

# Why Can't I Change?

*Jonah Pt. 4*  
*Jonah, Romans 7-8*

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*October 7, 2018*



# **I. PRAYER**

- i. Help us to know in our gut that if we have faith in your Son, Jesus, that we are truly your children. That you have redeemed us and are beginning a work in us that you will be faithful to complete.

# **II. INTRODUCTION**

## **a. So, two weeks ago, as we were studying Jonah...**

- i. I mentioned how the Scriptures teach that God created us with a mind and a heart.
  - Our mind is where we process information, think, study, reason.
  - Our heart is where our emotions and our motivations are found. It's where we put reason into action.
- ii. But one of the things that we observed is that there is often a disconnect between our mind and our heart.
  - Our mind will tell us what we should do.
  - Our heart will do what it wants to do.
- iii. So, it's possible to be completely convinced of something in your mind but your heart disregards it.
  - This is why we procrastinate...
    1. Our mind tells us what we should do, our heart does what it wants to do.



- This is how we rationalize stupid decisions...
  1. Our mind tells us what we should do, our heart does what it wants to do, and then our heart hijacks our mind and forces it to rationalize what we're doing.
- iv. **Mind Heart Disconnect.**
  - Something that we all experience and struggle with...
  - And this is also something that can be so frustrating, especially when we need to change.
    1. When we have a struggle or a habit in our life that we want to get away from.
    2. Our minds can be convinced of our need to change.
    3. But changing our minds is not as easy as changing our heart.
- v. And we see this struggle in the story of Jonah.

### III. JONAH

**a. If you've been tracking with the series, you know that the book of Jonah begins with God telling Jonah to travel to Nineveh and to preach against that city.**

- i. And at this point, Jonah's mind and heart are in sync.
  - Nineveh was known for being a dangerous and violent city and Jonah did not want any part of that.
    1. A good, thoroughbred Israelite had no business interacting with violent pagan gentiles...that was what was in his head and in his heart.



- So, he decides to get on a ship and sail away in the opposite direction of Nineveh.
- ii. **And, as he is sailing, God decides to let him know that he wasn't kidding and sends a massive storm to toss the boat around.**
  - And the sailors on the boat are doing everything they can to save the boat but the storm is too powerful.
    1. So, the sailors start to appeal to the divine...
    2. Jonah was the only one on the boat who worshiped the one true god...
    3. And during the chaos...Jonah lets the sailors know what is really going on.

iii. **Read Jonah 1:9-12**

- Jonah knows he is the reason for the storm.
  1. He felt the guilt and shame.
  2. And he tells them...*it's because of me...*that we're in this mess.
  3. It's my fault. Toss me overboard.
- We've all been in that place. In the middle of a storm. Consequences. And we know...it's because of me.
  1. I messed up.

**b. So, the sailors toss Jonah overboard and just when Jonah believes it's going to be the end, he gets swallowed up by a giant fish.**

- i. And from inside the belly of this fish, Jonah prays this incredible prayer of repentance to God.
  - I mean, this prayer is coming from the guilt and the shame that he feels for running away from the presence of God.



1. Jonah wants to obey God...He understands what he did wrong.
- ii. **Read Jonah 2:7-3:3.**
    - So, Jonah disobeyed God.
    - He felt guilty for that disobedience.
    - Repents.
    - And now he is on his way to obey God.
- c. So, Jonah heads to Nineveh, preaches to Nineveh, and miraculously, all of Nineveh repents and turns to God.**
- i. You would think that this would be an amazing experience for Jonah!
    - God had told him to go preach to Nineveh.
    - Jonah acted out of his hatred and prejudice towards the Ninevites in his disobedience.
    - Jonah repents to God in such a thoughtful and beautiful way through the storm and fish incident.
      1. Chapter 2 was not inauthentic. I believe Jonah was genuinely repenting before God.
    - Then in chapter 3, he obeys God and goes to Nineveh to preach.
    - And the Ninevites get saved!
      1. What joy it would have been to see such radical results from your obedience to God!
  - ii. You've been in that place as well, right?
    - You were straying away from God, you come to your senses, repent, vow to live a life honoring to God, and you genuinely motivated to obey.



## **d. But, look at **Jonah 4:1-3.****

- i. What happened?
  - What happened to **Jonah 2:9**?
- ii. Jonah's heart had all of the sudden reverted back to where it was in chapter 1.
  - A hatred for the Ninevites.
  - An irreverence for God.
- iii. Had Jonah's heart actually changed?
  - I think we can all relate with Jonah.
    1. Repenting to God.
    2. Wanting to change.
    3. Wanting to be a better person.
    4. But, the feeling doesn't last long.

## **IV. ROMANS 7**

### **a. You know who also can relate with Jonah?**

- i. The Apostle Paul.
  - Paul lamented this same struggle within his own heart.
  - **Read Romans 7:15-24.**

### **b. Paul is saying that there is a war waging inside of him.**

- i. This war where there is a part of him that wants to honor and obey God but there is another part of him that does not live that desire out.
- ii. Why can't I do what I want to do?
- iii. Why do I keep doing what I don't want to do?
- iv. Why can't I change?
  - What is going on inside of me?



## V. FAITH IN GOD & FAITH IN IDOLS

### a. If you look back at **Romans 7:20**.

- i. Paul says that this disconnect between our minds and our hearts is due to sin.
  - I think most of us think of sin as an action or a behavior rather than a condition.
- ii. Later in Romans, Paul says in 14:23 that **"...EVERYTHING that is not from faith is sin."**
  - So, think of sin not as a behavior or an action...but as the motivation behind the action.
  - So, anything that we do that is not from faith in God, is considered sin according to the Word of God.

### b. And to help explain what that means, I think we need to go learn from Jonah because Jonah understands this.

- i. Look back at his prayer of repentance in chapter 2 and look at what he says in v.8.
  - **Read Jonah 2:8.**
  - In other words, those who cherish worthless idols abandon their faith in God.
- ii. What's an idol?
  - Simply put, an idol is something you vainly put your hope in.
    1. And the word for idol here literally means: empty vanity or a vapor.



iii. **So, think of the sailors on the ship with Jonah during the storm.**

- The text says in Jonah 1:5 that the sailors were each crying out to his god to save them from the storm.
  1. None of the sailors were worshipers of the one true God.
  2. So, they were crying out to false gods.
  3. To idols who were worthless.
  4. They were worthless because they didn't exist.
  5. As Jonah 2:8 says – these gods were empty vanity...like a vapor.
- Putting your hope in idols is vanity because idols can't do anything for you.
  1. Who was it that calmed the storm for the sailors?
  2. The one true God.
  3. Not their false gods.

iv. **And while Jonah was confessing that cherishing worthless idols is to abandon God...**

- I think Jonah was repenting of himself doing this.
  1. Look at this again: **Jonah 2:7-9**.
- So, in Jonah's disobedience he wasn't calling out to false gods.
  1. But Jonah was putting his hope in something other than god...something worthless....as he fled God.
  2. He was doing something – Romans 14:23 – that was not from faith in God.



- v. So, when we talk about this disconnect between our minds and our hearts...when we struggle with doing the things that we don't want to do...
  - The Scriptures are showing us that there is a part of us that operates off of faith in God.
    1. We want to obey God's Word.
    2. We trust what God has to say.
    3. We believe that what God says is for our joy.
  - But there is another part of us that operates off of sin...it does things that are not from faith in God...in other words...it operates off of faith in worthless idols.

vi. Here's the disconnect...

- Part of us operates off of faith in God.
- Part of us operates off of faith in idols.

**c. And I believe that the reason that Jonah 4 records this weird encounter with Jonah and the plant is to help us understand what it looks like to have faith in idols.**

- i. If you remember, after Nineveh repents to God, Jonah gets angry because God decides to show Nineveh mercy...and he goes and sits on the side of the hill overlooking the city all grumpy because God didn't destroy the city.
  - And as Jonah was sitting on the side of the hill, God commanded a plant to grow next to him that would provide him shade from the sun.



1. And Jonah was pleased with this plant and the comfort it provided him.

- But then, the next morning, God commanded a worm to kill the plant and on top of that, God commanded an easterly wind and a sunny day...so the sun would beat down on Jonah's head and it would be hot!

1. So, Jonah was angry that the plant died.

- Then, let's pick up the story in v.9.

1. **Read Jonah 4:9-11.**

## ii. What is God doing here?

- It's like God is intentionally provoking Jonah. And that is what God is doing, but in order to teach Jonah and to teach us something about our hearts.

- Why is Jonah equally angry about God being merciful to the people that he hates AND that there is no longer a plant to give him shade?

1. Why does Jonah care more about the life of this plant than the lives of 120,000 people?

- And the answer is because both of these things are evidence that the idol Jonah has placed faith in is not delivering.

1. And it shows that even in the midst of Jonah's genuine repentance in ch. 2, his heart still had hope in idols.

## iii. Inside of Jonah is a game of ping-pong back in forth of faith in God and faith in idols.

- One moment, he repents of his sin and puts his hope in God.
- The next moment, he's angry at God and puts his hope in idols.



iv. **I think the idol that Jonah puts his hope in is control.**

- When God called him to go preach to Nineveh, he fled because he was trying to control the situation.
  1. He knew God was merciful and he did not want the Ninevites to be the recipient of that mercy.
  2. So, to control the situation, he heads in the opposite direction.
- What brought Jonah back?
  1. A very unusual way for God to remind Jonah that He was in control. He sent the storm. He sent the large fish.
- But even when Jonah does obey God and God does show mercy to the Ninevites, Jonah ping-pongs back to wanting to be in control.
  1. But the reality is that this idol of control is worthless, it is empty vanity, it is a vapor, this idol can do nothing for Jonah.
  2. Jonah, and all of us for that matter, are in control of nothing!
- In the plant episode.
  1. It's clear...God controls the plant, the wind, and the sin - Jonah does not.
  2. When Jonah had his faith in God...he trusts God's way.
  3. When Jonah has faith in his idol and doesn't get his way...he's left bitter, alone, and frustrated that his idol won't give him what he wants.

v. **And Jonah goes back and forth.**

- Faith in God.
- Faith in his idol.



- vi. You've been there before.
  - How do we change?
  - As Paul says in Romans 7:24 - *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"*
- vii. And Paul gloriously answers his own question in v.25a - *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*
  - And he spends all of chapter 8 in Romans explaining how God in Christ rescues us from this game of ping-pong.

## VI. ROMANS 8

- a. **Now, Romans 8 is so rich and packed with truth, there is no way I'll be able to preach this whole thing in the few minutes I have left.**
  - i. But, I want to bring some verses from Romans 8 to the surface to show you the argument that Paul is making.
- b. **But in Romans 8, Paul gives us two things that are key to renouncing your faith in idols and finding your joy in Christ.**
  - i. Celebrate the Cross.
  - ii. Pick-Up the Cross.
- c. **Celebrate the Cross**
  - i. Paul does not begin Romans 8 by giving you a list of things to do...rather, he begins with this:
    - Read **Romans 8:1**



ii. Isn't it interesting how in Romans 7, Paul seems to divorce the sin of his life from his identity.

- Look at **Romans 7:20** again.
  1. Is Paul saying we are not responsible for our sin?
  2. No.
  3. Rather, Paul is helping us to understand that as a Christ-follower even though we may still struggle with idols in our heart, they do not define who we are.
- In the same way that idols have zero ability to deliver what your hoping they will deliver, they also have zero ability to condemn you if God has decided to forgive you!

iii. **Go study Romans 8:3-13.**

- Because Paul explains that God has saved us, even though we struggle with sin and idols, he has saved us not because we have figured out how to change our own hearts and earn God's salvation, but he has saved us simply by his grace.
  1. By sending Jesus to become one of us.
  2. Who stood in our place.
  3. Went to the cross under the condemnation that we deserve.
  4. Paid off our debt and given us his righteousness so that we can stand before god, not as condemned, but as forgiven.
- And Paul explains that when we place our faith in Jesus and receive that forgiveness from God, that God puts his Spirit inside of us.



1. So, this ping-ponging that we experience between living by faith in God and living by faith in idols is a war going on inside of us.
  2. Paul calls it living by the Spirit and living by the flesh.
  3. Living by the Spirit is living by faith in God.
  4. Living by the flesh is living like our old sinful self that still puts hope in worthless idols.
- But the reality is that even though we still struggle with living by the flesh, that does not define who we are.
    1. When I put my hope in idols, that is not me but sin living within me!

iv. **Read Romans 8:14-17a.**

- And so, if you want to root out the idols in your life and live more by the spirit and less by the flesh, you first have to believe that no matter your struggle with idols, you are a child of God.
  1. If you trust in Jesus, you have God's Spirit in you and...LOOK AT ME...the ping-ponging in your life is evidence of the Spirit in you.
  2. The struggle is evidence of God's grace.
  3. The storm and fish in Jonah's life was God's grace of his child.
  4. The plant dying in Jonah's life was God's grace of his child.
  5. He is fighting for the trust and the faith of his children.



- v. I understand the frustration you feel and the desire to change and not put your hope in idols.
  - That's a good and holy frustration.
  - But don't believe the lie that you stand condemned before God if you trust Christ.
  - You are God's child.

**d. So, Paul reminds us to celebrate the cross and remember who we are in Christ despite our struggle....but then Paul reminds us that living by the Spirit means picking up that cross.**

i. **Read Romans 8:16-18.**

- Turning away from idols, living by the Spirit and not by the flesh, in this life as we wait Jesus to return, means suffering.
  1. We read earlier from Mark 8:34 where Jesus says: *"If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."*

ii. For Jonah to trust and obey God when he was called to go to Nineveh, would mean that he would have to pick up his cross.

- He would have to confess to his own prejudice and hatred of the Ninevites and ask God to change his heart from hatred to love.
  1. He'd have to confront his true idol – that if he were in control – he would destroy the Ninevites and not save them.



2. See, Jonah was driven to repentance through the storm God sent, but the storm didn't change Jonah's heart, that's why God did all that he did with the plant.
    - And listen, to make that kind of confession, to have that kind of self-awareness, to be willing to accept how deep sin and idolatry go into our hearts....that is suffering.
      1. It's experiencing the brokenness of our world and the brokenness of our own flesh.
    - This whole episode with Jonah wasn't about Jonah's salvation...it was about confronting his idolatry.
      1. And every one of us, as children of God, need to confront our own idolatry.
- iii. **There is no such thing as following Jesus on this side of glory without suffering.**
- The cross is not to be enjoyed. It is to be endured as we wait and also taste the glory to be revealed.
  - And the longer you follow Jesus and the more you pick up that cross, you realize that having faith in God is what leads to life and joy not faith in worthless idols.



**e. What in your life do you need to endure out of faith in God instead of indulge out of faith in your idols?**

- i. Where do you need to change?
  - What are you not willing to endure to see that change occur?
- ii. **Are you frustrated because in your mind you want so badly to never look at porn again but your heart keeps dragging you back.**
  - If you have faith in Christ, that struggle and that idolatry does not define you.
    1. The cross is triumphant in your life, you are a child of God, and God is not ashamed of you.
  - But you need to pick up your cross and it will mean suffering.
    1. Which means you need to bring that struggle into the light and confess to someone.
    2. It means having the self-awareness and humility to know you are an addict and you need help.
    3. It might mean you need to go without a smart phone and an internet connection for a while.
  - That all might sound radical. But it's for your joy. And I promise that idol will not deliver you anything, it is worthless.
    1. The suffering that God calls you to is his grace in your life because he wants to change your heart!



- iii. **Are you frustrated because in your mind you want to feast at God's Word everyday, but your heart keeps you in bed or scrolling through your phone instead.**
- If you have faith in Christ, that struggle and that idolatry does not define you.
    1. God doesn't revoke salvation for poor Bible reading habits.
  - But God's Word is water to our thirsty souls and to deprive ourselves of it is to voluntarily allow our minds and our hearts to be more influenced by the world and less influenced by the Word of God.
  - So, you need to pick up your cross and it will mean suffering.
    1. Get accountability.
    2. Cancel stuff in your calendar so you're not so busy.
    3. Meet with someone regularly to read.
    4. Understand that smart phone addiction is a real thing and get rid of it for a while.
  - All of those things will be difficult.
    1. It's why it's called suffering.
    2. But it's God's grace.
    3. Because a heart disciplined by His Word is a content heart.
    4. And a heart disciplined by the world is an anxious heart.
- iv. **And this is all true of the small things in life.**
- One thing that I have been convicted of lately is how I rush through bedtime with my kids.
    1. We have a routine where we read them a book, sing a song, and put them to bed.



2. And lately I have been rushing through that.
  3. Because the sooner the kids are in bed, the sooner it is my time for me to do what I want to do without distraction.
  4. So, instead of making that time meaningful where I can talk with them and pray with them...I rush and get frustrated if they go slow.
- I'm not condemned under this.
    1. But because God's Spirit is in me, there is conviction...that is God's grace.
  - So, even in this, there is a cross to bear...suffering to endure.
    1. Denying myself.
    2. Loving my kids more than myself.
    3. Prioritizing them over my plans.
    4. Confronting the fact that I value my leisure time over time with them.
  - There is a cross to bear even in the small things.

**f. What do you need to endure out of faith in god instead of indulge out of faith in you idols?**

- i. Just the fact that you have an answer to that question is God's grace in your life.
  - It is his fatherly love for you and his desire for you to live in joy.
  - There is no condemnation for you.
  - But there is a cross to bear.
- ii. Having a good marriage will mean you will have to suffer and bear a cross.
- iii. Evangelizing your neighbors will mean you will have to suffer and bear a cross.



- iv. Being generous with the money that God has entrusted to you will mean that you will have to suffer and bear a cross.
- v. Loving your neighbor will mean you will have to suffer, disrupt your plans, go out of your way, and bear a cross.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

### **a. But listen, all of this is for your joy.**

- i. Yes, there is suffering in confronting our idols.
  - But would you rather be Jonah celebrating God in the middle of the city as you see 120,000 people repent and come to faith.
  - Or would you rather be angry and frustrated on the side of the hill because you didn't get your way?

### **b. Paul says in **Romans 8:18**.**

## **VIII. PRAY**

