

# "Pride and Prejudice"

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Pride and Prejudice is a story, a popular book written by Jane Austen. Anybody read the book Pride and Prejudice? Don't be ashamed.

Good. Some guys as well. Well done. I'm very impressed. It's a period drama about, well, posh English people, as far as I could tell. It's a very well-known story. And it's one of my wife Jean's favorite stories.

She's got the movie. She's watched it a few times already. I myself must admit I've never read the book or seen the movie. But I thought because I'm using it in my sermon intro, I should at least read the plot summary on Wikipedia, just so I know what it's about.

And I just want to admit, honestly, this last week, I tried to do that. I looked it up. I tried to read a bit of the plot summary. And evidently, my male mind just doesn't get it.

I read a few paragraphs of it. And by that time, there were no car chases or sword fights. And so my mind just started to shut down. I couldn't quite get the story. And that's not the story's fault.

[ 1 : 0 7 ]     It's my own limitations, I do admit. However, the reason I'm mentioning the movie is not because of the plot. It's actually because of the title, Pride and Prejudice.

From what I could understand of the plot, it seems quite an appropriate title and a very compelling title because it describes the problems in the relationships between the characters in the story that keep coming up.

And it describes how common these problems are. I mean, from what I could tell, most of the problems and relational conflicts between the characters were because of these two things, pride and prejudice.

However, these are problems that are not just common in stories set 100 years ago. They're common in every age and in every situation in everyone's life.

And even in our own hearts, we still often, all of us, battle with these two issues, pride and prejudice. And I wouldn't be surprised if Jane Austen's story is so popular because we immediately, just from the title, can relate to it.

[ 2 : 1 4 ]     And the traits that are repeated and appear over and over again in the story are things that we know and recognize in our own lives and in our own relationships.

Pride and prejudice. They are certainly two words that neatly, very neatly, sum up what's going on in Jonah chapter 4. If you want to know, if you want a neat summary of Jonah chapter 4, it's pride and prejudice.

Namely, Jonah's. Because this chapter is pretty much all about Jonah's pride and his prejudice and how that affects his life, how it affects his job, and how it affects his relationship with God.

And by understanding it and by looking at Jonah and seeing what happens, we'll hopefully learn how our own pride and prejudice can do the same to us, how it can affect our lives and how it can affect our relationship with God.

And so that's what I hope we'll see this morning as we study this chapter. But first, before we do, just a quick summary of what's been before. This is, as I said, the last in our exploration of this book, the story about a prophet who's on the run from God.

[ 3 : 22 ] A prophet who was, we'll remember back in chapter 1, given a task by God to go and warn Nineveh about God's wrath for their sins. And we know what he did. He chose to turn and run the other way.

And we've been reminded right back in chapter 1, when we considered that chapter, just like how Jonah is so much like many people in our world who do sincerely believe they can escape God's authority over their lives.

But we were also reminded last week that one of the reasons so many people in our world think that they can escape God's authority, that they can ignore God and get away with it, is because, like Jonah was at first, Christians today are often unwilling to go out and tell the world an uncomfortable message.

And so, it was a rebuke for people who ignore God, but it's just as much a rebuke for Christians, people who come to church every week. The question is, why are we so hesitant?

Why are we so unwilling to take what we learn here and take it out there, into our workplaces, into our lives, into the conversations with our neighbors and family and friends? You see, that was the big rebuke, I think, of last week.

[ 4 : 41 ] It's an uncomfortable message. Because for people to understand the good news of Jesus, people need to first understand the bad news of sin and judgment and God's wrath.

And we don't want to tell people that. We hesitate. And I want us to think about just why we hesitate, because I think I speak for all of us. I mean, I'm a pastor, and I hesitate when I get the opportunity to speak to someone about the gospel.

We all do. Why? Why are we so unwilling? Is it fear? Is it just fear of what people will think of us? Is it laziness? Do we just not want to go there because it takes a lot of work?

What causes us? What causes you to be reluctant to reach out with the gospel, with your neighbors and your work colleagues and your family? Because let's be honest. I mean, just think about it.

If each of us was bold enough to talk to just one other person a week. If each person sitting here made a resolve to talk to one person a week about God, about Jesus and what he's done, and about the truths of sin and judgment, I think we'd see this church double within a month in size.

[ 5 : 50 ] I think we'd need to start two new services. If only we were willing to go and tell people that we knew. And I think one of the main reasons it's not is just our hesitation.

It's just that we get that moment, and at that moment when we get to choose, we just keep quiet. And then the moment moves on. You've been in that situation, haven't you? I certainly have. Now, why is that?

Well, I think we find out in this chapter, Jonah chapter 4, because it's now that we finally discover the real reason. After reading these three chapters, finally in chapter 4, we discover the real reason for Jonah running away at first.

And it's shocking, and it's a reason that no one expects. Have a look from verse 1. Right after God spares the Ninevites from judgment, let's read what happens. But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong.

And he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? This is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish.

[ 6 : 53 ] I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sin and calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.

Okay, so here we see the real reason Jonah didn't want to go to the Ninevites is because he knew God wanted to have mercy on them. But Jonah didn't want God to have mercy on them.

You see that? Jonah wanted the Ninevites to suffer. He wanted the Ninevites to be punished. And so we finally realized he didn't hesitate to go to Nineveh back in chapter 1 because he was scared.

He didn't hesitate because he was lazy. It was because he didn't actually want the Ninevites to be saved. Isn't that shocking? Isn't it? Well, what's even more shocking is that even after, we read in chapter 4, even after God has mercy on the Ninevites, Jonah still harbors this hope in the back of his mind that God is going to change his mind and punish the Ninevites because Jonah complained to him.

It seems as if Jonah's thinking God is going to go, you know what, Jonah, you're right. I really should punish them. And you know why we know that? Because Jonah goes and camps out on a nearby hill to watch the destruction of Nineveh, even after God's had mercy on them.

[ 8 : 15 ] He's thinking maybe God's going to come to his senses and finally give them what they deserve. Still, but it's as he's sitting here on this hill overlooking the city, waiting for the show, that God decides to teach him a vital lesson, which is a lesson he needed and a lesson we need this morning.

So let's read from verse 5. Jonah made himself a shelter. He sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort.

And Jonah was very happy about the plant. Okay, so he's probably thinking, ah, you see, you see God's coming around to my point of view now, isn't he? See, God likes me.

He actually likes me. He's provided this leafy umbrella for me to watch the destruction of Nineveh in comfort. I don't know, maybe Jonah was expecting a box of popcorn as well. But he certainly wasn't expecting what he got next.

Let's read on. Very interesting. Verse 7. Now, obviously, Jonah at this point didn't know what was going on.

[ 9 : 43 ] You know, it seems that God is just, he can't make up his mind. He seems at first to forgive the Ninevites, and then he helps Jonah to get a front row seat for their destruction. He even provides some shelter.

But then the next day he destroys the very thing that he provided. You know, what's God doing? It seems like he's being inconsistent here. And so Jonah's just had enough. Ah, just kill me now, why don't you, you crazy God?

I've had enough of this. And so it seemed, I mean, at first reading it seemed like we don't know what God's doing here. Seems like he can't make up his mind.

But let's admit that we often think that about God, don't we, in our own lives. I mean, God's ways often seem bizarre to us, don't they? Why does he bless us one day and then send us difficulty the next day?

Why? Is he just being inconsistent? Can he just not make up his mind as to what we need? I wonder if you've ever thought that in your own life. When you've faced struggles and troubles, you just wonder what God's up to.

[ 10 : 48 ] Why is he being so inconsistent? Well, what we see here is that God's always got a reason for doing that, even if we don't know what it is.

In Jonah chapter 4, we're actually told what that reason is. And when we read on, we realize God was doing that not because he was being, he was struggling to make up his mind or being inconsistent.

God was doing that because he wanted to teach Jonah something about Jonah. Namely, he wanted to teach Jonah about Jonah's own inconsistency in all this, not God's.

And we see this in how Jonah reacts to the plant. In fact, it's Jonah's reactions to the plant that really tell us what's going on and tell us why God is doing this.

So, and just how inconsistent Jonah's behavior is. For example, Jonah was very sad at God's mercy to the Ninevites. We're told he was very displeased. But he was very glad at God's mercy to him in providing the plant.

[ 11 : 53 ] Jonah was very angry that God didn't destroy Nineveh. But he was also very angry when God did destroy the plant. You notice that? And that's what's supposed to be highlighted in this chapter. Just Jonah's own inconsistency.

So, using this plant, God is actually exposing Jonah's double standards. It's that he's the one being unreasonable here, not God. But then, after that's exposed, God decides to talk to him and show him his biggest inconsistency by far.

And this is what we read from verse 9. And this is the end of the book of Jonah. Listen to what it says. This is God's final word to him. But God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?

It is, he said. I'm so angry I wish I were dead. But the Lord said, You've been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow.

It sprang up overnight and died overnight. Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and so many animals?

[ 13 : 06 ] Full stop. That's how the book ends. With God having exposed the real problem in Jonah's heart, and I think the real problem in all our hearts. You see, the fact that God is exposing you, the fact that Jonah was more concerned for a plant than he was for people.

And even animals of Nineveh. But why was that the case? You know, why did Jonah attach more value to a plant than to people?

Why would he do that? Well, I think you can sum it up in two reasons. Two main reasons he did that. The first is that he was thinking too highly of himself, and so he prioritized his comforts over everyone else's.

And secondly, he was thinking too lowly of the Ninevites. And so he didn't prioritize them. In other words, pride and prejudice.

You see that? Jonah was proud. Probably because he was a Jew. And he kept the law. And he was religious.

[ 14 : 12 ] And he did the sacrifices. And he tithed. And not to mention, he's a prophet. So quite an important Jew at that. And so that made him think that he actually deserved what God gave him.

And he had a right to God's blessings. And we see that come out. We see that assumption coming out in the story. Remember chapter 2? Back in chapter 2, if you can remember two weeks back.

Jonah is spared from death. And he then composes a psalm of thanksgiving. Remember that? To God. And how thankful he is at God's mercy and compassion towards him.

And how forgiving God is towards him. And yet, he's angry when God does exactly the same thing with the Ninevites. You notice that? The same thing that he's angry about is the thing that saved him in chapter 2.

Why is he angry when God does it for the Ninevites, but not for him? Well, because he's obviously assuming that he deserves God's mercy while they didn't deserve God's mercy. Just like he's assuming that he deserves this plan to comfort him.

[ 15 : 18 ] And so he's angry when God takes it away. You see, that anger comes from pride. It comes from a sense of deserving or entitlement. Deserving something that other people don't deserve.

That was Jonah's first mistake. But secondly, prejudice. When Jonah looked at the Ninevites, what did he see? He saw them as subhuman. He didn't attach any value to their lives.

He didn't care about their plight, really. He would have had a totally different attitude had the city been in Israel. But these were pagan Gentile Ninevites.

They're subhuman in his mind. They didn't deserve the same kind of mercy that Jews did. In other words, to put it frankly, Jonah was a racist. Very much so.

That's why he didn't care. Because of his pride, thinking too highly of himself. And because of his prejudice, thinking too lowly of others. And I think that's where it really comes home to us, living here in South Africa.

[ 16 : 27 ] It doesn't it? That's where Jonah links with our own situation. Because don't we do exactly the same? Don't we? When we look at criminals, what do we think of them?

When we look at criminals like those who murdered 16-year-old Francisca Blochenger in Takai last week, we want them to go straight to hell, don't we?

Be honest. That's what we want to happen to those men. And they should go straight to hell. But so should we. Each of us.

And we forget that. We think we have a right to God's mercy, but they don't. We haven't committed murder. But the fact is, you see, we've sinned against God in more ways than we'll ever know.

And besides, we've committed murder in our hearts and in our minds more than often enough. And yet we still expect a different standard to be applied to us than to others, don't we?

[ 17 : 32 ] We expect that we deserve God's mercy more than someone else does. They must get God's justice, but we'll enjoy God's mercy. We often think that.

It's exactly what Jonah was thinking about the Ninevites. And that's pride. It's pride. And it's obvious that we're proud because how do we react when God takes away something that we enjoy?

Health or comfort or a relationship? When God takes it away, what do we do? We get grumpy with him, don't we? We get angry with him. Why?

Because we think we deserve those blessings that he's taken away. I mean, we wouldn't get angry at someone who didn't give us what we don't deserve. We only get angry when we don't get what we think we do deserve.

Come on, God, I go to church. I pray every day. You owe me. That's what we think in the back of our minds. We would never say that. Of course not. But that's what we think. And it comes out in how we handle suffering.

[ 18 : 37 ] How we handle God taking away blessings. How do we react to that? Well, that'll show us the true nature of our hearts. That'll show us that we still have a lot of pride.

What about prejudice? Prejudice. Well, you don't have to look far to see that in our country, do you? It's all over. You know, at the moment, it doesn't really matter what race you are.

There's inevitably one group of people that you look down upon, that you don't value as highly as another. Their lives are not as valuable as the lives of your group. And you may, again, never admit it, never say it out.

But in the back of our minds, we often do that. You know, if you've been following the story of Francisca's murder, it was a terrible thing. It was a terrible crime that happened in Takai last Monday.

And she and her family, who we deeply mourn with, they deserve the best that law enforcement and the justice system can provide. Don't they? They do. They deserve it.

[ 19 : 37 ] To make sure justice is done. They deserve the best. But doesn't Sinokmolo Maffevuka also deserve that? Who's that?

Sinokmolo Maffevuka is a teenage girl whose half-naked body was found in a communal toilet in Kayalecha last week. But she didn't make headline news.

No one's been sharing her story on Facebook. Just another life lost in a township, you know. Hardly anybody notices. Now, I'm sure that the parents of Francisca Blochlinger, knowing just what it's like, would want to see justice done for Sinokmolo as much as for their own daughter.

They would want to see the perpetrators of that crime caught and tried just as much as for their own daughter. But it looks like that's probably not going to happen. Why?

Well, because Sinokmolo was poor. That's why. And so her life isn't seen as valuable. It's hard to say, but it's true.

[ 20 : 46 ] We've got to be true about these things. We've got to be honest. We live in a society where the lives of the rich are considered more valuable than the lives of the poor. Let's be honest. And we all too often contribute to that thinking in our own attitudes towards poor people that we come across when we don't want to give them the time of day because our time is far more valuable than theirs.

You see, prejudice is alive and well in our society and in our own hearts. And we've got to admit that. We've got to come to terms with that. When we look at Jonah chapter 4, we've got to be looking in a mirror.

When we look at Jonah, we've got to be pretty slow to criticize him when we realize that the same pride and prejudice in his heart is the pride and prejudice in the heart of all of us.

Well, thank God that he doesn't see people in the same way we see people because that's also what we realize in the story of Jonah.

Praise God that he values all the life that he's made. Even the animals of Nineveh. Why does he even mention the animals? He's trying to make the point that he values life while we don't.

[ 22 : 03 ] And so if he values the animals of Nineveh, how much more the people that are made in his image. Each one, each person, each Ninevite was precious to God.

Each person today, no matter what part of society they're from, no matter what clothes they wear, each person made in the image of God is precious and valuable to him.

And if we are going to reflect God to our world outside, we need to treat each person that we come across with the value that God attaches to them, no matter who they are.

You see, that's how we'll stand out as Christians in our community. That's how we'll contrast with the society around us. When we show that we value people who are made in God's image purely because they are made in God's image.

And that is what's going to make our witness credible to the outside world. Our witness. When we go and tell people about God's compassion.

[ 23 : 12 ] You see, we can't have a credible witness telling people about how compassionate and loving God is if we're not prepared to have that same compassion and love for people around us.

It'll make no sense to people. People have got to see the gospel when they hear the gospel. And so it's when we're prepared to love like God loved that when we tell them about God's compassion, it'll make sense to them.

God's compassion so deep that he came into our world as a man, Jesus Christ. A poor man. Jesus wasn't rich. He was poor by our standards.

And he hung out with the lowly of society. But that emphasizes just why he came. He came to share our sufferings. And then to suffer his own justice for our sins so that the most undeserving of us, the lowliest of us can still find forgiveness and a place in God's family in eternity.

You see, that is the heart of God. And when we see the heart of God, what we see is the complete opposite to Jonah's heart, don't we? And our own hearts by nature.

[ 24 : 28 ] Jonah just cared about himself at the end of the day. He just cared about his own comforts. And his emotions and his reactions were all a response to his own comforts and whether he had comfort or not.

He cared about the plant more than the Ninevites because the plant benefited him while the Ninevites didn't. He was inward focused. While God is the complete opposite.

God is always outward focused. He's always looking and working towards the good of others. And we even see that in the Trinity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father is always thinking about the glory of the Son and the Spirit. God the Spirit is always thinking about the glory of the Son and the Father. God the Son is always thinking about the glory of God the Father and the Spirit. It's always outward focused.

God is love. God is the epitome of outward focus and sacrificial love. Always. Which is the complete opposite to Jonah and the complete opposite to us sinful human beings.

[ 25 : 25 ] So I think this last chapter of Jonah is here to rebuke us for our inward focus. It's here to rebuke us for the times that we too are more concerned with our personal comforts than the salvation of the people around us.

Because let's be honest, often we care more about what's on TV tonight than we care about the millions of people who don't know Jesus and who are facing eternal judgment for their sins unless they hear about Him.

And so let's be rebuked this morning. Let's be rebuked as we should from this chapter. Let's realize that what's keeping us from opening our mouths and telling people about Jesus honestly is more often than not because we just don't care.

Let's repent of that. Let's ask God to change us from the inside out to reflect His image to be like Him which we can only be when we come to Him and accept Jesus as our Lord and accept the Holy Spirit to work in us.

Only then can we be conformed to the image of Christ so that we can change from being inward focused and caring only about our own comforts to being outward focused and reflecting God's love to the people around us.

[ 26 : 40 ] to genuinely care for them and to care for them so much that we don't only care for their life on earth but we care for their eternity as well.

When you care for a person enough you will care for where they are going when they die and you'll not hesitate at that point to open your mouth and tell them about Jesus their only way of salvation because you'll love them so much and that you see that is what's going to cause us to stop being complacent and that's what's going to cause us as our vision statement says to joyfully share the gospel everywhere.

Will you do that? Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for your rebuke in Scripture. We don't come here on a Sunday morning for necessarily for comfort or for entertainment we come to hear from you our Creator and Lord I pray that each and every person in this church this morning has heard from their Creator and I pray Lord that you will help each of us to repent to repent of our pride to repent of our prejudice and then to reflect your compassion and your love so much so that we would stand out in a sinful and broken world that we would stand out so much that as Barry prayed earlier we would be a lighthouse in our community that people would come to experience God's compassion your compassion through us and ultimately as they hear the gospel that you would save them and that you would bring them into your family from all walks of life and from all parts of our society Lord would you save people and would you use us powerfully for that end in Jesus name we pray

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