

Pursuing Those Who Need To Hear  
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Jonah 3 and 4

**Opening question: What factors could keep you or me from doing something God has called us to do?**

The story of Jonah is about the most RELUCTANT and REBELLIOUS missionary we could imagine, and how God used him in that day, and is still using Jonah's story to convict us today.

- Quick review of what you learned last week when Karl taught from Jonah Chapters 1 & 2. Look at Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. **What did God call Jonah to do?**
- **What DID Jonah do? Why did he respond this way?**
- **How did God deal with Jonah's rebellion?**
- At the end of Chapter 2, Jonah is in the belly of the fish and he's praying to God:

9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving  
will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

**Question: What has Jonah finally recognized in that verse (verse 9)?**

Lesson over, school's out, Jonah's got the picture, he's repented.

10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

That brings us to Jonah Chapter 3:

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."

**Question: What does verse 1 tell us about our God?**

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.

This was no "one-horse" town. As Karl taught you last week, Nineveh was *"The capital city of the Assyrian Empire; at that time, one of the most powerful empires in the world."* That verse says it would take three days just to walk around Nineveh. It was probably four or five times larger in population than Jerusalem. Nineveh was not only great in size and importance; it was GREAT IN EVIL and PAGAN CRUELTY. They were MURDEROUS.

4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

- This may be the most CONCISE sermon recorded in Holy Scripture.
- That last sentence of verse 4 is the extent of the message we're told about in scripture. Maybe Jonah took some Q&A, but that one sentence IS the message.
- How did the people respond? Verse 5:

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

- **Question: What does Jonah's simple message, and the people's response, say to you and me today about sharing the Gospel?**
- **What does it say about our responsibility versus God's responsibility?**

- So the people of Nineveh believed God...they REPENTED of their sin. And in verses 6-9 we're told even the King of Nineveh got into the spirit and decreed that everyone was to repent putting on sack cloth and ashes...even the animals.
- Can you picture the Ninevites rubbing down their livestock with ashes and trying to get "ole Bessie the milk cow" to put on sack cloth and bow down on her knees and repent!
- The people REPENTED. How did God respond?

Jonah 3:10 (ESV)

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

- **What does verse 10 say about the nature of God?**

*Exodus 34:6-7 (NIV) Tells us...*

*6 ...the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. YET he does NOT leave the GUILTY unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*  
(Emphasis Mine)

- **What was the relationship of Nineveh to Jerusalem and the land of Israel?**
- **Can you think of an example today of a nation that would be as hated and despised for their evil acts as Nineveh was?**
- The fact that this powerful, pagan city repented as a group was HUGE.
- This was one of the great REVIVAL's in all history, and God used an Israelite prophet named Jonah with his simple sermon, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" to bring them to God.
- What if the story of Jonah ended with Chapter 3? Jonah repents; goes to Nineveh and preaches; everyone THERE repents; end of story. Happily ever after.
- You can imagine that Jonah was THRILLED, right? Jonah must have floated back to Jerusalem on air to give a BIG PRAISE REPORT to his people, right? Chapter 4:

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

[The Hebrew word literally means Jonah BURNED with ANGER. "This BURNS ME UP!"]

- What? God used Jonah to win this evil city to repentance, and Jonah is angry? Why?

2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

- Jonah isn't praying a prayer of PRAISE but a prayer of PROTEST. *"God, I knew you'd do this. That's EXACTLY WHY I tried to run off to Tarshish."*
- *"These good for nothing, evil, pagan Ninevites deserved what you did to Sodom and Gomorrah...poof, GONE in a ball of fire!"*
- *"But, I KNEW IT. You're a God of MERCY and LOVE and you FORGAVE these pagans and I'm SO MAD...I'M SO MAD..."* (verse 3:)
- *3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."*
- Can you believe it? Jonah would rather DIE than see Nineveh go unpunished.
- **Question: Under what conditions might someone today NOT want to share the Gospel with someone? What would cause that level of anger to want someone to suffer judgment? If it's not ANGER, how could CYNICISM keep us from sharing the Gospel?**
- Verse 4 in the NKJV: *Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"* How did Jonah reply? Look at verse 5.
- *5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.*
- **What is Jonah doing...what is his state of mind? What is he hoping for and watching for?**

John MacArthur writes of Jonah:

*"He is full of prejudice, pride, and he cannot tolerate the magnitude of God's grace to a barbarian nation. He wants nothing to do with this. He would rather be dead than see people converted ... [He] is aggravated to such an extreme degree. What he hoped for was that he would preach destruction, go on a hill, wait forty days and watch it come and love every minute of it."*

- God was still teaching Jonah more lessons. Verse 6:

6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

- Jonah was a bit of a “drama queen,” don’t you think? *“Oh, I just want to die!”*
  - **First Jonah was mad because God spared Nineveh. What is he mad about now?**
- 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”

- You can almost hear the Lord saying “Let me get this straight, Jonah.” Verse 10:

10 And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

- There ends the book of Jonah. --- It ends with God asking Jonah a question: *“Should I not pity Nineveh?”* A question unanswered. No doubt so that WE could wrestle with the same question.
- **Why would the plant dying make Jonah upset? Instead of being concerned for the souls of the people in Nineveh, what was HE focused on? His own \_\_\_\_\_.**
- **What is God always focused on?**
- It’s not uncommon for someone to cry over a pet that dies (nothing wrong with that); or to be upset over a special antique that gets broken. Here’s the question though, do we spend more time crying over our “stuff” or our “discomfort” than over people about to face eternal judgment?
- Here’s another convicting point for all of us today:
- It’s shocking to us that Jonah didn’t want to carry God’s message to Nineveh.
- Before we get too judgmental about Jonah, ponder this question:
- **If Jonah had refused to go and tell them what would have happened to the people of Nineveh?**
- **Okay, if Jonah had gone to Nineveh but just kept his mouth shut about God, what would have happened to the people?**
- **So which is more DEADLY, refusing to tell people about Christ or just NEGLECTING to share the Gospel with them? -----**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Do you and I have a Nineveh? Someone we’re reluctant to witness to? Hopefully, there is no one we hate so much that we wouldn’t want them to hear the Gospel and be saved. However, there might be someone we think is BEYOND THE REACH of the Gospel so we just don’t tell them. It’s up to God who will and won’t be saved.
- Even if we’re dealing with people who are nasty, demeaning, and evil...we have to remember that in God’s eyes we are all VILE and WICKED until we are CLOTHED in the RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ. If someone is to us like Nineveh was to Jonah, God is asking us: *“Should I not have pity on that person, just as I did on YOU?”*
- We need to remember in Romans 9:15 Paul quotes the Lord...
 

*15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*

- God didn't call us to figure out who will and won't be saved. We are to give them the Gospel and leave the result to Him.