

God's Character of Patient Compassion

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[0 : 00] Lo, all things fly thee, for thou flyest me. Strange, piteous, futile thing, wherefore should any set thee love apart?

Seeing none, but I makes much of naught, he said. And human love needs human meriting. How hast thou merited of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?

Alack, thou knowest not. How little worthy of any love thou art. Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee?

Save me, save only me. All of which I took from thee, I did but take, not for thy harms, but just that thou might seek it in my arms.

All which thy child's mistake fancies are lost, I have stored for thee at home. Rise, clasp my hand and come. Halts by me that footfall is my gloom after all.

[1 : 13] Shade of his hand outstretched caressingly. Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest, I am he whom thou seekest.

Thou dravest love from thee who dravest me. I have read to you the first and last stanzas of Francis Thompson's poem, Hound of Heaven.

It was first published in his first volume of poems in 1893. It was praised by the likes of G.K. Chesterton and J.R.R. Tolkien.

This poem has been described by the Reverend John O'Connor from 1912 as follows. The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless.

It does not attract, rather the reverse. But when one reads this poem, the strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by his divine grace.

[2 : 36] Almost a meter there in his words. And though in sin or in human love, away from God, it seeks to hide itself.

Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to him alone in that never-ending pursuit.

The Hound of Heaven. We come to the end of this little book. A book that has many twists and turns. From fish to worms.

To destruction. To salvation. Warning of judgment. The power of a storm. But from beginning to end, it is the story of a God and his man.

A God that pursues his man even after his job is done. We have, as we discussed last week, the end of Jonah in chapter 4 is an interesting dialogue.

[3 : 46] It's a dialogue that feels extraneous that didn't need to be there in the grand scheme of the story. But once it's there, it causes us to question why it's there.

Because of how it ends in such a strange way. Jonah completed the mission. But it's meant to show the eternal perspective that God has for his people.

Jonah completed the mission. Great repentance from peasant to prince. Jonah. But God's not done. Throughout three chapters, Jonah's heart was still apart from God's.

Distant. And God's pursuing Jonah. He's still pursuing Jonah. Last week, we looked at this same chapter and we looked at the character of Jonah.

We looked at his hypocrisy, his prejudice, and his pride. This week, we're looking at the same section and actually looking back into the rest of the book as our final chapter.

[4 : 55] Our final look at the book. To see God's character. What is his character like? And what is his character like for us? Because it doesn't change. To do this, I want to look at three aspects of God that we see both in this chapter and in the book.

One, his compassion for his people. He is committed to ensuring his people are pursued. And that his people become like him.

The second is God's compassion for the lost. The people that he wants to bring into the fold.

Finally, for both groups, his desire for his people to be conformed into his image.

To have his heart and not just have external obedience. So, let's get into it. The compassion that God has for his people.

How does he hound us? First, let's define his people. For our context, you might say for an Old Testament book, it's Israel.

[6 : 02] It's the people of God. The people that have the oracles of God. They had the advantage. As Romans looks back, they had the oracles of God. New Testament, we would say it's the church.

The people that know and understand the words of God. What I want to do is I want to look at how God has used providence, persistence, and patience with his people.

And primarily with Jonah. Jonah is the one Israelite, the one Jew in our entire passage. And while he's his prophet, he's also his countryman.

The people, the one representative of the people. Providential. We've already studied providence. We've defined it. We've looked back on the storm and we unpacked what is this thing called providence.

God's working through other means to get our attention. Jonah. He has appointed five things throughout this book that have nothing to do with humanity to get Jonah's attention.

[7 : 10] Four of which could have killed him, by the way. The first one he hurled, the word was hurled. It was the storm. Immediately after Jonah fled to go the opposite direction from where he was called.

He went this way. He was called to go this way by a clear word of God. God hurled a storm. The remaining four things, the word is appointed.

He appointed a fish for Jonah. And while it could have killed him, it actually saved him. He also, in this book alone, I'm sorry, this chapter alone, he appoints three things to teach Jonah the lesson he needs to understand.

About his own heart. He appoints a plant for which he is exceedingly glad. 120,000 people were just saved and he was angry.

But a plant comes up and he's happy. So much so that God never intended to only spring up this plant. He also appointed the worm and then appointed the scorching wind.

[8 : 28] All of this was to work on Jonah's attitude. The form of this word appointed is only translated appointed.

This manah, this word that's used in Hebrew, only translated appointed here and two other times in Scripture. Here, four times. All these things he appoints. One other time it was Chronicles where it's just the appointing of people to take care of the temple.

But the other one is Psalm 61. Psalm of David, verses 6 and 7. Prolong the life of the king, David cries.

May his years endure to all generations. He's not talking about himself as king. May he be enthroned forever before God.

Appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him. Same appoint. Not used very often this way.

[9 : 29] God is appointing some things in Jonah's life to wake him up. To show him his steadfast love. To show him his faithfulness. He also appoints people.

The word isn't appointed here, but God also shows the depravity of Jonah's heart through the people that he brings into his life providentially. Sailors who seem to respond with logic much greater than Jonah does at the storm.

Why are you asleep? Call out to your God. And when they figure out that he's the prophet or the man of the God of the sea and the dry land, they're aghast.

What are you doing? From the captain to the lowest sailor, the sailors have it all together. Almost in a way to shame Jonah.

God also has a host of Ninevites around him that repent immediately at his preached word.

[10 : 39] Change their hearts to God. In a way that any other missionary we would think would be aghast and humbled at the marvelous grace of God.

But Jonah's angry. God uses things in our lives to wake us up. He uses people. He uses events.

It's not his clearest word. It's not like we just take a storm and say, okay, God spoke to me. I know exactly what I'm supposed to do. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm just saying, when you're kicking against the goads and things are continually pushing against you, think about what God is doing in your life.

Maybe it's not the way you're supposed to go. God is persistent with his people. Not just providential. He's a hound that continues to come after.

Our story is at least three months long. We know that because however long it took him to get from wherever he was in northern Israel to Joppa and then into the boat, who knows?

[11 : 53] It could have been a few weeks. It could have been a few days. We don't really know where he was in the northern kingdom. But we do know the journey from that area over to Nineveh would have been at least two months.

And he waits at least 40 days. We know Jonah waited at least that entire 40 days to make sure. Are you sure you don't want to kill them? Are you sure you don't want to destroy them? So we've got at least three months of time.

Jonah's heart is bent the wrong way the entire duration of this discussion, this whole narrative.

God is still pursuing him. God is still not letting up. Jonah 4.2. You know, it's the ironic words of Jonah that he is praying, almost shouting, you would think, in anger back to God about the attributes of God that are exactly opposite of Jonah.

Jonah 5.2.

[13 : 21] Anger is also translated long-suffering. God is long-suffering, especially with his people. That same word is translated long-suffering when it's used in Exodus 34.

It's the first time this word is used. Exodus 34 is the account after the tablets have actually come down from the mountain when Moses brings them down. And Moses, actually the Lord actually proclaims this with Moses.

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious. Long-suffering is what the New King James translates it. And abounding in goodness and truth.

Long-suffering. Jonah is quick-suffering. Reactive. Flies off the handle in prayer and disgust.

But you can just see Jonah praying this to God and God saying, Are you right to be angry? Do you do well to be angry? You can just feel God taking it.

[14 : 35] Just taking it from Jonah. Aren't you glad God can suffer long with his people? I mean, God knew even at the giving of the law what Israel was going to be like.

Did he not? He knew they would be complaining and asking to go back into Egypt. And why have you let us out here in this wilderness? So at the very beginning of the giving of the law, he tells them now, I am going to be long-suffering with you.

But he will not only be long-suffering, he uses his good to essentially melt our hearts.

Zephaniah 3.17, one of the last of the prophets, last of the Old Testament, says, The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

Mighty to save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. Think about that.

[15 : 46] Quiet you by his love. And he will exult over you with loud singing. Actually, we rarely see a passage where it says God is actually going to sing over us.

That phrase he does. And we don't see this expression, He will quiet you with his love anywhere else in Scripture. This is to Israel now in exile.

This is a book in exile. You are now being punished for having this wicked heart like Jonah had.

And I finally am moving you to another place to wake you up.

Another providence he's using. But God is so long-suffering with us. And he will quiet us. How does he quiet us with his love? Well, when he pours grace and grace and grace upon a wicked heart, eventually that heart goes, What am I doing?

I am a sinful man. He embodies that twin hounds of heaven that we see at the end of Psalm 23.

[16 : 52] Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. I will melt you with my goodness. I will set my covenant love on you, which means I am not going to let you go.

And I'm not going to let you stay with a wicked heart, even if it looks like you're doing what you're supposed to do. I'm not going to leave you there. You can't stay there. I'm going to pursue you.

I'm not giving you up. That's our God. Finally, he's patient. He's long-suffering, right?

He's persistent, but he's patient. Those can feel like antonyms, right? I'm persistent. I'm not going to give you up, but I'm also patient with you.

I think this is most seen in our discourse by just this dialogue that God has with Jonah. The very patient questions that he asks of God, that he asks of Jonah.

[17:59] Do you do well to be angry? Verse 4. Verse 9. Do you do well to be angry about the plant?

That's a silly little plant. You didn't even miss it before I brought it. You had this shelter. It was bad. You're not much of a construction worker, which is why you were so exceedingly thankful for this wondrous shade tree that I gave you.

But you care more about this plant than you do people. But I'm going to be patient with you. I'm going to keep asking you these questions. I'm going to keep putting before you my goodness and making you think, should I be this way?

Why am I this way? Lord, help me. Lord, I need thee every hour. Isaiah, you know, one of the very first expressions in Isaiah is when, you know, God says to him, let us reason together.

Your sins are like scarlet, but they will be whiter than snow. Let us reason together. God's wanting to reason with us. God is the God of logic.

[19:16] The same logic that the sailors all saw, they're right. How could you be like this? But that's the deception of sin. That's the deception of our own hearts where we can't see past our own pride.

God will melt it. If we're faithful, God's going to melt it. Even when we're not faithful, God, if we're his people, he's going to melt it. One of the most striking prophets of the Old Testament is Hosea.

You know the story of Hosea, most of you. Incredible word picture. My prophet, I want you to marry a prostitute.

That's one of the key images of the message. Part of his message is that act. Because that's what Israel is like.

The adulterous woman, but I'm going to marry myself to you and bring you in. Hosea 2, 13 to 20.

[20:26] And I will punish her for the feast of days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the valley of Achor a door of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband.

And no longer will you call me my Baal. For I will remove the names of Baals from her mouth and they shall be remembered by name no more.

And I will make for her, I'm sorry, I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven and the creeping things of the ground.

[21:37] And I will abolish the bow and the sword and the war from this land. And I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever.

And I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice and in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord.

Not just have head knowledge and do good works. You will know the Lord. That's his covenant faithfulness to us. That's how he pursues us.

His passion for his people is great. Nothing can separate. Neither height nor depth nor principality. When we're in Christ, we are in his love forever.

He will chase you down until you get it. God also has great compassion for the lost. Another word for lost in our passage, in Jonah's perspective, is your enemies.

[22:45] Is it not? God's history throughout Scripture is he has always had an eye beyond Israel.

From the earliest days of Scripture, he actually had that eye to all nations. Abraham, in you all of the nations will be blessed.

Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, all Gentiles. Rahab, while she was in Jericho, the promised land, she was actually the first Gentile convert, we believe, out of prostitution and in the line of Christ.

Ruth was from Moab and David's grandfather. or grandmother. Bathsheba was a Hittite.

Or Solomon. In Exodus, God always had an eye for the sojourner. The sojourner is listed in one of the parts of our psalm for our call to worship today. Sojourner.

[23 : 58] The person that wanders into our land that's not ours. Deuteronomy 24, when you reap the harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back and get it.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hands. Bless you in allowing somebody else to be blessed.

Jonah 4 was, 3 and 4, was one of the greatest acts of I care for the Gentiles in history.

120,000 plus. And whether it's the Samaritan woman at the well, the good Samaritan, the Syrophenician woman in the New Testament, Jesus knocks down the walls permanently that the son of the priest had set up, if you will, of the outer courtyards and the second, third class citizens that existed.

Care for them all. The message to his people is essentially, if you don't have my heart, I'll find somebody who will.

[25 : 18] The pruning off of the vine of what was dead to graft in the new is us.

Very few of us can claim an Israeli heritage, I believe. We're here because God cared for the enemies of essentially Israel.

And if they're persecuted and overlooked, all the better. The fatherless, the widow, I care for them.

Today, God's passion for the lost is shown by those outside of the church.

There's 120,000 who don't know their right hand from their left, verse 11 says. That's an expression to say, they don't know what's up or down with respect to the God of this universe.

They don't have the oracles of God. You do. Take it to them. You did. They repented and you still don't understand.

[26 : 31] You don't know my grace. You don't know my love. You don't have my heart. You don't have the right hand to the Lord. You don't have the right hand to the Lord. You don't have the right hand to the Lord. You don't have the right hand to the Lord. There's a comparison that you could make.

You know, Jonah in Jonah 4, we see in the middle of this passage, Jonah goes up on the east of the city and looks down into it, seeing what would happen. Again, we think this is after the 40 days had passed and Jonah had actually seen that God had relented, which is why he was angry.

But you could see that Jonah is almost like, maybe he'll still rain down fire, just on a couple. Jesus looked over Jerusalem in Matthew 23 and he wept that they wouldn't turn.

But you wouldn't have me. That's the character of our God over the lost, over the people far off. The Great Commission, that's the heart of the Great Commission.

It's from all nations, make disciples of all nations. The other part I want you to see at the end of 4, when he says, you didn't labor for this plant.

[27 : 46] Right? Verse 10. And he's comparing, he's intentionally comparing many aspects, many threads of his, of Jonah's exceeding joy in this plant and who you should have been exceedingly glad for, the salvation of 120,000.

You didn't work for this plant, but I've been preparing the soil in Nineveh for decades. I have been working to save these folks and they just needed the last straw, which was your preaching of judgment.

You must care for who I've cared for. You must have the heart of somebody that I have worked and labored for these people. Somebody else has sown. Somebody else has reaped.

You watered the last bit of water and the fruit is up. I have been laboring for these people. You know, when Jesus was chastising the disciples, the Samaritan woman at the well, remember the interlude between there?

You know, he's talking to her, he's talking to her. They went into the city to get food and stuff. And he's talking to her. He's saving her. He's putting his finger on her sin and her heart. And they come back and they're aghast that he's talking to her.

[29 : 05] Why are you talking to her? Why are you talking to that Samaritan woman? Again, they didn't have the heart either. They had the same bad heart that Jonah did. And he says, I sent you to reap for that which you did not labor.

Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. My labor. In the end, it's my work to get the gospel to all peoples.

You must have compassion for them. In short, I am preparing hearts everywhere. Jeremiah 12, verses 14 to 17.

This is in the, this is right at the point where Jeremiah is preaching the last words to a nation that's about to go into captivity. Northern kingdom had fallen.

It's now time for Babylon to come get the rest. That's where we're at. Thus says the Lord concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I have given my people Israel to inherit.

[30 : 14] Behold, I will pluck up from their land. I'm sorry. I will pluck them up from their land and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them.

And I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land. And it shall come to pass if they will diligently learn the ways of my people.

they, those enemy nations, learn the ways of my people. To swear by my name as the Lord lives, even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the Lord. God has had a heart beyond just Israel.

And God has a heart to grow beyond just our church or just the church, to fold more into the church. Before the time of judgment, today is the day of salvation for all people.

[31 : 27] Finally, God has a great heart to transform our hearts like his. That's really been the message the whole time. He's pursuing his people to have his heart.

He's pursuing other people to have his heart, the lost. And now he's going to, you know, he expounds to us as he goes through chapter 4, reason with me.

Let me show you my heart. So we cannot be like God in any part of providence, right? That's his job. But we can be persistent and patient with people like God can.

again, the irony of Jonah calling him slow to anger while he is angry is incredibly revealing. It forms the narrative and the motivation that God has for the entire rest of the chapter.

And when we look at the long-suffering God, we have to ask ourselves, are we so patient?

[32 : 41] Are we so persistent? Are we quick to react to the people in our lives? Are we quick to react to God when he doesn't do what we want him to do?

how are we in reacting to enemies? What is our heart for the lost or those that we have already judged in our minds that need the Lord's judgment?

Last week, we looked a little bit at Romans 12. Again, that was the, that's the treatise that starts after all the doctrines of who God is and what salvation is in Christ.

Here's your marching orders. Here's what it's supposed to look like. And the heart of it is your love with other people, right? Love God and love people.

One of the quickest ways I will show you how your heart isn't there yet is how they are to other people, especially those that you dislike.

[33 : 47] Romans 12, 20, and 21 to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not overcome, be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If you sit and go spar back and forth with somebody that's your enemy when you have the gospel, evil, you play into the hands by being overcome by evil, you are not going to win that person over by fighting with them.

It's not going to happen. Whatever the relationship is in your life where there is a standoff, our pride and our sin will keep us from ever seeing their side of anything.

This verse, these verses are here to say, overcome the evil by doing good. Now, it might not work. And by the way, this part where it says, by doing so, you will heap burning coals on their head, you can't twist that and say, yeah, I want to do them harm.

[35 : 05] I want to put some burning coals on their head. That's not the point. That's not what God is trying to say. God is trying to say, quiet you, quiet them with your love.

The way, I will quiet you and have quieted you with my love. Have a heart that I have. Share in the heart that I have for people that don't see clearly.

The other part of this is in chapter 4, there's an aspect that you can look at the whole narrative of Jonah and just see it as a bit of a microcosm of the spiritual life.

Just walk with me for just a second. God calls you to do something, I don't want to do it. God finally convinces you that your way is wrong and he almost kills you and you have this repentant prayer from the depths of the ocean and you're saved.

Salvation point. But your heart in working out other people is still pretty awful. And he's patient with you and patient with you to keep working.

[36 : 22] Why? Salvation isn't just our eternal life insurance that once we get it, we're good, we can live however we want, we can hate whatever people we don't want because we're God's people and it's all good.

No. If you don't have God's heart and you go into heaven that way, that's not going to be fun.

I mean, work with me here. God is working with you to change your heart to be like his so you can glory in who God is. Now. He's preparing us as Christians to have his heart now.

Learn from me now. When you think about our chief end, Diana is taking over the catechism and the first question, what is the chief end of man?

To, man chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[37 : 34] They know this. They don't want to be put on the spot. It's fine. To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. How are you going to enjoy a God that you disagree with?

Guess who's wrong? I mean, heaven is a grand opening of I finally have the heart of my father and can glory in the light of heaven, the celestial city.

John 17 records one of the most heartfelt prayers prayers in all of scripture and it's Christ's prayer. It's his high priestly prayer.

I want you to think about this prayer, just this one excerpt from the perspective of having a heart like God has. Verse 16, they are not of the world, that's us, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them, meaning set them apart, make them holy, make them good for your service. sanctify them in truth, your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

[38 : 54] And for their sake, I consecrate myself, meaning I'm going to the cross, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only around me in the garden of Gethsemane, but also for those who will believe in me, that's us, through their word, that they all may be one as you, the Father, are in me and I in you.

That they may also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. And by the way, the beginning of that prayer, Jesus says, this is eternal life.

This is what eternal life looks like. I'm praying for it now, for these and for all who will believe it. We want every story to end in a nice, tidy way.

But I will challenge you, the reason this book is not wrapped up in a nice, tidy way is so Jonah could see that his foul heart was important for us to see, to be sanctified.

The heart is deceitful above all things. Who can know it? I, the Lord, test the hearts, Jeremiah says. And I'm going to test you by giving you this passage to say, think about the depth of your own heart.

[40 : 33] What are you not surrendering to me? He wanted us to ask, are you, non-rhetorically he wanted us to ask, are you angry?

Are you displeased with God? Are you a complaining people? Are you always complaining about other people? Do you wish others the ill will?

are you neglecting to reach out to others? Is your complaining, nagging anger keeping you from reaching out to the lost or being a testimony?

And the last follow-on is, do you do well to be so? Do you do well to be angry? I am thankful for this book.

I am very thankful that God pursued Jonah to the end and didn't give him up in a bad state. We called an audible this week.

[41 : 45] We originally had a list of songs we were going to sing, and then after I had sent it out, I had said, hey, can we make a change? I'd like us to sing hymn 374. It's listed correctly in your bulletin as 374, but in the handout, it's the other hymn that we had prepared.

So, we're singing 374. Let me close in prayer. Our gracious Lord and God, you are a God that is mighty to save.

And Lord, you showed us in this book that you not only pursued the 99, or the 120,000. You went back for us the lost sheep, your own, when we didn't understand and when we had a foul heart.

Lord, we thank you for your grace and your goodness to us. A goodness and a graciousness that pursues us like a hound. That when he gets there, Lord, you give us just grace and mercy that

melts us, melts away our anger.

Lord, we pray that we would surrender our hearts to you, that we wouldn't be angry, that we pray that your spirit would convict us of whatever we need convicted of, that our hearts can look like yours in Christ's name.

[43 : 11] Amen.