

Do You Do Well?

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Sean. That was very kind. It is always a blessing to be able to come down and preach here or just be with you all.

I can't begin to tell you how much joy it brings to me when, you know, the amount of times that Sean and I prayed at King of Grace for what I see now.

So it's an answer to prayer, right? This is a miracle. This is really amazing. And so I think sometimes, like, I don't even know you and I prayed for you. What a blessing, right?

I mean, yeah, I hope you all are as encouraged to be here on a Sunday as I am to stand here and look at and see you all on a Sunday. So, yes. All right. He wants me to move on, no doubt. So we're going to be preaching from Jonah today.

And we'll be reading, we'll start our reading, actually, in Jonah 3, 6, and we'll go to Jonah 4, 4.

[1 : 04] I'm only going to be preaching from Jonah 4, 1 through 4, but we're going to go ahead and, for context, pick it up a little earlier than that. If you're not familiar with where Jonah might be, it's after, for instance, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamenta, it's after all of those.

It's right after Obadiah, that one pager. And when you get to heaven, Obadiah is going to be there and he's going to say, did you read my book? Don't walk in the door and say, Obahu. All right. So make sure you read Obadiah's book, too.

All right. So just to give you some background, because we're going to drop it in kind of late into Jonah here. Jonah initially starts in chapter 1, where Jonah is being called by God to go to preach to the Ninevites.

That's a country, a city in the country of Assyria. They're the enemy of Israel, and Jonah has no interest in following God's words.

So in chapter 1, we see him, instead of going east to Nineveh, he goes west, about 5,000 kilometers. That's his goal, to a city called Tarshish, and he runs away in the other direction.

[2 : 20] That boat eventually, God brings a storm and causes the boat to flounder. The sailors are trying to keep the boat afloat.

Jonah says, I'm your problem here. Throw me overboard, and the seas will get quiet. They don't want to do that, but eventually they do. They throw him overboard. The seas quiet down, and chapter 1 ends with Jonah being swallowed by a fish.

Chapter 2, we have Jonah's little experience in the belly of the fish going down to the bottom of the ocean. And if you were to pick up in there, in the end of chapter 2 is Jonah's resolution to it.

It says, when my life was fainting away, I remember the Lord, and my prayer came upon you into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish and vomited Jonah out onto dry land.

[3 : 29] Now, just as a real caveat there to understanding that a little bit, Jonah is kind of saying, hey, those people out there who worship idols, they don't deserve your salvation.

But me, I do. Because I follow what you say. I deserve your salvation. All right, Jonah 3, he now gets to Nineveh, and God again calls him to cry out to Nineveh.

And he says that he is to call out, in verse 4, yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Now, unlike every other missionary I have ever met, the people immediately repent and turn to God.

And that makes Jonah really angry. We're going to pick up in chapter 3, verse 6. All right. Now, the word of the Lord reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself in sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

He issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything.

[4 : 52] Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hand.

Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented from the disaster he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Therefore, therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

[6 : 12] And the Lord said, do you do well to be angry? May God bless the reading and the hearing of his word.

Let me pray. Father, Father, thank you, Lord God, for these words. Thank you for the book of Jonah. We thank you for what it reveals in our own hearts.

Lord, today, as we prepare to preach and hear, Lord, I just ask that you would prepare our hearts to receive the word.

Lord, give us ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts that are soft. And Lord, be faithful to your promise that your word never goes out and comes back void.

Transform us today. Conform us to the image of your son. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.

[7 : 23] So the title of today's message is, Do You Do Well? Imagine you were to sit down in your living room this evening and God met you there.

Like, literally pops up. Boom. There he is. And he says, Do you do well? Now, this is God asking you.

This is the God who nothing under the sun is hidden from. This is the God who sees in the dark as if it were light.

The God who has written all the number of your days in his book before there was one. This is the God who knits you together in your mother's womb.

Who knows the words of your mouth before they are spoken. Who knows the thoughts of your mind before you think them.

[8 : 35] And who knows the desires of your heart before you recognize them. Imagine God our God enters into your room tonight and says, Do you do well?

Do you do well, Stephen? Do you do well, Enza? Do you do well, Taylor? Do you do well, Mike? What do you say? This is God. He's not going to let you get away with this casual I'm good, all set. He's not going to let you get away with that shallow answer because he already knows. He already knows that you're not all good and you're not all set.

He already knows the depth of your depression. He already knows the hopelessness you feel, the frustration, the bitterness, the anger that you're experiencing.

[9 : 55] He knows all of those things already. See, he's not going to let you go because he loves you and he wants to see you set free.

he won't let you go with that shallow answer of all set because he is working, actively working in your life to conform you to his own image.

See, this is the story of Jonah. In truth, the sailors, the fish, even the Ninevites really, are background to what God is doing in the life of Jonah to conform him to himself.

God is, throughout the story, showing Jonah his own personal idols. That is, the things that Jonah holds more valuable than God.

Namely, his love for his nation and his own self-righteousness. Let me just say that God is after something in every one of you as well.

[11 : 14] Every one of us has things that keep us from wholeheartedly loving and following God. Every one of us has, at some point, drawn a line in the sand and said, God, I will follow you anywhere.

I will do anything you ask except maybe this thing here that I've put in this box. I don't want to cross that line. But anything other than that, I'll do.

See, you can apply it in your life as well, I'm sure. You've all, we've all drawn that line and said, I'm not willing to go past this.

We've all put a box around something and said, I'm just not willing to give that thing up. But I'll do anything else. See, but those lines you don't want to cross, that box that you want to keep that special thing in, those are your idols.

In the first three chapters of Jonah, we see some of Jonah's idols. Jonah runs from God because he does not want to take God's message to Nineveh.

[12:38] Why? Jonah knew that if he declared God's message, the Ninevites would repent.

And if the Ninevites repent, repent, then God will have mercy and relent and not destroy them as he promised.

The kingdom of Israel hated Nineveh. They hated the Assyrians. They hated them because they were an empire that was going after the same lands, the same contested lands that they were fighting over.

They hated the Assyrians because they were evil. They were violent. And they hated the Assyrians because they weren't Israelites.

Jonah hated the Ninevites because they were not us. They were them. The Ninevites were Jonah's enemy.

[13:48] And because he wanted nothing to do with compassion and mercy on his enemies, he had run away.

Jonah wanted the destruction of the Ninevites and all the Assyrians. Jonah drew a line in the sand and it was called judgment and destruction.

God called him to step over that line and follow him into compassion and mercy. Jonah put a box around his thing called national interest and God asked him to drop that precious box of national interest and embrace God's plan to have compassion and mercy on Nineveh.

National interest was an idol for Jonah and God was calling him to throw that down, to step over that line and follow him.

As we see in chapter 4 verse 1, God's compassion and mercy made Jonah angry.

[15:15] In fact, a direct translation of that word anger would be it made him burn. He was furious with God. He was seething.

Can you relate to that? I can. I can. Yeah. In 1991, February 24th, remember Sean said I was in the military, my battalion crossed into enemy territory.

We crossed into Iraq. We did everything that we had ever been trained to do and our enemy broke before us and ran.

And we pursued. When they stood their ground, we fought and we destroyed them. Just like we were trained to do.

We did our job and we did it well. At 8 a.m. on the 28th, we're looking across a valley. We prepared to engage the enemy and a call came over our radios and said, cease fire, stand down.

[16:30] It was over. The president had called a cease fire.

We had completed his objectives. We had done everything he intended us to do. And so we stood down and watched the enemy move off over the ridge line.

and I was furious. All I wanted was their destruction. That is all I wanted.

I had no interest in mercy or compassion, only destruction. But my president had other ideas. And so we stood down. See, in some way I felt like I had been cheated.

I had been betrayed. My president had somehow broken covenant with us, with me personally. At the time, I didn't see the president's order as being good.

[17:41] Him being faithful to his word made me angry. In fact, I felt it was evil. In some sense, this is what Jonah felt as well.

Do you see in verse 2 that Jonah prayed to the Lord? Do you see in your Bible that the Lord is in all caps, right? What that stands for is the word Yahweh.

Yahweh is Israel's personal name for God. When you see that personal name for God, that's Israel's creator God.

It's the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It's the God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt, defeated all of their enemies and set them up in the promised land.

God. This is the God of covenants, their personal God, the God who said, I will be your God and you will be my people. Yahweh was the God of Israel and Jonah was an Israelite.

[19 : 05] In Jonah's mind, he was not the God of the other nations. God of the Gentile nations and he certainly was not the God of the Assyrians.

To Jonah, showing mercy and compassion to the Assyrians was a breach of contract. It was a breaking of covenant. To Jonah, to relent from judgment and the associated destruction, to show mercy and compassion on the Assyrians was to allow the enemy of God's chosen people to grow strong and threaten Israel.

To Jonah, God's mercy and compassion on the Ninevites was not good. It was evil. And it made Jonah furious with God.

in your Bible, verse 1 says, but it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. Now, if you have footnotes in your Bible, that footnote may tell you there's an alternate reading of that first part.

The alternate reading would be, but it was exceedingly evil to Jonah and he burned. Jonah was displeased with God's mercy and compassion.

[20 : 38] It made him angry. But I think it was much deeper than that. See, Jonah saw what God did as exceedingly evil.

And so he burned with anger. He was so angry, verse 3 tells us that he prayed to God to take his life and take it now. Can you identify with that?

Can you identify with that sort of anger? Have you been in the place where you felt like God broke the contract? Have you been in that place where you could not see any good God's need to do it? In what God had done or was doing? In what he had allowed to happen? Where somehow, in truth, it felt like what God was allowing to happen was just evil.

Have you been so angry that you would just rather die than deal with that situation or bear the consequences of it? I have.

[22 : 01] Most recently, and I give you a lot of examples of this. Is this anger thing seeming repetitive for me? Anyway, most recently, last May, not so long ago, I had to decide to close our church in Salem, a church I had planted four years earlier.

It felt like God had made promises to me. I was quite sure of it. I had people that prayed with me. I got green lights from all sorts of places. Four years earlier, we had gone into Salem and planted. I felt like God was somehow breaking his promises now. It felt like God was betraying me in some sense.

In truth, it felt like evil. I was angry, and I struggled mightily. And friends, I know, though, at this point, I can look back and I say that as long as I have idols in my heart, even good things that I hold dear, that I hold more tightly maybe than God, he will, in his goodness and mercy, ask me to give up.

in love, he will smash those idols so that I can more fully follow him. So Jonah cries out in verse two to God, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was in my country?

[23 : 40] that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a God, gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster.

Here, Jonah is partially quoting, partially paraphrasing God's word from Exodus 34, 6, and 7. The actual words of God, and he's speaking to Moses here, are, the Lord, the Lord, a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.

But who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting iniquity of the father on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generations.

Jonah left out the second half of that verse. Jonah left out God's justice. Jonah chose to see the truth that he wanted to see.

Jonah chose to take parts of the passage that he wanted to use, parts that supported his version of the truth, and give them back to God.

[25 : 26] Jonah didn't apply the whole truth. He didn't apply the whole truth of Scripture, only what was convenient for him. Let me just say, church, that cherry picking the truths of Scripture is a dangerous business.

Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, our third president, was known for this actually. He had created his own biblical text. He went through the Bible and meticulously cut out the parts that he thought were good, trustworthy, the parts that he liked, and he pasted them on paper and created a relatively comprehensive or at least readable, coherent text of the story of Jesus and his teachings, but then leaving out the things that he disagreed with.

Now, how many of you use highlighters? This isn't a gotcha. I use them. I write all over my Bible. I mean, they fall apart by the time I'm done. I hate to get rid of them because there's so many notes in them.

Now, imagine you've got, some of you probably use a lot of different color highlighters too, the pretty ones, and your Bible's very colorful. Thank you for artsy people. Now, I only use a yellow one, but imagine you've got your highlighters out there and you're using your highlighter.

Oh, this is so beautiful. I love this. This truth is so wonderful to me. I don't particularly like what that one says. Where's that black Sharpie? Oh, yeah, there it is.

[27 : 11] Imagine that's how you did your Bible and took the black Sharpie on the parts you don't like, highlighted on the parts you do like. What's left, right? It's a Bible full of half truths. That's what Jefferson did.

That's what Jonah is doing. And if we're not careful in truth, it's what many of us do as well. When God relented of the destruction that Nineveh rightly deserved, God's compassion and mercy were seen as evil by Jonah.

Jonah could not see any good coming out of what God was doing, so he questioned God's goodness. He questioned God's goodness to the point of seeing it as evil.

Unless we judge Jonah too quickly, I'm not so different. And if you find yourself ever in that place of doubting God's goodness, you're not alone.

I say you're not alone because at the core of the book of Jonah is the oldest question posed by man about God. Is God good?

[28 : 25] Can I trust him? Can I trust God's goodness? It's at the heart of the story, really, of the fall of Adam and Eve. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It was the only, the only rule in the garden. Now look, there was more food in the garden than you can imagine.

There was no issue of food insecurity here. It was not a question of hunger or any real need that they had. No, it was a question of God's goodness.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, the question quietly being posed in the background was why would God withhold from them what was obviously good?

A fruit that looked good to eat. A fruit that would make them like God. They couldn't find a reason.

[29 : 37] They couldn't find a reason that the fruit would not be good to eat. See, the picture that Satan painted for them was that God was petty, selfish, and capricious.

The implications of that line of thought, if we were to carry it through, was that God is not good and if he is not good, then he is potentially evil. In the end, they chose to believe that God was not good. They chose to believe that their own understanding of what was good was more right than God's. They put themselves in God's place and decided that they were the ones who were best able to determine what was good.

Like Adam and Eve, we're all tempted by this question, is God good when I cannot see any good coming from it?

Is God good when my business fails? Is God good when my child starts running with the wrong crowd? Is God good when I'm unable to have children, when I can't find a spouse?

[31 : 02] Is God good when I get a diagnosis of cancer or Alzheimer's? The question that Jonah was forced to deal with was, is God good when he shows mercy to my enemies, the enemies of me and my country?

Now, our personal questions may be different, but you and I each have them. Is God good when dot, dot, dot, and you fill in the blank? Well, I want to take a few moments here to help us consider that question out of what we saw in Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7.

In that passage, God describes his goodness in terms of mercy, grace, slowness to anger, forgiveness, an abundance of steadfast love and faithfulness.

grace, but also in his justice and a remembrance of justice across generations. For me, I believe that the scriptures teach that God is good.

It's my bedrock and the foundation of my faith. But the scriptures teach me other things about God's goodness that help me understand it more.

[32 : 28] They remind me that God is the creator of time as we understand it. And that moreover, he is outside of that time.

God is eternal and he knows the end from the beginning. You and I, though, are not eternal. We have an expiration date. I don't know what's going to happen in the next second.

You and I are like less than a millisecond of time in a millennia. Yet our God knows us by name, created us in our mother's womb for his purposes which he will fulfill.

God knew you from before time and he set his love upon you. While you were still his enemy, he sent his son to die for you. He pursued you across time with his goodness.

He changed your heart. He opened your eyes. He softened you. He gave you faith to believe. He set you free from darkness.

[33 : 42] He forgave all of your sins like we read earlier as far as the east is from the west. He gave you the faith to believe. He filled you with his Holy Spirit, called you his beloved, made you his child, gave you the hope of the resurrection, promised you an eternal inheritance all through his son.

Why? Because he is good. You are not the recipients of those things because you are good.

You are not the recipient of those things because you were born in a Christian family. You are not the recipients of those things because of your own righteousness and the good things that you've done.

You are the recipient of those things because God is good. He is merciful and gracious, compassionate, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving sin, but also maintaining justice.

Jonah wasn't interested in compassion. He wanted justice. He wanted to see his enemies destroyed for their evil, and he wanted to see it now on his time.

[35 : 09] Yet God is able to do both. He is able to be both compassionate and just. So let me give you just a quick example from history that relates to this.

The events of the book of Jonah take place somewhere between 782 and 753 BC under the reign of Jeroboam II. Somewhere in that period, Jonah preaches to the Ninevites.

They repent, turn to God, God has mercy on them, and instead of destruction that Jonah wanted, they receive mercy.

And much as Jonah feared, they grew strong, and in 722 BC, they attack and defeat the kingdom of Israel, send them all into exile. Israel. Yet 110 years later, the Babylonians overrun the Assyrians and destroy Nineveh in 612 BC.

The prophets will actually interpret both of these, the fall of Israel and the fall of Assyrians as God's judgment for the evil that they had done. So what do I learn from that?

[36 : 21] Why am I telling you this? First, I learned that God is good. He showed mercy and grace to the people of Nineveh. He had compassion and forgiveness of their sin.

That is evident. He relents. Second, God is good. Justice was given as he promised. God promised through the prophets that if they did not turn, both Israel and Nineveh would be judged and destroyed.

And in a few generations, Nineveh had gone back to being who they were as Assyrians. God's judgment came to Israel through Assyria and to Assyria through the Babylonians.

Third, I am reminded that while God is good to us as individuals, we often have to step back to see that goodness over time, over generations.

In 1981, my father was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis. If you're not familiar with that, it's a rather cruel disease. It slowly kills you, it wastes your body, and eventually steals your ability to breathe.

[37 : 40] you die of congestive heart failure typically. Now, my father had been a strong man. He grew up during the Depression, served in World War II as a paratrooper, served in Korea.

He was a hard man at times, but an incredible judge of men and their character. As a child, I was pretty sure he was invincible.

So, at his death in 1996, I was feeling empty and angry. I could see no good in what had happened.

Yet, I can look back to that time now and see that God was very good to my family. God used to draw my heart to God.

God used that disease to draw my dad's heart to him. My father became a believer in 1993, about three years before he died.

[38 : 57] Moreover, through the events surrounding my father's death, God led me to the place where I became a believer about four months after his death.

What I could not see then, I can see now. God worked to shape faith in my family across four generations so that now, even his great-grandchildren, children.

Some of those are believers. I know with certainty that for all eternity my dad is with his good and gracious father.

Friends, that is a gift, and for those of you who don't have that shirt, you know exactly what I mean. That is a gift. I can look back now and say, God, you are so good to us.

In verse four of Jonah four, God asks Jonah, do you do well to be angry? In doing so, he's pointing out Jonah's failure to embrace God's heart and compassion for lost people of the world, even his enemies.

[40 : 19] He was pointing out Jonah's idolatry, which placed his love for his nation above his love for God. And finally, he was pointing out Jonah's deep-rooted conviction that God was not good.

As you would see, if you continue to read the story, and I hope you do, the rest of chapter four, the story ends, really with that question, it's never resolved.

Do you do well to be angry? That's in the face, then, at the end of the story with God's compassion. Jonah's anger and God's compassion, and it's left unresolved.

But, friends, our story doesn't need to end there. We don't need our story to end unresolved. see, this last question really is ours as well.

Do you do well to be angry? Do you do well to distrust the goodness of God? Do you do well to distrust his mercy and his compassion, his steadfast love, and his forgiveness?

[41 : 37] Do you do well to distrust his justice? Do you do well to mistrust the timing of his events? do you do well to be angry when God's purposes and yours diverge?

And in doing so, the idols of your heart are revealed. Do you do well to be angry? See, Jonah's response was, yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.

But, friends, that answer is there as a signpost to us. It's a signpost that says, do not enter wrong way. That anger of Jonah's was symptomatic of a heart misaligned with God's.

And when God points it out, as he did with Jonah, it's our opportunity to repent to run to God, freely admitting our anger and throwing down, throwing it down before the cross, the things that Christ already paid for, he already knows about it.

You can run to the cross, you can run to Jesus, you can throw down that anger and throw yourself onto God's mercy. Friends, if the question, do you do well to be angry, strikes home for you today, as it has, as I have prepared this and actually preached it twice now, both times, it does this for me.

[43 : 30] if it strikes home today, then that is the Holy Spirit at work within you. It is God's kindness which leads you to repentance, to mercy, to forgiveness, to restoration.

salvation. So as we close out the service today, or I close out this message, please don't leave here today without taking time to repent of that anger and turning to God.

Take time while you are here to find someone to pray with you. Look, I'm not saying it will be all better immediately, but today you can start letting go.

and start embracing the goodness of God in faith. Amen? Amen. Father, thank you, Lord God, for your word today.

We thank you for the truths of scripture. Lord, for those, any of us who are out here today in that place of anger, or through the kindness of your spirit, would you begin to turn our hearts towards you.

[44 : 49] Father, as we go forth in this week, Lord, I pray, I ask that these words would come back to us. Father, that you would make us a people who trust in your goodness even when we can't see it.

Give us the hope, the desire, the strength, the courage to turn towards you, to trust you when our paths diverge. And Lord, when we fail to do that, in your compassion and mercy, point it out to us and draw us back to yourself.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.