

“Jonah: Running from God—Fueled by Anger”

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April 27/28, 2013

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Introduction

After a frightening encounter with the power of God in the belly of a fish, Jonah obeys God and goes into the city of Nineveh. He preaches an eight-word sermon: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (Jonah 3:4). Amazingly, the Ninevites believed God. Even the king hears about what is taking place in the city and repents and calls a fast for everyone—even the animals. The king thinks that maybe God will spare them if they repent, and he commands everyone to urgently call on God and turn from evil. Jonah 3:10 says, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.” Everyone was happy except for one person: Jonah. He wanted the evil Ninevites destroyed, despite God’s love and compassion for them. This prophet is still on the run from God, and he learns some important lessons in the midst of his anger.

God’s way is the only way. (Jonah 4:1-4)

- Jonah is angry that God did things differently than he wanted, and it leads to anger. Any time we creatures begin to think we know better than the creator, it leads to either confusion or anger, and sometimes both.
- Verse 4 is really the crux of the whole Book of Jonah: “But the Lord replied, ‘Have you any right to be angry?’” We need to remember, this is God’s creation and universe; He’s in charge not us. Does Jonah have any right to question God’s actions? Do we? It is God’s prerogative to run His world the way He sees fit.

God’s timing is the best timing. (Jonah 4:5-9)

- After Jonah’s anger begins to burn, God provides a plant to make him more comfortable. Jonah enjoys the brief respite from the sun, but before long, God also provides a worm to kill the plant that Jonah was enjoying.
- Sometimes when we feel that God has forgotten us or chosen to take a different side of things, and we start begging God for some shade. But God is teaching Jonah, and us, an important lesson—he wants some shade from the pain he is facing, but it comes and goes in God’s timing, not his.

God’s love should be our love. (Jonah 4:10-11)

- God can choose who is destroyed and who is saved. We must not run away, we must not be angry with Him. We must follow Him.
- God chose to save the Ninevites, and that made Jonah angry because they were the “wrong” people—the enemies. And God’s great love for Nineveh was infuriating to Jonah; he wanted to keep that love for himself and for his own nation. We are called to love whoever God loves—everyone.

Conclusion

The picture of the prophet Jonah that we get in the Book of Jonah is not an overly pretty one. He is hot-and-cold, he is disobedient, he is angry. So why did God choose to include this Book in Scripture? Maybe it was for a couple of reasons: 1) To show us that God can use anyone to accomplish His purposes—even a stubborn, disobedient prophet, and 2) As a testimony to Jonah's changed heart. If Jonah himself wrote the Book of Jonah, he has obviously changed enough to record a story that is anything but self-glorifying. He must have had a change of heart. And Jonah serves as a reminder to us that God will use us—sometimes in spite of ourselves—if we will obey, and that God can change our hearts and give us a new life.