

April 12, 2015
Jonah chapter 4

Nineveh was founded by Nimrod just after the flood. It was the largest city in the world at the time of Jonah. Alexander the Great destroyed Nineveh about 612 BC. It cost Alexander the Great thousands of men and man-hours, to overthrow Nineveh many years after Jonah.

However, in Chapter three, God overthrew the great wicked city of Nineveh with just one man who went through the city with a simple message, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”*

The people of Nineveh **“believed God”**, repented and turned from their evil ways. *“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”*

We cannot emphasize enough that to **believe God** means to turn from sin to righteousness.

But God’s mercy caused exceeding distress and even anger for Jonah.

What preacher would be displeased to see an entire city of hundreds of thousands of people repent and turn from their wicked ways, thus sparing them from God's wrath? Yet history’s most effective preacher was displeased that God saved over 600,000 people, and did not overthrow Nineveh in the manner he wanted God to do. I cannot think of a preacher who would be displeased at such a great's response to his preaching.

V. 1, the anger mentioned here would be great "distress", or very grieved. Jonah was distressed from the very first when he was commissioned to go preach in Nineveh. And now that he has fulfilled his commission, he is greatly distressed with the results. The results distressed Jonah exceedingly, and he was very grieved, and wished to die.

Like many of us, he felt he could govern the world better than God Himself. We are tempted to quarrel with God’s Providence, and God’s tolerance with evil. What Jonah wished upon Nineveh was not unjust in itself, but his dispute with God for his mercy certainly was evil.

Sacred history tells us Nineveh was spared, but it does say why Jonah was greatly displeased that God spared Nineveh.

We see here that it was far better for the Ninevites to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hand of his prophet, Jonah. We might speculate that Jonah desired to see them destroyed because, as a prophet, he foresaw what Assyria was going to do to the people whom he loved. We can say that many times it is far better for our "enemies" to fall into the merciful hands of

God, then to fall into our vengeful hands.

Though Jonah had spent three days and nights in the “belly of hell”, he is still the same man who felt the same way about Nineveh now as he did before. Even after the city was converted, his feelings toward this people did not change. However, his bark may have been worse than his bite. Just because Jonah was displeased with their deliverance, does not mean he would have rejoiced over their destruction.

Jonah is quite displeased and very angry (distressed) over God's deliverance of this pagan people. He is burdened with his hard feelings toward the Lord, but rather than hold it inside, he laid it all out before the Lord in prayer. God knows all about our afflictions and even our feelings toward him. The benefit of laying it all out before him is not for his benefit, for he already knows. It is for our benefit to rehearse all these distresses before him.

V, 2. It is a height of foolishness for a man with the knowledge expressed in this verse to seek to run and hide from the Lord. Though neither Jonah nor any of the Old Testament saints knew anything about Christ, they did know that the Lord is gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness. How much more should we who know Christ praise him for his graciousness and long-suffering?

Did not grace and truth come by Christ Jesus?

We should praise the Lord that he is slow to anger, and long-suffering. However, there are many who take advantage of his long-suffering, thinking they have avoided the wrath of God. But "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" awaits those who insist on ignoring Jonah's God of mercy and grace.

V. 2. *“a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”* This statement applies universally, to individuals and to nations. Turning from wickedness to righteousness before the Lord will summon the tender mercies of the Lord.

V. 3. *“Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.”* Jonah prayed a very unusual prayer. Individuals commonly pray for life, but here Jonah prays for death. But this was presumption on Jonah’s part, for no man is permitted to question God in any matter.

At the start of his flight from God, he knew what had happened to a disobedient prophet who was slain by a lion for disobeying God. 1 Kings 13:26. He probably expected to be slain in like manner. When he realized he would not die in the belly of the fish, he prayed. Jonah realize that his life belong to God, and there was no thought of suicide here. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah also wish to die after his great experience on Mount caramel.

v. 4, “*Doest thou do well to be angry?*”

Geneva note: “Will you judge when I do things for my glory, and when I do not?”

Matthew 20:15 “*Is it not lawful for me to do as I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*”

One would think God addressed Jonah in,

Romans 9:14 “*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*”

We have talked about Godly vs Ungodly anger. Jonah knew Scripture well enough to not give an answer to God in v. 4, for he had no answer.

How like us! Someone calls our attention to the truth, and we must remain silent rather than try to answer.

The question is for all who have anger in their hearts: “*Doest thou well to be Angry?*” at God? Who can say yes without exalting themselves above God?

We should point out that even the “best” of men are subject to an uncontrolled spirit, in this case, a spirit of anger. The inner spirit of anger at God cannot remain inside. It will come out.

V. 5. “*So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.*”

Implied is that Jonah was only in the city for a day, then he went to a hill on the east side of the city which overlooked the city. There he waited to see what would happen. He no doubt hoped that his message would have no effect, and that God would overthrow the city. He saw repentance, but was it enough to turn God’s judgment?

V. 5 implies that he hoped that the works “*meet for repentance*” would last but a short time, and God would continue in his wrath against the city. Maybe their repentance was only a pretended repentance, and they would soon return to their wicked ways.

He prepared to wait until the forty days were over. So he went out of the city to build a booth

for shelter while he waited to see what God would do. In his deep distress or anger against God, the prophet went to work. Useful work is better than drink to get one's mind off of distressing things.

His booth was in a high place, so he could observe that would happen. It was also out of the way of any disaster he hoped would fall on the exceeding great city.

Would God show them mercy, or would they return to their wicked ways, and the wrath of God fall upon them?

V. 6. *“The Lord God prepared a gourd... to deliver him from his grief”, not from his anger. “So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.”*

There is much speculation about what this plant was, but the general consensus is that it was a common plant in that area called “Palmchrist, or “The Hand of Christ”. Its leaves are as large as a man's hand, it yields castor oil, and only takes a few days to grow to its full height of 8 to 12 ft. The plant is still common in the area where Nineveh stood. (Jonah, p. 216.)

If the plant was truly the “Palmchrist”, then the clear picture is of the “Hand of Christ” stretched out to those who are suffering in despair and grief.

How like Jonah we are. When we are well, all the world is right. But when we sink into despair and grief, we wish we could in some way escape from our situation, maybe as Jonah desired, even wish to die. But we must find our rest under the shade of our “Hand of Christ”.

2 Corinthians 4:8 *“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”*

Matthew 11:28 *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

Isaiah 61:3 *“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”*

Is our grief remorse over some secret sin? Or is our grief like Jonah's, grief over the fact that something did not go our way?

Only the “Hand of Christ” can comfort in the midst of whatever “grief” might be troubling us.

1 Peter 1:6 *“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in*

heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Did the gourd come up overnight or did it take a few days to normally grow? Does the Lord work miracles when natural and human means are sufficient? Certainly, he spoke to Lazerlth to "come forth", but he used natural means to remove the stone, telling others to move the stone. However, we must say that Divine Providence placed the seed in that particular location, knowing the prophet would build his booth there. Also, Divine Providence saw that the gourd would not germinate until Jonah built his booth.

We certainly cannot understand Divine Providence, but we do know that God knows what we will do, and in his knowledge of our movements, he prepares the various things into which we will enter. The most trivial things do not happen by chance.

God takes minute interest in the individuals of his creation, as he even numbers the hairs of our head. However, each individuals will be held accountable. The more we try to examine and understand Divine knowledge and Providence, the more confusing it will become.

The gourd was prepared to deliver Jonah from his exceeding grief, and it answered its purpose.

V. 6, "*Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.*" That is "Jonah rejoice with great joy." The gourd fulfilled his desire for physical comfort, as if he had been given a cup of cold water on a hot day. Jonah went from being exceedingly displeased and distressed of God, to being exceeding glad of the gourd.

Human emotions can change quickly from one extreme to the other. Did not Peter say "Lord, if it be you bid me to come to you on the water"? And then almost immediately, his courage left him, and he had to say, "Lord save me or I perish".

Our tendency is to swing back and forth between extremes: churches can be packed out by having an emotional high service, but when the people leave, they are in the valley of doom and gloom again.

Did Jonah see the gourd as God's stamp of approval on his action of remaining here to see what would happen?

God helps those who help themselves. Jonah helped by building the booth. God helped by providing shade.

V. 7. *“But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.”*

It is not uncommon in that part of the world for worms to feed upon the Palmchrist, and destroy it within a few hours. Jonah’s grief was replaced with great joy by the gourd, but his joy was short lived. His great joy was dashed the next day by the Lord.

A person may rejoice in his wealth, but that wealth can take wings and be gone tomorrow.

Proverbs 27:1 *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”*

The means of the destruction of the Palmchrist was by nothing as noble as an animal eating or trampling it. Rather, it was an insignificant worm. With the worm, God reminded Jonah of his insignificance.

Psalms 22:6 *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.”*
Isaiah 41:14 *“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”*

A characteristic of good men is that they are humbly conscious of their own insignificance and unworthiness, but they are not to be discouraged by their lowly estate.

[God] employed the mean agency described in the text, we may ask why He did so. Was it not, think you, to teach Jonah, and to teach us all, that there is nobler work for God's servants to be engaged in than that of destruction? The prophet had desired the destruction of Nineveh, and yet had reason to believe that his own preaching in its streets had been the means of its deliverance. This distressed him ; but God desired to show His servant that his distress was inappropriate, and that he had been called to nobler work than that. Let us pay great attention to this, and to the truth in which we are interested and to which it points. The Apostle Paul urges us to covet earnestly the best gifts ; but why should we covet such gifts unless we aspire to the noblest work that can be done in the service of God ? It is, indeed, precisely to this that we should aspire. We should be anxious to co-operate with God Himself in the edification of His Church and the salvation of sinners. (Burns, Jonah 235)

It is much nobler work to construct or conserve than to destroy and waste, though it is much easier to destroy and waste. It is much easier to destroy a piece of fine furniture as Lane makes, than it is to create it with great skill. Why should men turn their backs on the noble works of God and man and spend time on death and destruction?

It is much nobler work to save than to destroy, especially when we can work with God to rescue sinners. The natural tendency of man is to destroy. The first thing a child does in to destroy his

toys, and that natural tendency follows him throughout his life.

The tendency is toward war. The military men who can be create the most destruction are the most honored by the world.

Luke 9:51 *“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, 52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. 53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? 55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. 56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”*

Jonah was not in favor of saving Nineveh, but for destroying it. Using a worm, God rebuked Jonah for desiring death and destruction rather than life and salvation. **God destroyed his enemies in Nineveh by conversion, and they became friends of God.**

Our God delights in the salvation of his enemies, and calls us to be co-laborers with him in that task. We are also called to be co-laborers with him in teaching his former enemies all things whatsoever he has commanded us. We are called upon to Christianize the nations.

However, there are many worms among us whose goal it is to destroy the works of God. A good portion of those worms seek to operate under the guise of "Christianity".

V. 7, *“But God prepared a worm.”*

Matthew 18:7 *“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”*

1 Corinthians 11:18 *“For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”*

Jude 1:3 *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

“God prepared a worm” of destruction. That is, in the form of those *“who were before of old ordained”* to challenge and undermine the Word of God:

1) those who offer corrupt doctrine which is so close to the truth, yet it contains no genuine

salvation.

2) those who offer corrupt customs, traditions

3) those who offer corrupt company.

4) those who prey on the corrupt cravings of the heart. They promised joys of sin, but yet they do not tell us that is only for a season, and they lead to death.

Their purpose is to refine the Elect so they will bring honour and glory to God at the appearing of Christ Jesus.

V. 8. *“And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”*

God prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm and now a vehement east wind. The gourd, worm and the wind were not supernatural, but a providential arrangement by God. As my dad used to say, “Wind from the East blows no good for man nor beast”. The east winds are associated with destruction in Scripture.

The destruction of the good ears in Pharaoh’s dreams was caused by an east wind.

The locust were brought upon Egypt by an east wind.

The waters were parted by an east wind.

Vehement. It is a rushing, or strong terrible, hot drying wind, not unusual in that part of the world. The kind of wind that breaks up a ship at sea. This vehement east wind was probably not unlike the wind that met the ship used by Jonah to flee from God.

Psalms 48:7 *“Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.”*

The wind probably reflected Jonah’s foul mood at the time, as he desired God to send his destructive east wind upon Nineveh.

The *vehement* east wind should have reminded Jonah that his God could save His people from destruction by Assyria just as easily has delivered his people from Egypt by the east wind that parted the Red Sea.

We also should be encouraged by the fact that our God, the God of Jonah, could today just as easily deliver his people from the destructive forces at work against them by the enemies of God. The One Who with a strong East Wind brought the locust and parted the sea has at his disposal all the forces of the universe. Those forces are waiting to instantly obey their Creator, Who can deliver his people by a simple word.

With his shelter gone, *the sun beat upon the head of Jonah*, which made him even more angry at God.

How easy it is to see this anger in our children and grandchildren. The more we try to get them to do something, the more angry they become. We can see it in their face and actions that they would rather die than submit. But this self-destructive hardness is not unique with children. It is only better hidden in adults.

We see this stubbornness in Jonah. The worse his situation became, the more angry he became at God.

We have all met people like this. God does not do as they want him to do, and they become angry. The more God fails to fulfill their desires, the more angry they become. Our sinful nature is inclined to feel that we can get even with God with our anger at him.

But we should be thankful in all things: he provides spiritual and physical shelter as well as food, clothing in the time of storm.

Jonah *fainted*. He was so disappointed and distressed with the situation that he said “let me die here”, and he fainted away.

Even the greatest men of God can and do become discouraged, and desire that God would remove them through death, if necessary.

Then we have Elijah also desired to die after his great victory at Mt. Carmel. Here we see that after a great victory, the emotions sink to a depth where one may wish to die.

2 Corinthians 4:15 *“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

Galatians 6:9 *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*

4:3 *“it is better for me to die than to live.”*

4:8 *“It is better for me to die than to live.”*

Jonah was judging his own cause.

“The truth is that Jonah was not the best judge as to whether it was better for him to live or die at that time, and that none of us is called upon to decide as to the best time for his own departure from the present world. As long as we are permitted to remain here, it is better for us to live than

to die ; better for ourselves, better for the Church to which we belong, better for the world in which we live; but it will be better still for us to depart, and to be with Christ, when the appointed time of our departure arrives. (*Jonah*, p. 262)

V. 9 “*And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry (grieved) for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.*”

3:10, God saw their works of repentance, and had mercy on Nineveh. Seeing that God was not going to overturn Nineveh, Jonah became very grieved that God was not going to overthrow the great, wicked city.

4:4, “*Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?*” “Doest thou well to be grieved that I am going to spare it?” Jonah had no answer as he went about building his booth.

Hoping that the works meet for repentance would be short lived, and that God would overthrow Nineveh, Jonah built his booth for shade from the hot sun while he waited with his hope that the city would be overthrown. God caused a gourd to grow overnight to help shade him.

Follow the point: v. 9, Jonah was greatly grieved, even to death, that God overthrew the gourd which grew up of its own overnight. On the other hand, Jonah was greatly grieved even to death, that God **did not** overthrow the great city of 600,000 built by Nimrod and many thousands of people over the many hundreds of years since the flood.

“You had pity on a gourd which cost you nothing. Should not I have pity on a city that cost thousands of people hundreds of years of hard labor?”

Observe: We get tied up to the point of distress in things that are important to us, yet we ignore the things that are important to God.

Observe: Our nature is displeased with God when does not please us, yet we are displeased with God when he does as pleases him.

The gourd was God’s property, as was Nineveh. He had the right to spare or overthrow either or both.

Who is man that he can complain against God?

What is man who is no more than dust and ashes, that he can sit in judgment of God, calling God into account with, “What doest thou?”

The question to Jonah and to all who complain against God, “*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*” Matthew 20:15

The absolute owner of all creation can do with his creation as he pleases.

The Creator says to his creation, *“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”* John 13:7

Jonah did not know at his present time what the Lord was doing, but in time, the purpose was made clear.

We grow in grace and knowledge of God as we mature in the faith, but we will never reach full knowledge.

Abraham said, *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* Genesis 18:25. And we can be assured that He will always *“do right”*, though we may not agree with, approve nor understand his actions.

V. 11 *“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”*

Two concluding points:

First, God has a special concern for children. Matthew 19:13, 14, 18:3

Second, God has concern even for the beast of the field:

God is greatly displeased with those who inflict needless suffering on the beast he has placed under man’s dominion. Though they may be dumb, God hears their cries of suffering under the cruel hand of their masters.

Luke 12:6, 7, Psalms 145:9, Proverbs 11:17, Matthew 5:7, Hebrews 4:16.

Proverbs 12:10 *“A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”*

“What goes around comes around.” Sowing mercy will reap mercy from God and man.

Can the unmerciful expect God’s mercy when he needs it?

V. 11 *“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”*

Justly and gently rebuked, Jonah had no answer. He went home, and wrote a book that bears his name in order to testify of the greatness of Jehovah God. The book not only shows great honour to the Lord God, but reflects honour on Jonah. He did not attempt to flatter himself, nor excuse

his perverse actions and attitude through the whole ordeal. Jonah was a faithful man of God:

Proverbs 20:6 *“Many men will boast, every one of his own goodness: but who can find a faithful man?”*

We will say that Jonah and Paul were alike, both willing to be accursed from God for the sake of their people; that is, National Israel. Jonah knew that Assyria would survive to destroy unbelieving Israel, and Paul knew that Israel would be cut off for her unbelief, and both were willing to sacrifice themselves for National Israel’s “life”.

But neither Jonah’s nor Paul’s self-sacrifice could “save” their beloved nation. Only the self-sacrifice of the sinless Lamb of God could save the New Israel of God, the elect.

Galatians 3:13 *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”*

Galatians 6:15 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”*