

JONAH 3:1-10

LESSON: GOD'S LOVE FOR THE LOST —May 21, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

At the end of **Chapter 2:8-10** Jonah reflects upon those that observe and keep lying vanities; vain idols, for they are known to forsake their own mercy (Jehovah). Jonah realizes that he had substituted his own will and desires forward over Jehovah's Will. He now recognizes God's love and now wants to sacrifice unto God with the voice of thanksgiving and pay his vow unto God because salvation is of the Lord. Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

LESSON

I. JONAH: LIMITED TIME Jonah 3:1-4

3:1 AND THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME UNTO JONAH THE SECOND TIME, SAYING,— In chapter 1 the Word of the Lord had come to Jonah, but he was disobedient to God's Word. So, the Lord has to come to Jonah a second time about the same thing. Just as God give sinners chance after chance, He also give saints chance after chance. The book of Jonah teaches us that God's commands don't change because we try to run from Him. Jonah is told a second time to preach repentance to the Nivevites by God. He gives the same command again because it had not gotten done. This time there is something different about the prophet. Jonah had learned that he couldn't run from the presence of God. He had learned that there were consequences when being on a ship God did not tell him to get on. He endangered his life and many others by being out of position, like Adam. Jonah had learned the discipline of God, and now, he learns that obedience is the secret to intimate fellowship with the Lord. He couldn't spare anymore time.

3:2 ARISE, GO UNTO NINEVEH, THAT GREAT CITY, AND PREACH UNTO IT THE PREACHING THAT I BID THEE. This time Jonah arises and goes to Nineveh. He obeys the command to proclaim God's message. These were pagan, unbelieving people known as the city of blood (Nahum 3:1) who preyed upon one another and upon other nations. The Assyrians flaunted their power, greed, and violence before God and the world through numerous acts. If they knew about God, they did not obey Him; no Scripture to read; no previous ministry of divine revelation as far as we know. So, this is Jonah's opportunity to preach as God had bided him to.

3:3 SO JONAH AROSE, AND WENT UNTO NINEVEH, ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD. NOW NINEVEH WAS AN EXCEEDING GREAT CITY OF THREE DAYS' JOURNEY. How many times does the Lord have to say something to us to get our attention? Well, the challenges Jonah had gone through, made him think long and hard about the goodness of God. As he prayed in the belly of the fish, change came and when change starts in a person, then they can influence a community. Jonah does not hesitate at all. Jonah gets up and goes to Nineveh instantly with the right attitude with the Word of the Lord that was spoken to him. Jonah had limited time to get to that great city of Nineveh which was a three days journey.

3:4 AND JONAH BEGAN TO ENTER INTO THE CITY A DAY'S JOURNEY, AND HE CRIED, AND SAID, YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN. However, knowing he had limited time, it only took Jonah one day instead of the 3 days to get into that great city! With God's help all things are possible! Jonah's seven-word cry of prophecy was short but to the point: "In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown." The mission was to a people Jonah didn't like and didn't care for, but God cared for them. God may send us to people we don't like or care for to <http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

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declare a message, but only God knows the reason and commands He gives. Only God knows why we shun some and flock to others. Only God knows the purpose at that particular time in our lives and in their lives. Influencing others means getting our lives right with God first before we can influence others' thinking.

I. OBSERVATIONS:

- a. **JONAH'S MESSAGE WAS BRIEF, YET CLEAR** – Jonah did not preach, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." He preached with "burning anger" toward them, and the certainty of God's judgment— **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."**
 - i. 40 days of rain for Noah's ark was a time of washing away the moral pollution of generations.
 - ii. 40 years wandering in the wilderness where Israel was being trained to live by the promises and guidance of God.
 - iii. Elijah's 40 days on the run from Jezebel prepared him for God's reassurance;
 - iv. Jesus' 40 days of temptation and 40 days of resurrection appearances verified both the Messenger and His message.

II. **NINEVEH: BELIEF** Jonah 3:5-9

3:5 SO THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH BELIEVED GOD, AND PROCLAIMED A FAST, AND PUT ON SACKCLOTH, FROM THE GREATEST OF THEM EVEN TO THE LEAST OF THEM. They heard the preaching of one man declaring the law and judgment of God against sinners; and they responded in faith to the proclaimed Word by repenting.

- b. **NINEVEH'S EXAMPLE OF REPENTANCE IS A DISCREDIT OF ISRAEL AND EVEN JONAH** – It was not that some believed, but all of Nineveh believed; unlike Israel and Judah.
 - Israel in Jonah's own day – 2Ki 17:13-14, 18; 2Ch 36:15-16.
 - Israel in the days of Jesus – Mt 12:41.
- c. **THE NINEVITES SAW THAT THEIR SIN WAS AGAINST GOD**– Who wants to come up against God after hearing in 40days you will be overthrown? There was a genuine response of shame and repentance over their sin, when the recognition of their sin confronted them.
- d. **AN UNUSUAL FAST IS PROCLAIMED** –This fast was from the greatest to the least of them in sackcloth.
 - It does not say how long the fast was, but it might have been three days without food and water.

3:6 FOR WORD CAME UNTO THE KING OF NINEVEH, AND HE AROSE FROM HIS THRONE, AND HE LAID HIS ROBE FROM HIM, AND COVERED HIM WITH SACKCLOTH, AND SAT IN ASHES.

- e. **THE RULER REPENTS** – Instantly, as the Word of the Lord came to the king of Nineveh, he showed his people that he's a participant in this fast. He disrobes his royal robe and covers himself in sackcloth and sit in ashes. This is what a leader does. He does not only proclaim the Word to the people, but he demonstrates how important this is for their city, for he will be judged also.

3:7 AND HE CAUSED IT TO BE PROCLAIMED AND PUBLISHED THROUGH NINEVEH BY THE DECREE OF THE KING AND HIS NOBLES, SAYING, LET NEITHER MAN NOR BEAST, HERD NOR FLOCK, TASTE ANY THING: LET THEM NOT FEED, NOR DRINK WATER:—

- f. **THE DECREE WAS PROCLAIMED TO ALL** –The king and his nobles suffered; man and beast suffered; herd and flock suffered, and they were to taste nothing nor be fed anything or drink any water. Can you imagine America as a country just repenting of our sins to get back to IN GOD WE TRUST? Because judgment is surly coming! Nineveh's desire and actions should be a testimony to us for generations to come! From the greatest to the least; mankind to the animals obeyed the decree.

3:8 BUT LET MAN AND BEAST BE COVERED WITH SACKCLOTH, AND CRY MIGHTILY UNTO GOD: YEA, LET THEM TURN

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EVERY ONE FROM HIS EVIL WAY, AND FROM THE VIOLENCE THAT IS IN THEIR HANDS.

- g. **SACKCLOTH WAS FOR BOTH MAN AND BEAST TO CRY MIGHTILY UNTO GOD.** We see that the king had an immediate response of turning from sin to God which called for a true change of behavior. Man and beast were to be covered with sackcloth. "*Sackcloth*" was made of goat or camel hair; the garment of repentance, a sign of grief for the dead, or sorrow over disaster. Man and beast were to cry out with all their might to God. They were to turn away from their evil way and withdraw from the violence of their hands.

3:9 WHO CAN TELL IF GOD WILL TURN AND REPENT, AND TURN AWAY FROM HIS FIERCE ANGER, THAT WE PERISH NOT?—

- h. **THE KING OF ASSYRIA REASONS LIKE THE PROPHET JOEL** - Joel 2:12-14 says "*Who knoweth if He will return and repent....*" They saw this window of mercy open and presumed that God might deliver them. They gave themselves to seeking mercy from the God whom they had angered.

God was not obligated to awaken Nineveh. Jonah came with no promises, but only with the hope that a God who would warn sinners of His impending wrath "*might also show mercy toward them if they turned to him.*" The Ninevites discovered that God was more merciful than they imagined.

II. **MORE OBSERVATIONS:**

1. Such preaching of condemnation is often conditional - Jer. 18:7-10.
2. The least likely prospects might be the ones who will convert- e.g., 1Cor. 6:9-11.
3. We see the result of fasting and prayer, as one seeks to petition God - e.g., Ezr. 8:21-23.

The thing which produced faith in the Ninevites was their fear of God's wrath. But read the final chapter. You would think that Jonah would have been elated.

III. **GOD: COMPASSION** Jonah 3:10

3:10 AND GOD SAW THEIR WORKS, 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. It said that God looked upon their works. **What works?**—not just the outward appearance [sackcloth, ashes, fasting], but God also had respect for their actions that reflected their inward works that truly turned the situation around. Their works: they turned from their evil way. There were no mere words of regret, no mere words of "*I'm sorry,*" but a change of conduct signaling a genuine change of heart; their deeds had changed! God viewed their actions. God viewed their efforts to renounce their evil. God saw them amending their lives for good, and that was the thing He looked for and required. Numbers 23:19 says "*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent...*" We hence see that God was not only turned by outward rites, and the external profession of repentance, but He rather looked on the true and important change which had taken place in the Ninevites hearts because of their immediate obedient response. Here was genuine repentance, and God therefore repented of the calamity which He had threatened upon them. Mind you, God is never mistaken about what He will do, but He is about second chances, and as a result, God chose to spare them from divine punishment. Even though people will still choose to call what God did as "repenting." Of course, God already knew what would happen before Jonah ever arrived! He's God!

God may persist in warning us and confronting us until we turn away from sin and accept His forgiveness. He did that to Jonah through circumstances that got his attention. And He did it to the city of Nineveh through the preaching of judgment by Jonah. But what is even more awesome is that God is the one who instigates our ability to repent and turn back to Him. And through God's compassion...

- God first sovereignly chose the city of Nineveh on which to focus His love; out of His grace He elects these people to salvation.
- Secondly, through Jonah the people responded to God's Word and repented of their sin.
- And then thirdly, God mercifully relented in granting forgiveness of sin and withheld judgment, but in fact, that was His purpose all along.

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Jonah's mission was a success! Souls headed for destruction were saved!

When sinners repent of the evil that they have done against God, inasmuch as, He leaves His threatening unfulfilled, and *"does it not."*, His compassion is still available. Their conversion was part of His perfect plan! When we change our wills, God wills a change. When we choose to repent, God may choose to relent. God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance He delayed it another 150 years.

(NOTE: Salvation always works this way! God loves the sinner, has a plan to save his soul and He sends the Word so that the sinner might be convicted and see his condition. When that sinner repents of his sins, God saves him by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Of course, it's all part of His plan! It is not the level of experience which qualifies a person to be a Christian; it is the reality of their faith set upon Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

SUMMARY:

As the Lord had commissioned Jonah, the Word of the Lord comes to him a second time to go to the city of Nineveh and preach. This time Jonah rose up and went according to the Lord. Since it was a great city it would take three days to journey there. However, Jonah got there in one day and cried unto them **"In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown"** (3:1-4).

Everyone in the city believed and put on mourning clothes and went on a fast from the greatest to the least. The king heard the Word of the Lord, got up from his throne, taking off his robe, covering himself with sackcloth, and then sat in ashes. He caused the Word of the Lord to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh as a decree of the king and his nobles saying man, beast, herd, and flock were to taste nothing, neither to be fed anything or drink water. They covered themselves with sackcloth, crying with all their might unto God, turning from their evil way and withdrawing from the violence of their hands. While they cried out to God, there was a window of mercy open to see if God would turn and repent, turn away from His fierce anger and not allow them to perish (3:5-9).

God cannot repent, but He can only be who He is. But, God saw Nineveh's works: that they had turned from their evil way. And God repented of the evil that He said He would do. He gave them a second chance. God chose to spare them from divine punishment. Of course, God knew what would happen before Jonah ever arrived. He's God! (3:10).