

Good Things, Little Packages: Jonah Part 3, Chapter 3-4, “God's Compassion vs. Our Comfort” 9/3/17

How many of you are gamers? Long before virtual reality, X-Box, Playstation there was the Nintendo, came out in 1985. Nintendo had two buttons on it, [Insert Picture] **Power and Reset**. The Reset Button was a great invention because if things really weren't going your way and your brother was beating you in Tecmo Superbowl, or if you really messed up in Tetris, you could just hit the reset button and get another chance. I loved that reset button...except when my brother would use it when I was winning, and he would jump up and his reset and I would get furious! See I loved it when reset benefited me, but I hated it when it benefited my brother.

As Jonah comes to a close we are going to find that Jonah loves when God hits the reset button for him (shows him grace and forgiveness), but not when he hits it for others (shows others grace and forgiveness). Chapter 3 is Jonah's reset button. He really messed up didn't he? God told him to go to Nineveh, Jonah runs the other way, God throws a storm at him, causes a fish to swallow him. Jonah finally breaks from his disobedience, recognizes his utter desperation and cries out to God. God delivers him, causes the fish to vomit him onto land. We get to chapter 3.

Jonah 3:1-3a

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

Aren't you thankful God is a God of the reset? Jonah didn't get it right, but God's not done with him, God still loves him and wants to use him to accomplish his purposes. None of us got it right either, and yet God loves us, hits the reset button...more than once! If you are still breathing, he's not done wanting to use you to accomplish his purposes! Don't you dare take yourself out of the game if God hasn't!

Jonah 3:3b-10

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,

⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Amazing, massive revival! One of the greatest revivals ever recorded in human history. An entire pagan city (Over 120,000 people), dedicated to evil believes in God, repents in sorrow over their sin and turns from their evil ways. This is a theme in Jonah. Surely the heathen sailors were too far beyond God's reach. Nope! Now the Ninevites...Even the cows repent! God hits the reset button for the Ninevites too! Never think anyone is beyond the reach of God's hand of salvation. Never think anyone is too far gone that God can reach down and give them a changed heart and life. If he can do it for Nineveh, he can do it for your neighbor, the bully in school, your husband, your son or daughter, your boss, a hardened criminal or a terrorist.

And so here, this reluctant prophet, Jonah, becomes the Billy Graham, the Louis Palau of Nineveh! Now if this was a fairy tale, Jonah, the king, members of the city... and even the cows would have danced in a big circle and lived happily ever after... but there's a chapter 4.

Jonah 4:1-2

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² 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.

Now the truth finally comes out. Why did Jonah run? Not because he was afraid of the Ninevites, not because he didn't think his message would work, not because it was really far and he didn't want to leave home...It is because he didn't want God to save those bad people. Jonah wasn't afraid of the Ninevites, he was afraid God would be true to his character not just to Israel, but even to the gentiles. Jonah knew the word- Exodus 34:6-7.

Jonah 4:3-5

³Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah would rather die than see God be merciful to his enemy) ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?" ⁵ 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.

Why is Jonah sitting there watching? He's still hoping that the repentance isn't real. He's still hoping God will send destruction. He wants to make sure he doesn't miss the light show if it happens. "These horrible people will get what they deserve!"

Jonah 4:6

⁶ 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.

The writer wants us to pick up on the irony. Jonah was exceedingly angry because God was compassionate to others, but he's exceedingly glad because God was compassionate on him, providing shade. But God has a way of exposing our hypocrisy and our true condition. Ready for the object lesson?

Jonah 4:7-9

⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.⁸ 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."⁹ 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."

Jonah would rather die than see God be merciful, and he'd rather die than not be comfortable...God wants us to see these extremes so that he can expose our hearts. And here comes the whole point of the book, this book isn't about a big fish...this is the knock out punch.

Jonah 4:10-11

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?"

Mic drop. No verse 12. The story ends here. God says, "Jonah I am concerned about people, even bad people, even outsiders. I'm even concerned about their cows! What are you concerned about?" Jonah's answer? "A plant. My shade. My comfort. My stuff. My people."

God says, "Jonah I showed you compassion and you were happy, why aren't you happy when I do it for others?" Jonah loved it when God hit the reset button for him, but not when he did it for his enemies. Jonah loved when God showed him grace, mercy and forgiveness. But not when he did it for other people, especially those bad people.

We are Jonah. Jonah ends with God questioning us. And so that's how we are going to end. No more preaching because the Holy Spirit has it from here.

1)Apathy: Do you have more concern about temporary comforts than eternal destinies? Do you care more about your stuff than you do about people? God says, "Nate, I'm concerned about your neighbors. I'm concerned about the poverty,

violence, desolation in the streets on Wilmington. I'm concerned about the spiritually lost. I'm concerned about this generation. What are you concerned about?" I say, "My car broke down while I was on vacation and I had to get a new car. That makes me angry. The rain ruined my plans for the Labor Day, I'm ticked off.

2) Judgment: Do you desire God's compassion toward you but His judgment for your enemies? Are you happy when God shows you grace, mercy and forgiveness but you don't want him to give it to your ex-husband? Or your mother-in-law? Or your boss? Or the liberals? That people group? Or region of the country or world?

Let's sit with these questions for a few minutes in preparation for communion.

Transition to Invitation:

Don't know God? You've been introduced: *A gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*

God was concerned for the 120,000 in that great city. He's concerned about you today. Maybe you have been running from God. Maybe you've been angry at him. Maybe you feel you have got yourself too far gone that God can't save you. He is concerned about you. He has compassion for you. He proved it in Jesus.

Communion.

Closing Benediction: Imagine if we together were concerned about the things God's concerned about? Many of us are. But maybe of us a so caught up in our stuff that we have lost sight of the lost! May the Lord work on us today break our hearts for what breaks his.