

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 27/06/2021

Series – Jonah, the runaway servant

Part 8 – “Dealing with storms in our heart.

Text: Jonah 4

Scripture references from the ESV or NSV

Jonah 3:10 – 4:11 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?” ⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant^[b] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.^[c] So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” ⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

When we discover things in the Bible about God that our human minds cannot understand, we need to learn to live with the mystery and allow those truths to lead us to worship God and to submit to him, in awe and wonder.

What happens when God's ways are so perplexing to us that, instead of experiencing awe and wonder, trusting and submitting to God, we find ourselves unhappy and even angry with him?

Jonah experienced this (3:10 – 4:1 above). His mission to the Ninevites turned out to be successful, but this made him angry, not glad. From one sermon in one day, he saw a whole city respond in repentance and turn from its evil ways. If that were to happen in Broadstone, we would be rejoicing! Why didn't Jonah rejoice?

Jonah acted in external obedience to the command of God but he did not do it with a right heart. The problem was exposed when God didn't do what Jonah wanted God to do. There is a lesson for us here.

If our heart isn't right, we will respond wrongly to God's perplexing ways.

Jonah was displeased and angry because God didn't act as Jonah had hoped he would. It is safe to assume that he was displeased and angry with God himself. We may not respond as drastically as Jonah did, but when God doesn't do what we want him to do, we can still find ourselves irritated or disappointed with him. Maybe you have:

- prayed consistently for him to save your children. In fact, they seem to be going further away from God. You feel disappointed with God because, with just a word, he could turn their hearts to him but he hasn't.
- asked for help in your exams, but didn't get the grades you needed to do what you thought was the right next step. You are left perplexed and wonder what was the point of praying.
- asked God for a Christian spouse but nothing has happened. You are still single and are left feeling that God has acted unfairly.
- committed your day to the Lord, trusting he would keep you safe, but then you had an accident and question God's goodness.

When God hasn't done what we asked or hoped he would do, a storm of discontent, disappointment, displeasure and even anger at God rises in our hearts – the Jonah syndrome. But the problem isn't with God – it's with us.

When the desires of our hearts are different to the desires of God's heart then we are in danger of experiencing a storm in our own heart.

God's heart was set on delivering Nineveh, but Jonah's heart was set on its destruction. If Jonah's heart had been in

tune with God's heart, he would have been glad that Nineveh was spared, working amongst the people to help them come to understand this God of mercy and leading them to become worshippers of God.

Jonah's heart was sick in two ways and that sickness showed itself in anger towards God. This same sickness of heart is probably true for all of us to a greater or lesser extent.

1. Jonah had a heart that was governed by idols.

In his prayer, Jonah acknowledged that 'Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love' (**Jonah 2:8**), but he was probably thinking of the Ninevites! When God put Jonah under pressure, the governing idols that he was unaware of in his own heart were exposed – those things that were more dear to him than God was.

When God puts us under pressure, our idols are revealed too. Jonah's particular idols were:

- a) **The idol of nationalism** – Jonah hated the Ninevites because they were Israel's enemies. He was happy at the prospect that they would be destroyed. When God spared them, Jonah knew that they would be able to attack and destroy Israel in the future and couldn't cope with God behaving like this.

Jonah loved his own nation but he didn't love ALL people made in the image of God. At heart he was a racist who prized his own people above other people groups. His people, Israel, were his functional god, and the ways in which he thought, acted and spoke were determined by his love for them, and not by his love for God.

Jonah loved the people of God more than he loved God.

People can easily become our functional god. The people of God are precious to God and should have a special place in our hearts, as is also true with our family, but we have strayed into idolatry when

- our love for them becomes greater than our love for God **or**
- we are disappointed with God because he hasn't acted towards those we love in the way that we wanted.

b) The idol of reputation – Jonah had gone with a message of God’s judgement to Israel’s enemy, no doubt with the support of the Israelites. To go home and tell them that God had spared the Ninevites would have made him sound like a false prophet. Israel would have been furious with him as it was through his message that God had spared the Ninevites. Jonah’s reputation as a prophet was on the line.

Jonah was more concerned about his reputation than he was about God’s desire to spare Nineveh.

Jonah loved himself more than he loved God

How many of us are guilty of that? We are concerned about our reputation so we don’t speak up for God unless the message we speak will help promote our reputation and cause people to think well of us.

What are the idols in our own hearts?

2. Jonah had a heart that was empty of grace

Jonah had correct theology (v2 above), because he knew his Bible. This statement about God occurs both in **Exodus 34** and **Psalms 103** (see p4). He knew the theory of God’s character, but it hadn’t worked its way into his heart.

Jonah’s heart was empty of the grace he confessed.

That was true even after he had experienced God’s grace to him earlier. Jonah had run from God – a sinful action – but God had saved him from drowning and given him a second chance, recommissioning him as a prophet. Yet despite knowing about God’s grace and even experiencing it, his heart was still empty of God’s grace. Therefore he was unable to show grace to this pagan nation that he hated. Can this be true of us too? (More next week)

Do we have a heart that is empty of grace and so fail to show grace to those we think least deserve it?

Jonah found his heart exposed after encountering God’s perplexing ways. What can we learn from this?

a) When we find ourselves in perplexing ways, we can trust that God is working for our good.

Romans 8:28 (see p4) tells us that, for those who love God, all things work together for good...

Do we see God's perplexing ways as working for our good, when he doesn't do what we prayed for or frustrates our plans? We need to grasp this, because our greatest joy is to be found in God himself. He is to be the joy that surpasses all other joys – even the joy of family, God's people or all the gifts he gives us. When God is our greatest joy, we can't ever lose our joy, no matter what life throws at us.

However, our hearts are governed by idols. Our joy is too often bound up in functional gods like family, the people of God, ministry or worship music. These things are not wrong unless they have more of our heart than God does.

We never know how deeply we love something until God cuts across it.

When God cut across Jonah's love for his nation and his reputation as a prophet, he wasn't doing it to be unkind but to lead Jonah into a greater joy – the joy of God.

When God frustrates our plans, it may be that he is doing this to expose an idol we were unaware of, so that he can bring us to find our greatest joy in him.

b) When we find ourselves in perplexing ways, we can be honest with God in prayer

The Psalms are deeply honest conversations that people have had with God, telling of their frustrations, bitterness, anger, hatred, disappointments and even how they felt God was being unfair. Prayer is not only about praise and asking. These prayers of lament are given to us by God himself for us to pray back to him. God expects us to open our hearts to him in honesty and to express the grief that is in them as he reveals the idols in our hearts to us. That is what Jonah did (**vv2-3**). His prayer was not a godly prayer but it was still prayer. He had a truly honest conversation with God when he was in the fish, and then another honest conversation with God in Nineveh.

We need to make use of this amazing privilege of prayer to express our lament.

We can come before God and tell him exactly how we feel about his perplexing ways because he knows it anyway. It is in that place of honest lament that we will find God

dealing with our idols, and as we confess those functional gods and how they have ruled our hearts so **God will begin to set our hearts on him.**

As the Spirit brings all these things to mind when we pray, so we will discover the beauty of our Saviour.

c) When we find ourselves in perplexing ways, we can submit to the God who is all wise.

Can anything be more perplexing than the sinless Son of God suffering death on a cross for sinful humanity?

We really need to stop and think about this, not just glibly state, as we often do, that Jesus died for me. **Can anything be more perplexing than the Father who loved his Son from all eternity turning his face away from him?** Our sin was put upon the Son and he was no longer beautiful in the sight of the Father. Then the Father turned his face away from his beloved Son. **Can anything be more perplexing, particularly when we remember that our God is one God?**

Jesus himself prayed in the garden with honest, agonising lament, coming to a place of submission to his Father's will.

When Jesus rules our hearts, in the place of those functional gods exposed to us by God, then we have a Saviour who can enable us to submit to God's providences in our lives, filling us with perfect joy and peace, filling our hearts with grace so that we can respond with grace even to our enemies.

This is our Saviour, who doesn't ask us to do anything he hasn't already done but walks through it with us.

As we ponder the beauty of our amazing Saviour, he will lead us in joyful praise and faith filled trust.

Exodus 34: 6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands,^[a] forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,

Psalm 103: 8-13 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, [\[a\]](#) for those who are called according to his purpose.