

God is Merciful & Grace-Giving

Jonah 3:1-10

Lesson Objective

- **Big Idea:** Seeing people as God sees them is believing He can reach them.
 - **Problem:** We consider people resistant to and unworthy of an opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel based on how they look, act, or other assumptions that fuel our unbelief.
 - **Redemptive Solution:** Our merciful God forgives those who repent and turn to Him & nobody is too far from His reach. Just like Jonah, God invites us to be part of his work of reconciliation.
 - **Response:** Determine ways to get to know two or three people who you might be doubting God can reach. Take a step to initiate gospel conversations.
 - **Outreach Focus: Share**
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Last week we had a challenge to Prayer. If you were here last week and committed to praying for 5 people, how did that go? Anything you learned or saw God do as a result of praying specifically for other people?

Launch

- **What type of people do you perceive to be opposed to the Gospel?** How would you describe your view of these people? Do you believe God can reach them? Why or why not?

Last week we learned Jonah repented and God delivered him from the fish. Something cataclysmic occurred between Jonah 1 & Jonah 3. God got Jonah's attention through miraculous deliverance in the form of a fish. This week we are going to read about Jonah as he encounters God's commissions a second time.

Explore

Read Jonah 3:1-10

- **Who are the characters in this passage?** God, Jonah, The Ninevites, the King of Nineveh (the King of Assyria who probably resided in Nineveh).
- **Where do the events in this passage take place?** In Nineveh.
- **When do these events in this passage take place?** After Jonah repents in the belly of the fish; after the second commission (3:1). *Note: preceding Jonah's entrance into Nineveh, two plagues swept across the city (in 765 & 759 BC) and a total eclipse of the sun occurred (763 BC). These unusual events probably were considered signs of divine anger and may explain the Ninevites' ready acceptance of Jonah's message when he arrived in 759.*
- **What does God commission Jonah to do and does he do it?** God commissions Jonah to go to Nineveh and announce His judgment against the Ninevites.
- **How does the King of Nineveh and the Ninevites respond to what Jonah said?** They dressed in sackcloth, sat in ashes, fasted, turned from their evil & violence and prayed to God to relent.
- **The king took 4 action steps that testified to his outward repentance. What were they?** Stepped down from his throne, took off his royal robes (both actions symbolically relinquished his power and authority), put on burlap, and sat in ashes (both actions identified him with the lowly and contrite)
- **In Verse 9, what is the King's hope?** That God will relent and turn from his anger.
- **Why do these events occur?** To show the results of Jonah's obedience; to show that some of the most wicked people may repent.
 - **What does this reveal about God's characteristics?** It shows us that God is merciful, loving, grace giving.
- **What is the main message of this story?** Nineveh repents of her ways once Jonah obediently brings God's message to her.

- **What stood out as significant to you? (possible significant points)**
 - Identical Commission: Jonah's commission in 1:1-2 is the same commission in chapter 3:3
 - Overthrown/destroyed (v.4): The same word is used in other places in the Bible where God destroys wickedness or perversity.
 - Relent (9,10): Only used in the Old Testament with God as the subject. It is derived from a root which means to "breathe deeply" in a physical display of compassion.

- **What questions do you have about the passage? (possible questions)**
 - Verse 5: A common Hebrew narrative feature is to mention the outcome of an event before explaining the cause. So the repentance of the people most likely followed the king's decree which follows.
 - King of Nineveh: Refers to the King of Assyria who probably resided in Nineveh
 - Dust: From the ash-heap for refuse, the greatest sign of abasement in that day.
 - Beasts: Included as part of the Persian custom for mourning; emphasizing the totality of repentance.
 - Sackcloth: An Eastern sign of extreme remorse. It was a coarse cloth often made of goat's hair and also worn by the poor, prisoners, and slaves.

Jonah had some serious stereotypes, assumptions & unbelief to overcome toward the people of Nineveh. Let's explore further Jonah's view of Nineveh in contrast to God's view of Nineveh.

Jonah's View of Nineveh

- **If Jonah were asked to describe the people of Nineveh, what words or phrases would he use?** Pagan gentiles; barbaric; evil; wicked
 - **How would you feel about them?**
- **How do you think Jonah felt about them?** Hate; fear; resentment; intimidation.
- **What may have caused Jonah to view them as he did?** Nineveh's reputation; his fears or pride.

God's View of Nineveh

- **If God were asked to describe the people of Nineveh, what words or phrases would He use?** Evil; wicked, but open to repentance, people I made in My image.
- **How do you think He felt about them?** Compassionate
- **What may have caused God to view them as He did?** Knowing the hearts of the Ninevites, His Love
 - **What is God teaching us through His forgiveness of Nineveh?** He will forgive all who repent and turn to Him.

Apply

*Think back to the people who came to mind at the beginning of the lesson or Identify two or three people you have been reluctant to reach out to, (maybe some of the people on your list of 5 you've been praying for over the past week.) **What have you assumed about them or God's ability to reach them?***

- **Based on God's response to the Ninevites, how can you trust God to change your heart toward them?**
- **What truths about God do you need to remember when thinking about them and their spiritual journeys?** *3 Principles of a Sent Life: God is always at work to draw people to Himself, God uses people to lead others to Jesus, God continually invites us into the work of evangelism. (Accompanying verses below for printing out)*
- **How has God's forgiveness of you changed the way you approach others? How should it impact the way you approach others?**

****Pass out handout!***

Practical Steps this Week: *We are continuing to pray and trusting God for opportunities to share the Gospel by asking simple questions to begin conversations.*

- Continue to pray for the 5 people you want to know Jesus.
- Ask each of your 5 people ONE of the following questions to learn about their lives and spiritual journey. *For whatever question(s) below you ask, be sure you've thought through how YOU would answer them for yourself and be willing to share if the opportunity arises.*
 - Have you ever felt that God is working in your life? What was that like?
 - What does your tradition say about Jesus?
 - Do you consider yourself on a spiritual journey? What is that like? Where are you on that journey?
 - I'm curious about you. What question do you like people to ask you? *(maybe a good second question if the above don't go too far or they say they aren't really spiritually interested)*
- Attend a training time on how to use a simple tool to share the gospel.

Jonah 3 showed we must see people as God sees them. Jonah is still in the midst of learning that lesson. Next week we wrap up Jonah's story with an interesting ending in Chapter 4 that will continue to challenge us with how we often value personal comfort over compassion for others. Pray to Close.

For additional study/prayer:

Three Core Principles of a Sent Life from *SENT*, by Heather & Ashley Holleman

- God is always at work to draw people to Himself.
 - *God is working. John 5:17*
 - *God designed us to desire eternity. Ecclesiastes 3:11*
 - *God draws people to Jesus. John 6:44*
 - *The Holy Spirit is always testifying about Jesus. John 15:26.*
 - *Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That's what Jesus is still doing. Luke 19:10.*
- God uses people to lead others to Jesus.
 - *God gives us the Holy Spirit to become witnesses. Acts 1:8.*
 - *God uses us to spread knowledge about Jesus. 1 Cor. 2:14*
 - *God has given us a ministry to lead others to Jesus. 2 Cor. 5:17-20.*
 - *Jesus chooses and appoints us to bear fruit for the kingdom. John 15:16.*
 - *God created us in Christ to do the good work He's prepared for us. Ephesians 2:10.*
- God continually invites us into the work of evangelism.
 - *Jesus commands us to tell others about him. Matthew 28:18-20.*
 - *Jesus invites us into the work of drawing others to Him. Matthew 4:19.*
 - *Jesus sends us on the same mission He has to seek and save the lost. John 20:21.*
 - *God sends us to preach to others about Jesus. Romans 10:13-15.*
 - *God invites us to live as His witness. Isaiah 43:10-12.*