**The Book of Jonah**

Hearing God (Part Eight) – Jonah 4:6-11

Turn with me to **Jonah 4:6-11**; we will be finishing our series this morning entitled “Hearing God.” As we have journeyed through this book, we have seen that God is very much involved in the events of our lives, so much so that he will maneuver things to accomplish what he needs to transpire inside of us. The conclusion of our study of Jonah brings us to this very point; **what is God trying to accomplish in the life of Jonah**?

This whole book begins with God speaking to a man; giving him a divine mandate to go to a pagan city and proclaim that time is running out and that payment will be extracted for the sin that this nation has committed. Yet, Jonah is an unwilling candidate; his heart is not gracious as to give his enemies a warning that would cause them to change their ways. So he rebels until he is in need; he cries out to God for help in the belly of a fish and God graciously saves him.

He goes to Nineveh and declares the words of the Lord and the people of the city repent, the king repents and the city is spared, yet he is angry at the graciousness and kindness of God. He complains against God in **Jonah 4:2**:

*“Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.*

**The reality is, who of us is not grateful for the graciousness and kindness of God in our own lives?** We all are, yet some more than others. There are still those who believe that they deserve the graciousness and kindness of God based on who they are, what they have accomplished, or their standing in society. So, with that in mind, **how can Jonah embrace the grace of God for himself and yet struggle when it comes to others?**

* **All of us can have a tendency to be more gracious with ourselves rather than others, which explains why many times we become more judgmental and critical of others; it allows us to elevate ourselves above those around us.**

This is a dangerous and slippery slope to tread. **Psalm 138:6** reminds us:

*Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud.*

As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.” *7So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. 9Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.* **James 4:6-10**

*Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.* **Romans 12:3**

Let us not forget who we are; sinners who were saved by grace through faith, deserving of death yet given eternal life, lost in life yet finding new life in the Holy Spirit. We are all on a level playing field.

But, there are still those whom God is still working in their life to bring them to a decision of what to do with him; will they make him ***Lord or folklore***, will they make him ***myth of Messiah***, will they make him ***God or just a good idea***. Church, as followers of Christ, we were once lost like many today, but by the grace of God we have been found and brought into a new way of living.

When we begin to look at people are being less valuable to God, then we begin to show it through the way we look down on them and treat them. **Is that what God desires from us?** No! He wants us humble, he wants us faithful, he wants us fully aware of the reality of our sin and his grace. **Amen.**

Looking around us and seeing how humankind is lost without God should make us sad, cause us to grieve, desire to be a better witness and share the gospel with people. It should motivate us with a sense of urgency, for the sake of those who still are trying to live life without Christ; we have to be ready to share Jesus with people because people are important to God.

* **We are to see each individual’s divine value and be motivated by that rather than our own self-righteousness, our own preferences and our own opinions.**

A key theme throughout the book of Jonah is this very point; people matter to God; God doesn’t want to lose anyone. **2 Peter 3:9-10** tells us:

*9 The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.*

Nineveh is a prime example of what can happen when this earthly life comes to an end; it was deserving of judgment yet, because of the people’s repentance and response to God, they experienced salvation instead. Yet, it took a Jonah to come and declare the word of the Lord to them, bringing them to a point of decision about God; **do we ignore him and keep going on our way to destruction, or do we respond and experience the grace and mercy of God?** God wants to use us to bring people to the same place of decision, but he can only do it if we are willing candidates who will make it a priority in our lives.

When it comes to Jonah, clearly his motivation wasn’t in the right place; He was more concerned with ***his own opinions*** than he was with God’s, he was more concerned with ***the Jewish*** people rather than all people, he was concerned with ***his own needs*** rather than others. It wasn’t until God became the focus of his life that he made a change and did what God asked him to do; yet, it was only for a moment in time, because he goes right back to his old ways after God performs an incredible miracle of conversion in the city of Nineveh. Jonah should be celebrating, but instead he is accusing God. Why? Because his heart is in the wrong place.

The book of Jonah doesn’t end in chapter three because God isn’t done with Jonah; that’s why we need a chapter four. So let’s see what happens next; **Jonah 4:6-11**:

*6And the Lord God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah’s head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.*

*7But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. 8And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. “Death is certainly better than living like this!” he exclaimed.*

*9Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?” “Yes,” Jonah retorted, “even angry enough to die!”*

*10Then the Lord said, “You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. 11But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?”*

* **The journey of life isn’t so much about where and when we arrive, as much as it is about what we become.**

We have chapter four because God isn’t done with Jonah yet. In fact, God is so caring of Jonah that he sets out to save Jonah from himself. Notice in our text that three times it tells us that *“God arranged”* (appointed). God caused things to take place that would instigate a reaction out of Jonah that exposed who Jonah really was. The same is true in **Jonah 1:17** where God prepared a great fish; the same Hebrew word being used. And isn’t it interesting that, again, it was a time where God reveals himself and exposes Jonah for who he was.

**How many of us know that there are times when we need the revelation of God to show us who we really are, and where we need more of his grace and power?** Because, really, only God knows who we truly are. **Amen**. First, we see Jonah’s reaction to God’s goodness. God, in his mercy, causes a plant to grow and Jonah was grateful for the plant. The plant was a blessing from God. **Did Jonah deserve to have the plant in the first place? Did he earn it based on his waiting outside of the city for the destruction of the city?** No. It’s interesting that Jonah is celebrating the plant but he doesn’t celebrate the salvation of the city of Nineveh.

Second, we see that God takes the plant away. He allows a worm to come the following day and destroy the plant from the inside out. And then, to add insult to injury, we see God sends a hot wind to blow on Jonah (Mosul average temperature is 110F). God takes away the plant and then adds the heat. **What happens when the blessings of God are taken way and the heat of life gets turned up?** We begin to see what is on the inside of an individual.

* **When the blessings of God are unseen, and the heat of life gets turned up, we begin to see what is on the inside of us.**

When life is running smooth and comfortable, we can theoretical about our faith, never having it penetrate into our hearts; its merely intellect. But when things get uncomfortable, and the heat is turned up, the truth of God is driven into our hearts. Our faith becomes more than mere mental ascent; it becomes life and hope. We move from being theologians who study the word of God, to being disciples who walk in the words of God.

**Was Jonah truly relying and following God?** No, in fact, he would rather die in his anger and self-righteous attitude than give into God’s perspective. Somethings happens when our will falls out of line with the will of God; we become stubborn, self-righteous, angry, and even arrogant. Jonah could not see that the fact that 120,000 people turned to God was a good thing, because he was too wrapped up in his own wants, his own desires, his own opinion. His worldview did not match God’s. God was trying to get Jonah to change his perspective.

That is why God asks in **verse 9**, *“Is it right for you to be angry? Think about it Jonah, you are more concerned with a plant than with people. Is it right.”* The idea here is, ***“is it the right way to believe, it is the most beneficial from God’s perspective? Does what you believe line up with what God desires?”*** I am reminded of God’s perspective when it comes to Jesus. In tells us in **Luke 19:41-42**:

*41 But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. 42 “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace.”*

*16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.* **Acts 17:16-17**

**What do we learn about ourselves when we look at this fallen world? What do we learn about our hearts when we see the godless acts of lost people? What do we learn about ourselves when we value comfort over the divine transformation of sinners?** We learn that maybe we are too self-centered, maybe we rely more on things than we should, maybe we don’t love as much as we should, maybe we need a little bit more of Jesus to rub off on us. There is a lesson in this for all of us; may we ask, **“God, where is it that I need to grow, where is it that I need to change, where is it that I need your help to be a better disciple of you?”** Church God is speaking, and hearing God comes in different forms, but how we respond to God’s voice can mean the difference between eternal life and death for both us and others.

**Was God successful in saving Jonah from himself?** We don’t know. Because as we come to the end of chapter 4 it says nothing about Jonah’s response. But thank God he is greater than Jonah. **Romans 5:8-10** tells us:

*8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. 10 For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. 11 So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*

* Jonah was just a Jew; but Jesus is the Son of God
* Jonah was full of Judgment; but Jesus came to offer grace and salvation
* Jonah almost died because of his sin; but Jesus, who was sinless, died for the sins of the world
* Jonah reached out to one city; but Jesus reaches out to the world
* Jonah’s obedience was more compliance because it wasn’t from the heart; but Jesus did whatever pleased the Father
* Jonah didn’t love the people he saved; but Jesus still has compassion for all people and proves it on the cross
* Jonah waited outside the city for God’s judgment; but Jesus was crucified outside of the city to forgive.

Church, hearing God is vital to a growing, thriving spiritual walk with God because he is speaking to lead us, to grow us, and to show us who he is and what he is like. God desires that our lives stand for what matters to him. And what matters to him are people; those who are lost, those who are broken, those who are stuck, those who are wandering. God wants people to find him. May we be willing participants of his purposes and plans for this world. **Amen**. Let’s pray!