

## Obedience, Repentance & Mercy

### Jonah 3

#### Jonah in four Acts

Jonah is about us.

It is about every person who ever encounters God.

It is about our relationship with God and our world in a particular way:

1. Escaping the Inescapable
2. Praying from the Gut
3. Obedience, Repentance & Mercy
4. Invitation to Transformation

#### Today, we will study Act 3: Obedience, Repentance & Mercy

Frankly, this is a very simple act in the book of Jonah.

It has three movements involving 3 characters.

#### Jonah obeys and preaches judgment (v1-4)

*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:<sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

<sup>3</sup> *Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."*

We are not told how Jonah felt about his job.

We are not told his internal dialogue, his fears, his hopes, his dreams.

We can infer from chapter 4 that he hates the Ninevites. (We'll get to that)

What we *are* told is that he acts in obedience.

He goes and does a thorough job even though he doesn't like it.

It takes three whole days.

Not sure if he ate or slept, no details are given.

His message, however is very clear.

"Forty Days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

This is the absolute worst example of evangelism in our day ever!

Number one, it is a completely cold call.

No friendship - they are enemies, after all.

Number two, he is preaching nothing but judgment - the wrath of God.

No mercy, no invitation to the altar, nothing.

Essentially, God is going to cut you down.

But it isn't our day and in fact, it isn't bad evangelism.

It is the naked truth that those who are not aligned with the Kingdom of God.

Those who do not receive pardon by the King will find themselves under wrath.

Not under grace.

One of the essential realities of the Kingdom of God is a matter of allegiance.

It is the peril of the souls of the lost and God's compassion upon them  
that drives the reason for Jesus' mission on earth.

The previous method of Fear of Hell

Has evolved into the Benefits of Heaven

and now the Love of God.

But the emphasis on one and not all leaves a very poor gospel.

In fact, no gospel at all.

We must preach all the aspects of the gospel:

Kingdom, wrath, grace and the cross.

All that is asked of Jonah is that he be faithful and obedient as a messenger.

Nothing more and nothing less.

We have much to think upon.

### **The Ninevites respond with repentance. (v5-9)**

The Ninevites do the unexpected.

They are one of the first militaristic societies in the world.

They were unrelenting in their methods of conquest through military doctrine.

Empire builders followed that model of militarism.

Can Assyria change?

Can Iran?

Can North Korea?

Can China?

Can Russia?

Can Nato?

If you ask me or any other historian, I would say, no.

An entire society does not change overnight.

Even a human heart (ask any therapist) does not change over night.

We are layers upon layers of history, culture, experience, indoctrination.

So what changed Nineveh?

The text says, "They believed God."  
A God they never even worshipped before?  
Like the pagan sailors in chapter one the Ninevites turn to God.  
They actually believe the message and they repent.  
And they repent in a big way.  
From the highest of the high to the lowest of the low  
they strip themselves and wear sackcloth  
they lie in the dust and scatter ashes  
they call a complete fast.  
They cry out to God for mercy.  
They are humbled, they are sorry, they are desperate.  
They turn.

And this rattles my theological cage.  
Where does faith come from?  
It comes from God.  
But where does repentance come from?  
It comes from us as a response to that belief.

Are we so far from the Ninevites?  
Part of our continuing pilgrimage  
is the breaking down of our pride and self-sufficiency.  
Even the Buddhists know this is the source of our suffering.  
But instead of denying our existence to deal with that,  
We learn to deny ourselves.  
There is a world of difference in this.  
In fact, that surrender is the beginning and continuation of our salvation.  
A surrender that takes the fight with God out of us.  
And lays us down in peace.

### **God shows mercy. (v10)**

The story closes upon God's action in a single phrase.  
God saw their repentance and relented.  
Now, your response to this is dependent on your understanding of grace and truth.

Are you more a mercy person or more a justice person?  
On the one hand, we don't know the Ninevites from termites.  
We say, praise God, of course he is merciful and good and great happy ending!  
He forgives everybody!  
Of course he does!

On the other hand, if you lived in one of their conquered cities or states,  
You might not be so impressed with God.

If you saw your mother and father and siblings and children and friends spitted  
on pikes by the Assyrian military for no other reason than they fact they felt  
like it, you may be a little uneasy about this forgiveness.

Actually, you might be more than a little upset.

How can these villains escape justice?

Why and how is it that God is complicit in rewarding the wicked?

But there is a subtext here.

Everyone reading the book of Jonah would have known back in the day.

In 612BC about 150 years after Jonah's time, Nineveh is destroyed.

God is Just and God is Merciful.

No one escapes his justice.

And his mercy never denied to those who trust him.

Even if we are still learning.

### **Questions.**

Which character do you identify with the most?

Why?

How does reading Jonah expand your understanding of evangelism?