

Offended by Mercy

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Date: 01 February 2026

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading is taken from Jonah chapter 4 verses 1 to 11.! Please follow along your Bible.! If you don't have a Bible, please do still grab them from the front of the stage or at the back near the door.

Our passage is on page 727. Jonah's anger and the Lord's compassion. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? This is what 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. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

Then 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, till he should see what would become of the city.

[1 : 11] Now the Lord God appointed a plant 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 plant.

But when 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 the night and perished in the night. And should I not pity Nineveh, the 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 God. Great. Thank you, Betty. Let's pray together and ask God to speak to us from his word. Father, thank you for your word.

[2 : 27] Your word is so beautiful. It's so challenging. It's dynamic. It's amazing. It was written thousands of years ago and still speaks to us today. God, come and speak to us from your word.

Lord, not from my words. My words are not important, but your word. God, help us to see what are you saying in your word and help us to receive it and to change because of it. Lord, we want to meet you in your grace.

Help us, I pray in your wonderful name. Amen. Amen. I wonder what is your favorite book or story that has ever been written. My favorite book that has ever been written is Les Misérables, the great classic by Victor Hugo.

If you don't know the story, I'm going to give it away for you. So, sorry, spoiler alert. But it's written about a man. It's the story of these two guys, one called Jean Valjean.

He is an escaped criminal during the French Revolution in France. He runs away from, or he escapes from prison, and he's a petty criminal, and he's trying to make life work.

[3 : 34] And he encounters amazing, amazing grace, unbelievable grace, that completely turns his whole life around. And Jean Valjean goes from this petty criminal to now somebody who wants to give his life away.

And every moment he can, he wants to give grace and mercy to those in his midst. This encounter with grace turns his life around, changes him very, very deeply. But his arch nemesis is a guy called

Javert.

And Javert is a rigid law-keeping officer of the law. He's a merciless policeman. And Javert is convinced that people fundamentally do not change.

Once a criminal, always a criminal. And he's on to Jean Valjean's case. And so he spends about 20 or 30 years searching this guy down, looking for him, hounding him, looking in every nook and cranny that he can to find Jean Valjean, to have him arrested and put back in jail and taken away. And so the story climaxes when Jean Valjean spends his whole life kind of this new person. He's changed. He's a different man. But he's always looking over his shoulder because he knows that Javert is on to him.

[4 : 48] And he spends his life looking out for the merciless officer of the law, Javert. But then the story climaxes when it comes to a point where they face each other face to face. And there's this wrestle and there's this fight.

And Jean Valjean, the escaped criminal, has a chance to kill Javert. To get rid of him for good. To get him off his back and to finally be free from the terror of this merciless officer of the law.

But he doesn't do it. Rather than killing him, he saves his life. And he saves him. Rather than getting rid of him, he restores him.

And for Javert, this act of grace, of mercy, is too much. It rocks his world. And he cannot be the same person. This forgiveness throws his whole world off balance.

And he's no longer certain what is true and what is false. What's right in the world, what's wrong in the world. Whether justice or mercy are at the heart of the universe. He's always believed justice is at the heart of the universe.

[5 : 49] But here he discovers mercy and it throws his world off balance. And he doesn't know how to respond. And so he says this as he stands on the bridge one night. My heart is stone and yet it still trembles.

The world I've known is lost in the shadows. And with that he jumps off the bridge into the river Seine. And he's never seen again. It's an amazing story about the power of grace and mercy.

That grace and mercy can change one man's life so deeply and so profoundly. But another man, it can offend so deeply and so profoundly. One man is changed by it.

One man is offended by it. What's up with this idea, this notion of grace, of mercy, of forgiveness? What's so powerful about it that it can have such an effect on our lives?

Now, if you have been coming for the last few weeks, we're in the book of Jonah. And we are in Jonah chapter 4. Jonah is an intriguing book about this rogue prophet who runs away from God.

[6 : 46] But Jonah is an interesting character, right? He's emotional. He's unstable. He's difficult. He's impulsive. And the book raises all kinds of questions. Questions about God.

Questions about Jonah. Questions about ourselves. But it's also a book about the surprising power of God's love. And the mystery of mercy. And the mystery of grace. And so by now, you probably know the story.

Okay, Jonah is this prophet. He's called by the Lord to go to Nineveh and preach to the people there. But he runs away to Tarshish. And he gets on a boat to go to Tarshish. And a storm comes.

And he says to the people, The only way you can save yourselves from the storm, throw me off.

So he's thrown off and he drowns. But God rescues him with this fish. And God saves him not because Jonah is good, but because God is kind. And God calls Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh and tell them of God's coming judgment.

And that they are doomed. In 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed. And as one person said, this is the world's worst preacher. This preacher is the world's worst sermon to the world's worst people.

[7 : 51] And amazingly, it works. They respond. And they believe him. And they say, okay. And they respond. They repent. And they turn to God. And they turn from their ways. And God spares them.

And Jonah is obviously over the moon. He's exceedingly happy and thankful that this has happened. No, that's what you'd think. But that's not what happens. And so look at your Bibles with me. Let's read from chapter 3, verse 8.

The last few verses. It says this. The king said, Let everyone turn from his evil ways, from the violence in his hands. Who knows? God may turn from his fierce anger, that we may not perish.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways. God relented from the disaster that he had said he would do to them. And he did not do it. Verse 4, verse 1.

But this displeased Jonah exceedingly. The Hebrew says it was exceedingly evil to Jonah. And he was angry. The Ninevites turn from their evil.

[8 : 48] And this is an evil thing to Jonah. God turns from his anger. And this makes Jonah very angry himself. Now, chapter 3 ends on this amazing high, right?

Jonah eventually obeys God. The message is received. All is put right again. And in most religious cultures, that would be the end of the story. End of the story. And the moral of the story would be something like, Good things happen to those people who do good things themselves.

Jonah goes. He obeys. And all is well and ends well. But that's not how the Bible works. The Bible is not that simplistic. And so the Bible doesn't end that way.

In fact, think about the story of the prodigal sons, right? It kind of ends in the same way. The younger brother comes home. And yet the story ends with God asking, the father asking the older brother, the older son, this penetrating difficult question.

And the story of Jonah, chapter 4, ends in the same way, with this provocative question challenging us. In fact, many commentators, some commentators have pointed out that the story of Jonah is the Old Testament version of the parable of the prodigal sons.

[9 : 58] In Jonah, chapter 1 and 2, Jonah is like the younger brother. He runs away. He's disobedient. He's going to go do things his way. And in Jonah, chapter 3 and 4, he's like the older brother.

He's dutiful. He's obedient. He does the right things. But he is resentful. He's angry. He's annoyed. But God is not just interested in Jonah's work.

He's interested in Jonah himself. God doesn't just use Jonah like a widget in his machine to produce the results. God wants to get hold of Jonah's heart after Jonah himself.

And so the book ends with God after the Ninevites have repented. God now goes after Jonah and says, Jonah, I want you. I want your heart. Come, let's talk.

And Jonah is very angry by what he's seen. Now, why is Jonah angry? I mean, again, this is like someone said this is like, you know, someone getting a standing ovation at the National Theater right after a performance.

[10 : 54] And they are angry about it. This is like an author writing a best-selling book. And they are angry about the fact that they've done so well. Jonah is the preacher. People respond. And he's angry. Why is Jonah angry?

Well, look what he says in verse 2. He says, Jonah's first prayer was prayed from the belly of the whale.

The second prayer is prayed from the belly of burning anger. Now we see the heart of Jonah.

Remember, in chapter 1, we spoke about how the Assyrians are this wicked and evil nation.

Right? They do terrible things. They're violent. They're aggressive. And for anybody to be told to go to Assyria and tell them about their wickedness, confront their wickedness, was a suicide mission. I mean, these guys are going to just take your head off without any questions. It's a deadly, deadly mission. And it seems like Jonah's, at the beginning of chapter 1, it feels like there's an element of fear.

[12 : 09] Certainly for his own life, but also for his nation. If God doesn't destroy Israel's enemies, maybe they'll rise up and destroy Israel. And so it seems in chapter 1, maybe his motivation is fear.

He's scared of this. But actually here we see in chapter 4, that's not the problem. It's not the Ninevites that Jonah is bothered by. It's God himself.

Jonah says, this is exactly what I thought you would do. The problem isn't that Jonah is scared of the Ninevites. It's that he hates them. He's not afraid of them. He despises them.

And what Jonah really fears is that God will be forgiving. That's his worst nightmare. So let's look at Jonah's problems. Jonah's got a couple of problems here. What are Jonah's problems? I think Jonah's first problem, he's got two main problems.

His first problem is this. Jonah cannot reconcile God's grace and justice. Mercy and justice. And God has evidently been merciful to the Ninevites. He's turned from the disaster that he threatened.

[13 : 08] He turns his anger away. But how does that reconcile with God's justice? With the rightness of God? Does God suddenly not care about sin? Does God not care about wickedness?

Does God just turn a blind eye to all the evil in the world? As a leader in Israel, Jonah knows about the temple system. He's gone to the temple thousands of times. He's seen the goats and the bulls and the lambs that are sacrificed and slaughtered.

He knows that sin can't just be turned a blind eye to it. He knows that somehow some living being, some living creature must pay the penalty for sin. And he goes to the temple and he knows that some bull, some goat, some lamb is going to take upon itself the sins of the people and there's going to be an exchange.

They are going to die so that God's people can be free. He knows the price of sin, right? That justice requires a penalty to be paid. The problem is that in Nineveh's case, no sacrifice is made. No animals are slaughtered. No bulls are killed. No sacrifice is made. God just seems to let them go scot-free. And Jonah's wondering, will God simply wave a magic wand and all will be forgiven? [14:17] Is that how God works? So Jonah's wondering, how does the mercy of God and the justice of God come together? This seems wrong. It seems unjust. But actually what we see in this passage is not so much an intellectual problem, it's a heart problem.

It's not that Jonah can't wrap his head around the problem. It's that his heart is not open to the solution. He doesn't want to see what God wants to show him. When God doesn't destroy Nineveh, it doesn't just confuse him, it angers him.

It angers him. And why does it anger him? Why is Jonah so angry? Friends, why do any of us get angry? What is anger in our lives? I think anger reveals two things about us.

Anger reveals what we love and cherish the most. Think about that child whose toy is taken away from them, right? How do your parents sitting at the back?

How do your children respond when a toy is taken away? They say, please just give it back. I'd really appreciate it if you could return my toy dinosaur. No, right? They're angry, right? How does a parent respond when their child is bullied or abused at school?

[15:27] Friends, how do you respond when you face injustice at work, when corruption takes something away from you? When something we love is threatened, ridiculed, or taken from us, don't we all feel the sense of righteous anger?

Well, righteous in our own eyes anyway, right? Because that which is precious from us, when it's taken or threatened or ridiculed, anger is what rises up. What's most precious to Jonah?

Well, maybe his name and reputation, right? He's just gone to Nineveh. Forty days, you will be destroyed. And now they're not destroyed. He's going to look like a fool. Another religious lunatic, okay?

Maybe it's his reputation, his name, a false prophet. Obviously, Jonah loves his comfort and convenience. In verses five to nine, there's this episode where he's in the sun. God causes this plant to grow in a shade over him.

He's exceedingly happy. But his happiness only lasts a day because when the plant dies, he is angry and bitter all over again. Maybe it's his comfort and convenience.

[16:27] But actually, I think what Jonah seems to love and cherish the most is his superiority. The fact that he is not like those dirty Ninevites. He's not perfect.

He had a bit of a false start with running away. Fish had to rescue him. But at least he's not like those awful Assyrians. And what offends Jonah is the fact that God is being gracious to them. God is treating these terrible, horrible, sorry, not you guys. These terrible people here, God is treating them the same way that he's treating Jonah?

Jonah. And this offends his superiority. Offends his sense of righteous and religious self-importance. I wonder if Jonah is wondering, may I have to accept them?

Might I have to love them? Might it be that God is wanting these Assyrians, these Ninevites, to become my brothers and sisters that I receive? May I have to even worship with them?

[17:28] Jonah's sense of superiority is under threat. And he feels threatened. He feels angry. But I think there's a second thing that anger does. Anger reveals our fear at being out of control, doesn't it?

Again, just ask any parent, right? You think you're not an angry person. And then you have young kids. And all sense of being in control of your world goes out the window.

And if most parents, if you're anything like me, having young kids, you find there's this anger in your heart that comes out that you didn't know was there. Where does it come from? Well, there's nothing like young children to show you that you are not in control of the world, right?

And actually, on a serious note, this is what's behind so much aggression, male aggression, and even domestic violence. Ed Welch says this, anger is rarely just anger.

It is often a shield for underlying insecurities, fears, a desire for control. When a person feels weak or threatened, they tend to use fake strength, as anger, to reassert dominance, to gain control. [18:35] And I think this is what's going on with Jonah. Jonah has been confronted with the uncomfortable fact that he is not God, that he is not in control. And as Psalm 115 says, the Lord is in the heavens, and he does what he pleases.

And if he pleases to show mercy to the Ninevites, that is not in Jonah's control. And as much as Jonah wants to manipulate circumstances, control circumstances, to determine who is right and who is wrong, who deserves to be forgiven, he is not God.

He is not in control. The Lord is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. And therefore, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy. He has compassion on whom he wants to have compassion, even on his enemies, even on those that Jonah doesn't think deserve it.

Now, friends, before we move on, I want us to just think about something here in Jonah. I think it's very pertinent to many of us. Jonah's theology here is spot on, right?

Jonah gets 100% on the theology class test. But in verse 2, Jonah quotes Exodus 34. Remember, Exodus 34, the Lord reveals himself to Moses, and he says, The Lord, the Lord of God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[19:49] This is the quintessential creed that describes who God is in the Old Testament. You know the Apostles' Creed? This is like the Old Testament version of the Apostles' Creed.

You know the Apostles' Creed? It says, I believe in God, Father Almighty, creator of the heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his Son. And this is kind of the thing that Christians have said for hundreds, thousands of years to describe the most fundamental thing, what they believe.

In the Old Testament, the most fundamental thing that you can believe about God is Exodus 34.

The Lord, the Lord, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And Jonah says, this is what I believe.

It's true. This is who you are. Jonah gets top marks, spot on for his theology. Brilliant. Brilliant. And in addition to that, Jonah does pretty good things for God.

He's a prophet of the Lord. He goes to Nineveh. He preaches probably the greatest revival in the history of the world. In 2 Kings, I think it's chapter 14, he gives counsel to the king of Israel.

[20:49] And the king expands the kingdom because of his advice, his counsel, his prophecy.

Jonah does great things for God. And so here you have a man who knows the right stuff and serves God and has got a pretty decent ministry.

And yet, his inner world is broken. Jonah is not a healthy person. There's deep brokenness in his soul, isn't there?

There's something profoundly wrong, something off balance. And for all Jonah's doctrinal accuracy and for all his ministry success, his character, the condition of his heart, is not healthy.

Like there's a contradiction between what he believes in his head and what he believes in his heart.

Friends, I think this is profoundly challenging. Because what it tells us is that Christian faith is not about what you believe with your head only, even though that's important.

And it's certainly not about all the things that you do for God, all the ways that you serve. Christian faith is about what's going on in your heart. Do you know God? Do you love him?

[21:52] Do you trust him? Is your relationship with God vibrant and real and alive? Do we delight in God himself at a deep heart level? Which is what Jonah struggles to do.

Friends, might this be true of you? Do you know a lot of stuff in your head and serve in a lot of ways? But your heart is disconnected? It's a dangerous place to be. And so Jonah, angry as he is, he goes out of the city to the east of the city.

By the way, in the Old Testament, to go east is always a sign of fleeing God's presence. Remember in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden, east out of Eden.

Jonah goes east out of the city, away from God, up on a hill.

And he's looking over the city to see what will happen. And there he makes himself a booth, a kind of shelter from palm branches. But God decides he needs more shade. And so God causes this plant to grow.

And relieves him of his discomfort. And verse 6 says, Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But his gladness is short-lived. Because the next day God sends a worm to destroy the plant.

[22:56] And then the sun. And then the wind. And Jonah is very uncomfortable. And so verse 8 says, Jonah says, it is better for me to die than to live. God said, do you do well to be angry for the

plant?

Jonah says, yes, I do well. Well to be angry. Angry enough to die. Now, as we said, God doesn't want to leave Jonah in this place.

God wants to help him. He wants to change him. And this is very pertinent because we live in a very angry world. In our world, anger and resentment, bitterness is tearing societies apart.

It's tearing families apart. It's tearing individuals' lives apart. God doesn't want to leave us in our anger. He wants to heal our anger and change us. And so look what God does here. God does three things for Jonah.

Firstly, he brings suffering into his life. Now that sounds cruel, right? Because Jonah's life's not going well for him. And you'd think that God would bring comfort. But God brings suffering.

[23 : 57] We see this in the way that God first produces a plant to shade him from the sun. Gives him some comfort and relief. And then God causes the plant to die. The sun to bake down upon him. And brings a desert sandstorm into his life.

Until Jonah can't take it anymore. And God deliberately brings suffering and heartache upon him. Now why would God do that? In Watermark, we often say, if you're going to grow spiritually, you need three things.

You need to be in God's word regularly, daily, engaging with God's word. God's word must be speaking to you. You also need community. You need people around you.

Friends that can challenge you, that can encourage you. Friends that can point you to Jesus in the storms and the trials of life. But the third thing you need is you need storms. You need a crisis.

You need a trial or a challenge to come your way. Friends, you'll never grow deeply unless you grow through the storms. You need suffering to come your way.

[24 : 57] You need a couple of crises and storms that will bring you to your knees and show you that you are not in control of the world. And that you are not God. And God doesn't speak to Jonah in the comfort of a jacuzzi.

He doesn't address him in a massage parlor. He doesn't speak to him lying on the beach. God meets with Jonah in the storm of life. When Jonah cannot take it anymore, that's where he meets God.

In some ways, as a Christian, you must die in order to live, right? Following the pattern of Jesus. Crises, storms, trials, and difficulties cause something of us to die and get on our knees in order to live and find God's grace again.

God brings suffering to Jonah. But secondly, God also shows Jonah what Jonah is really like. He holds up a mirror to Jonah and he says, he lets Jonah see who he really is.

In some ways, that's what suffering does for us. It strips away the facade. It strips away the politeness. And it helps us see what's really going on. But look at how God does this to Jonah. He asks him the same question twice, right?

[26 : 01] In verse 4 and I think it's in verse 9. He says, do you do well to be angry, Jonah? Twice God is asking Jonah to look into his soul and to reflect on what's going on.

You know, I think for me, if I think of the last 15 or 20 years, the thing that has grown me the most as a Christian, apart from the word community and suffering. Okay, so here's the fourth thing.

Is probably about 15 years ago, I started listening to teachings of a guy called Tim Keller. And one of the things Tim Keller taught me to do was to look underneath the surface of both my behavior and my emotions to ask, why am I doing the things I'm doing?

Why am I feeling what I'm feeling? And so underneath my behavior and my emotions, there's something going on in my heart. What's going on in my heart? And Tim Keller taught me to ask questions like, why am I feeling angry?

Why am I feeling offended? Why am I being so defensive in this moment right now? Why do I feel despair? What's going on in my heart? What do I believe that's causing me to feel this way or behave this way or speak this way?

[27 : 05] Friends, this is what God is doing to Jonah. He's asking me, saying, Jonah, what's going on behind the anger? Why are you angry? Do you do well to be angry, Jonah? What's going on in your heart?

Why are you behaving like this? Jonah, what do you believe that's causing this anger and angst in your heart? So God brings suffering and then he shows Jonah what he's like. But the last thing God does, and this is the most important thing in some ways, God shows Jonah what God is like.

And specifically, he shows Jonah how much God is not like him. In some ways, that's what the whole chapter has been about, isn't it? Just how unlike Jonah God is and how unlike God Jonah is. I'm sure you noticed this, but what's one of the most dominant words in this whole chapter? The word that repeats itself many times. The word anger, right? Five times we're told that Jonah is angry.

Four verse one, Jonah was exceedingly angry. Four verse four, the Lord said, do you do well to be angry? Yes, I do well to be angry. Four verse nine, do you do well to be angry for the plot?

[28 : 08] Yes, I'm angry, angry enough to die. And Jonah is an angry, angry person. But how is God described in four verse two? The Lord, the Lord, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Friends, while Jonah is slow to love and abounding in anger, God is abounding in love and slow to anger. And God is saying, you see how you are like?

I'm the exact opposite. Jonah, I am so unlike you. And that's a good thing. And that brings us to the final paragraph in the final chapter of the book. It ends with God not only showing Jonah what he is like, but also showing us how much God is unlike him.

Look at verse 10 to 11. The Lord said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in the night and perished in the night.

Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city with 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from the left and many cattle as well? The word pity means to weep.

[29 : 13] It literally means to have tears in your eyes. God says, Jonah, should I not have tears in my eyes for all those people that do not know a thing about me? God says, I am nothing like you, Jonah.

And that's a good thing. God is not like Jonah because Jonah is not sovereign over all of life. You notice here that God appoints the plant to grow and God appoints the worm to destroy it.

God appoints the sun to beat down on him and God appoints the wind to blow against him. In chapter 1, God appointed the fish to save Jonah. Everything, every breath we breathe, every morning we wake up and face another day, our lives in the hands of the sovereign God.

But God wants to show Jonah something else, that he's unlike him. He's unlike him in tenderness and compassion. His tender and his compassion and his strong love. God says, Jonah, this plant, you care about it so much, but you don't care about people.

You care about this plant because it serves your needs. I care about these people because they're made in my image. I made them to know me and to love me, to find life in my name, to be rescued by me.

[30 : 37] Rosemary Nixon says, God's gentle and persistent questioning was an expression of the divine pity and compassion God had for Jonah. Just as God had labored over Nineveh, so now God laboring over Jonah.

Do you hear the tenderness, the compassion of God? Jonah, you pity this plant that you never made or created, raised in a day and died in a day. Should I not have tears in my eyes for the people that are lost and do not know me?

Friends, God is not like Jonah and God is not like us. And that's very good news indeed. Jesus Christ is unlike Jonah and unlike us because he really does rule over all creation.

Not a hair from your head will fall. Not a sparrow from the sky will die. Not a flower of the field will pass away without the sovereign God allowing it. Jesus Christ is unlike Jonah and unlike us in his mercy and his compassion.

Many years later, Jesus would stand also on the hill outside of Jerusalem, look over the city and weep. Of the city of Jerusalem because they did not know who it was that stood before him and his offer of amazing grace.

[31 : 45] Friends, Jesus Christ is unlike Jonah and unlike us because in him justice and mercy really do meet. For thousands of years, lambs and bulls and goats would be slaughtered at the temple and killed to pay for the sins of God's people.

Jesus Christ is described as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Jesus demonstrates God's great passion for justice, for sin to be dealt with, for evil to be judged.

Jesus demonstrates God's great mercy that he will allow himself to be judged, dealt with, killed and destroyed so that his people can be set free. Friends, Jesus didn't wave a magic wand so that all could be forgiven.

He went to the cross. He died in your place and my place so that we can receive grace and mercy. Friends, Jesus Christ is unlike Jonah and unlike us because he didn't give up on his people. Even those who had made themselves his enemies, he gave his life to save us. Truly, Jesus Christ is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sin.

[32 : 53] So the book of Jonah concludes. And it concludes with a question. God challenging Jonah with this question. The book of Jonah doesn't end with God's booming voice, God's decree.

It ends with an open-ended question. And the reason is because God is asking us that question. Should I not have compassion and mercy on my people? Friends, maybe we can end today with a couple of questions.

And I think this passage asks us three questions. So, here's three questions for us to end off with. Friends, what makes you angry? How would, friends, are you an angry person?

How would those people around you describe you? What makes you angry? What does it tell you about what's most important to you? What does it tell you about your need to be in control of life?

Friends, what might your anger say about what you believe about God? And how might the God who is so different from you, so unlike you, want to help you overcome your anger? Friends, who do you find hard to love?

[33 : 57] Friends, how much do you love the people that God has sent into your life?

Family members? Colleagues? Neighbors? Who do you find difficult to love? Friends, is there anyone that you've refused to love? Anyone you've cut off?

Anyone you've frozen out of your life? How might the God who is so different from you, want to help you to love those you find hard to love? Thirdly, most importantly, how personal, how vulnerable, how deep and intimate is your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Jonah's theology was top rate. Jonah had done a lot of great things for God, but Jonah's personal walk with the Lord was very broken. Friends, how much do we truly love God? How much do we trust Him?

Where are we running from the Lord our God? Friends, are any of us angrily accusing God? Where might there be more of Jonah in us than we like to admit? How might the God who is so unlike you, want to help you to know, love, and trust Him?

[35 : 12] Friends, do any of us need to change deeply? I know I certainly do. I know you probably don't think this, but some people think, oh, pastors, they've got it all together, right?

No, no, no. There's more of Jonah in me than I like to admit. Jonah shows us even the most religious people in the world are still in profound need of grace, in profound need of change. There's too much of Jonah inside of me. And it's not going to happen through rigid law keeping. It's not going to happen by meeting people like Javert, the merciless officer of the law.

It's going to happen as we encounter the surprising, arresting love of God. The grace of God is not just an idea. The grace of God is a person. It's a person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ who went to the cross for me and you. Let's come to Him now in prayer. Lord Jesus, it is true that you are grace, mercy personified.

[36 : 08] The Bible talks a lot about grace and mercy. But as we said, that's not just a concept. That's a person. It's you. You, Jesus, are grace and mercy and flesh and blood. You came to a world. You died and you rose again.

That we do not need to die, but can live. God, I pray, let your grace and mercy change us. Just like in Victor Hugo's novel, it changed Jean Valjean. Just like a changed soul of Tarsus into Paul.

Just like it's changed so many of us. God, I pray for every one of us in the room. Start with me.

Lord, let your mercy change me. Let it continue to change me. And make me more like you.

God, I pray in your gracious and wonderful name. Amen.