

Jonah's Anger and the Lord's Compassion

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you all. Man, those interest groups. I'll tell you what about those groups. For us, as we're trying to figure out, we're still in the first year of figuring out what it even means to be church.

And actually, all those things that our heart is, actually, can this be people over program? Let's run things only if there are people who are already doing those things. Let's not become a church that's just filled with all these programs where we're doing all these things.

Because you know, as well as I do, you guys live those lives that are regimented. You've got to go to work. You've got to do this. You've got to do that. And how can we be a people that are organic but also organized? Honestly, we're trying to figure that one out and trying to see where it goes. Actually, this week, I've been giving thanks for my work, my job. We had a few people around on Wednesday night when we were talking. And we were talking about death because that's kind of the thing that you talk about over dinner.

And one of the questions was, what would you do if you knew you were going to die in three months' time? Then I was thinking, and I was like, you know what?

[1:03] Praise God, I think I'll be doing exactly what I'm doing now. I don't think that will change. I'm just doing what I love. I don't think I'm working. And of course, my work is an interesting one because my work is... I don't know, there's part of me that thinks that my work isn't really, really needed.

And I'll tell you why, because I'm interested in this book here. I believe this book offers the words of life. It is able just to speak into every single situation.

But my job isn't just to teach you this so you would just then feed off what I teach you. That's not all there is. Because the goal is for you to do this. The goal is for you to be able to look at this book and go, man, I want to learn more about God myself.

I want to be able to equip you so you can do the same. Otherwise, I wouldn't be doing my job. Ellen, just thank you for the prayer, Ellen. But I was really struggling with my back this morning.

Actually, to the point where I couldn't get out of bed and my wife had to push me off the bed, which she seemed to enjoy doing a little bit too much. But then I couldn't walk. And so then I was like, oh, man, what do I do? So then I text.

[2:06] We have a dear Damien. Where's Damien? Damien's there. He's a chiropractor. So I text him at 7.30. I said, my back is going crazy. And then he brings all these tools here.

And maybe even at 10.30, we were just in there. And he was just hammering me with different things. And I was like, oh, I'm so grateful for Damien. But his job isn't one to then kind of teach me how to be a chiropractor.

You guys all have jobs where you actually do things. I mean, Eric, you're an anesthetist. You're not trying to teach your patients how to anesthetize. When people go to Ken for banking advice, he's actually helping them invest and do things.

He's not teaching them. Well, he's teaching them a little bit how to invest. But that's not all there is. When all of you do your work, you're kind of doing it for this. Hong Kong is a service-oriented culture, right? You go to people to provide a service with you.

You go to Queenie because she's going to do a great job barristering for you. And she's not going to teach you how to barrister. Clearly, I know a lot about that industry. But my one's different.

[3:13] Why do we gather? We gather because we believe this word gives life. But I'd be doing you a disservice if every week you just come in and you're like, okay, we're going to have teachers about the Bible and that's it.

But that's just called spoon feeding. That's just called milk. But the goal is how can we get to a point where you and I, both of us, have this hunger and thirst for this word and that we can equip each other to open this word together.

Because God knows, you know, you have access to this just as much as I do, right? Do you believe that? Or are you here kind of going, oh, I'm going to be taught the word today because I already can't do it on my own the rest of the week.

Or I can't be bothered to do it on my own. No, the goal is actually after having spent some time here, you feel as though you are hungry for this. And that's why we try different things. You know, every church around the world does the sermon, does the worship.

But we're trying to do different things. They're not new things. I think a lot of places do them. And I love copying from other places. Good practice. But that's why we try different things. That's why we try Discovery Bible Study where sometimes we have different people come up and share and then we force us all to do the uncomfortable thing, which is talk to the people that are next to us because we're called to be church.

[4:20] We're called to be a gathering of people, an assembly of people together. And this week, I have the real pleasure of inviting my good friend up again because we're going to try something different again. And can we just give him a round of applause, Sam?

He came up already last week. Do you want to grab that mic over there, Sam? But what we're going to do is we're going to try and exhort you, which means to kind of move your heart and teach you about, okay, what are you doing, Sam?

Are you breaking things? We're going to try and have basically a conversation about the word and opening up the word with you together.

Whilst we actually him and I have had a few calls this week talking about the passage that we're going to go through. And it's just a bit of joy to be able to work with each other to open up the word together. Sam and I, we go way back, at least in my Hong Kong time.

You and Rachel were one of the first friends that we had. We've gone through a lot of stuff. He taught at ICS for a while. And now you teach at where?

[5:25] Yeah, I'm a career teacher. But in the last two years, I've, yeah, I feel the call to spend more time with family, with my kids. And so right now, I teach the seven habits of highly effective people to school.

So I still work closely with students and teachers. He's my favorite pianist of all time, by far. It's not even close. Every time Sam plays, I'm nearly distracted from the Lord because I'm just listening to him play.

Nearly. But then I turn my gaze back to Jesus. But it's close because sometimes I think Jesus is playing the piano. And then it's just Sam. We've been through a lot of fun stuff.

We've also been through a lot of tough stuff, right? You've had health challenges. I mean, don't have to go through. Share a little bit about that. And yeah, I had the honor of sharing during the Restore Conference not too long ago.

But just in a nutshell, brain tumor. We had surgery, brain surgery for that. Thyroid cancer the next year, right after that.

[6:29] And then, yeah, complications that arose from my surgeries affected years and years of my life. And then, yeah, in the last few years, mentally, it was a big struggle for me.

So I kind of relate to Jonah. I feel like Jonah should have been at the Restore Conference had it been offered, you know, because I kind of recognize that language for myself. And seriously, I look at this man and I have such love for this man because there's been moments where, I mean, we've had the lows.

After church, we'd go for dinner. Actually, we were in the same clan. So at KFC, I were in the same small group. And every week, we'd just go through the word together. And it's always a joy, which is why we're doing this today.

But there'll be real lows as well, man. We would have dinner. And then, of course, the seizure would come. And it would cause a whole scene of just me wrestling you down with Christina in the restaurant. And those were the lows.

And in fact, I've had the privilege of accompanying you on a couple of those. And, yeah, each time, I'm just seeing the goodness of God come through. And then, of course, when I had my surgery and we had a kid, and Sam and Rachel, they've got two kids.

[7:36] Ellie and Jojo, how old are they? Ellie's turning four at the end of the year. Jojo will be turning two soon. Wow. And just beautiful kids.

And we were so blessed by them. They insisted, hey, we're going to come and cook you dinner. I'm like, no, don't come and cook us dinner. You guys have lots on your hands. But they were like, no, we're doing it. And they drove the whole family over to our house, cooked us dinner, took away all the dishes.

And it was just such a huge blessing. And it just reminds me why we do life together. There's just something beautiful about it. And actually, what I really am excited to show you today is as him and I opened up the word, I've been blessed by this man and what the Lord has said through him.

And hopefully it will bless you. And maybe the picture of us two sat here opening up the word together inspires you and goes, actually, who's your three? We've asked that in the past. Who's your three? Who are the people that you can go deep with?

Who are the people that if you had a really, really bad night, you want to hang out with and you want to be there with you? Who are those people? So we're going to open up the word. We're going to go to Jonah 4.

[8:39] I did say that this was going to be last week. But as I was preparing, I realized there's so much, so much we actually might go into next week just to finish off. And it's a nice, tidy end of June kind of thing.

But we're going to go to Jonah 4 today. So if I encourage you to open up your Bible or your app, we're going to go through this. And we're really going to ask the Lord, what is it that you are trying to teach us through this?

It's been such a fun series to preach just because, I mean, it's convicting on so many levels. But I pray that has been for you. So can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord and ask Sam actually to read the whole of chapter 4 to us?

Jonah 4. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, Oh, 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.

[9:42] Therefore now, oh, Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? 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 so he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plan 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 plan. But when the dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. 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. 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.

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.

[10:51] 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?

This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you are revealing yourself to us through this.

But we don't take this for granted. This book that is the bestseller of all time around the world, it's in every hotel room. And we get so used to seeing it. We get so used to hearing about it.

But Lord, never let us lose sight of what it actually is. It is you, Lord, speaking to us. It is you, Lord, showing us the love story. It is that you're writing to show us that you are a God of love and that you seek to know us and show us that love.

So be with us as we open up your word. May we all just leave it just glowing, knowing that you've been here. You've introduced yourself to us and that you are good. We thank you, Lord.

[11:58] In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So you've heard this a few times now, so I'll be quick. This will probably be the last time. And next week we'll probably just do a conclusion of the

whole book. But previously on Jonah, God goes to Jonah and says, go to the enemy.

Go to the enemy and preach a message of repentance. And then he runs away. He goes. And then he goes the opposite way. He goes down to the port, down to the boat, and then down into the ocean because the storm comes.

And that's the only way to appease the storm. The wrath of God is satisfied there. He's then in the fish. That's what we really hear about when we talk about Jonah. We hear about the fish. And then he's in the fish for three days and three nights, rent free.

And then he sings this song, this prayer. And, of course, this is a seemingly at first glance a prayer of confession. But we see there's just such heavy doses of self-righteousness through it all.

And then we see in chapter three, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah again. And he actually this time goes to Nineveh. And he preaches the message that he actually really wants to preach, which is you're going to die in 40 days.

[12:59] That's what he says. Now, to his surprise, to his shock, they repent. The most evil nation in the world. The values of ISIS with the power of the U.S. is the contemporary analogy here.

They repent. They may not. We don't know whether they actually turn to God and worship him alone. But they repent of their evil ways. And then God does the unthinkable. He forgives them. He relents from disaster. And then chapter four begins. And Jonah is exceedingly, exceedingly angry. And that's where we're at. And actually, Sam, you last week brought up a little bit about Jonah jumps into this kind of confession that he uses from Exodus 34 that God uses to describe himself to Moses.

And Jonah almost uses that back at God here and says, I knew it. This is exactly why I didn't do what you told me to do, because I know that you are these things. I mean, just share a little bit about what is it, what it is that you shared last week just to kind of rejig our memory.

Yeah. I mean, there's so much to unpack there. But just in a nutshell, again, he's quoting from Exodus 34. And he does a bit of a disservice. He quotes the first part of God's attributes.

[14:08] And this is not someone describing God. This is God describing himself as he meets the people in the book of Exodus. And he describes all the parts of God that actually displease him.

And he leaves out the very part that he desires, which is God visiting upon generations of aggressors. What is due their lot, what their punishment should be.

And so I see here almost like a mocking tone that Jonah has. And there's this unbridled honesty.

And I don't see this very much in scripture, say, for maybe the friend of God, Abraham.

Right. And he has this incredible, frank conversation with the Lord. But here, Jonah does something that I think I think, well, like Ellen said, some people relate to it. And my wife says this is her favorite book.

Like she just relates to this raw honesty with the Lord. And the amazing thing is God, God takes it. Like we are speaking to the creator of the universe, the one who made everything, the one who is perfectly good.

[15:14] And he's able to take what we put back at him, even though we are so, so wrong. And Jonah must know this. It's fascinating.

He goes into Nineveh. He preaches this message. And then he leaves. And then he sits outside of the town. Now, what you'd think a pastor should do if he's doing his job properly when he's preaching the good news is then he will stay.

Because then he'll say, hey, well, actually, now you've repented. This is how you become a good Christian. This is, okay, get your Bible out. You've got your devotionals. You do this. You do that. You attend church. You do small group. And then you attend the interest groups.

And then you go to Kenneth's wine tasting group because wine is godly because that's what Jesus did. Okay. So that's how you do it. And that's how you become a godly person. No. Jonah preaches a message. And then he leaves.

And then he sits outside the town. And he just sulks. And he's going, huh. Let's see what you're going to do now. And then he watches God just change his mind. And then what happens?

[16:10] He gets angry. Angry. He, like, he goes into the most evil city in the world, preaches the message, and they actually listen.

Do you know how many pastors in the world would love to do that? To lead a revival just from one sentence? The whole city would turn? We'd all be so happy to see that.

And yet he goes and sits outside, and then he gets angry. He gets angry. Why? Why does he get angry at God? Yes, it's because he sees the compassion of God. But as we've said at the beginning, it's also because it's down to his identity.

Jonah is a narcissistic nationalist. He is a narcissistic nationalist. He thinks about himself, and he thinks about his nation, and that's all he wants to think about. That is his idol.

That's why he's angry. He's angry because actually it's not going to go his way. And actually it's only a few years later, the Assyrians who have just been spared from disaster end up completely destroying Israel and taking over.

[17:10] So he almost has a right to be angry here. But why does God allow this to happen? Or why is this even in Scripture? I think one of the big points that really comes up for me is we get angry when our own idols come under threat.

Let me say that again. We get angry. We get frustrated. We get annoyed. We get anxious when our own idols get exposed. The things that we care about the most.

What did Jonah care about as a narcissist and as a nationalist? He cares about himself, and he cares about his nation. When those things come under threat, he gets angry. It makes me think when things that we hold in our hearts that are not God, there are small little gods, idols, counterfeit gods.

When those things don't go our way, what happens? We get angry. We get annoyed. We get anxious. So the question here is actually are there any idols that we have that actually God is trying to expose? God is trying to show you that actually this is an idol.

If you have an idol of control, then actually the Lord may allow things to go out of control just for you to see that actually that idol isn't good for you.

[18:16] If you have an idol of money, then actually the economy may not go the way it wants to. You may not do the deals that you want to do. And when things don't go your way, how do you respond? How you respond will then tell you whether that really is an idol or not.

Maybe your idol is a relationship. So when that doesn't go your way, then you get angry. Then you get frustrated. Then you get sad. Then you even question God's existence. That will show you what the idol is.

God here is showing Jonah exactly what his idol is. And now it's not just to expose the idol, just to go see how much of a sinner you are, see how you don't put your trust in me. No, it's not just that. It's not just for this kind of vengeful act.

He's actually showing it because actually we all know those idols, they will crush us. Our love for money will crush us. Our love for people's approval will crush us. Our love for power.

Our love for control. Those things will crush us. And God is a God of love who doesn't want that to happen, doesn't want us to pursue those things because those are inherently self-destructive. What idols are you holding on to in your own heart?

[19:18] And it's funny. This passage carries on and it says God appoints a plant to cover him, to give him some comfort. Then God appoints a worm to take away the plant. And of course, earlier God appoints a fish to come and save him from drowning.

And then God appoints the wind. God appoints the storm. What does this tell me? This tells me the Lord gives and he takes away. He gives and he takes away. I remember not this time, but the last time I was in hospital when I was in my 20s.

That was the song. That was when Blessed Be Your Name by Matt Redmond was still like a cool, hip, new song. The older people are just nodding now. Yeah, remember that tune? You give and take away.

You give and take away. Job, chapter 1, verse 21, that's what it says. He gives and he takes away. What storms do you have in your life? What idols do you have in your life that actually God is giving and taking away?

What's happening in your life that actually God is allowing to happen just for him to expose the idols that you have? It was just a conversation these last few days that actually even the troubles that we've been going through, God is allowing.

[20:26] God is allowing and God is wanting to show us something in it. He gives and he takes away. Do you think God can't get rid of that situation straight away? Of course he can. But yet he doesn't.

There's something about the circumstances that we're living in right now, the job that you're doing right now, the family that you're in right now, the relationship you're in right now.

There's something about that that God is trying to do something in, that God is trying to show you something in. Because you may have an idol. Because I know I do. The only question is, what idol do you have?

And of course, scripture says, Jesus is the only God that you want. He can't just be your number one. He has to be your only one. And so actually, this life here is basically preparation for heaven where he's going to just show us and expose to us the things that we've got that have taken the place that only Jesus can really take.

And that's why it says at the end, Philippians 2, that actually there is only one name. The name above every name. He's the firstborn of all creation. He's icon of the invisible God. It's all about Jesus.

[21:27] But we put so many other things in place of Jesus. And I think that's why God puts these things, people, in place to help show us those idols. Sam, as you look at this passage, what else jumps to mind?

And I mean, even about the giving and taking away, do you have any personal experiences of that that you can see that God's been exposing an idol in your heart? Yeah, absolutely. I think for a long time in my life, it felt like it was calm, calm, no storms.

And then when the storms all hit, like you said, they certainly reveal things about myself. It's been said that there are kind of two tests. There are Job tests and there are Jonah tests. The Job tests, you know, the enemies working behind the scenes and we're not privy to what's going on between between in the spiritual realm.

But God allows that to happen. And they kind of test our character. And we will go through those tests. But as you were saying, those storms that God appoints, God allows are to reveal who we really are and the idols that we have built.

And such a good reminder, you know, Ten Commandments, right? You can't have any other idols before God. And we just don't picture just having an idol built in our homes. We certainly carry idols with us all the time, right here in our pocket, in our phones, as we look at someone else with envy.

[22:45] For me, I guess a recent storm was as I was making the transition out of the classroom into just another line of work that came with just the practical reality of taking a bit of a pay dip.

As a teacher, you know, my relatives, this was before I had kids. Oh, so great. You know, like their education is taken care of. You know, this is you stay there for the rest of your life.

You know, you put the kids through school and they want to kind of map out my life for me. And I guess a part of me must have believed it to be true.

You know what? I'll take care of it. I'm the one who's who's providing for my family. And so as a provider, I mean, I'm covering their health insurance, you know, the prospect of their education. And as I leave, the first thing that I find out in my new job is, oh, there's no health insurance. And because of my colorful medical history, my attempts to get medical insurance, private medical insurance on my own, turned down, turned down, and turned down again.

[24:05] So I'm just unqualified. I can't get it. And so for me, that was a storm that came in. And unfortunately, that was the first time I kind of realized, you know, I'm not the one taking care of my family.

It's not about having medical insurance that protects my family. That doesn't protect my family. And I had to look back towards the face of God and surrender it to him.

And that reveals and continues to reveal to me what I sometimes put first over God himself. Yeah. And I shared this before. It reminds me of when Christina and I, we were getting ready for Reuben. And then we felt the Lord call us to give up our jobs to go into ministry. And it was like, well, what about our kid? And then I can just imagine now, as I say, and just imagine being in God's place, like, oh, that is so cute. That is so cute, James, that you think you're actually the one providing for your family.

Like, because you could stop work at any moment. You could not have a job at any moment. You could die at any moment. But the fact that you're here is because of me. But it's so cute that you think that you, but actually it's not true.

[25:11] I'm the one who provides. And if I'm the one who's calling your family into this, don't you think I will be the one that will provide? But you see, throughout all of this, and we see it in Jonah, whether you're incredibly angry because your idol's been exposed because you're under threat, or

whether you're incredibly worried and anxious, God is patient.

Now, sometimes we think, oh, man, I'm overreacting again. I'm still not trusting in God enough. Every time you see someone do something wrong in Scripture, God doesn't come down with this heavy hand and says, why did you do this?

You should know better. Which sometimes is maybe one of our experiences. I'm guilty of this even in my own parenting. But you see here, Jonah's exceedingly angry to the point where he says, take my life.

I'm done. I've just led the most successful revival in the history of mankind, and I have no reason to live anymore. Kill me now. Can you just imagine just the drastic contrast of just everything that's going on inside Jonah?

And then God, all he does is just says, Jonah, do you do well to be angry? He goes to Adam and Eve, who have disobeyed and kicked off a chain of events that we're still suffering the consequences of now.

[26 : 26] And all he says is, Adam and Eve, where are you? When we have the first murderer of mankind in the story of Cain and Abel, he goes, where is your brother?

Every time he just comes with a question, a gentle one. A gentle one of just going, hey, do you know my heart? Do you know who I am?

I'm gracious and compassionate. I'm slow to anger. I'm abounding in steadfast love. That's who I am. I'm here just to ask you to help you get out of your pickle, out of your trouble. But we don't have that.

We often just imagine this God that we've offended with our anxiety, with our anger. And that is so not true. Even scripture, Jesus says, Matthew 6, he says, who of you by worrying will add an hour to your lives?

Worrying doesn't do anything, but trust me. Trust me. As we go through this, what else strikes you from this passage? As we see this fascinating thing. Now, most of us think Jonah almost ends at chapter 2.

[27 : 29] The big fish comes. You disobey God. You get eaten by a fish. End of story. But of course, then we find out in chapter 3, it's a little bit more than that. The fish vomits him out, which is great.

It's disgusting. But he vomits him out and saves him. And then he goes. And so we think chapter 3 is where it ends. And wouldn't that be a great place for Jonah to end? He learns his lesson, delivers the whole nation, and then rides off into the sunset on his white horse.

And yet, for some reason, there's chapter 4. Chapter 4 is a problem. I'll tell you this now. If you weren't really paying attention when we were reading it, have a look again now. Chapter 4 is a problem if you are someone who's trying to make up a story to inspire people.

Chapter 4 is a problem if you're trying to show who God is. But God isn't just trying to show us who he is. He's doing that. But he's also trying to show us who we are. And that's why chapter 4 is here. Chapter 4 is a problem. And I want to just ask you, why is it a problem? As you look at this, what's problematic and almost what's encouraging about this? It's certainly problematic for someone who wants to have the final say.

[28 : 33] What strikes me is the honesty that's in this chapter. And scripture is full of honesty. I think that's why it's so convincing.

As a genre, looking at the Bible written in the time period that it was written, to write a narrative, a historical narrative like this, isn't fantasy.

It's not myth. It's a reportage of what actually happened. When we read about the woman who were waiting outside Jesus' tomb, it was the woman who were waiting.

Matthew 27, Mary and the other woman, they're watching the stone being rolled away. And who's waiting there when Jesus has risen and he's walking through the garden?

It's the woman. In another take, if the men had wanted to make themselves sound good, they would have written something like, oh, yeah, Peter, John and James were just waiting outside the tomb and filled with courage and filled with the spirit.

[29 : 37] We awaited the Lord's return. Right. But it's honest. And that's what makes it so, so convincing. And 2 Timothy 3, 16, all scripture is God-breathed.

There's a reason why Jonah ends the way it ends. I wonder as Jonah sat in his later years and he was penning this story, I wonder what came across his mind.

Maybe he wanted to write a bit more about how he's a different person now, how perhaps he's not that same nationalistic Jewish first identity anymore.

Maybe it was something else, but maybe the spirit of God stopped him for whatever reason. And it's unique because it's the book of Nahum, it's the book of Jonah that ends with a question.

And both of these books end with a question specifically about Nineveh. It's almost as if Jonah's not able to have the final word.

[30:37] But I do have hope for Jonah. I do have hope that he ended his life as a very different person. And my reason for this hope comes from the God that we have and the lengths that he goes to pursue, to change.

And as we, there's a part on our part where we take up our cross daily and we surrender to him. And he begins this transformational work in us. And you see, God is in the business of changing us, right?

He changes names. Abram to Abraham. Jacob wrestles with the Lord and he walks away with a permanent condition. You've got a condition right now.

Hopefully it's not permanent. It might feel permanent at times, right? This one? This one? Oh, I was, oh, wow. He brought this on himself. Okay. I just thought I'd beat you to it. Ouch. Okay.

Okay. He walks away with a permanent condition, but also with a new identity, right? And he births a new people. But I believe God changes people.

[31:41] Peter and Simon, he's a great other example. But last week, Alex was sharing from, um, our father's day sharing. He's talking about first John. And when I think about, uh, the brothers, John and James, it's, it's striking to me.

God renames so, so many people. But to my knowledge, he only nicknames two people. Right. And the nicknames of John and James are the sons of thunder.

Right. Because they've got this temper, right? Lord, can we call down thunder? Can we rain down punishment on these people for rejecting you? And I don't know if there's this humorous side of, of Jesus that we really don't know about, but he, he gives them this, this nickname, but let's fast forward to the end.

And as John writing the last book right here, revelation, right? All of his friends have passed away, but this is other book first John, which Alex was quoting from, and it's, it's a book filled with tenderness, right?

God is love, right? Like God lavishes his love on us. Something's changed about John. Something's changed about him. And next to first Corinthians 13, the book of first John is like the de facto book to quote at your wedding.

[32:57] Uh, I, we, we picked it for our wedding years ago. Um, and I don't know, Flo, we can make it to your wedding. It was on the wedding invite. On the wedding invite.

Fantastic. Yeah. So, so Scott did, did a work in John that we were able to see because he, he, he had a chance to write, uh, later on in the canon, in the New Testament.

But the kind of God that we have is the God who, who will, who will change us, who desires for our hearts to be turned towards him and to, to turn towards not just the Hebrew people, but the message, which is for all people.

Yeah. And so have a thing. What idols do you have that actually God is trying to orchestrate circumstances to reveal to you, to expose to you so that you would surrender it for your own good? What idols are you facing right now that you have inside your own heart that God may send a storm? He may send a fish. He may send a plant. He may send a worm. He may send the wind, whatever it may be.

[33:58] He gives and he takes away with the sole purpose to prepare you, to form you for what you're destined for, which is eternity with him. What is it that you've actually got going on that actually has that?

And you see here, and it's just a fascinating turn of events here. And you see just, I think Jonah, he would have been great at a store because, well, actually you can see that he's going through some mental health challenges here.

He's, he's got these highs and he's, he's got these lows. He's got these, he's got these moments where he's incredibly angry. And then as he's out, so chapter four, verse five says, Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there.

And he just sits there. So he just makes a little, little stall for himself and sits and looks at the city, hoping that in his heart that it will still perish. But it doesn't, of course, but it's sunny. It's kind of like these last few days that we've had in Hong Kong, which again, we're not complaining about the sun because we all need vitamin D, but it's hot.

It's hot. So you then you try and find the shade. And then he, and then of course God sees that and gives him comfort and actually raises up this big plant to cover him, to give him shade. And then at that point he's super, super happy.

[34 : 59] So he goes from exceedingly angry to verse six. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. He's like, Ooh, plant. Ooh, I hate those people. I want them to die.

I want me to die. And then, Ooh, plant. Ooh, I love plants. You can see that he's probably unstable at best at this current moment. And then when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant.

I mean, this is just getting a little bit comical here. He truly does give and he takes away. Appoints the worm to attack the plant so that it withers. And when the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind. He's in, he's the God of everything from worms to fish to, to the storms, to weather, to everything.

And he appoints the scorching east wind and the sun be down on the head of Jonah because he probably didn't have much hair. Because angry guys are usually angry, bold guys. On the head of the Jonah so that he was faint.

And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to live than to die. When our idols are exposed, sometimes we lose the meaning to live. And then we actually just don't want to live anymore. When your job isn't going well, you know, if you lose your job, you know, I don't even know what to do anymore.

[36 : 07] Well, when your idol is studies and doing, wanting to do as well as you can in your exams. And that has a whole host of reasons behind that. But when they don't go well, you see so many secondary students struggling with this issue of mental health, struggling with suicidal thoughts.

Because we as a society have nurtured out of them, into them, this idol of study, this idol of doing the best as you can, which isn't self not a bad thing, but it's not the only thing.

And so you see it happens to him and he's going all over the place. And then God asks him again, he's just so gentle with Jonah. He says, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry.

Angry enough to die. I love that plant. That plant was so good to me. Now I want to die because the plant is gone. I even named the plant. But now he's gone. And then God finishes up with this.

And the Lord said, and this is how, this is why this is just such a fascinating bit. The chapter, the whole book finishes. 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.

[37 : 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? I think it's comical that he just kind of puts, and also remember the cows.

The cows are there. And of course, 120,000 doesn't seem a massive amount unless you consider actually back in those days, the average city only had about 3,000 people. So this was a big metropolis.

And so, and that's it. It just finishes. You're angry about the plant, but I'm angry about all these people who don't know what they're doing is wrong.

And what about the cows? And then it just stops. And then you stop and you go, Why, God, why did you leave this here?

And if you were making this story, why would you finish it like this? Until, I mean, this is what Tim Keller's book, The Prodigal Prophet, it's just so piercing when he says it. He says, That question that God sends to Jonah, which is like an arrow.

[38 : 11] You care about the plants that I only just created yesterday? What about the people? And as that arrow goes from God to Jonah, you realize, and then the book stops, you realize that arrow does not just stop at Jonah.

That arrow is coming straight for us. Because suddenly, Jonah disappears. And you're like, Oh, that's a question for me. He was worrying about the plant.

But I was worrying about my job. He was complaining about the wind. But I was complaining about that relationship. That why isn't God doing this for me, doing that for me?

And suddenly you realize God just turns it on you. I mean, this is just masterful in the way he does it as he writes this. It just stops on the cliffhanger and turns it to you. What about you? Do you care for the people?

And those of you who have been around me, you'll have heard this story before. Hong Kong, there's a lot of people in Hong Kong, especially on the MTR. And if you're the same height as me, which is 5 foot 5.7, you are conveniently at the same height, a lot of people, just under their armpits when you're on the MTR.

[39:20] And it's just such a painful experience. And it gets even more terrible when they start clipping their toenails. And so the habit that I've had since I've been in Hong Kong over these last five and a half years is just to go, retreat into just the countryside and hang out with the mosquitoes there because they love me.

And there was one time I took the ferry from Stanley all the way to that little island that only has ferries on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. What's it called? Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Poultai. Is it Poultai? Poultai, though. And then I climbed right to the end near the georocks.

And there was just this most beautiful scene. There's this picture where the georocks were on the right and then just the mountains in the far left and then just the waters. And I just took this picture of it. And I was like, this is just, God, this is you.

Man, this is you. But as I was taking the picture, there was just this incredibly inconvenient group of tourists that were just in the bottom left corner there. And I was like, oh, this picture would be so perfect.

We're not for the fact there are those humans there. And then I felt God just remind me, you know what's the most beautiful thing about this picture? Those people.

[40:30] Why? Because those people are made in my image. Yes, the mountains. Yes, the ocean. Yes, the sun. Yes, the blue sky. They're all beautiful. But did you not realize that the most beautiful place in Hong Kong is Causeway Bay?

Just outside Sogo, where all the people are. Or in Admiralty Station on the platform at 6 p.m. on a Friday when you have to queue for 10 trains.

That is the most beautiful place. It doesn't smell the nicest there, but it's the most beautiful place. Because these are all people who are made in my image.

And these are all beautiful. The fact that you want to get rid of them from your cute little picture that you can put on Instagram for those 10 people who follow you to like it shows me that you've missed the point.

And what about the cows? Tell me, James, what about the cows? And it's funny because that's what I think.

[41:37] That's why I think Jonah comes around. Because he finishes there. Because I think Jonah does come around because otherwise we wouldn't have this book. Why else would we have this book presenting the story of a jerk?

Unless the jerk comes around in the end and writes this book. And what I like the most about this is that, as you said, he doesn't feel the need to have the final say. Because if it was me, I would say, okay, I was a jerk, guys.

I know. I know it was bad. But where am I now? I am now the CEO of an NGO that looks after enemy countries and spreading the gospel to them. And I do this and I have five kids.

But no, it just stops. And I think it's because of one thing. I think it's because of Jesus. I think as Christians, we cease needing to have the final say.

Because we know what Jesus did for us. And Jesus is the one who has the final say. And that cures us from the need to defend ourselves when we're not in the right. It cures us from the need to kind of present ourselves in the best possible way to people.

[42:36] Because Jesus. Because Jesus. That's why I think there's hope for Jonah. Hey, I want to circle back to the end as we conclude here. You brought up Exodus 34 about Jonah just choosing to omit certain traits of God.

And it really brings into this issue of just talking about justice and love. What thoughts do you have about that as we conclude? I think we're all Jonah.

I think we look at God and we kind of zoom in. We magnify the traits that we want. That appeal to us. That make us feel warm inside. And for a lot of, I guess, this generation, it's God is love. Right? And that speaks to us. The forgiving nature side of God. The love your neighbor. We like that side of God. And we, like Jonah, we omit parts of God that are difficult to accept. I think for some cultures to hear that, hey, you know what? God calls us to a standard of holy living, holy relationships, boundaries.

[43:40] That's difficult to accept. And then to hear, oh, forgive your neighbor. Or forgive people who trespass against you. Oh, yeah, yeah. That makes sense. But then to other cultures, hearing the same message, they would have a very different response.

I would just imagine maybe like an honor, shame culture, maybe in the Middle East where, yeah, you know what? The strict boundaries between men and women. God's design for marriage should be between a man and a woman.

We accept those. No problem. We'll do it. But then to hear, oh, forgive, to love your neighbor. That would be difficult. And so here's the thing. God subverts, challenges every one of us.

We are Jonah. Jonah, every single one of us is Jonah. Every single culture is Jonah. And we need to come to God and to allow him to show us the fullness of who he really is and to challenge the very parts of us that resist him.

And, of course, Jonah's big plight with all of this is actually he looks at God. He's like, God, you are a God of love. But I've lost confidence in the fact that you're a God of justice. So can God really be a God of love and of justice is really the question that he's asking.

[44:55] And he's saying he's voted with his feet and he's saying no. He's going to be loving and that's it. And I can't roll with that. But really, now that now we know what we know about Jesus. What thoughts run through your mind?

It's funny how Jonah comes at this because he wasn't on the receiving end of the full justice of God. God's spared him. The way he runs away from God, the way he speaks to God, the kind of justice that he wishes upon his enemies. He's actually receiving grace on his own.

And as we kind of come to the end of this book, I can't help but look at who this book is really about. And it's really not about Jonah. We might see ourselves in Jonah, in the Ninevites.

But this is not fully just about us. This is about Jesus. In Matthew 12 and Luke 11, they're almost identical passages where Jesus talks about Jonah.

[45:58] Jonah doesn't get to complete and have the final say on his own story. And I don't know if he knew that someone to come was going to speak about it. But someone did.

And Jesus comes and he calls himself the greater Jonah. Jesus makes it about himself. I think we have to go there for a minute. And the fact that we're all Jonah, we've been through this these last few weeks.

We are all Jonah because we all forget grace ourselves, right? We all forget that we look at other people and we point out the problems that they have. And like, God, why aren't you judging them? Why aren't you sorting them out?

And you realize, actually, we have that. I mean, I had that example pop up in my own heart the other day. Christina and I, we took that long, treacherous journey to Shenzhen a couple of days ago.

So, of course, she's, we had to go through the farmer's line because someone doesn't have a Wu Hangjing. So, so anyway, and of course, we're with a child. So he doesn't have his own e-card thing.

[46:58] And I'm just waiting in the queue. And do you, do you have you, okay, so I have a problem with queues, by the way. And this, this comes back from when my dad had how he raised us. Even in a McDonald's line, he would put me, my brother and himself all in separate queues just to see who would get there first.

And then suddenly, whoever gets there first, the other two absorb into that one. We were that annoying family. So then I would, I was standing and I was like, okay, Christina, we have to, okay, that family looks like trouble. They're going to have problems in the line.

So then you say, stay away from that queue. And then you join this queue. And then you realize, actually, the one single person here ends up being the one with the problem. You're like, ah! And then you go into that queue. Anyway, we jump around a couple of times. My wife gets completely annoyed by all of this stuff.

But I just can't help it. It's just, that's my idol. So, and then, and then when I'm just behind this one family that are just in the queue and they're just there forever.

And I'm like, criminals. I hope they find what you did and drag you to that room. Because you're taking so long. So, so long.

[47:59] Come on. What business do you have going into Shenzhen? Seriously, just go home. These thoughts are just happening inside my head. And then what happens when I get to the queue?

And then suddenly we get checked. And then we're taking forever. I'm like, I hope those people don't know. Oh my goodness. I hope they understand my situation. I married a wagwaran. I hope they understand. Don't we do that? Don't we judge others by their actions? But we judge ourselves by our intentions.

Don't we do that? Don't we have that kind of Jonah inside us? Well, we forget. And it just takes a moment. And that's it. And actually, even just as you said that. And this is where we'll finish.

Because I know you have some really, just really cool comparisons between Jesus and Jonah.

That I would love for us to finish with. Is when you said that Jesus comes and basically has the final say for Jonah. And says, I am the greater Jonah.

[48:58] Doesn't, wouldn't that just warm Jonah's heart? That everything that he's gone through. And you're like, I am, what, what Jonah wasn't, I am. And that just sends goosebumps.

Just because for me, it's like, man, this is how the whole of scripture just comes together. To point towards him, right? And just wanting to share with us, just the comparisons between just Jesus and Jonah.

Jesus is the greater Jonah. Jonah ran from his assignment. And Jesus ran towards it. Jonah went into the city because he had to. Jesus came because he wanted to.

Jonah sat outside the city and hoped for its destruction. And Jesus stood outside and wept and pleaded for her salvation. Jonah was thrown overboard into the sea for his sin.

And Jesus was cast into the sea of God's wrath for ours. Jonah was taken into the depths of darkness for three days because of his disobedience. For Christ was taken into the darkness of death for three days because of ours.

[50:07] Jonah showed up bearing an announcement of condemnation. But Jesus says in John 3, 17, that God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world.

And there's a peek in Hebrews about Jesus suffering. It says Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

So finally, Jonah went outside the city hoping to witness his condemnation. But Jesus went outside on the cross, outside the city to accomplish its salvation. He is the greater Jonah.

And whilst we've spent so much time wondering, okay, what if Jonah is in me? And that's a valid question. That's a valuable exercise that we have to do.

But maybe we finish just there. But what if it wasn't even about you? What if it was all about Jesus? What if he's the center of everything? What if everything came from him, through him, for him, by him?

[51:05] What does that mean? Maybe this is where we finish and we go, okay, well, what does that mean for us? And maybe just as this book finishes, I turn it back to you.

I don't know. What does it mean for you? As you reflect on the idols that you have. As you reflect on the storms that God has allowed. As you reflect on the plant, the worm, the wind, the Ninevites, the self-righteousness.

As you reflect on the honesty that Jonah has. All these things. What does that mean for you? How do you respond? And what does Jesus bearing that good news mean for you?

And how can you apply that? I can't tell you how to respond to this message. The arrow is coming straight for you. I'm going to invite Florence and the team now to come up just to spend a moment here.

And I'll lead us in a prayer. Actually, I want to take this chance. Can I pray for you as well? When we obey the call of the Lord, I've got to tell you.

[52:05] When we love anything, when we love something, it costs us something. We shared about Sam's health these last few years.

And honestly, it's been a dilemma for me to even ask him to come up to do this with me. Because I know that every time I ask him to do something with me in church, the enemy seeks to destroy.

The enemy seeks to bring him and his family down. And we were just talking about this last night as we were on this call. And his health is suddenly getting a little bit shaky. Suddenly, some of the signs are just coming back.

And I was just like, should I even ask him? And then I said, hey, if anything isn't right, if it just doesn't feel right, don't even worry.

Just drop it. And I'll be fine by myself. And then yesterday, he just said the words to me. And he was like, actually, no, quite the contrary. Even with all these things happening, we're going to push through.

[53:08] And this isn't just him. It has to be Rachel as well, because she's the one who has to. And so I wanted just to spend that time to honor the family here. Just going, actually, for him to even do this, even preaching the gospel, there is a cost.

Obedying the Lord, there is a cost. I don't know what that is for you. And that's how I want to pray for him. And I want to pray for all of us. It says we seek to respond to this message that the Lord has given us.

Seek to respond to this arrow that is coming right towards us. With the aim of really piercing our hearts, cutting straight to the deepest parts of our hearts. How will you respond?

What will you do? And yes, it might cost you. But he is good. And he is worth it. Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, that you come to us.

You come and preach peace to those of us who are near or far off. And thank you that that good news is for every single one of us here.

[54:12] Whether we are as far as the Ninevites. Or as self-righteous as Jonah. Or as well-intentioned as the sailors. We come to you now.

And with Jesus, we look at you. You are the center of everything. You're the author and perfecter of our faith. Would you bring healing? Would you bring restoration?

Would you give us faith? Thank you for this brother and for his family. As they heed your call, would you protect them? Would you not allow harm to come upon them?

May your grace and your mercy and compassion and love cover their family and cover all of us here. We respond to you, Lord. May you unite us in one voice.

As we say, we trust you. We trust you. We trust you. You truly are the center of everything.

[55:21] And we worship you now. In your name we pray. Amen.