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## Small group questions

### *Jonah – Compassion which annoys*

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

1. What sort of people are the hardest to want to be forgiven?

#### **Skim read Jonah ch 1-3**

2. In what ways do you see God's compassion in action to Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites?
3. How did the Ninevites express their repentance? Can you have the symbols of repentance without the inner reality? (Compare to baptism and communion.)

#### **Read Jonah 4:1-3**

4. Why is Jonah annoyed? Can you see his point?
5. Compare Jonah's complaint with Ps 103:7-11! What's wrong with this picture?

#### **Read Jonah 4:4-11**

6. What is Jonah up to when God speaks to him?
7. How does God's 'illustration' with the vine and the worm reflect what is going on between God and Nineveh? (see also, Luke 23:33-34)
8. Did Jonah have a right to be angry about the vine? About Nineveh?
9. Thinking more broadly, how are we like the Ninevites? (check out Ephesians 2:1-10)
10. If forgiveness comes at a cost, who paid for the Ninevites to be forgiven? (check out Rom 3:22-26)
11. If God's compassion annoys you, what does that say about you?
12. 'If our hearts are cold, the book of Jonah is an invitation to look deeply into the heart of God, and be transformed by the warmth of his compassion.' Discuss
13. Pray that God's compassion might continue to transform us.

# Compassion which annoys – Jonah 4

**Opener: General Joshua Blahyi – a warlord in the Liberian civil war – claimed to have killed thousands**

- **Recruited child soldiers**
- **Murdered children**

Surely there is no pit in hell deep enough for a man like that!

And yet before the civil war ended, he claims he had a vision. A man in white told him to repent or die. He became a Christian, now runs a home where former child soldiers are rehabilitated.

But think of all the lives he took, the innocent lives he ruined! Is it right?

**Context:** This series, part of our ‘Compassion Initiative,’ thinking about the compassion of God and today we are thinking about the fact that sometimes, compassion is annoying. God’s compassion annoys us. When we hear of someone who has done dreadful things claiming they have thrown themselves on God’s compassion and now they feel assured of God’s forgiveness. Don’t we still cry out for justice?

**Big Question: Why does God’s compassion annoy us?**

**To address that, we are looking at the last chapter of the book of Jonah. But first, let’s have a quick cruise through this little book of Jonah, and think about how God has already displayed his compassion leading up to this final chapter... Fortunately, it’s a fairly familiar story, so we’ll race through it:**

**Chapter one:**

- God tells the prophet Jonah to go and preach against the great city of Nineveh, capital of Assyria (bad dudes) because of their wickedness.
- Jonah jumps on board a ship going in the opposite direction!
- God sends a storm: the sailors think they are going to die.
- Jonah tells them it is his fault. He has angered, “the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the Land. He insists they will be safe if they throw him overboard!
- They do it, and the sea is instantly calm.
- These sailors had been worshippers of idols. But through this random encounter, God has revealed himself to them and shown them his might and his compassion.
- And God shows compassion to Jonah too! When it looks like he will drown, God sends a great fish to swallow him and to keep him safe three days and nights.

**Chapter two:**

- From inside the fish, Jonah prays to God, thanking him for his compassion in rescuing him.

**Chapter three:**

- God gives Jonah a clean slate, “Go to Nineveh and give them the message I gave you.
- This time Jonah obeys, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!” It’s a harsh, uncompromising message, but not undeserved. So what will the Ninevites do?
- THEY REPENT! From the greatest to the least, they repent in sackcloth and ashes. That’s just the symbol of forgiveness; the real repentance is in their hearts and will show up in their actions. The King decrees that everyone in the whole country, even the animals, have to join in this expression of heartfelt repentance.
- And the result? God shows COMPASSION! V10 – When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion on them and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

**And so we come to chapter four, and we find out that not everyone is a fan of God’s compassion...**

**First, we see in v1-3, the cold heart of Jonah, then in v4-11, we see the compassionate heart of God**

## Part One: v1-3 – The cold heart of Jonah

<sup>1</sup> But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD , "O LORD , is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. <sup>3</sup> Now, O LORD , take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah had preached God's message to the wicked Ninevites/ They had repented in sackcloth and ashes/ God relented and did not send the destruction he had threatened. IT'S AN EVANGELIST'S DREAM!

But Jonah doesn't see it that way. He was greatly displeased and became angry. He is so annoyed at God's compassion that he is furious!

Look at the second half of v2 – it reads like a beautiful song of praise: I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

But Jonah is not saying it as a compliment! He even tells God, "Isn't this what I said when I was still at home?" – it looks like Jonah has already had a debate with God that isn't mentioned in chapter one... This is why I ran off in the opposite direction.

See, Jonah, wasn't afraid to take a message of destruction to Nineveh. He didn't care what they might do to him.

What he was afraid of was God's compassion; that if these people repented of their wickedness, then God would be soft, he would turn and forgive them.

These enemies of God's people, renowned for their cruelty in battle, renowned for the way they would destroy whole cities and cultures, these brutes would be forgiven. They would get away scot free.

It turned Jonah's stomach. In fact he is so disgusted and so tormented by God's compassion, that he prays, just kill me. I can't live with your compassion.

### Illustration:

Michael Marslew murdered at Pizza Hut. Years later, his dad met his murderer being released from prison and helped him transition to the outside world, but not everyone was happy about this compassion...

**Application:** Jonah seems churlish, like a tantruming toddler, but do we do the same thing?

When I hear the dreadful things that ISIS has done against Christians, I want ISIS destroyed! I want them bombed into a paste! I don't pray for them to be converted! But is that appropriate? No, it's not.

When I hear about pedophiles, I don't want them to turn and be forgiven, I want them to go to the deepest pit of hell! Is that appropriate? No, it's not. AND WHY NOT? BECAUSE I'M NOT GOD. IT IS GOD'S JOB TO JUDGE AND IT IS GOD'S PLEASURE TO SHOW MERCY.

And let me say clearly: if I have a problem with God showing compassion, the problem is with me, not God.

God is sovereign in creation, in judgement, in redemption, in compassion. **And now we see the compassionate heart of God...**

## Part two: v4-11 – The compassionate heart of God

<sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

<sup>5</sup> Jonah went 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. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> 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."

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"

"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

First, God deals compassionately with Jonah. He could give him a smack on the bum – a favourite of parents dealing with tantruming toddlers, but he doesn't. He corrects him by giving him an illustration to show what is going on.

God questions him, v4, do you have any right to be angry?

Did you notice where Jonah is at the time? He's walked out from the city and has built a little shelter – why? To wait and see what would happen to the city! He's sitting there on a banana chair with an esky full of cold ones, hoping that God might change his mind, "you know what? I'm going to wipe out Nineveh after all!"

God's question cuts through. Then God sends a plant>>>shade

Then God sends a worm >>> sunstroke!

Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?

YES, I'm angry enough to die!

V10 – not your vine, I made it grow.

But Nineveh – v11:

- 120k people
- They don't know what they are doing
- Plus cattle!
- Implication: God made them all and God cares about them all.
- You care so much about this vine that wasn't even yours, yet you tell me I can't have compassion on this great city of people and cattle, THAT I HAVE MADE!

**Illustration:** Reg: "I finally know what it feels like to be forgiven...and I've forgiven the Japs."

**Reflections:** 1) Repentance is from the Lord: the Ninevites' and mine (Eph 2:8-9)

2) Jonah told this story! >>> presumably, he saw the light!

3) We know from the rest of the Bible that this is not cheap forgiveness, sweeping the Ninevites' wickedness under the carpet. It's hard-won forgiveness, paid by Jesus on the cross. Same for us. Do we think your sins are insignificant? Guess what, they were so bad that the Son of God had to die for them! Do we think the Ninevites were beyond forgiveness? Guess what? The son of God died for them! Do I think the African warlord, the ISIS thug, the pedophile should be excluded from heaven if they truly repent and throw themselves on God's mercy? Guess what? The Son of

God died for them... God is sovereign in compassion. He has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy. If he has shown such compassion to me, do I have any right to be angry when he shows compassion to others whom I judge more harshly than I dare judge myself? No.

4) God has compassion to blot out transgressions. God has compassion on people who do not know their left hand from their right – THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING - they have no moral compass. God has so much compassion that when people's sin meant somebody had to die, he took that death in the person of his son. And as that son died on the cross, HE PRAYED, "FATHER FORGIVE THEM, THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING."

**Application:** 1) We don't always feel compassion for people who have wronged us. We don't always want God to forgive sinners. This little book of Jonah the prophet is an invitation to us – an invitation to look deep into the compassionate heart of God. As we do, may he melt away our cold heart and fill us with the compassion that he has shown to us.