



A Needed Realignment with God

Jonah 4

By Pastor Paul Hudson

August 31st, 2025

*** This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We're in the final chapter of Jonah, chapter 4. Last week in chapter three, we saw the Lord telling Jonah once again to go to Nineveh and preach the message to them. This time Jonah obeys the call, though reluctantly. Upon arriving in Nineveh, he walks throughout the city for one day, prophesying that God will destroy the city for their wickedness in forty days. The people of Nineveh respond to God and repent. The chapter ends with God relenting from the destruction that he said he would bring.

Now, before we read chapter four, I want to talk a little bit about what history tells us about ancient Nineveh in relation to any evidence of their repentance and turn toward the God of the Hebrews. The truth is, apparently there is no evidence in recorded history that Nineveh ever repented or worshipped Yahweh. It could be that this was a brief moment in history that the Assyrians did not want to mention in their historical records. Nonetheless, we know from recorded history that Nineveh was in fact destroyed in 612 B.C. and never rebuilt. It lay in a heap of ruins for centuries.

However, there is some evidence concerning Nineveh's possible repentance in the omen texts from Nineveh, the *Enuma Anu Enlil*. These texts from the 8th century BC, around the time of Jonah, predict calamities following a total solar eclipse in 763 BC. About that time, Nineveh was thought to be in a depressed state due to being ruled by a king who was perceived as weak, coupled with the threat of bad omens and an expectation of divine wrath. Interestingly, Nineveh's fortunes turned during the second half of the 8th century, which contributed to a revitalization of Assyrian power in the ANE. That resurgence could very well be the result of Nineveh's repentance, and this could also correlate with the Isaiah 8:7, suggesting that Yahweh controls Assyria's power.

Let's read Jonah Ch. 4. We're picking up the story where God had just withdrawn his judgment from Nineveh because of their repentance.

Jonah 4

4 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

4 But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

10 But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

The Word of God for the people of God.

Let’s pray.

God withdrew his intended judgment upon Nineveh, and “to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.” Alright, the relationship between Jonah and God has issues. Jonah and God—there’s something not right between the two! This is such an interesting little story because we see the human struggle in a man of God that is completely at odds with God’s character. Let’s not forget, Jonah is a man of God. Jonah is a true follower of God, a believer. He fears the Lord, he worships the Lord, he prays to the Lord, he is undoubtedly devout in his religion. He is not someone weak in the faith. He is not someone who is struggling to believe in God. He knows God very well, and he probably could recite the first five books of the Old Testament.

Yet, here is a man of God who has issues with God! To Jonah, God’s way of dealing with this world seems very wrong, and it makes him angry. So angry, in fact, that he’d rather die than live. He asks God to take away his life. “I’d rather be dead,” said Jonah to God, “than to sit here and watch you give a pass to evil people who deserve punishment.” To Jonah, none of this seems right.

If Jonah, a devout, anointed prophet of God, has issues with how God works in this world, how much more might we have our own struggles with God’s ways? I don’t know about you, but I can identify with Jonah. God’s way of working in this world doesn’t always seem right to me. In fact, sometimes I get downright angry with God. Sometimes God’s justice seems so distant. How can God allow evil to survive? It would seem that God should simply wipe evil from the face of the planet so that we can all live in peace. I’ve prayed before in angst that Jesus would come back now and end this nightmare of a world that we live in. I get so upset when people blatantly deceive others for their own profit and get away with it... I get angry when people steal, destroy, or kill with evil intent and nothing happens to them. Where’s God’s justice? Why does it seem that God is so slow to do anything more often than not? Have you had these feelings?

This is the same struggle that Jonah had with God. The Ninevites, in Jonah’s mind, were savage barbarians... they didn’t even deserve to be called human... and yet, God provided a window for them to repent and be saved despite their historical way of life that was so opposed to all that God represents. God’s holiness and justice seemed put on hold and that was wrong to Jonah.

In his anger, Jonah expresses why he ran away from God. In verse two he said in a prayer, “That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” Jonah was angry at God’s character in practice, but in reality, it was Jonah who was running away from God’s compassion, and he didn’t even see himself.

Jonah was running away from God’s graciousness. Jonah was running away from God’s love. All the while, it was Jonah who was most in need of what he was running away from. It was

Jonah who was most in need of God's grace. It was Jonah who was most in need of God's patience and love. And ultimately, Jonah was angry at God for that which God had already so graciously shown him.

We might be angry at God for the way he operates or doesn't operate in this world, but we must understand that the same things that anger us are the very same things that have led us to his merciful love and compassion. The things that make us question God are the very same things that God uses to bring us into his grace, compassion, love, and mercy.

We are often blind to ourselves. We get angry at God because of someone else when the reality is that we ourselves are prone to opposing God's grace, compassion, love, and mercy. At the same time, we too easily forget that it was God's grace, compassion, love, and mercy that saved us. The Apostle Paul came to a self-awareness of his own awful sin and need for God's patience, in 1 Tim. 1:13-16 he said:

13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

— Of whom I am the worst, Paul says— Paul has the highest EQ of all the Apostles— and in verse 16 he says, “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

The Apostle Paul understood that God's great patience and mercy was shown to him so that the immense patience of Christ would show through him as an example to others. If Jonah had the EQ and self-awareness of Paul, then maybe he would have stuck around in Nineveh for a year discipling the newly converted Ninevites instead of sitting on a hill waiting to see if God would destroy them. If he had spent a year with them, teaching them the Scriptures and how to pray, then maybe we would have heard about Nineveh's conversion in the annals of history. Perhaps the Assyrians would be the friends of Israel today instead of bitter enemies as they have been for thousands of years.

The Apostle Paul, who was a devout pharisee zealous for God's law before his conversion, was able to turn his violent anger and zeal into the grace, compassion, love, and mercy of Christ. In our anger and frustration with God, we need to return to his grace, compassion, love, and mercy because that is what we need the most and that is what we have already received in abundance!

In verse four, God asked Jonah, “is it right for you to be angry?” In other words, God was asking Jonah, “is your angry righteous?” There is righteous anger and sinful anger. Eph. 4:26 says, “in your anger, do not sin”: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Similarly, Psalm 4:4 says, “Tremble” meaning “tremble with anger,” “and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.” Both of these verses encourage to maintain righteousness in anger and to deal swiftly and righteously with the anger in your heart before it is allowed to get out of control.

In Genesis 4— we'll take a closer look at this in our next series on the first 4 chapters of Genesis— Cain became very angry because God accepted Abel but rejected his offering. I used to feel a little bad for Cain— at least he brought an offering to God, right? A side note about that- in today's ultra-grace-laced church, Cain would be celebrated for simply bringing an offering to the Lord without regard for his motivation in it or whether it was the kind of offering that God requires. One of the drawbacks to the mantra "come as you are," is that the church too often leaves you as you are when you go out the doors. A church without transformation is a church without the Holy Spirit. There are good reasons why Cain's worship was not accepted, and we will look at that in our next series.

Cain was angry for being rejected by God, and the Lord asked him the same question he asked Jonah: "why are you angry?" And God said, "if you do what is right, will you not be accepted?... but sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." God was telling Cain to rule over his anger because it was about to get way out of control. As it were, Cain ignored God and murdered his own brother out of anger.

Jonah's anger and Cain's anger were both similar in that they were unrighteous in their anger. Righteous anger, by contrast, is born out of love and compassion, and it is constructive not destructive. It's an anger that desires to see restoration rather than destruction. Righteous anger is born out of wisdom. It comes about when foolishness has caused pain. Righteous anger is properly managed and is never allowed to turn into rage, malice, or revenge. Righteous anger is far from malice because it intends to restore order. Righteous anger is far from rage because the hot spot of anger is not focused on one's own emotion; rather it is focused on the evils done. Righteous anger's intent is to heal rather than wound. Righteous anger does not seek revenge; it seeks redemption instead.

Psalm 4 encourages that when you're angry, lay on your bed in silence and search your heart. In your searching, offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord." In other words, reframe your anger away from malice, rage, and revenge and toward grace, compassion, love, and mercy. In grace, compassion, love and mercy are restoration, healing, and redemption.

Jonah had a problem with God because he did not believe that restoration, healing, and redemption should come to his barbarous enemies. Even though Jonah himself had literally just experienced a breathtaking dose of God's healing in his own life, he could not bring himself to accept the same for those who had hurt him and his people.

So, instead of seizing the opportunity to disciple 100,000 new converts and lead them into a deeper relationship with the Lord, sadly, he went outside the city in hopes that God would come to his senses and destroy those wicked pagans. For a man who knows God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, he sure is out of touch with God!

Outside the city, God caused a large leafy plant to grow up over Jonah to ease his discomfort, and vs. 6 says Jonah was very happy about the plant. In fact, this is the happiest Jonah's been in a long while... probably ever since this whole ordeal had begun. But was he really happy about the plant or was he happy that maybe God had validated his anger by bringing him comfort in that place of waiting? Maybe he felt that this plant was a sign from God, that all he needed was to just wait a little longer and God would soon rain fire and brimstone down upon Nineveh.

I think this little detail carries a great lesson for us. Sometimes we might think that a comforting sign of God's presence is a sign of validation. We might be sitting outside of where God really wants us to be, seething with anger, and he might provide us some comfort out of his gracious compassion for us. We might misinterpret God's comforting presence as validation. As if he approves that we are where we are supposed to be and our anger is righteous. Maybe you come to church or to prayer and you feel the peace of God's presence, and you take that as a sign that God is ok with that bit of opposition you have toward God.

Well, God was not validating Jonah's anger or his fight to get his own way outside the city. We should not misinterpret God's comforting presence as a validation of our anger or fight to get our own way. We need to know that God's compassion and love remains for us even while we are stubbornly seeking our own way. In time, he will get our attention just as he did Jonah!

As it were, for Jonah, that comfort only lasted a day. When we are persistently stubborn and opposed to God, he will assure us of his love and compassion for a time, but he may strip the comfort to pull us back into his love and compassion. The next morning God prepared a worm to eat the plant, and then he sent a scorching Sirocco, which is a nasty hot, dusty wind blowing off the blazing desert sand dunes from the east. Siroccos, I've heard, are incredibly miserable. Jonah would have been stuck without shelter in this driving hot wind. He said to God, "just let me die!" Again, God asked him the question, "is your anger righteous?" and Jonah remained stubbornly defiant.

The story ends with God contrasting Jonah's meaningless concern for a comforting plant to that of God's compassion for a people that do not have his law and had never experienced his grace until now.

Let me ask you. If you're dealing with anger right now, is your anger righteous? Is it right for you to be angry? Check your anger before God, bring it to him in all honesty. Think about how much grace, compassion, love, and mercy you have received from God. Be wary of comfort without transformation. It's easy to confuse God's gifts with validation, the gift of his Spirit is meant for our transformation not to comfort us while we are opposing God. Finally, be righteous in your anger. Righteous anger is fueled by the grace, compassion, love, and mercy of Christ, and its aim is always restoration, healing, and redemption. Amen.

Let's pray.