

Jonah 4

"The Disappointing Grace of God: God Just Won't Stop Messing with Me"

A disgusted servant.

A patient tutor.

The justification of God.

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If you have your Bibles, you might want to turn to Jonah chapter 4. Will be looking at. This hour Jonah chapter 4, what can we call the disappointing grace of God or if we put words in Jonah's mouth? God just wouldn't stop messing with me. So let's look at the text of Jonah 4.

And read through Jonah chapter 4 beginning at verse 1. Now, Jonah thought it was a huge disaster and it burned him up. So he prayed to Yahweh and said, oh he always wasn't this what I said while I was in my own country. That's why I was eager to flee to Tarshish.

For I knew that you're a God, gracious and compassionate slow to anger and rich in faithful love and relents over sending disaster. So now Yahweh, please take my life from me for it's better for me to die and to live. He always said is it right that you're so burned up?

Now Jonah went out of the city and settled to the east of the city and made a hut for himself there and sat inside of it in the shade until he could see what would happen to the city. Then Yahweh God appointed a plant who made it grow up over Jonah to serve as shade over his head to deliver him from his distress.

And Jill and it was terribly glad over the plan. Then got appointed a worm. When Dawn came up the next day and it attacked the plant so that it dried up. And when the sun rose God appointed abiding East biding East Wind and the Sun beat down on Jonah's head and he fainted away and asked to die he said it's better for me to die than to live.

Then God said to John are you rightly burned up over the plan. And he said rightly I'm so burned up. I'd rather die. Then you always said you have had pity over the plan. Something you did not toil over or make to grow it came up in a night and perished in a night and I.

Should not I have pity for Nineveh that great city which has in it more than a hundred twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left as well as much livestock. You're in the reading of God's written word. Sometimes you need to fill in some gaps with a community you may between what it was say 40 years ago and what it seems to be today.

I've seen when we were living in South Carolina or heard reports of a certain town that had for instance a large textile mill everybody would be employed there practically the town was booming and so on but if you go there today outsourcing is taken place the mill has closed.

It's, Kind of a skeleton of its old self you have a dollar general an antique shops perhaps, but that's about it. So there's a lot can happen in the in the sandwich area in between and you you fill in the gaps with that kind of information. Well with the story of Jonah here between chapter 1 and chapter 4, we need to fill in some gaps.

One thing is just to remember that the fish was Jonas. Salvation when Yahweh prepared a great fish that was the vehicle of saving Jonah from death. It was not his judgment really. It was a vehicle of saving Jonah preserving him from death. And then the second thing is and you don't have to agree with me on this but I'm still not going to change my mind.

In the the sparing of the sparing of Nineveh in chapter three was the mercy of Yahweh. But there was not a revival in Nineveh. In chapter three. There's no indication of chapter three that the Assyrians and Nineveh turned to worship. Yahweh. There's no indication that they rejected their paganism.

Rather there was a cleaning up of their overt wickedness the violence that was in their hands. Chapter three verse A. So what you have there when when the Lord's bears them is a postponement of judgment on Nineveh and a Syria. Until they home will prophesy later when Nine of his time is up.

But we have to be careful with Jonah three because there's a lot of bombas goes around sometimes someone will say, oh look what Jonah you see Jonah didn't want to go to Nivea but look at the greatest revival that ever was took place there. Now it didn't. It was a postponement of judgment because they stopped doing and inflicting violence and practicing overt wickedness but there was no indication of a turning to Yahweh or turning from paganism.

So sometimes if you want to flesh out the principles of what was going on in Jonah 3, you can check out Jeremiah chapter 18 verses 7 to 10. That's a later profit but, Kind of flesh is out what the way the Lord worked there. Now, then we come to chapter 4 and this very unusual interchange in which it's as if Jonah would say.

God just wouldn't stop messing with me. God just sticks with him through this whole affair and won't let go. Now, I think what you have in Jonah 4, you can you can sum it up in maybe 3 scenes or segments. The first segment is this dusted servant. That's what you see.

And and the the highlight there is the character of God. Verses 1 to 3. Discussed that servant the character of God. Now the in verse 1 the

translation. I translate Jonah thought it was a huge disaster and it burned him up. That is the Lord sparing or postponing the judgment of Nineveh and chopped into chapter three.

It's actually Reese it was it was evil to Jonah a great evil that would be a wooden literal translation but not necessarily evil in the sense of a moral kind of evil but the, The that term evil can sometimes be used as a as distress or nastiness or disaster and this I think catches the Jonathan it was a huge disaster and it burned him up.

Now, you you have a great evil then literally in verse one Jonah thought it was a great evil. I you have great things all through the the prophecy of Jonah and the one hand you have. A great wind or a great storm in chapter one verse four chapter one verse 17, you have a great fish chapter three you have a great city.

Now, you have a great evil or great distress or a great disaster. What Jonah is be moaning is the him disappointing grapes of God inspiring none of them. At this point it wasn't what took place in chapter three was not the pardon of. Nineveh it was the postponement of their judgment, but even that was mercy from heaven.

Now, Notice that there's you you can take Jonas or model here a bit in verse two. Notice notice the virtue in his discussed. So he prayed to Yahweh and said, etc. You take your difficulties about God to God. He prayed to Yahweh about this. Now you might you might think Jonah is way offbeat and so on.

He is in in his attitude but he takes his trouble to the right place. Let him serve to a certain degree as your model then. This and this candor he comes right out and tells the Lord what's bothering him. Now, what was the reason for his discussed? Well, it was at Nineveh was spared and now finally at the end of the book the secret is out.

You didn't know for sure. Why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh but at the end of the book he says, ah Yahweh wasn't this what I said while I was in my own country. That's why I was eager to feed a Tarshish for I knew that you were a God gracious and compassionate slow to anger and rich in faithful love and relents over sending disaster.

That there you have. Here's. Here's the trouble perhaps.

He didn't want none of the to be spared. And he said I told you or I could have told you beforehand this was what I was worried about. Now there's a bit of a trouble now because now you know that he did not want Nineveh to be spared but then curious incurably curious people that we are we say why didn't Joe know what Nineveh to be spared?

And it's a question that the text does not answer. Now you read Expositions or commentaries on the book of Jonah and they have various suggestions of why Jonah didn't want Nineveh to be spared. So on someone will say well, Jonah. And they would say Israel thought the same way.

I don't know how they know that but they will say that Jonah suffers from a narrow exclusivism. Jonah doesn't like pagans and he wants some eliminated. Well, it's after one verse 12, he told the pagan sailors how they could be spared from drownings, so I'm not sure that that holds somebody also say well Jonah thought he would be viewed as a false prophet.

You see if he says yet forty days amenable will be overthrown and they're not overthrown then it makes him look bad as a prophet. Others will say well Jonah was having political foresight. He knew that if God spares the Assyrians. Then they later will likely crush Israel. And so on.

Have to read it into the text. Others say well he was upset at the kind of repentance quote unquote that the Assyrians would manifest. It would be a superficial kind of repentance and so on. And so that's what he was upset about. And some others would say well he was disturbed because a means of awakening his own people of Israel would be lost.

If when he threatens and God relented on that judgment then, A whole example for Israel is is wiped off the off the table. If Nineveh had been judged then Israel would have had a kind of a paradigm to know what was coming for them. But now they don't. Well all of that is speculation and you could go on and you could add several others, but the fact is the text doesn't tell us why Jonah didn't want nine of the spare.

It just tells us that he did not want nervous spared he was upset. At God's grace or mercy to nine of them. So let's not read any of those reasons into the text. They come from background considerations, we can't be sure of them. So just leave them where they belong.

Leave them out in the landfill, and and don't drag them into the text. Now notice here a certain irony in verse two in in Jonas discussed. Did you notice first two there? That's why I was here to flee to Tarsus for I knew that your God gracious and compassionate slow to anger and rich and faithful love etc.

Remember that was in Joel chapter 2 and it really comes as we said last night from Exodus 34 verses 6 and 7 where y'all wait proclaimed himself as this kind of God and then you have about eight or nine times in the Old Testament when this kind of it's almost a level of a kind of a cradle statement about the Lord, That that comes it comes up about eight or nine different times.

It comes up sometimes as an appeal in prayer like a numbers 14 18 those as sites the Lord's character as as an argument in prayer for why he shouldn't obliterate Israel for their rebellion in the wilderness. Or you have it as an argument for repentance in Joel 2:13, which we dealt with last night.

And sometimes as in song 103, you'll find it as a reason for prayers and so on. Here's the irony. This is the only place in the Old Testament when this statement this cream this summary of Yahweh's nature is made a complaint. Jonah is upset because God is like he is.

And it's almost as if he's saying I knew it. I knew this was going to happen. I know you have a certain grace bent to your nature and I could tell what was going to happen. And he upset. So that enrages him. Now, what's the result of his discussed?

Well, you notice in verse 3, so now Yahweh, please take my life from me where it's better for me to die than to live. Now, you may take it a different way. But I think how I see that there is that that Jonah is asking for his life to be taken from him because he wants out of the profits call.

I don't want to be a profit anymore. I want to hang it up. I I. I no want longer want to be involved in this form of prophetic ministries. He's asking for his release. Now, how do we apply this? This section on as we call that the disgusted servant focusing on the character of God.

Well beyond beyond the sparing of Nineveh itself, what was it that really disturbed him?

For I knew he said. That you are. God compact gracious and compassionate. His doctrine. His right theology is what made him uneasy. It's important for you to see that. You see when you get this unlike this and something the way Jonas appearing in Jonah chapter 4, it's easy for someone to object and say, ah what Jonah needs.

It's a heart for people and not all that sterile theology. But that's the problem. His theology was not sterile. He knew the creed and he knew the creed was true the confess of faith about Yahweh and it was the creed. It was his theology that had him to upset because he didn't like how God was.

In this particular instant. The real issue then. As not to go following dead ends about why Jonah did not understand or why Jonah wanted Nineveh eliminate. But simply to know that he was angry with God for acting in a way that he Jonah. Did not understand or approve. At rude as John McKai says Jonah was finding fault with God for being the way he is.

The Lord has failed to live up to his expectation. He did not like God's way. Of being gone.

Could that ever slop over into our thinking and into our? Way in in various matters in a Christian life. That when we boil something down. It's really that we don't like God's way of being God or God hasn't met our expectations. There was a book back in the 1960s, that's JB Phillips who?

With. New Testament translator is Phillips translation the New Testament was kind of popular back in the 1960s and in the 20th century not so much now but JB Phillips wrote a little book called your God is too small and in the first half of this book he dealt with people's.

Wrong conceptions of God and it's rather revealing if you can ever get a chance to get a copy of it it's worth looking at but one of the one of the false ways of viewing God, he called the perennial grievance the perennial grievance, that is when you mentioned God God is just a blur of disappointment to these folks.

And they say well here's the one I trusted and he let me down and the rest of their lives is shadowed by there can be there can be no mention of God or religion or anything without them in a very melancholy way saying oh yes God is a disappointment why well because there was the prayer that was unanswered there was the disaster that was undeserved and they almost get a ghoulish delight he says out of rehearsing the details of their disappointment.

With God I almost as if citing the details of a gory operation of that sort of thing and then he says this what is usually happened to such people is that they have set up in their minds what they think God bought or ought not to do and when he apparently fails to tow their particular line, they feel a sense of grievance.

They set up in their minds what to think God ought or not, that's what Jonah did. He was. Didn't want to let God be he got he was upset with God's way of being God. You may think that Jonas response is terribly vicious. But you can be guilty of essentially the same twisted way of thinking yourself.

Now let's go to a second scene or or segment this was discussed as servant now we look at patient tutor tutor. God is the tutor patient tutor and this focuses on the consistency of God in verses for denying. I what I want you to see here is first of all God's patience with what Jonah notice how consistent Yahweh is Jonah has just confessed Yahweh to be gracious compassionate slow to anger etc and now in verses 4 to 9 that's exactly the way he is with Jonah.

The consistency of God. It's a beautiful thing to see. He doesn't call Jonah a sarcastic twerp does he know he patiently questions him and leads him on? He exercises tremendous restraint toward Jonah, which simply shows that what Jonah had said about God in verse 2 is entirely true. Not only gracious and merciful toward Nineveh but towards Jonah of all people.

You see how he deals with his obnoxious servant in such a gracious way, how kind God is to crabby serving? That's a consistency of God. But let's go beyond God's patience here and let's look at. God's persistence with Jonah. Notice how how persistent God is throughout the whole book of Jonah first of all, he pursued him into the ship didn't he in chapter one I and in in chapter two into the sea and into chapter three he pursued him into compliance to go to Nineveh and in chapter four, he pursues him into his anger even into his little heart that he constructed outside the city in in verse.

Five and he's dealing with him. He always just won't relent over Jonah and Jonah wants out Verse 3, and also verse 8, he wants the Lord to take his life, he doesn't want to profit anymore. PO. PROP FE HET I want to profit in that way. So but Yahweh presses on with the tutorial doesn't he and he has a little demonstration that he goes through with Jonah.

He you have the verb he appointed or he set the point at a plant and he appointed a worm and then he appointed a biting east wind and so on and Jonah was glad over the plant and then he. Distressed and angry about the plant being dying and so on and again he asked to die rather than to live Jonah wants out.

And I think as at this point that Jonah would have probably said after verse 8. God just won't quit messing with me. He just keeps coming after me and he does he presses on in that tutorial. He won't let up. There's just something about the doggedness of. God here.

Now, I'd helps sometimes to see the endurance and as we say doggedness of God, I was rereading recently an interview that Shelby foot gave a few years ago with ceaseless some element on cease-man Shelby foot, so southerner course and maybe some of you have read his three volume work on the civil war the civil war and narrative.

Three volumes. Big fat volumes probably a total of 2,800 pages and Shelby foot said that between the years 1954 and 1974 20 years he did nothing else but focus on writing that those volumes that was it he didn't nothing else doing nothing else and he said then I found this interesting he said I did it all with a dip pen dip pen by which he meant hey.

Had is his no computer stuff or type right but but just legal patter whatever but then he had a pen some of you may have remembered that you have a pen in elementary writing class decades ago, and you put a pinpoint into the end of this pin and then you dip the pinpoint into a bottle of ink, hey you wrote several words and then you dip the pin into the ink again and you wrote several more words they were.

Shelby foot says they were these pens where ones like used to have in post office at the at the counter they would have these sort of things and so on and he was kind of upset because you couldn't get them very well anymore, but can you imagine I know no ballpoint no jelly none of that not even a fountain pen but a dip pen you have different inky right he said it slows me down.

Well sure it did you write here for words and you have to go after more ink, etc, you're really does slow you down it'll make you take 20 years to write that thing but that kind of dog get this sanitation and endurance now, that's what you have here with Yahweh's work with Jonah.

Now why? Why didn't Yahweh just wash Jonah off the board what is Yahweh asked? Well, I think. He keeps on with Jonah because he doesn't just want a successful mission he wants a sanctified missionary. So he puts Jonah through his school, that's why the Lord is tutoring him. And you know, you have this coming up by implication, maybe in the way the Lord Jesus invites us like in Matthew 11 verse 29 when he says take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

That's a process, isn't it? I don't know just instantaneous. The Lord has a tutoring program. He goes through. So.

We we take on. Ending and come to know what our attitudes ought to be. And that's what he's putting Jonah through here. There's a sense in which God won't stop messing with us either. He wants his servants to share his character and outlook. He doesn't want us to simply confess a creed verse two.

But to share in the moral likeness of God that that creed speaks up. Not just a spout agree, but to share a character. And God just never stops going after that. You're remember the famous Romans 8:28 and 29 the God works all things together for good to those who love him.

What is the good verse? 29 tells you? Those who he Ford knew or for love. He also marked out beforehand to be shaped to the likeness of his son. That's the good that he's after to be shaped to the likeness of Jesus.

And he won't stop. And till he gets that done. It's called sanctification. Now, let's look at a third component and we would call this last word versus nine to eleven or ten and eleven last word and the stress here is on the justification of God the justification of God versus ten and eleven.

Now, that plant was pretty significant. Interesting that throughout the book as you go back in chapter one. God preserves the sailors. In chapter two God preserves. Jonah from drowning in chapter three. God preserves, nine of us from judgment. And the chapter four God destroys the plane. He does something different here and then and then the Lord applies the plant worm wind situation to Jonah.

And you notice the contrast in the pronouns verse ten then you always said you emphatic pronate you have had pity over the plan something you didn't toil over or make to grow came up in a night and perished in a night and I emphatic I should not I had pity for nine of that great city, etc.

So you have the contrast drawn, don't you? You always question here in verses 10 and 11 is sometimes taken as putting a stress on value. That is you have a plant a mere plant versus a. People and even animals. So, which is more important chlorophyll or human souls. That sort of thing.

And that's true. But I wonder if there isn't a more basic stress than that not so much on value but on freedom.

God made a threat against Nineveh. And then he granted them a reprieve. And then God gave a gift to Jonah. And he retracted the gift. And isn't there an implication? That God can do what he wants. He's free. God. Jonah had no claim on that plant. It was a grace plant if you want to put it that way.

Yahweh was pleased to give it to him for his relief and he was pleased to take it away and destroy it as he desired but Jonah had no claim on it. And no rights over. So is not Yahweh free to do as he likes with minimum. Free to act in pity.

Reminds me of the question that the vineyard keeper asked in Jesus' pair boy in Matthew 20 verse 15. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Of course he is but note now. Note how Yahweh presses this matter on Jonah. Is it? Do you notice it's always

questions?

God's always asking Jonah questions. And the book ends I go depends how you translate it, but I think it's rightly translated ending with a question. So you have these questions throughout chapter four and especially at the end so that it's not all wrapped up in some big declarative statement, but as a kind of a different approach he leaves Jonah hanging with the question and that forces you as a reader to have to deal with it as well.

Yeah, you have to make your own decisions as sort of like I think was a South African airline Kahulua airlines that that I read would have these takeoffs or different twists to the normal announcements on airline intercoms and you're familiar with them nobody pays attention to them, usually, you know, they you're so familiar with them, but one of their one of their quips was.

When they were warning about the oxygen mask and they said in the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure mask will descend from the ceiling stop screaming grab the mask and pull it over your face if you have a small child traveling with you secure your mask before assisting with theirs, if you're traveling with more than one small child pick your favorite in other words, you have might have to think about this and that's the way the book of Jonah ends, you may have.

To think of here's the question. And you're not provided with the direct answer he sucks you in you have to deal with it it's like the end of the parable of the so-called prodigal son, which is really the parable the Presbyterians on in Luke 15 when the older brother is griping and the father goes out to to plead with him and so on and in Lou 15 verse 32, Jesus doesn't tell you how the older brother responded.

I think it's deliberate because he wants. To suck you in. The have to face how would I respond to that and that's what's happening. I think here. But is God free. To do what he chooses with what belongs to him. As he says, I will. Show grace to whom I want to show grace.

And I'll show compassion to whom I want to show compassion.

And that's the justification of God, let's pray.

Our Father and our God we have to confess that when we. When we sit down and think it's true, we are thankful that you do not stop messing with us that you really do want us. Not just to know our beliefs and doctrine but to share your character. And we thank you for the Lord Jesus inviting us to that sort of thing to take our youth upon us and learn from him.

Grant o Lord. Grant o lord that we would be able to do that we pray. For Jesus safe and ours amen.