

When Anger Overcomes Mercy

Good morning Pleasant Hill! How was your week? I had a good week. We had a chance to meet Monday and plan our Easter Egg Hunt at Seipelt Elementary. I was excited to see so many people who were interested in taking a part in the event. Each community group will take part in the event from buying bicycles for door prizes to feeding the teachers and staff at the school all week.

I think we decided that the Fite Community will be providing breakfast for the teachers and staff on Monday April 15th, the Fite/Walker Community will be providing coffee, tea and snacks for the teachers and staff on April 16th, my community will be serving them lunch on April 17th and we are inviting the entire church to take part in buying the teachers and staff a personalized snack or small gift on Thursday before they leave for Easter.

I've sent a survey to the teachers at Seipelt Elementary so they can tell us what their favorite school friendly drink is, what their favorite salty snack is, what their favorite sweet snack is and I also asked them what is something small that we could provide for them or their classrooms that would make the end of their year brighter. Finally both the O'Bernier and Scott Communities will be buying bicycles to give as door prizes.

If you or your community would like to buy other door prizes or "lucky egg" prizes please feel free to do so. It would be great to have 4 or 5 bikes, a game system, gift cards, or whatever the Lord lays on your heart to bless someone else with. **We have capped the hunt to the first 500 kids who have registered for safety reasons.** Make sure your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers and colleagues know to register early so they don't miss out on a great Easter Egg Hunt and a chance to meet the Easter Bunny and get photos with him.

We're going to be wrapping up our study through the book of Jonah today by studying **Jonah chapter 4** in its entirety. If you have your Bible with you, go ahead and grab it and begin flipping to **Jonah chapter 4**. While you find it, I want to

briefly remind you of where we've come from in this study so that when we begin to examine our text today everyone will be caught up.

When we started our study in **Jonah chapter 1** we saw that God had commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, which is part of the Assyrian Empire, and give them an opportunity to repent of their sin before God brings judgement to them. To say that more accurately, **God told Jonah to go tell the Ninevites to repent SO THAT he would not have to destroy them.**

That didn't really sit well with Jonah because he was no fan of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were brutal to the Israelites. They enslaved them. They robbed them. They tormented the Israelites. **The last thing Jonah wanted was to play any part in God offering mercy and redemption to group of people who showed no mercy to him or his people so Jonah said no to God and ran.**

He didn't just say no to this opportunity to go to Nineveh, quite literally he tried to disown God and hide from him. When Jonah go on the boat in Joppa to go to Tarshish he was trying to start a new life away from God.

I think many of us can identify with that, I know I can. When God pushes on the right button inside of our hearts and convicts us about our nature and instead of falling on our faces and repenting and asking for strength to change our hearts we tell God, **"That's enough! If that's what it takes to show my love to you then we're through!"** Maybe we're not that dramatic, but we say that in our hearts. I know because we like to run and hide form Him. **We avoid church and community groups like the plague. We stop reading the Bible. We stop thinking about living holy lives and we stop praying. The last thing we want is to hear from God when we don't like what He has to say. So we, like Jonah, run.**

And **God**, as is His nature when His children are disobedient and we run from try to run from Him **chases us down, chastises us and drives out of us the disobedient heart that caused us to want to run in the first place.**

God does this in so many ways. Sometimes it's by losing our health, sometimes it's by someone we love facing hard times or tragedy, sometimes it hits our bank accounts, or sometimes it even comes as God sent the storm to Jonah with our entire lives being thrown into chaos at once.

One thing's for certain, when God sends the storm, the storm is unrelenting until God's will is done. Jonah felt that as he was thrown overboard by the men on the ship at his request so that he could just die instead of being obedient. But something strange happened at the bottom of the ocean. As the waves stopped beating at the surface of the ocean, God got down deep into the heart of Jonah and Jonah repented of his disobedience and God forgave him.

God had mercy on Jonah at the depths of his disobedience and Jonah repented. This is so important for everyone to hear. We're going to spend a lot of time talking about it that morning.

When you and I are at the deepest, darkest places in rebellion from God and we realize that we need mercy and grace to restore our relationship with the Father we can have confidence that the Father hears us and desires to give it to us. We need to always remember that all of us need mercy and grace because all of us are broken and sinful. If we can remember that when we see others who are in need of mercy and grace in spite of their wicked actions then we will have learned a lot about what God wants us to see in the story of Jonah.

Jonah goes to Nineveh smelling like a fish burp, preaches a five word sermon and God saved a city and Jonah's not happy about it. That's where we will pick up today. I hope you've had a chance to find our passage in **Jonah chapter 4**. If you haven't found it yet that's okay, any text I read from the Bible will be on the screen behind me.

Jonah chapter 4 reads, "**1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

5 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. 6 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. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 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." 9 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." 10 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 a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that 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?"

May God bless the reading of His word. Will you pray with me? Amen.

What makes you mad? Take a moment and reflect with me. I mean, what really gets you going? Is it when your kids don't do what you told them to do? Is it driving on 275 and someone won't get out of your way so you can pass? I mean, COME ONE PEOPLE the left lane is for passing, the right one is for driving. If you aren't passing someone then GET OVER! Am I right? Maybe your spouse gets you going because no matter how many times you asked them nicely, reminded them and nagged them they just won't remember to do whatever it is that you asked them to do. Maybe it's your boss or your coworkers who light you up.

Whatever or whoever it is that really pushes your buttons have you ever stopped to think about the underlying cause of your anger? Look, some anger is righteous and justified. Jesus was angry and didn't sin when He ran the

money changers out of the temple with a whip for trying to make the temple a marketplace. I'd be willing to bet next week's paycheck with any of you in this room that most of the time your anger isn't righteous or justified. **I'd bet that your anger rests in your own self-righteousness and your own system of justice.**

When you and I are angry and we begin to dig into the "whys" behind our anger we will almost always conclude it's because someone did something that you don't think is right and they need to be punished for it.

Guy won't get over in traffic, you yell because he needs to know what an idiot or whatever four letter word exits your lips at that moment, even though he can't hear you. Your family can hear you, but that guy can't.

Your kids didn't do what you told them to and you lose it? Why? Because they need to be punished for disrespecting you. Mercy and grace is scarce in our anger most of the time. **I lost it on Spencer a couple of weeks ago for having 20-30 empty soda and water bottles in his bedroom.** Why? Because he knows the house rule of not bringing food or drinks into the bedroom. I'm pretty sure that's one of the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mt. Sainai, or at least it's etched in stone in my heart. So I lost it on him and I sinned. I didn't show any mercy or grace to him. I screamed at him, I grabbed him, I even pushed him. I lost it. **In my eyes Spencer only deserved my wrath at that moment, not grace.**

When the moment had passed and I saw the aftermath of my actions I was filled with sorrow, regret and shame. Anger is so explosive and destructive. It can get out of control much more quickly than we can get it back under control.

That's where Jonah is as we begin looking at our text today. Look at **Jonah chapter 4 verses 1 through 3**. It reads, ***"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

What is the "it" that displeased Jonah and made him exceedingly angry? The "it" for Jonah was watching the people of Nineveh and their wicked king repent. It made him furious because in Jonah's eyes the Ninevites deserved judgement, not mercy and grace.

We forget so quickly that we were once like the Ninevites living unrepentant sinful lives, facing the wrath of God, but God in his mercy offered us grace. Whatever the "it" is for you that causes you to refuse forgiveness, mercy and grace to someone you know, please know that God loves them as He loves you.

I encourage you to reflect on your anger and dig deeply inside of you to see where you are withholding mercy, grace and forgiveness before you end up like Jonah wishing for death instead of mercy.

Let's keep going. Look with me at **Jonah chapter 4 verse 4**, it reads "*And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"*"

Let me give you the Jeff Smith annotated translation to this conversation between God and Jonah. "God, I'm mad at you. I hate that you made me do this. I hate them and I don't understand why you would offer them mercy. I'm so mad I want to die!" **Without missing a beat God looks at Jonah and says, "How's that working out for you?"**

When you hold a grudge at whatever or whoever you are angry with, how's that working out for you? Have you lost friends, family workers and jobs because of it? People are going to do what they are going to do and you have absolutely no control over their choices or actions. You can choose how you will let it affect you and your life. **To put it bluntly, how has your anger made your life better?**

Look, you and I have to come to terms with a truth that is interwoven throughout the entire book of Jonah. God is sovereign. **Have you ever stop to think why God would choose Jonah to be the messenger to the Ninevites? I mean surely in all of Israel there was someone who didn't have this disdain and hatred for the Ninevites or at least not to the degree of Jonah.** You follow me?

So if God could have chosen someone else to go, why didn't He? God didn't because he loved Jonah too much to let him soak in anger and hatred of a people who he deemed were unredeemable.

So God told Jonah to deliver a message that He knew he wouldn't deliver,

so that God could bring the storm in Jonah's life that He couldn't outrun,

so that God could bring Jonah to rock bottom and repentance

so that God could deliver a message of forgiveness to a people that Jonah didn't want forgiven

so that God could get to the heart of the matter with Jonah.

God is sovereign and He ordains all things in our lives, both what we see as good and bad, for our good.

Paul knew that. It's why he wrote "**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**" in **Romans 8:28**. Joseph knew it too. That's why he could confidently say to the very brothers that left him for dead and then sold him into slavery "**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**".

God is sovereign over every single aspect of our lives, both the good and the bad, and he loves us too much to allow sinful hearts to rule over us. He requires us to be holy as He is holy. **The book of Jonah was about more than God's mercy and**

grace to a people who were His enemies. The story of Jonah is about God's continued mercy and grace towards those who He calls sons and daughters. He loves us too much to leave us like we are.

Let's keep going. **Jonah's just not getting it. He's still actively rooting against mercy and grace.** Even though he preached his five word sermon and people were repenting, somewhere down deep in his heart **he was still praying that God would relent on relenting and destroy Nineveh.** He wanted a front row seat if that was going to happen.

Look at **Jonah chapter 4 verse 5** *"5 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."*

He goes into the desert, builds a booth. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert with Moses this was a very common thing. The Israelites would build a booth to avoid the heat of the day. In today's world he would have grabbed his camping chair, a cold ice tea and turned towards the city like he's waiting for a fireworks show.

Let's keep going. **Jonah chapter 4 verses 6 through 8** read, *"6 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. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.8 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."*

God is not finished with Jonah. This is so striking to me. **If the purpose of the book was to offer mercy and grace to Nineveh if they repented and they repented, why wouldn't the book just end? It's because this book isn't about the Ninevites it's about Jonah.**

I know we like to think it's about God's redemptive plan for a wicked city and about how God's grace can cover the sins of the lost because it's amazing that God used a 5 word sermon from a man who smelled like a fish burp and hated the people whom he was preaching to to save an entire city. But don't get lost here. Stay with me. **The story of Jonah is about Jonah, not Nineveh.**

I find it fascinating that the people who hated God repented and changed when they heard from God, but the man who loved God and had served him for years wasn't getting the message. So God, being a long suffering, patient Father, continues to teach His son.

I'm so very thankful that God is a loving and patient Father. I wish I were a loving a patient Father. I often set such a bad example for my boys when it comes to being loving a patient. It feels like every single time I have the opportunity to be loving, long suffering and patient with my boys I become Jonah. I want to be like my Father in Heaven but something in me drives me towards self-righteous anger demanding satisfaction and wrath.

Even though Jonah was angry with God and even though in his heart he wished for judgement and punishment for the Ninevites, God shows him mercy and grace by providing a plant for shade. God didn't wait for Jonah to go home to care for him. God cared for him in his sinful heart because Jonah is still his child. And Jonah was glad for the mercy from God.

You'd think that something would click in his head wouldn't you? You'd think that something inside of him would say, "Wait a minute. I see what God is doing here. He's showing me that way down deep in my heart, I am just like the Ninevites. I am in need of mercy and grace in my disobedience like they are."

But nothing clicks in his head or his heart so God sends a worm to eat the plant and then God sends an unrelenting heat making Jonah wish for death once again. We're back at the bottom of the ocean again, am I right? Think about it, we are back on

the boat wishing for death because we won't simply repent of the sin that has hold of our hearts.

Let me say this again, God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. I've heard it said more times than I can count that the very definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different outcome. Although, I don't really think that's the clinical definition of insanity, it does make sense to me.

No matter how many times Jonah tries to change God, God doesn't change. No matter how many times we plead to God to change to be like us, God doesn't change. No matter how many tantrums we throw, God is a loving patient Father who desires for us to be in alignment with His will and He will not leave us alone until we are.

So after Jonah's temper tantrum and again asking to die. God looks at Jonah and asks the same question he asked before in **verse 9**, "*Do you do well to be angry for the plant?*". **What part of our anger changes our circumstances when God is sovereign?** No matter what you are angry about, God's will **will** be done.

God finally lays it all out for him. Let's conclude our time together by looking at **Jonah chapter 4 verses 10 and 11**. It reads, "*10 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 a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that 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?"*"

Jonah's is so self-centered that he refuses to see the truth that's God's has grace and mercy on whom He will. Jonah love Israel because they are his people, other people do not deserve the opportunity for mercy and grace. As long as the plant helped him, he appreciated it.

Jonah is like so many of us who have been believers for a long time or who were raised in church. We develop a self-centered worldview that limits our scope of vision so that we refuse to see that the world around us is just like us, except we've have received the grace and mercy of the Lord and they have not.

God sees value in all humanity because he created us. We need to open our eyes and see the whole wide world around us that we don't value. You can see when we don't value it because we will have no burden to reach it with the gospel. We are like Jonah and God is telling us, you don't value them but I do.

God says, "They are precious to me. Go, share the message of repentance, mercy, grace and hope with them." Look at your hearts and ask yourselves why aren't you burdened by people who need to hear the gospel?

Often times we look at people who are not like us and we exclude them from the gospel. We hate them because of their sexual immorality, we hate them because of their political affiliations, we hate them because they have wronged us or our family at some point. **In our anger and hatred we are Jonah wishing for judgement when God is calling us to go deliver the message of mercy and grace.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, God loves you too much to leave you like that. **Remember this story isn't just about the Ninevites, they heard the message and repented immediately. This message is about believers, it's about you and me, who in our self-righteousness would withhold from those we do not love, nor deem of worth, the very hope of mercy and grace.**

Sin is sin and anyone who is in sin needs to hear the message of hope that God sent to the Ninevites. Even those who are caught so deeply in sins that you find repulsive and offensive and you secretly or even openly pray for the day they will be judged by God. You've got your camping chair and glass of iced tea ready to watch as God gives them what they deserve.

I have to ask, how's that working out for you? Jesus command to Go wasn't just to those who were raised in church or who have your values. **Jesus command to go demands a humble heart who desires to do the will of our Father by going to our enemies and those who would do us harm and sharing with them with God's message of mercy and grace.**

If we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus, we need to go where Jesus would have gone and love others as Jesus loves us. We need to repent and seek to bring the light of Jesus the darkest parts of our hearts that we are hiding from Him so that we can live our lives for Him.

The saddest part of this book to me is the ending. We have no indication that Jonah repented and confessed the hatred and anger in his heart. **We see the book end with God asking Jonah a question and we don't see Jonah's answer.**

<The worship band should come to the stage>

We like to hope and believe that Jonah repented and confessed and lived his life differently showing the love, mercy and grace that God has shown to him. But we don't know for sure. That's where we are in this service today though isn't it?

There are those of us all over this room that God has just opened our eyes to sin that we've been hiding down deep inside of us that we won't let go of. We make excuses as to why we hold to them and maybe some of those excuses make sense to you.

God is closing this series and our service today by asking you the same question he asked Jonah. How's that working out for you?

Will you stop thinking only about your need for grace and mercy and begin seeing the world as He sees it with eternal value in the people that He created? Or will you keep holding on to your anger or whatever He's talking to you about instead of offering mercy, grace and love?

We are going to begin a time of response. We do this each week at this time as a way to offer each person a chance to respond to what God is saying to them.

<continue response time>

During this time in the service each week we also open the communion table for two reasons. First, if you are a member of this church or regular attender, we open it so that you can bring your tithes and offerings and place them in the plates.

We also open the communion table to anyone who is a member of the body of Christ regardless of where your membership is. Every Sunday as we gather together corporately we remember Christ's body which was broken for us and remember Christ's blood that was shed for our sins.

Anytime we take communion I like to read from **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** which reads, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." Would you stand and pray with me as we begin this time of response?