

Way Down in the Middle of the Ocean
“Jonah a Man Full of Anger”

Introduction: This short book portrays the “up and down” aspect of a servant of the Lord refusing to do what God had called him to do.

- Jonah initially ran from the call of God (Chapter 1) due to fear, disgust, and being disgruntled with the wicked people of Nineveh.
- We discovered that in a rowing contest with God, we always lose.
- God’s grace in the form of a great fish was extended to Jonah where he repented (Chapter 2)
- Jonah was given a second opportunity to preach in Nineveh and this time he was obedient (Chapter 3)
- The Ninevites heard the Word, repented, and were shown mercy (3:10)

Today: Jonah is angry about the outcome of his preaching and the mercy given to Nineveh.

Four times reference is given regarding Jonah’s anger

QUESTION: If honest, would you say that Jonah’s narrative reflects well the character of many Christ followers—up and down?

By the end, two reflection questions:

1. How do I connect with Jonah?
2. How do I resonate with the Ninevites?

I. Jonah—The Epitome of Selfishness

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 4 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 4 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." Jonah 3:10-4:3 NASB

A. Jonah's displeasure with God stemmed from his selfish plans and desires.

1. Nineveh—wicked people and city (Jonah 1:2)
2. People of Nineveh committed great atrocities
3. Jonah fled initially because he feared for his life and his reputation with Israel
4. Jonah had no desire to witness Nineveh being spared—he wanted complete destruction. Why?

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. 4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. Jonah 3:10-4:1 NKJV

- a. Wickedness of Nineveh, people did not deserve to live.
- b. Them being spared could prolong the pressure against Israel.
- c. Jonah was a nationalist, pro-Israel, anti-foreigner and longed for their end

B. Jonah's concern for self was the reason for his disobedience

So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Jonah 4:2 NKJV

1. He fled for Tarshish to avoid the possibility for Nineveh to repent.
2. Jonah's logic: I flee, no word is preached, no conviction available, no repentance=destruction.

NOTE: Jonah's selfish nature resulted in a servant of the Lord preserving his life and reputation at the expense of someone else's life and obedience to God.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4 NKJV

3. He was aware of God's character—compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, relents concerning calamity.
4. Destruction of Nineveh as self-preservation was of more value than obedience to God's call.

C. Jonah's selfishness distorted his view of God and his understanding of God's mission.

"Jonah's sulking disappointment came from a failure of imagination, a failure of heart. He had no idea what God was doing—the largeness of his love and mercy and salvation. He had reduced his vocation to his own performance—he was in the right place, doing the right thing—but he interpreted everything through His Jonah ideas, his Jonah desires." Eugene Peterson

NOTE: It's not enough to just know of God's character, we have to embrace God's heart.

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. Matthew 15:8 NKJV

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45 NKJV

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16-17 NKJV

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 NKJV

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Psalms 34:18 NKJV

TRUTH: Salvation is available for ALL people despite how wicked or sinful they are.

1. Have I allowed my agendas, biases, and ideas to distort my understanding of God's mission?
2. Am I angry because MY plans are not panning out? Is it possible God has something else in mind?
3. Has my political agenda—attempt to preserve my ideal of a nation caused me to forget that my citizenship ultimately lies in Heaven?

II. Jonah—Displaying Unmerited Anger

Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" 5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:4-8 NKJV

A. The Lord addresses Jonah's anger

Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Jonah 4:4 NKJV

B. The creator teaches Jonah a lesson about the unreasonableness of his anger

1. Waits outside the city to witness the outcome of the Word of the Lord
2. The creator appointed a plant to provide shade for Jonah—"extremely happy"—change of moods
3. The creator appointed a worm to attack plant
4. The creator appointed a scorching east wind over Jonah
5. Jonah pleaded again for his own death

"The shoe Jonah wanted Nineveh to wear was on his foot now, and it pinched."—Leslie C. Allen

- Jonah desired destruction
- Jonah's theology became a personal reality
- How did that feel Jonah?
- Do you have a right to be about this plant?

TRUTH: When our changing circumstances determine our moods instead of allowing the never-changing, consistent, faithful God to be our fixed point, we will never find true peace and satisfaction.

III. Jonah—Ignorant of Divine Mercy

Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10 But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?" Jonah 4:9-11 NKJV

A. Jonah operated by self-interest

1. Attachment to the plant minimal—here and gone (v. 10)
2. Concern was not for the plant but his own protection

B. God operates out of genuine love

1. Parable of gardener (prepares soil, plants, tends to, destroyed)
2. God's concern is for Nineveh—I made them
3. Your pain is nothing to mine when I consider their destruction—my creation

C. God extends mercy

Get what you do not deserve: forgiveness, compassion

1. Spared Nineveh for a season
2. God had compassion for people because they belonged to Him
3. If God who is perfect and holy is able to show mercy, then we who have been shown mercy should show mercy to others.

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Matthew 9:36 NKJV

D. God's compassion, His mercy, and His grace are available for ALL

IMPORTANT LESSONS

1. *"No one should oppose God's mercy in receiving sinners into the Kingdom"—Mark Boda and Gordon McConville*

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?" Jonah 4:11 NKJV

QUESTION: It's easy to pray for family and prodigals to be welcomed into God's family, but how about extending mercy to the murderer, the rapist, the shooter, or the Muslim? Someone who has hurt you.?

2. A person who resents the mercy of God toward his or her enemy shows enmity to God's purposes and discontinuity with God's thinking.

QUESTION: Does not God desire ALL to come to repentance? Should we not have God's heart and mind?

3. People of God's Kingdom ought to be the most grace giving, merciful, and compassionate people—we live by heavenly values.

- We understand the significance of eternity—there is a literal Heaven and Hell
- We know that life without Christ means eternity in Hell separated from God
- We have been shown mercy—given what WE don't deserve, so we should be quick to do the same for others

READ: MATTHEW 18:23-35

4. God's mercy has no boundaries—it's available for the most wicked people, the greatest sinners, our most hated enemies, and those who oppose the Christian faith.

QUESTION: If God's mercy has no boundaries—no WALL keeping people out—should not our mercy be the same?

Conclusion:

- Ends with an open-ended question

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?" Jonah 4:11 NKJV

- Leaves the reader the opportunity to make various applications—did Jonah repent and understand or walk away angry and bitter?
- Reminded God's ways are not our ways

"A Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whimpering his insidious message of smug prejudice, empty traditionalism, and exclusive solidarity."—Leslie Allen

Response

Are you like Jonah today?

- Unwilling to forgive a family member, neighbor, or friend?
- Not interested in extending compassion and praying for even the most lost?
- Bitterness and anger overwhelming your life?
- Concern is self-preservation instead of others' eternal home?

Are you like Nineveh?

- In need of compassion, forgiveness, and mercy?
- Lost and without Christ, but ready to repent?

Take time to respond!