

Jonah 4

Jonah and the Great City Part 4 | God Loves the Nations

Spence Shelton – November 20, 2016

Intro

Christmastime is upon us! And ya'll I love Christmas. Inside I'm Buddy the Elf. Christmas is one of those times, ya'll know this, where our community, is a little more open to coming to church. So we consider this time of year really important as we partner with you in taking the gospel to our community. We begin our Christmas series we call advent (old latin word that means "the coming") where we remember the arrival of Jesus and the implications on the whole world...and we look at the hope it brings for us today. And you and I both have some friends that need some hope. And around Christmas, they will come looking for it. And we have it. We have it. And we are going to celebrate that great hope all month.

Got several fun things planned for our worship services and even some tools we'll be handing out for parents to guide your families along.

One thing I want to tell you about now: this year we are going to have a Christmas Eve Service on Saturday the 24th. In fact, we are going to have 3 of them. Here's what we are asking you: Let's make it count. We need to think of this

almost like an outreach of sorts to our community at a time they are willing to listen. We will not have service on Christmas Day as we will all be tired from Christmas Eve. But our Worship team is already working on Christmas Eve and its going to be pretty awesome. You remember how good Good Friday was. Wait til you see Christmas.

Last thing real quick: I'm excited to tell you we will be holding a member meeting two Sundays from now, December 4th, immediately following our second service. That member meeting will be for the purpose of affirming Tony Ferguson as an elder of Mercy Church. This is a big, exciting moment for Tony and his wife Jill, and a great moment for the entire Mercy Family. December 4th.

Alright. Announcement time is over. Open your bibles to Jonah Chapter 4. This is our 4th week in this series "Jonah and the Great City". Next week Scott Urbanek, our college and missions director, is going to close out our series. He and I have been talking about his message and it's going to be strong as he shows us how to understand Jonah in light of Jesus. Will be strong.

Ok you ready? Let's get into it. We read through it, look at it, then talk about it. Here we go.

[1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. Ok, so if you are new, let me catch you up. As a church we are walking through the book of Jonah together. It's a short

book, 4 chapters long probably only a couple of pages in your bible. And today we come to chapter 4.

Chapter 1: Our prophet was called by God to go proclaim a warning about pending calamity to the people of Nineveh. He ran, but then learns one of life's greatest lessons and that is that you cannot outrun God.

Chapter 2: is Jonah's prayer of repentance where he seems to have a genuine moment of heart change where he recognizes his need for the Lord and there in the nasty fish belly he repents, turns back to God.

Chapter 3: Jonah goes to Nineveh this time and, albeit begrudgingly, he preaches. He warns Nineveh about God's destruction and everyone in Nineveh seems to repent. When you see the "it" in our first verse today that displeased Jonah, he's talking about Nineveh's repentance. And it feels like Chapter 3 should be the end. Maybe a verse 11: Nineveh repented and Jonah returned home rejoicing in the Lord.

But instead we get chapter 4. And as it opens this huge act of God's mercy on Nineveh is met with Anger from Jonah. And this is where we are going today. This look into is God's heart for people and how Jonah deals with it. And I want you to grab ahold of one truth today ok:

The call to the nations is the window into God's heart.

God is going to challenge us today. And the challenge is not just to go tell the gospel to the nations. It's deeper than that.

The challenge is to see God's heart for the nations. And then to hold his heart for lost people groups up against your own heart. And see how closely they align.

(art for kids hub) – Draw yours and then put it beside the expert. You think "yeah I did a good job" and then...oh I'll never be that good.

Because what we will see today is that God isn't after begrudging obedience to his commands. He's after your heart. So we want to get an honest assessment of where our hearts are. And some of you, maybe for years, have been living a life of cold-hearted (not that you are a mean person)...un affected obedience. Like Jonah you'll do what God says but its been a long time since your heart has been in it. You are just going through the motions. Today I'm praying God breaks through and changes your heart as you see his.

[2] 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. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

To say it mildly Jonah is not happy. In fact he's fuming mad & He's kind of lost his mind. And of course now we see the reason he fled to Tarshish. If you remember in week 1 we

looked forward to this moment. Jonah knew the character of God. going to be so important today. He knew it. And he didn't believe Nineveh deserved a merciful God like Jonah's God. Jonah is so out of sorts he actually quotes God's own words to him in protest. Verse 2 "gracious and merciful, slow to anger" – It's a quote from God's own mouth about himself. There's this account in Exodus where Moses asks to see God and God says no that will kill you. My holiness will kill you. But, hide between these rock faces up on the mountain here and I'll come by. And as Moses hides God passes by and as he passes by the Lord says this about himself:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Exodus 34.6

This is who the one true God is. And Jonah is now trying to throw that in God's face as a character flaw of God. And he's so mad, he says you know what, just kill me now. Because I cannot live in a world where you would let this people, with their gross injustice, go unpunished. Why is Jonah so upset?

Because even though Jonah is now obedient to God's commands, his heart isn't in it. And listen: **heartless obedience to God is deeply frustrating to your soul.** You ever been there? It's draining, and eventually turns you into a bitter prideful person. You live the moral life where you

obey the 10 commandments but...your walk with him is cold. That's Jonah.

Is that you? Maybe angry at God that you aren't getting what you think you deserve...and someone else is getting something you know they don't deserve? Why would an enemy of God be shown mercy from God? Doesn't make sense. Why did the jerk in your company get the promotion and you are over here doing things the ethical way and nobody cares. Come on God! God where is your justice!? That question is your heart drifting away from God's heart. Because you aren't seeing people like God sees them. That was Jonah's problem. The problem God was trying to reveal to Jonah. Let's keep going:

[4] And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?" [5] 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.

Do you do well to be angry? - a great comment for you in your life. "Is that working out for you?" God's going to ask him this question again in a minute.

See what Jonah is doing? He's sitting on his rear like the Grinch looking over whoo-ville (YES let the Christmas references pour down like rain!). He almost is becoming the very evil he saw in Nineveh. He became angry when he see's God relenting from violence. That's why he's outside the city. He's holding this sad one man vigil in hopes God

comes to his senses and sends fire and judgment onto them. Do you see how his religion has become his source of violence? He is moral and upright, they are wicked. Why don't you give them justice!?

Watch this: our religion so quickly morphs into pride the minute we forget God's grace on US. That we aren't actually any better than the worst of God's enemies. Talk about that more in a bit.

So here our boy Jonah sits out on the dirt face frozen in his best Michael Phelps scowl at Nineveh. Then comes a somewhat odd but at the same time really great revealing ending to the Jonah story.

[6] Now 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.

Just like the Lord appointed the fish, he appointed the plant. I love when God himself uses a great teaching illustration. That's what the plant is. The plant is there as a small act of mercy. To "save him" one rendering can be to "deliver him from harm." See the lesson? God is delivering Jonah just like he is delivering Nineveh.

Jonah could hardly miss the point that this, too, was a merciful gift to him from God. But such gifts were fine with him only as long as they were not also given to his enemies. See the hypocrisy God is calling out? Nineveh gets

deliverance from divine wrath and Jonah gets mad. Jonah gets small little deliverance from sunburn and he's exceedingly glad. God is setting him up!

[7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] 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. [9] 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."

This seems like an odd encounter doesn't it? I mean is God just harassing Jonah? Of course not. The author is telling us this because in verse 9 we see the question really permeating the whole book of Jonah. Do you do well to be angry Jonah? Really Jonah? This is what you are angry about? And Jonah is so messed up now. His heart, and God's heart, are so out of sync. Which is what God is trying to show him, so God drops the lesson in our last two verses:

[10] 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."

Really you pity the plant? You don't pity it. You pity yourself. I provided the plant....And by the way...it's just a plant. It's insignificant Jonah. You are being so dramatic

over this insignificant plant. You really only care about yourself Jonah. Let's be honest here.

And then God drops the lesson of the plant:

[11] 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?"

If you care for this little insignificant plant, should I not care about this great (which can also mean significant) city? 120,000 people. Aren't humans a bit more valuable than the plant Jonah?

Daniel Timmer in his commentary on Jonah nailed Jonah's fatal flaw "Jonah wants to receive God's grace without being changed by it, and at the same time to snatch it away from those whose lives *are* in fact changed by it." ¹

Is that you? You want the blessings God gives but still want God to operate on your terms? God I want your grace on my life but I don't want you in charge of my life.

I believe God is calling some of you to go proclaim the gospel and you are unwilling. You may say...I'm not like Jonah. I don't hate lost people. In fact I think it's a good thing to tell people about Jesus I'm just not ready or I'm just not the one to go. Says who?

¹ Timmer, Daniel. *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, salvation, and spirituality in the book of Jonah.* From the NSBT series (Downers Grove IL IVP: 2011). 133

Listen, God loves the nations. And the reason Jonah is so angry is that his heart is about himself and his preservation. And when God called him to take the gospel to the nations his true heart and God's heart collided. And his true self was revealed.

The call God is placing on us Mercy Church, to take the gospel to the nations, is our window into his heart. And your willingness to obey him...that's your window into your own heart.

Lip service to God's mission is not obedience. And a lot of Christians are really good at tacit, lip service endorsement that allows us to still retain control of our lives. But what if we loved the nations like God does?

We'd run to the lost with the gospel! We'd beg God for their salvation. We'd give whatever it takes to see the nations reached with the gospel. And if you are frustrated right now that may be the spirit of God challenging your true heart. Do you love what he loves?

I told you God's call to the nations is a window into his heart. I want us to look through that window and from chapter 4 I want you to see three things God loves. And I want you to compare your heart to God's. Remember that's what we've said before that the bible is like. It's like this mirror that shows you who you really are and at the same time gives you a vision for where God is calling you. As you

are encountered by what God loves, does it match up with what you love?

God loves the city

The ending of Jonah I think is the oddest ending of any book in the bible. It just kind of cuts off. God says

[11] 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 much cattle? What is that? God loves cows? God is not talking about how repentant these cows have been. Here's what's happening. See today your money that makes up our economy is small. Dollars, coins, and little micro chips in your cards. But back then your money was big, hairy, and you had to feed it 2-3 times today. He even cares about their economy. He cares about the flourishing of the city.

But chiefly, his point is that he is comparing people to the plant. And he is saying Jonah, that's a plant. If you love that plant...how much more beautiful, more valuable...are people than a plant.

Let me explain. How many of you have ever been on the Blue Ridge parkway? If you are new to NC, you need to go there. Wait till the smoke clears and then...go. There's a trail just outside of Asheville that takes you to a small lookout on one of the mountains and you can look out as far as you can see and the view is breathtaking. It's my most

favorite site because it is beautiful. And this week I was deeply challenged by God about that. Because as beautiful as that landscape is...do you know what it is? A bunch of plants. And in this window of Jonah 4 I look through and I see God valuing people so much more than plants. People are what he finds most beautiful. And where do you find them? In the city. Do you know what God finds most beautiful? It's not the mountains...it's Monday morning at the DMV. Why? Because it is packed out with his most prized possession...PEOPLE! Does God love the lake? Sure. Know what makes his heart beat though: that line you stood in to vote. Office parks, traffic jams, malls...places that are packed with PEOPLE.

That's why God loves the city...its full of his most beautiful creation. Do you love the city? Let me ask it another way: Do you view your time here in Charlotte through the lens of what you can get from it or how you can carry God's mercy into it?

Let me say there are so many of you that inspire me to love our city more and I'm so grateful for you. I see guys like Jack Guthrey who spend their afternoons over at Hoskins Park Ministries giving his life to helping men get back on their feet after their lives fell apart. That's Jackie Austell giving her time to helping to fight the human trafficking problem here in our city. That's just a couple of examples and I could go on. Do you love this great city as God loves it? Too often we think of the church as a refuge from the city when God designed it to be a blessing into the city.

God loves the nations

Couple centuries later Israel is going to be conquered by Babylonia and will find themselves exiles into Babylon. Another foreign enemy nation just like Nineveh. Jeremiah 29 records God telling the exiles to move into this foreign city. To build houses and to marry and to plant gardens. Basically establish themselves as citizens. And then he says "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

God uses the exile to bring his grace and mercy into the very city that captured his people. And when he brings his people out 70 years later, some from Babylon will come with them as converts to the one true God. He is weaving a plan to bring all people groups back to himself. Why? Because he loves them. We talked about this last week. Now the question is how can we actively love them? John Piper in his book *Let the Nations be Glad* said it this way "Love is helping people toward the greatest beauty and the highest value and the deepest satisfaction and the most lasting joy and the biggest reward and the most wonderful friendship and the most overwhelming worship – love is helping people toward God. We do this by pointing to the greatness of God."²

² Piper, John. *Let the Nations be Glad* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker: 2003) 33.

Now right here is the spot where we need to pause and be honest. You hear me say God loves the nations. I'm asking you if you love the nations. And you are like...well I think it's sad that they don't know Jesus. Is that feeling love? Well, it's kind of impossible to love an abstract idea isn't it.

And many Christians search their hearts, after hearing about God's heart for the nations, guilt ridden hoping they will discover or generate a heart for the nations. But it's just hard to love a statistic or a label on a map. It's probably not going to happen all of the sudden. That's the gap between you and God. God sees them & knows them & loves them. And the way you begin to develop God's heart for unreached people is to go look them in the eyes and hear their stories.

And as you do...here's the cool thing...you will experience more joy in Christ yourself.

Here's the 3rd thing you can discover as you look at Jonah 4

3. In sharing God's love with others you discover more of it yourself

Jonah missed this. Our participation in God's mission is actually a means of grace in our own lives. I'll prove it to you: When we baptize a new believer here at Mercy its like a ripple of joy runs through our church. The person is rejoicing in new life they have found in Christ! And then the

other people closest to that person...in their inner circle...are celebrating with joy! Tears are completely common in that circle because they've been praying for that person and now that person has found true life. And their heart is worshipping because God has proven himself faithful! And then the rest of the church starts celebrating because even though they don't know that person well, they are reminded of God's love afresh.

In God's sovereignty he has made us for his love. And the more we dwell on it, and the more we give it away to others, the deeper we sink into it. As I watch the same gospel restore addicts, save marriages, humble atheists, and rescue wandering souls I become more in awe of how powerful God is.

Remember that question: Who is your 1? As we go into Christmas I want you thinking about who your 1 is.
