

What is Greater than Sin? God's Grace.

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Turn with me to Jonah chapter 4. The passage that Brother Pete read this morning is a very appropriate one for this message. The believer is an odd character. He is holy and righteous in Christ; he is a sinner in his flesh. He is commanded by God not to sin, and yet as Paul said right after that verse where, speaking by the Spirit of God, he commands us not to sin, and turns around and says, "that which I would do, I don't do it. That which I don't want to do, that's what I do."

If there is ever an odd character in Scripture that manifests what we are, Jonah is one of them. I see myself a whole lot in Jonah. I want to read the first five verses of chapter 4. Lets' begin in chapter three and verse ten: "And God saw their works (Nineveh's), that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Now, Jonah was sent to preach to Nineveh, sent there with a command from God to preach the Word. And he went and preached the Word. I don't know of any faithful pastor that would be any less than thoroughly delighted to see God work a work of grace in the hearts of his people. He'd be just delighted to see that. And yet, we read in verse one of chapter four,

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. (He's mad!) 4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? 5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. (We'll just take those first five verses.)

Some of the writers give various reasons that Jonah was angry. Some think he thought it would mean the destruction of his own nation, because they had heard the gospel preached for years and years and years, and they never repented. That could be the case. Some say that he was prejudiced against Nineveh because they were Gentiles; as the Jews referred to them, they were just Gentile dogs, just heathens. Some say that Jonah felt that God made him look foolish because his

prophecy didn't come to pass. He said Nineveh was going to be destroyed in forty days, and it didn't happen. So Jonah was mad that he sent him to preach a word that didn't happen. All those may be the case; I don't know. But I do know this, with my own experience, and I think that many of you may say the same—the Lord sometimes leaves us to ourselves, just long enough so that we exhibit the worst possible exhibition of sin that can be committed. And if for no other reason than to show us that there's something greater than sin.

The title of the message this morning is, *What is Greater than Sin?* And if we were to give it subtitle, it would be, *God's Grace!*

I. WHAT DOES UNGODLY ANGER CAUSE A BELIEVER TO DO?

Jonah is mad—he's angry. I'm sure nobody here gets angry about anything—we're all very pleasant. We keep the same faces on every day every hour of the week that we have on right here every Sunday morning, I'm sure. But here's Jonah, a prophet of the Lord, a preacher sent forth to declare God's word, which sees this abounding grace in Nineveh, and gets mad about it!

Let's consider a few things that anger—this ungodly, sinful anger--caused Jonah to do. There *is* an anger that's not ungodly. The Scripture says that when the Lord was in the temple and was going to heal the lame man, he was angry with the folks that didn't want him to heal him because it was the Sabbath day. But this anger right here is not a godly anger.

1. Ungodly, sinful anger will cause a believer to *exalt* 'self.' I know I say that a lot. I know I talk about sin being the exaltation of self a lot, but I've come to the place that I've narrowed this thing; no matter what we do or think, it's all for our self-promotion. [exalting ourselves over God, at the expense of our brethren and our fellow man] an exaltation of self is what it is.

Here's what Jonah said concerning himself, verse two: "Was this not my saying?" "This is what I said was going to happen!" He is saying, 'I'm wise. I *knew* this was going to happen!' "Therefore now, O Lord," he says in verse three, "Take, I beseech thee, my life from me." Now he tells the Lord what's best. "For it is better for me to die than to live." Because God showed Nineveh grace, Jonah got mad and he beseeched God to take his life because God blessed his preaching.

Ungodly anger will cause us to exalt ourselves over God, so that we totally forget who God is. We'll cease to be thankful to him, and we'll attempt to command him,

and we'll attempt to command everybody around us. Has your spouse or somebody else ever done something and things didn't go just like you planned them to go, did you make this statement that Jonah made: 'I *knew* this was going to happen.' That's exactly what we do; if we said what we really meant, I probably couldn't say it right here this morning.

Submission to God means that we don't necessarily get what we want. Subjection to God means trusting him to perform what's best for me, even when it doesn't seem to me like it's the best thing. What did Job say? "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

I don't mean any disrespect at all, but I know that we have all prayed for Brother Pete to get a job, but have we thanked God that he took Pete's job from him? That's a hard thing, and brother Pete, I know that's a hard thing. But my point is that God is on his throne, and for whatever reason that he takes anything from us, if we're his, it's going to teach us something. Some good will come out of it, and we're going to learn from it. Have you found that to be the case? Some things have been taken from me that just broke me, but at the end, I looked back on it and thought, that was the best thing for me.

[Ungodly anger] is a refusal to wait on God, to do what God's pleased to do, how he's pleased to do it, when he's pleased to do it.

2. Ungodly anger causes a believer to *justify* 'self.'

And secondly, something I see here is ungodly anger—it might be better not to call it anger; we might do better to just call it *sin*, because that's what it is. What will sin cause a believer to do, justify himself? Verse two, Jonah says, "Therefore, I fled." "That's why I fled. I knew what was best; I knew what you would do. *That's why* I did what I did." If I get angry at somebody and I start speaking out, I'm never the one to blame for it. It sounds like this: 'Well, *they* don't... *they* shouldn't have... *I've* tried... and *I've* done...' Jonah said, "I knew, *therefore* I fled." That's self-justification. In other words, my rebellion is justified. I'm justified; they're wrong, and I'm right. When we justify ourselves, we declare that we have a right to be sinners, and sinful against God. We honor that which God calls an abomination. And our sinful nature makes us masters of self-justification—*masters* of it!

3. Thirdly, this sin causes a believer to *reject* God. In verse two Jonah says, "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." Here's why he fled. Listen to this. Is this rejection of God? "For I knew"—Here's what he knew—"thou art a gracious God, and merciful, and slow to

anger, and of great kindness, and delighting to show mercy rather than evil." When God quickens a sinner's heart, and gives that sinner Light to see him in all this glory that Jonah just exhibits, that's what God does to draw us to himself. And Jonah said it is because of those things that I went away from you. That's sin! That's what sin will do. Jonah rejects God for being God. Sin will make us be angry, and stand before the Lord, exceedingly displeased because God showed the same grace and mercy and longsuffering and kindness towards sinners in Nineveh that he shows to us.

Any time that we reject God; any time that we don't get our way, and we're angry because God is gracious, (jealousy is a cruel thing.) But sometimes we see somebody that gets something, or has plenty, and we don't have it, and we've gone a long time without it, and we've been trying our best to do everything, to walk honorably before God, and what we really think is that we *deserve* something—we deserve it and *they don't* deserve it. And God blesses somebody like he blessed these in Nineveh, and it made Jonah mad because he was gracious and longsuffering. Everything that God had shown to Jonah, Jonah was mad because God showed that same mercy and grace to them. That's why Paul says, "don't walk in sin any longer." That's why Paul gives the exhortation and the admonition not to continue in sin any longer. This is what sin does! It causes us to *exalt* ourselves; it causes us to *justify* our rebellion; it causes us to *reject* God.

4. And then look, [sin] causes us to *separate* ourselves from those whom God has joined us to. Sin always divides.

Let me tell you what would happen. Every one of you have seen me do enough things outwardly; every one of you here, if I went row by row—even the kids, I guarantee you—if we went row by row, they could name things, and every one of you could name something you've seen me personally do that was sinful, or that you didn't think was right. And I could do the same thing for every one of you. If we all stood up and started doing that, do you know what would happen? We'd go home, and we wouldn't come back here again; we'd get mad. That's exactly what would happen. That's what sin does. We would be wrong to do it, and the result of it would be that it would divide us. It would split us into thirty pieces (the number of people present).

Listen to what Jonah does in verse five, "Jonah went *out* of the city." In verse three, Jonah wants God to take his life *from* him. He wants to be *separated from* the ones that God showed mercy to. In every hour, it is God our Savior who

delivers us from the law of sin that wars against us and brings our members into captivity. Don't you find that if God lets you go—

I personally have had a rough week; it's been a rough one, and I've been mad and angry; I've been a cantankerous old coot this week. Everybody has been wrong but me this whole week! My wife came home on Friday and the first thing I did was run her off out of the room, because I was just being selfish. And that's sin; that's what sin does—it divides, it just divides

The Lord took a city, and he gave Jonah a multitude of brethren in Nineveh. He revealed to him that there was a family in Nineveh that he didn't even know he had, with all these brethren. But sin made Jonah go out of that city and say, 'I'm done with them. I don't want to have anything to do with them. I'll just go out here and sit down and wait and watch.' Sin causes us to separate ourselves. It causes us to leave those whom God has put us with. It causes us to run away, and leave.

5. Ungodly anger—sin—makes a believer stop *trying* to love. We don't even want to love when sin overcomes us. Verse five says that Jonah went out of the city and made a hut and sat down. In his anger, Jonah decided that he wasn't going to preach, he wasn't going to teach—he was going to quit. He said, 'I'm going to go out here, and sit down; I'm not going to help anybody; I'm not going to help my brethren; I'm not going to help my loved ones. I'm going to stop forgiving, I'm going to stop being gracious, I'm just going to go out here and make me a hut, and sit down and not do another thing.' That's sin! That's what it will do.

6. Ungodly anger will make us *expect the worst* for those that God has joined us to. Verse five says Jonah sat down "till he might see what would become of the city." Now, do you think Jonah sat there thinking, 'I hope something *good* happens to that city!' That's not what Jonah sat there hoping at all. He's mad; he saw what happened in the city. He went out and sat down, and if he has to sit there forty days, he'll see if God will destroy it. That's what he's sitting there for. He wasn't waiting to see something good happen. Those are the thoughts we enter into; that's what happens whenever sin overcomes us, when sin takes over. But thanks be to God, the Scripture that Brother Pete read this morning said that sin shall not have dominion over you.

God may leave us to ourselves for a little season, to reveal to us what we are if left to ourselves, if he takes his restraining hand of grace off of us. But because he reigns, and grace reigns, sin is not going to reign. We are not going to continue in it.

Let me show you something; look at Romans chapter seven with me. This is the same man that just said in Romans chapter six, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!" But here is what he knows and here is what every believer knows: We don't want to continue in sin. We don't want to be the servants of sin any longer. But he says this, verse 21, "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Is that what happened to Jonah? Jonah delights after God after the inward man. Jonah delighted in his Lord. He came out of the sea, being delivered out of it, saying, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah rejoices in the Lord. He is a believer; he's trusting the Lord. But do you think at this point where he is right now, when God brings him through this again, like he did before, do you think Jonah's going to see, 'But I was brought into captivity by this raging in my members, this *law in my members* that is against the *law of the inward man*. One of them is flesh, and one of them is spirit, and they won't ever get along.' That's why we have to be reminded over and over and over what sin is. That's why we have to be reminded over and over and over not to continue in it. That's why Paul says to mortify the deeds of the flesh.

The more and more that I look into this word, and study this word, when we start looking at our flesh, and trying to mortify the deeds of the flesh—by ourselves, by our flesh, by our will, by our way—what we always end up doing is this: we stop doing something, like being angry like Jonah was, and then we feel glad because we have stopped being angry. And all we've done was stay in sin; but now we're just self-righteous about the sin.

So what is it, and where is it, and how is it, that we're delivered from this law? How is it that we're delivered from this captivity that we come into? What does Paul say? Verse 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." That's who delivers us. That's who is going to ultimately deliver us from it in the end. But that's who delivers us from it every hour of every day. That's who delivers us from this when we fall into it. That's why sin doesn't have dominion over us. That's why it's not going to continue on and cause us to perish. It's because Christ died for us. And Christ put away our sin. And when he died, we died. We were buried with him in baptism. And he comes in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he delivers us from this captivity. And it's not by turning us to ourselves, it's by turning us to him. And we see him, and we no longer think about ourselves.

The only thing that could make me stop thinking about myself this week was Christ Jesus seated at God's right hand. What he did was convict me in my heart that I hadn't asked about anybody else; I hadn't sought to do anything for anybody else; all it had been about was me, me, me. And I heard the question, 'Who are you? Who do you think you are?' I'm a sinner, saved by his grace, who did nothing and still doesn't do anything to warrant any mercy or grace from him, and yet he's merciful and gracious. That's who delivers us.

And Paul says, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God"—I delight in it; I walk after it with the mind, in the spirit—"But with the flesh the law of sin." I look at my flesh, I look at my members, and I look at what I am, and I don't delight in it; I don't find any pleasure in it. I could look at things *you* do and say, 'That's *good!* That's a *good* thing you did.' And every one of you that knows God will say, 'Brother, don't brag on me,' because we know what we are. A little bit of bragging and we'll start agreeing with you. 'Yeah, that *was* good!' And we're right back in that captivity again.

Do we get angry? We get angry, we get mad at our spouse, our employer, our children, our brethren. Can we just stop it? Can we just turn it off? Can we just make it stop? We can't! If we're honest, we can't. If God keeps his hand off of us, if he keeps his hand off of Jonah, Jonah will continue right on in his anger. He's where he's going to be if God doesn't do something for him. If God hadn't done something for him before, he never would have went to Nineveh. And if God doesn't do something for him here, he is going to sit right there under that hut, right there watching that city, mad as a wet hornet, just waiting on God to destroy that city. And that's what he's going to do. It's going to take a God of mercy and grace and power to come to him *in* that power and deliver him from the captivity that he's in. That's who does it.

II. WHAT IS THE ONE THING GREATER THAN SIN? IT IS GOD'S GRACE!

Now let's see God's grace. Verse four, "Then," after all this carrying on, after all this carrying on, that Jonah has done—"Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?" He's bringing Jonah down; he's going to teach Jonah again; he's going to correct him. He's going to deliver Jonah from this captivity.

Whether it's the first hour in which we believed, or it's the last hour in which we believe, this is the one on whom we depend to deliver us from the captivity of ourselves, constantly, continually.

Jonah changed often; we have seen it throughout this book. *We* change often; it doesn't take but a little word, or a little look—just the craziest, silliest little thing. We're happy about somebody, or we're mad about somebody, or we're boasting in ourselves about something—the silliest little things can send us in every direction. But God does not change. His grace never changes based on our rebellion, or else it ceases to be grace.

He delivered Jonah from captivity over and over. When Jonah fled the first time, the flesh, sinful flesh, would have said, 'Well, I knew it! I knew this would happen! I expected that from him. I expected something like that from him. I always thought he might do something like that, that Jonah.' But grace said in chapter one, verse four, "But the Lord..." That's grace. Grace sent out a wind to break Jonah, a vessel of mercy.

When Jonah was pursued by the chastening hand of God and cast into the sea, the flesh would have said, 'Well, that serves him right. Anybody who treated people the way he treated them, made those people have to cast all their goodly rich possessions off that boat; disobeying God like he did—that man *deserved* to be cast into the sea.' Grace says in Jonah 1:17, "Now, the Lord..." Grace prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, to save him.

When Jonah was delivered to the shore of Nineveh, the flesh would have said, 'Well, we'll let you back in here, now, you can come back; you've said some good things, you professed salvation is of the Lord. We'll let you back, but now, I don't know if you can preach anymore. After somebody did what you did, I don't know if we'll let you preach anymore. I don't think we ought to.' Grace says, Jonah 3:1, "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the *second time*, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." That's grace.

Here again, Jonah lashes out in anger; he fled again. Sinful flesh will say, 'Well, three strikes and you're out, buddy. That's it. We've bent over backwards to be kind to you, and here you are, treating us like you always have. That's it; we're done with you.' Jonah 4:4 tells us what grace did. "Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?" That's grace!

Conclusion.

We face a trial, we fall into sin, we reject God, we reject our brethren, we get made at the world, we don't want to have anything to do with anybody—everybody's wrong and we're right...but if we're God's, for the sake of his Son who came to this

place and lived, and laid down his life for his own brethren, God comes to us right where we are in our rebellion, to the very heart of it, and speaks to us in our hearts, and he says, "Doest thou well to be angry?"

Our Lord not only *teaches* us to forgive seventy times seven, he *does* it. Grace allows chosen, everlastingly loved *saints* to act like utter *rebels*—to crown him with thorns and spit in his face. And then grace says, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." That's grace.

I want to end with Romans chapter five. This is what I have been trying to say. We glory in Christ Jesus. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and it is by him that we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Verse three says, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed"—Why? why not?—"because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

After all our rebellion, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. I believe that's what Paul means when he says in Romans 8:13, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." When the Spirit comes and sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, that's when it is easy to treat these bodies just like what they are—just dead, just dead. But if we let that love begin to fade, begin to grow dim, and we begin to think about ourselves, and what we ought to have, what we deserve, how we ought to be treated, how we ought to be looked at—then we get angry, like Jonah. But God, through tribulation, just like Jonah was going through, sheds his Spirit in our hearts and reveals, I love you, not because of you.

Do you see what you are? That's what the Lord revealed to me this week. 'Clay, do you see what you are? Do you see that I don't love you because of you? I love you because I chose to love you by grace.' That's what grace is. It's not that it necessarily comes easy, but we don't become ashamed of saying, 'I don't care if I don't have that, I don't care if I'm poor—I've got the riches of my Lord! I don't care if I don't have this or that; I don't care if that brother did this to me, or if I did this—what I care about is, God loves me in spite of me! He loves me for his own grace and mercy and truth, and his holiness' sake, that's why he loves me.' And we're not ashamed to cry out and say, 'Thank you, Lord! Thank you!'

That's what it's going to take. We pray for our loved ones and our family and our friends and they're *ashamed* to call out on the name of God, and to confess him as Lord, and say, 'Thank you, Lord, for what you've done.' But the reason is, the only thing that can make us *not ashamed* is when he sheds that love in our hearts and we see it's free. That makes you cry out with gladness, not shame—gladness!

- I pray that God may be pleased to deliver us from our captivity right now.
- May he settle our hearts at his feet.
- May he cause us to see our foolishness at being angry and full of guile.
- May he cause us to see that his grace, and mercy, and longsuffering, and kindness—is greater than our sin!