

Week 6 – Jonah Complains; God Challenges– Jonah 4:1-11

Scripture Reading: Psalm 142:1-7

Introduction

Have you ever had occasion to wonder if God knows what he is doing?

If you have you really shouldn't feel alone because those thoughts are a common malady as old as humanity itself

Genesis 3 records the first time it happened –

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Everything was going along just fine until Satan showed up and put doubt into the minds of our first parents

Adam and Eve decided they knew better than God and thought that, just maybe, God didn't know what he was doing

And humankind has wrestled with those same thoughts and feelings ever since

People have been questioning God, disappointed with God, and even getting angry at God forever **[Mad.jpg]**

Most of us have been there at one time or another

Causes

There are all kinds of reasons we have those kinds of thoughts –

We can find ourselves having those thoughts **when we don't get what we want**

We can also find ourselves thinking that way **when something unexpected and unwanted happens** in our lives or in the lives of those we love

We can also begin to believe that we have *the* proper perspective and **when God chooses to work differently than we think is warranted** we can find ourselves questioning God or even becoming angry at him

And when we find ourselves feeling that way we once again discover that we are behaving like Jonah

As we've considered the account of Jonah's experiences recorded for us we've seen:

How God commissioned him with the task of carrying his message of warning to Nineveh and how Jonah ran away in rebellion

We saw how God pursued him and arrested his running with a violent storm and how that led to the sailors throwing Jonah overboard to drown only to have God rescue him by the unlikely means of a great fish

We looked at how Jonah finally recognized the futility of running from God and how he gave in and agreed to preach God's message

But we also saw that Jonah's heart hadn't really changed and how he preached only out of necessity and how he still harbored hate for the people of Nineveh

Jonah obeyed the letter of God's command but there was still a great deal that God had left to teach Jonah

This is our final sermon in this series on the book of Jonah as today we will be considering Jonah 4:1-11

Please join me there in your Bibles and follow along as I read the passage in its entirety

As we pick up the account, Jonah has just completed his circuit through Nineveh preaching his message of judgment and his reaction is unusual

And in this final chapter we will see once more just how much each of us can be like Jonah

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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." And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

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. 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?" And he said, "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. 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 are taking notes, our major points on the note sheet are:

I. Jonah **Complains**

II. God **Challenges**

And for the sake of alliteration –

III. Jonah's **Cumbrances** - or, the things that held Jonah back

I. Jonah Complains

It's noteworthy how Jonah – in spite of God's mercy toward him – remains unmerciful toward Nineveh

A. Jonah's anger

The first thing we notice in **verse 1** is that **Jonah is angry**

He has preached the message that God sent him to preach and the Ninevites responded favorably to it

They believed God, repented of their evil, fasted, and prayed to God for mercy – and Jonah was *exceedingly displeased*

The Hebrew used here indicates that this caused Jonah to believe that he had been personally injured and that God was doing an injustice

As a result, Jonah was ticked off

The truth is most of us get ticked off when we feel we've been wronged – even if the person who wronged us is God

But Jonah was a prophet of God and most prophets are happy when their message is heeded

And Jonah has been God's instrument and he was a part of what could be the greatest revival in history

Billy Graham [**BillGraham.jpg**] was the best known, most successful evangelist of our time and though he preached to larger crowds than Jonah Billy Graham never saw an entire city repent of their evil ways and turn to God

But the response of the Ninevites made Jonah mad rather than glad and we're left to wonder why he reacted as he did

B. Jonah's accusation

But we don't have to wonder for long because Jonah voiced his complaint and he accused God of wrongdoing

Look with me again at **verse 2** –

And [Jonah] 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.

As I said, most preachers have the tendency to be unhappy and complain when folks don't respond to their sermons

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet and when we recognize that he preached for 40 years without seeing any tangible positive results we understand why he might weep

But Jonah was upset not because his preaching was ineffectual but because it was too effective

The Ninevites had actually heeded his warning and he feared that God would respond to their repentance

We've previously documented that Jonah hated the Ninevites and that he wanted them destroyed

But I want you to notice that he isn't mad at the Ninevites because they've responded favorably

Jonah is mad at God and he accuses God of being too soft

Jonah knew that God is a merciful and gracious God

He knew that God demonstrates great patience with people who are sinful and disobedient

And he knew that if the Ninevites were truly repentant that God would relent from the disaster he had pronounced

Jonah knew these things in a couple of different ways

He knew the character of God because he was a Jew so he knew of God's record of mercy toward Israel and how he had repeatedly demonstrated longsuffering toward the nation

And Jonah had just personally experienced God's patience and mercy with him in spite of his rebellion and stubbornness
[quote1]

It's noteworthy how Jonah – in spite of God's mercy toward him – remains unmerciful toward Nineveh

As we saw when we looked at Jonah's motives for running away, Jonah is a patriot and he sees God's mercy toward Israel and himself as being only right but he can't abide God being merciful to others

So Jonah is mad at God because he believes that God has been too soft in even offering mercy to the Ninevites

C. Jonah's actions

And, in his anger, Jonah behaves like a spoiled child

Look with me at **verse 3** where Jonah says –

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

When I read those words I hear them as being uttered in a very whiny, petulant voice – don't you?

Jonah couldn't accept God being as merciful toward Nineveh as he had been toward him and his people and Jonah would rather die than see God spare his enemies

Seriously, Jonah was so upset that he wanted to die simply because the people of Nineveh turned to God and he knew that God would likely accept their repentance

Let's jump ahead now for just a moment to **verse 5** where we see Jonah engage in some kind of comical behavior

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.

Jonah knows God's character – he's just accused God of being a sentimental softy

But still he goes a safe distance out of the city and builds himself a little shelter to watch what God will do

I picture Jonah remembering what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah and parking himself on a hillside in what he thinks is a secure spot to watch the fireballs rain down on Nineveh

It seems he thinks that he's made an effective case before God and now God will do the right thing and destroy Nineveh

After all, Jonah feels so strongly he wants to die - surely God will act appropriately in the face of that reality

II. God Challenges

It's revealing of God's character how- in spite of Jonah's rebellion, his reluctant obedience, and now his sulking complaint – God still takes the time to patiently try to turn Jonah's heart around

A. Asks a question

But God challenges Jonah's thinking instead and he uses three different methods

Notice in **verse 4** which we skipped over that God first asks Jonah a question – *“Do you do well to be angry?”*

God loves to ask those kinds of questions – questions that aren't designed to elicit information but rather to get us to think

God asks Jonah the same question again in verse 9 but when he asks this time no answer by Jonah is recorded so I guess we can assume that Jonah just continued pouting

As the father of two daughters and a former high-school girls' softball coach, the pouting, silent treatment is familiar

How well I remember the sullen silence that was meant to communicate displeasure

When well executed the silence could be deafening – even though it was never particularly effective

When God asked, *“Do you do well to be angry?”* Jonah should have considered his behavior but he didn't

So God provided an object lesson

B. Uses an object lesson

Look with me at **verses 6-8** –

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. 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.

The word “appointed” is repeated three times in these three verses

The Lord God appointed a plant, he appointed a worm, and he appointed a scorching east wind

And we previously saw that God appointed the great fish that saved Jonah from drowning and carried him back to land

God was compassionate in directing the fish to swallow Jonah in spite of his ongoing rebellion and he was likewise compassionate in providing much needed comfort to Jonah with the plant even though he was being petulant

Scholars agree that the plant in question might well have been the castor bean plant [[castorbeanplant.jpg](#)] which grows very quickly in hot climates to a height of 12 feet and has large fan-shaped leaves

Still, the fact that the plant grew where it did and as fast as it did clearly shows God's handiwork in providing for Jonah

One thing we want to make sure to note is that this is the only time that we are told that Jonah is happy

In fact, **verse 6** tells us, *“Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant”*

Jonah was exceedingly displeased that the Ninevites took his message to heart and repented but he was exceedingly glad over the plant – further revealing that there was something seriously amiss with Jonah's value system

The plant sprung up overnight and Jonah enjoyed the shade provided by the plant for a day but then God took the plant away just as suddenly as it had appeared by sending a worm to attack it so that it withered

God provided the plant – Jonah did nothing to cultivate it he simply benefited from it – and then God provided the worm to destroy it just as quickly

Then God appointed a “scorching east wind” that Jonah's shelter was unable to protect him from and without the additional shade provided by the plant Jonah's shelter was inadequate so Jonah was left comfortless and swooning

And like Elijah's self-pity party under the broom tree, Jonah again tells God that it would be better if he could just die

Jonah was happy as long as God was coddling him but when things changed Jonah felt pity for himself and he felt pity for the unexpected but short-lived plant, but he felt absolutely no pity for the people of Nineveh

And in **verse 9** we see God give Jonah another opportunity to consider his ways by asking another question designed to cause Jonah to think and possibly change – *“Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”*

Clearly Jonah’s answer should have been, “No” but he sticks to his usual self-centered script and says – *“Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”*

Let’s consider Jonah’s response for a moment

Jonah was obviously angry but we don’t want to miss the ultimate object of his anger

Jonah was angry with God – he was angry with God over the possibility of Nineveh being spared and he was angry with God over the plant

If we truly believe that whatever we have comes from God’s hand then we have to come to the conclusion that any dissatisfaction we have is ultimately dissatisfaction with God

I think we would all agree that God wasn’t wrong in providing the plant in the first place – it was a gracious gesture

And God wouldn’t have been wrong if he had never provided the plant at all – he wasn’t compelled to do so

So clearly God wasn’t wrong for giving Jonah a day of respite and then taking it away

But this was an object lesson and Jonah wasn’t grasping it so God explained the lesson verbally

C. Gives an explanation

Look at **verses 10-11** again –

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. 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?”

Again, God wasn’t asking for information with his questions to Jonah – he was trying to get Jonah to see the light

But God has to plainly state what he was trying to illustrate so he compares Jonah’s concern for the plant to his concern for Nineveh

Notice that God didn’t chastise Jonah for caring about the plant – he simply used Jonah’s concern for the plant to explain his care for Nineveh

Jonah had nothing to do with the plant – he didn’t plant the seed that allowed it to grow; he didn’t cultivate it and nurture it to maturity – it simply appeared suddenly, provided a bit of comfort, and then went away just as quickly

But God had created every living soul in Nineveh and he loved them just as much as he loved Jonah

Scholars interpret the phrase *“120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left”* to mean lacking discernment

And some conclude that those 120,000 were young children which would make the overall population of greater Nineveh over half a million people – others interpret the phrase as meaning all the Ninevites, children and adults

Whichever meaning is intended the point is clear; God hated that the Ninevites were so far removed from him and he yearned to have them turn to him

I find it kind of amusing that God seems to have recognized that Jonah might still not care about the Ninevites so he threw in the fact that there were also a lot of domesticated animals who would be destroyed along with the people in the hope that Jonah might at least have pity on the animals and not want to see them destroyed

But God’s point is that Jonah had neither created nor sustained the plant and yet he cared deeply for it – how much more should God pity the people of Nineveh who he made, nurtured, and cherished

And the book of Jonah ends abruptly with God’s final question left unanswered and Jonah’s final condition being hot, faint, angry, and desiring to die **[quote2.jpg]**

It's revealing of God's character how he takes the time to patiently try to turn Jonah's heart around in spite of Jonah's open rebellion, his reluctant obedience, and now his sulking complaint.

III. Jonah's Cumbrances

Jonah was tripped up by ingrained attitudes that kept him from being what God desired

When we hear someone referred to as a "Jonah" we tend to think of two things

In secular circles the term is often used in the context of saying the person is a jinx who brings misfortune whereas in Christian circles it is usually meant that the person is running away from God in some manner or another

But Jonah had different ideas and different priorities than God and we expose our inner Jonah most noticeably and most frequently not by running **away** from God but by running **against** God because we too have our own ideas and priorities

Let's take a quick look at what hindered Jonah and kept him from being what God desired him to be – or **Jonah's cumbrances**

A. He was stuck in a pattern of sin

First, we see that Jonah was stuck in a pattern of sin

Like a phonograph needle stuck in a record groove Jonah just kept replaying the same sins over and over again

1. He overvalued himself

And his first sin was that he overvalued himself

Jonah actually thought he knew better than God what should be done with the Ninevites

And he thought so much of his opinion that he would rather die than see God go against what he thought was best

Jonah was a patriot and he cared about Israel but in reality Jonah cared about nothing or no one more than Jonah

In Jonah's mind he was the center of the universe

The only time we see recorded that Jonah was happy was when God was coddling Jonah and as soon as the comfort of the plant was taken away Jonah reacted like a baby whose toy has been taken

Jonah was offended each time God didn't do what he thought best – he overvalued himself

2. He fixated on the past

Jonah also fixated on the past rather than look at the situation in front of him and what God was trying to do

Without a doubt, the Assyrians had been a painful thorn in Israel's side for a long, long time

As they conducted raids into the nation of Israel they inflicted brutal torture and death on Jonah's countrymen

And Jonah couldn't let it go

He was determined to hold onto the hurt as justification for going against God's efforts to turn Nineveh to repentance

For Jonah, Nineveh's past precluded any future that didn't include God's destructive wrath

3. Us

How much Jonah do you have in you?

Let me ask you, what value do you place on your opinions?

Philippians 2:3 tells us –

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but **in humility count others more significant than yourselves.***

And **1 Corinthians 13:5** tells us that love doesn't "*insist on its own way*"

Of course Paul was writing about our interactions with each other but we have those same inter-personal interactions with God too

And none of us wants to admit it but the reality is pride can take root in any of us as it did in Jonah and we can actually begin to believe that God is being unfair or unrealistic or unreasonable when his ways differ from our preferences

Or consider this, how long do you carry grudges or nurse hurts that have been done to you and allow them to affect your interactions with and opinions of others?

Jonah certainly clung to his grudge against Nineveh

Ephesians 4:32 says we are to –

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Likewise **Colossians 3:13** tells us to bear with one another and forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven us

And **Luke 17:3-4** show us the limits on that forgiveness

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him

I think the sins of overvaluation of ourselves and clinging to past hurts do more to hinder the work of the church than any others – and really, if you think about it, the two sins are closely related

But when we think we're special we naturally begin to think we deserve whatever will make us happy even if that involves setting aside how much we've been forgiven and demanding to see those who may have slighted us or injured us in any way suffer to our satisfaction

And those attitudes keep us from being able to move forward as a church as we focus on having our egos stroked through the fulfillment of our desires more than on what God would have us do

B. He majored on the minors

Next we see that Jonah majored on the minors

1. He didn't see things from God's perspective

No matter what God did to try to reach him, Jonah simply didn't see things from God's perspective

Jonah ignored God's plan and fixated on what he wanted – revenge on Nineveh

Consider how badly Jonah wanted Nineveh to suffer for their wickedness and past injustices against Israel all the while forgetting or discounting or expecting God's forgiveness of him and the patient care God had shown Israel in spite of their wickedness

Jonah simply couldn't or wouldn't see that his sins and the sins of Israel grieved God as much as any Ninevite's did

He didn't value the Ninevites as God did as he saw them only as an affront to be obliterated

Think of how you see those around us today who we could rightly call enemies of the faith

Do you view them as an abomination that needs to be eliminated or as fellow image bearers who need the Lord?

Do you view the sins of the world – whatever form they might take – as being more grievous to God than gossip or lying or gluttony or pride or selfishness or any of the things we dismiss as trivial when we do them?

Really, is the nature of their sin the important thing or that they are sinners who need the Lord the same as we do

We need to allow God to develop his heart in us; we need to allow God to show us things as he sees them

2. He valued his priorities over other people

Jonah was also fixated on things that didn't matter and allowed them to dictate his mood and he valued his priorities over other people

Consider how elated he was over the appearance of the plant and how devastated he was when it was taken away

Such a trivial thing shouldn't cause such intense reactions

But yet they do – we all have our "plants" don't we?

I want you to think about the last thing that upset you and got you all bent out of shape

Honestly now, was it a castor bean plant issue?

What kinds of issues does it take to push your buttons?

When Kathy and I were engaged we went through pre-marital counselling and our pastor asked us some odd questions like whether toilet paper should go over or under on the holder and how we squeezed a tube of toothpaste

And he told us that it was those kinds of things we would fight about in time – and he was right

Rarely have Kathy and I truly disagreed on the large, consequential matters of life

Folks, far too often these days we get upset about things that shouldn't be more than a blip on our radar screens while ignoring what we should be passionate about

We simmer and stew or rant and rave about trivialities while being totally unconcerned that our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members are on their way to hell and eternity apart from God

I used the word “cumbrances” in the title of this point because these attitudes and actions weighed Jonah down

But they also were impediments to Jonah and they will be weights and impediments to us if we let them

An *impediment* literally means something that strikes against our feet and trips us up [quote3.jpg]

Jonah was repeatedly tripped up by ingrained attitudes that kept him from being what God desired

Weights and impediments will hinder our progress unless we remove them so remove them we must if we want to be the people and the church that God wants us to be

We need to follow the advice of the author of Hebrews – look with me at **Hebrews 12:1**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

Self-centered, self-important, weighed down and tripped up by his personal priorities and unable to see people the way God sees them – that was Jonah and it can be us at times

Conclusion

And so we come to the end of the book of Jonah

Sadly, there is no happy ending as the book just abruptly ends without God's final question being answered and we have no indication that Jonah ever understood what God was trying to teach him

I think the existence of the book and the fact that Jonah wrote down the account indicates the likelihood that, in the end, Jonah came around to see things God's way – for Jonah's sake I hope that's true

But the real question is whether we have gotten what God is trying to show us?

Do we desire to have God's heart and see people as he sees them?

Do we love the lost and desire for them to be saved so that they can also experience God's grace and mercy?

Early on in the series we saw how God commanded Jonah to go to the lost only to have him run away

But we also saw that God has commanded each and every one of us to also go to the lost with the gospel and to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world

Having seen the example of Jonah each of us must now determine for himself or herself whether we will obey what God has commanded us to do or whether we will be a Jonah who not only runs away from our duty but also runs the risk of finding out that we have spent our lives running against God

Let's pray