- that existed less than a day

- which Jonah could take no credit for—invested nothing in
- and on the other side—God—having mercy, compassion over a people
- who had lived out days
- whom God had created—nurtured, invested in
- provided food, shelter, breath—held together
- and shown great compassion

- is it unreasonable—Jonah—to expect that you would have more compassion for people than a plant?!!!
- can I not do for a city (which is of significant worth) what you insist I do for a plant (which is of insignificant worth)?

SHOULD I NOT HAVE COMPASSION?

- and here—the book unexpectedly ends—it seems almost abrupt, rude

- we wonder if part of the parchment was lost

- I'm not ready to hear the end of Jonah—I want Jonah's answer

- but Jonah's silence may not mean he has nothing further to say

- maybe it is more—HE HAS SAID ENOUGH!!

- the smallness of his imagination leaves him with nothing more to say that would be worth hearing

It becomes increasingly obvious that the question is left for us to answer

- and how we answer it will determine how the book ends

- will determine our own approach to the world we live in--

- a. Will we accept this freedom and mystery of divine forgiveness—demonstrated through Jesus?

- b. Accept that His death pays the price of those farthest from Him?

- c. Will we enter His work of grace—or sit on the hillside of narrowness and bigotry waiting for judgment?

- d. Will we have more compassion for people than things, plants?

- e. Will our imaginations extend beyond our own Israel—to see the immense world of God's grace?

But behind this question may be a more elemental one

WILL WE ACCEPT GOD ON HIS TERMS?

- or will we insist upon constricting God's ways into our self-crafted expectations

- use Him as an adjunct to carry out His will

-will we whine and chaff and shake our fist when God does not conform to our ways?

-pick up our toys and stomp to Tarshish?g

-sit on a Ninevite hillside waiting for God to see it our way?

-or will we come to terms with this—that God’s hugely dimensioned destiny does not—dare not—square with our child-size plans?