

Reading: Jonah 4

Theme: Jonah the moaner!

Last time, as we started Jonah 4, we noticed in v1 **Jonah's resentment** and we considered some of the reasons for this - there was the problem of his reputation and the problem of God's honour, intertwined with God not honouring his ministry. We saw Jonah as a bitter, resentful man and yet amazingly he was a man of God, a prophet, who had recently been shown much of God's grace personally. This didn't prevent him resenting God's working when the same grace and pardon were shown to the Ninevites, for this was the last thing Jonah wanted and he resented what God had done. We noted Jonah was not to be thought of as a one-off, but is typical of all believers to a greater or lesser extent. We can be angry with God and resent His working in our lives, or in the lives of others. We can resent God's blessing, promoting or providing for those we feel do not deserve it. Perhaps the more common form of resenting God's working is that some tragedy, sickness, or sadness has come upon us or on those we know and love and we cannot understand it. Jonah resented God showing mercy in sparing Nineveh, but his anger didn't just stop there for we have recorded for us:

2. Jonah's complaint (v2)

Here we see Jonah the moaner! Things had not gone as he had expected or imagined. Now he gave vent to the resentment and he moans, complains before God. I think we all get the idea - it really upset Jonah, "*got up his nose*" and irritated him that God had not destroyed Nineveh. It is amazing, even frightening how Jonah can suddenly sink into such rebellion against God; especially in the light of the Lord having so

marvellously dealt with him just a short time previously. Jonah knew many great truths about God - as was noticeably brought out in his prayer in the belly of the fish. He knew salvation came from the Lord alone (2:9); he trusted the Lord for his own salvation and deliverance (2:4 & 6); he realised salvation was all of the free grace of God and not earned by people (2:8) and yet incredibly, he could not make the connection between what he knew and God's mercy to Nineveh!

We noted last time, Jonah had this area, an area of precious sin - exclusive Jewish nationalism and it gave him an unbalanced and incorrect view that salvation was only for the Jews, was only for the ones who were descendants of Abraham. In short Jonah was filled with pride, spiritual, exclusive spiritual pride. His attitude was that we are fine, while others, especially those of Nineveh were not and it blinkered him, caused him to be short sighted. In v2 he says literally, as he complained to God "*is this not what I said when I was yet in **my homeland***". His homeland was the centre of his universe, the be all and end all of his vision and all others were discounted.

It is easy to condemn Jonah, but we are to realise that all of us are like this. We can see things our way, expect, demand (*silently at least*) that things be done our way, in accordance as we see things. It could be caused by all sorts of factors, yet we too can react by resenting God's blessing on things not carried out in accord with our views, our plans and we can resent others who do not see things as we do. We all have our own areas of prejudice, weakness which we will react to,

almost in an unthinking way. These reactions can even spill over into our attitude and approach to God. Our Christianity seems fine in theory, but we are not prepared to put it into action when it cuts across our pet prejudices.

Jonah had his theology right for he knew what God was like, even knew God's purpose in sending him to Nineveh and yet it was not applied and worked out in his life, as his own ideas and prejudices short-circuited the glorious things he knew of God and he misapplied God's dealing with him and Nineveh. Let's note 3 main things from Jonah's complaint,

A. His praying.

Jonah was hot and bothered, full of anger and resentment, but he did not run away from God this time, but he "*prayed*" - if we could call it praying! He remonstrates at best; he flies at God and complains about what God has done. I wonder how many of us would be honest enough to say that we have come like this to God in prayer, we went to God in prayer and we moaned in bitterness and resentment; we arrogantly told God that He was wrong by allowing such and such, or not stepping in and doing...!

This is the second prayer of Jonah we have recorded for us. The first was from inside the fish and there is a great contrast between these two prayers. Obviously, there is the location - the belly of the fish and Nineveh; in the 1st he cried to the Lord in need (2:2 AV), but here he cried to Him in anger; the 1st was in humility and need, but this one is in carnal pride; in the 1st he was empty of self, but here he is full of self; in the 1st he justifies God and accuses self, but here he justifies

self and accuses God! There is a similarity in both prayers, for in both he is desperate - in the 1st he is desperate to live, and here he is desperate to die!

We have to say that Jonah prays in what we would term the wrong spirit - as he seems to lecture God, to make excuses for his sin and even blamed God for God's goodness. We would never pray like that would we? Well, not often anyway; we feel we would be justified if we did so; anyway, God would understand wouldn't He!? We need to pause a moment and to realise that even our greatest, highest, most noble prayers are tainted with sin, even when they include tears of genuine repentance. Prayer is not a case of getting the right formula or feelings and then hey presto the answer drops down! God hears and answers prayers because we have a relationship with Him. God is so long suffering, patient and He puts up with all our pride, selfishness, sin, our moaning and complaining in our prayers. Our prayers can so easily have the essence and fuller flavour of Jonah's prayer!

Jonah here, because he felt he had such *great wisdom and insight*, told God what was wrong with the situation! Jonah could not accept it and he lectured God! There is a world of difference between not understanding the situation and asking God why and for reasons; contrasted to not accepting a situation, demanding answers and action! In the one we submit and ask God for wisdom, guidance and understanding; but in the other we can so easily charge God with injustice, with a lack of love. Yet we can do this so easily when things don't go according to our plans. It is not easy when things do not go as we expect or planned them. It hurts our pride; our

sense of dignity and we can so easily fool ourselves into thinking we are reacting to even God and especially to others in righteous indignation. It is not good for any of us to pray in anger, as we can charge God too easily with folly, wrongly question and complain to Him. Jonah not only complained in his praying but he also:

B. Justified his earlier rebellion.

Jonah was ready to justify his past misdeeds, as anyone of us can be. Jonah, in justifying himself to God, explained why he was disobedient previously. He said in essence *"There I told you so, that is why I did not want to come here!"* There was Jonah telling God in his complaining prayer that he was justified in disobeying Him - he was using his present circumstances to justify his past disobedience and sin! It is strange that he didn't use such when he was talking to the sailors or in his prayer when he was in the fish!

Here Jonah used human reason alone in arguing with God *"I knew you would spare them, that is why I ran away, surely you can see that?"* He side-lined, completely ignored the principle of obedience to God and His commands; he ignored the mercy of God in sparing him when he had run away; he ignored God not only sparing him, but re-commissioning him as His prophet! To suit his own ends Jonah twisted circumstances and even abused the goodness of God. He almost accused God here of error, making a mistake as Jonah almost said *"Look, I am right and You are wrong in sparing Nineveh!"* This was the outworking of sin in this man of God! We need to realise that sin can work itself out in us also. We can hang onto our personal prejudices, our personal sins and

we will even tear heaven to pieces, tear God's word apart just to keep a little bit of precious sin in our hearts. Sadly we, like Jonah, will dethrone God and enthrone self as being in charge of our lives, for sin always does that and will always excuse itself when it does so!

Are any of us ready to excuse our wrongdoing - either by present or past circumstances or events in our lives? As much as we would want to shift the blame, we are to realise we are personally accountable before God for that which we have done, especially that which is wrong towards God. As Jonah sought to justify his earlier rebellion, we are to see what he does, for he:

C. Reproaches God's character.

Jonah recited what he knew of God and His character, it was good and true theology, but he did so with a coldness of heart and used it to reproach God "*I knew that you are...*" He openly spoke of God's graciousness, compassion and love, but it did not seem to have affected him one little bit. This can happen to us also. We can so easily speak of God, His love, it being shown in the so great salvation He has provided, but we can then turn around and fail to know and experience it personally and we can remain untouched by the love of God and we may remain unsaved. Even believers may know God's love, know a great deal about Him, and yet fail to show the same love to others, whether to Christians or non-Christians. People can have the attitude that the theory is fine, but they can't be expected to show such love, patience, long-suffering especially to so-and-so, or to this or that type of person!

Jonah's prejudices blinded his eyes to see the purposes of God to the Jews **and** Gentiles. From Jonah's point of view, God should only have been merciful to the Jews, for if He did so to the people of Nineveh, then He was not just, because God should punish them! How on earth (or in heaven) could God ever be kind to them? Jonah failed to read God's word correctly and missed God's promises to bless all the nations. Yes, the fullness of the blessing of the Gentiles was still some time off in the future, but the time would come when the blessing of God, the salvation He provided would go out to all nations. Yet even in OT God was reaching out and Nineveh would be those who would rejoice in receiving of God's grace and mercy. Sadly, Jonah objected to such and he couldn't or wouldn't take it in!

I have had many Christians express their feelings and wonder why God should ever have bothered with them. Perhaps we feel like that, and we can't understand why God has set His love upon such a one as us. The glorious gospel truth is that God's salvation is for all who will believe on Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is offered freely and genuinely in the preaching of the gospel, in the reading of the gospel, in the consideration of what Christ has done in His life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. As we recognise that, shouldn't we desire to tell others? For if this God was able to save us, then what He's done for us He can do for others.

There may be things in our lives we may feel we have reason to complain about, moan about, be bitter and angry about, then if so, we need to ask ourselves if we have ever paused to consider God's graciousness, compassion and abounding love

as it is in this so great salvation He offers, that He has given to many of us. We are not to remain angry, bitter and complaining, but are to *"Taste and see that the LORD is good"* (Psalm 34:8) and we will know the sweetness of His love being worked out in our lives and the goodness of the Lord should be effective in our lives in every part on a daily basis.

For those of us who are Christians, we are not to excuse sin, justify it, especially by accusing God of being the reason why we did so! When we sin, it is because we are led astray by our lusts and desires; as we go our own way and not God's way. When we find ourselves in that situation, we are to humbly come back to Him, get down off our pedestal of pride and seek the Lord to be in control of all areas of our lives. Then desire to tell whosoever will listen and hear of our lovely Saviour and do so, not because we must, but because we long, desire that others may hear the Gospel and we are to pray that God would save many as He did in Nineveh through Jonah's ministry. We need our hearts filled with the graciousness and compassion of the Lord and that work out in our lives.