

God's Patience & Our Besetting Sins

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 March 2018

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] Jonah chapter 3. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now, Nineveh was a very important city. A visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city.

He proclaimed, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned. The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down in the dust.

Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles. Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything.

[1 : 02] Do not let them eat or drink, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That's why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish.

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live. But the Lord replied, Have you any right to be angry?

[2 : 11] Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head, to ease his discomfort.

Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

He wanted to die and said, It would be better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?

I do, he said. I'm angry enough to die. But the Lord said, You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow.

It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.

[3 : 26] Should I not be concerned about that great city? Let's hear God's word. Jonah was such an unhappy preacher.

Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned. I have a hard time knowing if he was saying that as boringly as possible or with as much glee as possible.

He didn't want to be there. Even after he had been saved from drowning and burped up on shore, he didn't want to be here, and he didn't want to be warning these Ninevites of the wrath to come.

He didn't want to give them 40 more days. He wanted wrath right now. Right now. And that's the kind of God Jonah wanted in that moment for those Ninevites.

So my question for you as we begin is, which God is your God? Your functional God? Is your God like Jonah?

[4 : 44] Impatient? Without compassion? Impatient? Or is your God the God of the book of Jonah? Who, when he saw 120,000 people who didn't know their right from their left, he had compassion on

that city.

Well, what was Jonah's problem? He said, I knew it. I knew this. I knew where this was going. You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

They were going to repent and you were going to spare them. I knew it. I knew that was going to happen. And I can't stand it. And I'm done. And I want to die.

I'm just done. Well, what did Jonah want? He wanted an impatient God. He wanted a God that didn't give sinners a chance to repent.

And my question is, is that your God? The God that Jonah wanted to have, at least for the Ninevites. Or is your God the God as he really is?

[5 : 55] Patience. Patience so that men might repent. Maybe you already know which way you lean.

Maybe you kind of already know. I really feel like God is impatient and quick to anger. And maybe just a little bit delights in sending calamity. I always have to be on the lookout for him.

I'm leery. And I have to be leery of him. I always have to be scanning what he's doing. Am I in danger?

Am I safe? Is he going to get me? I just saw a series of interviews that a man did on homeless people.

He goes up and interviews them. Really good. It's on YouTube. You can look it up. But there was this girl. She was about 20 years old and homeless. She had been in the foster care system.

[6 : 57] According to her, she had been placed in 57 different homes. I don't know if she's just exaggerating, but she had been placed in a lot of homes. She grew up in the foster care system. And she finally ran away.

Now she's homeless. And he was interviewing her. And really what caught my attention was not what she was saying, but what her eyes were doing the whole time that she was talking.

She was constantly scanning and looking and looking and looking for danger. She wasn't even realizing that she was doing, but she was. She hardly ever made eye contact.

And if she did, it was just for a moment. And then she was back to scanning. Is that your heart toward God? Are you afraid to make eye contact?

Is he more of a bully than a father? Maybe that's how you tend to feel. Where God's patience isn't something you're comfortable with or that you rely upon?

[8 : 05] Well, maybe you aren't sure. Maybe you aren't sure. Which God is your God? The God of the Jonah wanted or the God of the book of the of Jonah? But here's another test.

Another test. What is your God like? What's God like when you just fell into that same sin again?

That same sin. And you know what sin I'm talking about. That sin or those two or three sins that are really besetting.

And you come back to God. And what do you think of God then? And that's what we're going to be talking about this evening. God's patience and our besetting sins.

God's patience and our besetting sins. We're doing this series on this question or this idea of that. That it's who God is. That is our help.

[9 : 04] That is our hope in our troubles. And he's our hope. Who he is. The kind of God that he is is actually our hope and our problems.

And I don't think there's a problem that we feel more acutely than the problem of besetting sins. You say, if I could just get this sin out of my life, it would be leaps forward in holiness for me.

If I could just get this sin out of my life, then my life would be so much better. And you know what? You're right. You're right. It would be so much better. Isn't that what we're looking forward to in heaven is when we don't have any more sin.

So how does God's patience help you with your besetting sins? And that's what we want to talk about. And first, I want to be clear that we all have besetting sins.

Everyone does. To some degree or other. Paul did. We don't know exactly, but remember Romans 7.

[10 : 14] He says, The evil I do not want to do, this I keep doing. And Paul could probably be talking about evil in a general sense. But I have no doubt that Paul could probably put his name and a finger on some things that he still struggled with, even as an apostle.

And so the evil, I don't want to do, this I keep on doing. Romans 7 is overflowing with this frustration and this pain and this, and we're going to have hope when I'm still struggling in sin.

And Paul ends up saying, What a wretched man that I am. He's a man that still knows what it's like to wrestle with sin. And no doubt there was one or two that he still had troubles with.

We all have besetting sins. Paul did. Abraham did. We don't know a lot about Abraham's life. We don't get to see like a biography or anything. But we do see these two occasions when he was afraid and lied about Sarah to the king.

And it was the same thing. And they happened years apart. But when the same circumstances happened again, he fell in the same way. Maybe that sounds like your life.

[11 : 28] When the circumstances are just right, I very easily go to that sin. Well, Abraham did. Peter's mouth got him into trouble, not once, but more than once.

We could go on. But, you know, we don't have to go to the Bible even to see that people have besetting sins. Everyone we are close to has besetting sins.

Isn't that true? It's only the people we don't know very well that we ever imagine that they don't struggle.

But the people that we know well, the people that we're close to, we're being honest and compassionate, but we can say, yeah, they struggle with this. And they could say the very same thing about us.

It's only the Christians that you don't know very well in the church that you can imagine that they don't have any problems. But be assured, once you got to know them, they would have issues that they find difficult, sins that are besetting.

[12 : 41] So we all have besetting sins, particular sins that we particularly struggle with for whatever reason. And so my response is, then it's so good that our God is patient.

It's so good that our God is patient with us in our sins. He's patient when we struggle, and he's patient when we wander away and we have to come back.

And he's patient when we're like Asaph and we're like a brute beast. That's what Asaph said. I was like a brute beast before you. And yet here comes Asaph and the Lord is patient and helps him.

Thankfully, God is the God of the book of Jonah, slow to anger, relenting from sending calamity.

And so we all have besetting sins. And so tonight, I want to encourage you that's really, that's the heart of this message is an encouragement that to remember that God is patient.

And God's patience and your besetting sins are not something that don't have anything to do with each other, but they have everything to do with each other. That God is patient that we might repent again and again and again and come back again, come nearer again when we've wandered away.

[14 : 03] He's patient that we might repent. 2 Peter 3, He's patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. repentance. So secondly, second, and the second point, I want to make sure that you're hearing me right, correctly.

You're hearing me right. I'm giving encouragement and I'm giving this reminder to those who really want to be done with the sin. Who really want to be done with it.

And you say, I hate it, but I can't get rid of it. I wish I could. I hate it, but it keeps coming back or I keep doing it or it's almost like I can't stop myself.

These things that we could tell ourselves, maybe they're true, maybe they're not, but you say, it's been here and I've been wrestling with it for months and months or years and years and given the right circumstances, I can go right back to it.

And we say, what a wretched man that I am and it makes me so sick and I hate it. It's not the consequences of it. The consequences are almost beside the point. I mean, we don't like the consequences, but it's not that we hate the consequences and don't mind the sin.

[15 : 14] It's we hate the sin. That's who I'm talking to. In 1662, over 2,000 Puritan ministers were ejected from their churches.

They were said, you can't preach in your church anymore. You're done. It's over. And when, and the date was set. And so there was this fateful day in 1662 where all of these ministers were preaching their very last sermon to their congregation.

They have one last thing that they get to say. There's actually a copy of their farewell sermons in our, in the church library if you're interested.

But one preacher, Edmund Calmy, I think I'm saying that correctly, he tried to put into perspective what was happening and he wanted to remind his people. This is what he said and this is what he

wanted them to remember.

There's more evil in the least sin than in the greatest outward calamity. So here they were in the middle of a calamity.

[16:31] The pastor and their church were being torn apart and it wasn't just happening in this one place. It was happening all over England. This is a national calamity. But he said we need to remember there's more evil in the least sin than in the greatest outward calamity.

And so consequences or suffering is one thing. But sin is a whole other thing and it's much evil. Much more evil.

That's the real evil. And what I'm saying is if that's how you feel about your besetting sin, then comfort your heart, brother.

Comfort your heart, sister, with this truth. Your God is patient, slow to anger, abounding in love. Paul said he had unlimited or perfect patience with me.

But maybe you say I've already done it once or twice or three or four hundred times. I've sinned and I've come back and I still want to say but God is patient.

[17:40] The truth of God's word and the truth of who God is has not changed. Between the first sin and the four hundredth, God's character has not changed.

God is still patient, slow to anger, abounding in love, relenting from sending calamity. He's steadfast to bless his people. But again, I want you to hear me right.

I'm talking about and I'm giving encouragement. I want this reminder to go to those who really hate their sin, not those who are cherishing it. Not those who are cherishing it.

David said, if I had cherished sin in my heart, then he would not have heard me. Cherished sin does really, truly turn God's ear away from our prayers.

But I want to say there is a world of difference between a besetting sin that you are fighting against and a cherished sin. There's a world of difference between struggling with sin and falling again and again and cherishing sin in your heart.

[18:52] You can struggle and struggle and fall again and yet not cherish sin. So remember Jesus said, I think it was Peter, he asked, Lord, how many times do I need to forgive my brother?

And Jesus said, if your brother sins against you seven times in a day and he comes to you and asks for forgiveness, then you are to forgive him. So let's go to this case of this man who is sinning seven times against you.

Obviously, he's struggling with sin. But is he cherishing it in his heart? No, he's coming. He wants forgiveness.

He wants done with it. There's a big difference between a besetting sin and a cherished sin. And so, get yourself in the right category.

Don't say, yes, I just have to struggle with the sin and God is patient and everything is okay.

[19:53] If really, you're cherishing sin in your heart. And on the other hand, don't say, God won't hear my prayers. God won't listen to me. God won't draw close to me.

God won't take me back. God won't forgive me. I'm cherishing sin when really, you're not. You aren't cherishing sin at all. You're fighting against it. It's the difference between finding a mouse in your house and not doing anything about it and just letting it go and saying, I'll get to it.

I'll get around to it sometime. And saying, I've tried again and again to get the mice out of my house and yet they keep coming back. World of difference.

If there were mice in my house and there's not, I have a big cat, if there were mice in my house, my relationship with my wife would completely hang on my attitude toward those mice.

If I didn't care, if I was lazy about getting rid of them, if I was like too cheap and I didn't want to spend five dollars on mousetraps, or if I said, well honey, I put out one, I put out one mousetrap.

[21:08] Isn't that good enough? My wife isn't going to be very happy with me. But if I'm trying and trying and I'm doing everything I can and I've got all the mice traps I can have and I'm trying to get rid of them, well my relationship with my wife is going to be okay.

She's not going to be happy, but she sees I'm trying, I'm working at it, and I want to please her, I want to do what is right, and then the relationship will be good.

Our God is patient with us that we might repent again and again, that we might come to Him broken and contrite of heart, and He takes us back each and every time.

Now, see, when you've fallen, Satan will get in there and try to interject his view of God into your heart. And can I tell you, it's a very tempting view.

It's a view that you might be sympathetic toward because it's your old view of God. Satan will try to get in there and interject his view of God, this lie about God, that He's not good, that God's like you, and He doesn't want anything to do with you now.

[22 : 26] Maybe in a little while. Maybe in a few days. Or He won't forgive you again. Or He'll keep you at arm's length. There's probably no point in keep on fighting.

God doesn't really like you. So just give up. And what's the point? Everything is dark. What's a little bit more? Everything is bad right now.

So what's a little bit more? You might as well go on sinning. But that's not what the Bible teaches at all. God is patient.

So now in the third place, I want you to picture a patient man. I want you to imagine what is a patient man like? What does he look like?

Well, turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. And Paul gives us really a description of what a patient man is like.

[23 : 41] And he's doing it by commanding them, by instructing them of what kind of people they ought to be. And this is what he says. It's Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 2.

And he says, Be completely humble. Now, patient people, are they proud? No, they're not.

They're humble. They're humble people. They aren't proud and easily offended. Pride is what makes us so sensitive to the insults and the assaults of others.

But humility gives us patience. So he says, Be completely humble and gentle. What is a patient man like? They're gentle. And so, a gentle parent, when a child comes broken and sad, receives that child.

They don't berate. They gently lead that child to repentance. They gently lead that child back to their side, back into relationship, lined up side by side again.

[24 : 56] Be patient. Bearing with one another in love is what he says next. They bear with others in love.

There's always something to bear in the church. There's always something to bear. And God and the Holy Spirit says to his people, bear with each other in love.

That means you need to put up with people and bear with them. Be patient with them. But through all of this, all of this instruction about being completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love, isn't the Holy Spirit saying, this is what I'm like?

Isn't God saying, this is what I am like? Now you do the same. You be the same. That's what verse one says. As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

God is like this. You've been called into fellowship with him. And so now you need to live this life.

So the Holy Spirit is saying to us, God is saying to us, this is what I am like. Now you do the same.

[26 : 14] He is not saying, now you do this, but I don't have to. You be this way, but I'm not really going to be that way. No.

Next he says, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. What is a patient man interested in?

What does a patient man value? Well, they value relationships and unity and keeping the peace, keeping relationships close.

Relationships are important to a patient person. Now, an impatient person doesn't really care about relationships. He cares about what's right for him, what he needs, what he wants, what she wants, whatever.

You can't get your act together, then out you go. We're done. If this isn't good for me, if you're too much for me, we're done. They don't care about, they don't value relationships.

[27 : 18] But a patient person does. God is that kind of person. I was watching a documentary on Larry Bird, and it was talking about his first marriage.

He was very young. He was first marriage, his first wife, and he had a daughter from that marriage. But at some point, that marriage fell apart. I don't know the details.

And then, from then on, Larry Bird had nothing to do with either of them. No relationship with them. And the explanation was this. One of his coaches said this. Once you hurt Larry, that's for life. He's not ever going to accept you again.

Once you hurt Larry, that's for life. He's not ever going to accept you again. Thank God, he's not like Larry Bird.

[28 : 18] Just writes people off just like that. He values relationships. He cherishes the relationships that he has with his children.

Pastor John just said, as much as we want to be near him, he much more wants to be near us. He wants peace, and he wants unity with you.

Parents, you prize your relationships with your children. Well, who put that in you? Whose image are you reflecting? That's from God. That's his heart.

And so, are you stumbling? Are you falling? Well, remember the patience of God. Don't, don't miss that comfort that is here. Don't buy into Satan's lies about your father.

Don't let him confuse you. Remember, we talked about those two categories of besetting sin and cherished sin. Don't let him confuse you and get you in the wrong camp and get you thinking the wrong things.

[29 : 31] And, and, that's really, this is the first practical application I have for you. I don't want you to lose heart in the face of your besetting sins. Don't lose heart.

Don't quit believing. Don't get discouraged. Don't stay away from your father. Where else can you go? Who else can help you?

Where else is there such mercy? And so, don't, don't be like that homeless foster girl that's now on the streets, on the run, afraid to come home, afraid of everybody.

No, come back. Your sin is not greater than his grace. Your sin is not greater than God's grace. Your sin is not greater than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Christ. Think about it. What was the pinnacle, the zenith, of all of history? It was the middle cross.

[30 : 30] And it didn't happen at the beginning of history. It happened after thousands of years of sin. And where God overlooked the sins of the Gentiles.

And He put up with the sins of the Jews. Why? Why was He so patient? It was to bring this world to the place where the cross would happen. So, not all the sins of the Gentiles and not all the sins of the Jews could turn God away from saving us through the cross.

And so, what I'm saying is is your sin as besetting, as troubling as it is, is not going to undo what Jesus did on the cross.

It is not greater than the cross. You're under His blood. And so, God's patience is for you. And so, fight on. And that's the second application.

Fight on. Don't abuse His patience. Use His patience. Don't abuse it. Use it. What is it for? 2 Peter 3. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

[31 : 39] And then, in a few verses later, Paul, or Peter, says, bear in mind that the Lord's patience means salvation. It leads to salvation. It allows for salvation.

And then he goes on. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation just as our brother Paul also wrote. So, Paul, or Peter, obviously has some of Paul's writings in mind.

And he said, you know what? Paul said something about God being patient. He's probably talking about Romans 4. verse 2, where Paul said, or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance from turning away from sin and coming back to Him.

That's what God's kindness leads you toward. And so, what is the point of God's patience? It is not a get-out-of-jail-free card that you can cash in and you sinned and that's it and I can just take it for granted.

That's to abuse God's patience. That's to abuse His kindness. That is to show contempt for His kindness is what Paul says. But what is it for that you might repent?

[33 : 03] You might turn away from your sin and come to Him and return to Him and be close to Him again. That you might repent for the first time.

That you might repent for the first time. God has spared some of you. He's sparing some of you. And so why are you still here and under the gospel?

Well, it's because of His kindness and His patience. This goodness is leading you to repentance. Repent for the first time.

And brother and sister, repent again and again and again all the way home. And so did you fall? God is merciful.

Slow to anger. And there's grace still for you. And it's grace. It's grace as great as His heart. Great as God itself. Mercy and patience as great as God's heart.

[34 : 06] And He loves you. He cherishes that relationship. And so let that lead you to repentance. Why would you sin against one who loves you so much?

Who's been so patient with you? When you wander away, He rejoices when you come back. And you say, how can He do that?

How can He rejoice when I've come back again and again and again? Well, I don't know.

There's one answer. I don't know. Love doesn't make sense sometimes. Love isn't a business. It's not cold logic. But this is something I do know.

Love is patient. And love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud.

[35 : 10] It is not rude. It's not self-seeking. It's not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. And it always protects.

Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails. So trust Him. Trust His patience. And fight on. Repent on. Repent on all the way home. Let's pray. Our God, we come humbled knowing our sin.

Knowing our besetting sins and our troubling sins. And so, we come contrite in heart and knowing that we are not worthy and yet we cling to the cross.

We cling to your character. And we trust in your patience and your grace. We trust in your love.

Pray for my brothers and sisters who are maybe thinking about giving up the fight.

[36 : 27] Oh, encourage them that you are there. You are waiting. You are close. And turn them around. Grant them repentance.

That they might have life and breath again. And I pray for those who even now are abusing your patience.

Who don't see it. Who don't see their sin. please wake them up. Give them spiritual eyes to see their situation. Give them spiritual eyes to see you.

That you might woo them and draw them to yourself. Lord, we thank you for how you've helped us today. Send us on our way rejoicing.

Send us on our way trusting in Jesus all the way. Pray this in his name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.