

We have come to the conclusion of Jonah, the only prophetic book that is more about the prophet than it is about his message. We have seen the patience and grace of God on the Ninevites but especially on Jonah. And perhaps you have been able to relate his old nature to your own. Last week we left Jonah angry with God for being merciful to Nineveh and hoping He would change his mind and blast them. Jonah is about to learn a major lesson.

⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. Jonah 4:6 This is the first time we read of Jonah being pleased. Verse one tells us that Jonah was exceedingly angry. In Hebrew it can also mean to be hot. Sitting in the desert while waiting for the wrath of God to fall he was hot in two ways. He was not worried about the souls of Nineveh. The Lord set about to relieve him of both forms of being hot. The first was his physical condition. When you consider the 120,000 souls and their destruction, what is a day in the sun? The plant relieved him of his discomfort.

The word discomfort is another use of that word we have seen before translated as “evil.” If you recall, it can be translated as we would use the word “bad,” meaning either evil or trouble. To Jonah the condition of sitting in the heat with only partial shade was bad. That area often reaches a high of 110 degrees or more and if the east wind is blowing, it becomes extremely dry. The author was using the word “evil” like we would use a pun. In other words, Jonah’s hot-headed uncomfortable condition was evil. He was being selfish. His up and down emotional state was a sign of him always wanting what would please him and no one else mattered. He did not say he was happy when delivered from the fish or when his message was received. But now a little plant makes him exceedingly happy.

This account is so encouraging because we see how rebellious and selfish Jonah was, and yet God was so patient with him. God worked through him despite his weaknesses. All the while God is maturing him and changing the way he understands God and his situations. Thankfully, that is how God works with us as well. Amen?

The word for plant here also means nauseous and comes from the root word for vomit that we saw at the end of chapter two. The seed and the plant contain ricin, a deadly compound. The pollen is highly allergenic. But the leaves are quite large, the smaller being six inches across, thus providing the shade that Jonah longed for. The plant is common on the shores of the Mediterranean but not found there in Nineveh. The same action of God that made the fish made the plant. The word was “appointed,” which can also be translated to count or to prepare. The idea is to choose or prepare a certain thing for a certain purpose. God prepared that plant for that purpose just as He prepared the great fish for a specific purpose.

The plant grew at a supernatural rate and covered the booth Jonah had made, which further shaded him. The transpiration of the leaves would further cool his little shelter. It probably reminded him of the cloud that led and covered the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness giving them relief from the sun (Numbers 14:14ⁱ). He may have thought that was further evidence of his favored status as a Jew. His exceeding anger at the repentance of the Ninevites was turned to exceeding joy over this sign of God’s favor and the relief from the sun.

The fact that the noxious plant was a blessing reminds us that throughout Scripture, **what at first appears to be evil is used by God for a blessing**. Some examples are Joseph being sold into slavery resulting in saving his family (Genesis 50:20ⁱⁱ), Jesus rebuke to the Sidonian widow, resulting in her expressing faith and her daughter healed (Matthew 15:28ⁱⁱⁱ), the demoniac being told not to follow Jesus but to go back and testify, resulting in the feeding of the 4000 (Mark 5:19^{iv}; Matthew 15:37-39^v), or Paul being imprisoned resulting in his time to write letters that have helped the church for 2000 years. But the ultimate example is Jesus' crucifixion resulting in victory over sin and death. The noxious plant relieved Jonah of his discomfort. And for that plant and perhaps what it seemed to signify to him, he was exceedingly glad. Did he think God was condoning his anger toward the repentance of Nineveh? If that is the case, the next morning would bring bitter disappointment.

⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. Jonah 4:7 Just as God appointed the fish and the shade plant, so in this verse He appointed a worm. God appoints blessings and things that remove blessings for our good. He is teaching Jonah that his attitude toward the Ninevites is not in line with God's heart. While Jonah may have thought this vine was a vindication of his prejudice, it is really God leading him into a revelation that his heart desperately needs. The vine Jonah thought was a blessing was really God's tool to open Jonah's eyes to his spiritual condition. The worm Jonah thought was a curse was the blessed analogy that God would use to transform Jonah's attitude. We often mistake blessings for God's favor when they may become lessons on our misguided priorities. Then we mistake what we think is a curse that takes away what we thought was a blessing when both are God's instruments to open our eyes to our sinful attitude.

Jonah should have been rejoicing that his message was received and the Ninevites were spared, for that was God's heart. Instead, he is rejoicing in the momentary vine that is here today and gone tomorrow. The souls of the Ninevites are eternal. The little physical things we rejoice over in daily life soon pass. That is why we are to set our hearts on things above and not on the things of this world (Colossians 3:1,2^{vi}). Or as the Apostle Paul said, *¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The book of Jonah is the only prophetic book that is focused on the prophet rather than the prophet's message. God is teaching us His patient ways of dealing with our sinful nature. He is showing us through Jonah how self-centered and rebellious we can be. He is also revealing how gracious and patient He is with us.

I believe there is another picture of Christ in the choice of the word for "worm." The word for worm in Hebrew is (*towla*). This worm was used to make red dye. It would attach itself to the stock, lay its eggs under its belly, and die. This assured the larva's survival and left the stalk dyed red. What a picture of Christ who gave Himself upon that blood stained cross so that we might live (Hebrews 2:10^{vii}). That analogy might not be as big a stretch as you might think, for the Messianic Psalm 22 predicting the crucifixion details has the Messiah on the cross saying in verse 6^{viii} that He is like a worm (*towla*)! It is the same word used for worm in this verse.

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."* Jonah 4:8 Just as God appointed a fish, a plant, and a worm, He appointed a scorching east wind. It reminds me of a declaration from Job when his wife told him to curse God and die. ¹⁰ *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* Job 2:10 God appointed two difficult circumstances to teach Jonah something very important.

I saw a political cartoon recently depicting two hicks saying they did not believe in climate change. But with the current heat waves they decided it must be God's wrath. It was meant to mock Christians I suppose. Call me a backwards hick, but I believe everything is in the hands of God, including the weather. I do not think it was a coincidence that Quebec officially declared itself a secular state to suppress religion and now has raging forest fires. I do not believe in coincidences. Incidences coincide because God ordains it so for His purposes. That is why we call them God-incidences. We can only guess why they are sent, and like Jonah here in this passage, we often guess wrong.

Temperatures in that region have been known to reach 130 degrees. When the east wind blows, called a sirocco, temperatures quickly rise 22 degrees and the humidity drops to single digits, drying out all green growth. Those who experience it say that their skin seems to tighten and they become irritable. *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."*^{ix}

There is another word play that we do not see in English. The worm attacked the plant. The sun beat down on Jonah. In Hebrew "attacked" and "beat" are the same word. (Chewed and blazed in NIV.) Sometimes it is translated "smite." Remember this for the conclusion. Another word similarity is the sun caused him to be "faint." An almost identical word was used in 2:7 when he said his life was "fainting away." Writing this way, Jonah reminds us of his repeated low points so we can learn from them.

Jonah seemed to be the type of person who can quickly find something to complain about. It is a common human tendency. But under those conditions, any of us probably would have wondered what God was doing and why He would one day bless us with comfort and the next remove the blessing and smite us with severe discomfort. That is the time to ask God what He is trying to show us.

Jonah was a bit melodramatic in his request to just die. One day he is fleeing from God's call because he might die if he goes to Nineveh. Then at death's door in the fish he finds faith and is determined to live. His message is received, and it disappoints him so in verse 3^x he asked to die. God raised a plant to give him shade and he is so happy. The next day the plant dies, and he asks to die again. Could we say Jonah is mercurial, a bit of a yo-yo? Can you relate? We can be that way at times, hopefully less than in the past. It is a warning to us that we are not keeping our eyes on the Lord and His promises.

It is one thing to be ready to lay down your life for the Lord, and another altogether to ask Him to take it because you are having a really bad day. Maybe he did not want to return to Israel and declare how he brought grace to Israel's enemy. Add to those unbearable conditions and he just wanted it all to be over. But contrast that with Paul and Silas beaten with rods in Philippi and sitting in stocks singing praises to God

(Acts 16:25^{xi}). We must live by the Spirit. Yielding to our flesh and whining only makes us feel worse (Galatians 5:16^{xii}).

I have concluded that something even deeper is going on in Jonah's heart. He knew he failed God by booking the ship to Tarshish. I think at this point Jonah thinks he just does not understand God. He may have thought as I did at one point in my life, "How can I be used of God? I have made so many mistakes. I will never be sure of what I believe!" Kirk agrees with this summation and writes, "*He was now ready to say of his life, 'Ichabod, the glory is departed.'*"^{xiii} "There is no reason to go on living." How patient our God is to teach and direct us during our fits of selfishness!

Our times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15^{xiv}). We have an appointed day when we will go home. We must leave that in God's hands. The secular world denies that truth and wants to say that we should be able to determine it. They call it euthanasia. **If we are alive, there are things to learn and service to the Lord that can be done even if we are bed bound or in prison.** We underestimate the power of prayer. God will take us home when it really is better for us to die than to live. The decision is complicated by all the extreme life saving techniques available today. We must use wisdom and seek God's guidance when deciding on extreme measures to live a little longer.

We often say that a person passed too soon, but that is never true. God knows what that person's future would have been. When we say that we are declaring we know better than God. Taking one's own life is saying you know better than God. We are alive for a reason, and that reason is all about preparing us for eternity and bringing glory to God. I have seen paraplegics who have amazing ministries. What do we have to complain about in comparison!

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."* Jonah 4:9 Here we are again with God using questions to get us to examine our hearts to see our true condition. In the first chapter it came through the pagan's mouth. "What is this you have done!" In verse four of this chapter God asked Jonah if his anger over the repentance of Nineveh was a good thing. Now God asks if it is right to be angry over the loss of the plant. "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" I believe this means angry over the loss of the plant and the shade it provided.

Like a spoiled child, Jonah shoots back, "*Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.*" I imagine that even as the words came out of his mouth, he realized how childish he sounded. Sometimes the words that come out of my mouth shock me. It exposes me of being in the flesh, self-centered, and unloving. I try to take it back or explain that is not what I meant, but the words are already out there. Lord willing, we will soon go through James on the power of the tongue and the need to tame it (James 3:8-10^{xv}).

It is hard to understand Jonah having pity on the plant. What he was missing was the shade the plant provided. Is he hiding his selfishness with supposed pity for a plant? **Jonah thought God had been too gracious to Nineveh, but not gracious enough to him.**

God is gently trying to have Jonah realize he has valued a plant more than 120,000 souls made in the image of God. Jonah was angry over God removing the vine that mercifully gave him shade, but he did not want to see God's mercy on 120,000 souls. God is pointing out the inconsistency in Jonah's priorities. Stuart writes that this is the central question of the whole book. **"What right do we have to demand that God should favor us and not others."**^{xvi} Bringing it down to the issue of the plant caused Jonah's mouth to condemn himself. Often we find our expressions expose our heart.

¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, 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?” Jonah 4:10,11 God sums up the lesson in these verses. Jonah valued the plant though he had no part in how it provided shade for him. The plant was temporal, here today and gone tomorrow. Jonah wanted it to live and was furious when it died. Should God not have pity on the repentant people of Nineveh, 120,000 eternal souls? Not knowing the right hand from the left was a Hebrew term for not having learned moral values. They were not taught God’s laws.

We often expect too much from those who do not know the Lord. Why would they *not* practice immoral behavior? They do not know any difference. They live in the flesh. Their conscience may bother them, but they can easily justify their actions in their own minds. We should not feel anger when the unbeliever mocks us, calls us ignorant, or tries to cheat us and steal from us. That is what immoral people do. They *do not know their right hand from the left*. Pray that they will recognize a day of judgment is coming and repent. Have pity on them for they do not know any better (Luke 23:34^{xvii}). They make their lives miserable and do not even realize they are enslaved to sin (John 8:34^{xviii}).

You might ask why God mentions the cattle. It was their most valuable possession. Cattle served them. If the Ninevites converted, the cattle would also serve God. The Proverbs tell us that the righteous man regards the life of his beast (Proverbs 12:10^{xix}). In other words, he takes good care of his animals that are a creation of God.

This was a radical message at this time in Israel’s history. It would be another 400 years before they realized that telling others about the God of Israel was an honorable thing to do and pleasing to God. While **the main message is the nature of man that we see in Jonah and the grace and patience of God in dealing with us, the secondary message is God loves the world (John 3:16^{xx})**. That is why He sent his one and only Son. Repentance alone did not save the Ninevites. If Jesus had not taken their sins’ punishment on the cross, repentance would be meaningless. God does not despise a broken and contrite heart because that heart accepts the forgiveness Jesus merited for us on the cross (Psalm 51:17^{xxi}; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15^{xxii}).

Jesus taught, *⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.* Matthew 12:41 Why did he use Jonah? Jonah was the first to see mass conversion of Gentiles since the Exodus (Exodus 12:38^{xxiii}). God had set in motion the salvation of Gentiles around the world (Isaiah 49:6^{xxiv}). But I believe there is also another reason.

I told you to remember the word “smite.” Jonah was smitten by the sorocco wind and he crumbled. The prophet Isaiah who lived in the same era as Jonah predicted that Jesus would be smitten by God for our sin (Isaiah 53:4^{xxv}), and he bore up under it until our sin debt was paid in full. Yes, it is the exact same word in Hebrew. How much greater is Jesus than Jonah? He is a greater evangelist, and He took a much greater striking and prevailed because of His love for us (Hebrews 12:2^{xxvi}). May God help us take the lessons of Jonah to heart. May He ever help us to see His patience and faithfulness toward us and help us love Him with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves.

Questions: 1 What is the word play in verse 6? 2 How do we often misinterpret events in our lives? 3 What things did God appoint? Implications? 4 What picture does the worm present? 5 What is the word play in verse 8? 6 Why did he ask to die a second time? 7 When is it time to die? 8 What was God helping Jonah to see? 9 What did this reveal about the heart of God? 10 Why is Jesus greater than Jonah?

ⁱ **Numbers 14:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 15:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

^{iv} **Mark 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

^v **Matthew 15:37-39 (ESV)**

³⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ³⁸ Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

^{vi} **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

^{vii} **Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

^{viii} **Psalms 22:6 (ESV)**

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

^{ix} Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p. 505

^x **Jonah 4:3 (ESV)**

³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

^{xi} **Acts 16:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

^{xii} **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

^{xiii} Kirk, *Life and Mission*, p. 228

^{xiv} **Psalms 31:15 (NIV)**

¹⁵ My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

^{xv} **James 3:8-10 (ESV)**

⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

^{xvi} Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p. 506

^{xvii} **Luke 23:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

^{xviii} **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

^{xix} **Proverbs 12:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

^{xx} **John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

^{xxi} **Psalm 51:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

^{xxii} **2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

^{xxiii} **Exodus 12:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

^{xxiv} **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

^{xxv} **Isaiah 53:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

^{xxvi} **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.