



Sunday 5th May 2019

Jonah Chapter 3 (week 2 of 3) – Small Group Notes

Jonah 3:1-10 - Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a **second time**:

² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

³ Jonah **obeyed** the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a **very important city—a visit required three days**. ⁴ On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.**"

⁵ The Ninevites **believed God**. They **declared a fast**, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, **put on sackcloth**.

⁶ When the news reached the **king** of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, **took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust**.

⁷ Then he issued a **proclamation** in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: **Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.** ⁸ **But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.** ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had **compassion** and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

In the sermon Shawn referred to God's call on our lives in two different ways: a big call that may drive much of our life, and the many small calls that God may bring to us at any time.

- How are each of these understandings of calling important, and how do they overlap?
- What experience do you have with each of these?
- How do you think we can better cultivate a sensitivity to the Spirit so that we are better able to hear and respond to God?

One of the themes of the book of Jonah is about dealing with our limitations. To be human, is to have limits. Some limitations are part of life that we need to accept, and others are meant to be challenged.

- How do we discern the difference between limitations we much accept, and others we must challenge?

Read Jonah 3:1-2- Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a **second time**: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Consider for a moment how hard Jonah's call was. It required significant time and energy (to travel 550 miles back then). It was very dangerous (from what we know of the Assyrians). He was sent as one man to a very large city, with a message that people didn't want to hear (judgment on likely the most powerful city in the world at that time).

- What sort of call today could parallel the call God gives to Jonah?

WHAT GOD CALLS YOU TO MIGHT NOT BE EASY.

Things of value are often costly in various ways. We know physical fitness will take great effort, but often we come to spiritual fitness in a way that is lazy and consumerist.

- Why do you think that is?

This attitude becomes a real issue in regard to calling. It's like people say, 'God, I will serve you... as long as I enjoy it!' So, we should be willing to sacrifice for God, but we also shouldn't be bitter about it.

- How do we hold together sacrifice and joy?

Following God's call may mean that you change the world, but you might also see no purpose to what God has called you to do. Our part is to be obedient. Using an analogy in the NT... you might be called to plant seeds... while someone else gets to take in the harvest. You might not get to see the seeds grow.

- Can you think of any times that God has used you, or someone you know, and you didn't get to see the result?

OUR PART IS TO BE OBEDIENT. SO HOW DO GET THERE?

We know we should be obedient. How do we do it? There is a very helpful part from Jonah's story, but it brings us back to this mysterious fish.

Beginning of chapter 2... Jonah is rescued by a great fish... end of chapter 2 he is spit onto dry ground.

- How and why is the fish instrumental in Jonah's change of heart between the start of chapter 1 and the start of chapter 3?

God went to extraordinary lengths to give Jonah a second chance, using a means that brought Jonah to the end of himself so that he was willing to obey.

THE KEY TO OBEDIENCE IS SURRENDER

How do we get there? By letting go of ourselves. By giving in to the all-powerful God that made us. Only in facing death and being overcome by God's grace could Jonah finally surrender and therefore obey.

- How can we surrender to God, without needing a near death experience?

POWER OF GOD'S WORD

(surrender leads to obedience; obedience allows God to work through us)

Read Jonah 3:4 - On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.**"

In the Hebrew text, there are only five words in Jonah's message.

God's word + one prophet = huge response!

God's word is powerful... we don't need to dress it up!

- When have you seen, or experienced, the power of God's word?

Look how they respond... **Read Jonah 3:5-9**

- What do you see about their response that is impressive?

FRUITFUL MINISTRY MIGHT BE MESSY AND IMPERFECT

Their repentance, we know from history, will be short-lived... it won't be long until they destroy the northern kingdom (ten tribes) of Israel. How does this history (the first exile) make the book of Jonah even more significant?

They try to be Jewish in how they respond, but they don't know what they're doing. They use fasting and sack cloth (like the Jews), but they make the animals do it as well!

- How do we help those that are new to faith in a way that doesn't discourage them when they get things wrong?