



Session 4: Presenter Gary Brandenburg

“Can you hear me now...?” Anyone who owns a cell phone, and that would be just about everybody, has said those words before. What do we call this frustrating phenomenon? We call it a “dropped call.” Dropped calls don’t just happen to cell phone users. It happened to Jonah and it can happen to any of us. God had a job for Jonah, to go to Nineveh to call the Ninevites to repentance. But Jonah dropped the call and ran away. In the belly of the beast he came to his senses. In our last session we read about his repentance. This week it appears that his repentance was short-lived.

Chapter four begins with the word “but.” We have encountered this word before in the beginning of Jonah’s story...1:3. The last verse of chapter three says, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.” (Jonah 3:10). The very next word is, “but.” Jonah still doesn’t get the message. What is the message? There are two parts to it.

I. God relentlessly pursues the lost. No matter what the nationality, “God desires for all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:4. When Jonah sees that God is gracious, he gets angry. Anger is a theme repeated all through this final chapter.

We do well to pay attention to what makes us angry. “Anger is most useful as a diagnostic tool. When anger erupts in us, it is a signal that something is wrong. Something isn’t working right. There is evil or incompetence or stupidity lurking about. Anger is our sixth sense for sniffing out wrong in the neighborhood...When we are angry, we know that we are on to something that matters, that really counts.” Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, p. 157

June Hunt, in her new book titled, *Keeping Your Cool When Your Anger is Hot*, pinpoints four reasons for our anger; injustice, fear, hurt, and frustration. Jonah qualifies for all four. First, he perceives that God is being unjust. It doesn’t seem **fair** that God would be gracious to those Jonah considers to be his enemies. There is some ethnic pride at work here. I’ll never forget a comment made by an Israeli man to a missionary in Israel, “Have you ever wondered why we Jews don’t try to convert YOU? Because we don’t want you!”

Secondly, he is **fearful** that if God spares the Ninevites they will be a problem to Israel in the future. And he was right. One generation later the Assyrians carry

Israel off into captivity.

Third, it's possible that God's decision has **hurt** Jonah's professional pride. He predicted the destruction of Nineveh. If it doesn't happen, he loses face. How will he explain that? He'll never be invited back to any prophecy conferences.

The fourth reason Jonah is angry is his **frustration** over the fact that God does not work the way he expects Him to. He is surprised by God's grace toward the Ninevites.

Jonah had his head on straight, but his heart was all wrong. His doctrine was pure...v. 2, "I knew..." but he couldn't accept it. We've all experienced this to some degree or another. There is a dark force at work in our fallen human condition that takes comfort in identifying our enemies. It's a wonderful thing to know who my enemy is, to know who it is we are supposed to hate.

You can witness this in a small way this weekend because this is Rivalry week in college football. Groups of fans in one color hate groups in another color and for what reason? One loyal fan has even written a book titled, "To Hate Like This Is To Be Happy Forever." A familiarity with Jonah 4 can take all the fun out of rivalries. Jonah has a serious case of what the Germans call "Schadenfreude" which is a word which means to take pleasure in the misfortune of others.

There is such a thing as "righteous indignation," or anger about the right things.

But there are many things that trigger an angry response that reveals our own flaws. Jonah assumes his anger is based on something outside himself when his anger comes from something inside of him. If he truly valued what God values, he would rejoice at the response of God to the repentance of the Ninevites. But he does not feel that way. In fact, he would rather die than see his enemies saved...v.

3. In his self-centeredness Jonah was damming up the wells of salvation to water his own garden. But there is another huge theme in this chapter. God not only relentlessly pursues the lost but...

II. God ruthlessly perfects the found...Jonah 4:4–9. Our disappointments are often God's appointments. God's appointments are brought on all through this book. Just like God had mercifully appointed a fish to save Jonah in 1:17, He now he appoints a plant to give the sulking Jonah shade. He then appoints a worm to kill the plant and ruin Jonah's shade (4:7). He then appoints a hot wind to make Jonah miserable (4:8). Jonah has two responses: he is angry that his shade is gone (4:9), and he pities the dying plant. God now has him where he wants him. *"You pity the plant, Jonah? You didn't labor over it; you didn't make it grow; it came and went in one night. But, Jonah, I did labor over Nineveh, I did make it grow, and I've been at work on Nineveh not one night but for years; and shouldn't I pity*

its 120,000 people and all its cattle? Jonah, forsake your racism. Forsake your nationalism and follow me. You owe your life to me. Therefore, 'be merciful as your father in heaven is merciful' (Luke 6:36)." (John Piper)

Jonah reminds us of another biblical character Jesus told about in the New Testament. Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? Jonah is the older brother. The Pharisees distorted the grace of God into legalism. They made the grace of God dependent on human conditions. What Jonah wanted was a God made in his own image, a god with his own prejudices. Here are a couple of reminders that will help us overcome “the Jonah complex.”

1. Our transcendent God is also imminent. He is not only Lord of all creation, but He is also Immanuel, “God with us.” The God of the universe so loved the world that He gave His only Son...because God desires for all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. He will use whatever means necessary to bring us to Himself. Proud racism and prejudice are no match for God’s sovereignty. I once heard about some Muslims in North Africa who had an intense interest in The Passion of the Christ film. What could possibly persuade them to even WANT to watch that movie? They heard that the Jews were very angry about the film! So, they wanted to see it. God used their hatred for Jews to hear about His love.

2. “You grow as you go.” The salvation of Nineveh becomes the stimulus for the sanctification of Jonah. Rick Warren’s book, Purpose-Driven Life may need to be amended. It opens with, “It’s not about you.” That’s not quite true. It IS about you. It’s not ALL about you, but it is about you and how you respond to God’s love for all people. The world is not His only objective. My heart has a bull’s eye on it. Sanctification is the unfinished process of aligning my values with God’s values. God will use whatever means are necessary to conform us into the image of His son. “When God wants to drill a man...”

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects

Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him

Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!

How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendor out-
God knows what He's about.

The book of Jonah closes with no conclusion. God didn't call us to be a receptacle of His blessings. He calls us to be a channel of His blessing. So, this week, when you see someone you would rather avoid, engage them. You never know what one small act of kindness may grow into.