

Part 2

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We're finishing up our short mini series in the book Jonah. Today is part 2 of this two-part series and we'll be focusing our attention on Chapters 3 and 4. Where the 1st two chapters of Jonah focus on a disobedient prophet - who's given a message from God that he does not want to bring - Chapters 3 and 4 are about the responses, of the Ninevites and of Jonah, when God's message is finally delivered.

What we do with God's word when it comes to us will have a dramatic effect on the trajectory of our lives. How we respond to God's word matters. The way we respond, and the changes we make, in light of God's holiness and truth, have a continuing and compounding effect on our lives.

For the Christian, our joy will increase in orders of magnitude as our knowledge of, and delight in, God's ways deepen over a lifetime. As we trust in the lord and encounter his goodness, his trustworthiness, his steadfast love, we taste and see that the Lord is good and it both satisfies us and makes us hungry for more.

Alternatively, if our hearts are hardened to the things that God cares about.

If our obedience is begrudging or reluctant or If we obey conditionally - obeying God with a what's-in-it-for-me attitude. If that's where we're at, then joy in God, joy in his word, joy in Christ and in the Gospel will always seem to be out of reach. More than that, we may be in real danger and in need of a heart change that only God can provide.

When God's word comes to you, it always produces responses.

You see it in Jonah. God's word came to Jonah and he ran from it.

But God's word to Nineveh produced repentance. What's your relationship to God's word? What effect does it have on your life? When God's word comes to you, what do you do with it?

Let's begin today and open up Jonah Chapter 3 and look at what happened to Nineveh When God's word came to them.

Jonah 3:1-5

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." 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. 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!" 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.

If you were with us last time I was preaching there's something that should stick out to you right away in the first three verses.

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."

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

Unlike the first time, Jonah now obeys God. This is a big change from Chapter 1 when he booked his ticket to Tarshish to get as far away from Nineveh as possible. And so following the dramatic events of Chapters 1 and 2 Jonah's running, the great storm and the great fish that swallowed him, We see God's grace to Jonah because the word of the Lord comes to him a second time.

God shows his steadfast, patient, forbearance here. And if you're a believer in here today, I'm sure that you too can recall God's grace in second, third, or even fourth chances. And Jonah's experience of God's patience here isn't unique or special to him. This is who our God is. God delights in a turnaround. God delights in your turnaround.

And so Jonah takes a big step of faith and moves in the right direction. He brings God's word into the city, and the people of Nineveh respond in a very unexpected way.

I said we'd be looking at responses this morning and our first one is this:

Nineveh's Response to God: Repentance

Jonah 3:5-10

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.

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

7 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."*

*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.*

This is a pretty epic turnaround.

Back in the first Chapter of Jonah, God gives the reason for why Nineveh is on his radar in the first place. He tells Jonah in Chapter 1, Verse 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

This great city, one of the greatest threats to God's people, Israel, world-renowned for its evil. They were practicing evil to such a degree that it moves God to threaten intervention at, you might say a biblical level. And yet, the people of Nineveh believed God. Nineveh repented.

It's a miracle.

When you hear the world miracle, especially in our context here, people in a church, most of whom are probably familiar with biblical stories....

You might think of Moses parting the red sea, or fire falling from heaven for Elijah. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego not being burned in the furnace, or Daniel - safe - in the Lion's den

Maybe your thoughts jump to the New Testament and the miracles of Jesus. He's healing diseases, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dead are raised.

Miracles. They show us God's great power.

But without a doubt, the greatest miracle that God does in the book of Jonah has nothing to do with a fish. The greatest miracle in the book of Jonah is Chapter Three Verse 5.
"5 And the people of Nineveh believed God."

Only God could cause 120,000 hearts to change.
So that they might go from being uniquely brutal and evil in the world to fasting, crying out to the true God for mercy, clothed in sackcloth, lying in ashes. The greatest to the least, wearing the physical and cultural garments of sorrow and repentance. Like all miracles, It's almost beyond belief. The fact that the people of Nineveh believed God after Jonah's

pathetic missionary journey says all that we need to know about the effectiveness of God's word.

God calls us to be faithful. He calls us to go and tell. But, like we heard from Jonah himself in Chapter 2, salvation belongs to the Lord! Our stumbling and fumbling efforts are not determinative when it comes to whether or not someone believes God and repents. Salvation in Jonah's day, In Jesus' day and in our day belongs to the Lord and he gets all the glory for it. This should transform your idea of evangelism. And embolden you to speak. Because If God can use Jonah's message to bear great fruit, surely he can use yours.

By our efforts we can't save anyone, but as the Gospel goes out, even imperfectly, the truth of God's word resonates so profoundly within the hearts of those whom God is calling that they cannot resist the message of God's grace.

Like it says in Romans 9:15-16

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Jonah didn't save anyone,
but as the sin of Nineveh was exposed in the light of God's holiness, hearts were transformed.

The people of Nineveh repented.

Like it says in verse 10:

*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.*

They heard from God, and they changed their ways. God saw what they did, he answered their call and they were saved. They were spared. God did not destroy them.

Sometimes when my kids say that they are sorry to one another. They're not actually sorry. They're sorry that they are in trouble. They regret that consequences have come into their life, they don't necessarily regret the pain that their actions caused.

And so you might think to yourself, was the repentance of Nineveh genuine, or was it just for show? All we see in the text is what is said here, but later in the New Testament Jesus himself actually affirms their repentance

Look at what he says in here in Matthew 12 starting at verse 38:

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." 39 But he [Jesus] 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. 40 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.

41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

You see, the religious critics of Jesus' day continued to scheme and sin until he was crucified. They heard his preaching in the countryside. They heard it in the synagogues. They had the Son of God in their midst, preaching about the kingdom of God and yet....

When the word of the Lord came, the people of Nineveh believed God and the Pharisees did not.

Repentance is a gift that comes from God and so he knows if it is true. For the Ninevites, the mark of repentance was that they stopped their evil. As a follower of Christ, to repent of your sin, it means that your life is different. To repent of a sin, it means that the sin stops. You put it off. You lay it in Jesus' grave along with your old life.

Laying down the old life of sin and wearing the new life clothed in the righteousness of Jesus is part of what it means to be born again. And we must be born again. Jesus in John 3:3 says that

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

And considering the beautiful illustration of baptism that we just saw earlier, which itself is a picture of being born again, in Romans 6:4 Paul says

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

And so the born again believer, puts off sin and then puts on righteousness.

If you feel as though your spiritual walk has slowed to a crawl, and that you're struggling to grow in maturity have you considered that you might be attempting to hold on to sin and righteousness at the same time?

Sometimes we have a problem with this. We think that if we become consistent with our bible study, or attend more church events, maybe never miss a community group, all our problems will be solved and we will mature spiritually.

I want to warn you. You will hit a ceiling in your spiritual maturity if you continually add spiritual disciplines to your life without letting go of sin.

Spiritual disciples, (bible reading, prayer, coming to church) are good, even great, but for us to grow and be healthy in our faith, we don't get to cling to Jesus while clinging to sin. Faith in Christ will require all of you. You will have to change.

Repentance is not lip service or just a mental ascent to the truth of God. If the Ninevites had believed Jonah's message but continued in their evil, God would have destroyed them. Repentance requires change. It bears fruit, the produce of Godly sorrow. And it's gift from God.

And if you know you need to repent and you don't know where to start: Pray. Ask God to give you this gift.

So, Is there anything that you need to repent of? Is there sin that you have thoughtlessly made normal or routine in your life? We're going to be taking the Lord's supper together here in a little while and I would encourage you to examine your heart today and be honest before God.

God is gracious. He was gracious to give the gift of repentance to the people of Nineveh in Jonah's day and today, if you call out to him, he will be gracious to you.

God's grace comes to Nineveh. The Ninevites repent. And Jonah rejoices in God's salvation. I'm kidding. He doesn't. He doesn't do that. I wish that were the case. I'd be able to go back over there, and pick up a guitar and get us out of here. But instead Jonah's gonna Jonah. He's going to make my life difficult.

And here we are at point number 2

Jonah's Response to God: Frustration

Open up to Jonah Chapter 4 Verses 1-9

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

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. 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." 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."

Jonah was making some progress there for a minute. He had taken this big step of faith and moves in the right direction. Being obedient to God. It was a good start. But there's a misstep in his turnaround. It's incomplete.

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Think about it, in Chapter 3 Verse 3-4, The book of Jonah gives us what might seem like some inconsequential geographic information. It says:

3 Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey.

We're told that Nineveh is so large that it would take 3 days to cross it and yet Jonah stops one day's journey into the city. So he's obedient. I mean, he went to Nineveh this time. He went inside the city. But like, just inside the city. And once he gets there, he delivers what might be the shortest and worst preaching recorded in the bible.

Jonah's message to the Ninevites. One day's journey into a city that's three day's long consists of 8 words.

We see it in verse 4

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

From the text, You get the impression, or at least I do, that Jonah got to the gate of Nineveh walked across the city for a day, said his message, dropped the mic, and walked away.

So was Jonah obedient? Maybe technically, but...

What does he do after he preaches? While word is spreading like wildfire throughout Nineveh and people are genuinely turning to the Lord in repentance, Verse five tells us that Jonah walks out of city, heads east to where there's a good view and he makes himself a

booth, or a shelter, so that he can sit there and watch the fireworks rain down on his enemy.

This is what life was like before youtube.

Even stranger and very unexpected, while Jonah's out there fixing up his camp, God appoints a plant to grow and bring shade to Jonah.

Look at Verse 6

God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

God sees what Jonah is doing and it's almost like he's asking, "are you comfy? Is there anything I can do to make your stay here more comfortable?" And Jonah is exceedingly glad about this plant. It's the only thing in whole book of Jonah that he's glad about. He's not glad about his assignment or the fact that the Ninevites might turn from their sin. It doesn't even say that he's glad to be out of the belly of the fish. Jonah is not recorded as rejoicing in worship once he's back on dry land. The first time Jonah is happy in the book of Jonah is when he notices that this plant is providing shade to his front row seat of what he hopes will be Nineveh's destruction.

So, I'll ask it agin: Was Jonah obedient?

Yeah, but something is still obviously wrong.

As Christians, we desire to be obedient to God's word, his commands. We know that there is safety in them and that when we live in the way that God designed us to, it will lead to our flourishing and our happiness. But as humans, still struggling with sinful desires and foolish pride, sometimes something is wrong with our obedience. Just like Jonah. Just like Jonah we can be frustrated about what is God is doing and how he is doing it.

We can obey, but we don't always see God's command as good. We don't want to cross the line into sin, but maybe we want to get as close to the line as we can.

For example:

Maybe you're like this with your use of alcohol. You've heard the warnings in scripture against drunkenness and the clear call that it is sin to be drunk, but in your heart the way that you functionally approach drinking is "Where is the line? I want to be right up against it."

It can even be like this with our giving. Where we're obedient to give but our hearts just aren't in it and we give because we feel we must, not because we're glad to. Not because

we have cheerful or generous hearts. We want to get out the calculator and make sure that not only our needs but all of our wants will be covered before we consider what we might give back to God.

Maybe you can say, "that's me" to one or both of these examples. Or maybe there's something else that the Lord is convicting you of right now. I'm sure that everyone of us can find an example in our lives where our obedience was or is reluctant, even resentful at times. This is Jonah's problem. And it's our problem too.

Praise God that he still works through reluctant obedience. Showing his power in our weakness. God continues to do amazing things in the midst of our broken and imperfect obedience because he honors his word even as it comes through broken vessels.

Jonah wakes up the next morning to find that the plant which made him exceedingly glad has been destroyed by a worm appointed by God. Jonah is already frustrated that God might show mercy on Nineveh. It doesn't make any sense to him. But now, with the death of Jonah's special shade plant in the desert and a scorching wind on the horizon, God turns the dial up to 11 to expose what is really in Jonah's heart.

And then we get it. We get a full on second-grade style temper tantrum with dramatic exasperation that's punctuated by Jonah talking back to God.

It says in Verse 7-9

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."

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."

I can't keep a straight face when I read it.

There is such a ridiculousness to this. Can you believe he talks to God like this. The boldness of it is astounding. The dynamics of God and Jonah's relationship truly seem like that of a patient and long-suffering parent caring for a child who just wants to watch the world burn.

It's astounding that God doesn't simply say
"you know what, I'm done with you" ⚡ bzzt ⚡

Because for me, it takes almost all of my powers of patience just to help my two year old Ezra eat Quinoa. Have you ever helped a two year old eat quinoa?

It should be a punishment. He oscillates between delighting in taking these sticky grains of destruction and pressing it into the cracks in the table or he's crying hysterically about how it tastes "bleh"

"Yes, I do well to be angry."

Jonah talks this way to God. He's frustrated with him. and yet at the heart of it, we already know that this is what Jonah know about God.

Chapter 4:2

I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Jonah's responses to God have this thought in the background. Jonah know's what God is like. Now we should not emulate Jonah's disobedience or his half-hearted obedience. We should also avoid temper tantrums in general. It's not a good look for anyone.

But we should long for this kind of honesty before God. Willing to be truly known by him. Bringing to him our weaknesses, our failures and our frustrations. Knowing that its only through the work of the Holy Spirit that lasting change in our hearts becomes possible. And all of it, grounded in the knowledge that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Ninevites responded in repentance, Jonah responded in frustration and in the last part of the book of Jonah, we see God's response. We see God's heart. We see what motivated the missionary journey in the first place and why God is so patient to Jonah.

God's Response: Compassion

Look with me at Jonah chapter 4:10-11

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?"

Sometimes as a preacher there can be a pressure to land the plane. To get the point. To figure how this thing is going to end.

In this passage we have God as the master teacher, and preacher and in a relatively small amount of words, he really gets to the heart of the matter. He created this moment with the plant, was responsible both for making Jonah comfortable and uncomfortable. And its purpose was for this moment: To set Jonah up, so that he might see the great compassion of God.

God doesn't say that Jonah was wrong to be sad that the plant perished. He says "You pity the plant, should I not pity Nineveh, Jonah? The great city full of 120,000 people who don't know their right hand from their left"

What's amazing about all of this, is that these people were enemies of God. They were idol worshippers. They were enemies of God's people Israel. They were a cutthroat, brutal people. And God says "Should I not pity Nineveh?"

The Book of Jonah is a story about how God is the Lord of All. That's what Jonah is about.

He is the Lord of the wind, and the sea. The lord of the deep and all creatures in it The lord of the plants, the worms and the cattle. He is The lord of frustrated and reluctant followers and He is the lord of those who are his enemies.

God is the Lord of all.

And when he looks at his enemies. He has compassion. He says they don't know what they're doing. They don't even know their right hand from their left Jonah. Should I not pity them? My creation. Praise God that this is how he sees his enemies, because we were God's enemies.

This is part of what makes the Gospel such good news. The theologian A.W. Tozer said that "Until we believe that we are as bad as God says we are, we can never believe that He will do for us what He says He will do."

and in
Romans 5:6-10 it says

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Our sin separated us from God. It caused us to be spiritually dead and without hope. With no way to make things right by our own efforts.

And God sent his Son to be the better Jonah, the willing missionary.

While Jonah flees to Tarshish, Jesus doesn't run from his task and even when it's difficult, he submits to the will of the Father. Jonah finishes his journey and only goes partway into the town of Nineveh, but Jesus goes all the way to the cross, paying the penalty for our sins against God.

It was like Jonah was dead when he spent three days and three night in the belly of a fish But Jesus really died in our place, and spent three days in the grave and the power that raised Jesus from dead is the same power that works salvation in our hearts as we become alive in Christ.

Romans 8:11

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

What wondrous love God has for his creation. We could never have dreamed of the lengths that God would go to redeem a people for himself.

God is the Lord of all and it's all his.

And It doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done. It doesn't matter what your background is or where you come from or how you grew up or the color of your skin. The invitation of the gospel is for everyone. Even for those who are far off and those who have been enemies of God, because everyone is made in the image of God.

Jonah reluctantly took his message to Nineveh, but Jesus takes his message to the world.

In light of God's great compassion to you when his word came to you, Is there some way that God is calling you to respond today? Is there a reluctance in obedience that needs to stop? A pattern of sin that needs to end? A Compassion for the lost that needs to grow?

Bring your heart to God and ask him to help you respond in a way that might glorify God and bring honor to Christ because of the great compassion he's had on you.