

- A man was walking down a street and noticed a man struggling with a washing machine at the doorway of his house.
- When the newcomer volunteered to help, the homeowner was overjoyed. The two men began working on the bulky appliance one from inside the house the other on the porch.
- After several minutes of fruitless effort the two stopped and just stared at each other in frustration. They looked as if they were on the verge of total exhaustion. Finally, when they had caught their breath, the first man said to the homeowner: "We'll never get this washing machine in there!" To which the homeowner replied: "In? I'm trying to move it out of here!"
- My wife and I have learned that whenever we have to do a job that requires both of us, we need to be specific on how, because for whatever reason, our tendencies are always to do the opposite.
- If I think left, she thinks right. If I go down, she goes up.
- When that happens, it is frustrating.
- Yet it leads me to wonder how often we are frustrated in this life because of the exact same reason.
- We expect life to go left and it goes right.
- We think God will do one thing and it seems as though he does the exact opposite.
- We desire for God to give us a spouse and instead we stay alone for a long time.
- We want financial freedom and yet things seem to get worse.
- We want effectiveness and yet it seems as though we are spinning our wheels.
- What do we do with this? When God doesn't meet our expectations, what do we do?
- "God is God and we are not so get over it?"
- Do we become fatalistic and stop trying because God's not going to do anything we want anyway?
Do we stop trusting God and always be waiting for the other shoe to drop?
- I often have a main point, but this week I want you to consider the main idea as a question.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**

- Jonah 4 is culmination of the entire book of Jonah. Everything in the narrative has been leading up to this point and it gives us a clue as to the main purpose of the book.
- Chapter 4 records a conversation between God and Jonah over the fate of Nineveh. It shows the original objection that Jonah had towards his mission, and highlights God's attitude and the way it differs from Jonah's attitude. He uses an object lesson to show how Jonah's attitude is inconsistent with what he expects from God.
- As we saw last week, chapter 3 ended this way:
3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.
- Since Jonah was God's prophet, you would think he would be thrilled. He had preached about their sin and the people had repented. They had come to follow the living God. His work had been effective. He had obeyed and God had worked. That's worth rejoicing?
4:1 But . . .
- Something was off. Something did not seem right. What could possibly cause this turn in the story?
4:1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? 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. 3 Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

- Jonah threw another hissy-fit. Just like when God called him the first time, he got angry and a little dramatic.
- Just kill me God. My life is miserable.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**
- Why was Jonah angry that God spared Nineveh? Obviously Jonah had desires and expectations that God was not meeting. He is angry that God is being gracious and compassionate. Why?
- Perhaps it was the loss of Jewish national security. They were arch enemies. Jonah wanted his enemies out of commission.
- Perhaps it was a loss of Jewish national esteem. If these guys repented and were spared, it would seem that they were as important to God as were the Jews, which flew in the face of everything that most of Israel believed.
- Maybe it was more personal. He had predicted doom in 40 days; if it didn't happen then what would people think and what kind of prophet would he be?
- Or perhaps it was just that his sense of justice was offended. They didn't deserve mercy; they didn't merit grace! They deserved to be destroyed.
- Jonah was ticked because God acted like God was going to act and he didn't agree with it.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**
- Jonah did what we do.
- He got angry – really angry – at God.
- He blamed God.
- He sulked.
- He got depressed.
- He decided to do his own thing.

4 But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?” 5 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.

- Would God relent? Would he change his mind and destroy the city?

6 Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” 9 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.” 10 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. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?”

- Throughout this entire chapter, the writer contrasts the character of Jonah with the character of God. The expectations of Jonah with the decisions of God.
- Jonah desires destruction for Nineveh, God gives mercy.
- Jonah wants to die, God helps him live.
- Jonah loves the plant that shades him, God sends a worm to kill it.
- God wants Jonah, and by extension all of Israel, to understand that his ways and views of the world were different from what was being expressed by the nation of Israel.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**

I. Remember that God is sovereign.

- Sovereignty is all about power and authority and being in control.
- God wants Jonah, Israel and us to know that he has all things under his control, including all of creation.
- He caused a storm to catch the ship Jonah is in. He used a great fish to swallow Jonah. He caused the fish to spit Jonah back out again. (see 1:17, 2:10, 3:10). This theme continues in chapter 4.

6 *Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant . . .*

7 *But at dawn the next day God provided a worm . . .*

8 *When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind . . .*

- It sometimes seems good to Jonah and other times it seems like God is against him. In every case, it is God in control. It is God who provides.
- Did you notice that God asks Jonah questions three times.
- First about the city (v4). Jonah has no answer.
- He then questions him about the plant (v9) and finally he again questions Jonah about the city of Nineveh (v11).
- The questions themselves have an implied answer. It puts into focus who has the right to make judgments about salvation.
- Curiously, the only question that Jonah replies to is the one that impacts him personally in a positive way (the plant).
- How often do we have a decision that we think we have figured out and God has something infinitely better in mind?
- The root problem that we have is that when God doesn't act like we would like him to, we question his character. If you don't act like I think you should, then maybe you cannot be trusted. Maybe you aren't really good. Perhaps you are not all powerful.
- And so we complain. We mope. We get angry or depressed. We try to take back control. We do something else to feel good.
- And all the while God wants our attention and focus on him.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**

II. Know that God wants to bring your heart in line with his character.

- God was so interested in demonstrating not only his sovereign control over things but his character as well, that he did a live action object lesson for Jonah.
- The object lesson was to expose Jonah's heart attitude.
- He caused a vine to grow that provided him with shade. Jonah is thrilled with it even though he did nothing to make it happen. God then destroyed the plant which led to extreme discomfort for Jonah.
- His lesson lands at both a personal and national level.
- God extended grace and love to Jonah through the vine even though he had done nothing to deserve it. This made Jonah happy. Then he did to Jonah by killing the plant the exact same thing that Jonah wanted him to do to Nineveh.
- This exposes the inconsistency and hypocrisy of Jonah's heart. He wants God's grace when it benefits himself and is angry when God doesn't do it.
- He does not want God's grace and mercy extended when it will benefit those that he hates or despises.
- Both are unmerited. Both deserve God's judgment. Yet God decides to extend mercy and the message rings loudly. The last verse of the entire book puts an exclamation point on it. You, Jonah, are so concerned about my blessing and grace for something small that is

undeserved. Don't you think I should extend my blessing and grace for something far more valuable, as evidenced by an entire city of people that don't know me and all the natural creation that is part of it?

- The same object lesson rings to the nation of Israel. The example of Nineveh is a story which was repeated over and over throughout Israel's history. They sinned, and God extends grace and mercy to them to invite them back to himself. This example reveals God's character and is his call to live pure and godly lives, and his desire to offer grace and mercy to anyone who responds.
- The invitation to Jonah, to Israel, and by extension to us today, is to bring our hearts in line with the character of God.
- He is good – trust him.
- He is loving and compassionate – love others without reservation.
- He is merciful – live a grateful life.
- He is in control – follow him.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**

III. How I respond will determine how I experience God.

- Throughout the book we have seen that God acts and people respond. God's mercy is extended to people throughout the story inviting a response.
- Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites all connect to God and respond to his invitation.
- The stress is on the relationship of people to God. The Book of Jonah is about how God relates to total repentance by those who are least expected to exhibit it
- The irony of the story is that the sailors and Ninevites, the two groups of people who are ungodly and Gentile, both respond positively to God while Jonah, the prophet of God, runs away from God and ends up angry with God at the end of the book.
- For the Jewish readers of this book, the story is a reminder of what had been forgotten.
- Israel's purpose in the world beginning with Abraham (Gen 12:3, 22:18) was that they existed to bless other nations and be an example to them of how to live in God's ways and pursue a relationship with him. Their love for other nations was a part of the law that God had given them.
- I wonder if too often we are more concerned about ourselves than we are with the people of the world around us.

- The writer of the book of Jonah ends his entire treatise with a question from God to Jonah. *11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?"*
- There is no response. No resolution.
- Why? Because the author of the book wants his reader to consider and respond.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**
- The Israelites were clear in their belief that they were God's chosen people and this put them higher than other nations and deserving of privileged and preferential treatment. They disdained the nations around them which were seen as deserving of punishment and not blessing.
- They had clear expectations as to how God should treat them.
- They had clear expectations as to how God should treat everyone else.
- Yet while they expected God's blessings, they were not listening to God. They were not obeying God. They were not pursuing him, putting him first or listening to him.
- God used Nineveh as an example of mercy and forgiveness

- It would have been a jarring example of God's expectations and how Israel was falling short.
- So God asks the question, "Don't I have the right to have compassion and grace on everything and everyone? What about you?"
- The question facing you and me this morning is the same one.
- **HOW WILL I RESPOND WHEN GOD DOESN'T MEET MY EXPECTATIONS?**
- God is in control.
- He wants to bring your heart into line with his character, his love, grace, mercy and goodness.
- How you respond will determine how you experience God.
- The next time you respond negatively to something that goes contrary to your expectations, lean into who God is, trust him and move towards him. You will not be sorry.