

“The Heart of God”

Jonah 4:5-11

July 24, 2022

⁵Jonah 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. ⁶Now the LORD God appointed a plant^[a] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.^[b] So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸When 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.” ⁹But 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.” ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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?”

Recap of Jonah 1-3

- In Jonah 1, Jonah *runs away from God* as Jonah refuses God's commission to go to Nineveh. We see Jonah's animosity, lack of compassion and prejudice towards Nineveh (the Assyrians) which prompts Jonah to run away from God on a ship to Tarshish.
- But on the ship, Jonah along with the other sailors encounter a supernatural storm (from God) which ultimately leads to the sailors throwing Jonah overboard. As Jonah is drowning in an ocean in Jonah 2, Jonah cries out to God and is mercifully rescued by a fish (whale). While in the belly of the fish, Jonah prays and begins to *run towards God*.
- As God recommissions Jonah to go back to Nineveh to preach His Word, Jonah in obedience *runs with God* to Nineveh to deliver God's message. The people of Nineveh (including the king) respond with repentance and believe as they fast and pray to God.
- This would normally be cause for a celebration, but Jonah responds in anger and frustration in Jonah 4 as Jonah tries to *run God* and dictate to God what He should do...

Big Idea: *The Gospel message isn't just about God's love, mercy and grace for us -- but for others as well. Often times we lose sight of this when our hearts become hardened or self-focused.*

1. Jonah's Continued Hardened Heart (vv. 5, 9)

- After Jonah's outburst in vv.1-3 and God's question to Jonah in v.4, how does Jonah respond?
 - No verbal answer by Jonah to God but his actions and attitude are quite clear...
- Jonah's Continued Desire for God's Judgment on Nineveh
 - Jonah stubbornly hopes that his “temper tantrum” will force God to what Jonah wants
 - Jonah stubbornly hopes that God will “choose” Jonah over Nineveh
 - Jonah stubbornly hopes that God will still bring on judgment to the people of Nineveh – perhaps like God did when he rained down fire in judgment and destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorah (cf. Genesis 19: 23, 28)
 - Jonah stubbornly hopes that God will withhold His mercy and grace from Nineveh
- Jonah's heart remains hardened to the people of Nineveh (and to God) – despite having witnessed city-wide repentance and revival.

- In this closing chapter in the book of Jonah, we see Jonah has not changed much from the beginning of the story to the end of the story.
 - It's a tragic story in which Jonah's hardened heart is filled with prejudice, resentment, bitterness, anger and sin towards the people of Nineveh (Assyrians)
- Cf. 1 John 4:7-21, Ezekiel 36:26-27

2. **God's Continued Merciful & Missional Heart (vv.6-11)**

- Despite Jonah's hardened heart, we see the heart of God, who God is, as He shows mercy...
- ...Towards Jonah
 - God creates a plant to provide shade and comfort to Jonah (v.6)
 - God even appoints the worm to destroy the plant (v.7) and the scorching heat and wind on Jonah (v.8) as a lesson and opportunity for Jonah to understand – even this is a powerful demonstration of God's mercy and patience towards Jonah!
- ...Towards Nineveh
 - God withholds judgment from Nineveh – despite the cruelty and violence (among other sins) (cf. 3:10)
- In all this God's missional heart to see all people know Him is revealed clearly to Jonah and to us – God is not just the God of Israel – but God of all peoples, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture or language. We see this even more clearly in the New Testament in the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) – as well as in the book of Acts...all the way through Revelation (7:9) – God's merciful and missional heart for all people to know Him and worship Him!

3. **The Contrasting Heart of Jonah & God (vv.10-11)**

- Jonah's final words in v.9 ("Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die") once again reveals the condition of Jonah's heart – which once again stands in contrast to God's heart.
- More specifically, we see Jonah's Concern for a Plant vs. God's Concern for the People
 - Jonah's concern for a plant which he neither grew or took care of vs. God's concern over people who He created and knows
 - Jonah's concern for a thing vs God's concern for people
 - Jonah's concern for the destruction of a plant vs. God's concern for the destruction of a people
 - Jonah's concern for something so temporary like a plant vs. God's concern for the eternal souls of people
 - Jonah's concern for himself, his comfort, his feelings, his desires vs. God's concern for others
 - Jonah's willingness and desire to die for/over a plant (instead of Jonah's willingness to live for Nineveh) vs. God's willingness through Jesus to experience ultimate discomfort, pain, shame and suffering (on the cross) so that those who repent and believe in Him would not have to experience and face God's judgement but experience and know His mercy and grace.

Big Idea: *The Gospel message isn't just about God's love, mercy and grace for us -- but for others as well. Often times we lose sight of this when our hearts become hardened or self-focused.*

Reflection Questions

- Are there areas in your heart where it has become hardened to God and/or others? If so, in what ways?
- Are there people (whether specific or general) who you find yourself feeling less compassionate -- instead of growing in greater love for -- these days? Why?

- In what ways might your perspective on life (i.e. things, people, etc.) been distorted or skewed? What might it look like to have one eye on eternity while living this life in the here and now?
- How have you been living life like Jonah (i.e. being focused on your personal comforts, interests, priorities, agenda, and life)?
- In what ways do you need to be reminded (or hold onto) God's merciful and missional heart -- for you personally as well as for others? In what ways do you need to be reminded of Jesus and the Gospel message?
- For Parents: Spend some time this week in discussing with your child(ren) how the Gospel frees us to love others with the good news of Jesus -- and how Jesus can change our hardened/self-focused hearts.