

Sunday Sermon Series – Ever Chasing God: Jonah
Pittsford Community Church
August 2016
Week Four - Jonah 4
Major Theme: Grace exposes the fugitive from God

Review:

Grace chases a fugitive from God

Grace rescues a fugitive from God

Grace has purpose for the fugitive from God

This week's theme: **Grace exposes the fugitive from God**

Introduction: Door to door evangelism with CCC

- "I'm mad at God. I haven't talked to God since my brother was murdered."
- Why? Do you think it was God that killed your brother? Do you think that it was God's will, God's gracious loving perfect will, that someone murdered your brother?
- Now concerning the issues of sin, sovereignty, power, and will, we need to save those for another time – but regardless the events in this person's life had led her to a place where she was now harboring blame and resentment toward God in her life. She was angry with God.
- The argument goes like this: God is sovereign, he could have done something or prevented something, he didn't, so now I have a problem with him. Anyone ever feel that way?

Read passage: Jonah 4

I asked this question at the beginning of the series: Why did Jonah run?

Answer: Because he knew the character of God, and that character did not line up with his own beliefs about who God should be concerning the people of Nineveh.

(v.2)

- Remember Nineveh was the poster child for all that was evil and wrong with the world. They were enemies of God, enemies of Israel, corrupt, hostile, oppressive, and in Israel's mind they were the scum of the earth. And they for sure didn't deserve any sympathy, love, mercy, or grace. They deserved judgment. They deserved to burn.
- Jonah was a prophet. He had spent his life standing before God. He knew how it worked, he knew that when God spoke, it didn't even matter what the message was, God spoke because he cared about the people he was speaking to. Even if the message was "40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" Jonah knew that God opening the door for connection with the people of Nineveh opened the door for the possibility of his mercy and grace being granted to them and that was not ok with Jonah.
- Last week we saw Jonah begin to preach in Nineveh and in a city that took 3 days to visit he had to get out of there after one day. Why? I believe it was because he saw people believing his message as he was preaching it

and repentance spreading like wildfire through the streets and he couldn't handle it.

- Most ministry leaders get mad because people don't respond. Here Jonah is infuriated because they do! But he wasn't mad at the people of Nineveh, he was mad at God. Argument: God is sovereign, he could have done something or prevented something, he didn't, so now I have a problem with him.

What is being mad at God? – It is thinking that I reserve the right to decide for myself how God should treat me or others.

v.1 – *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.”*

In week 2 of this series we saw that our first step away from God is the loss of thankfulness in our lives. That loss of thankfulness leads to an ungrateful spirit. That then turns into disappointment with God, which then turns into displeasure with God.

- Hebrews 12:15 – warns us saying, “See to it that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble.”

Jonah's root of bitterness was in full bloom and it had sparked in him an internal temper-tantrum where he perceived the gracious actions of God to be exceedingly evil to him.

v.3 – *“Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

- Listen church: **How we react is often a better thermometer of our heart than how we act.** And Jonah's overreaction shows us that his heart and sensitivity to God was not right.

v.4 – *“And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”*

- “Anger” – Hebrew idiom = nostril burn – Notice Jonah's nostrils burned against God (1). But God is slow to anger (2). Even though he has every right to be angry with us because our sin makes his nostrils burn, he is slow to anger.

- Notice again God's gracious and loving response to Jonah – he doesn't rebuke him, he doesn't smash him – he just asks him the question, “Jonah, does it really do all that much good for you to have your nostrils burn?” “Do you understand the contrast – I am slow to anger; you're so quick to extend anger and violence toward me or somebody else?” God tenderly and understandingly comes to Jonah and simply asks him a question.

- Have you ever noticed the times in the Bible that God asks people questions? – of Adam and Eve, “where are you?” - why? God didn't ask the question because God didn't know where Adam was, God asked the question because Adam needed to know where he was – Adam, you are not where you are supposed to be and you are not where you once were. Job – “where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?” – Jonah – “Do you have any right to be angry?”

Are you mad at God?

Spiritual Examination to determine if you are mad at God:

1) If you can't pray or praise - Can you pray or praise? (Job – the Lord gives and takes away...)

2) If you can't stand to be around happy people - Can you stand to be around happy people? (spiritual maturity – rejoicing at the success of another person)

3) If you've stopped serving him – Are you actively serving God, have you stopped serving him?

4) If you spew anger toward people you love the most – are you angry?
(Ultimately all anger is directed at God)

5) If you try to numb your pain through substance, stuff, or sex – Are you bouncing around from substance to substance trying to comfort yourself?

And Jonah goes and makes a man-made thing to try to ease his pain

v.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.”

- Still holding out hope that destruction would come to Nineveh, Jonah sits on top of a hill and creates a booth for himself so he can have a front seat view of the end for Nineveh.

- Whatever makes you feel better Jonah. Notice how he doesn't respond to God after verse 4. He knows he's got nothing to excuse his actions, no response that can match God's wisdom.

Why do you get mad at God?

Two roadblocks: 1) God withheld something that I wanted 2) God has removed something that I loved (Position, possession, person, power)

So many people will get mad at God when they experience a loss in their life (chronic physical pain, loved one, reputation, income)

Illustration: I read a story this week about a funeral for a baby who was miscarried in the later stages of pregnancy. It was a small funeral in the parking lot of a church and the parents decided to do a balloon release to signify as the balloons went up that they were releasing the child back to God – There were of course other children at this funeral and when it came time for the release their was one three year old child who didn't want to release his balloon – long story short a tantrum broke out the balloon ended up popping the child wouldn't except another balloon and what was a beautiful event turned into something other than that because someone decided to be self-centered. Listen: this is something that is perfectly understandable for a 3 year old; but not a 43 year old. Yet when it comes to our own lives that is too often exactly how we respond when God tells us to release something to him.

5 reasons why it is foolish to be mad at God

1) I don't know everything God does (v.6-8a)

- Since God is committed to our good, and proceeds in teaching Jonah another lesson.

- “appointed” – 4 times in the book - - fish – to save him, plant – to cover him, worm – to expose him, wind – to scorch him - - it is not until Jonah learns the lesson that he will find the comfort that he so desperately needs

- "Scorching east wind" – commentary: "it is a constant, extremely hot wind that contains fine particles of dust. It contains constant hot air so full of positive ions that it affects the levels of serotonin and other brain neurotransmitters causing exhaustion, depression, feelings of unreality and occasionally bizarre behavior."

- God is doing things and orchestrating events and circumstances in your life beyond your control that you do not understand to try to get you to a place where you will give up trying to be your own savior.

- Understand that the trouble in your life is actually a gracious act of God to turn you around and get you to understand how desperately you need him. You don't know everything God knows so quit acting like you are God. **If you knew everything God knew, you would not question anything God does.**

2) It exhausts my strength (8)

- he was faint because of his wrestling/fighting

- strong faith is trusting in God when nothing makes sense knowing that God is in complete control – God wants us to find rest and enter into his rest.

- *Matt. 11:29 - Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

- it's fascinating that the body sleeps and goes unconscious 1/3 of every day – this is God writing into the fabric of creation the necessity of us letting go and trust him to run the universe during the 8 hours we are asleep. Why should the other 16 be any different? God's no like, "whew! I'm so glad you're up! I almost lost control here!"

3) It fuels bitterness (8)

- Jonah asks to die again – what is that attitude? – bitterness – harbored hurt

- God wants us to release the hurt – Why? Because as we read earlier in Hebrews 12, God knows that bitterness will rob you of your joy and trust.

4) It destroys my reason to live (9)

- I have no reason for living, I would rather die. "God you took my _____. That was everything to me. Just kill me now."

- Has anyone here ever felt like that? You say, "I just don't want to wake up in the morning."

5) It feeds self-pity (10-11)

- You become consumed with yourself – you are a victim, no compassion for others, can't see the needs of the people around you, and you don't understand how God wants to use you

- It's curious that the only point in the book where Jonah was happy was when he was using God (plant), but when God wanted to use him he is extremely mad

- Do you understand how much God pities you? Do we understand how pitiful we are before God? We are a people who don't know our right hand from left.

- My only hope, my only reason for living is to be a reflection of the glory of God as he loves a pitiful sinner like me. If you are mad at God, you don't see yourself as a pitiful sinner. You think you deserve more than what God's given.

- Do not overlook how the story ends – We never find out what happens – the book ends on a question – it’s the only one in the Bible - that’s because our own response to God is open ended as well – we get to write our own ending to the story
 - o The question left for us is: Are you going to run into the arms of God or are you going to continue to flee and curse and be angry and be a fugitive from God? The story of these 48 verses is the story of the entire Bible – man runs from God, God chases him down, and he extends ill-deserved grace to those who are bent on running from him.
- If God cares this much should we not care too? Could the same that God says about Jonah be said of us? Do we care more about the items in our gardens, the produce in our fields, of perhaps the content of our garage, or home, than we do about our fellow men and women and the spread of the gospel to them? Do we care more about our own comforts and plans than about the grace of God extending to our world in our time?
- Phil. 2:5-8 – Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- The real question is this: Would Jonah be willing to be like Christ? Would Jonah be willing to die to self? The issue which faced him is well-expressed in these anonymous words: “The last enemy to be destroyed in the believer is self. It dies hard. It will make any concessions if only it is allowed to live. Self will permit the believer to do anything, give anything, sacrifice anything, suffer anything, go anywhere, take any liberties, bear any crosses, afflict soul and body to any degree – anything, if it can only live. It will consent to live in a shack, in a penthouse, in the slums, in far away heathendom, if only its life can be spared.”
- As the band comes us I would ask the same question: What about us? What about you and me? God calls us to die to ourselves and trust his goodness in our lives. But I know each one of us struggles with holding on to past hurts, prejudices, entitlement, bitterness, anger. God in his grace is exposing that in our lives this morning. As we listen to this closing song we are going to do something a little different this morning. Instead of singing we are going to spend some time in reflective prayer. Ask God to expose the areas of life where we have placed ourselves in the center. Pray that God would give us the same mind as Christ, that we might be able to let go of the sin in our life which so easily entangles us and embrace the grace that our ever chasing God desires for each one of us.