

Rejecting God's Will

Jonah 4:1-11

How many of you have ever made the same mistake more than once?

I'm right there with you.

One of my recurring mistakes is misjudging the amount of time an activity or project will take.

I can't tell you the number of times I have left home to do a job for someone and Michelle asks me, "How long do you think you will be?" and I have replied, "It should only be a few hours, I'll be home before you know it."

Those few hours seem to go by what seems like a few minutes.

It's pretty common for something unexpected to happen and before you know it a few hours has turned into the whole day or sometimes even multiple days.

It has happened so many times that when I say, "I will only be a few hours." Michelle will sometimes say, "Now is that actually a few hours or is that Mike time?"

It is really bad when I come up with a number in my mind and double it to be on the safe side and still end up being wrong.

We do that don't we? We fall short in the same things more than once.

If you can relate to that then you will be able to relate to where we find the prophet Jonah in our text this morning.

As we come to the end of our time looking at this servant of the LORD we find him in chapter four with very much the same attitude that he had when we first met him in chapter one.

In chapter one God tells him to go to a faraway city called Nineveh and Jonah resists God's will and tries to run away.

God works in his life and brings him to Nineveh and Jonah delivers the message that God commanded and it looks like he is on the right track, but here in chapter four we see that he is once again unhappy with God's will.

[He would rather get what he wants than what God wants. I believe that is a struggle all of us face on a regular basis and I believe there is some help for us in those struggles here in **Jonah chapter four**. There are three warnings for us in this passage about rejecting God's will in our life and if we will take these things to heart it will encourage us to pray for and desire God's will instead of our own. Here is the first warning...]

Point #1 – Rejecting God’s will hardens our hearts towards God. (Verses 1-4)

What the LORD desires is completely inseparable from His character; therefore, when we despise what He wants we are also turning away from Him.

The end of Jonah chapter three is an amazing scene.

Having been threatened with complete destruction, the people in the huge city of Nineveh had turned from their evil ways to seek the mercy of the LORD and God grants it to them.

I mean just imagine God telling you to take a trip to Toronto in June and to go up and down the streets preaching and thousands upon thousands of people turning away from their sin and accepting Jesus as their saviour, how would you feel?

I imagine we would all be overjoyed and praising the LORD.

Jonah, here reacts in the opposite direction in **verse 1**.

The heart of Jonah’s preaching was, “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*”

Matthew Henry takes that to mean that he told them nothing of repentance and gave them no encouraging words about forgiveness.

He only spoke to them about their evil and their impending destruction.

Verses 2-3 give us a bit more insight into what Jonah was thinking.

It turns out he jumped on a ship and tried to run away, not because for fear of rejection, or imprisonment, or torture, or death, but because of the possibility that the LORD would relent from the disaster that He threatened.

On the surface that seems unthinkable.

How could a preacher of God’s word be so upset that people actually listened, turned from their sin, and received mercy?

He is so upset that he wants God to take his life from him. How can this be?

What we have to appreciate is both the history and the future between Israel and Assyria.

The Assyrians had inflicted great harm upon the country Jonah loved and in just 30-50 years they would come and conquer the northern part of Israel and bring unspeakable harm.

We don’t know for sure, but it is very possible that as a prophet of the LORD Jonah knew what was coming.

If, however, God gave the Ninevites what their sins deserve here and now the future disaster that was coming upon Israel might be delayed.

On top of that, Jonah's preaching back home was being ignored as his own people persisted in their idolatry despite having been warned of their coming destruction.

In Jonah's mind the people who should be listening refuse and the people he would expect to remain godless turn and believe the LORD.

I think he believes this is all going to work out for the destruction of the home he loves, that is why he is so angry.

It would be easy to judge Jonah harshly here, but we would be wise to try and appreciate magnitude of what this means in his life.

This is like your worst enemy accepting Jesus and going to heaven and your closest friend rejecting Him and going to hell.

That is hard stuff and yet the LORD says to him in **verse 4.**

That is a rhetorical question. Of course his anger is misplaced.

His resistance was much deeper than "I don't want to go to Nineveh" it was "I don't want to go to Nineveh because of Who You are LORD."

What God commands and what He desires are the direct result of Who He is.

When we reject what He commands we are hardening our hearts towards His nature and character.

[This past year I was introduced to turning wood on a lathe. One of the things I learned early on is the importance of sharp tools. If a tool becomes dull cuts are no long smooth and precise and the farther away from sharp the tool gets the more problems develop and it can easily become dangerous.]

Fighting against what the LORD wants for our lives is very much like that.

It dulls our affections for Him and the farther we get from Him the less we want to listen to what He says which further decreases our love for Him and the cycle just keeps going.

It is surprising to me how often I hear people talk about being a Christian and loving Jesus while at the same time saying, "I don't need to listen to this or that part of the Bible!"

That's impossible brothers and sisters. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me he will keep my word."

Why does He say that? Because what He says flows out of Who He is which means if we don't want His word we don't really want Him.

[Of course we fall short. We all disobey at times which is why no one can be saved by works, we all need grace and forgiveness. The question on the table here is are we striving to embrace

God's will or are we willfully rejecting it? Willful rejection of what God says is a willful rejection of God Himself. If we start walking down that road it is going to lead to something else in our life. We can see it here with Jonah, we see that...]

Point #2 – Rejecting God's will leads to disappointment. (Verses 5-8)

Knowing and loving the LORD is the only possible way to find lasting purpose and satisfaction, so when we desire the opposite of what He wants we are setting ourselves up for frustration and sadness.

After voicing his great displeasure to the LORD we read this of the prophet in verse 5.

With the entire city turning from their sin in hope of receiving mercy the preaching task of Jonah was complete.

Where the Ninevites are hoping for God to show kindness, Jonah is hoping for the LORD to change His mind back to bringing destruction upon the city.

Commentators point out that east of the city there is mountainous terrain and Jonah likely travels in that direction so that he can look down on the entire city.

If fire from heaven does fall upon these enemies of Israel, he would like a see it happen.

The climate, however, in that area of the world can be very hot and dry at times which seems to be the case at the time of Jonah's ministry and so he cobbles together a makeshift shelter to try and get some relief.

He likely had very little to work with and would have gained only a small amount of comfort from what he made.

The LORD, however, does this in **verse 6**.

Instead of the dry bits of whatever Jonah had scraped together, the LORD provides for his servant a fresh green plant, likely with broad leaves, to a height high enough to give Jonah relief from the intense sun and heat.

Verse 10 tells us that God made it grow in a single night.

It is plainly a miracle and notice Jonah's reaction, it says, "[he] was exceedingly glad because of the plant."

Why so happy? In part, no doubt, because of the relief and comfort that had been provided to him.

But there is probably more to it than that.

Biblical scholar Carl Keil believes he rejoices in the plant because "he saw in it divine approval of his waiting for the city to be destroyed."

Surely the plant must mean that God is starting to see things Jonah's way.

His happiness is short lived as we read this in **verses 7-8**.

Not only does a worm from the LORD eat the plant so that it dries up and loses its ability to provide shade, but God also commands “a scorching wind” which makes the conditions rather hostile to the man’s wellbeing.

I’ve had heat stroke a couple of times and it drains your strength and energy dramatically, that is what Jonah is feeling like here and he returns to his go to response, ‘*Just take my life LORD.*’

It feels like a pretty big understatement to say that Jonah was disappointed at the loss of the plant.

Why such a big reaction? Why is he so beside himself over a plant?

Because he had so hardened his heart towards what God wanted that he was willing to seek his comfort and satisfaction in a created thing rather than his Creator and that always leads to disappointment.

[Every now and again when I am doing the grocery shopping I will see something on sale and decide to give it a try. One time I saw beef kabobs on sale. I think it was something like eight kabobs for two dollars. I thought, how can you go wrong with beef on a stick? I’m not totally convinced it was beef, it wasn’t on a stick, and they were extremely spicy which may have been an attempt to hide the questionable ingredients. They were edible, but a pretty big disappointment. The fact is, a frozen processed mystery meet is never going to compare with a fresh steak.]

Because Jonah had hardened his heart towards God’s will, he had hardened his heart towards God and finding some small bit of joy in a created thing was always going to end badly.

It is the same for us.

Have no envy brothers and sisters for godless people who put on fake smiles and tell themselves everything is fantastic.

Proverbs 23:17-18 says, ¹⁷ *Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.* ¹⁸ *Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.*

While there is true and lasting hope in the LORD, everything else will lead to sorrow.

I have met many people who think opposing God will make them happy and all of them end up miserable in the end.

One of the worst judgments the LORD can place upon a person’s life is to give them what they want when what they want is against what He says.

If you are frustrated and angry in your life I want you to ask yourself and very important question, ask, “Am I primarily concerned with what God wants in my life or with what I want in my life?”

If we make our will the priority of our lives it will lead to sorrow.

[We’ll end up very much like Jonah does here. It is a sad state of affairs and it does some pretty bad things to our hearts. It hardens them towards LORD and it fills them with disappointment. That is bad for us and it is bound to produce something else that is hurtful to us and those around us. That comes out in the last few verses of Jonah’s story. As the LORD confronts the attitude of His servant we can see that...]

Point #3 – Rejecting God’s will produces poor priorities. (Verses 9-11)

We will value unimportant things and discard things of true significance when we live in opposition to the LORD.

God asks a question in **verse 8** that is very similar to the question He asked in verse four and this time and answer from Jonah is recorded for us.

This is one of those situation where some people might think the LORD is just being mean.

He gives Jonah the plant to bring him some comfort and then just as quickly He takes it away.

What is up with that? My guess is Jonah was thinking something along those lines.

What God is doing here is He is forcing Jonah to consider the state of his heart.

That becomes clear in **verse 10**.

The word translated ‘pity’ here can also be translated as compassion, care, or concern.

It is like the LORD is saying, “You are deeply invested in this plant, now let’s think that through.”

Jonah put no effort into planting it, he did not make it grow, and perhaps most importantly it only lasted a day.

Why does something that is so fleeting hold such a powerful place in his heart?

Why did it make Jonah so happy and its loss so unhappy? I believe it is because his primary focus was what he wanted rather than what God wanted.

The LORD continues in **verse 11**.

Jonah had nothing to do with the plant growing and yet he is beside himself at its destruction.

Compare that with the LORD and the Ninevites.

Who created these people? God did!

Who gave them what they needed to live and grow?

God did.

Yes up to this point they have rejected the LORD, served false gods, and committed all kinds of terrible sins, but they are nevertheless people made in God's image and created for His glory.

If they pass into eternity separated from His grace in Christ they will endure eternal punishment in hell.

Does God owe them compassion, grace, and mercy?

Not at all, but He offers those things because He has made human beings to reflect His glory and He is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to redeem us for that purpose.

What is a plant in comparison with that?

Yet that is what Jonah cares about.

[We see the effects of that in our own world today. As people turn further and further away from what God wants, people are devalued. Human beings are seen as the problem upon the earth and the solution is to have less people. Our society kills children for convenience. I have heard people lament over bird eggs and insects while at the same time championing abortion. Why? Why are things often so upside down? Because that is what happens when people reject God's will.]

Even the most basic understanding and acceptance of the gospel of Christ will challenge such foolishness.

Jesus did not enter the world as a tree, or a bird, or some other animal.

He entered the world as a man to succeed where we have failed.

He embraced God's will to the fullest possible degree with the greatest degree of humility and at unimaginable personal cost.

He died in order to break the curse of sin and death and He did just that in the power of His resurrection.

Just as the LORD showed great compassion to the Ninevites who turned from their evil ways, so too God will show compassion to everyone who turns from sin and looks to the cross of Christ for redemption and restoration.

When we understand and accept that our upside down priorities get turned right side up.

If we truly humble ourselves we will see that dying to ourselves and living for Lord is the way to lasting joy and satisfaction.

We will see the value of people and want to point them to Christ.

Jonah could have done that?

When he saw the people repenting he could have started to teach them, but instead he goes out of the city and looks down on it hoping for it to be destroyed.

What happens next is left unsaid. The writer just leaves us hanging here.

What happened to Jonah after this? I'm inclined to agree with Matthew Henry that as his heart was softened in the belly of the great fish, it was once again softened by God's persistent intervention in his life, but we cannot know for sure because it is left unsaid.

I think the reason God leaves it like this is because every human being struggles with the same heart issues that Jonah does in this book.

We all struggle with wanting what we want rather than what God wants and the LORD is setting before us here a fork in the road.

It is a fork in the road that we face daily. Will it be my will or God's will that I desire.

For the one born again by the power of the Holy Spirit it is God's will that we will strive for.

Will we do it perfectly? No, we will fail just like Jonah, but the LORD will be faithful brothers and sisters, He will bring storms, He will bring things that stop us in our tracks, He will bring things into our lives and take them away in order that we might pray, "Not my will but your will, O Lord, be done."

May the LORD be gracious and answer that prayer more and more until we come into the presence of His glory and see His will is for our highest good.