

Life Group Discussion Guide

Jonah: A Tale of Two Hearts

Week 4: A Deeper Storm Still • Jonah 3:10–4:11

The biggest storms we'll face in our lifetime are those that rage in our own hearts. As we conclude our study of the "reluctant prophet," chapter 4 follows Jonah into an even deeper storm than those he faced on the ship and in the fish.

Here, we confront the undeniable difference between God's merciful heart and Jonah's self-preserving one: God's grace includes those we exclude.

To unpack this idea, Pastor Jon presented three things grace does:

1. Grace Enrages

Chapter 4 opens with a very angry Jonah. Verses 2 and 3 tell us why: "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. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'"

Jonah knew who God is. And he did everything possible to keep God's message from reaching the wicked Ninevites, because he knew just what the outcome would be: grace. A grace that, in his eyes, they didn't deserve.

Before we criticize, let's be reminded that each of us have a "Nineveh" in our own lives that we struggle to have compassion toward. Pastor Jon gave four reasons why:

- a. **We Feel Superior** – We look down our nose at others in the belief that they need way more grace than we do. We have a hard time forgiving others because, deep down, we don't think we ourselves need much forgiveness.
 - b. **We Feel Envious** – When we compare ourselves to others, we feel we've done more to earn God's grace than they have. So...what's He doing being so good to them?
 - c. **We Feel Victimized** – When God shows mercy to someone who's wronged us, we feel we're the ones who deserve that grace. They, on the other hand, belong on the receiving end of His wrath.
 - d. **We Are Tribal** – We don't believe "those people" are worthy of God's grace because they aren't "our people." In our differences, we can't bring ourselves to love them. When we don't love them, we prefer that God didn't either.
- Which of these four heart postures can you relate to?
 - What have these perspectives produced in your life? In other words, what has been the outcome of viewing yourself and others this way?

2. Grace Mystifies

In the heat of his anger, Jonah sits outside the city and waits to see what will happen to it. There, “the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort.” (4:6) As you might expect, “Jonah was very happy about the plant.”

This reveals something about Jonah’s heart that’s often true of ours: it’s easy for us to think we have a deeper grasp on God’s grace than we do. Pastor Jon put it this way:

“Jonah does not like that God is gracious, but only when that grace is aimed at his enemies. When that same grace is aimed at him, he’s very happy! See, it’s not actually God’s grace that we love. What we love is ourselves and life going according to our expectations. But when others cross those expectations, it burns us.”

- In examining your own heart and life, do you see a greater love for God’s grace or for your own happiness and comfort? Why do you answer that way?
- What are the signs/symptoms of a life lived for our own good as opposed to the good of others, no matter who they are?
- How does this heart posture differ from the heart of God?

After God provides the leafy plant to ease Jonah’s discomfort, He then does something even more mystifying: “But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint.” (4:7)

Thus far, God has provided the storm, the worm, and the wind – all of which made Jonah’s life harder. Meanwhile, He has shown immense mercy to the exceedingly wicked Ninevites. Like Jonah, you might be wondering what’s going on here. Mercy for the wicked. Hardship for God’s servant. How is this grace?

God’s actions reveal one of the most important truths found in this short book:

“There’s something your soul needs more than comfort. You could have all the comforts of the world but be miserable, but you could be incredibly uncomfortable and have invincible joy if you grasp God’s grace.”

What God’s after is not our comfort, but our heart. Although Jonah finally went to Nineveh, he never loved Nineveh because he didn’t grasp God’s grace. That’s what chapter 4 is all about. It exposes Jonah’s angry heart – the deeper storm – and confronts him with God’s true heart.

- Where do you believe true satisfaction and joy are found?
- Does the way you live align with what you say you believe? Why or why not?
- Pastor Jon explained, “For idolaters, liars, the sexually immoral, unbelievers, and violent people to enter into the kingdom of God, we must grasp the gracious heart of God, and that often

involves us in suffering.” What type of suffering might be involved in showing the heart of God to the Nineveh in your life?

- Do you believe reaching these people is worth your suffering? Why or why not?

3. Grace Triumphs

In the final verses of the book, God exposes Jonah’s petty self-interest against His own expansive grace. Jonah’s self-absorbed and self-sabotaged role in the salvation of Nineveh stands in stark contrast to the true and better Jonah who came for ours. Pastor Jon said it this way:

“The theological, cultural, and moral distance that separated Jonah from Nineveh was a mere yard compared to the millions of miles the Son of God traveled to become one of us and live in a place without love for him – a place that would kill him.”

Jesus’ journey to us triumphed over everything that kept us – and our enemies – from God’s grace.

- How does Jesus’ death on the cross defeat our impulse to:
 - Feel superior?
 - Envy God’s favor toward others?
 - Define ourselves as victims?
 - Exclude those who differ from us?
- Have you invited God to crush your sense of superiority, your envy, your victim mindset, and your tribalism? What do you think will change when you do?
- Whom is God sending you to that you sense reluctance in your heart to reach? Pray now for the humble obedience to pick up your cross and follow Jesus where He’s leading you to go.
- What tangible step will you take to show God’s heart to your Nineveh, even if it means suffering?

“God’s grace includes those we exclude. And He wants to reach them through us. That’s the deepest lesson from Jonah, and it’s the deepest lesson from the Gospel.”