

Sunday Sermon Series – Ever Chasing God: Jonah
Pittsford Community Church
August 2016
Week Three - Jonah 3
Major Theme: Grace has purpose for the fugitive from God

Introduction: Worst Gospel Presentation Leads to Repentance

This was the title in a newsletter published by CRU a few years back. A CRU staff member had recently led a student from the university football team to Christ. This team member was so excited about his new relationship that he told the staff member, “I have to tell the rest of the team.” So the student invited the team to his frat house one evening and several members showed up. The following is the staff member’s account of the event.

Roughly 15 members of the football team showed up. A bunch of strong, athletic men joking around, cursing, telling crude jokes. The student gathered them up and began sharing about his new relationship with Christ. The room grew silent quickly. To put it gently the presentation wasn’t good. The student fumbled with his words, looked nervous, and had long periods of silence as he thought of what he was going to say next. The gospel was there but it was choppy, poorly constructed, and simplistic. By the time he was finished I was dying inside.

What would come next? Surely these football players were about to crush the spirit of this student who was a new believer. After a period of silence one of the players spoke. He said, “I want to become a Christian.” And his statement was followed by several of his teammates expressing the same sentiment. I was shocked, dumbfounded – that God could use that awful presentation in the way he did.

Sometimes the method isn’t as important as the message. This morning we are going to see that God moves in ways that we least expect. Sometimes using the least equipped to accomplish the greatest work.

Review:

Grace chases a fugitive from God

Grace rescues a fugitive from God – 5 lessons about grace

This week’s theme: **Grace has purpose for the fugitive from God**

God is a God of mission. God is a God on mission. That mission is concerned with not only what God wants to do in us but also through us. God in his grace has chased down Jonah. God in his grace has rescued Jonah. Now we see that God in his grace has purpose for Jonah. And if Jonah is a picture of us, we see that God in his grace has purpose for us too.

In this passage we will see four truths concerning God’s purpose for us.

Truth #1:

God calls all people to his mission.

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

- You say, “Wait a minute, Chris. You can’t just apply Jonah’s specific call to all Christians of all time! That’s bad exegesis.”
- Normally you are right, but as Christians we believe that Jesus is God. And just as Jonah was called by God to go, Jesus has told all who would follow him to do the same. Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20:21)
- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go (as you are going), make disciples of all nations...(Matt. 28:18)
- It is not just Jonah who has been called by God to “Get up and go!” but we have all received that instruction from the Lord. And though this is hard truth to hear I must say it. It follows then that if we refuse to live a lifestyle that focuses on making disciples then like Jonah we are living in direct disobedience to God. We are living in sin. Now, church, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but make no mistake his desire for us is obedience. Isn’t it great news that God is a God of second chances?
- Now I understand that living an evangelistic lifestyle can be an unsettling thing to many, which is why we have the story of Jonah to show us that the pressure is off, it’s not about us or our performance. It’s about God and his ability to use us, in spite of our lack of abilities, our shortcomings, and our spiritual heart problems.
- Look at the text. God’s call is again clear to Jonah. It has not changed except for one notable difference: “the message that I tell you.” Why is this added? It’s to take the pressure off Jonah. It is to emphasize to Jonah that all God expects from him is obedience. God is saying, “Now go and this time do what I tell you.” All he is saying here is, “Jonah I want you to be willing to join me in my mission.” And he is about to rock Jonah’s world.

v. 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.”*

- Lit. “A great city to God” – not just a reference to the worldly status of Nineveh. This was also a reference to how God viewed the city.

NYC is a great city by the world’s standards, but God is also deeply concerned with the people of NYC – Mosul, Iraq – Rochester, NY

- “You’re the God of this City” - It doesn’t matter how great the city is, there is a God who is greater still who has concern for it. Nineveh is a great city why? Because a great God has concern for it.
- three days journey in breadth – or “a visit was a three days journey” – Disney – in other words, to really go to all the places in Nineveh you needed to go in order to experience the place, or visit the sights, or bring a message of judgment from the Lord, if you wanted to cover all of your bases and do it

well, it really should have taken about three days. Why is this important?
Because of what Jonah does in verse 4...

v.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!"

- Here we begin to uncover a little bit more about Jonah. If you've read Jonah before you know that there is a fourth chapter in this book. Nineveh isn't saved and everyone lives happily ever after, God and Jonah still have some unfinished business that needs to get worked out. So what's going on here?

- Because Jonah has now experienced the overwhelming grace power of God he has decided that obedience to God is the only correct option and so he goes. But that doesn't mean that he wants to go.

Has anyone here ever been told by God to do something that you don't really want to do and you do it because he's God but in your spirit you are going begrudgingly, your kinda the martyr in the situation? I'm doing it for God. But you are really still at the center of you life. You're really still the only one you are focused on or concerned for? That's Jonah. So if that is your heart condition for service to the Lord, 10 out of 10 times the result will be the same - you phone it in. You do the bare minimum, you ask yourself, "what is the least that I can do to accomplish this task, to still say I obeyed, to get through it with my pride intact?", and you do that.

- Jonah begins to go into the city and he can't handle it. Whatever is going on in his heart, in his spirit, moves him very quickly to this minimalistic attitude. To do his job well requires three days, he gives God one.
- Additionally, his message is brief to say the least. Whether this was all he said or if there was more is not really relevant, but the author is making a point that Jonah's message was minimalistic at best. It was blunt, it was tactless, it was hopeless, and it certainly didn't communicate a whole lot about the loving grace of God nor anything about possible mercy for the Ninevites. But this is where Jonah encounters the first truth concerning God's purpose for us:

Truth #2:

God's Word transforms hearts, not human strategy

v. 5-6 - "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. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes."

- Now don't hear me wrong. I'm not saying that strategy isn't important. We should have a plan to equip people, to train people, to reach people. I believe that it's honoring to God. But we must also realize that no amount of programming, or training, or strategy can ever bring about the change in people's hearts that we are hoping and praying for.

- Any thinking mind has to ask the question: "What caused Nineveh to respond in this way?"

- Could it be what Jonah looked like? Maybe it was circumstances in Nineveh before Jonah arrived, maybe it was simply Jonah's reputation

- Hear me this morning: Maybe God used any or all of those things in reaching the people of Nineveh, but it was his Word which penetrated their hearts and brought about their repentance. We too easily get distracted and bogged down by the process that we forget the power that the Word of God contains within itself. God wrote a book. And contained in its pages is everything necessary for faith and salvation. Listen to its testimony concerning itself:

- Heb. 4:12 - *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

- Psalm 119:105 - *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

- Psalm 119:130 - *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

Illustration: Preaching – My words verses God’s Word

- The process of awakening: Illumination, Conviction, Compunction (Godly Grief), Faith and Repentance

- And when it goes out, God’s word never returns void – Is. 55:11 – *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

- God’s word has power to influence and change. It does this in its own strength.

- Are we hiding God’s word in our hearts this morning? When we talk with people about life, concerns, problems, stresses, the future – are we simply sharing with them our message, or have we hidden enough in our heart to share with them his message?

Grace has purpose for the fugitive from God. Your ability to carry out that purpose is rooted in the power of his Word, not in your abilities.

I hope that truth is encouraging to you this morning because it should take the pressure off us. God is not calling you to perform, he’s calling you to be obedient.

Truth #3:

Sharing is your job; revival is God’s job

v. 7-9 – *“And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”*

- At this point Jonah is nowhere to be seen in the story. He gave it a day, said what he had to say and got out of there. However, because his message was potent with

the power of God's Word, despite his minimalistic efforts, revival was happening in Nineveh.

- Why? Because God is the hero. He is moving and he is the mover. Many of us hesitate to share our faith, to engage different cultures, to be missional because we are not sure we are cut out for it, have the skills to do it, or don't know how.

- How would you feel if I told you that the pressure's off because it's God's responsibility to move people not yours. Jonah didn't talk to the king. Jonah didn't tell him to issue a proclamation. And yet because of his obedience to God to simply share his word with the people of Nineveh, God was now using that in ways no one could have even begun to comprehend. God is the hero; but he calls us to be a part of the process.

Grace has purpose for the fugitive from God

Truth #4:

God intends to bring life out of death

"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."

God was using Jonah and the people of Nineveh as a sign of what he intended to accomplish with all of his creation. Listen to Jesus as he talks about the prophet Jonah:

- Matt. 12:39-40, *"But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*
- Jesus of course was referencing his death on the cross, his burial, and his resurrection. He knew that the story of Jonah was a symbol of God bringing back to life that which is doomed to death and destruction. In fact throughout the whole story of scripture it is clear that God's intention was always to bring life to that which is dead.

And God wants us to lay hold of that truth this morning. **Grace has purpose for us.**

God desires to use us in the process of bringing to life that which is dead. God cares too much for the world to let it go unchecked into eternal destruction.

If you are a Christian this morning, God has already brought to life that which was dead: you. Our response to him can only be thankful obedience.

If you are not a Christian this morning, know that God is offering you life. The Bible tells us that the wages of our sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Would you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ this morning?