

Revival, Rage, Compassion (Jonah 3-4)

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[0 : 00] Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city. It took three days to go through it. Jonah began by doing a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

This is a proclamation he eschewed in Nineveh. By the decree of the king and his nobles, do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink, but let people and animals be covered with sackcloth.

Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

[1 : 10] When God saw what they did and how they turned from the evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord, Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is, sorry, that is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Now, Lord, take away my life or it is better for me to die than to live. But the Lord replied, Is it right for you to be angry? Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city.

There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his comfort.

And Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

[2 : 20] He wanted to die and said, It would be better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? It is, he said. And I'm so angry, I wish I were dead.

But the Lord said, You have been concerned about this plant. Though you did not tend it or make it grow, it sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have great concern for this great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell from their right hand, from their left, and also many animals?

Cool. So now we welcome Pastor William. Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone.

Very, very enthusiastic. Some of you have been at a wedding, obviously. Yeah, for those of you who don't know me, my name's William, one of the pastors here.

A real privilege to open up God's Word. Before we do that, why don't we pray and ask for his help. Oh, Lord, you are so good to us.

[3 : 40] Where we have sinned, we have just sung, your mercy is more, more than our sins and failures. So help us as we listen in to this part of your Word.

So good for us. So good for us. Profitable for teaching us, rebuking us, instructing us, building us up for a life of godliness and trust in you. So help us now as we continue to hear and listen to how compassionate you are, and how you give us and others a second chance to turn to you.

I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. In life, we don't always get second chances. In a past life, I once worked for a company that organized medical conferences.

And so these are quite hard events. They flew in speakers from overseas when pre-COVID, of course. We would be a team that wrote the words and put together their PowerPoints.

Someone would design it really nicely, and then the doctor just flies in and presents the talk. Nice gig. The busiest person on our team was the event manager, like kind of logistics. Everything that she did had to be just right.

[4 : 48] And so she was often very stressed. She forgot something. There was no second chance. There was no undo button. Or think about news presenters, okay? You're on live TV, and one mistake, and your mistake is I'm recorded forever and turn into meme after meme, right?

I wonder who took the photos at Gary and Vicky's wedding. Imagine if that person forgot their battery on the camera. There's no chance to redo, right? Don't get a second chance.

Or maybe if you're a skydiving instructor and your parachutes fail, no second chance. You won't be working tomorrow. In life, we don't always get second chances.

And yet here in Jonah 3 to 4, we have a runaway prophet who's given a second chance, right?

Another chance to give the Lord's mist to Nineveh. Notice how it starts in verse 1.

It says, then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. So the author wants us to remember he's had a second chance here. Those of you who were here last week, we heard about the first time last week, didn't we?

[5 : 50] God said, go, and Jonah said, no. He ran away, got thrown away, and then he's praying away in this little fish, sorry, a big fish. And despite all of his sin, right, his hypocrisy, his selfishness, his complacency for the lost people of Nineveh, despite all his sins, God's mercy was more.

He gave Jonah a second chance to preach in Nineveh. So we're going to hear about that today.

Just like last week, I want to look at three main scenes in the second half of the story of Jonah.

There's Nineveh's revival, and then there's Jonah's rage, and then we're going to hear about the Lord's compassion. Nineveh's revival for chapter 3, and then in verse 4, we hear of Jonah's rage and yet the Lord's compassion.

Let's dive in. Let's dive in. Here's Jonah on dry land. This is where we pick up the story again.

Remember, he's dripping with fish vomit. And the Lord says to him, here in verse 2, go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.

All right? It's pretty much the same thing he said at the start of the story in chapter 1, verse 1. This time, Jonah goes, verse 3, Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord, and he goes to Nineveh.

[7 : 06] Remember how hard this is for Jonah. He's a prophet. He's loyal to Jeroboam II, right? The king that we heard about a bit last week. He's loyal to this king over the northern part of Israel.

And perhaps Jonah expected God to give him a Christian job like Nahum had, right? Could just sit from home and scold the Ninevites. Or Isaiah could do the same, sit at home and scold the nations. They got to just preach judgment and not have to go anywhere. But instead, God calls Jonah, and only Jonah, okay, out of all the prophets, to go into enemy territory, to Assyria, to preach God's word, right?

Bloodthirsty, idol-worshipping, disgusting Assyria. That terrorist state where it would be better to be dead than captured. Imagine if I sent you into Saudi Arabia and to preach at Mecca.

Can you see how hard that would have been for Jonah to do? But look, Jonah knows he can't run away, right? He's already tried that and it didn't work. So he goes into Nineveh, a city so large it takes three days to travel through.

[8 : 16] And yet he's just a third of the way into town when he cries out his message. You can read it here in verse 4. It says, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Maybe it was a summary.

That's a pretty short sermon, don't you think? Wouldn't you love sermons this short? In Hebrew it's just five words. He forgot to mention anything about Yahweh's mercy, right, that he just received, or how they should respond.

Best sermon ever? I don't think so. Yeah, right. Yet what happens, okay? He preaches this crazy, crazy sermon. Not very good. And yet what happens?

Verse 5. The Ninevites believed God. And they declare a farce and they put on sackcloth. This is how they would repent, show that they were sorry to God.

Everyone repents, okay? And the author wants to make it really, really clear. Everyone repents. He even says the people and the animals repent. They show their sorrow by wearing the sackcloth. [9:16] And this is after they hear one of the worst sermons in Scripture. They all turn. Imagine that. Imagine all of ISIS turning. All of North Korea or that government that you can't speak of right now.

Right now, we would call this a revival, wouldn't we? Wouldn't we? We would call this a revival. Revival. And revival is a pretty popular word these days. A group of us pray for it. Pray for revival before church each week. Last night's Rice Rally theme was, This is my revival. We all long for revival. But what does a real revival look like?

Funny. We have one here. I think in Jonah 3, we see at least two elements of a real revival, a real work of God. There's two things at least I think we see.

We see crisis and we see repentance. We see crisis and we see repentance. Historians point out how around the time of Jonah's mission, which is about 800 BC, 8th century BC, Assyria was actually struggling with all kinds of disasters.

[10:23] There were famines going on, plagues, a bit of revolts, even an eclipse that scared them. It's interesting that in the original language, at the very start of when it says, Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me.

That word wickedness can also be translated as disaster or trouble right throughout the book.

There's actually a double meaning right through the book of Jonah. Is it their evil or is it the trouble, the disaster that's upon them?

Perhaps Jonah preached to a disaster-struck city that was more receptive to the word of God.

Right? One day, I think we'll look back at 2020 and we're going to tell our kids and grandkids that we haven't.

That was the year of COVID. Right? And it might be too early to tell you, but one of the reasons that God has allowed COVID to spread all around the world, to cause disaster to so many families and countries, is to make people more receptive to the word of God.

Maybe crisis is turning people to listen to their maker. One of the most encouraging things I've heard from other graduates, other missionaries this year, is how around the world, people have been wrestling with deep questions because of the struggles they've had through COVID.

[11:51] When they're separated from their family, they've been asking, Who is my true family? When they have lost loved ones, they have asked, Who do I turn to for comfort? Because of crisis, people are searching for hope, asking questions about Jesus, and joining his family.

I think sometimes when life is peachy, when we live in really nice houses and go to good schools and have everything we need, we don't see a need for God in our lives at all.

I think for some of us, I've heard some of your stories, a death in the family was what rocked your world, right? It made you really look for true hope. Maybe you had a serious injury once, and that really made you rethink your life choices and priorities.

Friends, God can use crisis to bring revival, to bring you back to God, to drive you back to Him. So if you've been wondering why COVID, or why this particular suffering that is going on in my life, maybe that crisis is God's way of talking to you right now, calling you to revival, to repent, turn your hearts back to Him.

So be careful what we pray for when we pray for revival. Notice in chapter 3, I think another aspect that is really important in a revival, it looks like many, many people doing what?

[13:09] Repenting. Repenting. Turning back to God. Remember as we were talking in Matthew chapter 3, a few weeks back, how John the Baptist called people to repent, right? To turn back to God.

Here we see a whole city doing this. The author uses the word turn or repent four times from verses 8 to 10. The city turns from evil and violence.

They pray God may turn His fierce anger, and God sees them turn from their evil ways, and turns from His threat to destroy the city. Do you get the point? Repentance requires turning back to God. Not just feeling bad, not just feeling sorry, not just feeling guilty, you got caught out. There needs to be repentance if we want true revival, whether at PCBC, whether at Rice Rally, whether across Auckland or the world.

If there is passion and energy, friends, and yet no one is turning away from their sins, that's not a revival. If there is no desire to give up sinful ways, it is not a revival.

[14:12] And I can speak from personal experience. If I raise my hand or pray a prayer, even sign up for a course, true revival comes only once you start saying no to sin and yes to God who satisfies.

The author and speaker Martin Lloyd-Jones puts it this way, he says this, a revival is a miracle. It's the hand of the Lord and it is mighty. It can only be explained as a direct action and intervention of God.

Men can produce evangelistic campaigns, but they cannot and never have produced a revival. Man can do nothing. God and God alone does it. We see that in chapter 3.

God sparked the revival in Nineveh, not Jonah, not his sermon at least. God turns Assyrians young and old to give up their violence, their wickedness.

It's God that has so much mercy that he would offer a second chance to people. Isn't that amazing? The end. Hang on, it's not the end, right?

[15:17] We often finish our story there, don't we? But look, there's a whole chapter before us. Let's look at chapter 4. Let's look at chapter 4. We've seen revival. What do we see next? Chapter 4, verse 1.

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became exceedingly angry. This is the part our Sunday school teachers left out. I mean, imagine getting first prize in a piano competition, right?

And as you walk up to get your prize, and then you smash the piano on your way up. What's going on? Or imagine this, okay? You're going to be a grandparent. Congratulations. Congratulations.

And then they show you the ultrasound, and you're like, oh, holy.

And you rip up the photo. It's crazy, isn't it? But that's what we have here. That's what we have here, isn't it? After preaching the most difficult sermon in his life, after witnessing an amazing revival, Jonah responds with happy, no, rage.

He's furious. What's going on? What's going on? Let's have a read. He prayed to the Lord. Oh, Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home?

[16:26] That is why I was so eager to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding to love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Now, oh, Lord, take away my life. It's better for me to die than to live. Hmm. At least this time, he's honest in his prayer, isn't he?

Jonah knows that God shows mercy to wicked people, and he hates it. He hates it. He'd rather die than see his sworn enemies spared.

And how does the Lord respond? Look at verse 4. Do you do well to be angry? That's a simple question, isn't it? Right? Do you do well to be angry? Jonah doesn't answer.

He walks out of the city. He makes a booth, okay, just like a little shade, like a tent, kind of. sits and watches. Even now, he wants to see for himself whether God will just judge and send fire down on those stinking Assyrians.

[17:30] And yet God appoints a shade plant, okay? God knows Jonah's angry, and yet he's still so merciful to him, isn't he? All right? A plant to cover him, to deliver him, literally, from his trouble.

But then the next day, God does something that makes Jonah even more furious, right? Morning awakes, and then there's a worm, and it comes and attacks the plant, and then it withers away. No plant left. And then the sun comes up, attacks Jonah's head, literally, with unbearable heat. Oh, Jonah is angry. And again he says this, right? Verse 8.

It'd be better for me to die than to live. Can you see how low Jonah's gone? God's number one prophet. Now he struggles to let go of a plant, okay?

That's the punchline. By the end of the book, Israel's premier prophet is portrayed as a petulant child, all right? More attached to a plant than to sinful people.

[18:27] National hero? You're right. Why is Jonah so angry? Why all the rage? We're talking about some of the sins that Jonah was harboring last week.

Today I want to put it in another way, give you another angle. I think Jonah's wrestling with two problems. He's wrestling with an intellectual problem, a head problem, but then he's also wrestling with a heart problem as well.

Okay, so the intellectual problem is this. How, logically, how can God truly love Israel if he's still showing mercy to Israel's enemies, you see?

Remember, Israel's there, Assyria's there, which is Nineveh, and they're about to attack Israel, okay? How can God show mercy to Israel, right? I promise to bless you, make you a great nation,

but I'm going to leave those terrorists on your doorstep.

Jonah cannot understand how these two things compute. As long as Nineveh remains standing, Jonah knows that Israel is at risk. If our country border North Korea, we'd be anxious too, wouldn't we?

[19 : 32] And yet, Jonah doesn't trust God with his anxiety, does he? And this is his deeper heart problem. Jonah is more loyal to Israel than to God.

He loves Israel so much that he'd be happy for a whole city to perish, okay? So that he can keep Israel going. Look, if your love and concern for your own country makes you disobey God, makes you push God away, what would you call that?

We call that an idol. An idol. And look, all of us here have idols. If you're not a Christian, you're worshipping something.

If you are a Christian, we still struggle. We worship other things more than God sometimes. A theologian put it this way, our hearts are idol factories. They just keep churning them out, okay? And it could be any of God's good gifts that we put as ultimate in our lives.

They become idols for us. It could be family. It could be money. It could be comfort. It could be a relationship. It could be our reputation among others.

[20 : 42] It could even be a position that we have in church or a serving role that we covet. And look, Jonah Ford tells us, if you want to know something in your life as an idol, watch what happens when God takes it away.

How would you respond? If it makes you mad, maybe that's your shady plant. Maybe that's your idol. So what's your shade plant, friends? What's your shade plant?

I had to ask myself again and again when we were in Sydney, did I love New Zealand so much that I would close my heart to the millions of people around the world who have never had a chance to hear about Jesus?

Should I care for people who God has mercy for? Or am I prouder of my country than my king?

What's your shade plant? Are you more passionate about your car than your character?

Are you more excited about your gamer rank than your God? Or fashion rather than your father?

What is your shady plant? Maybe when we see Jonah, we laugh, but perhaps we are more like him than we think.

[21 : 48] Are we not? And PCBC, I think there's shady plants that are unique to immigrant churches like ours too, right? Because we can be, we should be, and we should be thankful for the sacrifice that our parents and others have made for this church even to exist, shouldn't we?

But if we close our hearts to other ethnic groups outside these walls, if we say this is a Hong Kong first church, for example, if we don't make the most of gospel opportunities in our workplaces with our friends, maybe that's our shade plant too.

Friends, may we never turn our culture into our ultimate goal. May we never be prouder of our cultural identity, but be most proud of our kingdom identity in Christ.

What an adventure. Revival in Nineveh, a rage from Jonah. And look in these last three verses, verse 9 to 11, we get a remarkable glimpse into God's compassion.

Read with me, verse 9, but God said to Jonah, do you have a right to be angry about the vine? I do, he said. I'm angry enough to die. But the Lord said this, you've been concerned about this vine, though you didn't tend it or make it grow, it sprang up overnight and died overnight.

[23 : 12] But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who can't tell their right hand from their left to many cattle as well. Shouldn't I not be concerned about that great city?

I love how it ends, the book ends with a question. It's meant to question us. It's a simple argument, really. Are people more valuable or is your plant more valuable? Right?

God basically says this, Jonah, you weep for a plant. I weep for people. In verse 10 and 11, the word that I said, I translated concerned or pity.

It comes from a Hebrew word that means this to get emotionally involved even to the point of tears. That's God's compassion. That's God's compassion for people.

Can you see how sympathetic and understanding God is compared with Jonah? Jonah. Jonah becomes attached to this little plant. Comes and goes in a day. Yet he can't bring himself to love a city of lost people.

[24 : 14] Jonah loves this plant, okay? Just because it gave him shade and gave him some use. And yet God loves a whole city that has no use to him. Friends, when you and I get absorbed in

worshiping our idols, whatever they are, getting angry about them, let the Lord rebuke you and remind you, turn from your rage.

Look at my compassion. Jonah reminds us, it's so easy to know God's mercy up here but not feel it in here. And yet God here feels the weeping and the hurt of the lost people.

When we truly get God's compassion, I think that will work a true revival in our hearts and in our communities. Because look, there's all kinds of bad reasons to serve, to go on mission, to do this, to do that.

God does not want you to join something, join this mission out of guilt, out of peer pressure because someone told you. Don't sign up to serve God because of that.

Don't sign up to serve on God's mission just so you'll get the applause or the reputation. The best and highest motivation to join God's mission is because we have known God's compassion to us.

[25 : 31] His compassion for those who need to hear of His grace and mercy. Let God's compassion change you. Nothing else. So what should move us to build relationships with people from different congregations here at PCBC?

God's compassion for people. What should motivate us to keep going to family dinners with our relatives even though they hate you talking about Jesus? God's compassion.

God's compassion. Why might you even hold on to your birth passports? Like friends of ours have and risk entering East Asia to live and serve among unreached peoples?

God's compassion for people. So what will God's compassion do to you, PCBC? Maybe God's compassion could move some of you to learn a new language or appreciate a new culture to get to know your neighbors.

A friend reminded me this past week that third culture kids. That's many of us. People who have lived in different cultures. Once we have an identity secure in Jesus Christ we become great cross-cultural workers, missionaries, evangelists because we know God's compassion and we have a firm identity in Jesus.

[26 : 48] What will God's compassion do for you? Maybe it will move you to help specific groups of God's image bearers who need compassion like Cambodia's daughters, Rwanda's orphans, disadvantaged children that we meet in our workplaces.

Maybe God's compassion will move you to actually love your extended family, to spend time with grandma and grandpa, to sacrifice time and energy to be near them as they age.

Show them compassion literally to suffer with them. Perhaps God's compassion will move you there. Friends, because in Jesus, okay, we are Jesus followers.

In Jesus, you and I know God's compassion in a way that Jonah never gets to experience in his life, right? Because remember that question he wrestled with, how can God be just and merciful at the same time?

Jonah never gets an answer to that in this story. Yet in the New Testament, in the New Testament, in Matthew's gospel, a couple of Pharisees and teachers start grumbling.

[27 : 59] And then Jesus gives them a service and tells them, you want a sign? You hypocrites. You want a sign? You wicked and adulterous generation. Someone greater than Jonah is here.

Jesus, our true prophet, the one who draws near a city of wicked people. and he doesn't run away. He weeps for Jerusalem, right?

He got emotionally involved even with tears. The Savior, our Savior, he looks at crowds of people and he doesn't laugh at them. He doesn't run away from them. He is filled with compassion because they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Everything Jonah fails to do, our Lord Jesus, he did and he went even further, right? Because Jonah would throw himself into the water to escape his mission and yet Jesus will throw himself into God's wrath to die on the cross to fulfill his mission to save sinners.

Jonah goes outside the city to watch it suffer and yet Jesus goes outside the city to do what? To suffer on a cross, suffer outside that gate to sanctify people through his own blood.

[29 : 13] And on that cross, on that cross, that wonderful, wonderful cross, as Jesus took the full punishment of God for sin, our sin, our sin, there we see God's compassion fully displayed.

I'm going to celebrate the Lord's Supper soon. It would be so good to share it together. And Jesus told the Pharisees about the sign of Jonah, didn't he? And yet, we have one better.

In the bread and the cup, we see the signs of Jesus. We see God's compassion for sinners as we remember and celebrate. That's a gospel, isn't it?

