



WEEK SEVEN HANDOUT – **Misplaced Priorities**

BAND of BROTHERS 2021

“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...?”

– Jonah 4:11 ESV

- **Did God repent?**

*When God saw what they did, how **they turned from their evil way**, God **relented of the disaster** that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. – Jonah 3:10 ESV*

- What’s going on here?
“evil” and “disaster” – both the same word in Hebrew

ra’ (rah) – has a wide range of meanings

evil
wickedness
mischief
hurt
trouble
affliction
adversity
harm

the author saying that God had intended to do wickedness or evil?

He suggesting that God was repenting of sin?

- This passage uses **phenomenological language**
“based on observed or observable facts”
 - The way we see things from our limited perspective
“I saw the sun **rising** over the trees”
 - The author is describing events as he saw them
“God **changed** His mind”

What God said:

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" – 3:4

Jonah and the Ninevites heard **destruction**

God **appeared** to have changed His mind

What God did:

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do. – 3:10

But God had always intended **salvation**

But their "turning" had been **pre-ordained**

*"...he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, **for he is not human that he should change his mind!**"* – 1 Samuel 15:29 NLT

*God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so **he does not change his mind.** Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?* – Numbers 23:19 NLT

"The biblical narratives in which God appears to repent, or change His mind, are almost always narratives that deal with His threats of judgment and punishment. God is not talked into 'changing His mind.' Out of His gracious heart, He only does what He had promised to do all along – not punish sinners who repent and turn from their evil ways. He chooses **not to do** what He has every right to do." – R. C. Sproul

- **The "Worst-Ever-Ending" Award**

*"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?**"* – Jonah 4:11 ESV

- Repentant cows?
 - Even the Ninevites' livestock fasted and wore sackcloth
 - Notice the references to "beasts" in verses 7-8

b^ahēmâ (bay-hay-maw') – beast, cattle

- Why does the author end his book with a reference to cattle?
- It's a not-so-subtle comparison
 - The Assyrian cattle showed signs of repentance
 - It's another jab at the unrepentant Israelites

*Like a **stubborn heifer**, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?* – Hosea 4:16 ESV

*“Israel is like a **trained heifer** treading out the grain—an easy job she loves. But I will put a heavy yoke on her tender neck.” – Hosea 10:11 NLT*

*Listen to me, you **fat cows**
living in Samaria,
you women who oppress the poor
and crush the needy,
and who are always calling to your husbands,
“Bring us another drink!” – Amos 4:1 NLT*

- Israel remained totally unrepentant
 - The cows of Nineveh looked more spiritual
 - They had gone without food and water
 - They had “mourned” with the people
- But Israel remained unbowed and unbroken
 - So did Jonah

- **Jonah’s response**

*...it **displeased** Jonah exceedingly, and he was **angry**.* – Jonah 4:4 ESV

displeased – *rā’ā* (raw-ah) – evil, good for nothing

“it displeased Jonah with great displeasure”

- Jonah viewed God’s actions as evil
- To him, God’s plan was a big mistake
- Eerily similar to Jesus’ encounter with Peter (Matthew 16:21-23)

angry – *hārā* (khaw-raw) – incensed, to burn up, enraged

- Who is Jonah angry with? Yahweh
- If anyone had the right to be angry, it was God
- If anyone deserved His anger, it was the Israelites
- And of anyone, Jonah had no right to be angry

“Do you still want to argue with the Almighty?

You are God’s critic, but do you have the answers?” – Job 40:1 NLT

“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’ Does the pot exclaim, ‘How clumsy can you be?’” – Isaiah 45:9 NLT

Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, "Why have you made me like this?" When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? – Romans 9:20-21 NLT

- Angry enough to die
 - Jonah didn't want to die
 - He was attempting to blackmail God
 - He was saying, "Choose me or the Ninevites"

"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." – Jonah 4:3 ESV

- He wants God to repent of His "sin"
- To renege on His offer of compassion

"Do you do well to be angry?" – Jonah 4:4 ESV

*"Is your anger pleasing or well-placed?"
"Is it justified?"
"Is what you are doing right?"*

- Jonah gives no answer
- He simply walks away

- Waiting to see what would happen
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.
– Jonah 4:5 ESV

- God still had time to change His mind!
- The 40 days in not yet up
- So, Jonah pulls up a chair to watch the show
- He still has hopes that God will **relent**
- His dream of Nineveh's demise is still alive and well

Jonah		God
...created a booth from which to wait Nineveh's destruction by God	→	"created a plant with which to shelter Jonah from the scorching sun
...experienced discomfort	→	...provided shade
...enjoyed relief		
...was grateful for the plant	→	...created a worm

...lost his shelter ← ...destroyed the plant
 ...grew faint ← ...sent a scorching wind
 ...lost his will to live

- God was behind all this
 - He “ordained” the plant
 - He “ordained” the worm
 - He “ordained” the wind

- The judgment of God
 - The **scorching sun** and **east wind** were symbols of God’s judgment

*...the vine [Israel] was uprooted in fury
 and thrown down to the ground.
 The desert wind dried up its fruit
 and tore off its strong branches,
 so that it withered
 and was destroyed by fire. – Ezekiel 19:12 NLT*

*Though he may flourish among his brothers,
 the east wind, the wind of the Lord,
 shall come,
 rising from the wilderness,
 and his fountain shall dry up;
 his spring shall be parched... – Hosea 13:15 NLT*

- Jonah had experienced God’s **judgment**
- But he had also experienced **His mercy**
- And one day, so would the people of Israel

*They will neither hunger nor thirst.
 The searing sun will not reach them anymore.
 For the Lord in his mercy will lead them;
 he will lead them beside cool waters. – Isaiah 49:10 NLT*

- **Misplaced anger**

- He was angry that God hadn’t spared **the plant**
- His loss was **personal** in nature
- But the plant’s death had been **God’s will**
 - Yet, Jonah didn’t like God’s way of doing things
 - He would have reversed God’s priorities
 “Destroy the Ninevites – save the plant”

*“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. 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?” – Jonah 4:10-11 NLT*

Israelites

Had been set apart by God
We governed by God’s holy law

Could receive atonement through the sacrificial system

Ninevites

Had no prior relationship with God
Were governed by their own sin nature

Were living in a state of total ignorance and condemnation

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.^a He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. – Ephesians 2:1-3 NLT

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Why do you think God chose to end this book as a cliff-hanger, with no real resolution?

Read Ephesians 2:4-9. What does the story of Jonah had in common with these verses and why is its message to relevant for today?

There are still “Ninevites” living in spiritual darkness. According to Ephesians 5:8-10, what is the best way for us to show them the light?