



MEMORIAL WEEKEND STAND ALONE: THE UPSIDE-DOWN STORY OF JONAH

May 26, 2019

Pastor Jeff Cero

BIBLICAL TEXT(S)

"Almost everyone in the book of Jonah acts in a way that is unexpected. The 'believing' prophet disobeys God, before finally obeying. The 'unbelieving' pagans obey God, responding with tender hearts. And a righteous God who rightly judges the wickedness of Nineveh, relents with mercy and compassion."

-Pastor Jeff

TEXT(S):

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."

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When Jonah's warning 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. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh.

"By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. **(Jonah 3: 1-10)***

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." **(Jonah 4:1-3)***

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. **(Hebrews 7:25)***

*"The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here." **(Matthew 12:41 NLT)***

MESSAGE SUMMARY

The book of Jonah is a unique. It's the only prophetic book in the Bible where the prophet is not also the author. This might be because in this story, it's the prophet who needs God more than the people he's called to prophecy to. Jonah is sent by God to the people of Nineveh, a wicked city outside of the nation of Israel. Jonah doesn't want to go. He tries to run from God, but God saves him and gives him a second chance. Jonah takes it, albeit begrudgingly. He preaches to the city, but is disappointed when the city repents.

He wanted God to destroy Nineveh, not have mercy on it.

Often, we can be the same way. There are people and sins that we think are beyond God's redemption. We want justice, not the mercy and love of God. What we so often forget is that it's not what we intellectually believe about God that matters. It's not what we've done or not done that draws us closer or keeps us from God. It's our response to God's great love and mercy that really count. When we respond well to God, we embrace grace and mercy, both for ourselves and for others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you lead your group through a progression of engagement with the Bible passage and the speaker's message, helping them understand and apply the teaching.

LEAN IN

These are icebreaker/warm up questions, mostly just to get the group talking and start the flow of conversation. Choose one question and talk it over for 5-10 minutes.

1. What example or story stood out to you in Sunday's sermon?
Why was it significant to you?
2. Have you ever watched a TV show (or movie) where the main character turned out to be a disappointment or a bad guy? What was the show and why did you feel that way about them?
3. Did you ever run away as a kid or has your own kid ever run away (or threatened to)?
What was the reason to run?
4. Have you had any big transformations in your life (i.e. weight loss, huge habit change, etc.) or have you witnessed the transformation of someone else? What was the event that prompted the transformation?

LOOK DOWN

These are questions on the passage and observations about what's been read.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. Jonah 3:1 says "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." From your own knowledge and/or from looking over chapters 1 and 2 of Jonah, what happened the first time the word of the Lord came to Jonah? What did Jonah do?
2. What was the message that Jonah proclaimed in Nineveh? What words would you use to describe the message?
3. What was the response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's message?
How did God respond? What does this tell you about God?
4. What is Jonah's response to this situation in Jonah 4:1-3?
What does this response say about Jonah?
5. In Matthew 12:41, Jesus makes reference to this story from the book of Jonah.
What does he say about the people of Nineveh?

LOOK OUT

These questions help connect the world of the Bible to today.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. Jonah received a second chance from God. How have you seen people use second chances well? How have you seen people use second chances poorly?
2. Jonah didn't think the people of Nineveh deserved a chance to experience God's mercy.
Are there people or groups today that the world or the church (either our church or the church at large) views in the same way?
3. How have you seen the church (either our church or the church at large) act like Jonah did in this story? What was the result?
4. Where in the church have you seen Nineveh like responses, where people have miraculously repented? What do you think we can do to create more of these opportunities for responses?
5. Jesus points back to the people of Nineveh as examples of what it looks like to righteously respond to God's message. How do you see people in the church and the world responding to the message of the Gospel? Who responds like Nineveh and who responds more like Jonah?

LOOK IN

These are questions that help you consider personal application.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. Take one minute and have everyone in your group pray silently, asking God to show you who or what is a Nineveh for you (someone or some sin that you think is past God's mercy and love). What did God reveal to you?
2. Jonah received a second chance from God after royally screwing up the first time. Have you ever had a similar experience? What happened? How can this experience help you to have grace for others?
3. Jonah's message to the people of Nineveh was short and not very hopeful, but the people responded to God anyway. Have you ever botched (or thought you botched) a message/conversation/exchange/opportunity/etc. and God used it despite you?
4. In this story, it was really Jonah who had a hard heart and needed God's forgiveness. Have you ever had a time in your life where you thought you were doing God's work for others, only to find you God needed to work on you most? What happened?
5. Jesus points out the response of the people of Nineveh as an example we should emulate. How are you responding to God in this season of your life? Are you more like Jonah or more like Nineveh? Why?

LIVE IT OUT

These action steps help apply this week's message to day to day life.

Choose one question and talk it over for 5-10 minutes.

1. What can you do to start softening your heart towards those you may have written off or that you think are beyond God's love and mercy? How can your group pray for you in the process?
2. Do you need a second chance from God? Our God is a God of second (and third and tenth and hundredth) chances. Is there something that you need to change in your response to Him? What do you need to do and how can your group pray for you?

