

Remnant Life Church
July 27, 2025
Jonah – Part 4
Running Ahead of God
Jonah 4:1-11

Say what you will about Jonah, but his stamina is amazing!

- He has spent time running from God
- Running back to God after being taken to a fishy wood shed
- Then running with God as he delivered God's message to Nineveh
- And today we look at this final lap of Jonah's marathon

Now, Jonah's problem is not what he is called to do or say, but who he has been called to say it to.

- Jonah tried to veto God's plan because of his own, selfish beliefs
 - Jonah was still clinging to a prejudiced presupposition that Yahweh was the exclusive God of the people of Israel
 - Jonah believed so fervently in his own created theology that he would not even let God change it
 - At the heart of Jonah he lived by... *This what I believe about God and not even He is going to change my mind.*
 - Today, we would call this spiritual pride
 - Spiritual pride is what happens when a Christian becomes so engrossed, so enamored with their own beliefs about God, Jesus, the church that they become unteachable
 - Jesus called this a hardened heart
 - In **Mark 8:16-18a** Jesus is talking to the disciples following the feeding of the 5000 and He tells them to guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod
 - *They discussed this with one another and said, It is because we have no bread. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?*
 - Aside from a brief time when he was fulfilling the call of God on his life, this is also an accurate description of Jonah
 - His heart was hardened against the people of Nineveh
 - He had eyes yet could not see, and had ears yet could not hear
- How many of us suffer from these same afflictions
 - And so often it is with regard to our own lives
 - We can see the problems very clearly in others but not in ourselves
 - And if we are unteachable, unwilling to give up our own presuppositions, that will never change and we will never grow spiritually
 - Now Jonah said all the right things, did he not?

- His prayer in the belly of the fish is very Psalm- like as he cries out to God
- He confessed his need, but did he repent?
 - He did not – as a matter of fact, he continued to complain about God's mercy to the Gentiles
 - At no point does he ever confess his sin of pride and of disobedience
 - Why? Because Jonah wanted to be in control of what was happening
 - Even if that meant trying to control God
 - And what happens to most people when they do not get their own way?
 - It starts when we are infants and remains with many people throughout their entire lives
 - If I don't get what I want – I'll get angry, very angry

READ - Jonah 4:1-3

- These may be the worst things ever recorded regarding a prophet of God
 - First, Jonah is very displeased with God's mercy
 - Second, because he did not get what he wanted he became angry...with God
 - Third, he gives what is undoubtedly the lamest set of excuses to justify his behavior
 - And finally, he would rather die than accept responsibility for his actions
- And this has all come about because Jonah was unable to manipulate God
 - Is this not the epitome of human arrogance – to believe we can control God
 - Consider an example of this thinking...
 - When the 19th-century lawyer Robert G. Ingersoll, a devout opponent of God's existence, delivered his lectures against Christ and the Bible, his ability to capture the people with his masterful orator skills usually assured him of a large crowd. One night after an impassioned inflammatory speech in which he severely attacked man's faith and belief in the Savior, he dramatically took out his watch and proclaimed, "I'll give God a chance to prove that He exists and is almighty. I challenge Him to strike me dead within 5 minutes!" First there was silence, then people began to become uneasy. Some left the hall, unable to take the nervous strain of the occasion, and one woman even fainted as the tension continued to build. At the end of the allotted time, the atheist exclaimed derisively, "You see! There is no God. I am still very much alive!" After the lecture a young man said to a Christian lady sitting next to him, "Well, Ingersoll certainly proved something tonight, didn't he?!" She replied, "Yes he did, he proved God doesn't take orders from atheists."
 - God does not take orders from an atheist, nor a self-absorbed OT prophet, nor from you or me
 - And now, Jonah has reverted back to his old nature
 - Or perhaps he can simply no longer keep up the charade
 - But how does God respond to him?

- That is truly the focus of the last chapter of this story

READ – Jonah 4:4-9

- We can see how far Jonah has slid back by what he says in the 8th verse
 - Jonah has asked God to go completely against His very nature
 - God is the creator of life
 - And Jonah wants God to help him embrace death
 - And while we might expect a stern rebuke from God we see something else entirely
 - God asks Jonah a question that is spoken in patience and kindness
 - And, as with all questions that God asks, it is not because He needs to learn something, but it is always the one being asked who needs the information
 - ITOL God's questions is only 3 words
 - In English it is 8 words
 - God simply asks, *Is it right for you to be angry?*
- And this is an important question for us as well
 - There is so much anger in our country today
 - Much of it is politically motivated and it has divided our country even more than what it has been
 - God certainly had every right to be angry at Nineveh because of their great sin
 - But He chose to forgive them
 - And that is His decision to make and His alone
 - *Vengeance is Mine* ([Lev 19:18](#); [Deut 32:35](#))
 - And now, with everything else that Jonah has done, he keeps insisting on putting himself in the place of judge, jury, and executioner – a place he does not belong
 - We, too, often put ourselves in the place of God when we remain angry at a person, a people or peoples when God has pronounced forgiveness
 - You may ask, how do I know if they have asked forgiveness?
 - You don't and that is the reason you are not to sit in judgment
 - In [Matthew 7](#), Jesus taught that we are quick to judge the sliver in someone else's eye when we are often walking around with a 2x4 in our own
 - IOW – tend to your own issues!
 - For us to judge other people is what it means to run ahead of God
 - And so God simply asks, is that your right to do that? To sit in judgement of others
 - That question only has one answer, *No Lord, that is your right, not mine*
 - But Jonah did not even answer God
 - Instead, we read that he stomps out to the east side of Nineveh, builds himself a shelter, and likely plops down in

the dirt like a petulant child

- But just like in the boat, God was not through with Jonah
 - And what God does for Jonah continues to be an object lesson on kindness
 - God supernaturally caused a plant to grow overnight to give Jonah shade
 - Jonah did not deserve this act of kindness
 - The plant was likely a Caster Oil tree, common to that region that grows very fast and has broad leaves
 - But it was still supernatural in nature – no tree grows to full height overnight
 - And God had two purposes for doing what he did
 - We read in the 6th verse, God made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort...(some versions use the word misery or grief)
 - That word *discomfort* can be interpreted in two ways
 - The first is the obvious physical discomfort of the blazing sun
 - But the second, and this is what we find ITOL, means evil, wickedness, or something very displeasing
 - In this circumstance, we can read that God provided shade, an act of kindness, to cover or shield Jonah's wickedness
 - The tree was meant to be yet another object lesson for Jonah to remind him of the goodness of God
 - So that he might finally understand that the primary nature of God is not destructive judgment but mercy, grace, and forgiveness
 - Did Jonah finally get the message?!
 - No
 - He is nothing if not consistent in his stubbornness
 - And because of his hardened heart, God took away the tree
 - Well, this sets Jonah off again
 - And God asks one final question in verse 9
 - *Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*
 - God is still giving Jonah the opportunity to make things right
 - But Jonah holds his ground - his twisted, selfish, misguided ground

READ – Jonah 4:10-11

- God provides Jonah with one final lesson on the beauty of His mercy
 - And it is in the form of a statement of an absurd contrast
 - God said to him, you have pity on a plant that you have nothing to do with as it grows and then dies
 - But over 120,000 people mean nothing to you
- What we now realize is that Jonah's pity on the plant was a projection of his own self-pity

- He has been pouting for nearly the entirety of this story because he could not control God and his circumstances
 - He could not have things the way he wanted them
 - And when you get right down to it, everyone needed the mercy of God; not only the inhabitants of Nineveh, but Jonah as well.
 - And then...the story of Jonah ends abruptly without a clear resolution
 - The author has left the end of the story for the reader to conclude
 - What became of Jonah?
- But now, it is time to ask the most difficult question of this entire 4 week series
 - How easy is it for us to see ourselves in the actions of Jonah?
 - I believe the story of Jonah forces us to see and confront our own power struggle with God
 - How often do your own desires and wants clash with the direction God has for your life?
 - What is your response to God when His leading in your life goes against where you want to be or go?
 - Are you living in the Tarshish of escape, or in the Nineveh of obedience?
 - And the thing is, I believe you know with absolute certainty the answer to that question
 - You know the areas of your life that still need to be surrendered to God
 - You know those things that you cling to that God told you to release
 - You know that thinking that is contrary to the teaching of God's Word that has become a part of your daily life
 - But here is the good news
 - That same grace God extended to Nineveh He extends to you and me this morning
 - But just as the people of that lost city did, we too must confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness
 - Something that Jonah never was able to bring himself to do
 - We really don't know what Jonah did but we do know that the plans and will of God were accomplished in spite of a prophet who had some hard lessons to learn
- Let me leave you with this
 - *Michelangelo's painting on the great wall of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican portrays the prophets, apostles, and patriarchs of the Bible. Of all those who were painted, few have the prominence and radiance in their faces than that of Jonah. Perhaps Michelangelo had a firm belief as to what happened to Jonah after the abrupt ending to his story. Or what is more likely, the artist is expressing his own hope that Jonah did finally accept the lessons of God and become a willing communicator of God's grace. We simply do not know the artist's intent. But unlike that painting, we do know that our own portraits are not finished. And what*

our final portrait will be is dependent on, not only the mercy we receive, but the mercy we are willing to extend to our own places and people of Nineveh.

How much of Jonah is in you this morning?

- We are to love and forgive as Christ did
- That is not easy, but with a humble heart, and a willingness to surrender your life, your desires, your wants fully to God, His love will be seen in you.