

# The Book of Jonah

*Jonah 4:1-11*

## Devotion

- **Opening Prayer:** Almighty God, our heavenly Father, without Your help our labor is useless, and without Your light our search is in vain. Invigorate our study of Your holy Word that, by due diligence and right discernment, we may establish ourselves and others in Your holy faith; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- **Small Catechism:** Confession – What do you believe according to these words? (LSB p. 326)
- **Hymn:** God’s Own Child I Gladly Say It (LSB 594)

## Chapter 4:1-11

*Read Chapter 4:1-11*

## Review Previous Class

See worksheet

## Introduction

- The end of chapter 3 presents a joyful conclusion.
- The repentance of the Ninevites in the third chapter resolves the conflict that began when Nineveh’s “evil” provoked Yahweh (1:2).
- This would be a fitting ending to the book:
  - The sailors repent
  - Jonah repents
  - the Ninevites repent
- Not so fast!
- Jonah’s anger toward God that began in 1:1-3, comes up again.

## Verse 1

*“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry...”*

- This is the ESV translation.

- The Hebrew highlights his anger better saying, “It was evil to Jonah – a great evil...”
- QUESTION: What was evil to Jonah?
  - For Jonah, it was evil for God to change his verdict from destruction to salvation of the Ninevites, from wrath and destruction to grace and mercy.

*“Evil”*

- This Word frames the entire narrative.
- The noun or adjective is used nine times throughout Jonah.
- It is refers:
  - To the wickedness of the Ninevites (1:2; 3:8, 10a)
  - To divine punishment that Yahweh threatens and sometimes carries out (1:7-8); 3:10b; 4:2)
    - Such as the evil that afflicts the sailors in the form of the storm.
    - That which would have been carried out on the Ninevites.
  - To Jonah (4:1, 6).
- This evil has affected Jonah.
- He should be rejoicing:
  - Luke 15:10, “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
- Jonah believes he should be passing judgment/making the final verdict on the Ninevites.
- The greatest evil in this book isn’t the Ninevites but Jonah himself.
- Luther states:
  - “It magnified Jonah’s sin and shame that he, a servant of the true God and a member of the holiest land and nation, should turn out to be the worst and most grievous sinner, worse than the idolatrous heathen...”<sup>1</sup>

*Verse 2*

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 19 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 64.

- In this verse we see that Jonah didn't want to preach to Nineveh because he didn't want it to be saved.
- This verse reveals that Jonah, a prophet of God, is more vengeful than we suspected.

*“O LORD, is not this what I said...”*

- Literally, “...was not this my word...”
- Jonah's reference to “my word” here is in opposition to the Word of Yahweh.
- God's Word:
  - that came to Jonah twice.
  - that converted the sailors.
  - that was used to call out to Nineveh causing them to repent.
- Jonah's placing man's word against God's word.
- Apparently, Jonah hasn't read the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “All flesh is grass...the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6, 8).
- As we've discussed before, Jonah is saint and sinner.
  - In these words the old Adam speaks, declaring that Yahwe is a God who is soft on sin and weak on justice.
  - Even though the prophet has been hurled overboard,
  - swallowed by a great fish
  - vomited onto dry ground
- Jonah has yet to learn that Yahweh is merciful to all nations, not just Israelites.

*“...for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”*

- This is the second of two creedal statements about Yahweh uttered by Jonah.
- The first was in Jonah 1:9, “...the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land”
- Jonah's word in 1:9 and also here confess who Yahweh is.
- The foundation of this confession comes from Exodus 34:6-7 (READ):
  - “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving

iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

- When Moses wants to know, “Who are You,” this is what Yahweh tell him.
- These words become a confession for Yahweh:
  - Prophets preach about it
  - Psalmists sing about it
  - Wisdom writers reflect on it
- Jonah knows that Yahweh is “gracious and merciful.”
- Yet, he’s complaining about:
  - Yahweh’s mercy.
  - Yahweh’s steadfast love
  - “relenting from disaster”
    - Better translation is “changing your verdict about evil”
    - Here we get the language of evil again.
- QUESTION: What the irony in all of this?
  - Jonah himself is alive only because of this very same grace and mercy, steadfast love...
- Application for Us:
  - This is a powerful reminder for us:
    - When we get jealous because someone has been blessed in a certain way.
    - When the Lord has grace and mercy in a way that doesn’t seem right by our standards.
    - “They really should have deserved...”
    - “What about me over here?”
    - This is exactly what we heard two weeks ago with the Workers in the Vineyard, “We worked all day, and you paid them the same...”
  - The sin Jonah is guilty of is our sin as well.
  - We get upset of the nature and character of the Lord, even though for Christ’s sake, He has been gracious and mercy to us. Not giving us what we deserve.

- Lord forgive us our sins.

### Verse 3

*“...O LORD, please take my life from me...”*

- His first wish for death comes in a form of a prayer.
- This wish reveals things must really be bad for Jonah is he’s asking for death.
- Yahweh shows compassion to Nineveh, the same compassion he received, and His entire world collapses.
- God alone creates and sustains all life.
- God desires all people to be saved and live as to glorify him.
- Therefore, any wish for death is self-centered.
- It disregards the Lord who is live.
- Throughout our the Book of Jonah, we continue to hear of death and life.
- Yet, Jonah and Yahweh disagree on who should live and who should die.

### Verse 4

*“Do you do well to be angry?”*

- Yahweh doesn’t break off the conversation with Jonah.
- Neither does He grant Jonah’s wish.
- Instead, Yahweh asks Jonah a rhetorical question
  - To which the answer is “no.”
- It’s as if God is asking him:
  - Let’s think about your anger.
  - Is this a good thing for you?
  - What are you gaining from all of this anger?
  - What are you confessing about me as God – nature and character?
  - What are you confessing about yourself?
- It’s like a parent taking aside the disobedient child, “Let’s think about what we’ve done...”
- I can’t help but think of God’s question to Cain before he kills Able.
  - “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?” (Gen. 4:6)

- In both instances, God’s warning both of these individuals to examine their hearts,
- To change their attitude, their spiritual disposition.
- To repent of their sin.
- We know Cain doesn’t and ends up murdering his brother.
- Jonah doesn’t answer God.
- This further shows the depth of His rage.
- Having his sin revealed to him by God, Jonah, like a pouty child, he goes out of the city...

### Verse 5

“Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city...”

- Apparently, Jonah is done preaching and now leaves the city.
- This could be seen as a minor act of rebellion,
  - Similar to his flight away from Yahweh in 1:3
- He locates himself to the east of the city.
- He plans to wait out the 40 days in hope of seeing Nineveh’s destruction.

“Made a booth”

- This was a small shelter or hut constructed out of natural materials.
- As one could imagine, it was to provide protection from the sun and wind.
- Notice who makes the shelter – Jonah.
- He often seeks safe haven in that which is unsafe:
  - Sought refuge in a ship, but that didn’t save him from the storm or from God.
  - His call to be hurled into the sea didn’t allow him to escape God’s call.
  - He was in a great fish that delivered him to Sheol but eventually vomited back to dry land.
- This little shelter wouldn’t help either.
- Yahweh seeks to move Jonah to take refuge in His generous grace and compassion.
- The use of the word “booth” is important as well.
  - We think of the Feast of Booths.

- A festival that was to remind the Israelites of their semi-nomadic wanderings in the desert before entering the promised land.
- Read Deut. 16:13-17
  - But notice who's listed here?
  - The sojourner.
  - The Israelites are to welcome foreigners to this festival.
  - They are also called to celebrate God's gracious provisions of the harvest.
- The fact the word "Booth" is used here highlights God's grace to all people.

### Verse 6

- Jonah, driven by his anger, is silent.
- Like an angry child toward his parents, he doesn't want to talk.
- So, instead of attempting to speak to Jonah further, which is clearly useless at this point...
- In verses 6-8, Yahweh provides three ways to try to move Jonah to pity.
- Each beginning with Yahweh's action of providing something.
- God providing shouldn't be a surprise.
- QUESTION: Throughout the Book of Jonah, what are things that Yahweh provided?
  - Yahweh is the God who created the entire universe (1:9).
  - He provides the great fish to save Jonah (2:2).
  - Now He'll provide a plant.

"...the LORD God appointed a plant..."

- In these verse, we see the first instance of God providing.
- The context indicates that this would be some kind of big, leafy plant that would furnish good shade.
- The booth would still be there,
- However, being in the Near East with the intense sun and heat, any additional shade is welcomed.

"...to save him from his discomfort..."

- A better translation here would be "to save him from his evil..."

- QUESTION: Where have we heard this word before?
  - Describing the Ninevites (1:2)
  - the Sailors and the storm (1:7-8)
  - Back to the Ninevites, who turn from it (3:8, 10)
  - Yahweh averts his judgment, the evil he had threatened (3:10)
  - Evil then surrounds Jonah (4:1)
- So this plant isn't simply to protect Jonah from the heat of the sun.
- Yahweh's intent is to save Jonah from his evil.
- Yahweh is trying to convince Jonah to share his own desire for all people to be saved through repentance and faith.
- This plan will serve this purpose

“Jonah was exceedingly glad...”

- Jonah benefits from unmerited divine grace.

#### Verse 7

“...God appointed a worm ...”

- Here, God removes his gracious provision
- Providing a worm to kill the plant
- In verse 9, we see Jonah mourns the death of the plant.
- QUESTION: Yet, throughout the Book of Jonah, what do we know about death?
  - God can bring to life.
  - Sailors and Ninevites were all dead to sin
  - Yet, God brings life.
  - Jonah himself is a walking example of one who was dead but brought to life.

#### Verse 8

“God appointed a scorching east wind...”

- Continuing to remove His gracious provision
- The God who hurled a great wind upon the sea, now provides a scorching east wind in the dessert.



- Jonah is exposed to the sun.
- This heat can be seen as the heat of God’s judgment.
- God retracts his grace and leaves Jonah exposed to his own evil.
- There’s no mention of Nineveh being affected by this.
- Only Jonah is suffering.

“became faint”

- This same verb was used in 2:8
- Jonah’s life fainted away, recalling his time in the belly of Sheol
- Will Jonah now experience another resurrection in faith and life?
- That essentially is the unanswered question at the end of the book?

“It is better for me to die than to live...”

- In 4:3 Jonah desired death.
  - He expressed his wish in a form of a prayer to God
- This time, this plea for death is really to himself.
- This pleas corresponds to the decrease in relations with God.
- Jonah moves farther and farther away from God.
- Jonah’s theology appears to be this:
  - Yahweh’s wrathful desire to judge those outside Israel should outweigh his merciful desire to save them.
  - Jonah can’t stand the thought of no Israelites being saved

### Verse 9

- Jonah is only concerned about a plant that perished.
- This compassion is astonishing given the fact:
  - He wouldn’t arise to call to his God in order to save the ship and its crew from perishing.
  - He first fled rather than preach the divine Word that could save Nineveh from perishing.

- Jonah continues to reveal that he's only concerned about himself.
- A mere plant's death makes him wish for death.
- He finds the death of a plant more discomfoting than the knowledge that all who die without faith in the one true God will perish eternally.

### Verses 10-11

- Verses 10-11 compare Jonah's disposition toward the plant and Yahweh's disposition towards Nineveh.
- Jonah's attitude toward the plant and Yahweh's attitude toward the city are described by the same verb "To pity"
- Nowhere in the book does Jonah "pity" anyone or anything else than this plant.
  - His lack of pity for people is the heart of the problem
- The verb pity implies the object itself:
  - Has no merit or worthiness.
  - It hasn't earned forgiveness, mercy, or exemption from judgment.
  - The reason for pity lies completely in the realm of the Gospel.
- The Ninevites display this awareness when they threw themselves entirely upon God's mercy.
- Yahweh teaches Jonah:
  - about the breadth of divine compassion
  - This compassion transcends the prophet's narrow and rigid concept of justice.

"...should not I pity Nineveh..."

- This is the last of Yahweh's twelve question throughout the book.
- Again, this question reveals the extent of Yahweh's mercy.
- The book of Jonah doesn't say how the prophet answers this question.
- It stops abruptly.
- We don't know what happens to Jonah.

Application:

- Yet, it isn't about how Jonah answers.

- Rather, it's how we answer Yahweh's penetrating question.
- Yahweh's question invites us to participate in the conflict.
- So:
  - Who's right in this conflict, Yahweh or Jonah?
  - How do we regard God's generous grace toward all?
  - Do we joyfully participate in God's mission to bring his redemptive love to every lost and condemned creature?
  - Do we selfishly attempt to withhold God's grace from those for whom Christ died, knowing that without faith in Jesus, they will perish eternally?

### **Final Thoughts / Questions**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, shall God have compassion upon all people? Whatever Jonah's answer may have been, Scripture reveals to us that in the fullness of time (Gal.4:4), the "one greater than Jonah" appeared (Matt. 12:41): Jesus the Nazarene. He has spoken the definitive answer with his whole heart, written in his own blood that he shed for you from the cross. The life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised second coming of Jesus are the Father's yes. Yes, God shall have compassion upon all people for Christ's sake, including you!

### **Closing Prayer**

Almighty God, grant that we, who have been redeemed from the old life of sin by our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, may be renewed by Your Holy Spirit to live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.