

**WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE - Thoughts on God's Will from
the Book of Jonah - Part 5
Sunday , August 2nd - 6:30
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Jonah chapter four - "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." [4] And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?" [5] Jonah went out of the city and sat to 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. [6] 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 his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. [7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." [9] But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." [10] 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 a night and perished in a night. [11] And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

1) **PERHAPS IN THIS LAST CHAPTER YOU REALLY BEGIN TO SEE WHAT THE BOOK OF JONAH IS ALL ABOUT**

The first few chapters show us the ***penalties of disobedience*** to the voice of God. We see the doctrine of chastening. The book closes on the theme of ***priorities***, what we fix our heart on, what we give our attention to. This chapter sets the stage for a great lesson on ***repentance***. True, Jonah has been delivered from the belly of the fish. But his heart is still not ***tuned*** to the direction of God's call:

Jonah 4:1-3 - "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is

why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah has not yet reached the point of being *pleased* with the will of God - "...it displeased *Jonah exceedingly....*" There is a depth to repentance that should make us take our time with it. We don't just *cut deals* with God. We allow Him to reshape our hearts in His image. Never rest at any point short of this goal. God wants us both to obey His *instructions* and share His *concerns*.

2) THE BOOK OF JONAH SHOWS US GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR BAD PEOPLE

The Assyrians were cruel and pagan, doing all they could to annihilate God's people. This had caused Jonah to lose sight of the value of their souls. Jonah had learned to share God's viewpoint on their *sins*. What he hadn't yet learned was to share God's viewpoint on *sinners*.

This *doesn't* mean God won't *judge* sinners along with their sin in His wrath. What it *does* mean is God wants to give wicked, sinful people the chance to repent, escape His wrath, and receive His grace. And He wants Jonah to share this desire. This desire is not easily attained by religious people. We can become too harsh too quickly with those who reject and persecute the cause of Christ. Jonah (the *prophet* Jonah) is proof of this.

3) ANY OUTWARD ACT OF OBEDIENCE MAY BE ONLY PARTIALLY RIGHTEOUS, AND WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHY THIS IS THE CASE

There are some profound insights on why this is the case in **verses one and two**:

Jonah 4:1-2 - "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

Actions aren't *fully* righteous (though outward obedience alone *is* a good *start*) until the *heart* is right in them. As we saw earlier, even though Jonah had reluctantly come to terms with obeying

God's will outwardly, he was not reconciled to it in his heart. His heart still sees it as unreasonable and irritating.

The problem in all this isn't for the **Ninevites**. As long as they hear the call to repent and listen, the state of Jonah's heart will be irrelevant. The problem is for **Jonah**. The action without the attitude will always be less than joy-producing for the **doer**. **Others** may benefit from my obedience, but **I** will be less than Christ-like.

When we look at the Scriptures we can see this applying to many areas of the Christian life:

2 Corinthians 9:7 - "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-17 - "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. [2] "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. [5] "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

6:16-17 - "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [17] But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face...."

Having said this, there is **one** possible exception to the rule. Outward obedience **can**, if the doer is absolutely honest and humbly reliant on the Holy Spirit, **train** the doer to **find** a joy of heart in the obedience if he or she **admits** the lack of it. For the teachable mind the outward act can become the **first step** to a transformed heart. This is possible as long as the outward act isn't

done hypocritically, ***pretending*** an inward holiness that isn't fully developed yet.

This point is very important for the hungry heart to remember. It is particularly applicable to steps of restoring relationships and forgiveness. We wish we had the means to ***produce*** the kind of heart we know we should have. In these cases it is helpful to remember that the Holy Spirit can and will, over time, produce the love inside. But I mustn't ***wait*** for those feelings before I take whatever steps are required immediately to set things right.