

“Confronting our Moaning” Texts: Jonah 3:10-4:11 Cf. Genesis 12:2-3; Isaiah 49:6; Romans 5:8; James 2:13 Series: “Living the Jesus-Way in this Mosaic” Pastor Dave Sattler January 27, 2019

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: James Bruckner, Peter Williams, & Kevin Youngblood. Books: “From Every Tribe And Nation” by Mark Noll (c.2014), “Prodigal Prophet” by Tim Keller (c.2018), “Jonah the Moaner” by Nick Page (c.2006), “Missions Messages” by A.B. Simpson (c.2001). Online: hillsong.com. Wikipedia: Mosul, Iraq. Songs: “What a Beautiful Name” by Ben Fielding & Brooke Ligertwood.

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I. Introduction & Review:

- <Slide> Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC, today finishing off our Preaching Series for Missions Month 2019.
- Our city is becoming increasingly diverse in ... ethnicity, socio-economics, worldview, religious ideologies ... and I could go on. The world is right here in the neighbourhoods of North & West Vancouver!
- So, as Christ-followers, how do we live the Jesus-Way, in this mosaic? In our city, in our world ... how can we, with God’s help, adopt a mosaic-mentality, hearts truly open to all sorts of people all around us?
- <Slide> We’ve been journeying through the Book of Jonah, a true piece of literary genius. With lasting impact. History, biography, drama ... with steady doses of irony, humour, & ambiguity mixed in.
- But, for all its grand narrative, this is primarily a story in which **hearts are on display** — peoples’ hearts, a prophet’s heart, and, most prominently, God’s heart for all to see. Chiefly, Jonah spotlights for us the Christian God’s amazing love for, and desire for relationship, with all.
- <Slide> One author aptly titles his children’s book, “**Jonah the Moaner.**”
- And Jonah challenges our misguided views and exposes the dark prejudice often resident deep in the hearts of Christians.
- These miscreant attitudes fuel our moaning on topics, like, the objective ‘fairness’ of God’s mercy. Or, send us running in the opposite direction from God’s call to join in His mission to lost people.
- Worse, this kind of wrong thinking can even turn us inward and leave us sinking in a deadly pool of our own self-pity!
- <Slide> Please turn to Jonah 4, or look it up on p.754-55 in the blue Bibles in the seat-rack in front of you, or fire it up now on your electronic device.
- So far, we’ve witnessed the miraculous conversion of Gentile sailors, a number of robust interchanges between God and His disobedient prophet, and the shocking repentance of Israel’s archenemy.
- When called by God to go and preach to the evil Ninevites, Jonah bolts.
- And his running precipitates a series of unfortunate events, in which, God sends a violent storm, Jonah is tossed into the ocean, and is then swallowed up by a large sea creature.

- In that sweet place of contemplative retreat [3 days in the belly of a fish], Jonah appears to have a turn of heart. And he actually goes and does what God has asked: “preach” judgment to the great city of Nineveh (1:2).
- Surprisingly, the Ninevites “turn from their evil ways” (3:10) en masse.
- Even commit, ironically, to the Hebrew practice that symbolized repentance, all “cover themselves with sackcloth” (3:8) from the King down to the cattle!
- Then God relents, extending mercy on Nineveh (3:10). Which brings us back to Jonah, the man, and his story. On a human level, so relatable.

Jonah 3:10-4:11 (NIV) <Read>

10 When God saw what [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” 4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord 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 very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.” 10 But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

- <PRAY> ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. Open our hearts more to the Jesus-Way. We’re hungry to hear from You.’

II. Narrative Outline:

1. <Slide> Jonah Becomes Angry (4:1-4)

- When the great city turns to God, the great prophet turns away. Again.
- Having dealt with Nineveh’s evil, God now shifts to dealing with Jonah’s.
- Appears Jonah’s quickly forgotten God’s mercy in rescuing him from the bottom of the Mediterranean. His pride and prejudice surface again.
- But, this time, instead of running, [perhaps we have progress], the text says Jonah “prayed to the Lord” (2). Albeit, it’s an ‘I-told-You-so’ kind of prayer.
- And a brutally honest dialogue ensues.
- Which, in case you’re wondering, God is tough enough to handle.

- In v.2-3, Jonah's anger erupts like a preacher on a dark Monday morning after [I can relate] ...
 - Q: 'God, I know Who You! Gracious & compassionate, slow to anger. And it's not fair! To us 'good' people who deserve Your favour when others clearly do not! I knew this would happen and I don't like it! It's why I bolted for Tarshish. Don't You get it? What's wrong with You, God?!
- **<Slide>** APP — When there becomes a GAP in our lives ...
 - Between our **expectations and our reality**, we get agitated.
 - This sense, or feeling of anger, is not sin.
 - It's a natural reaction to human disappointment.
 - However, when we allow our anger to provoke our 'ramping up', or, fester into resentment, we have a problem.
 - Anger is generally fuelled by our attempts to 'play God,' by our desire to control — our lives, and, the lives of those around us.
 - When God, or other people, don't do what we want them to do, or, what we think they should do, it infuriates us. And we lash out.
 - Over the years my own manifest anger has hurt my closest loved ones; my outbursts have put barriers between me and God — and me and other people.
 - And I'm learning, with God's help, to deal with my anger.
 - Keep short accounts. Not sink into deep resentment. Express frustration in healthier ways. Starts by acknowledging I'm not in control [that's God's department]; there's stuff I don't know. And, by trusting God to level out my amped-up expectations, or, change them altogether.
- Anger burning hot, Jonah issues an ultimatum, "Lord, take away my life" (3).
- **<Slide>** BQ: **So, why's Jonah so angry?**
- Is he concerned about his reputation? Q: 'If I preach judgment, he thinks, then God better bring judgment on Nineveh. Or, I'll look bad.' Maybe.
- More likely, Jonah's angry because he categorically disagrees with God.
- One commentator says, Q: "It was as if [Jonah] felt it was up to him to save God from his ... folly." — WILLIAMS, p.100
- Jonah wants mercy for himself, but justice for everyone else!
- He fails to accept that His God, the One Who's shown him mercy, is also the God of the entire world. And Jonah doesn't want to share! But, that's not the way things works in God's economy. Yes, God did say to Israel,
 - Q: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you." But, the second part of that promise is often missed, "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." — cf. Genesis 12:2-3.

- o God says to His people, Q: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”
— cf. Isaiah 49:6.
- **<Slide>** Christ-followers throughout the ages have wrestled with this calling.
- Over 100 years ago, the founder of our movement, the Christian & Missionary Alliance, confronted this ...
 - o Q: “I cannot understand,” A.B. Simpson said, “How any man or woman can believe in the [Lord] ... and not be a missionary — or at least be committed to the work of missions — with every power of his or her being. There is no mockery more sad and inconsistent than for a believer to speak of the blessed hope with folded hands and selfish heart.” — A.B. SIMPSON, p.25-26
- Here’s the point: the people of God are blessed by God for one purpose: **to be a blessing to others for the glory of God.** This is our call.

2. **<Slide> God Provides an Object Lesson (4:5-8)**

- Jonah’s brooding drives him out “east of the city” (5).
- It’s his ‘Alamo-moment’, one last stand, hoping God will finally succumb to his wishes and destroy the evil city of Nineveh.
- Despite Jonah’s animosity, God still ministers tenderly to His angry prophet.
- Again God takes Jonah to His “School of Creation” using nonhuman creatures to give an object lesson, “God [provides] a leafy plant” ... for shade. And Jonah becomes “very happy” (6).
- Then, in another twist of irony, the next day, God performs on Jonah what Jonah wishes for Nineveh: the withdrawal of His mercy, “God [provides] a worm, which [chews] the plant (7).” Then, “the sun [rises], and [God provides] a scorching east wind.”
- Uncomfortable, his shade now gone, fickle Jonah wants again “to die” (8).
- This time he’s shutting down. Turned inward. Jonah wants out.
- **<Slide>** APP — We need to camp here just a moment ...
 - o Not to make light of it, but does the thought cross your mind that Jonah might be having a mental health episode here?
 - o His downward emotional spiral reminds just how hard life can be.
 - o How things on earth aren’t as straightforward as we’d like them to be. How our circumstances, are, sometimes very difficult to handle.
 - o Here’s what I know: isolation is not a friend of mental health.
 - o Again, not to be trite, but, if this is your struggle, I encourage you to open up about it. Looking to friends & family for support — health care professionals, the church; and, looking to Jesus, can provide a huge boost out of the dark spiral of mental health. I’ve seen it!

- **<Slide>** In his brand new book, Tim Keller writes:
 - Q: “Jonah runs and runs. But even though he uses multiple strategies, the Lord is always a step ahead. God varies his strategies too, and continually extends mercy to us in new ways, even though we neither understand nor deserve it.” – “*Prodigal Prophet*”, p.21
- So, what’s the point of God’s object lesson? Is He trying to expose how the prodigal prophet’s far more concerned about a withering plant to shade his head than he is about the spiritual needs of his fellow humans?
- Is God wanting to widen Jonah’s perspective?
- **<Slide>** APP — And sometimes this is how it is: our view of others ...
 - And their needs, is clouded — blinded even — by our own self-interest. We get caught up in the flurry of our busy-ness, our education-path, career-advancement, romances, successes — our own stuff — and fail to see the needs of people all around us.
 - **Life turns us inward.**
 - And that’s not pretty. When all we can ever think of is ourselves!
 - But the Jesus-Way turns this kind of thinking inside-out.
 - God is always outward focused. And I wonder ... why do I spend so much time navel-gazing — fixating on my own problems?
 - Funny, when I begin to see other people the way God sees them, put my own stuff on the back-burner, my life seems lighter ... and my problems even feel a little bit smaller.

3. **<Slide> God Asks Questions (4:9-11)**

- Like the sea in the ancient world, the desert symbolizes chaos and death.
- There Jonah sits outside the city baking in the hot desert sun.
- But, he can’t run from his problems. And he can never hide from God.
- God asks, “Is it right for you to be angry?” “[Oh] it is,” replies Jonah deep in his self-pity. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead” (9). Another death-wish.
- In v.10-11, God has the last word. And, it appears it’s a bit of a counter-rant.
 - Q: ‘Jonah, you think the stakes are high when I pull my mercy from you and your little plant [that you didn’t even water]? Think about the 120,000 lost people of Nineveh. And all those animals. And their need for My mercy. That’s more than a moaning prophet suffering from a little sunstroke! [Even tho’ I care about that too.]’
- And, strangely, and abruptly, the story concludes. Open-ended. Ambiguous.
- With God posing a question. And readers left to speculate. Does Jonah ever repent? And, the way I see it, here’s how the story ends. No, I’ll tell you later!
- Throughout the narrative, it’s notable how God just keeps coming back to His beleaguered prophet ... asking questions.

- Makes you wonder ... God's omniscient! He knows everything, right?!
- So, why's He asking questions when He already knows all the answers?!
- This is God's soft, patient way of exposing our inner motives, our double standards, helping us see for ourselves ... our wrong ways of thinking, our bad attitudes, the darkness in our own hearts.
- <Slide> Sometimes He comes to us directly. Often God uses other people.
- ILL — Years ago, a close friend lovingly confronted me ...
 - With a question. Q: 'Do you think it's okay that you come across differently when you're talking to people you don't have time for, or don't really like?' Wow! They were really onto me!
 - I thought no one noticed. And, truthfully this hurt a little, but, it also got my attention. Helped me identify and analyze some of the dark attitudes I was battling internally. Exposed my utilitarian ways of treating people. And, God's been working on me, from the inside out, since. And it's been good.

III. Application:

- Let's land the plane now with a few application points.
- A. <Slide> On ... **Our Black & White Thinking.**
 - God's exhibition of clemency towards the evil Ninevites, who are so lost, they can't "tell their right hand from their left" (11), challenges our sense of justice.
 - It's not fair that God forgives violently evil people. Smashes our common sense. Especially for those of us linear thinkers. God's love, in human terms, looks a bit foolish when His forgiveness is doled out so freely.
 - God's way is not the way we would do it if we were God. But, newsflash ... we're not God. Frustrating, I know. But that's a good thing.
 - ILL — So, is it ever right to wish on other people ...
 - The full consequences of their sinful actions?
 - Many of us grew up in church with teaching that suggested so.
 - When it came to associating with, or how to treat 'outsiders', one was taught to put on an air of smug, distant judgment — to 'look down our noses' at 'others' who swore, or smoked, or drank, or ...
 - <Slide> When Cf. James 2:13 calls the Church out:
 - Q: "Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.**"
 - APP — And, to live the Jesus-Way today, in this mosaic,
 - Situates us right in the middle of this unresolved struggle.
 - No, we mustn't cave and simply blend Christianity in with all the other religious ideologies, to keep the peace. That's how the Truth is lost. A watered-down message is no message at all. But we

mustn't escape to our own little comfortable Christian 'communes', either. That's how the merciful voice of Jesus is silenced in our city. A solid message with no audience is no message at all.

- o We must drop some of our black and white ways of thinking, the narrow-mindedness of our western world-view, and shed the narrow-heartedness of our legalism.
- o The Christian Story calls us to live, with God's help, in the great unresolved struggle between God's justice and God's mercy.
- o May **His mercy in us** triumph over judgment.

B. <Slide> On ... **People in Process.**

- Jonah stands as solid proof God that can use anybody. There are no perfect prophets or missionaries or pastors or Christians. Earth-shattering, isn't it?!
- APP — And I think about how we often we write ourselves 'out of the script!'
 - o Q: 'I'm not 'missionary material.' And we resist, justify, alibi, Q: 'Mission work is only for the 'big-shots' — the Gaileen Wardens, the Geff Haradas, the Kim Closes, the Ralph Shareskis! That's garbage!
 - o This is one of the ways the enemy keeps us on the sidelines and off the front-lines of the exciting mission of Jesus in the world.
- <Slide> As I mentioned a couple of weeks back, for some time now, NSAC Leadership has been praying for God to raise up the next generation of missionaries. For God to call ... new individuals, couples, families, second-career people ... from our church, to **GO** as missionaries to the "least-reached people groups" of our world.
- God's mission-call is daunting; it drags us far outside our comfort zones. To 'other' people, different from us — some we may not understand or even like, or ever choose to befriend. But, when we open our hearts and go, God is able to love and reach all sorts of people through us.
- And it's a beautiful adventure!
- <Slide> APP — People of NSAC, let us not get sucked into believing ...
 - o We have to 'have it all together' before God could ever use us.
 - o Do you know that God is the Master Multi-Tasker? It's often, when people, like us, still in process, step out on mission, that **God does His deepest work in us. While He's working through us!**
 - o All starts with taking that first step. Today, right where we find ourselves. Initiate a spiritual conversation with that skeptical family member. Bring a meal to a hurting neighbour. Invite a friend or co-worker to church. Or, make a bigger jump. Go on a missions trip. Enrol in biblical studies. Make a career change. Study a foreign culture. Move overseas.
 - o Let us not hesitate to obey God's call.

C. <Slide> On ... **God's Relentless Mercy.**

- Most scholars agree, only Jonah could have written this.
- In part, because, at that time, there was no Hebrew genre for this type of writing. Who would make themselves so vulnerable? And, why would someone who turned away from God never to return, ever take the time to write about it? Or, write about God's mercy extending to animals? C'mon, man, cows can't repent, can they?! Why would anyone write such nonsense?!
- Unless, their heart had turned.
- My theory? God's irony, God's humour, and God's relentless mercy, jostles Jonah, and ultimately, arrests him from his stupor.
- ILL — Deemed 'ridiculous' by other world religions ...
 - The Christian concept of mercy stands out.
 - Other faiths believe salvation is based solely on what one does.
 - One's entrance into paradise is determined via 'submission', or, one's 'good' outweighing one's 'bad.'
 - Problem is: these ways of thinking are derived from human ideas about the way the world should be and how God should judge.
- APP — The Christian Story is that, instead of us reaching up ...
 - To Him [impossible], God reaches down to us. Even at our worst.
 - <Slide> Cf. Romans 5:8 says, Q: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
 - Maybe today, you feel unworthy to even be in church.
 - Well, God loves the unworthy, the under-qualified, the angry, the imperfect — the sinner.
- ILL — When Ben Fielding and Brooke Ligertwood were writing ...
 - The song, "*What a Beautiful Name*", they had a vision.
 - Here it is, Q: "Perhaps we have never known [God] close and tender, as a friend acquainted with the depths of our humanity, knowing our flaws cannot perturb His love. Our prayer for this song is that we can all enter into a deeper, more lateral, revelation of the person of Jesus Christ — the epitome of beauty." — *hillsong.com*
 - <Slide> Q: "You didn't want heaven without us. So Jesus, You brought heaven down. My sin was great, Your love was greater. What could separate us now." — Ben Fielding, Brooke Ligertwood, c.2017
- The 'Sign of Jonah' is that **God always comes to us.**
- And He's done so in the Person of Jesus. People of NSAC, may we experience for ourselves, and, joyfully share with family, friends, & neighbours ... the beauty, the wonder, and the power only Jesus brings. Amen.