

TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP**JOIN A SERVE TEAM****NEW HERE?****CONNECTION CARD****STAY UP TO DATE****SUBSCRIBE TO DIGITAL BULLETIN****Series: Jonah & the Mercy of God****Title: When God's Mercy Offends You****Text: Jonah 4:1-11**

If you read the story of Jonah in most children's Bibles, the story usually ends with the storm calming, the fish appearing, Jonah obeying, and Nineveh repenting. Jonah chapter 4 is rarely included in children's versions of the story.

The last chapter of the book of Jonah is uncomfortable because there is no celebration, no resolution, no happily ever after ending. Instead, the book of Jonah ends with anger, tension, a plant, a worm, and a question. Chapter 4 may be the most important in the entire book because it reveals the real problem: Jonah's disobedience was deeper than running. Jonah had a heart issue that did not doubt God's power, but instead knew the character of God's mercy. Jonah's worst fears became a reality when God's mercy was displayed to his enemies.

Jonah's Anger (4:1)

- "This change of plans" refers to the relenting of God's punishment on Nineveh. There is a play on words in the Hebrew that highlights the irony of this verse. Literally, the verse reads, "It was a great evil for Jonah, so it angered him." Ironically, at the beginning of the story, Nineveh was described as evil earlier (1:2; 3:10), but now that God had relented from his destruction of evil seemed evil to Jonah.
- Have you ever been angry at God? Sometimes life does not turn out as we expected, or God does not do what we prayed or hoped he would do. Anger might be our emotional response to God's inaction to our situation in life.

God's Character (4:2-4)

- Jonah's anger led to complaining. Finally, Jonah reveals why he ran to Tarshish in the first place. Jonah ran because he knew God would be true to his merciful character toward the evil Ninevites.
- Jonah quotes the most frequently repeated verse in the Old Testament about the character of God: "merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry, and filled with unfailing love."
- The Lord first reveals his character to Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34:6-7. This description of the Lord's character is repeated at least 20 times in the Old Testament (Numbers 4:18; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; Jeremiah 32:18; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3; Nehemiah 9:17). This character of the Lord underscores the whole book of Jonah. The Lord is the God of mercy, not giving people the punishment they deserve.
- Notice how Jonah's character is exactly the opposite of the Lord's character. Jonah is not merciful, and he is quick to anger.
- Jonah would rather be dead than watch the Ninevites live experiencing God's mercy. The Lord questions Jonah's anger, but Jonah does not respond verbally. He responded passive aggressively.

The Mercy of the Plant (4:5-6)

- In his anger, God withdrew. He stayed outside the city in hopes of viewing its demise.
- The Lord arranged a leafy plant to provide shade, relief, and comfort from the heat of the sun as we waited for the demise of Nineveh. Jonah was grateful for the plant.
- The plant embodied God's mercy as the Lord responded graciously to Jonah's anger.

The Mercy of the Worm (4:7-9)

- The Lord also arranged for a worm to eat the plant, causing it to wither away. The Lord also arranged a scorching wind to accompany the hot sun. Jonah came to the point of exhaustion and wished he were dead.
- The worm embodied the mercy of God because it led Jonah to be open a different perspective, to experience the destruction that Nineveh did not, but on a smaller scale. However, Jonah's anger prevented him from seeing the Lord's instruction through the worm.

The Mercy of a Question (4:10-11)

- The Lord reminds Jonah that he was not responsible for plant. Jonah was upset that the plant died, but he could have cared less that 120,000 people in Nineveh could have died without God's mercy.
- One of the most striking things about Jonah is that God doesn't end the book with a statement. Instead, the book of Jonah ends with a question. Why a question? Because questions invite reflection. Questions require a response. Questions expose assumptions. Questions invite us to change our perspective.
- God's final question is aimed at something deeper than Jonah's anger. It challenges Jonah's entire perception of reality. In many ways, the book ends with God asking: "Jonah, will you allow my mercy to reshape the way you see the world?"
- And that question extends to us, because one of the greatest obstacles to spiritual growth is not ignorance but the assumption that our perspective is already right. One of the most dangerous things we can do is allow our opinions, experiences, preferences, politics, hurts, or assumptions to become the lens through which we interpret everything, including God.

How would you respond to the Lord's question if you were Jonah? The question at the end of the book of Jonah is an invitation to meditate on how we might respond to the Lord's character of mercy.

When God's Word challenges our assumptions, confronts our prejudices, exposes our blind spots, and expands our hearts, he is not trying to diminish us. The Lord is inviting us to see reality as he sees it. And the book of Jonah ends where every follower of Jesus must eventually arrive: not asking God to conform to our perceptions, but allowing his mercy to transform them.

Ultimately, Jonah must have been changed by God's mercy. Who else could have recounted these events other than Jonah himself? Certainly, after some time, Jonah allowed God to change his hard, angry heart. He passed this story on to others so that God's word might continue to confront the people of God.

How has the mercy of God transformed you? How does the mercy of God still need to transform you? As followers of Jesus, we put ourselves in a posture of hearing the word of the Lord and responding in obedience, even when the word of God challenges our perspective and confronts our hard, angry hearts.

Further Study of Jonah:

- Watch the BibleProject video: <https://bibleproject.com/videos/jonah/>
- Watch the Bible Project Visual Commentary Video on Exodus 34:6-7: <https://bibleproject.com/videos/character-of-god-exodus/>