

JONAH

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Jonah 4.1-4

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I. Connecting With One Another

When was the last time you turned around? Maybe it was figuratively, when you made a New Year's Resolution to give up a certain behavior or habit. Maybe it was literally, when you missed a street you meant to turn on. Maybe, just maybe, it was spiritually, when you committed to seeing things in a new way.

For extra credit, think of a time for each of the above categories and share them with your small group!

Before continuing in this study, spend some time in prayer:

- a. That, as we turn onto the home stretch of our study of Jonah, we would recognize, receive and respond to God's Word for us in Jonah – both individually and as a church family,
- b. For those leading our worship gatherings, small groups, bible studies and children's classroom times – that God would guide their planning, preparation and leadership,
- c. That the Holy Spirit would prepare us and use us to reach out to our friends, family and neighbors to share the good news of our gracious and compassionate God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love.

II. Introduction to this Study

Chapter 4 contains the final section of the book of Jonah, which we begin this week with verses 1-4 and will conclude next week with 5-11. This final section concerns the same principal characters introduced in Jonah 1.1-2: the LORD, Jonah and Nineveh. Our wayward prophet and the LORD each offer a speech to the other party regarding the future of the great Assyrian city. Interestingly, in the original language, these two speeches are exactly thirty-nine words each, giving the impression that both Jonah and the LORD are given "equal space." Especially considering the many questions within these 11 verses, we, the readers, are allowed – or required?! – to respond.

In 4.1-4 we are presented with what Jonah claims was his initial response to God's call on him at the outset of the story. We first read his private thoughts, then his prayer, which reveals (again) his thorough knowledge of Scripture. This quotation, as we will see below, could function as a rather brilliant statement of faith – but is that what it is? Near the end of this week's text we see the beginning of God's response to his beloved prophet.

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Jonah 4.1 aloud in as many translations as you have available (doing so is a helpful way to get as close to understanding the original language's "range of meaning"). The original Hebrew features a kind of repeating repetition:

"But it was evil to Jonah, a great evil..."

Kind of awkward, isn't it!? The English idiom "burning with anger" gets us very close to the author's original intention. Why do you think the narrator goes to such lengths to emphasize Jonah's displeasure? If it helps, reread chapter 3, recalling that the Assyrians were hated enemies of God's people.

- b. "A great evil" brings together two words that have been repeated throughout this story for the first (and only) time. Recall all the "great" things so far: the city (1.2; 3.2, 3), wind (1.4, 12), the sailors' fear (1.10, 16), the fish (1.17), the people (3.5), the nobility (3.7). And the "evil" things so far: the people (1.2), the storm (1.7, 8) and the people's sin (3.8, 10).

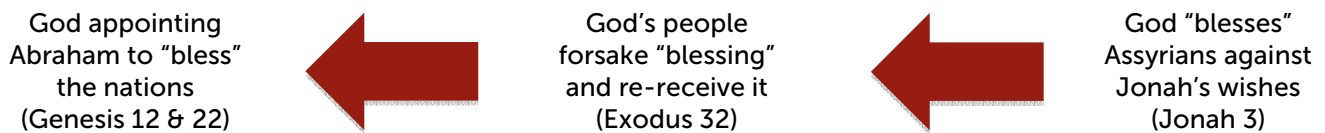
Why would the narrator of Jonah bring these two words only now? Weren't there many other opportunities? It seems to insinuate Jonah was more upset at God's action (see 3.10) than God was at their sin in the first place (see 1.2). Is Jonah justified in reacting this way? Why – or why not?

- c. In 4.2, Jonah claims that it was because of God's grace and compassion that he fled to Tarshish in the first place. Based on our study the past seven weeks, do you get the impression Jonah is telling the truth – or not? What makes you have the impression you do?

Recall the reason the LORD sent Jonah in the first place, because of the Ninevite's *havvah* (which could be translated "wickedness" or "evil" on one hand, or "trouble," "calamity" or "difficulty" on the other). Which aspect of these words do you think came to Jonah's mind in Jonah 1.2? What do you think he was thinking of in 3.2? Does that alter your initial impression above?

- d. Jonah's (rather orthodox!) statement of faith in the second half of verse 2 is based on Moses' interaction with the LORD in Exodus 34.1-7. What does Jonah leave out of what God says there? Why do you think he does so?

God's revelation to Moses in Exodus 34 follows closely upon his "relenting" in Exodus 32.1-14 and connects Moses' and God's people with His original intentions for blessing the through Abraham (compare Exodus 32.13 with Genesis 22.1-17, recalling our study of Jonah 2!). An overly simple diagram might look like this (read from right to left, going back in time):

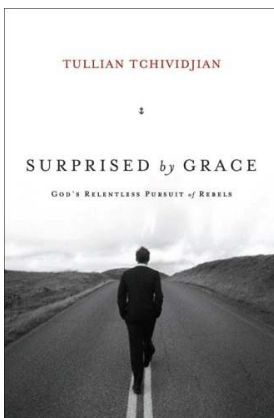


Does this clarify what Jonah is so upset about (that God was letting the Assyrians in on His blessings)?

- e. Compare and contrast Jonah's request to God in 4.3 with his request to the sailors in 1.11-12. Are there any similarities? Differences?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- Have you ever been in a similar situation to Jonah, where someone received grace when you didn't think they deserved it? How about an extension on a term paper, help with a work project or even assistance with their household their chores!? If so, how did you respond? If not, how would you?
- When have you been angry when you didn't deserve to be? Were you really upset at that particular thing – or could it have been something else?
- Have you ever tried to "lie to God"? Someone else (who also knew better)? How'd that work out?
- What has prompted you to want to give up on God (or your faith, your church, your small group, etc.) in the past? Did you do so? Why did you feel that way? Was that feeling something you needed to take responsibility for? Or was someone else to blame? How was it resolved? If it hasn't been, could it be? If so, what's stopping you!? Are there ways someone could come alongside to help?



In his book, *Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels*, Tullian Tchividjian writes,

When God's actions show that he's totally outside the box Jonah constructed for him, Jonah can't handle that. It's so crushing for him, so hurtful, that he's infuriated. His reaction proves that in his religiousness and spirituality, he's lost sight of God. He can say the ancient formula, and he knows it intellectually – *God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*. But in his heart, Jonah doesn't really see it enough to trust and embrace and celebrate it.

Looking back, it becomes obvious that even in his prayer inside the fish, Jonah still doesn't get it. Yes, he triumphantly declares, "salvation belongs to the LORD!" And yes, Jonah has been saved. Yet *he still needs to be saved*. (page 117)