

# Jonah

## It's Bad Enough to Be Wrong...

Jonah 4:I-II

This Week's Message  
February 25, 2024

*Jonah: It's Bad Enough to Be Wrong...*

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.*

Jonah 4:1  
(New International Version)

### ***Sunday's Scripture Reading*** ***Jonah 4:1-11***

<sup>1</sup>*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.*

<sup>2</sup>*He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

<sup>3</sup>*Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

<sup>4</sup>*But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

<sup>5</sup>*Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.*

<sup>6</sup>*Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.*

<sup>7</sup>*But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.*

<sup>8</sup>*When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."*

<sup>9</sup>*But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."*

<sup>10</sup>*But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.*

<sup>11</sup>*And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"*

On Sunday, I will conclude the series of messages from the book of Jonah, as we turn to chapter 4.

I have remarked several times during the course of this series that Jonah is not a person to be admired. There is nothing positive that we learn about Jonah in this story. Nothing. This unfortunate reality led to the title of my message for Sunday – *It's Bad Enough to Be Wrong....* Jonah was wrong. Completely wrong. But his being wrong wasn't the most unfortunate part of the story. While it was bad enough that Jonah was wrong – wrong about how he viewed the Ninevites and wrong about how he felt about God calling him to go to Nineveh – he couldn't simply be wrong. No, Jonah had to loudly broadcast just how wrong he was. Listen to some of what he says in the first few verses of chapter 4 – *but to Jonah this seemed very wrong*. What was it that Jonah believed to be wrong? God's mercy. At the end of chapter 3, we read of God's mercy on the Ninevites, an action of which Jonah did not approve. Jonah then goes on to express his displeasure with God by saying, *isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that*

*Questions to Consider –*

\* Jonah was clearly not at all comfortable with the people of Nineveh. To some extent, this is understandable, as the people of Nineveh were enemies of the people of Israel. But God had called Jonah to go to the Ninevites to preach to them. Jonah, unfortunately could not, or would not, move beyond his disdain for the Ninevites. To be fair, we don't always do well at moving beyond our dislike of some people. How then, do we move beyond our discomfort with and dislike of people who are different from us?

\* How can we foster greater understanding between people who are different from one another?

\* Why do you think some people seem to relish the idea of God punishing others?

\* Jonah disapproved of God's love and compassion toward the people of Nineveh, he did so because he disapproved of the Ninevites. Because Jonah disapproved of the Ninevites, he believed that God should disapprove of them as well. Do we ever project our feelings about others onto God, and expect God to feel the same towards other people as we do?

*you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.*

It's bad enough that Jonah felt the way he did, but to express those feelings, and to express them to God in the manner that he did, with such an element of disdain, revealed the depth of Jonah's contempt for the Ninevites and his unwillingness to

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align himself with God's will. It seems obvious, to me, that if you have such a level of contempt for people, you would remain quiet about it, but not Jonah.

In chapter four, Jonah finally admits to God what he had until that point been thinking but had not been verbalizing, and it is this – Jonah did not like the way God operated, which meant that Jonah was doing more than simply objecting to God's actions. The folly of Jonah's complaint is that he is objecting to the very nature of God. It is God's nature to be compassionate and loving, and Jonah knew this, and because God was prone to compassion and love, Jonah wanted nothing to do with the mission he was given. Sadly, it wasn't that Jonah did not understand the nature of God; he understood it very well – he just rejected it.

Instead of desiring love and mercy, Jonah wanted judgment and punishment. Jonah wanted to shrink the circle of God's love, allowing in only those of whom he approved. There are still too many people who want to shrink the circle of God's love, but however much they might want to shrink the circle, God wants to expand it.

I Peter 3:9 says that *the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* Jonah could never understand those words. Instead of desiring God's grace and mercy upon the Ninevites, he went out of the city, found a place to sit down, and waited, hoping that God would destroy Nineveh instead of offering them mercy.

I hope to see you Sunday, and until then, God bless you!