

# Jonah's Character Self-Centered Obedience

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Preacher: Don Rhymer

[ 0 : 00 ] Each time their children responded to anything in a good way, they put the child's name on a piece of paper and put it in a jar.

If the child brushed their teeth, helped with dishes, cleaned her room, set the table, or did anything commendable, her name went into the jar.

If she or her brothers or sisters did something wrong, her name or their name came out of the jar. At the end of the week, a name was drawn from the jar and the winning child got a present.

The children quickly learned the point of the game. Get your name in the jar as much as possible.

The more times your name was in the jar, the greater your chance of winning.

You're wondering how it worked. It worked great. It was an effective tool for teaching children. It taught them to be selfish.

[ 1 : 12 ] It taught them to do things for improper motives. It taught them how to earn parental approbation and therefore a name in the jar. They quickly learned what they would get, what would get their name in the jar, and how to maximize the number of times for a minimum amount of effort.

They became manipulators of the system. When mother wasn't around to notice good behavior, there was no point in being good. The system effectively moved from this family from biblical action springing from biblical motives to ungodly ones.

Let me say in passing that the biblical incentives and rewards are not an end to themselves, but rather outcomes of obedience to God. There is a temporal blessing attached to obedience, but the God who knows our hearts calls us to right behavior for the purpose of honoring him.

He honors those who honor him. If this story is at all familiar, it is a quote, a lengthy quote from Ted Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, a book written for parents to do just that, shepherd the heart, not just work on behavior.

Ted Tripp used this in a part of the book where he taught about what behaviorism is. Behaviorism could also be called formalism or behavior modification or even legalism, where there's doing the right things and that's what matters externally and that's all I care about is seeing my children do what is done.

[ 2 : 52 ] But their hearts are far from the hearts of what the parents really want, perhaps. We come to the part of Jonah today where we are getting to the heart of Jonah.

We could have had a book that ended after chapter 3. God relented, saved Nineveh, Jonah fulfilled his commission, we're done with the book of Jonah, we're moving on.

But that's not what God intended. God wants us to see the heart of Jonah that caused him to flee from the very first verses of the book and help us to see, by the way, that just because you have a call from God to preach or do work of the Lord or any kind of sanctified labor, that your heart still can be enraptured with sin or coveting an idol or doing something that dishonors the Lord.

The reason chapter 4 is recorded in inspired biblical texts is so God could show us our heart in obedience. So for the final two weeks, we're going to look at this same set of verses.

We're going to be in chapter 4 for this week and next week. But my point this week is to show what is the heart and the character of Jonah and what is the heart and character of our God in the same verses.

[ 4 : 24 ] Because this is really the end of the whole matter. Yes, there's a great fish. Yes, there's storm. There's sailors. There's salvation of people, which is huge, which is the, you might say, the penultimate goal on earth of what our calling is.

But God wants us to pit these two hearts together and see what does this heart look like and the character of Jonah and what does the heart of God look like.

So to do this, we're going to look at three things. We're going to look first at the general state of Jonah's hypocrisy, his external obedience. We will go into a second point that goes deeper and maybe the source of his hypocrisy or his reason being his prejudice.

And then thirdly, we will look at his pride, the root source of what gets him in trouble, what causes God to reach out to him. First, Jonah's hypocrisy.

Obedying the letter of the law and failing at the heart. Verse 1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

[ 5 : 40 ] As if our book couldn't have any more twists or turns, we find a prophet upset that his preaching was effective. That's what we have.

He is displeased. It says he is displeased exceedingly. These are the strongest words possible in the Hebrew to display that Jonah's dissatisfaction with God is as great as it could be.

In fact, it's described in the Hebrew as being a great evil. What is this great evil? This displeasure is almost an evil. So if you think about it, a wicked pagan city hears the word of God that you preach, they heeded the warning.

And the prophet is angry. Two sermons ago, we talked about our being redeemed for obedience, that Jonah was tossed into the waves, descended to the depths, swallowed by the fish, and for three days and three nights was in the belly of the fish praying to the Lord.

And he prayed a wonderful prayer of redemption, a prayer that led to his redemption. Preached a wonderful sermon, if you will, to himself in his own soul.

[ 7 : 03 ] But as he was redeemed, you're redeemed, we're redeemed to have a relationship with God, to be holy before God, and to be set apart for his holiness, which includes obedience, and that we are redeemed to glorify God.

Well, if we take that as a three-point scale, Jonah might have barely gotten a half a point out of those three. When he was redeemed, his heart knew nothing of a relationship with God that understood his heart.

Jonah does exactly what God wants for the effect God planned, and he's furious. Jonah has a heart problem, and it manifests itself with a horrible attitude.

1 Samuel 16, 7, The Lord said to Samuel, Do not look on his appearance, or the height of the stature, because I have rejected him.

For the Lord does not see as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. God has always been concerned with the heart.

[ 8 : 13 ] Bad hearts leading to bad attitudes are not only obvious to God, but they affect our earthly relationships. We can do a right thing with a poor attitude, but what joy does that bring anybody around you?

All of us know, whether we're parents, whether we're spouses, when somebody says or does the thing that we wanted them to do, but with a horrible attitude, what does that do to the relationship? It's as if it's disobedience. It's as if it doesn't even matter. You know, Nehemiah, when Nehemiah went before the king, he had a sour heart, and the king could see it.

Artaxerxes could see it. When we have an attitude and a heart that's strayed from the Lord, that doesn't try to see, what is the Lord's heart in this matter? It is obvious.

It affects our attitude. It affects our external relationships. Are there areas of your life that you're willing to do what you're supposed to do for work or spouse or kids or whatever, but you don't really want to do it?

[ 9 : 28 ] Now, sometimes that's an admirable thing. There's times in our lives when it isn't important that we have a great relationship in certain obedience.

There's times we just need to eat our peas, but if it's a command that involves the relationship, especially with our Lord, it behooves us to seek the Lord's heart on the matter and ask Him, Lord, why are you having me do this?

Not, I told you I didn't want to do that. I told you back when I was in my country, my country, I didn't want to save them. James Montgomery Boyce says, it is a warning that it is possible to obey God, but to do so with such a degree of unwillingness and anger that so far as we are concerned, the obedience is no better than disobedience.

We often act the same even when we are apparently obeying God. We are doing what we think we should be doing, living the kind of life we think a Christian should live.

But secretly, we are unhappy and angry with God for making the requirement. For this reason, many Christians look and act miserable much of the time.

[10:55] Now, I am not talking about going through something difficult where it, again, we plead to the Lord, Lord, help us through this.

I can't see what I am doing. That is not a heart that is, that is a heart that is trying to understand God's heart. This is a cold, Jonah has got a cold, callous heart where he is doing this to everything God is saying.

That is what I am trying to ask you. Do you have that in relationship? Do you have that with our Lord? Well, God will call you on it if he has not already.

The Lord said in verse 4, Do you do well to be angry? The word translated angry could also be translated evil.

The word translated well can also be good. It's as if God is saying, What is it good of you to do this evil? Or, what right do you have to be wrong?

[11:59] Because that's really how God is describing this in the Hebrew. He's using a play on words intentionally. You are so wrong to reject something so right.

And if we don't see that, we get that at the end in verse 10 and 11. So this is a horrible attitude over something that outwardly he's supposed to be God's man to preach God's word.

Jesus calls this hypocrisy. Jesus would talk to the Pharisees and scribes using Isaiah's passage.

Mark 7, verse 6, And he said to them, Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites? As it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Now, Jonah, we could say, has a little bit more integrity with his hypocrisy because he's outwardly telling the Lord he doesn't want to do something. But he's the prophet of God.

[13:04] And he tells God his own characteristics in verse 2. You're a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger, compassionate, relenting from disaster.

And he uses the covenant name, Yahweh, I am, meaning you are the God that can do whatever he wants. And yet he's saying, God, I didn't like that you did that.

I mean, can you see the coldness? Can you see the callousness? That's where our heart can go if we let it. If we don't heed God's call, do you do well to be angry?

So the second part of Jonah's failure in his heart is manifested in his prejudice. There's a reason behind his disobedience, his fleeing.

He doesn't want to see specifically Nineveh saved. He doesn't want to see them spared.

[14:06] Jonah has no compassion whatsoever on the nation of Assyria and the city of Nineveh.

Now, we talked at length in chapter 1 that when we looked at the whole background of this passage that we knew that Assyria was essentially the pagan nation to the north of that northern kingdom.

Israel's borders would have expanded and been restored, which meant Assyria's borders would have been pushed back. And even in this book, God says, Nineveh's great evil has come up to me.

They are an evil nation. They're a vile nation. And historically, we know that's confirmed with torture, with murder, with mutilation, and all kinds of things that aren't worth mentioning.

It goes deeper than that for Jonah. Jonah was essentially a nationalist. He cared about preaching repentance and a warning for repentance to Israel.

He wanted to see Israel saved. He wanted to see Israel redeemed. Israel was God's people. Israel was the nation he's from. Israel is the nation he wants to see saved. And perhaps he already knows the coming judgment that's coming on Israel.

[15:29] And if he preaches a message of repentance to Nineveh, does God's favor now move to Syria instead of Israel? We don't know what he's thinking, but we know he doesn't want to see Nineveh saved.

Another way to put this is he truly was a racist. It's a word that is used quite often in our public speech today. Whether it is or isn't in certain circumstances, clearly it is where Jonah's heart is. And it is clearly not where God's heart is. God desires a tribe from every tongue and every nation to rejoice at his throne.

God desires people from all tongues to rejoice in his name. It's easy for us to get caught up in a specific people group and say I'm not racist.

but we can still have prejudice. We can still see people in our lives that we sort of see as enemies or people that think very differently from us or people that we have a beef with, people that we have a current conflict with and we don't want to see God's compassion exerted on them or God relent

from judgment of them.

[17:05] We may not have the same outward nationalistic perspective of wanting danger and judgment to come upon a specific people, but we struggle with prejudice if we really look.

My friends, we must pray against this spirit. If there are people difficult for us to love, we have to seek the Lord's heart. We have to see that, Lord, would you change their heart?

Would you change my heart? Would you change both of our hearts so we can get through this?

Would you have me to see through your eyes these people?

God may save them. God may not, but it is not ours to choose whether they are judged. It is not our decision. When God says, take the speck out of your own eye, he's saying, work on yourselves and your own heart.

Take the log out of your eye, and not remove the speck from your brothers. I will judge, and if it's me, if I decide to let the danger fall or relent from the danger, I am the Lord.

[18:16] God wants us to work through all these earthly difficulties we have. If you think the Lord isn't commanding us to this, let me walk through part of Romans 12.

Romans 1-11 walks through all of the doctrines of who God is. Paul is unpacking in excruciating detail what grace is and what God is and what it looks like to save and what it looks like to have mercy and what it looks like to have sin and what it looks like to be redeemed and why Christ came to take care of it all and how he is salvation.

And Romans 12 starts, therefore I beseech you brothers by the mercies of God, present yourselves a living sacrifice. So he's going into what are your practical things to do? What does that look like?

I'll pick it up in verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Do not curse those who persecute you.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

[19:36] Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.

For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. These last two verses. 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 evil by evil, but overcome evil by good.

We're to preach, we're to stay true to who the Lord says we are by his word. But it doesn't mean we have an outward judgmental attitude to those who don't. We need to reach them with the same God that has saved us.

[20:44] When we who have been gripped ourselves by the grace of God see that we have been given the riches of the glory of Christ, by grace, when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, then we will truly see everyone with the same great need that we have.

Alistair Begg says, only those who have been grasped by grace will be able to rejoice in the super abundance of God's grace lavished upon those who are so clearly undeserving.

I'll say another part of the same kind of idea. Commentator Douglas Stewart says, it is always easier to assume that God is with us more than he is with our enemies.

Is that not our heart? I mean, that is our prejudice. I'll close this point by telling the story of the end of the prodigal son.

You know, the prodigal son is another book or story that could have ended at a short part. Okay? Son wants his inheritance now.

[21:55] He wants to go live for the world. He wants to go live it up. Eat, drink, and be merry. So he basically tells his father, I wish you were dead. Can you just give me my inheritance? Now, he runs off.

He gets lots of friends with his money initially, but they're not true friends, and eventually it all goes away, and he's eating pig food. And he remembers that, was there not greater treatment of my father's servants than what I'm getting now?

He remembers the love of his father, and he runs back, and his father runs to him. It could also be called the loving, redeeming father, not the prodigal son.

While he's still off, the father goes to him, rejoice, put on the robe, kill the fatted calf, the son has returned. The story could have ended right there.

father's father. But there's an older brother that resented it. Verse 25 of Luke 15. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[ 23 : 08 ] And he called one of the servants and asked, what are these things and what they meant? And he said to him, your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

See if you see the same trend here. But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered the father, look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, not brother of mine, son of yours, notice the accusation of, he's accusing the father, very Jonah-like, who has devoured your property with your prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him, and he said to him, son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.

Nineveh was lost and now is found. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. Christ adds to the ending to help us see it is easy for us to look at somebody else getting good and us having a problem with it.

[ 24 : 46 ] we have to repent of that. The last section might be the core of the whole thing. This is Jonah's pride. It is illustrated with an object lesson that God uses language intentionally to pit against where Jonah's heart is.

Pick it up in verse 5. Jonah went out of the city and sat at the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city.

Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from discomfort from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

Same exceedingly adverb used above when he was angry exceedingly angry or displeased at God's saving Jonah.

At the end of verse 4 God questions are you right to be angry? Jonah doesn't respond. God pins him to the wall with the perfect question are you right to be so wrong.

[ 26 : 13 ] Do you do well to be angry? He doesn't say anything. At least in scripture he maybe grumbles under his breath. It's probably his attitude at this point.

So God gives him an object lesson to teach him the depravity of his own pride and where his own self-centeredness truly is. he wanted to see what became of the city in verse 5.

So he goes up to the east. Now if he went and journeyed and likely came from the west to go through Nineveh so this way and he goes through three days through the wall to wall to the city the natural direction would have been to keep going east.

So he probably found a hill to look into the city on. Now some commentators think this is a flashback before God finally relented at the end of 40 days that is seen at the end of chapter 3.

I don't think so. I think it's still chronologically happening. 40 days has ended. God has relented.

[ 27 : 24 ] Jonah is angry and he's still going up as if to say maybe God's still going to destroy him. Maybe he was going to do it after 50 days.

It's almost as if there's this anti or flip of Abraham with Sodom. Abraham said God if there's at least 10 in that city would you save it?

Yes if there's 10 in the city I'll save it. Got down to five got down to one Abraham rescues Lot and that was it and fire and brimstone but Abraham was pleading if there's just one you could almost say Jonah is like he's saying Lord maybe there's one that didn't repent would you would you strike a lightning bolt somewhere in the city and just kill some Ninevite so so he's he's in this heart judgmental attitude prejudice state and he's looking into the city and he builds himself this shelter because it's hot it's the Middle East it's 100 plus and you're going to bake you're going to die if you stay in the sun elements too long in the Middle East our passage says later that he felt faint when he didn't have it so God raises up a plant the commentators the experts think it would have been a castor oil plant racinus is the name of this plant it's kind of also another play you might say where this is what we used to call people to throw up he's got a pukey attitude right so you've got this plant

and he's exceedingly glad of the plant which is kind of another way of saying God's protection is far better than this rickety shack thing that I made so he wouldn't have been exceedingly glad if this shelter wasn't a lot better than his own and the next day God kills it he appoints the plants he appoints the worm and then he appoints the scorching wind after the worm to say suffer just a little just feel this for a little bit and he exposes his heart once again for the third time in the book Jonah asks to die he's so backwards in his heart that he'd rather die than obey the Lord essentially again or have his heart turned to the Lord that's where we are now he'd rather die than even have his heart turned to be as God's he wanted to be thrown into the ocean in chapter one earlier in the chapter when he was displeased over

Nineveh he wanted to die then this plant that he didn't miss initially but once he saw the glory of this plant that was then taken away now he is despairing so God ties Nineveh and the salvation of souls to the love of a plant in verses 10 and 11 and the Lord said you pity the plant for which you did not labor nor did you make it grow which came into being in the night and perished it and should I not pity Nineveh same word pity compassion you have compassion over the plant should I not have compassion over Nineveh your priorities are flipped earthly possessions and comfort are here salvation of souls are here he's exceedingly unhappy with with

[ 31 : 34 ] Nineveh he's exceedingly glad over a plant he valued his plants life the plants life for a shade protecting from temporary heat more than he valued the ramifications of eternal flame on Nineveh when Jonah explains the details of who God is he indicts himself you are gracious and merciful slow to anger I believe I know better than you of who you should be gracious to and it's right that I'm quick to anger about these things I am quick to anger over Nineveh and the plant are you angry about things are you easily angered about the simplest things in life working on a car stubbing your toe computer doesn't work sitting in traffic

I mean we can go on and on about the things in our life that cause us to react to be quick to anger and we think God doesn't know that the sparrow that falls is not even close to as important as we are when we are quick to anger about things it reveals something about our heart it reveals something about the pride that is in our heart that says I don't deserve this this computer should work every time exactly the way it was programmed the fall should not affect electrons it's a diagnostic for us especially when that anger and this has happened to me I've had that moment at the computer as a boss when one of the folks that works for me comes to me and has a true issue that needs resolved and I am flustered over this computer and feel like I can't talk to them right just for a second you feel that and eventually you come around okay let's put the computer aside and let's deal with this issue but anger can do that it can be a litmus test for us spiritually on do we have our priorities right are we just discontent this is a this is a drastic contrast but I think it tells us a little bit about where our priorities are

Jonah's anger is part of the story here and his quickness to anger still in the same passage where he said himself that God is slow to anger commentator Hugh Martin says is there anything in which I am like Jonah unreconciled to the will of God his will in his word his procedure in providence and and when he expostulates kindly with me doest thou well to be angry do I allow his condescending remonstrance to pass away unimproved let me beware God's purpose though unwelcome to me is very dear to him it is after the counsel of his own will and I must if I'm a child of God be constrained to feel that it is so and constrained to sympathize with him and acquiesce it's a long way of saying when God's putting it on your heart are you is it okay that you're angry no it's not

I'm asking that rhetorically fix it be patient think about I am your loving father and I desire good things for you Jesus challenged the Pharisees on flipped priorities and their heart and their sin of pride listen to what Christ says to the Jewish leaders in Matthew 23 we have seven woes this is in the middle of the seven woes that Jesus pronounces against the Pharisees this is when he truly lets them have it for the depth of how woe means judgment Jesus has the right to pronounce woe and judgment on you the fourth and fifth woe are these verse 23 woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law justice and mercy and faithfulness plant like things mint and dill and things that grow right earthly like sacrifice and people loving people these you ought to have done without neglecting the others you blind guide straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel next woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside they are full of greed and self indulgence you blind Pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate but the outside may also be clean sometimes I wonder how much of the sign of Jonah I mean there's

there's a ton here that just aligns with everything Jesus preached God can and God exposes perversity of heart the prejudice of thoughts and the depths of our pride walking with God means trying to understand the heart behind what he asks and dialogue with him respond to him next week we will look at this same passage and walk through and say look at the slow to anger patient compassionate God that has walked through this with Jonah the whole way as we close the book [ 38 : 01 ] I will just say one note as we smash Jonah into the ground help me with just one thing and that is that we believe I believe that Jonah still wrote the book he still penned the book for eternal scripture and if you understand 1st Peter 1 it means he had an eye even as a wayward prophet to know this was going to become a picture of something greater and he knew I believe he knew that this was to serve us and he wanted to use his own heart as an example now we don't really know that we don't really know what his heart turned but there's hope that out of his own words when he describes his God that God saved!

Heavenly Father it is with a heavy heart that we turn to you in looking at Jonah who for weeks we see how could he do this or what was he thinking when yet again scripture shows us the depravity of our own thinking well did Jeremiah state the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick who can understand it Lord you immediately follow that up to say I the Lord search the heart and test the mind Lord as you search and test our minds and hearts see if there be any way contrary in us you are the great sovereign and we know you are good help shine light in areas of our heart or biases in our thinking that are not of you help us in the name of Jesus forgive our hearts help us turn especially as we take the bread and the cup remembering the totality and completeness of your redemption for which your son died in his name we pray amen to Thank you.