

6. Interpretation – Chapter 4

July 26, 2018

If the Book of Jonah finished its incident at the end of chapter 3, Jonah would be recorded as the greatest evangelist in human history. With one, rather very untactful message, over a half million people repented, turned their hearts to the God of Israel, and followed Him. But the Lord knew the motive and the heart behind Jonah's preaching. And the Bible is so honest that it reveals the thoughts and intents of Jonah's heart and exposes his sins.

This runaway prophet was very much like the prodigal son in chapter 1 by wanting to do whatever he wanted, but in chapter 4, Jonah was more like the older brother of the prodigal son.

As I mentioned to you before, in chapter 1, we find Jonah was running away from God. In chapter 2, he was running to God while he was in the belly of the great fish. In chapter 3, after he was called back to his duty, Jonah was running with God. Finally, in chapter 4, we see him again running up against God. Jonah must have one very hard head like us.

It is not enough for God's servants simply to do their Master's will. We must do His will from our hearts. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart. That's where Jonah's problems were to be found.

The most remarkable thing is that God tenderly dealt with His ungrateful prophet and sought to bring him back to the place of joy and fellowship like He would do with anyone of His children.

A. MERCY TO ME, NOT TO OTHERS

Jonah 4:1-4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4 Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

What do you see here?

Do you see that Jonah preached the message of repentance to the people of Nineveh with his heart behind it?

Why did Jonah become angry? And whom was he angry with?

Jonah didn't give his message because he cared about the people of Nineveh, but he was hoping that they would reject his message and God would fry them extra crispy. That would be his pleasure to see them getting God's wrath.

Jonah himself called on the mercy of God while he was inside the belly of the great fish and enjoyed the mercy of God when it was extended to Jonah. Now he resents God's mercy when it is extended to others. What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the people of Nineveh?

Luke 6:37-38 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and

running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh are so painful to Jonah that he would rather die than witness it. It has been said, "We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive."

For the second time in this account, Jonah prays, but his second prayer was much different in content and intent. He prayed his best prayer in the worst place, the fish's belly, and he prayed his worst prayer in the best place, at Nineveh where God was working mightily. His first prayer came from a broken heart, but his second prayer came from an angry heart. In his first prayer, he asked God to save him, but in his second prayer, he asked God to take his life!

Once again, Jonah would rather die than not have his own way. In other words, he says, "I quit. I am going for a non-prophet status from now on."

As we can see Jonah might know some of the attributes of God, but He didn't realize how the sovereignty of God works.

Jonah also was concerned about his reputation, not only before the Ninevites, but also before the Jews back home. When Jonah's friends found out that he had been the instrument of saving Nineveh from God's wrath, they could have considered him a traitor to official Jewish foreign policy.

God likes to ask us questions, because they reveal our heart. It also puts us on proper ground before Him, because He has every right to question us and we owe Him answers.

- Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you have done? – Genesis 3
- Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? – Genesis 4
- What have you done? – 1 Samuel 13:11
- Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? – 2 Samuel 12
- Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? – Isaiah 6
- Who do you say that I am? – Matthew 16
- What do you want Me to do for you? – Matthew 20:32
- Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? – Luke 22
- Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? – Acts 9

Have you ever been angry at God? Don't lie, you are in the church sanctuary. If we are angry at God, He will ask us the same question He asked Jonah: "Is it right for you to be angry?" And the answer must always be, "No, Lord. All Your ways are right, even if I don't understand them."

B. AN OBJECT LESSON FOR JONAH

Jonah 4:5-8 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the

plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Why did Jonah sit on the east side of the city and made a shelter for himself?
What was he hoping to see out there?

Jonah hoped that the repentance of Nineveh was not real and hoped that he would see the city destroyed after all. He went out of the city for his own safety and made himself a front row seat to see God's wrath against the Ninevites.

The plant that the Lord prepared for Jonah, is that a real plant?

Does it represent anything allegorically?

Just as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, now He prepares a particular plant to grow overnight to shelter Jonah as he waited hoping that their city would be destroyed. This is the first time we find Jonah happy. He was selfish and petty. His happiness was just as fleshly as his anger.

3 chapters we studied were easy to tackle in comparison with this chapter 4. But this chapter deals with the deeper layer of Jonah's characters which we, probably all of us, can understand.

So, let me ask you to write down your own true answers, don't speak out. Just write them down on your outline notes. Be honest with yourself. Here are the questions:

- What makes me happy with the Lord?
- What makes me angry at the Lord?
- What makes me want to give up in my Christian walk?

The Lord was giving Jonah an object lesson here:

Jonah was a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways as the Book of James declared.

- One minute he's preaching God's Word, but the next minute he's disobeying it and fleeing his duty post.
- While inside the great fish, he prayed to be delivered. But now he asks the Lord to kill him, because the Lord was delivering his enemies from eternal death.
- He called the city to repentance, but he wouldn't repent himself.
- He was more concerned about creature comforts than he was about winning the lost.
- The great fish, the Ninevites, the plant, the worm, and the wind have all obeyed God. But this ungrateful prophet still refuses to obey, and he has the most to gain.

Can a godly person go from being godly to being selfish in no time?

Yes, any one of us can be in that situation. Whenever we discard God's perspective for our sins and ramification of our selfishness, it will happen.

Here was a man who survived three days and three nights in a fish's stomach; a man who repented, prayed, and preached the truth to the people of Nineveh; a man whom God used to bring about a spiritual awakening. Yet he fell into sin again. It's a reminder that no matter how long we have known the Lord, we can still mess up. No matter how long we have known the Lord, we still may need to be revived again.

C. A LESSON FROM THE PLANT

Jonah 4:9-11 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10

But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"

Which words come to your mind after you read this portion of the Scripture?

The plant was just a plant, and Jonah had no personal interest or investment in the plant except what it provided for him at the moment. Jonah's anger was unrighteous. Unrighteous anger feeds the ego and produces the poison of selfishness in the heart.

We can be quick to say that Jonah was wrong. What about us? When we know how much we have been forgiven by God, how can we not forgive those who offended us?

A wise man gave us the definition of "Forgiveness": Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me.

Do you have someone in your heart who offended you before and you don't want to forgive that person? I said that you DON'T WANT, not CAN NOT. Yes, you can forgive that person. You might say to me, "You don't know what he has done to me." You are right, I don't. That person might be someone who took advantage of you emotionally, physically, and financially. What are you going to do about it, since you heard the message from God? You need to forgive that person, no matter how you were hurt by that person. But restoration is depending on each situation. If you are not going to forgive, you are not hurting anyone else except yourself. You would become a bitter, short-tempered, and nasty person to be around.

There is one person who wept over when He saw a city. It was Jesus Christ our Lord. I need to compare a few things between Jesus and Jonah:

1) Jonah preached a message of judgment.

But Jesus preached a message of grace and salvation.

2) Jonah almost died for his own sins.

But Jesus willingly died for the sins of the world.

3) Jonah's ministry was to only one city.

But Jesus is "the Savior of the world".

4) Jonah's obedience was not from the heart.

But Jesus always did whatever pleased His Father from His heart.

5) Jonah didn't love the people he came to save.

But Jesus had compassion for sinners and proved His love by dying for them on the cross.

6) Jonah waited outside the city to see if God would kill those he would not forgive.

But on the cross, outside the city, Jesus asked God to forgive those who killed Him.

Since Jonah wrote the Book, I think it is reasonable to say that after this experience, Jonah left the dead plant and went back to Nineveh, and I think that he rejoiced with the Ninevites that they had come to a saving knowledge of God.

But the real issue isn't how Jonah answered God's question. The real issue is how you and I today are answering God's questions:

Do we agree with God that people without Christ are lost?

Like God, do we have compassion for those who are lost?
Do we pray that the Gospel will go to people in every part of Sahuarita, Green Valley, Corona de Tucson, Rio Rico and the world, and are we willing to be a part of that process to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?
Do we rejoice when sinners repent and trust the Savior?
Are we willing to overcome the differences and to forgive those who were against us with the same grace and mercy of God that we received from Him?

All of those questions and more are wrapped up in what God asked Jonah.
We can't answer for him, but we can answer for ourselves.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) It is our choice to accept the will of God that is backed by His sovereignty or refuse it and face the consequences.

No matter what we try to do against God's will, He will accomplish His will over ours in His time. By standing against Him, we are the ones who miss wonderful opportunities to be used by Him for His glory.

2) We need to remember that salvation belongs to our God.

No other name under heaven than Jesus can we be saved – no special social class, no particular race would receive any special preference from Him. It is available to everyone only through Jesus Christ.

3) God's forgiveness is not only for our own sins against Him, but also it is our model so that we can extend this forgiveness to others.