

Trinity Church Golden Grove

By Luke Dahlenburg | May 30, 2021

## Introduction

### Do you sometimes feel like life is unfair?

- Study really hard, even harder to get a good grade? And then, your brother, well, he just does nothing, and it comes easy to him. Unfair you say!
- Natasha handed in an assignment last week, worked hard, was marked really low. Unfair! Fortunately, it was remarked and she went up.
- Waiting in a line and seeing someone cut in.
- Tax time, getting less on your return.
- Maybe you think the church is unfair? Stance on same sex marriage, role of men and women, or unfair that the other church is growing.
- **Deeper:** Forgiveness as unfair? Showing mercy unfair?

C.S Lewis in 1952: Every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war. And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. It is not that people think this too high and difficult a virtue: it is that they think it hateful and contemptible.

- Have you ever thought God was unfair? Unjust? Jonah certainly did.
- He accused God of being evil, insisting he would rather die than go on living with a God who he thought was unfair!
- If that's ever been you, then welcome to Jonah 4. Concluding chapter both the heart of God and Jonah is now laid bare before us. And they couldn't be more different.
- Big idea of Jonah 4 is actually the big idea of the book we have seen week after week: God is filled with more mercy and is more missional than his people are.

### Here's how we will unpack this

- Jonah's heart in full conflict with God's character. Filled with racism, religious self-righteousness, anger.
- God's heart full of compassion towards Nineveh and filled with patience and mercy towards Jonah.
- As the book ends, we finally see where it's all been heading; for us to do a spiritual check up on our heart. In Jonah, God is asking us to consider how we feel about God showing mercy to you, to others and if there are any deep seated, sinful attitudes to his character.

- Going to be a hard conversation today. But, don't worry if it's a little painful along the way. Just as God had the last word to Jonah, God's grace to us in Jesus gets to be our last word too.

## 1) Jonah's Heart

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### **Jonah 4:1, But to Jonah this seemed very wrong...**

- What seemed wrong? In ch 3:4 Jonah gave his one sentence sermon in the city causing the king and all Nineveh to repent in sackcloth and ashes for evil.

Imagine: If Stephen Marshall popped into TCA and Des Smith preached one sentence. Then Mr. Marshall walked back to Parliament House, stopped working, didn't take his afternoon coffee, put on track it's, sat in the parklands, full of sorrowful for his sin. And then, like a ring, from his cabinet and minsters, to other parties, those watching on the street, from the trams, the apartments, the inner suburbs, the outer suburbs, the regional areas it ripples out and they all feel the same sorrow and join him on their front laws and lounge rooms = all for sin. What would your response be to this? Rejoicing? Do you pray for a thing such as this?

- Scene confronted Jonah. Response wasn't rejoicing, but rage:

### **Jonah 4:1, ...and he became angry.**

- Very strong, very angry. Literally = exceedingly evil, becoming furious. Burning with rage
- Why? Hates Nineveh. Ancient form of racism. Jonah Calvin says that Jonah is simply being inhuman in his attitude and refused to treat them as human beings in the image of God. And in that sense, he is racist.
- Hates that God hasn't killed them!

It's a bit like the when you see supporters furious at the umpire for playing the free kick or not calling holding the ball. A great sense of injustice has been done – against you and you yell, screwing up your face. This is Jonah, screwing up face to God, shaking his little fist. Except, umpire is right? God is in the clear.

- Staggering! disappointed because there is no fire from heaven! A city repents! See's God's kindness as evil.
- Deep down, is this attitude in our hearts towards a people group? Or person? Who would you hate if they called you up and said, "I'm a Jesus follower."
- But: Jonah's faulty heart does not prevent his mouth from speaking the whole truth of God. Just look at how he explodes:

**Jonah 4:2, 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 Tar-shish. I knew that you are a gracious**

**and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.**

- Throws the most famous character bio of God in the entire Bible back into God's face and says it's a fatal character flaw.
- Jonah does a Myers Birggs assessment on God and says your character is flawed. I don't like anything I see. Insults God for this same mercy and power he experienced in the fish.
- Isn't this what I said = stronger than saying, "I told you so." = Jonah is pitting his word against God. He's saying, "My word was right, and your word was at best, ill thought out, wrong and evil."
- Self fixation. 9 times Hebrew in 4:1-2 'I / Me'
- Perspective is me centred. No idea he's got a heart problem.
- Finally after 3 chapters of wondering why Jonah ran, all the pieces fall into place, what I said, Lord, when I was still at home?
- See: Jonah wasn't afraid of Nineveh. Please see that - I'm amazed at how many people get this so wrong! No where does the text say he's afraid. He's not afraid.
- Much worse than that. Ran because of bad theology. First rate knowledge, miserable understanding of what it means.
- Quotes **Exodus 34:6**. Quoted over 20x in the Bible. Favourite way for the writers described God.
- Jonah goes to this description because he knew that God forgave his own people group for their Idol worship - the cow at Mt. Sinai. He knows that God forgives and relents to those who are sorrowful.
- God's Mercy: Means God's goodness toward those in misery and distress.
- It's staggering: How can you know this God so well and yet be so distant from his heart at the same time?
- Simply: He wanted a God he could control. He knew that God would relent and he didn't like it. Problem wasn't God, but Jonah's view of God.

The ugly side of Christianity is when people take God's character and use it for their own benefit, glory and agenda. "In the name of God and use it for evil."

- Jonah abuses God for being who he is, thinking, that God is unjust in being merciful.
- He's a harsher judge than God is and would rather die than go on living with the God who loves his enemies.
- Point: Jonah's theology was in conflict with the nature of God and how he thought God should behave. Good theology gone bad. And he was fooling himself in the corruption of his own sin in the process. We can do this too, can't we?

- But look at how God responds. Just as Jonah affirmed that God is slow to anger, we now see God's perfect patience now directed at Jonah's wayward heart:

**Jonah 4:4, But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"**

- It's a calm word. When someone is this upset, you can't reason with them. Words often fall on deaf ears and closed hearts. Patience is good medicine.
- So, God just plants a seed – is your anger justified? That is, are you right to be angry at God's character and nature?
- God wants Jonah to self-reflect.
- More over, God will answer Jonah's question a bit later in **Jonah 4:10**, after he's spoken through creation – like the storm and fish, this time it's a plant and a worm.
- Pity party is in full swing and he's about to play the pouting game:

**Jonah 4:5 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.**

- Absolutely nothing will happen to city! But, lots will happen to him. Quite an ugly picture, isn't it?

Friend of mine studying to be a GP, we were around there for dinner and just before desert he said, "Come on, I want to try something out on you." He started to poke and prod, bend and tap on my arms, legs and back. I was practice. He had an exam later that week. It was quite odd – in-between mains and desert I had a physical!

- Before we get to our next point now good time to pause and do a quick checkup on our own hearts.
- Jonah has the building blocks to explain evil and justice. He just doesn't like the answer in front of him.
- Do you fool yourself when it comes to God's word? Say: That's just cultural, I don't take the Bible literally, or say that it's only the spirit that matters, or that we can't really know the intent anyway.
- That won't do. **Psalm 119:96** says that there is a limit to all perfection but that God's word is exceedingly broad = Far from being oppressive and limiting, the instruction of God is freeing and illuminating. All human, earthly pursuits face limits. There are limitations on resources, on time, on energy. But one – God's word is boundless. Jesus said his words will never pass away.
- God's Word should argue with us and wreck us, that's good? It confronts us with our sin, our fragility, our not-being God. We tend to forget that in a culture that likes to define truth for ourselves, God in his kindness loves us too much to let us figure it out on our own. So he

gives us his word. And it must clash with us if there is to be a reformation of our heart and will.

Each chapter of this book has been given us the pieces of a puzzle and right here, at the end, we can start to see the picture on the box. And it's a little shocking.

The picture we are working on is actually a mirror – you /me. Instead of thinking, "Jonah is so wrong and evil," The twist comes in that God is asking all of his people about their own attitudes towards him.

- God saying, "Okay, you pride yourself on the bible, on theology on knowing me. How do you feel about God showing mercy – to you, to others? Do you forgive others and truly love your enemies? Don't you run away from me too on certain issue? Aren't you afraid of being exposed, like Jonah was? My word is meant to change you and shape you and sometimes, you need to self reflect deeply on how much you aren't like me, to see how great my mercy truly is."
- Theology of the living God must have living consequences in us, right?
- Let's look at God's hearts and see the answer Jonah and you and me need if you are feeling a little spiritual sore at this point:

## God's Heart

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- So, God wants to get through to Jonah, to show that there is no conflict with God's character and nature. As is typical for Jonah, God uses creation to speak to get his attention.

To understand what God does, you need to think back to a typical South Australian summer.

Here's a photo to get you in the mood. Screen shot from 2 years ago. Jonah is sitting outside in this sort of heat. Feel that.

- God sees Jonah in the heat and accelerates the growth of this lefty plant next to him. It's brilliant. It grows right up and over his head. It's cool and refreshing, like walking in to the cold section of Woolies on a hot day and wishing you could stay there a bit longer. Jonah has the same smile on his face. Inside, he's grumpy, but outwardly, he's content to stay in the cool, very happy about the plant, ready to watch people die from the comfort of his green oasis.
- He must be thinking, like he did when he first ran, "Things are looking my way! God's given me a plant!" Sad and horrific: Happier over a plant than people = says he was exceedingly pleased.
- Notice it says in **Jonah 4:6, God provided**. We know that something is going to happen. Jonah isn't going to expect. We see this same phrase repeated in **Jonah 4:7** because not only did God provide the plant, but also **a worm!**

In our old home, we had a grape vine and in spring, the kids and I would go caterpillar hunting. We'd watch them eat the leaves and try to catch as many as we can. They ate very quickly! God's worm made short work of Jonah's nice shady plant.

- But, it gets worse for Jonah because God then provided a hot east wind. It's burned down on his head – the air conditioner was broken and Jonah is becoming hotter and fainter and more uncomfortable, so much so that he just wants to die! He's certainly winning the pity pouting game!
- "If I can't be comfortable, what's the point in living! If I'm not proved right, then why live?"
- And then, God's gentle voice questions Jonah again. Same words as **Jonah 4:4**, this time with reference to the plant.
- God has the best pedagogy, doesn't he, – objects, questions, he wants Jonah to arrive at the conclusion himself.

**Jonah 4:9, 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."**

- This question debunks Jonah's thinking. Jonah shows more concern for the death of a plant than for the life of a city.
- Think: He only like the plant because it benefits him. God loves Nineveh, even though they don't benefit him, you see?
- Thankfully, God's way nicer than I'd be in this moment. He is slow to anger after all. Explains lesson of plant and why it's connected to Nineveh.

**Jonah 4:10-11, 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. 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?"**

- God sees this great city as greatly in need of his mercy.
- Shouldn't I care about a city – 120,000 (Population of city Port Adelaide Enfield in 2016) – who don't know me? Gentle nature of God.
- Cannot tell their right hand from their left = Can't make decisions, don't know what is, 'right' they can't get out of sin on their own. They need his mercy, they need to know the consequence if they don't repent.
- Someone said: "The audience to whom the story was first told, everything suggested the answer 'No!' An evil gentile city should not experience the divine pity. But to say 'No' after hearing the story of Jonah would be embarrassing, not to say petty."
- With that, God gets the last word. Jonah is silent.

- Not rhetorical. **Jonah 4:11** is the answer to **Jonah in 4:2**. "You suggest that you were right in escaping Nineveh in order not to preach a message of doom because you knew that mercy would lead me to have pity. But I am not like you in, being moved to tears over a mere plant. I am moved by the greatness of the people who cannot tell their hands apart."

In 2014, in Mosul, at the higher of ISIS, they bombed and destroyed the monument called Jonah's tomb. Mosul is modern day Nineveh. And it's believed to be, whether it is or not is hard to tell, but it's said to be the final resting place of Jonah the prophet. What's interesting is that tradition tells us Jonah went back into the city after going out. In fact, Jonah never left Nineveh, this was his burial place. Which means, Jonah got it. Sitting under the tree, his silence the only answer to give to God's question. Interesting isn't it?

- So, how's your own heart doing today?
- Thankfully, as Jonah learnt, God's mercy is that we do not have the last word.
- God continues to speak his grace and mercy to us through Jesus.

## Our Hearts

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- The silence of Jonah at the end jolts us to ask the question: 'How do you feel about God showing mercy to other's? To your enemies? Those who have hurt you deeply, taken advantage of you? Does it feel a tad unjust?
- The danger that Jonah fell into as a Prophet of God is what you and me can fall into = The more you know of God's character the more you can become less interested in the God who is transforming you, by his grace.
- There is a complacency that comes with being familiar or having all your theological ducks in row, that misses our hearts and attitudes and view of others.
- Knowing God does not mean you have some sort of control over God, sometimes I think we can slip into this mindset, like you are close in his ear and can influence him.
- It's absurd to think that, but isn't that a real danger? We do it with people, don't we? Closer we are, we relax more less inclined to take notice or be kind. Why wouldn't we think we do that to God at times? Jonah does it.
- Think: No one is exempt: Bible College students, Denominational affiliation, pastors, being a part of Trinity church, your past success or knowledge = are they not all tempting moments to say, "I've figured out God, he should do this in this situation and make this decision."
- Instead of seeing the blessing that to know God more, leads to more humility and confession of sin and reliance on his mercy and seeing others the way God does.
- Rich theology should make you more compassionate and merciful.

Kanishka Raffel newly appointed A/B Sydney. Once he found out he said, "Went to room, knelt at bed, and felt convicted of my weakness and my need for God but also his amazing grace to be at work though weak servant."

- Do you understand God's mercy to you? Does that define you? Shape you?
- After all, God says, should I not be concerned?
  - Yes! God is concerned!
  - God is concerned for Nineveh, Jonah and you!
  - God is patient and gentle with Jonah and you!
  - God is working in your life, though painful moments, like Jonah experienced under the tree, to gently speak his mercy to you.
- See: God's kindness not just on the weak and helpless but on the strong and the mighty. This makes God's mercy profound: God has mercy on us all.
- How amazing!
- More over, because God has kept on speaking, he has the last word though Jesus, his son, who, went outside of the city, like Jonah, but not to watch destruction, but to be destroyed = to die, to take judgement, all to show the mercy and kindness of God to us who also don't know our right hand from our left.
- God is exceedingly kind and good to us in Jesus. Invitation to come to God of mercy
- And, when we do need mercy again, and we will, like Jonah, who was one of God's people:
- We can say and follow the words of **Hebrews 4:16, Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**
- Is that you today? In need of God's mercy? Why not come, why come to Cross - the throne where mercy and grace are found?
- Let us be a church who is known for our mercy and compassion, that we would declare the truth about our compassionate God, who is slow to anger, and that this would cause us to reflect deeply on our own need of his mercy and show that to each person that walks though out door - not matter what sort of 'Nineveh' they come from.
- You don't have to be left outside, like Jonah, any longer.