

The Amazing Jonah P5

When God Loves Your Enemy

Exploring My Strange Bible

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Speaker in the audio file:

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Tim: Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying, Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this Podcast, I'm putting together the last ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this strange, and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at thebibleproject.com.

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

Alright. Hey guys. This is the last of a five-part series we've been doing through the Book of Jonah. This is when God Loves Your Enemy. It's exploring the last chapter of the Book of Jonah. If you haven't listened to the first four teachings that explore the earlier parts of the book, I recommend you do that in the previous podcast. This last chapter of the Book of Jonah is actually one of the most puzzling and difficult parts of the book. I have had children's books at home that I will never read to my children. It says it's about the Book of Jonah, but it happily leaves out any recounting of the final chapter of the book which is actually not that surprising because that last chapter, Jonah Chapter 4 turns the story from happy story of Jonah finally obeying and the Ninevites responding ideal way to this message that comes from God's prophet. And then chapter 4 just throws a huge wrench into the whole thing as God's own prophet gets really, really angry at God for forgiving his enemies. So what I use this for was opportunity both to talk about what's going on in the Book of Jonah, and about the very scandalous teaching of Jesus about enemy love. So I hope this is helpful for you, this was really challenging for me personally as I was preparing it. And let's dive in and learn together.

Here we go. It's our final week in the Book of Jonah. Yeah? Let's rock and roll. Let's look at what that is. We've been heading it, what I call, The Veggie Tales Factor, right? This mediation of the Bible stories to us through children's media that tends to kind of make them all bland, and about being a nice person or something like that. And so what we've been discovering, I know at least myself have been rediscovering, kind of studying and working through the book again. This is not a children's story by any means. Of course children could grasp the

basic outline of the story. But the themes of the story are so profound, you very much have to be an adult to get them dealing with themes about religious hypocrisy, and exposing spiritual apathy, and the devastating effects it has on us and other people, and about the ways that God can use pain and suffering in our lives as a severe mercy to wake us up. Themes of divine judgment and divine repentance, how can you explain that to your three-year old. So these are themes that are meant for adults. And that's because this story, as all of the scriptures, it's aimed at revealing God's character to His people, that's the purpose of the scripture, not to entertain kids, but to reveal who God is, His character, and his purposes, to know what He's up to in the world. And so today, Jonah in Chapter 4, we conclude the story with this ridiculous, apparently, sun burnt man sitting at the East of Nineveh, who wants to die. He would rather die than live with a Godlike Yahweh. And how does this speak God's word to us tonight? Let's dive in.

So remember the big storyline. You have this prophet, religious man of God who hates his god and runs from his god in the opposite direction. That leads him to hit bottom. He brings ruin on himself and all these other people, his spiritual apathy, but God makes this brush with death, make all this seem like it's the worst thing that ever happened to him but actually becomes a severe mercy, that's the best thing that's ever happened to him, and it wakes him up. At least for a moment. And he physically then obeys and goes on this commission to confront the wickedness of the city of Nineveh. And last week we talked about all of that, and I showed you cool, archaeological pictures, you know, depicting how horrible the Assyrians and the Ninevites were. And so he preached this five-word sermon in Hebrew, so it's eight words in English, five words in Hebrew. And the whole city repents and turns to God. And you would think, if you were a prophet from Israel, this is a great line on your resume, you know what I'm saying. This is like notoriously, it's like sin city, you know.

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And you can—there are days preaching in, five-words in, and the whole city has this radical transformation and you would think most or any other prophets of Israel would be like, "Yeah, that's right." Stoked. And how does Jonah feel about this? How does Jonah—look at the last sentence of chapter 3. It's verse 10.

God saw the repentance and the soft hearts of the Ninevites, and so Chapter 3:10, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways and he relented." He forgave them. "-and He didn't bring on them the destruction that he threatened." Any other prophet of Israel would be like, mission accomplished, God shows grace, His reputation is honored, and so on. And what was Jonah's response to all of this? He is ticked, he is livid with anger. Look at his response. But to Jonah, this all seemed very wrong. "No. What? No, no, no. This is not what's supposed to happen. This is very wrong." He became angry, and he prayed to the Lord. When you see Lord in all capital letters, it's Yahweh in Hebrew. He prayed to Yahweh and he precedes to God out big time.

This might be a new category of prayer for some of us. Apparently you can pray and just let God have it. But we did series in the Psalms of the summer, and you saw lots of people letting God have it and venting. And it was a form of prayer. So look at what he says, you just imagine, he has clenched teeth, you know. He's hot with anger. He prayed to Yahweh, "Isn't this what I said, Yahweh? When I was still back at home? This is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish." So you remember Israel, by the Mediterranean Sea, what direction is Nineveh? East. What way is Tarshish? It's as far west as you could humanly go, right? It's the edge of the known world for ancient people in our coast of Spain, way across the Mediterranean. Now why did he flee? Did he flee because he's scared that the Ninevites might kill him? He runs because he hates Ninevites. He knew that this is what's going to happen. So he says, I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God. I knew that you're slow to anger. I knew you are abounding in love. I knew that you're a God who relents from sending calamity. Now Yahweh, take away my life. It would be better for me to die than live." Can you see the heat of his anger? I mean this seems ridiculous to us and the levels of irony go way deeper.

Look at verse 2, do you see these descriptions here? The words that he uses to describe God, so he says, "You're gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love." Does this sound familiar to anybody? Your kind of heard these descriptions before? Maybe. So of you like, well it does sound Bible-ish. So yes, that's true. So, this phrase right here, gracious, compassionate God, slow to anger, bounding love, this kind of like the John 3:16, which is the famous verse in the new testament. It's kind of like that equivalent in the Old Testament. This is one of those most repeated descriptions of God over a dozen times throughout the Old Testament. And what Jonah's actually doing here. This is so great. You

kind of have to be a Bible Geek to know it, but he's quoting from a book in Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

He's quoting from the book of Exodus. And actually he's quoting from a quotation of what God says about himself in Chapter Exodus 34:6. And it's a story about how the Israelites were sitting at the foot of Mt. Sinai and God revealed the Ten Commandments to them. And the first of ten commandments was, "Don't have any Gods before me." The second one was, "Don't make any idols." So God is not an object among the creation that you can depict Him with a piece of wood or stone or something like that. And so they weren't going to make any idols to depict Him unless they're going to fixate their attention on the wrong thing. And so, and what's the first thing they do for the days go by and the cloud is still over the mountain, what are the Israelites doing? Like, "Where'd Moses go?" "I don't know. Let's make a golden calf." "Yeah, that's a good idea to represent Yahweh." And so they do and they have this sexual fertility ritual, it's ridiculous, it's crazy what they're doing right here at the foot of the mountain. And so God is going to bring judgment and dump His people that He recused out of Egypt. Moses intercedes, and what does God do? He forgives them and renews the covenant with them. And Moses say, "Holy cow. Like why are you doing this? Who are you, Yahweh?" And Yahweh says, "Well, I'm Yahweh. I'm gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding, and loving kindness." In other words, Israel exists as a people of God because God is this way. And here what Jonah does is he takes these very words of God and throws them back in His face and he's like, "I knew you were like this. You've always been like this. You've been like this since Day 1." And what's funny is, he wouldn't exist as an Israelite if God were not like this. But he's so irrational and hot with anger at this point, he's just throwing these words backs, "You. I knew You were going to do this. You love to forgive people who don't deserve it. You love to do this kind of thing. I knew this was going to happen, that's why I ran. You made me come here in the first place." He's so angry. Now we might read this, and be like, whoa, this is so crazy.

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He's criticizing God, he's like sending hate mail to God because God is too gracious, for being too nice and for forgiving people who don't deserve it. Clearly

Jonah chapter 4, he loses it. He's this comical, kind of ridiculous figure. And I'm guessing there are very few of us in the room who are like sympathizing with Jonah right now, and going, yeah, that's right. You know, we're like, no, we're laughing at him going, "Dude, you wouldn't exist if it wasn't for these very traits that you're criticizing God for." But he's like this laughable figure. And he does seem ridiculous to us. What Jonah 4 is all about, is this exposing what I call, it's like the dark side of God's mercy and grace. It's the scandal of the liberality of God's grace, the wideness in His mercy because of course, I'm quite happy if I come to realize what a screwed up person I am and I turn to Jesus and He shows me His grace. Sweet. That's great.

But then there's this other complex thing that happens as a Christian when you realize, yeah, Jesus is like that to me, and He also is like that to the person that I despise and hate. And then I'm kind of like, "Whoa. What? They don't deserve. Did you know what they did to me?" And so here we go. The motivation for Jonah criticizing God's grace is actually pretty understandable to us. And if we were in the same situation, we would probably say the same thing.

For example, let me show you a picture of a man named Gordon Wilson. Gordon Wilson is an Irishman, passed away now. He lived in the town of Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. In 1987, I think, late 80s, Northern Ireland, what's going on at that time. Most of you should know. But maybe only some of you do. So this was at the height of the conflict between a British who was still basically a colonial power over the Irish, and then you have the Irish who were resistant against British rule, and so on. A common story in the 20th century in many countries around the world. Do you remember the name of the essentially the resistant group against the British? The IRA. The Irish Republican Army. But Gordon Wilson, he was an Irishman who was a follower of Jesus, he did not endorse the IRA and he was not behind them. Town of Enniskillen had a little town square, he worked in kind of the downtown area doing a drapery business. Family's doing drape and window dressing business. Britain has an equivalent to a memorial day called Remembrance Day. It's in November and it's the way in honoring the British soldiers who died in the two world wars. And so Gordon Wilson went with his family to the town square of Enniskillen and unbeknownst to him and all the people there, IRA had sent people to plant bombs in different buildings around the town square, and during the Remembrance Day ceremony, those bombs went off. You'll see some of the pictures here. The number of buildings around the town square kind of collapsed, and walls caved in on groups of people that were there. And among them were Gordon Wilson and his family. And he and his

daughter were caught underneath a wall that collapsed and were there for many hours and after a number of hours, they were both trapped next to each other, both pretty injured, and they were able to talk during that time. They were rescued, they were pulled out. Gordon's daughter did not survive through the night, but Gordon did. And about two days later, after he was kind of aware and could talk, the BBC came and did an interview with different other survivors. And the interview with Gordon Wilson, if you Google this, the interview with Gordon Wilson, it all hit the news and just went viral, at least as viral as it could be before YouTube in the 80s. And it caught the attention of the whole world because of what he said. And William Uri who recounts the story, he captures it, this way. He said, "No one who heard Gordon Wilson will ever forget what he said in that interview. His grace towered over the miserable justification over the bombers. Speaking from his hospital bed, Wilson described his last conversation with his daughter, "She held my hand tightly and she gripped me as hard as she could, she said, 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her last, exact words to me and those were the last words I ever heard her say." William Uri comments. He said to the astonishment of listeners, Wilson went on to add, "But I will bear no ill will. I will bear no grudge. Bitter talk is not going to bring her back to life. I will pray tonight and every night for the men who did this that God will forgive them. No words in more than 25 years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact." And the story, it gets even more amazing.

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A year after, to commemorate the Enniskillen bombing, Gordon Wilson held kind of a public event where he invited public representatives of the IRA to come meet with him, and he invited news crews to all show up there, and because of his faith in Jesus Christ, he announced that he forgave his daughter's murderers. And he begged the IRA to stop the violence and this exact date to forward, their agenda. During this whole year, just catapulted him, he became a senator when the Irish gained independence, made the Irish a republic. He became a senator, and so on. And this towering figure, still today, in Irish culture because of his commitment to Jesus to forgive his enemies. Now, this is where the story gets very interesting. One of the later presidents of the Irish Republic, Mary McAleese talks about the legacy that he left and she puts it this way, so interesting. She said, "Gordon's words, they shamed us all and caught us off guard. They sounded so different

from what we expected and what we all have become used to. They brought us stillness with them. And they carried a sense of the transcendent into a place that has become so ugly, we could hardly bare to watch." But Gordon had his detractors. And unbelievable, he even received bags of hate mail. "How dare you forgive?" people demanded. "What kind of father are you who can forgive your daughter's killers?" It was as if Gordon had spoken those words of forgiveness for the first time in human history. As if Christ had never uttered the words, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." One out-spoken critic who was a Christian said to me about Gordon Wilson, surely the poor man must have been in shock. As if offering love and forgiveness is a sign of mental weakness instead of spiritual strength. Did you see that here? You know people name their daughters Grace and we sing songs about grace and whatever. And we think this is beautiful thing. But there actually is this real scandalous side to it when grace, the wideness of God's mercy begins to include people that we hate. Begin to include people that we despise or has wronged us or that we think don't deserve it. And then it's really, really disturbing, this whole grace thing. This is what Jonah 4 is about. It's not so crazy. He's depicted as ridiculous, yes. But the motivations that are behind Jonah's critique of God's grace are the same that motivated Gordon's detractors. How would you respond in a similar situation? It's very understandable. And so what God is going to do to the rest of Jonah 4, He's going to try three times to bring Jonah along to help him understand his grace in a new way. Let's dive in.

Verse 4, this is God's first try was Jonah. Look at verse 4. So Yahweh replied, you knew that straight up, ask a question, let's talk about this, Jonah. Sounds like a therapist, "Is it right for you to be angry, Jonah? I mean, you're angry at me showing grace to the Ninevites, I mean, is that legitimate, Jonah?" And what was Jonah's response? Just stonewall. He just ignored them. That's what he does, right? Jonah went out of the city and he sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a little shelter, a little tent, and he sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. So first of all, he just ignores God altogether, which is not the first time in the story he's done that, right? So this clearly just didn't work. God's like, "Let's engage about this Jonah, is this legitimate that you're angry?"

He's just like, "I don't want to talk about it," and he leaves.

And so he goes outside the city and he makes this shelter which means he plans on being there for a while, and he's waiting to see what's going to happen to the city. Now what is this about? What do you think he thinks is going to happen to

the city? Does it sound good? What do we know for sure he wants to happen to the city? So he wants fire from heaven or something. That's what he wants. And this just raises for us his five-word sermon, I told you this would come back, there's more to it. there's a lot more to it. He's angry for many reasons. Not just because God's gracious, but because God's played a trick on him. He's played a really, really brilliant trick on him. Go back to chapter 3. Do you remember this five-word sermon? What was his five-word sermon in Nineveh? Look at Chapter 3:4.

He went to a day's journey in the city proclaiming, "Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

That's it. He tried to raise it last time, like this is very odd. Because we know that he was commissioned to preach against the wickedness of the city, and what does he not mention at all? Anything about the city's wickedness or what they're doing wrong. He's sent to tell them why, you know, prophets usually explain why this is happening, like there's no reason he doesn't give any reasons why. And who does he not mention at all? He doesn't even mention Yahweh, the God that he's supposed to be representing.

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So this is very strange. This is very strange. And it gets even better. I didn't tell you last week because I want to save it for the final week of the series. This is the best part of the book; this is absolutely brilliant. And kids would never get this. Kids would never get this. Okay.

The last word of Jonah, "Some of you have forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" in NIV, what others have you have? Overturned, some of you? Any others? Overturned or overthrown. Is that what we got in the room? That's great. Those are two standard translations. Okay. Here's what's great. So this is Hebrew geekiness. So forty days and Nineveh will be haphak. Say it with me, haphak. Now this is great. Many words in English have a basic meaning and then depending on the context you used it in, can have different nuances or something. So you could say like I destroyed my car and that would be the physical destruction of my car. But you could also say like, I destroyed the world record for how many redheads are gathered in one place got destroyed here in Portland a few weeks ago. Did you see this? New world record for a number of redheads in one place, Pioneer

square just two weeks ago. Anyway, so the world record was destroyed which is—is that a bad thing? No that's awesome. That's really cool that that happened. And so it's the same word, but with a different nuance. So this is language. Language works like this all the time. Same with haphak. So the basic meaning of haphak is just to turn something over. You just turn it over. So for example, the Prophet Hoseah in the metaphor, he describes Israel like a piece of baked bread that has not been haphak. No word is ruined. You just got to bake both sides of the bread, but if one side too long, oh, that's ruined. You throw it out, right? That's Hosea, he's very clever metaphor actually. So it's just basic meaning, to turn over.

Now if you take a city that's really bad and it gets haphak, you get a very—you can understand like really negative sense of haphaks. So for example, in Lamentations, the sin of my people is greater than that of Sodom. You know, Sodom, arch type of human. Evil in the Bible and Sodom was haphaked in the moment without a hand to help. So this is an overturning that's clearly negative, like destroyed or overturned or something like that. But, haphaked can also mean something turned over from bad into good. Something from good into bad or bad into worse or something from good into bad like in chapter 30. God you have haphak my grief and mourning into dancing. You've removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. So it can be something as bad, it's transformed into something good.

Now here's what so brilliant. Which meaning do you think Jonah intends as he walks around Nineveh yelling his five-word sermon? Which meaning do you think he intends? Clearly number 2. Which meaning do you think God intends, and of course, which actually happened? Come on. That's funny. Does Jonah think it's funny? No, he's ticked. Right? He's ticked. So God won't let Jonah get away with anything in this book, right? He tries to run away, yet that didn't work. So he tried, maybe I'll just go to Nineveh and engage in what I call, prophetic sabotage. Give them as little information as possible, so it ensures that they're going to get fired from heaven. And now even that doesn't work. God uses words against him, right? Just like Jonah uses his words against me. It's brilliant. This is a brilliantly told story. And so of course he's livid with anger. Because God has used even what he intended for evil to turn into good, to bring people into repentance, and to find grace in life. He is ticked off. And you might, I don't know, you may be ticked off too. I don't know if it's justified, really.

Clearly somehow, he's hoping, he's going outside of the city. He's going to wait out this forty days and like they will repent of their repentance. He's hoping

something, a horrible moment, meteorite coming from the sky or something. So he's out there just doing. He's ticked. God is going to engage him another time. The direct question and reasoning that didn't work.

"Is it right for you to be angry, Jonah about me showing grace?"

Stonewall. He gets the hand. So He tries a different technique, the small plant tactic. Verse 6. This is such a good part of the story. So Yahweh God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. This is the only time in the whole story that he is happy. Oh should—I didn't mention this before; I'll mention it now. I've heard some very creative misinterpretations of the leafy plant that brings ease from his discomfort, right? So anyway, don't go there. You're trying, making the Bible become your pet when you do that, right. That's what you're doing. So don't go there. But nobody knows what the leafy plant is. People think it's a gourd or a castor oil plant. I'm dead serious that I've had someone use this verse to try and show that to me. Anyway, it doesn't matter what the plant is except for that kind of plant. That's clearly out of the question. But whatever the plant is, the point is, it's just something that provides shade. It's the only point of the leafy plant. So keep going.

[25:00]

He wants to die, "Argh, I'm angry. I want to die." Now he's very, very happy. But at dawn the next day, God provided a little worm. God provides a huge storm, a huge fish, a medium sized leafy plant, and then a tiny worm. This is like the whole spectrum in the story. The teeny little worm, and it chewed at the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed down on Jonah's head and he grew faint. He wanted to die, and he said, "Oh, it will be better for me to die than to live."

"Wait, I thought you were just happy."

He's like, "No, I want to die."

"No, I'm very happy."

"No, I want to die."

This is so comic. You guys get the comic feel of the story here. This is another way that's expressed in the story-telling and probably this is the way I filter reality now. The moment I read the story, I think of my two-year old son and the grocery store check-out aisle. Anybody? Did you know or maybe you've seen someone else's two-year old in the grocery store check-out aisle? Holy cow. So I am convinced that people who designed modern grocery store check-out aisles have as their goal to make parents of little kids miserable. I mean it's the worst. It's always bad. It's never good. It's never good here. Especially for little boys because what are my options? On the left, I have all these glossy magazine covers of women scantily clad. So I'm directing his attention this way, clearly. But one of my making him look at over here, just a wall of sugar. So he's stoked on this gold mine of Butterfingers or whatever, and so on. What are my options? He might be in his cart, but he's two now, so his arms are log and he can grab some mints or gum or something. He's really happy, "Oh my gosh. It's the best day ever." I have to take it away from him and puddle on the floor, and he's driving in my arms as we leave, and as he screams, and so on. So I'm just like, "I can't win. I can't win." It's a long day aggression. In my head as I read this because he's like, "Oh I'd rather die than live with a God like You. Open this plant."

"Oh my gosh, it's the best thing ever."

"Oh, I want to die again."

So here we go. This is crazy and we're like this is so strange. What is this story about? Here's what it's about, verse 9. God said to Jonah, and He just repeats his question again but with a little twist. God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plan?" So he couldn't get Jonah to own up to this question of, "Is your anger not showing grace to your enemies? Is that legitimate?" Jonah just gave him the hand. So try this small plant tactic.

"Is your anger unto death about a plant legitimate?"

That's good. Good question. This should shake him out of his irrationality, right? And what is his response?

"Of course it's right for me to be angry. I'm so angry, I wish I were dead."

And you're just like, "Whoa, he's beyond reason, like clearly at this point, he's a goner." But God doesn't give up because He's gracious, He's compassionate, He's slow to anger, abound in love and kindness, He's committed to Jonah. He's going to work this out. So the Lord said again, this is the time. The Lord said, "Listen Jonah, you've been concerned about this plant." Some of your translations might

have shown pity on this plant, you've had shown compassion on this plant. The whole point is, you've had all this extreme emotion. Very happy, very sad, about this plant. And listen, Jonah, you didn't care for the plant. I mean, you didn't even make it grown. You can't claim to have an emotional attachment to the plant because it came up overnight, it hasn't even been in your life for very long. So let's just say, Jonah, that your emotion for this plant is legitimate."

Verse 11, "Shouldn't I be able to have that kind of same strong emotion, and concern for something a little more significant? Like, a huge city full of human beings, like Nineveh in which there are more than 120,000 who can't tell their right hand from their left. And also many animals." The end. So the Bible's so strange, you guys. The Bible is so strange. This is such a great story. What on earth is that?

So first of all, if this story were left like, how does Jonah response, and what does that mean, they don't know the right hand from the left? This is so brilliant what God's doing. So he tried first to expose how foolish it is that Jonah's angry at showing grace to the Ninevites, that didn't work. So He says, "Let's get Jonah's anger another way and try and help him understand how ridiculous it is. Let's do this whole thing with the plant," and so He's super stoked on the plant, "And let's expose his anger about the plant. Is your anger legitimate?" And that didn't work at all either. And so now He's trying a different tactic. God's not going to try to expose his anger. He recognizes Jonah's stoked on something. For the first time in the whole story, he's happy, and he cares about something other than himself.

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Do you see this? And granted, something that's provided comfort for him. But this is the first time there's a little corner of his heart that cares about something other than himself. And God's like, "We can work with that." So God's gracious and accommodating, and He says, "Okay. You've got a soft spot in your heart of emotion and care for this little plant. For this little plant. Now let's just grant you the legitimacy of that strong, emotional attachment you have with the plant, Jonah, and we're all laughing at you. You're quite ridiculous right now. But I'll just give that to you. That's a good thing you should be concerned about something other than yourself. Good for you, Jonah. Let me just compare that, wouldn't it be okay—is it okay with you Jonah if I were to have a strong and emotional concern

about something other than myself? And that concern is quite similar to yours, maybe something more significant, you might grant me like, the lives of thousands upon thousands of human beings who are made in my image.”

And not only that, look at the description of this 120,000 human beings. What does it say? It’s very interesting. What does it say about the Ninevites? They can’t tell their right hand from their left. I always think of 1990 or something, Kevin Nealon, Saturday Night Live, Mr. No Depth Perception. Remember that one? It wasn’t his best known on the skit. It’s pretty funny. You can Google it. It’s not like he was walking into walls all the time or something, I don’t know. And so, they don’t know their right hand from their left. It’s clearly a little Hebrew turn of phrase or something like that. It can’t mean they don’t know right from wrong at all because God clearly expects them to know right from wrong. He brought a word of judgment from their behavior, and they responded because He knew that they should know better. So it doesn’t mean they don’t know what’s right from wrong. It seems to be this idiom that they’re misguided like the human beings, we have some intuition, morally or spiritually the way that we should go, but we should go right, but we constantly go left, right? We should be going left, but we constantly don’t know which way to go. We’re lost and misguided morally and spiritually. And this is a common description of human beings in the Bible. Usually it’s connected with sheep. Stupid sheep that go astray. This is that idea here. Now God’s not excusing the Ninevites, He’s not saying, “Oh, they didn’t know better. That’s why they just happen to slaughter thousands of people.” They’re very accountable for their behavior, but they’re lost and misguided, that’s where their injustice comes from.

And He says, “Listen Jonah. You are all worked up about your little deal, and your little plant, and good for you. That’s great. But can’t you see that I might just happen to be concerned about something more significant like thousands of human beings and also their pets?” They’re animals, right? And you’re supposed to laugh just like you did at the end. You’re supposed to laugh because what did the cows do in chapter 3? They repented and sackcloth and ashes too. So God spares them as well. And so the last word of the book is animals, cows, literally, it’s cows, and all their cows. What is Jonah therefor doing to us? We’re like, “How does Jonah respond?” Well what did he say? I want to know what he said. But that’s to miss the point of the whole book because this story was never about Jonah in the first place, was it?

Who was this book actually about? It’s about you. And the real question is how this story is a word from God to His people. And the real question we should be

asking is, "How am I living the response to God's question?" Because that's what's happening right here. Jonah is this ridiculous caricature of people who grasp the scandal of God's grace and that God loves your enemy as much as He loves you. And when that sinks in, especially when you have a fresh wound from an enemy, and you're struggling with issues of forgiveness. All this chapter packs a punch, a strong, strong punch.

And here's what God is trying to do. He's trying to get Jonah out of himself, and just say—Jonah clearly thinks the Ninevites are the worst, wretched centers of the planet. But of course, in the story of Jonah, who's the most hard-hearted person in the story? It's Jonah. And so God is gently trying to get him to see, "Jonah, don't you see what's happening here? Yeah, you're a part of the covenant people and that's cool, but that doesn't for a second excuse your religious hypocrisy superiority. You're just as broken, and lost, and misguided as they are, Jonah. Don't you see that? Shouldn't I be concerned about them and their animals?" And there you go, there you go.

And so really where this takes us is the fact that God loves your enemy. And some of us might here that, and we might think, Okay, I think I could swallow that. I think I could deal with the fact that God loves my enemy. I am not at all sure what I think about the fact that He might want me too as well. So I'm cool.

[35:00]

If God loves my enemy and forgives my enemy, I sure hope He doesn't expect me to try to do that. And this is crazy. Because this is one of the most, like, fundamental core issues of the story of the Gospel. Forgiveness of one's enemies. That's what God is doing for us at the cross. Jesus talks about these kinds of stuff all the time. This is what Jonah 4 is about. Jesus put it this way. He said, "But I tell you who hear me, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.'"

And I think even as Christians, we respond to some of these teachings of Jesus in a bizarre way. Sometimes we're just like, "What?" Some of us were just kind of like that's noble and very admirable, Jesus. But I'm just going to straight up, not going to do that. If you look at how we live, we're just like, "No, Jesus. I'm not going to do that. You're crazy if you think that's how it's supposed to go." And this was his whole announcement of the Kingdom of God. It's that in Him, a

whole new way of living in God's world has arrived where though Him, people are reconciled to God. Where people who had made ourselves enemies of God through our self-absorption and selfishness and thinking that we're the star of the show and God's the bit player of my story along with everybody else, right. And so we go through life with that. And some of us make more of our lives and do a train wreck than others, but we all do it in different way. And some of us make our lives a train wreck of course, by actually not doing very what's wrong with other people, but feeling quite proud about ourselves for not doing very much wrong to other people, which in God's eyes is just as equally horrible way of being a human being. That is religious pride.

And so we all do this. And we're all participants in it. And we hear words like this, and we're just like, "Jesus, you clearly didn't have your coffee that morning. Like He's not thinking straight." The world doesn't work like that. And Jesus is like, "Actually, you all are the ones who have it upside-down." This is how God made us to live. Fully reconciled to God and to other people. And of course, none of us have to like, try and do this on our own. We do this simply because God is like that already gracious, and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, who loves to relent from sending calamity. An example number A. You and Me. And so the book ends like with God inviting Jonah, like Jonah, you have no high ground to stand on to start declaring who gets God's grace, and who doesn't. We've all made ourselves enemies of God. Some of us are quite blind to that fact, and others of us have started to wake up to that fact. And that he's moved towards me and grace. And this is not right, I'm not tending as your pastor. I recognize there are stories of real pain and hurt, and real wounds from other people in the room right now.

If there is one place in the world where the train and spiral of human wronging each other, and responding that wrong with other wrongs, just spirals into the mess the world is. There's one place that it stops. It stops at the cross. And the community of people that form around the cross are called to live differently. Not because we think we're better, but because we have been shown grace and compassion. We have been treated not by God who's slow to anger, who's abounding in love and kindness towards us. And so what Jonah chapter 4 is doing, what Jesus often did in His teachings is deconstructing the whole idea of what an enemy is. And so you can see it clearly what happens in Jonah's mind.

The Ninevites have been clearly stereotyped and demonized in his thinking. He's thinks they're the bad guys. They have very soft hearts and turned to God immediately. He's the bad guy, but he can't even see that. And so this is what

happens to us with our enemies. And enemy is someone who in this case, like Jonah, a group of people or individual, somebody who's wronged you, somebody who's wronged somebody you care about or we can probably broaden it, like someone who's just really difficult for you to be around, annoying or toxic personality. And you just can't deal with them. And that's okay. Like it's totally okay to struggle, like to be around certain people. The issue is, what do you do with the repulsion and those emotions? And what most of us tend to do is we tend to fixate on the thing that they did to me. And so we take this complex human person who has a family of origins, crazy story, and probably people that they've wronged and other people who have wronged them. Not to excuse what they've done, but just saying, they have a story.

People don't just behave in screwed up ways for no reason. We have all those stories behind the ways that we act. And so this person came into my life and this happened, and this is what they did. But what we tend to do as you replay the movie a million times in your head as you stare at your ceiling at night, is you tend to reduce their complex humanity down to the thing that they did to you. And so maybe, you know, someone lied about you or something.

[40:00]

And slowly they become the person who told a lie to me, then they become a liar. And then the movie in your head have a fork and tongue or something like that. We begin to reduce down their humanity to that trait that's annoying to us or the thing that they did to us.

And then, of course we are the ones who are wronged by them, we tend to paint ourselves as the opposite of them. And then you end up as Jonah Chapter 4. He's so blind to the fact that the line of good and evil goes right down the middle of him, that he thinks everyone else is the problem, and they're just like, "Come on." And so what God is trying to do, and what Jesus did all the time is that He deconstructs the whole concept of enemy. And He just says, "Listen, we are all contributors to why this world is the way that it is." Of course, some people are screwed up in more ways than others, but the line of good and evil goes through each and every one of us. We have all made ourselves enemies of God. That's the point of the cross. And as the saying goes, "The ground is level right there before the cross." Every human being receives grace and mercy and I do not get like

prerogative to stand up before the cross and to say, "I totally—Okay, thank you. Totally stoked on that, Jesus. That person totally—not them. Are you kidding me, them?" That's not how it works.

It's all or none. Like that's the whole point. And that's the point of the Gospel is that none of us get to declare that and simply God's gracious, liberal mercy. He's gracious, and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and kindness. And so how Jonah 4 ends, here's the punch, we'll conclude with this. Like who's this story really about? Is this really about God and Nineveh? No, this story is really about God and His own people. And He's trying to bring His own people around and open their eyes, open their hearts to how messed up they are, and how much they need His grace as anybody else. And so it's actually, God has intentionally brought Jonah into contact with his enemy, not by accident, but precisely because He wants to teach Jonah something.

And think about this, you guys. How many of you have a difficult person, an enemy, a toxic person in your life, and you think, I would be able to follow Jesus so awesome if that person had never crossed my path. My life would be so great without them. And Jonah 4 just flips out over and says, "Could it be that that person is in your life precisely as the divine invitation for you to grow and mature in your experience in God's grace?" Not just now in receiving it, but beginning to show it to someone else. Not just like mentally ascending to do it, but actually beginning to let it flow through you. Could it be that this is actually the next step of growth for you?

And this is that a theologian named Walter Wink, close with this idea, calls this, The Gift of the Enemy. And he puts it brilliantly, here. He says it this way, he says, "This is a gift that our enemy may be able to bring us to see aspects of ourselves that we cannot discover any other way than through our enemies. Our friends seldom show us our flaws. They're our friends precisely because they are able to overlook or ignore those parts of us. The enemy is therefore not just our hurdle to be leaped over on the way to God. Our enemy might actually be the way to God. We cannot come to terms with our own inner shadows except through our enemies. We have almost no other access to those unacceptable parts to ourselves that need redeeming except through the mirror our enemies hold up to us." He recommends this little exercise, and I commend it to you. He says, this week at some point, you know, in response to this sit down to Jonah 4 in a blank sheet of paper, get the person in your mind, that your enemy and write down every character trait about them that you hate. Like just get it all out there and somebody like that sounds like, go all out of fun. I like that idea. So just like,

they're selfish, they're careless, and they're greedy, and they don't care about other people, and so. So just get it all out there. And then he says, so finish and stop, then pray and recognize during God's presence and then just line by each, go through each thing that you wrote down, and just ask yourself, have I ever displayed the same kind of behavior. And then it's just a matter where you're going to be like Jonah or not. Oh I've never been selfish before; I've never been careless about the needs of other people. It's like, really?

The first step towards enemy love is recognizing the common humanity, the common brokenness that we all share. This is clearly where God is leading Jonah. Don't you see, Jonah? Shouldn't I care about people who are misguided? The Ninevites maybe you too, Jonah? Could it be that this person is in your life precisely because God's inviting you into a deeper experience of His grace for you, could it be?

[55:00]

I hope that was helpful for you, but also stimulating, thought provoking, kept you thinking about your own life and your own enemies that you need to reconcile with. Hey, and also thanks. This is the conclusion of the first, like series we did at Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast. We're going to have a lot more episodes up, and so thanks again for listening. If this series has been helpful for you and you think other people might find this podcast helpful, you can help me by sharing it with other people or going to iTunes and giving it a review.

But you guys, the Bible is huge and wonderful and strange. And there's a lot more to explore. So I'm excited to more of that in the future.

[End of transcription 46:18]