

RODGERS
BAPTIST
CHURCH
SUNDAY
SCHOOL SERIES

A BIG ~~FISH~~ GOD STORY!



God's reluctant servant vs. God's relentless compassion | by Bro. Travis Gilbert

TO
LUKE, NOAH, AND ETHAN

your mother and I desire,
that your lives be spent
running with Christ,
for your good and
His glory!



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface p. 7

Lesson #1*Relentless Compassion* - p. 9

Lesson #2*Prophet Overboard!* - p. 15

Lesson #3*Whale of a Tale pt. 1* - p. 21

Lesson #4*Whale of a Tale pt. 2* - p. 25

Lesson #5 *Big "Time" Revival* - p. 29

Lesson #6*Gourd with the Wind* - p. 35

PREFACE

The Bible is amazing. Comprised of sixty-six individual books, written over a span of hundreds of years, with a variety of writing styles, and three different languages, yet it possesses a unity and clarity of focus that points to its divine inspiration. The Bible is not simply an interesting and ancient book. It is the very Word of God!

One of the genres of literature within the Bible is prophecy. There are sixteen prophetic books in the Old Testament and one in the New. Of the sixteen Old Testament books of prophecy four are referred to as "Major Prophets:" Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The other twelve are designated as "Minor Prophets." These labels are due to their size. The Minor Prophets do not lack significance in comparison with the Major Prophets. One of the twelve Minor Prophets is Jonah. Like all of the prophets, Jonah was an "in-between man." He stood in-between God and the time in which he lived. Unlike the other prophetic books, Jonah is a narrative rather than a strictly didactic message.

Jonah may also be one of the few Minor Prophets that most people can name. Whether or not one can find Jonah in the Bible, they have heard the story before. This popularity does present a problem. Being swallowed by the great fish dominates the headlines, but that is not the main theme of this little book. In fact, the great fish swallowing Jonah is not even the most miraculous occurrence of this narrative.

Through the ages this story has been batted around with a lot of different perspectives. For instance, higher criticism says, "Obviously, the Bible isn't true. This story can't be true. A man can't live in a fish for three days." Then theologians debate, "Did he die in the belly of the fish and then God resurrect him again, since Jesus pointed to him as a type of His own death, burial, and resurrection?"

So over time we have really missed the main point of the book. The real theme of Jonah is not "Can man live in a fish?" The primary theme of Jonah is the relentless compassion of God for the worst kind of people (Jonah 4:3b, 11). Sub-themes in this book include: the love of God and how we share it with others and the will of God and how we respond to it.

Over the coming weeks we will work our way through this minor prophecy with the major proclamation that God's grace is for all people; any who will repent and believe will receive mercy!

Rejoicing because of Grace,

Travis Gilbert
Garland, TX
June 2014

RELENTLESS COMPASSION

Jonah 1:1-3:

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

This was not the first time the word of the Lord came to Jonah. We read in 2 Kings 14:25 that...

“He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher.”

Jonah was a real prophet in Israel during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. The book of Jonah is not an allegory or a parable, but the account of an actual, historical prophet and event. Jesus considered Jonah to be a historic figure, and Jonah is the only prophet with whom Jesus personally identified (Matthew 12:39-41; Luke 11:32). He was from the town of Gathhepher, which was located about 3 miles NE of Nazareth. He was probably a popular prophet because of his prediction that Israel would regain lost lands.

Jonah was one of God's prophets, a mouthpiece for almighty Jehovah. Why would such a man so blatantly rebel against God? Tarshish was all the way over on the southern tip of Spain; the absolute opposite direction of Nineveh. Why would Jonah do that? Before you rush to judgment against Jonah, consider some things about the people to whom God called him.

Consider the Ninevites

Nineveh is referred to as a “great city” four times in Jonah, and archeologists tell us that description is well deserved. *Nineveh was great in size*. The circumference of the city and its suburbs was 30 miles, and the inner wall of the city had a circumference of 7 miles.¹ Jonah 4:11 identifies 120,000 persons “*that cannot discern between their right hand and their left*.” I believe that is a reference to small children, and from that we can safely conjecture that the population of the city was around 500,000.

¹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas*, p. 353

Nineveh was great in splendor and influence. It was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire (Israel's arch enemy at the time). *Nineveh was also great in sin.* They were known for their violence, showing no mercy to their enemies. They impaled live victims on sharp poles, leaving them to roast to death in the desert sun; they beheaded people by the thousands and stacked their skulls up in piles by the gates of conquered cities. They even skinned people alive and decorated the city with the skins. One of their kings - Ashurnasirpal II - recorded this lovely text for posterity:

“I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls, and I cut off the limbs of the...royal officers who rebelled”²

Jonah's Fear

To that city Jonah was commanded to go. Do not think that Jonah went in the opposite direction because he feared being impaled, beheaded, and turned into a wall decoration. Fear *is* what motivated Jonah to rebel against God and run from His will, but *not* fear of personal harm and injury. Jonah was afraid that his gracious and compassionate God would shower the Ninevites - those violent, wicked, immoral, and pagan people; the enemies of God's chosen nation - with grace and mercy (3:10-4:2). Jonah was afraid that God would forgive them. He did not want that.

(Before you piously shake your head at the callous heart of this OT prophet, put yourself in his sandals. The Ninevites are not a problem for us, but what about the homosexuals, the pornographers, the abortionists, the humanists, the terrorists, the Muslims, the Democrats or the Republicans? Are any of those groups your Nineveh? Or is there a certain person, maybe a particular family, who is your Nineveh?)

As believers we should regularly remind ourselves that “*we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*” (Ephesians 6:12) Let's not make the mission field out to be the enemy. We have one adversary. He is a formidable one, but we must not confuse him with those we have been called to reach.

God's Word is His Will

Take a good look at Jonah 1:1 again. Do not allow your familiarity with the story to obscure the awesome introduction that is given: “*Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying...*”

² As quoted in *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas*, p. 128

Did you get that? This book begins with a powerful phrase, "The word of the Lord."

Of all the introductions this book could have had, this was the one divinely chosen, making it very clear that God had a plan, and God had a purpose, and God spoke His word to Jonah.

I think a lot of times we find life really confusing.

- I don't know what to do!
- How should I spend/save my money?
- What should I do with that thought?
- Should I be involved with this person?

All the answers are simple. That does not make them easy, neither are the decisions we must make and the actions we must take, but God has made everything we are supposed to do really plain in His Word. God's Word is His will and it is a book that we handle. It is objective. We open it up, and it is print on page, but it is so much more than that. It is the very Word of God to us. If we will learn and live God's Word by the power of God's Spirit we will decide and do what is right.

The Word of God is the power and the authority of almighty God. It was by the word of God that the worlds were made. He spoke and the worlds became. John 1:1-3; 14:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

When Jesus spoke stormy seas were calmed; the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the demon possessed, the lame, and the maimed were healed, and the dead were given life.

The word of God is not anything to be taken lightly in one's life. The word of God is perfect, it's irrevocable, and the word of God is that to which you and I are held accountable.

And the Word of God, from cover to cover, demonstrates the relentless compassion that God has for sinners. We see it here in Jonah and in Matthew 5:43-45:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;"

Pause here for just a second. This is a massive transition for Jesus' original audience, but this message was not just for them, it is for us! "I say unto INSERT NAME HERE, Love your enemies..." Then Jesus puts the clincher on it when He says:

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

This is reiterated in Romans 12:17-21. Here we are commanded to repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. We are commanded to never avenge ourselves, but to trust in the justice of God. Instead of settling the score we are to set the table! If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. We are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

As with all God's commands, this one liberates us. If you are offended, hurt, have an enemy, then trust God with it all. It is His prerogative to do justice in their lives, not yours. Once we give that to God (Please note that we "give it to God" NOT BY ONLY SAYING "God I give it to You," but by DOING what we just read from Matthew 5 and Romans 12). Once we give all that to God we are wide open to respond with compassionate love. Then we are able to hope and believe the best, not just about our friends but even about the people who have or who are hurting us (1 Corinthians 13:5, 7; Colossians 3:10).

Simple ≠ Easy

The inspired, inerrant, authoritative, irrevocable word of the Lord came to Jonah, telling him to love with the Good News people he hated. The inspired, inerrant, authoritative, irrevocable word of the Lord comes to us, and just as with Jonah, to it we are held accountable.

Sometimes the word of God in our lives is a challenge; going against every emotion in our being. Sometimes what God asks us to do demands gut-wrenching obedience. Have you ever had a word from the Lord through His Book and said, "No thanks. Not going to do it."

There are people that I have a hard time loving. There are people I do not want to love. But if I want to follow the principle that is being taught in Jonah, if I want to follow the example of Christ and be joyfully obedient to Him and in fellowship with Him, then I will love those people unconditionally by sharing God's love with them. We can, through Christ, not only do this but enjoy doing it!

Anything short of active compassion toward all people, toward even the worst of people, is a shortfall of serious spiritual consequence. That is why we must learn the book of Jonah. We cannot study this book without facing change in our lives. Change is tough, but God is going to work on a little change in our hearts for His glory and our good.

Read through the Gospels and you will notice that Jesus had a relentless compassion for even the worst of people. That really bugged the Pharisees, and often times His disciples too.

May we not be a people who are content with *selective obedience*. "I'll obey the things that are easy for me, the things that are comfortable for me. I'll obey the things that make me really look good in public. But it's those stubborn areas that I don't want to give up."

Maybe it's the area of money, or maybe it's your plans, or perhaps it's even the most difficult command of all, and that is to...

- Love your enemies,
- Bless them that curse you,
- Do good to them that hate you, and
- Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

AND you will only be able to do that if you...

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength!

The book of Jonah challenges us to change our attitudes about people; attitudes that run the gamut of bitterness, anger, outright hatred, or uncaring indifference and to change all of that, by the power of the Spirit, to an attitude of relentless compassion; an unconditional love like that of our Savior. His love was so relentless and so comprehensive that He went to the cross for us.

Do you reflect the heart of Jonah or of Jesus?

PROPHET OVERBOARD!

In this lesson we will really go *below the surface* with our examination of Jonah.

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah... saying, Arise, **go to Nineveh...**”

Here is one Old Testament example of God's love for Gentiles. Through His commission to Jonah, God was striking against the tendency of His people to be exclusive, to be cliquish, to shut others out. Israel believed that her enemies ought to be punished (“*Ye have heard it said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy*” - only God never said that!). The people of Israel were certain that they were the only ones God could really love. God would not have any interest in bestowing His grace to Gentiles, right? Wrong! God proved to Jonah and to us all, that He is clearly interested in and clearly loves the whole world.

1. *Don't hate what God loves, or be indifferent about that for which His Son died* (Acts 10:9-15) We spent an entire lesson on that last week, so here we will just state it and move forward.
2. *God does not wink at sin.*

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.”

That is a little Jewish jargon, which in our lingo would sound something like: “I've had it up to here with their wickedness.”

It should be supremely sobering to realize that God's patience and perseverance have thresholds. For Nineveh the time had come for them to repent or be judged.

Please do not think, “Wow, they must have been really wicked.” We have all been given the same warning! God does not wink at sin. He is *personally offended* with my sin (yours too). Sin is a big issue to God. That is why God sent Jonah to Nineveh. That is why God sent Christ to the cross. The same God who, right now, has His hands outstretched in amazing grace and abundant love, desiring to forgive sinners and give them eternal life; those same hands will one day cast sinners into eternal punishment if He is continually rejected through unbelief and a refusal to repent.

Do we as Christians grasp the fact that we are living in a day of grace? I hope so, but the Day of Judgment is coming.

This is not melodramatic preacher-speak. This is biblical reality: “*Man is like to vanity: days are as a shadow that passeth away,*” Psalm 144:4.

The apostle John tells us that this world will pass away (1 John 2:17) and the writer of Hebrews warns us that:

- “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” Hebrews 9:27.
- “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” Hebrews 10:30-31.

God has not, does not, and will not wink at any sin. Sin is serious business. Sin pays wages. Those wages are death. That is why God sent Jonah to Nineveh, Christ to the cross, and Christians to the world.

1. *Don't hate what God loves, or be indifferent about that for which His Son died* (Acts 10:9-15)
2. *God does not wink at sin.*
3. *Christians are expected to speak to the issue of sin.*

What has happened to sin? It is alive and well; never been better. That silly question was asked because sin has become an archaic, dirty little word in our culture, even in some churches. Take a look at how some pastors describe their preaching:

- ✓ *There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible thumping. Just practical, witty, messages.*
- ✓ *The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hell and fire. Preaching here doesn't sound like preaching. It is sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes.*

One author sums up the above attitudes like this:

“So the new rules may be summed up as follows: Be clever, informal, positive, brief, and friendly. Never loosen your necktie. Never let them see you sweat. And never, never, use the H-word.”³

And do not call people sinners or speak about sin or the need for repentance. Now do not misunderstand. This is no call to be ugly and judgmental. It is an acknowledgement that being a person of compassion does not mean we never call a sin, a sin, or that we never call for repentance. People must be called to repentance, *but be careful!* Do not attempt to pull the mote from your neighbor's eye while you have a huge beam sticking out of yours (Matthew 7:3-5).

³ John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, (Crossway, 1993), p. 47

Jonah preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus Christ preached repentance. So must we. God expects us to speak to the issue of sin; *first our own*, and then those to whom He has called us.

1. *Don't hate what God loves, or be indifferent about that for which His Son died (Acts 10:9-15)*
2. *God does not wink at sin.*
3. *Christians are expected to speak to the issue of sin.*
4. *God expects us to speak to sin from a heart of compassion with the intent of *repentance, rescue, and restoration.**

Sin breaks the heart of God. Sin should break our heart. Sin was so serious that justice had to be done and judgment had to be paid. God's own Son had to feel the nails and the pain of the crown of thorns and shed His own blood, that there might be atonement for sin. That is how serious sin is, and it was the love of God that motivated the Cross. There we see a perfect balance between justice and love. At the cross Jesus Christ compassionately dealt with the depth and offense of our sin.

That is the heart of God. That must be our heart as well.

"But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD"

Jonah was not buying any of this love stuff. His attitude was, "Go ahead and forgive the lousy Ninevites if you want to, God, but I won't preach to them! I will not go to Nineveh. Not me. I'm going to Spain!"

I love the honesty of God's Word. We see the heroes of the Bible, warts and all. Their flaws are recorded right alongside their strengths. That really helps me to clearly see myself in the mirror that is the Bible. Take a long look. What do you see?

This lesson will conclude with another short list. This one is not of God's expectations but of our rebellious patterns, all of which Jonah manifested. The goal is not to cause despair but to strip away our excuses so that we may live lives of joyful obedience to and fellowship with God.

#1 – Sin always distances us from God.

Three times in Jonah 1 (twice in v. 3, v. 10) we read that: *"Jonah...fled from the presence of the LORD."*

If you wonder why Jesus feels so *historical*, so *biographical*, so *institutional*, so *distant*, if you wonder why you *lack intimacy* with Him, it just may be that there is something you keep clinging to that blocks the joy of His presence. Are you distancing yourself from the Lord? If that is the case then do not blame someone else. Instead,

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you,” James 4:7-8.

Too often we pull a Jonah by resisting God and fleeing from Him. When that happens we draw nigh unto Satan not God. When we decide to disobey the word of the Lord, we indicate that we really do not want to be near Him. Because when unrepentant sinners are near Him *conviction* happens. Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, and distanced himself from God. So check the distance.

#2 – Sin in our lives always brings a measure of calamity to others.

Jonah 1:4-5:

“But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them.”

There are no private sins. We may sin in private, but the consequences will always be public. Sin always creates calamity to innocent people around us. There is no such thing as a “sin that won't hurt anybody.”

#3 – That peaceful, easy feeling is not always a sign of being in God's will.

Jonah 1:5-6:

“Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.”

We often say, “I have such peace about this,” and by that mean it must be God's will. Jonah had peace about what he was doing. He was so at peace that he could sleep through a violent storm that caused experienced mariners to fear for their lives.

Understand this: we can *rationalize* our sin so well that we feel very comfortable about it, and thereby block the convicting work of God. Rationalization is a horrible enemy. Jonah could have provided ten reasons why it was right and good and proper that he should not go to Nineveh. But none of those reasons could stand up against “*The word of the LORD came unto Jonah, saying... ‘Go to Nineveh.’*”

In the light of God's word all the rationalizations melt away. Be careful, you can be very much at peace - at least for a little while - and very much in sin. God does not ask for your reasons or excuses. He simply asks you to follow Him.

Do not forget that "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,*" Proverbs 14:12; 16:25.

#4 – Everyone hates a hypocrite. (*Be sure to check the Mirror before you leave.*)

Jonah 1:9, "And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."

Think about that statement coming out of Jonah's lips at that moment. This is the problem of *hypocrisy*. It is so easy to detect it in everyone else. But when we claim that we are followers of Jesus Christ, that we fear Him, and yet we live in rebellion to Him, look in the mirror and ask, "Who's the hypocrite?"

#5 – Stubborn hearts = rebellious lives

Jonah 1:12, "*Take me up and cast me forth into the sea...*"

This was no selfless sacrifice on Jonah's part. This was another act of open defiance against God. Here was Jonah standing on the ship deck, fist raised to God shouting: "I will not go to Nineveh! I'll die before I preach salvation to them."

Being thrown overboard was not the only option here. Jonah could have gotten on his face right then, confessed and repented of his sin, submitted to God's will, and had the ship reverse course. The storm would have ceased. But that was not Jonah's heart at the moment. He was so stubborn about his sin that he would rather die than obey God.

Do you have some stubborn sin? Have you ever said, "This is one area God's not going to get? I don't care what happens."? Sin is a real *stubborn* thing.

So Jonah's last words in this chapter are, "Throw me overboard!" What a testimony to those pagan mariners: Jonah, the "*throw me overboard*" prophet of Israel.

Does your heart feel distanced from God because of sin that is unconfessed and not forsaken? Is your heart distanced from God because of a lack of compassion for others? Is there sin in your life bringing calamity to others? Do you see and have you felt the damage that bitterness, hate and an unresolved anger bring? Are you rationalizing sin? Do you have that "peace" factor in check? Sure you feel good about it. You have talked yourself into it (Deceived yourself according to James 1:22).

How will you respond? Let God break, melt, and mold your heart as He wills.

WHALE OF A TALE PT. 1

Jonah may be one of the most familiar stories of the Old Testament, because we are always fascinated with the fantastic, and, no doubt about it, the four little chapters of Jonah form one whale of a tale! But the main theme of this narrative is not a huge fish, disobedience, or even repentance. Yes, those things are all in there, but they do not form the central idea. The main theme in Jonah is the relentless compassion of God for sinners.

God's relentless compassion is contrasted with Jonah's reluctant ministry. Studying this book provides us with a ring side seat to the stubbornness of sin versus the sovereignty of God. Chapter one ends with Jonah deciding to be known as the "*Throw me overboard*" prophet of Israel. This mouthpiece of almighty Jehovah defiantly chose death over obedience to God.

At least, that is what he thought he was choosing when he told the mariners to throw him overboard. I wonder. Was Jonah smiling as he tumbled over the ship's rail and into the furious sea? Did he say to himself, "Guess I won't be going to Nineveh after all! I'm gonna die, but I won't be going to Nineveh."

If that is what he thought, then he was amazingly mistaken. Jonah 1:17, "*Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*"

Why a Fish?

Let's just spend a little time talking about this fish shall we? Was the fish just some incidental detail? Nothing is incidental with God! There are no coincidences with God. Happenstance is not how God works. Everything with Him is purposeful, for His glory, and His people's good. Jonah being swallowed by a great fish is no exception.

In Matthew 12:38-40 we learn about the intentionality behind Jonah being swallowed by the fish. During Christ's ministry He was challenged by His opponents to provide a sign that would divinely validate the authenticity of His ministry. (As if His birth, baptism, miracles, preaching, and the testimony of John the Baptist weren't enough.) He pointed the skeptics to Jonah. Let's read.

"Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Ever heard the phrase, “The devil is in the details”? Forget that. God is in the details! You can say, ‘God used a great fish to swallow Jonah, big deal.’ *It is a big deal* because hundreds of years later Jesus would reference that as an authentication of His ministry! The fish, as everything is with God, was not mere happenstance! Now notice Matthew 12:41, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.”

Jonah in the fish foreshadows the Resurrection, and the men of Nineveh will be used by God to pronounce judgment on the hard hearted religious skeptics of Christ's day because they had a greater prophet than Jonah preach to them, and yet they refused to repent and believe.

Ok, a Fish. So What?

It is very important for us to remember this. When God asks that we do something, we must not be whiny and grumpy and petty about it. We must understand that it is for our good and His glory. Then joyfully do it. God is in the details, and He will work out, during our obedience, blessings that we never imagined.

The relentless compassion of God for sinners, and His will is to use His people in compassion transactions, is the primary theme of Jonah. The major *subtheme*, however, is that God is a sovereign God, managing all the details of our lives, the good, the bad, the indifferent, the obedience, and even the rebellion. He rules and overrules all the details of our lives, and all the details of history, to ultimately bring out His good in the end.

Be encouraged by that glorious truth, and do not let go. “On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”

But what happens when a believer is not trying to stand on the solid Rock, and is instead trying to jump off into the sinking sand?

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”

Any good parent will correct disobedience. Most rebellious children do not, at first, appreciate the correction. In fact, despair may be their first reaction. That is because **despair is an outcome of sin**. When guilt gets too long and too deep, we despair about ever being able to recover. When sin breaks relationships, we despair over ever having a friend, or a husband, or a wife, or a child who loves us again. That is not surprising, because the wages of sin are not a pretty picture.

Of course, that is not what Satan wants us to think. His advice is, “Follow your own agenda, and you'll be happy.” That is the bill of (false) goods he sold to Eve. She thought, “I'll eat the fruit. That looks really good.” As soon as they ate, Satan

slithered off and left them full of shame, with sheer loss of hope, in the depths of despair. *Sin causes us to despair, but God alone will provide hope and assurance!*

BUT, this hope and assurance will only be found when we come to Him in repentance and faith.

“Then Jonah Prayed”

Jonah 1 ends, “And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights,” and chapter 2 begins, “Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly.” You bet he did! Ever been there? Not in the actual belly of a fish, but at the end of your rope, with nowhere to look and no where to turn except to God.

Jonah 2:2-9:

“I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

As we study this prayer we must remember that God had an agenda for Jonah's life. God had a plan, a purpose, and it was that Jonah needed to go to Nineveh and proclaim the Gospel. That was a very hard thing for Jonah to do. Jonah's sin was that **his own agenda was far more important to him than God's agenda**. For that he needed to repent.

This brings us to the first aspect of Jonah's prayer.

#1 – The Assurance of Deliverance

We must come to God in repentance with the unflinching assurance that He will deliver us. He will forgive us. Notice again Jonah 2:2:

“I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I {He wasn't in hell; that's a symbolic statement for the grave, for the depths of darkness.}, *and thou heardest my voice.*”

What strong assurance we have when we come to Him in repentance! Then verse 6: “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”

God delivers those who are captured and lost in sin when they come in repentance and faith. Satan seeks to deceive us here with accusations and doubt:

- “Don't you know what you've done?”
- How many times do you think you can come and ask God to forgive you for this?
- Aren't you totally ashamed?
- It would be better if you didn't bring it to God.”

Be reminded. No matter what we have done or how many times we have done it, God is not surprised by our sin. He knows all about it. How stubborn it is. How regular it is. He knew this over 2000 years ago. He personally felt the weight of it on the cross. Knowing all about it, He died for us anyway. Please remember that, and have confidence that when we come in repentant faith *He will deliver!* (1 John 1:9)

Jonah's prayer teaches us the assurance of deliverance, and provides an awareness of God's discipline. That is for the next lesson.

WHALE OF A TALE PT. 2

Jonah's prayer from the the belly of the fish in chapter two is a prayer of self-revelation, self-awareness, of God-awareness, and a very true and solid prayer of repentance. The prayer teaches us (1) *the assurance of deliverance*, and provides us with...

#2 – An Awareness of God's Discipline

Many times when I got spanked, Dad would tell me, “Travis, this is for your own good!” I never believed that was true, but it was. The Bible says so in Hebrews 12:11,

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

The Bible makes it clear that no discipline of God is pleasant *for the moment*. Our heavenly Father will use secondary sources to make us aware that we need to repent, but if we are not careful we will miss the whole point of God's discipline because we get angry at the secondary sources.

Jonah did not make that mistake. Who threw him overboard? The mariners did. Jonah could have said, “I didn't expect you guys to follow through! I mean, you just threw me in with no life raft!”

That is not what Jonah did. He prayed, “For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.” (Jonah 2:3; emphasis mine)

Jonah knew exactly what was going on and why. This was all about the hand of God in his life. The chaos was created, controlled, and conducted by God as a clear act of discipline. Because (Hebrews 12:6) “*whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.*” The great fish was God's rod of correction for His wayward prophet, and it had its intended effect. Before this Jonah was running to Tarshish, but after being swallowed and then spit out onto dry land by the fish, Jonah said, “Which way to Nineveh?!”

I am not suggesting that every time we stub a toe we are being disciplined by God. I am not suggesting that every negative thing in life is due to some sin. I am saying that we must continually confess our sins, and not blame others - including God - for the divine discipline that is a result of our own disobedience.

As the reluctant missionary prayed from the belly of the great fish prepared for him by God for just this occasion we learn from his prayer that we may be assured of deliverance, aware of God's discipline, and that...

#3 – Without God we have No Hope

Jonah 2:3-6 teaches us that there is total despair if God's not there.

“For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”

Reading that passage vividly conveys Jonah's graphic and real despair while in the belly of that great fish. His only hope was God. That is true for all of us no matter the situation.

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25)

If we had talked to Jonah in Joppa, he would have told us what he was doing was absolutely the right thing to do, but then when the despair begins to set in and he had no place left to go, he recognized that what seemed right was so very wrong *because it was contrary to God's will*. Jonah learned that lesson: “When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.”

What about us?

The fourth and final aspect of Jonah's repentant prayer is...

#4 – The Determination to Do What's Right

This is revealed in verses 8-9:

“They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that *that* I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.”

What does it mean to repent? A popular but wrong answer is that repenting is feeling really bad about something, maybe even weeping deep tears of sorrow, saying “I'm sorry,” feeling a little better as a result, and then going back the next day and doing the same thing - that which caused the need for repentance - all over again.

True repentance is transformation. To repent means to change your mind. It is changing how we think about something, and then changing the way we live because we no longer think the way we used to think. Of course, repentance is not a do-it-

yourself job. It can only be done first by the prodding of and then by the power of the Holy Spirit.

✓ *"I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving"*

Did you notice that Jonah said he would sacrifice unto God with a voice of...*thanksgiving*? One of the marks of true repentance is gratitude to God. We can always tell when someone has been really repentant, because they have a grateful spirit. They are grateful that God has cleansed and delivered them.

✓ *"I will pay that that I have vowed."*

That is a strange statement. What had Jonah vowed? Who was he? He was a prophet of Israel, a mouthpiece of Almighty Jehovah. That was the call of God on his life; a commitment to proclaim God's truths and to live out those truths. A commitment that Jonah attempted to abandon, but one that he here reclaimed.

The LORD is Our Only Hope

Then he says...

✓ *"Salvation is of the LORD."*

The Lord is the only hope of salvation that has existed, does exist, or will ever exist. I do not know how many readers are Star Wars fans, but I certainly am. The first Star Wars movie begins with Princess Leia just totally without hope. She sends a message to the Jedi master Obi-Wan Kenobi, and the crucial part of the message says: "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope. Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope."

What and/or who are the Obi-Wan Kenobis of your life? Are you counting on a friend to save you? Maybe mo' money would do the trick? You could just lie your way out of trouble. Is deceit your only hope? Is your only hope a new job, a new significant other, a new major at university, a new look? I'm talking about the Obi-Wan Kenobis of your life; there are thousands of them out there. But as Psalm 42:5 says,

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? {In other words, why are you in turmoil and in despair} **hope thou in God.**"
(emphasis mine)

That is what Jonah affirms. He had one hope: Salvation comes from the Lord. We have one hope. ***Salvation comes from the Lord!*** Eternal salvation. Yearly salvation. Monthly salvation. Weekly and daily salvation. Moment-by-moment salvation. It all comes only from the Lord!

Amen! In a world that is given over to despair and false remedies for it, God is there. God still listens. He hears the cry of our souls, and even if we are in such despair that we cannot articulate our pain, the book of Romans says that the Holy Spirit takes it before the Father, and He always hears our cry (Romans 8:26).

Jonah gives us a paradigm to follow for prayers of repentance. This paradigm has four segments:

1. **God will deliver and forgive.** If we confess and forsake our sin, He will forgive and cleanse us of it.
 - 📖 Proverbs 28:13 - "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy."
 - 📖 1 John 1:9 - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
2. **Recognize and submit to God's discipline.** "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.*" (Hebrews 12:6a)
3. **God is our only hope.** There is no one else and nowhere else to turn. Obi Wan Kenobi can't save you. Not even Yoda can. Only God can forgive sins and make you whole.
4. **Repentance means transformation.** To repent means to, by trusting in and relying on the Spirit, change your mind and the direction of your life. Every prayer of repentance must end with a commitment to do right, to live responsibly, and to joyfully follow God's agenda for your life.

The result of Jonah's prayer was that the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Then the word of the Lord came unto Jonah *a second time!*

Praise God that He not only delivers the repentant sinner, but He restores the repentant sinner! Our God is the God of second chances. Be delighted that God consistently is a God of second chances! And live likewise.

BIG "TIME" REVIVAL

When reading the scriptures it is always a good practice to keep a pad and a pen at hand, or just make notes on your smart-phone/tablet. Jot down thoughts, insights, cross-references, and, of course, questions that arise from the text. When studying the book of Jonah, one must contemplate this important question: Was the great fish more relieved to be rid of Jonah than Jonah was to get out of the great fish?!

No doubt, having a pouty, pugnacious prophet in its belly gave the fish a serious case of indigestion! On the other hand, a three day stay in the belly of a great fish was no prize either. Their relief had to have been mutual.

Another good reason to jot down notes while reading the Word is to outline the book one is reading. As succinctly and accurately as possible list the main themes of the book. Here is an example from the New Testament book of Acts:

- **Chapter 1 - *Jesus goes up.***
- **Chapter 2 - *The Holy Spirit comes down.***
- **Chapters 3-28 - *The people go out!***

Here's an example outline for Jonah:

- **Chapter 1 - *Rebellion***
- **Chapter 2 - *Repentance***
- **Chapter 3 - *Revival***
- **Chapter 4 - *Relapse***

And back of it all is the *relentless compassion of God for sinners.*

In today's lesson we have arrived at the revival section of Jonah's narrative, and the title of the study is play on words. Big "time" instead of big "tent" revival because this chapter has a lot to do with time, and it records a colossal revival (with no tent).

Let's Try This Again

Jonah 2:10-3:1, "And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*. And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah **the second time...**"

"*The second time,*" after all that Jonah had done and *not done*, (remember, we sin by *doing* things we should not and by *not doing* things we should, James 4:17) God still gave him *another chance!* The Word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time!

When we fall or fail or both, the enemy wants us to believe that our ministry is ended. To believe that there is no hope for recovery. But God Almighty is the God of the do-over! The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. (Understand that **all Christians** are called to the ministry, not just those who are ordained or licensed to preach).

We do not have to read very far in our Bibles to discover that God will restore reluctant servants who have repented.

- ✓ **Abraham fled to Egypt**, when he should have stayed in Canaan,
- ✓ **Abraham lied about Sara being his wife** when he got there, and did the same thing 25 years later in Gerar! God gave him a second chance, *both times!*
- ✓ **Jacob lied to his father Isaac**, his father-in-law Laban, and just about everyone else, but God restored him and used him to build the nation of Israel.
- ✓ **Moses killed a man and fled from Egypt**, but God called him to be the leader of His people.
- ✓ **Peter denied the Lord three times**, but Jesus forgave him and said "Follow Me."

Be encouraged with the knowledge that God uses failures, and issues second chances. But do not view these examples of restoration as excuses for sin. Grace is amazing. Presumption is sin. Jonah is a good example to us here because he did not take God's forgiveness and mercy, God's gracious provision of another chance, for granted. He repented. He was restored, and then he obediently fulfilled his calling.

Nineveh by Morning

Jonah 3:2-4:

"Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

You may recall that God refers to Nineveh as a "great city" four times (1:2; 3:3-4; 4:11). Nineveh's origins may be read about in Genesis 10:8-12.

The city could boast of a great and ancient heritage, as well as its great size and security. Nineveh was an ancient metropolitan city with “suburbs” surrounding its walls. This was a city of significant size and Jonah spent *three days time* traveling through it preaching God's message.

What is your opinion of the big city? I grew up in the country, outside of a small town. Growing up in the country, you are raised in the midst of God's marvelous creation, but cities are monuments to men rather than God.

Take Chicago as an example. For three October days in 1871 that city burned to a pile of ash. (By the way, Mrs. O'Leary's cow has been exonerated of all wrong doing connected with that incident.) Chicago was rebuilt, and one of the great hallmarks of the city is its architecture. You can visit Chicago and pay for a massive tour of the architecture of the city to the glory of architects like Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and others. All cities are monuments to the works of men. Even Jerusalem was called the city of David.

Therefore many people, Christians especially, glorify the country and vilify the city. We are not comfortable with the blight of inner-city problems: the homeless, the poor, the slums, the welfare-families, the criminals, and the liberals (most metropolitan areas are blue islands in a red sea). Cities are simply huge discomfort zones for us.

Comfort is not King. Christ is.

Nineveh made Jonah uncomfortable, *but that is where God had sent him*. Too many times churches and believers are more interested in their “comfort zones” than they are with their “obedience zone.” Think about it, the words “comfort” and “Christian” often do not belong together this side of glory. Too much time, focus, energy, and passion are spent on comfort. Here is how we think and live outside the comfort zone:

- ✓ Love **all people** with the relentless compassion of God,
- ✓ Separate yourself from the things of this world, and shine your light before men who will see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven,
- ✓ Seize every opportunity to share Christ,
- ✓ Immerse yourself in the Word of God and live with a Christ-like mind

Live like that and we will be so fundamentally different from this world that radical will be the only way to adequately describe us.

God is always busy preparing us for effective ministry to a lost and dying world, and what makes us effective is not our music, our buildings, our methods, or our ministry models. What makes us effective is this: *“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”*

Compare Jonah 3 with Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore [*Arise, go*], and teach all nations [*unto Nineveh, that great city*], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you [*preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee*]: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. [*Jonah, more than anyone knew that God is always with His children, even in the belly of a great fish.*]

Ready for Revival?

We make things so complicated and complex. We focus on the peripheral instead of the central. Thus we create problems that are not there or that do not matter, and we get off the ministry tracks. We have the ultimate tool for ministry, far superior to buildings, worship styles, and contemporary or traditional methods. We have the Word of God.

Ready for revival? Then live and preach the Word. Do we:

📖 “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.” 2 Timothy 2:15-16

Our message our power our authority is only God's Word. Nothing should eclipse it. God's Word is the spark that ignites revival. It alone is the power of God unto salvation.

📖 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Romans 1:16

God's Word is the message that produced the greatest miracle recorded in the book of Jonah. The revival that swept through that ruthless, violent, immoral, pagan city was a result of one man preaching the Word of God! Jonah 3:4-9:

“And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let

them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

Jonah entered the city preaching, and it did not take long for the people to get the point. Jonah said, "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" Here is another reference to time in this narrative; specifically the time of forty days. Throughout Scripture, the number forty seems to be identified with testing or judgment:

- ✓ *During the Flood it rained 40 days and nights.*
- ✓ *The Jewish spies explored Canaan for 40 days.*
- ✓ *Israel was tested in the wilderness for 40 years.*
- ✓ *Goliath taunted the Army of Israel for 40 days.*
- ✓ *The LORD gave Nineveh 40 days to repent.*

The important thing here is not to waste time and energy trying to decipher the significance of the number forty. Instead, understand that the time to preach is *now*. The time to repent is *now*. Time is limited. Make the most of it.

The Ninevites did not need forty days. The entire population repented at the preaching of God's Word by Jonah. From the King on the throne to the lowest peasant in the field, they openly demonstrated their repentance to God by humbling themselves before Him in a repentant posture and with a repentant spirit.

A key word in this chapter is **great**. Jonah came to a city that was **great** in *size, splendor, strength*, and, most of all, *sin*. God gave Jonah a **great commission**, to preach to these Gentiles that judgment was coming but they could escape it. Then God performed a **great change** in the city because the entire population repented, from the King to the peon. This was the greatest Gentile revival of all time, and it shows what the Lord will do with a frail, stubborn human instrument willing to *preach God's message!*

What is revival? Are you ready for the simplicity of the answer? Jonah shows us that revival begins when we submit to God's authority and obediently follow His will. Revival spreads when we simply preach the message that He has given us.

Are we ready for a big time revival? It starts with us.

GOURD WITH THE WIND

Jim Valvano was a basketball coach. He coached the NC State Wolfpack to a National championship in 1983, defeating the heavily favored "Phi Slamma Jamma" Houston Cougars. Following the most spectacular last-minute finish in NCAA tournament history, Valvano ran onto the court going crazy, hugging anybody he could reach, players, refs, and journalists, it did not matter. He was a passionate man. Jimmy Valvano died of bone cancer in April of 1993. Just eight weeks before he died, he gave a rousing speech at the ESPY Awards; a speech that ended with the statement: "Don't give up...don't ever give up!"

I am thankful for the truth that no matter how disobedient, no matter how bad my attitude might be God does not give up on me. He's still working on me. To make me what I ought to be. The book of Jonah not only reveals the relentless compassion of God for sinners, but also His relentless drive to conform His people into the image of His Son. God just will not give up on Jonah.

I would have by now. Thankfully, I am not God.

Another Prayer from Jonah

Spiritual revival is often followed by sinful relapse. I have personally experienced this awful pattern. In Jonah chapter four the prophet of God was in the midst of that ugly cycle. Jonah 4 also sheds light on this penetrating and practical point: *we sin when our heart is filled with unholy anger*. The rage and the relapse are connected.

Jonah's mind was distorted and deluded by his sinful anger, and worse yet, it had driven a huge distance between his heart and God's. God is relentless, however, and He begins to move in on the attitudes of His pouty prophet. God had Jonah's body going in the right direction, but He still did not have Jonah's heart where it needed to be.

Jonah's second prayer during this ordeal is recorded in verses 2-3. The first one is recorded in chapter 2. It's interesting to compare the two. We spent one whole lesson examining that magnificent model of a repentant prayer. The issue then was Jonah's rebellion, his reluctance to follow the will of God. God could no longer speak to Jonah through His Word, because Jonah was ignoring it. That did not stop Jehovah. He simply employed a storm and a fish to get the backslidden believer's attention. Once Jonah was all ears, he repented of his stubborn sin, submitted to God's will, went to Nineveh and preached the Gospel. The result was the greatest revival in Gentile history. Jonah 3:10 says, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, *{The one time God relents in this narrative!}* that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not."

Were I the story's author, I would have penned the words: **The End** following 3:10. The Holy Spirit saw things differently.

Jonah 4:1-2:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was not this my saying*, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”

Jonah wanted to block this compassion transaction between the hated Ninevites and God. Jonah's theology was very sound. He knew that God is gracious and merciful. He understood that God desires to forgive and redeem lost souls. Jonah was fine with that, as long as we are talking about upstanding, responsible, Jewish folk, but when we start bringing pagan, violent, ceremonially unclean Gentiles into the mix, now that was not kosher. Some people struggle with what they do not know about God, but Jonah's struggle was with what he did know.

He did not like the fact that God was willing to be gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness, to the people Jonah did not like. His theology was not the problem. The problem was his refusal to live that theology.

It's Both/And NOT Either/Or

That reveals something to us. In our Christianity it is very possible to live with *outward conformity* while having a deep *inward carnality*. We can have *sound theological knowledge* and a *bad heart*. Jonah's knowledge was exemplary. His attitude was for the toilet.

Ask yourself two questions.

- ? *Am I like Jonah, the head is in the right place but the heart isn't?* The church in Ephesus had this problem (Revelation 2:1-7).
- ? *Am I the opposite, heart bursting with love for people but the head not where it needs to be?* The church at Corinth went through this (1 Corinthians 5)

Neither position is a good one. Think about it this way. If you were to take a flight, would you want (1) a qualified pilot or (2) a safe aircraft? We want the qualified pilot *and* the safe aircraft, not one or the other. It is possible to have sound theological knowledge and a bad heart, and it is possible to have a good heart and bad theology. Neither option is a good one. One is not better than the other. The only acceptable option is good theology coupled to a good heart (Ephesians 4:15).

Instability Relapse

Jonah is so out of sync with God, that he ends his pathetic prayer with a suicidal request. “Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is better for me to die than to live*” (Jonah 4:3).

It is certainly true that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Two chapters ago Jonah pled with God to save his life. Now he pouted before God, and asked Him to take it.

Relentless Compassion for Pouty Prophets

God’s answer is awesome, because it is so different from how I would have replied. Instead of exploding on Jonah, God calmly, patiently, and lovingly asked if Jonah had a good reason to be angry (v. 4).

This obviously implies that there *are* good reasons to be angry, and it is just as obvious that Jonah's anger was sinful. Which explains why Jonah never answered; “So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city,” (verse 5).

Have you ever been so mad at a person, that when they say something you do not want to hear; you just turn around and walk out of the room? Jonah did that to God. Impersonating a spoiled child, the prophet of God stomped out of Nineveh. He built a self-pity shack in full view of the city, no doubt with hopes that God would judge Nineveh despite their repentance.

How does God handle this guy? Jonah 4:6-9:

“And the LORD God **prepared** a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God **prepared** a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God **prepared** a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live*. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, *even unto death*.” (emphasis mine)

We should notice two things from that section of Scripture.

#1 – God's Sovereignty

Three times we read that God prepared something: a gourd, a worm, and the scorching east wind. Do not forget chapter one, where God prepared a great fish (v.17), and a great wind and mighty tempest in the sea (v. 4). While the main theme of this narrative is the relentless compassion of God for sinners, the secondary theme - but no less important - is God's sovereignty. In other words, God's will *will be accomplished!* God used His creation to teach Jonah about His relentless compassion for all people. Jonah was dreaming, scheming, and running, but God was ruling and over-ruling it all to accomplish His good purposes.

#2 – Jonah's Sinful Anger

Sinful anger is a terrible emotion because it *deceives, deludes, and distorts*. Jonah was offended because Nineveh repented, but at the same time he was happy, happy, happy about a gourd. A preacher of the Gospel wants an entire city destroyed, while at the same time forming an irrational, emotional attachment to a plant. Jonah rejoiced and was invested in a gourd. Heaven celebrates when lost souls repent.

Jonah's perspective was totally out of whack and completely unaligned with God's perspective and purposes. Sinful anger always does that.

Jonah is not the only believer who is guilty of this.

Look in the Mirror

He had partially submitted to the will of God. He had gone to Nineveh and preached repentance. The problem was his unwillingness to embrace the ways of God. Simply put, he still hated the people of Nineveh. He did not love what God loves. He embraced God's rules but not God's character. He was satisfied with outward conformity and inward carnality.

Jonah is not the only believer who is guilty of this.

We demonstrate our love for and commitment to Christ when we love what He loves and are committed to His commitments.

May we never become so busy with the project of following Christ that we lose the passion of Christ. Three times the resurrected Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Following each of Peter's responses Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." In other words, care for those for whom I died.

Jonah, if you really love Me, you will care about Nineveh.

INSERT NAME HERE, if you really love Me, love the place in which I have set you down, and the people among whom I have placed you.

Syncing _____'s Life

I am so thankful that God's relentless compassion is full and rich toward the worst of sinners and to the most out-of-sync followers. Jonah got out of sync with God when life became about him, and not about his LORD. How do we get out of sync? Like Jonah, we will be out-of-sync with God when life is about **us** and **our** preferences and **our** perspectives and **our** desires and **our** want-tos, and **our** hurts and offenses.

To be synced with Jesus Christ is to joyfully understand that life is not about us and our preferences, but that it is all about Jesus.

It's about **His** perspectives and desires becoming **our** perspectives and desires. Colossians 1:15-18⁴ says that Jesus Christ:

“is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.”

Do you realize that the singing, the preaching, the ministering, everything we do in the Christian life whether we are gathered - at church - or scattered - life away from church - is not for us or about us? It is for the worship, honor, and glory of Jesus Christ. And when all is done for His honor and glory then His people will graciously receive abundant blessings and edification. But it's not *about me*, it's *about Him!*

Jonah was angry because he forgot that being a prophet of God was not about him, but it was about serving the plans and purposes of God. Life is about advancing the cause of Christ, by the power of Christ, for the glory of Christ! His passions need to be our passions!

Let's build an altar, and let's place ourselves on the altar before God, that He might use us as a living sacrifice for His glory and the gain of His kingdom, and for our own good, too (Romans 12:1-2).

⁴ Please note the intentional segue into our next Sunday school series, a study of Colossians!

Getting the Last Word

Jonah 4:10-11:

“Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?”

This book has an abrupt ending. Jonah has nothing to say, and God has the last word. “You had compassion for a plant. Shouldn't I have compassion on these people?”

God always gets the last word. Make sure it is a good word by being conformed to His will and His way; conformed on the outside because we are transformed on the inside. Our lives cannot really be conformed to Jesus if our hearts are not.

Are you willing to take the whole trip, or are you only half way there?

Do you need to offer a sacrifice?

We do not know how Jonah answered God's question. That does not matter. What matters is how will we answer?

