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C0825 – July 30, 2008 – Jonah 4:1-11 – The Heart Of God

Alright, last time we worked with Jonah 4, we want to continue thinking through this dialogue between God and Jonah because this is the culmination of the book. There's a tendency to think the zenith has been reached when ~1 million Ninevites believed God and were saved. But if that were the main point of the book it would have ended with chapter 3. So chapter 4 negates that idea. Chapter 3 is necessary but Chapter 4 is the climax. So if you miss this point you miss the main point of the book. What this book is meant to contrast is the heart of God and the heart of man. Once again it goes back to the Creator-creature distinction. The heart of the Creator is essentially compassionate, gracious, merciful, abounding in lovingkindness, relenting of calamity but the heart of the creature, according to Jeremiah, "...is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" The depravity of the human heart is beyond comprehension. We really give man the benefit of the doubt but if we are to take seriously our depravity, our sickness how much greater the contrast between our heart and God's? Might we not see God's grace in a much clearer light? And we all have the tendency, we look out and we see so and so and so and so is so terrible, look what he did, and the very act of judgment is an affirmation that I'm good. And here's Jonah, he looks at the Ninevites, "Oh, look at this sick excuse for humanity, this nation of corruption, this wart of a city, gotta get rid of them, in the meantime failing to see his own sickness, that he too was a wart of humanity." So the chapter lays bare the heart of the Creator and the heart of the creature.

To do so, as is occasionally the case in Scripture, you find a one on one confrontation between the Creator and one of His creatures. In Gen 3 it was God and Adam, in Job 38-41 it was God and Job and here it's God and Jonah. Now these are all counseling sessions and they are important passages for

developing counseling theory. You ask yourself, how does God handle these situations, how does God handle a rebellious person? How does He draw forth poison from someone who thinks they're not poisoned? On what grounds does God deal with someone who's out of it spiritually? And that's what we have here, we have Jonah who is a sinner, obviously in 4:1 he's angry, that's his sin, all anger is not sin for Paul says, "In your anger do not sin," but this is a sinful anger, and in v 2-3 he goes into a prayer, he's praying yes, but this prayer is a carnal prayer, I mean, there's some rational statements in there such as who God is but it closes with an irrational request, "Therefore, please take my life from me..." That's not a logical conclusion. That's irrational. And that's what always happens to the carnal mind, the mind at enmity with God is darkened, professing to be wise they become fools, the result of rejecting God on the mind is foolishness, you can suppress God, you can reject God, you can be mad at God but just remember there are always consequences to sin. You're free to make your choices but you're not free from the consequences of your choices. Sorry. So sin affects the mind, the mental processes that go on in the mind, the thought processes that take place, it's just not true that the mind is left unaffected by sin.

Now, let your eyes scan that prayer and God's response in v 4. What is it in that prayer that God responded to? It's a fascinating response. Does He respond to the prayer? No, he goes for the mental attitude of v 1 doesn't He? "Do you have good reason to be angry?" God just like He always does gets right to the issue. You know, so often we try to work with someone and we just kind of beat around the bushes but God is so adept at this that He's able in one fell swoop to just cut through all the flack, all the excuses, all the goo, and it's frightening because we infer from this that He sees all of our hearts, it's not just Jonah, it's all of our hearts, and you realize you're just kind of lying naked before Him, all the gunk in your life He sees all of it. And that's a scary thought. It's frightening to think that you can pull the wool over other people's eyes but you can't pull the wool over His eyes. He's omniscient, whatever you do it doesn't surprise Him a bit, He's known from all eternity, He's got your record book, He's got all the data and you're not going anywhere. And this discussion isn't going anywhere until Jonah figures out, "Hey buddy, you've got a sin issue here. Get back in line." And it's fascinating to watch this because here you have a believer who's out of fellowship and by golly God insists that we get one thing straight right off the bat and that one thing is unconfessed sin. "You've got an anger problem Jonah." Now deal with

it. You come back in line with My purposes. I've got a program I'm working here and you need to get in line with My program. To get Jonah there God is going to work with him, and it's fascinating because rather than say, Jonah, you confess your sin, you have a problem, straighten up. God doesn't do that. He works with Jonah, He's patient with Jonah, he gives Jonah the very thing He gave to the Ninevites: grace and time to repent. And the logic of how God does this is irresistible.

Alright, we've had the response of the Ninevites, we've had Jonah's response to the response of the Ninevites and we've had God's response to Jonah. Now verse 5, **Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.** So the forty days had elapsed, that's how I'm interpreting this, some commentators say he went outside the city before the forty days had elapsed. But that's not right because Jonah isn't angry at the Ninevites for repenting. V 2 says he's angry at God for relenting. That's the problem, so the forty days must have elapsed because God said He was giving them forty days. If the forty days hadn't expired then Jonah couldn't be angry at God for relenting since that judgment could yet come. The logic is plain. So the forty days had elapsed and God's judgment didn't come so he's all angry outside the city. And he's watching what will happen. Will the repentance last? Was the repentance real? Look at the heart of this guy. What's his hope? That the repentance will wear off and God will smash them. And he built **a shelter for himself**, this is a makeshift shelter of sticks and limbs but obviously it's inadequate. So he's camped out on the hillside in a makeshift tent wanting to see God wipe them off the face of the map, another Sodom and Gomorrah incident, fire and brimstone, "Let's go Lord. Get the show on the road." This is the heart of man, we want the Lord to carry out our plans. We want the Lord to line up with our program. We want the end of grace. Do you realize that every time we pray for the Lord's return we're praying for the end of grace? There is an end to grace, grace doesn't just go on and on and on forever. For one, when a person dies is there any more opportunity for faith in Christ? No, that's it. No one is going to stand before God and God say to him, "Now, I know you didn't hear the gospel so let me feed it to you real quick and you decide now." Sorry, it's too late. Physical death is the end of the grace offer. And obviously with our enemies we so often want the end of grace, we just call down judgment. Well that's the heart of Jonah. If he knew and we don't know for sure, but if Jonah

knew about Hosea's prophecy, turn over to Hosea 11:5, if it was in the wind that Assyria was going to take Israel captive then what is Jonah trying to do here? Thwart the plan of God. Can God's plan be thwarted? No. Now here in Hosea 11 God is talking about how he brought Israel out of Egypt, how He loved Israel, how He cared for her, sent prophets to her, healed her, all the things He did for her but they kept running into idolatry and he says in v 5, "They will not return to the land of Egypt; But Assyria—he will be their king Because they refused to return *to Me*." Now, this is going to be fulfilled in 722, 40 years later, another period of testing but this time it's not a period of testing for Nineveh but a period of testing for Israel. They'd become rich, they had become increasingly idolatrous and that is going to lead to their captivity to Assyria. So we can imagine if in fact Jonah knew this was coming why he wanted God to destroy Nineveh. So he's camped out waiting for it.

Verse 6, and while he was there watch this and keep in mind, our question. How is God going to awaken Jonah to his sin? What's his method because we can use this with people, it takes a lot of thought but it's highly effective. **So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort.** What's the first thing God does after confronting Jonah with His anger. Let's put them in order. First, God questioned Jonah, He started with a question not a lecture. And obviously the question was to stimulate thought, "Do you have a good reason to be angry." Now he's up there thinking, he builds his shelter and what's the second thing God does? He extends grace. Gives him a plant. Now, we know this was not a natural phenomenon. Notice it says **the Lord God appointed**. Anybody remember where we've seen that the Lord appoint something before? Chapter 1:17. The Lord appointed a great fish. So the first point is that the Hebrew word (*mana*) signifies a miracle, you see it again in 4:7, He appoints what? A "worm." You see it the last time in v 8 where He appoints what? A "scorching east wind." Okay, so these are all miracles, there are others in the book of Jonah; the great storm, the faith of the Ninevites and so forth but these four appointments are also miracles. So this is the second of four appointments, a plant grows up over Jonah. There's another reason we know it was a miracle from v 10. When did the plant grow up? Overnight. So you had no plant and then at night a plant grew up. Plants don't grow at night. Plants require light to grow, remember, photosynthesis is a light dependent process but it was night when the plant grew up so the text is emphasizing a supernatural appointment by God.

And notice Jonah's response to the plant. **And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.** Oh the grace of God, it's just so wonderful, I love to receive the grace of God, it makes me so happy. You know this is the only time we see Jonah happy in the whole book. He wasn't happy when he was saved by the fish, he wasn't happy when the Ninevites didn't get smashed by God, but he was happy when this plant grew up. Now why? What was God's purpose in growing the plant? **to deliver him from his discomfort.** This improves his makeshift shelter. It shields him from the boiling hot sun. Botanists think this may have been the ricinus plant, the castor oil plant that grows up eight to ten feet tall, has large, lush leaves, so this is giving Jonah some nice shade and he's all smiles, but what do you not see? Do you see Jonah confess his sin? No. No positive volition toward God, no thankfulness for the plant, no confession of sin. What might Jonah have thought at this point? That God was blessing him for his obedience. "I went to the Ninevites and I said what you wanted me to. So now I'm getting blessed."

But I suggest that while he may have been thinking that God is trying to get across another idea. Could it be that God is saying, "Jonah, just as you are happy over the plant so I am happy over the Ninevites repentance?" But apparently he didn't get the lesson so verse 7, **God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.** So here's another miracle, God **appointed a worm** but notice something about this miracle? Is it a good miracle? No, it's a bad miracle. Don't get the idea that all miracles are for people's favor, they can sometimes be in the negative. God struck a king with worms and he died (Acts 12:23). Always remember that signs and wonders are not all good. People want to always talk about the good ones well what about the bad ones? One thing I have never heard or read about in the signs and wonders movement is a negative miracle, never, not once did I read about Benny Hinn striking people with worms so they die. Why is that? So here this worm eats up the plant or the singular could refer to a group of worms. And they spend all night munching those nice lush leaves and Jonah was probably conked out asleep.

When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind. the **scorching east wind** was a *sirocco*, these are heavy winds, 60mph, hot winds, they're not refreshing but hot, hot and carrying lots of dust and the dust can travel hundreds of miles and it just pelts you. It's very

uncomfortable, it can blow dust hundreds of miles. These are some of the winds our soldiers in Iraq faced and you'd see pictures on the news of our guys digging holes and burying themselves just to get out of the wind, it's terrible. **and the sun beat down on Jonah's head** so I take it from that that the winds blew over his makeshift shelter, he's just out under the direct sun beating down on his head to the point **that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."** Now, why would he want to die? Things have to be pretty bad to say death is better than life. Keep in mind Jonah's life back in Israel. He lived in a little town called Gath-hepher, he was wealthy, had all the luxuries of life, he was popular. Let's review this from 2 Kings 14. Jonah had quite a prophetic career so far, he was a prophet in the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II, and in verse 25 we read about Jeroboam following one of Jonah's prophecies. "He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, *according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai...*" So Jonah issues this prophecy about extending the borders, so Jeroboam follows God's word and extends the kingdom out over into Trans-Jordan from the Dead Sea up to Lebanon and what this did for the northern kingdom was economically important because you had major trade routes through this area such as the *Via Maris* and the *King's Highway* and these connected North Africa to Mesopotamia, there was a lot of wealth that traveled along these roads, so this extension of the borders brought trade routes into the kingdom and of course that meant economic prosperity, people began to get wealthy and what this meant was that Jonah, the guy who prophesied this to begin with was, of course, very popular for this. And I'm sure he received lots of perks, had a very nice place, was very well-known, very popular, he's accustomed to all the comforts and luxuries of life. Now you stick a guy like that up on a hill under the hot boiling sun with 60mph winds and a lot of dust pelting him and he's not going to like it too much. The slightest discomfort can bother these kinds of people and you can see it sometimes if the air conditioner gets up to 74F they start falling to pieces. The least discomfort and these people think it's the end of the world. And that's the danger of having all the luxuries and you meet some of these people around the world and you see the living conditions, they've got three walls, dirt floors, no running water, no AC and people see this and they say, "Oh, I can't believe people can live like that. I'd go crazy." They're soft and Jonah's a softy.

Then God said to Jonah, v 9, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” God’s just not going to get off the issue. You’re angry at Me for not wiping out the Ninevites, you’re angry at the plant now **“Do you have a good reason?”** Why are you upset? Why are you angry? Are you going to deal with your sin or sulk in it? **And he said, “I have good reason to be angry, even to death.”** Now you have to be pretty angry to want to die. Just kill me God. You know, talk about a softy. But this just shows how irrational we can become when we get out of it spiritually. Kill me because I don’t have a shade plant.” That’s where Jonah is. Does sin affect the mind? Of course. And look at the rebellion, this is just flat out aggression against God. Because ultimately what’s he angry about? It goes back to who God is, you’re not doing what I want you to do God, you’re not doing my will. Now wait a minute. How did we get here so quick? How did we get to the point where we’re God and He’s man? How did this role reversal happen? Same way it always happens, sin. Autonomous, rebellious man replaces God with self. Self becomes God. ¹⁰**Then the Lord said,** verse 10, and here’s the lesson, here God’s bringing it home. **“You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. ¹¹“Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”**

If you missed it here’s the argument: *you had compassion on a plant for which you did no work, should I not have compassion for men and animals for which I did work?* God is the creator of these people and these animals. Just think of the animals, the forms I created to communicate about Me, those aren’t chance evolutionary forms, those are forms which reveal My divine nature to the Ninevites every day. I labored to create those, those reflect My wisdom, My handiwork and you just want Me to wipe them out without a second thought, that’s the work of My hands. And you’re upset about a plant you didn’t plant, a plant you didn’t water, a plant you didn’t nourish, a plant you didn’t maintain, a plant you didn’t do a thing for. I did that, that’s My plant, I gave you that plant and you didn’t have one ounce of gratitude, all you’re interested in is your own damn comfort. Not unlike many of us I might add. Concerned about the AC when there’s a harvest out there. People dying everyday and do we care to take them the message?

Oh, and the 120,000 by the way. I've got 120,000 children out there under the age of 3; newborns, one year olds, two year olds, three year olds, cute babies, beholding their mothers face, taking their first drop of mothers milk, taking their first steps, saying their first words, 120,000 of them and you could care less? I weaved those together in their mothers womb, I did that, that's My wonderful work. And all you can think about is your shade plant! What's wrong with you? I created these kids, I gave them four-chambered hearts, I gave them circulatory systems and brains more complex than a billion computers, each and ever one, I created the eye with its rods and cones, I laid the neural pathways, I formed all that in the womb and on top of it all I gave them the breath of life and you just want Me to damn them?"

Is our society any different than Jonah? Get pregnant and don't want to have a baby because it's just such an interference in my life, the baby will get in the way of what I want to do so I just go down to the doctor and have them suck it out, which incidentally rips the baby into hundreds of parts, and we toss it in the alley, oh and by the way, we're not committing murder, this is medical treatment, I was treating a disease. That's the politically correct language now, pregnancy is a disease, that little baby in there is labeled by some of our lawyers as an "intrusive aggressor" so to deal with this intrusive aggressor we just suck it out with a vacuum. That's our medical establishment. That's not socialized medicine, that's private medicine. That's the medical establishment I couldn't get recommended for because I'm a creationist. Don't be surprised at this, I would be a problem, I wouldn't go along with this because I say that's the image of God and you say it's biochemical aggression, they're just being logical to the evolutionary premise so don't be surprised. Look, "the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it?" Don't be surprised when the law says, "Okay, we can now kill the *born*, not just the unborn." He's only two, okay; you can get rid of him. Look, this is already in the literature. If animals eat their young and we're just animals why can't we kill our young? You can't stop the logic it just flows. "Having made our peace with forty million abortions, we will make our peace with forty million infanticides. As we begin to see already, there is no way to welcome the one without the other If a fetus is not enough like an adult to be a "person," then neither is a babe in arms. If an unborn child is an "intruder" in the mother's womb, then a toddler is an intruder in her home. If an embryo is an "aggressor" against her liberty, then an infant is an aggressor against

her heart.” Whenever the first step has been taken the second has not long tarried. This mentality is not unlike Jonah’s at all, just kill them God.

“Yes, our society is sick,” you say but not me. I don’t say that, I don’t go along with that. Well do you damn nations, do you damn religions, do you damn races? Then your damning God’s work. And in the final analysis we don’t have the heart of God. God does not want to judge. He will judge but He doesn’t take pleasure in it. And when we are like Jonah and we sit in our homes wishing for God to judge are we not just like Jonah?

That’s the note the book stops on. It just leaves you hanging. What happened to Jonah? Did Jonah ever get it? That’s the final question I want to deal with. We’re not told anywhere in the book itself if Jonah ever got it. But can we answer the question? I think we can and I think we can answer in the positive. I think Jonah got it. Why do I say that? Because we have this book. Jonah wrote the book and I don’t think he would write this book if he didn’t get it. So the fact of the book’s existence in the canon of Scripture is evidence that Jonah did figure it out. This is one of the evidences that the word of God is indeed the word of God, you have characters and they write their story and it records their faults. That’s not characteristic of pagan literature. The Bible consistently portrays man as depraved at heart and I think we can all identify with that, it’s comforting to know, “Hey, somebody else thinks like me.” And yet in the end he got it. That’s an encouragement, there’s hope for me too. Jonah got it and therefore my prayer for all of us is that we too would figure it out. We too would be ready to say, “Alright God, You got me, You’re heart for the world is much greater than mine, You’ve invested Yourself in all people, all nations and all animals, You care about Your creation and You love the work of Your hands and You don’t want to destroy it and I’m willing to go wherever You want, whenever You want, to whomever You want with Your word, with Your grace, with Your lovingkindness.” This is really the heart of the book, it’s the heart of God, the fact that He loves all nations and there isn’t a soul out there worthy of His grace, if someone was then obviously it wouldn’t be grace at all but what was deserved. So now I want to see if there are any questions about the whole book, just take a few minutes to field any questions you might have.

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