

Text: [Jonah 3:1-4:11 \(CEB\)](#)  
Date: November 23, 2025  
Title: “Angry at Grace” – Jonah, week 3  
Theme: Will we hold on to anger, or learn to love like God loves?

# 1

This is the week where Jonah’s story gets really interesting  
When we see that Jonah isn’t just about a guy who gets  
swallowed by a fish  
But about an anti-prophet who has zero compassion for the  
people God calls him to serve  
Up to this point – unless you’ve been reading along with us in  
Jonah – you’ve had to take my word for it  
Now you see it for yourself

Jonah not only runs away  
He preaches half-heartedly  
Puts his own spin on the word he’d received from the Lord  
And then goes up on the hillside and grabs some popcorn  
Waiting and watching and hoping for the destruction of Nineveh

This is really the heart of the story  
Where the author lays it on thick

God calls Jonah once more to preach to that “great” city  
Nineveh’s called that *multiple* times  
As though the author WANTS readers to take offense  
To take offense at the enemy’s salvation  
Just like Jonah takes offense at his mission

Nineveh’s said to take 3 days to walk across – an exaggeration,  
for sure –  
But meant to show just how miraculous it is when 120,000 people  
Not to mention the cattle and other farm animals  
ALL repent in sackcloth and ashes

Did you catch that detail? Even the ANIMALS repent  
They fast, they put on sackcloth, and God spares them too

It's meant to be ridiculous  
Absolutely over-the-top

And Jonah, the anti-prophet  
He doesn't preach a message of grace  
Doesn't preach a message of mercy

Instead he just says this:  
"40 days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!"  
That's the extent of the "good" news Jonah shares  
"40 days till smiting time, people!"  
Not too dissimilar most of the street preaching I've heard through  
the years

But I've never seen any street preacher succeed like Jonah  
He's the MOST successful prophet in the whole Bible  
The king repents, the people repent, the animals repent

## 2

Success, though, doesn't make Jonah happy  
Just the opposite - it makes him furious  
Because he realizes he's not going to get to see the show he paid  
to see  
He's not going to witness Nineveh's destruction

He rages:  
"Wasn't this what I said when I got on the boat and went in the  
other direction?  
I KNEW you were compassionate!  
I KNEW you were merciful!  
I KNEW you were patient and full of steadfast love!"

Now, this is very familiar language for anyone who reads the  
Hebrew scriptures  
Because this is how God is described again and again and again<sup>1</sup>

Can you imagine yelling those things at God – as though they're a  
CHARGE to be laid against our Creator?  
It's like: DAMN your compassion, God!

It's ridiculous - the story is ridiculous in every way  
The bitter prophet, the giant fish, the animals fasting and  
repenting  
A city of 120,000 having a come to Jesus moment in response to  
this NIGHTMARE of a preacher

And it's ridiculous precisely because it's meant to draw us a  
picture of how ridiculous WE are  
With our pettiness  
Our divisions  
Our insistence that there are some people beyond God's love  
And our refusal to see that we are just a part of God's bigger story  
You might call it "Jonah Syndrome"

The joke here is not sackcloth on cows, who repent like the  
humans  
The joke is that we can worship a God we CLAIM made  
EVERYTHING and EVERYONE  
And yet expect that same God NOT TO LOVE EVERYTHING and  
EVERYONE  
DEMAND it, even!

Jonah knows full well who God is  
He's no fool  
He describes God's character to a "T"  
Merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in  
steadfast love

The thing is:  
Jonah apparently made up his mind long ago  
That he doesn't want to be like God  
He doesn't want the most fundamental thing any person of faith is  
aiming for – to be more godly

No, Jonah is content to be a “basic” human  
He wants to be able to hate without God making him feel bad  
about it  
He wants to hold grudges forever  
And keep believing that there are some people who are outside of  
God's grace

And he's going to hold fast to that  
Even if it means taking his anger down to his own grave

I mean, it almost drowned him once, but God saved him  
God saved him out of compassion – not only for Jonah  
But for Nineveh, so he could fulfill his mission

And Jonah APPEARS grateful  
Until he SUCCEEDS in that mission  
And then, when he's done, he asks God to take him out AGAIN  
If there is any testament to God's patience in the story, it's that  
God doesn't grant Jonah his wish

Jonah does all this, rather than just admitting what he already  
KNOWS to be true  
That God loves ALL the people, because God MADE all the  
people

Even if WE hate them  
Now, I know that's hard to believe  
Because that narrow view of God's love and care is so embedded  
in who we are – it's so patently human

It's why years after they first went up, people still want to complain  
about and throw beer cans at our signs out by the road  
It's why politicians are still making speeches where they're  
bragging that the United States is "killing all the right  
people"<sup>2</sup>

### 3

This is what Jonah Syndrome looks like in 2025  
When we take it upon ourselves to disagree with – sometimes  
VIOLENTLY disagree with –  
Our Maker's love and care for ALL people

Jonah Syndrome shows up whenever we begin to see certain  
people in the world as expendable  
Whether folks on SNAP or Medicaid  
or kids in Gaza or Ukraine

That's exactly God's point to Jonah at the end:  
"Can't I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than  
120,000 people"?  
Like, why wouldn't I?  
Didn't I make them too?

Even Jonah – as bitter as he is  
If God's going to kill him,  
It's going to be with kindness

So God tries one last time, sends a little comfort  
A shrub to give Jonah some shade to nap in while he waits on the  
fire and brimstone he's sure is coming for the Ninevites

Can you imagine?  
THIS is what mercy looks like  
God goes so far as to bless the HATER with some shade so he  
can more comfortably stew in his own bitterness

THAT'S how far God is willing to go for Jonah  
And THAT should tell you everything you need to know  
Because that's how far God goes for us, too

#### 4

You know, over the past couple weeks  
I've asked some questions as I've preached through this little  
book

First, "Who is the THEM that you don't want to serve?"  
And then second, "Are we committed to the salvation of our world,  
or just our own?"

Today, as I wrap up  
I just want to leave you with one more  
To ask the question God asks Jonah  
"Is your anger a good thing?"  
You know, that feeling of alienation that you carry toward  
*someone or someones*

Now, we know Jonah's answer  
Jonah says, emphatically,  
"YES! It's a good thing!  
I'm going to take it the whole way down to my grave!  
THAT'S how good it is!"

But we're not meant to look for life lessons from the anti-prophet

I'll ask again: "Is your anger a good thing?"

Because all of us have a “them”  
And all of us are more committed to our own salvation than that of  
others

But if there’s been anything you’ve taken away from this little book  
I hope it’s that God’s love and mercy are relentless  
Even when God’s prophets are reluctant to share it

So I’ll ask once more: “Is your anger a good thing?”  
Or is it costing you the chance to love like God loves?

**By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 34:6, Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8 are some examples.

<sup>2</sup> Statement by Sen. Lindsey Graham at the Republican Jewish Coalition gathering on November 4. See the video at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1140692241597440>. Fact-checked here: <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/fact-check-lindsey-graham-said-110000322.html>