



God's Patience in Our Pettiness

Jonah 4:1-9 |

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RELATED SCRIPTURES

Matthew 20:1-15 | Romans 7:24-8:1

SUMMARY

"It was once the fashion in the Selesia and Bohemia of Eastern Europe to build pulpits in the shape of an upright whale. In order to take his place as a preacher, the pastor or priest had to enter the interior of the pulpit at the base, climb a ladder through the belly, and then come into the open mouth and deliver the sermon. I've always wanted a pulpit like that."

I came across this somewhat odd historical fact while reading Eugene Peterson's meditation on the story of Jonah ([and, yes, there are pictures](#)). There's something humorous, yet profound in the idea of sermons being delivered from the mouth of a whale. The preacher must be reminded of the central theme of Jonah each time he enters the pulpit: "Salvation belongs to the Lord." But also of Jonah's running, Jonah's stubbornness, his eagerness to preach divine wrath instead of delighting in divine mercy.

We all could use a climb through the belly of a whale each morning as we head out the front door, and as we return. Every day a reminder that God delights to show mercy to those who don't deserve it. How much different would our parenting become? How much more tender our conversations with spouses? How much more compassionate our treatment of and words with those on the other end of the political spectrum?

Or perhaps not? Jonah underwent that same journey and then found himself outside the city, popcorn popped, waiting to see some Sodom and Gomorrah style fire from heaven. Disappointed, he collapsed, and the Lord still made a plant to shade him in his misery.

We are such fickle Creatures aren't we? We experience once-and-for-all-time rescue through Christ, and yet we can't get over the way someone treated us. We watch for their downfall, hoping not to miss a moment of the action, and grow bitter when they don't receive their just desserts. God mercifully comes to us by his Spirit, who reminds us that we are Abba's child (Romans 8:15-17), but that's not good enough. The worm eats away at the peace and we find that we haven't escaped ourselves! Who will rescue us from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?

GROUP QUESTIONS

- From the sermon, or your direct reading of Jonah 4:1-9, share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you about how God's grace to Nineveh... to Jonah?
- Read Romans 7:25-8:1. How has God in Christ rescued of your (my) own pettiness?
- If there's one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of these portions of Scripture, what is that thing?