

Week 5

Hey Jonah... God Loves Everybody Else Too
Jonah 3:10- 4:11, Mathew 5:43-48

Welcome

Good morning. Here we are. We have reached the end of Jonah. I hope this has been helpful for you these last few weeks. I'm so grateful for this opportunity to share what God has placed on my heart. Would you stand (if you are able) and pray with me?

- Prayer -

Recap

Let's remind ourselves how we got here. We are walking through the book of Jonah and trying to read it as the Jewish people would have read it originally. Obviously this is not easy, but it is important for us to try to put ourselves into that world a little bit and look for those context clues.

So let's imagine that we didn't know how the story ended - Ok here is Jonah, running away from this mission to the Ninevites (well, yeah, those guys are bad news, so that is relatable, I wouldn't want to go either). God has other ideas and sends all the forces of nature to conspire against Jonah. Jonah finally does go to Nineveh and God's message is heard. The people repent of their evil ways and God does not destroy the city. If the book ended right there at the end of chapter 3 is it a good ending? Yes, right? Mission accomplished. That's where a lot of the kid's book versions leave off right?

But then the author drops the floor out from underneath us on the very first line of chapter 4.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

We have been reading ahead, keeping this ending in mind as we studied the beginning of the story, but if we hadn't been reading ahead I think this ending is surprising. Jonah is ANGRY because the mission is *successful*? That doesn't seem right. Wait a minute Jonah - wasn't it, like, your job, your calling, to get people to repent? Was this not the goal all along?

So here Jonah is revealing his real motivation. It's like the end of a mystery novel, right? The detective calls everyone into the room and explains what was REALLY going on the whole time.

That's what Jonah is doing **in Chapter 4:**

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. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

You can really imagine him saying this prayer through gritted teeth right? *"I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,"* I knew you were like this God, you've always been like this! You have been like this from the beginning!

Of course the irony is that these are God's own words that Jonah is spitting back at him.

In Exodus 34 as God passed before Moses he proclaimed, *"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"* - this is Yahweh's description of himself. It is one of the most quoted lines throughout the Old Testament. But here Jonah is turning it into an insult.

And of course it is completely hypocritical. It wasn't that long ago that Jonah was in the belly of the fish and God showed mercy to him. Why can't Jonah show mercy to the Ninevites?

But the Lord replied: Is it right for you to be angry?

It is interesting that God's response to Jonah is actually in keeping with this character that Jonah has just used as an insult. God is trying to engage Jonah in conversation. God is being remarkably patient and gracious. "Come on Jonah let's talk about this...Is it right for you to be angry? What is Jonah's response. Silence. Talk to the hand! It just says he leaves the city.

Word Play

It is now that I get to let you in on another one of God's little jokes. We have seen several of them over the last few weeks. Of course you know that the humor in this story is one of the reasons why I love it so much.

Well, probably my favorite joke in the whole book is one that God gets at Jonah's expense back in chapter 3. We could have talked about it last week but I wanted to save it for today.

Go back to Jonah's 5 word sermon - 8 in English "yet 40 days and Nineveh will be what? A lot of translations have overthrown right, others will say destroyed. The Hebrew word is "hapak". Say it with me "hapak". Well what is hapak? It just means to turn over. For example in Hosea, Ephraim is described as a cake not properly "hapak" - as in, it was burned on one side. Like a pancake that didn't get flipped over. But "hapak" gets used metaphorically dozens of times in the Old Testament. **Let's look at some examples:**

Psalm 66:5-6

Come and see what God has done:

he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.

He [hapaked] the sea into dry land;

they passed through the river on foot.

Psalm 30:11

You have [hapaked] my mourning into dancing;

Jeremiah 31:13 is basically the same thing "*I will [hapak] their mourning into joy;*

So "hapak" can mean to turn something from bad to good, but it also could mean to **turn from good to bad**

Joel 2:31

The sun shall be [hapaked] to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Proverbs 12:7

The wicked are [hapaked] and are no more,

but the house of the righteous will stand.

Lamentations 4:6

The punishment of my people

is greater than that of Sodom,

which was [hapaked] in a moment

without a hand turned to help her.

Hmmm, what happened to Sodom? Fire from heaven right?

Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be [hapak]

An interesting detail: In chapter three verse 1, God tells Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh and speak “the words I give you”. So whose sermon is this anyway? So here we go, which meaning do you think Jonah had in mind as he was preaching? The fire from heaven version right? Which meaning did God have in mind? And of course, what actually happens? Ho ho Ho, that's a good one right!

I think this is hilarious! You think it's funny right? What about Jonah, does he think it is funny? No, he figures out that he got tricked and he is MAD. He wanted to see Nineveh destroyed.

So what does Jonah do?

The Leafy Plant Strategy

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. 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. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.

God really uses his full range in this story doesn't he? He appoints a huge storm, a huge fish, a medium sized leafy plant and now a tiny worm. **And finally:**

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.” But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”

So here God is employing a new strategy. Jonah didn't want to talk about Nineveh, but God is still trying to get through to him so what he does is he gets Jonah to care about something, anything, other than himself. So we will call this the leafy plant strategy.

“Ok, Jonah you didn't answer me when I asked why you were angry about Nineveh, but now how about this: is it right for you to be angry... about the plant?”

And what does Jonah say?

“Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”

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.

God is being very patient with Jonah. It's like God says: “OK Jonah we can work with that. Jonah, here you are, you care deeply about this plant. You didn't plant it. You didn't make it grow, but you care about it. OK, let's just grant that to you Jonah. Let's say it is legitimate for you to care about the plant. How noble of you Jonah. But don't you think, I mean, is it alright with you Jonah... if I care about something outside of myself, something maybe a little more important than a plant, like say, an entire city, full of people and all their animals? Ha! Do you get it? If you didn't think by now that this story was supposed to make us laugh... well, the last word in Jonah is literally COWS.

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! (Right! Because you remember the king made the livestock repent in sackcloth too! So God spares them as well!)

But, forgetting the humor for a minute, this is a good question right? Why shouldn't God care about all of these people? Why can't Jonah understand this? Or does he? What is Jonah's response? The story just ends? Does he answer God's question? We don't know... it's just cows and then... nothing. Where is the ending!?

Well, I think the obvious reason there isn't more of an ending because this story is not about Jonah, is it? This is a story about us. It has been all along hasn't it?

The question is not – “how did Jonah respond?” The question is how will you or I respond when we realize that God loves our enemies too.

I think, at its core, Jonah isn't a story about what happens if you run away from God. It isn't a story about some guy that got swallowed by a fish, it isn't some sort of documentary about a brief revival in the city of Nineveh. No, this is a story about learning to love our enemies the same way God does. This story is meant to teach us about the character of God and the fact that he loves everyone, not just me.

This is very much part of being a Christian. Jesus says in the Matthew passage we heard earlier: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Personal Connection

So....

Do you have an enemy? I mean in some way we all do, right? There are, like, terrorists in the middle east that want to destroy us right? But they don't know us personally. Let's look closer.

I told you in the first week that the story of Jonah is near and dear to my heart because Tim Mackie's sermon series on Jonah had a big impact on me, it “haped” my life several years ago. You see at the time, I had an enemy. They were a coworker, someone who wasn't really my boss but who sometimes thought they were my boss if you know what I mean. Our personalities clashed hard and we had many arguments. And I resented working with this person. I considered quitting my job on account of this person. Do you, or have you ever, had anyone in your life like that?

I was in a pretty bad place with this relationship until I was convicted by Tim Mackie. I listened to his sermons on Jonah and I was convinced that I needed to start praying for my coworker. I think the prayer changed me a lot more than it changed them, and it took some time, but eventually we made peace. We still occasionally clash heads, but today we clash heads as friends. Maybe not best friends, but we get along! And I never would have dreamed it was possible. God is good Amen?

What about you? Can you think of someone, a coworker, a rival, a family member, a neighbor, someone who actually knows you that you think of as an enemy? Maybe you can't think of anyone right now, so what about this: Have you ever voted? It doesn't matter who or what you voted for, if you picked sides even once in this country then guess what, there are people out there who hate your guts. Which is pretty sad if you ask me but that's the truth right?

The challenge of Christianity is that God calls on us to love everyone, even our enemies. Because he died for them too.

Gordon Wilson story

While you are thinking about who your enemy is, I have one more story for you. It is about a man named Gordon Wilson. Have you ever heard the story of Gordon Wilson? He lived in Ireland during the “troubles”. Which is the shorthand name for a kind of civil war that lasted for about 30 years between protestants in

northern Ireland who wanted to stay part of great Britain, and the Catholics who wanted the whole island so be independent. There was a lot of violence between paramilitary groups on both sides.

Now it so happens that on November 8th 1987, Gordon Wilson and his family are at a remembrance day parade – basically what we would call our Memorial day parade. And during the parade one of these paramilitary organizations, the Provisional IRA, exploded a bomb that collapsed a building on top of the crowd.

And Gordon Wilson and his grown up daughter get trapped under some rubble. He survives, he is rescued by the first responders, but his daughter is killed along with 11 other people. And the part of this story that sparked the most attention occurred several hours later in a nationally televised interview with the BBC where Gordon Wilson described his last conversation with his daughter. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

["She held my hand tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say." Then to the astonishment of listeners, Wilson went on to add, "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life... She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night, [that God might forgive them.]" Historian Jonathan Bardon recounted, "No words in more than twenty-five years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact."

And this moment ended up being a kind of turning point in the troubles. Gordon Wilson becomes a kind of campaigner for peace. He held an event a few years later where he publicly invited former members of the IRA to attend and where he personally forgave them and pleaded with them to stop the violence. Ten years after the bombing the leader of the IRA issued a public apology. And while there are still tensions in northern Ireland, relations have been marked by significantly less violence in recent years thanks in large part to Christians like Wilson who have been willing to work for peace.

But it was interesting, that there were Christians during this time who were critical of Wilson for meeting and praying for the members of the IRA. They didn't think the terrorists deserved to be forgiven. And who does that sound like? hmmm

It makes me wonder how I might respond in a similar situation. How do we as Christians in this country respond to violence? How do we respond to the actions of those who intentionally or unintentionally work to injure or kill. Are we angry? Do we pray for God to wipe them out? Do we rely on forces like the police, military, or the courts, to get revenge to get "justice"? Do we pray for our enemies?

Closing challenge

So today as we close, I have a challenge for you.

Let's take a minute to think of your "enemy" if you can. A specific person is best. Now here is the exercise you can do in your prayer time this week. Take a piece of paper and write down everything you hate about your enemy. This is the fun part! Oh, yes, they are selfish and self-centered, they only care about themselves, they are always rude to me, or whatever. Get it all out on paper, it's very cathartic.

And then, when you are done, you set the paper in front of you, and you pray. And then you take your pen and you go through line by line and ask yourself: "have I EVER, in ANY WAY exhibited this behavior toward someone else?" Have I EVER acted selfishly? Have I ever been rude? Have I ever talked about someone behind their back? And if the answer is... well... yes, then you cross out each line as you pray your way through the list. And when you get to the bottom of the page you will probably have a much smaller list of grievances. And then the only question is: Will you choose to be an agent of peace in a world of conflict? Like Gordon Wilson? Will you respond better than Jonah?

Would you stand and pray with me.