

Jonah 4:1-4 – Underserved Deliverance - Lesson Summary

I'm sure that at some point in our lives we've all gotten something good that we didn't deserve. Most of us would be excited. However, what about when good things happen to wicked people? We likely all struggle when undeserving people receive good things. As we consider the beginning of the final chapter of Jonah, we will see that Jonah struggles in the same way. Jonah struggles with undeserved deliverance.

In order to fully understand the book of Jonah it's important that we understand it's literary structure. God intentionally recorded it this way in order to highlight specific truths about Him. Throughout the book we see parallel situations. Chapters 1 and 3 deal with Jonah's encounter with God and his encounters with non Israelites. Chapters 2 and 4 include Jonah's prayers. In chapter 1, God's word comes to Jonah, he's given a specific message to deliver, and he responds to God's word. Based on Jonah's response, God sends a warning through a storm. Jonah must turn from running away from God. Chapter 3 follows a similar format. God's word comes to Jonah, he's given a specific message, and this time he responds by heading to Nineveh and speaking a word of warning to them. Nineveh must turn from their wickedness. In both chapters we see God provide deliverance to pagans, the sailors and wicked Nineveh. But, Jonah experiences deliverance as well.

Chapters 2 and 4 include Jonah's prayers. Both are responses to God's deliverance. Chapter 2 addresses Jonah's deliverance from death by God's provision of a great fish. Chapter 4 addresses Nineveh's deliverance through God's mercy and grace. However, both prayers reveal Jonah's personal struggles.

Jonah's prayers come directly from Scripture. His prayer in chapter 2 is a collection of Psalms while his prayer in chapter 4 is a direct quote from Ex. 34:6-7. Jonah knows God's Word. As a prophet, he's a good Jew and well versed in Scripture. Sadly, Jonah struggles to apply this word. You could say that Jonah has a correct theology, but his prayer in chapter 4 reveals his corrupt heart.

When God delivers Jonah, he rejoices, but when God delivers Nineveh he becomes exceedingly displeased, angry, and in such despair that he'd rather die. So, what happened? How can Jonah respond so differently to God's display of grace? Jonah's focused on the wrong things. He is looking outward rather than inward. Jonah judges the Ninevites and God, yet never himself. Jonah is not ok with God giving people what they don't deserve, yet, he fails to see that he receives what he doesn't deserve as well. In a display of God's grace, in the midst of all of this, God does not abandon Jonah.

In Jonah 4:4 we see God speak to Jonah once more. This time He addresses him with a question, "Do you do well to be angry?" God begins to expose Jonah's heart. The God who showed grace to the wicked is showing Jonah that He provides grace to the self-righteous as well. God provides Jonah correction. He offers Jonah an opportunity to be delivered spiritually. Do you believe that God does the same for you and I? Do you believe that in the midst of our open rebellion and self-righteousness, He offers us the same grace? We are all undeserving. Not one of us is worthy of our patient Savior's grace. We can't earn it. We can't demand it. And, we can't take it apart from God's compassionate love toward us. The study of Jonah has the potential to tempt us to consider Jonah in the way he considers Nineveh. We can judge his arrogance and stupidity, but are we all that different? We've all received undeserved deliverance through the grace of Christ. The book of Jonah should direct our eyes upward and outward and challenge us to live and love like Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How have you seen others be rewarded even when they don't deserve it? How has that made you feel? God's grace is the same for us. By grace we get forgiveness and newness of life even though we don't deserve it. How does that make you feel? Do you believe that's even possible?
- 2) The story of Jonah reminds us that God's love can be extended to the most wicked people as well as the most self-righteous people. Who are the people in your life that you find hard to love? How do you struggle with sins of the flesh and self-righteousness in your life?
- 3) God continues to show grace to Jonah in the midst of his stubbornness and pride. How does God's pursuit of Jonah encourage you? Do you believe that He does the same for you and I?