

## **Blinded by Hatred**

### **Jonah 4: 1-11**

Rev. Philip Parker  
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A man absolutely hated his wife's cat and decided to get rid of him by driving 20 blocks from his home and dropping him off at a park. When he got home the cat was walking up the driveway. The next day he decided to drive 40 blocks from his home before dropping the beast off. When he got home the cat was sitting in the driveway. Frustrated and angry, the man said, "That does it." He put the cat in the car and drove hundreds of miles away, way out in a remote section of the countryside. A few hours later he called his wife, "Jan, is the cat there?" "Sure," she replied, "why do you ask?" "Could you put him on the phone?" the man said, "I'm lost and need directions."

Hatred is a serious problem. It can lead us astray or in Jonah's case reduce us to an all-consuming rage sitting under a wilted shade tree. It's nothing to laugh about. It can disrupt and destroy our lives and the lives of those living around us. Like Jonah we can become blinded by hatred. In fact, that's the theme of this fourth chapter in the book of Jonah. After preaching to the people of Nineveh, Jonah went out east of the city, made a shelter for himself and sat down to see what would happen. He already had a pretty good idea about what was going to take place. The people had truly repented and he knew that God would forgive them. That was the nature of the God whom he served. He was a God who was always eager to forgive. To be perfectly honest, that's why he had tried to flee on that boat to the far side of the Mediterranean. Jonah hated the Ninevites. He didn't want God to forgive them. He wanted God to destroy them. He hated them so much that he cried out to God, "I am angry enough to die!"

Have you ever been that angry? Have you ever been so filled with hatred that you couldn't see straight anymore? Were you so filled with rage that even for a moment you lost touch with reality? Sadly, in today's world a lot of people find themselves blinded by hatred. All across our land people are brought before a judge for crimes of passion, fancy terminology for violence motivated by hatred. Even when it doesn't express itself through physical violence, the consequences of hatred can be devastating. Years ago during my first pastorate, a neighboring field was filled with what looked like a new kind of crop, growing luxuriantly in the afternoon sun. Inquiring about this new kind of crop, I became the recipient of a humorous reply. "Pastor," the man said, "That's not a new crop. It's a field of weeds. The family of the man who owned that land died three years ago. His family hate each other

so much that they have been arguing with one another about who owns it ever since.” Instead of producing wheat or corn, the deceased man’s family was raising a crop of weed filled discord and strife.

That’s what can happen when people let hatred get the best of them and that’s why we need to carefully scrutinize this last chapter in the book of Jonah. What is it saying to us? For starters it is reminding us of the origin of hatred. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh and he wanted God to destroy them because they had horribly abused his fellow countrymen. Without going into detail, Nineveh was the capital city of the dreaded Assyrian Empire. They were the crime bosses of the Middle East. If you didn’t pay them off with tribute, they would invade your country, destroy your cities and send your people into exile. They were exceptionally cruel, the inventors of crucifixion as a means of striking terror in the lives of their adversaries. Jonah had every reason to hate them because they had cruelly oppressed his people.

Hatred can be motivated by many things, but when you get right down to it, the origin of hatred is rooted in abuse. It can be verbal or physical, personally experienced, or observed in the lives of others. We feel violated because of what someone said or did to us or to someone else. It can be as simple as a harsh word, a disregarded promise, or a case of hurt feelings. It can also be as serious as what took place between Jacob and Esau. As you remember from the Biblical account in Genesis, Jacob deceived his elderly and nearly blind father, Isaac and stole the birthright that should have been given to his older brother Esau. As a result, the Bible says, “Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob’” (Genesis 27:41). In other words, Esau wouldn’t do anything until after Dad died, but when that happened, he would have his revenge. That’s why Jacob fled from home and years later was petrified when he and his family returned to face his brother Esau.

Yes, hatred can have a devastating effect upon those who are hated. It can also have a devastating effect upon the hater. The picture of Jonah sitting outside of the city of Nineveh is a perfect example of what hatred can do to the hater. Jonah was miserable, sitting there in the blistering heat. He was so hot that he was about ready to faint. Instead of rejoicing with the people of Nineveh who had repented, there he was, sulking all my himself, bitter and angry that the city had been spared. He was consumed by his anger and not only that, he was also angry with God. He complained, “Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive” (Jonah 4:3). Hatred can do nasty things to us. It isolates us. It separates us from others, at times even those we love and it separates us from God. That’s what I discovered years ago. Two brothers hated one another and that hatred destroyed not only

their lives, but also the lives of their families. They would never have darkened the front door of a church, except perhaps when they were residing in a coffin.

So what can we do about that kind of hatred, the kind of hatred that can ruin our lives, just as it did Jonah's? It may be nothing more than a slight offense, a disagreement with someone who has offended us. Big or small, even a small dose of resentment is dangerous. It can wound personal relationships, it can keep us out of church and it can put us in a prison of bitter isolation from God and one another. Thankfully, God has provided us with a remedy in Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus. He says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). That's precisely what God was trying to do when He caused a plant to grow over Jonah. Jonah was delighted by this new addition to his life. Now he could sit in the shade. The next day, however, at God's command, the plant was eaten by a worm and died. Once again, Jonah was sweltering in the bright sunlight and he was upset, muttering to God about his right to die. This turn of events gave God an opportunity to confront Jonah with a singularly important spiritual truth. The LORD said to Jonah, "You didn't grow the plant that withered away and yet you felt sorry for it. How about all those people in Nineveh. Aren't they more valuable than a little bit of vegetation? Don't I have the right to show compassion and pity on them. After all there are at least 120,000 innocent children in that city" Jonah 4:10-11. In other words, forgiveness and compassion need to replace anger and hatred, especially when the objects of our hatred are like those children in Nineveh.

So in closing let me share the "brownie story" with you. It will sum up everything that I have been trying to say, everything that, indeed, God is trying to say to us. A young woman by the name of Susan was a caregiver. She didn't volunteer for the job. It was thrust upon her. She was responsible for the care of her elderly grandfather-in-law who took delight in criticizing her. In his eyes, she could do nothing right. Worse still, he always sat in the kitchen with his leg propped up on a stool to help ease the pain that was continuous. One day Susan was working in the kitchen and she accidentally bumped his bad leg. A string of curse words exploded from his lips. Susan was reduced to tears—tears of anger, hurt and genuine hostility. She hated this mean spirited devil who dominated her life. What could she do to quieten her own feelings as well as reduce the animosity that they obviously had for one another? She thought for a moment remembering what Jesus had to say about forgiving one another. Then an idea popped into her head. She remembered that granddaddy loved brownies. So she fixed a batch and put the still warm pan on a table close

to where he was sitting so that he would smell the brownies when he woke up. His angry tirade had so exhausted him that he had fallen asleep. In a few moments the waft of the cooling brownies stirred him to consciousness. Susan was on the other side of the room fixing dinner. With tears running down his face, grandpa called her over, "Can you forgive me? I'm a cranky old man who doesn't appreciate all that you do for me." Pulling a chair up beside her grandfather-in-law, they shared a brownie with one another as well as the beginning of a new relationship. As the writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament reminds us, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" Hebrews 12:15.