

Jonah

A Study in Jonah 9 weeks

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This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Perhaps you have only heard Jonah shared as nothing more than a “big fish story.” Some people teach that the book of Jonah is not a real historical account. They teach it to be just a parable. Those who do this, usually are reacting to the account of Jonah surviving in the belly of a whale for three days. They are convinced this just isn’t possible.

There are a couple of things I must share concerning this attitude. The first is that the original text does not say “whale.” It says God prepared a “great fish” – and that leaves open a couple of possibilities. One being that God created a “new kind of fish;” and the other is that God “modified an existing fish.” God “prepared” a fish so that Jonah would not die while in it's stomach.

And the other response to the idea that Jonah is just a parable - Jesus used the events in Jonah as an example - or as an illustration - to help explain some things in his life. Jesus certainly had no aversion to using parables to teach kingdom principles. But Jesus didn’t refer to Jonah as a parable – Jesus referred to Jonah as having happened. So for me, I may not be able to explain how Jonah survived on the inside of a fish for 3 days; but I do accept it as being possible because God “prepared” the fish for what it was needed to do.

There are several things in the book of Jonah that we really need to be aware of. They are things that are relevant to our daily lives in this contemporary society in which we live. So let’s look together at the book of Jonah:

Read Jonah 1:1 and make notes:

Some Bible scholars believe the name “Jonah” means “dove.” We are told in 2 Kings 14:25, that Jonah was from Gath-hepher.

The phrase “word of the Lord came to” – is a familiar phrase to O.T. Records. We find it in prophetic narratives in the book of Kings, in Jeremiah, and Haggai. But when it says “to Jonah son of Amittai” – this probably brought to the surface some negative emotions in the Judean hearers. Jonah was a prophet of the northern divided kingdom.

While southern prophets like Amos and Hosea were speaking against the sins of the rebel northern kingdom - this northern prophet Jonah was speaking about extending the borders of the northern kingdom. This prophet of the northern kingdom wasn’t thought highly of among the people of the southern kingdom.

This account, has a shadow of prejudice all over it, even before it has an opportunity to begin to unfold. The people in Judah, were much more interested in hearing something to condemn concerning Jonah, than they were in hearing something to applaud.

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Sometimes the people back then, much like the people of today, lose sight of the fact that God calls people into ministry from nations other than our own. Sometimes God gives ministry gifts to people of tribes other than ours. We are not the only people upon the earth from which God calls and gifts ministers.

Read Jonah 1:2 and make notes:

Sometimes back then, much like we do today, the people seem to lose sight of the fact that God is the Lord of the nations – and it is to Him that the whole world is held morally accountable. He is not “just the Lord” or our nation. He doesn’t love only the people of our nation. God loves all the people in all parts of the world – regardless of the nation into which they are born and raised.

Nineveh was a great city – But God is Greater. The statement that the wickedness of Nineveh has “come up before me” sounds somewhat familiar doesn’t it. God earlier had stated that the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah had come up before him.

As bad as the initial feelings might be toward this northern prophet Jonah – the feelings about Nineveh would be even more negative to the people of Judah. It just might have been a common attitude among the Judean hearers of this story – “well, if someone has to go to that hell hole – Nineveh - it might as well be one those worthless prophets from up north” - “no sense wasting one of our good prophets on such wicked and evil people.”

But I believe the better view might go something like this – “what a privilege for Jonah to be chosen to take the message of God to Nineveh.” This puts Jonah in the same category as the angels selected to take the message of God to Sodom and Gomorrah.

On one level, we might think what a horrible assignment this would be. But when we consider what the N.T. tells us – “God won’t let anything come our way that is more than we can handle” - this sort of tells us that Jonah must have been seen by God as being a man of great spiritual strength - because he was chosen to take the message to the most wicked and feared people of that day.

And what an encouragement this is – that a prophet is selected and anointed of God from among the prophets who have the least respect among the majority of the people.

Read Jonah 1:3 and make notes:

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Jonah – this man that we have determined to be a man of considerable spiritual strength – or else God would not have given him such an awesome assignment. Jonah didn't go where God told him to go.

Jonah set out on a trip of his own choosing – which just happened to be going in the opposite direction as his assignment. The people of Judah are accustomed to hearing a story of God calling a prophet to take a message to some people – and the next thing is that they hear – “so they went straight way” to the people. What a shock it must have been to them when they heard – “and he took off in the opposite direction.”

I'm pretty sure at this point, some of the people said what the majority were thinking – “that's just what we would expect from one of those sorry excuses for a prophet in the northern kingdom.” I'm also guessing at about this point in the story – that some who had decided to just tune out when they heard the prophet was Jonah are probably deciding to “tune back in” when they hear that he has disobeyed God.

These people - already did not respect Jonah because of his part in the northern kingdom. Now that they hear he has become something of a villain – disobeying a direct instruction from God. I'm sure I can even imagine what they must have been thinking of him. If there had been even a glowing ember of dislike for Jonah at the beginning of the story - this must have been like pouring fuel on a glowing ember – now the dislike is a full flame

Lets summarize what we know about Jonah at this point:

- .1. Jonah ran away from the Lord –
trying to get away from the Lord's presence
- .2. Jonah headed toward Tarshish –
this was one of those far away places nobody purposefully goes to –
the kind of place you might think “surely, God hasn't revealed himself there yet”
- .3. Jonah rejects the commission of the Lord –
And thinks he will put as much distance between himself and God as possible

Have you ever wanted to feel like you were smarter than an O.T. Prophet? Well, if you know Psalms 139:7-10 – then you might be smarter than Jonah was at this point.

Read Psalm 139:7-10 and make notes:

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Okay, now that we all feel smarter than an O.T. Prophet – let’s evaluate Jonah for a little bit here. Jonah received a call from God. Every Christian receives a “call of God” – sooner or later.

It may not be to preach or to teach - it could just be to visit someone - it may be to give, or to just listen – or it might be a great variety of others ways to minister. It seems that too often most of us do pretty much as Jonah did. We try to run from God – and try to run in the opposite direction of what He has called us to.

Consider Jonah – why not go to Nineveh? Why not just go there and tell these people what God has said to tell them?

Jonah probably knew the stories about these people. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians of that day were some of the most cruel and heartless people. History records reveal that they buried enemies alive. They sometimes skinned their enemies while they were alive. History also tells us that they impaled their enemies on sharpened poles and many other things I’d rather not mention.

I can see why anyone in their right mind - would want to avoid this place. If you had known the reports of the kinds of evil and cruel things these people did – would you just jump up and run over to their country to say “what was probably a negative sounding message?” Most of us would have to think about that assignment for a while.

Perhaps Jonah felt that these people deserved to receive the wrath of God. Jonah may not have said it in words –but Jonah’s actions said, “I would rather disobey God than to see those evil people saved.” How about us – what would our thinking be in this case? “Well, the pastor recently recently shared that sin has consequences” - “these people sure have sinned a lot” - “maybe this destruction is just the consequences they deserve.”

And how silly we say Jonah was to think he could run away from God – Adam and Eve couldn’t hide from God – and neither can any of the rest of us. Where can we go – that God is not already there?

We really get messed up sometimes when we decide to disobey God. Sometimes when we are disobedient – things seem to work out for us - and we think – “God’s letting my disobedience slide this time.”

As we read further – we see that there was a boat right where Jonah needed one. And it was headed in the opposite direction of God’s instructions – just like he wanted to go. It turned out that he had enough money to pay the fare - and he was even able to find a place to sleep on the trip.

Some of us – have disobeyed God – and even though we know that we are not doing what God has asked us to do - we will look at our immediate circumstances and decide – “its okay.” We might even say something like “wow – this must be okay with God – see how everything is just falling into place for me.” Some of us don’t like it when we hear someone say “God sent some hard times my way.”

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Read Jonah 1:4 and make notes:

Disobedience on Jonah's part – brought about chastising - and it brought about discipline actions on God's part. Please note that the ship was not breaking up. It was “threatening” to break up. What a tremendous time to repent and say “I’m sorry God – I’ll go and do what you asked.” But Jonah did like many of us:

Read Jonah 1:5 and make notes:

This child of God was being rebellious. He has disobeyed God. Trouble comes because of his disobedience. But it is not Jonah that prays – it is the ungodly people that are praying. Too often we – “the Christian” – are sleeping while the world around us is trying helplessly to do what “we should be doing.”

These sailors didn't know how to pray - they didn't even know to pray to God. Jonah knew – but he wasn't doing it.

Look at the part of verse 5 where it tells us that the ships crew was throwing cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. This was not their cargo! They had promised to safely deliver these goods which belonged to someone else. The man of God knew what he was supposed to do – but would not do it. The people around him was working frantically trying to save what they could of the situation – and the man of God – where was he and what was he doing?

Now the last part of verse 5 where we are told that Jonah was asleep below deck. Because of disobedience on the part of God's child – others were being made to sacrifice in order to survive. How often it happens - that all of those around the person in rebellion – work with all of their might to save the situation - All to no avail. We are told in the book of Jonah that they “could not” save the situation.

Throwing the cargo overboard did not appear to help the ship. They could not throw enough cargo out of the ship to help because the weight of the sin of Jonah' rebellion was so much heavier than the weight of the physical cargo.

Jonah - 01 - Dangerous Disobedience

Just think about the precious resources that were lost. The Pastor in rebellion – will work the church to death – for nothing. The person in rebellion – will work their entire family to death trying to keep things going – “but they can not.”

Here’s what I ask you to take home with from this text:

It is Dangerous To Rebel Against God.

Not just for ourselves – but for all those around us.

In the days of Jonah, they didn’t have insurance policies. When cargo had to be tossed overboard in order to keep a ship from sinking during a storm - the person who owned the cargo experienced real financial loss. Sometimes it was the person who sold it and was expecting to be paid when it was delivered. Sometimes it was the person who purchased it and had paid in advance in order to get it. Whichever the case – these were not the people who had disobeyed God. Jonah’s disobedience caused these innocent people to experience loss.

And think of the poor sailors – they hadn’t disobeyed God. Jonah’s disobedience caused these poor guys – not only the extra frantic work of trying to save the ship from sinking - But he caused them to experience a lot of anxiety and worry.

Please take a few minutes to consider: “has my disobedience caused harm to others?” - “is my current disobedience causing harm to others?”

I want to be part of “edifying and building up.” I do not want to be part of tearing down and destruction. This means – I need to make sure I remain obedient. What about you?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

If you recall, from the earlier verses – Jonah had boarded a ship going in the opposite direction from Nineveh, where God had told Jonah to go and preach to the people there. God caused a great storm to come upon the sea where the ship was. While the ships crew was throwing things overboard and praying to whatever god they could think of to – Jonah was down below enjoying a deep sleep. And things were not getting better – the scriptures tell us that the ship was threatening to break up. These experienced sailors and their captain were genuinely worried.

Read Jonah 1:6 and make notes:

The captain of the ship goes below and finds Jonah sleeping – as though he didn't have a care in the world. If you were the captain of a ship in this situation – and you had gone below for whatever reason – and there you found Jonah asleep in the midst of the storm – wouldn't you be somewhat annoyed? Maybe a whole lot annoyed?

The captain is astonished. “How can you sleep?” - “don't you have a lick of sense” – “can't you tell we are on the verge of sinking” – “you nut case you – this is no time for sleeping” – “get up and help!”

The rest of the crew has each one called on their god – and the storm has not become better. If anything, it has become more intense. So the captain says to Jonah, “Get up and call on YOUR GOD! Who knows - Maybe he will take notice of us, and just maybe we won't perish.”

I can't help but wonder if Jonah thought he was having some kind of nightmare. As he is being awakened – he is hearing the same words that he heard a few days before – the words that caused him to try to run away from God.

In the original language V2 God says, “arise and go” – here we are in V6 and the captain is saying “Arise and go.” Earlier when Jonah heard this phrase it was “arise and go – to Nineveh.” Now Jonah is hearing “arise and go – before your God”

Here Jonah is – having fallen asleep with a guilty conscience – and he hears the words “arise and go before your God.” And he is in the process of doing exactly the opposite of going before his God. Do you think this might have been one of those “i-i-i-i-i” moments?

Jonah was in the process of deserting his call to deliver a prophetic message. It just had to sound haunting to be awakened by such words. What a relief it must have been for just a few seconds when Jonah finally was able to wipe the sleep from his eyes and discover it wasn't His God standing before him, but only the captain of the ship.

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

And then the next thoughts that have raced through Jonah's mind, may have been something like this: "if only this guy knew how disobedient I am right now to God – he wouldn't wanting me to ask for anything from Him" - "if this just knew how bad my personal relationship with God is right now – surely he wouldn't be asking me to talk to God on his behalf."

I don't know about you – but I know I have had those kinds of thoughts some years ago when I was trying not to do what God had told me to do – and then someone asked me to pray for them.

This pagan captain probably had an attitude that if they all prayed to every god they could think of – they just might hit the right god – and just out of luck may get some relief. When this captain made Jonah aware of the storm – and asked him to pray to "his God" and just maybe he would do something about it – I'm guessing Jonah was pretty quick to think – "it is my God – Yahweh – who is probably behind this storm."

The account in Scripture doesn't tell us whether Jonah prayed or not. Apparently Jonah follows the captain topside – where they find the rest of the ships crew. They have probably thrown practically everything overboard at this point and the ship still appears to be in danger.

Read Jonah 1:7-8 and make notes:

The ships crew had come to the conclusion that the storm was just too violent to be just an ordinary storm. They concluded that somebody on board this ship must have done something to make some god - somewhere - very mad. When they cast lots – it pointed out Jonah – they immediately wanted to know about this guy.

They all knew each other – they worked together – they had probably all heard each others stories many times – but this guy – who is he – where is he from – what does he do – why kind of people are you from?

Read Jonah 1:9 and make notes:

Jonah answers the last question first – and his answer kind of goes right to the heart of the matter. When Jonah declares that he is a "Hebrew" – that would be enough for any who knows the Hebrews to know what God he worships. But just in case these sailors are not familiar with the Hebrew people – Jonah tells them that he worships "Yahweh – the one who made the sea." And he apparently tells them that he is in the process of trying to run away from his God.

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

The sea is the thing that is threatening to break up their ship – the sea is the thing that is only moments away from taking their lives from them - and here in their midst is a man who claims that he is purposefully and knowingly being disobedient to the God who made the sea!

Much like when Jonah was thinking he was being confronted by God when the captain was waking him up – Now the crew of the ship is having their “i-i-i-i-i” moment. Hearing what Jonah said just terrified the crew – “what have you done?”

Some people want to read this as a question from the crew - wanting to know the details of what his disobedient act was – but I don’t believe this is the best view.

At this point, the crew felt their lives were hanging by a thread – this ship could break apart at any minute – they probably were not the least bit interesting in “what” Jonah had done – they probably did not care about hearing the details - They were more likely thinking about his being disobedient to his God – and Jonah making his God mad – and then bringing the punishment of his disobedience upon them. Their thoughts were most likely along the lines of “we didn’t do anything to make your God mad – we didn’t even do anything to hurt you – what have you done by bringing this destruction upon us?”

Suppose a person is told that they have contracted a highly contagious disease – for which there is no cure – and that it usually will cause death within a week. This person concludes that they only have a few days to live – there isn’t much time to do the things they have always wanted to do – so they must get busy now doing the things that are their hearts desire. One of their hearts desires is to have children – and they think - well even if I could help conceive a child this week I wouldn’t get to help raise it – so they decide to go into one of the daycare facilities – and just go from child to child – from youngest to oldest – and spend some time playing with the children. As a parent of one or more of these children – when you found out that this person had brought this highly contagious disease to your children’s daycare – You might ask the question “what have you done?” That’s more of the way in which these sailors were asking Jonah “what have you done?”

Read Jonah 1:11-12 and make notes:

Since Jonah admitted that the God he has made angry is the God who made the sea – it makes perfect sense to ask him what needs to be done to make this God stop being angry and to allow the sea to calm down.

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

Jonah understood some important things: Jonah understood that God desired obedience more than God desire sacrifice - Jonah understood that to disobey God is sin - Jonah understood that “the wages of sin is death.” For Jonah, it was easy to know the answer to the question – just throw me to my death. The penalty for sin will be paid – and the storm should subside.

I find the reaction of these pagan sailors very interesting. They wanted to know who caused this calamity to come upon them. When they discovered who – then they wanted to know what needs to be done to correct this situation. And when the response was – “I must sacrifice my life to the sea” – you would almost expect these sailors to waste no time in tossing him overboard.

Read Jonah 1:13 and make notes:

Instead of tossing Jonah overboard – they tried with all their might to row this ship back to land no doubt with the idea that they would toss him off the boat upon land. Maybe these sailors were thinking about Jonah’s story of being disobedient to God. Since God was mad at Jonah for not going to some place to preach – maybe God really wanted Jonah on land instead of into the water.

Even though Jonah had put all of their lives in danger – even though Jonah has caused to them to almost lose their ship – even though Jonah had caused them to lose all their cargo - which means they are now not going to be paid - Even though – they did not want to be cause of Jonah losing his life. “If only we can put in onto land – then he won’t drown – and it won’t be our fault if he dies.” But the sea grew “even wilder” – they could not row the ship anywhere. It became obvious to them – they had no choice but to throw him overboard.

Jonah had confessed to being the malignancy in their lives. If they continued to try to keep him on board – the whole ship was going to break apart in this storm and they were all going to drown. If they tossed him overboard, maybe – just maybe – Jonah’s prescription is the right one – and the ship and the rest of them would still be alive.

Isn't it interesting - that Jonah, a child of God, was willing to allow all the “non-children of God” people in Nineveh to die – but this ship's crew – who were not “children of God” worked hard in an effort to keep Jonah from being destroyed?

Read Jonah 1:14 and make notes:

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

The sailors – having realized they simply can't avoid Jonah's solution – they began to call out to Yahweh – Jonah's God – and ask Him not to hold them responsible for Jonah's life – since Yahweh was obviously doing what he wanted to do. They were talking to a God they were not familiar with - they didn't know what He liked and did not like – they were trying to talk it through with Him – “this is what you want – right?” And you can just hear some of the crew questioning those who are about to carry out the execution of throwing Jonah overboard – “are you absolutely sure this is the right thing to do?”

I'm thinking these guys were not absolutely sure – it's just that they had already tried everything they knew to do. So they take hold of Jonah – and toss him into the sea.

Read Jonah 1:15 and make notes:

The results were very dramatic – as soon as Jonah hits the water – the sea suddenly began to calm down – Wow! The answer to the raging sea was found. But the answer to these sailors prayers had also been found.

Jerome, (about 400 A.D.) pointed out that the text does NOT say the sailors “seized” Jonah, nor does it say they “bound” him; only that they “took him.” When we consider Jerome's observation, it helps us understand that even at this point, the sailors were not angry with Jonah – but they had tried everything else that they could think of. Now it was more likely out of a sense of desperation than great anger that they surrendered Jonah to the sea.

If we were honest with ourselves, I wonder how many of us would have this kind of attitude toward a person who had caused us to work so hard – toward the person who had put our lives in danger – toward the person who had caused us to lose all the cargo that probably meant we would not get paid – if we survived the trip. I fear many of us would have been very angry and perhaps even to the point of desiring to inflict some pain on Jonah – then turn him over to the sea.

Read Jonah 1:16 and make notes:

These sailors – who up to just moments ago – were pagans! Now they are making sacrifices to Yahweh – and they are making vows to Him.

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

I ask you to take your focus off of Jonah for just a moment – and try to focus on the Israelites who later hear this story. Do you remember - when we began this look into Jonah - I shared with you how the Jews in the south probably held Jonah in very low – if any – respect and regard? They did not like Jonah – he was a prophet from the northern kingdom – who did not speak doom and gloom to the northern kingdom. These Jews in the south wanted to hear words of destruction to the northern kingdom for separating from the south. They probably had thoughts that said, “what else would you expect” when they heard that this Jonah prophet disobeyed God.

The southern Jews held to some stereotypes of northern prophets that were not completely true. The Jews in general held to some stereotypes of Gentiles that were not entirely true either. As they listened to the account of Jonah – they hear that Gentile dogs – are making sacrifices to Yahweh – and these Gentile dogs are making vows to Yahweh – and these Gentile dogs are worshipping Yahweh.

Along with Jonah – some Gentile stereotypes were thrown overboard that day. In this account – it was the Jew who was disobedient and defiant before Yahweh. And it was the Gentiles who were worshipping Yahweh and making sacrifices to Him.

Now back to Jonah – The last message ended on a very somber note didn't it? The disobedience of one person causes the people around them to suffer. The disobedience of God's minister – is very costly to all those around them. If you grasp the message from the last lesson – then the point of this lesson is very important to hear.

I know some would use the text in this lesson to make the point that “sin does not pay” - or they might use it to say that “if you sin – there is no escape – God will get you in the end.” First, let me say – that the point of the last lesson from Jonah remains true. When we as God's people are in rebellion – we are going to cause those around us to lose much. Here is the point we should take home with us from the text of this lesson:

When God's people confess and repent – lost people will turn to God!

Don't get too focused on the fact that Jonah is bobbing around in the sea – there's more to the story. Rather – take a look at what these pagans began to do!

As long as God's people deny their sins – as long as God's people refuse to repent for their sins – as long as God's people want to lie about their need to make things right with God - the people around us will continue to suffer loss. BUT - When God's people will own up to having been unfaithful – the lost will start coming around and getting right with God.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14 and make notes:

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

As long as God's people refuse to repent for their unfaithfulness – we are going to be the cause of loss all around us. And we are not going to see revival come – we are not going to see the lost saved. But when God's people will confess and repent – The lost will be turning to God in great numbers.

So, How are we doing today?

Are we being disobedient or faithful: Faithful to help those we are asked to help?

Faithful to give what we have been asked to give? Faithful to tithe?

Faithful to speak that encouraging word? Faithful to teach?

Faithful to go? Faithful to clean up? Faithful to help?

If you are not saved – please don't allow the disobedience of someone who calls themselves a Christian - to keep you from accepting Jesus as your Savior. Christians don't become immediately perfect the moment they are saved. We have a lot of growing and maturing to do – Unfortunately the lost people see a lot of immature Christians and they let that disappointment keep them from Jesus.

Please accept Jesus as Savior today – and begin the growing, the learning, the maturing process today. And then one day soon – join me in trying to rescue people who in the darkness of life and bringing them into Light of Salvation in Jesus Christ.

And if you are a Believer who has some un-confessed disobedience - Please confess to it and repent today. Let's do this so that we do not hinder the loss from coming to Christ – and instead become one who actually is an encouragement to the loss to get saved!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 02 - Repenting Christians

(this page for additional notes)

At the end of the last lesson – we left Jonah, having been thrown off the ship into the stormy sea. The sea became calm – but Jonah is in a dangerous place and situation. He was a long way from land – and it probably was not realistic to think he could swim to shore from where he was. There are also things in the sea that would eat him for lunch and that would be the end of Jonah.

Jonah had been disobedient to God – and Jonah knew he had been disobedient to God. I’m pretty sure those Jews in the south were close to rejoicing when they heard that this disobedient prophet from up north had been thrown overboard into the stormy sea. Jonah deserved to suffer – he deserved to die – But God is so merciful and so gracious.

Read Jonah 1:17 and make notes:

The Gracious gift of God - is Life! God does not abandon His servants – even when they have been disobedient. As disobedient and rebellious servants – we often times get ourselves in dangerous situations – and how many times God has been there to snatch us from the jaws of death.

God “provided a great fish” – the word translated “provided” in the original language was the word “manah” (maw-naw). The basic definition of this word is: “to count, to assign, to tell, to appoint, to prepare.”

Let’s face it – not just any great big ole fish would not do! While I am willing to concede – it may be possible for a person to survive for a short time inside a really big fish – providing they are swallowed whole – AND they are removed very quickly. But for someone to be inside a regular ordinary fish – means they are going to be washed with a lot of really strong digestive acids – the kind that dissolve fish scales from the skin and meat from the bones.

The fish that God “appointed” and “prepared” and “provided” - Protected Jonah from digestive acids – AND – it provided him with oxygen to breath for 3 days and nights. Yeah, this was a special fish – prepared to meet Jonah’s needs – for the mess he had gotten himself into.

Do I need to point out – that if Jonah had simply gone to Nineveh in the first place – like God had told him to do – he would not be needing a “rescue at sea” operation! The simple act of Jonah being swallowed – not eaten mind you, but swallowed – by this specially prepared fish – is a tremendous picture of God’s amazing grace. And sometimes when we feel we have been swallowed up – it is in reality one of those “God’s amazing Grace” times for us.

What a wonderful story – when we hear that God rescued and delivered from destruction – someone who is innocent. But It Is An Amazing Grace story it is – when we hear that God rescued and delivered from destruction – one who has been willfully disobedient and rebellious.

Jonah - 03 - Elite Christianity

Many people today have trouble believing the events of Jonah's story could even possibly be true. Doubting the reality of the account of Jonah is not new. People in Augustine's day (about 400 A.D.) were doubting the reality of Jonah's story, but Augustine declared that Christians should never fear attacks by their critics. Augustine said Christians must either believe all the divine miracles or to believe none of them. Augustine makes a great point. How many divine acts, or miracles, can we throw out of the Bible and still have real faith in God?

Now, just in the natural – without any special preparation from God – what is the longest amount of time that you think a person might be able to survive inside a great fish – before they die? 1 day? A few hours? Maybe just a matter of minutes?

I'm thinking they would suffocate long before they are killed by the digestive juices. People in those days understood death of the human body. They knew full well just how fragile the human body is. It is just way too easy to take the life of a human being. So how does 3 days and 3 nights sound?

There just isn't any room for Jonah to take credit for being some kind of super strong person. Three days and three nights far exceed any realm of possibility for Jonah to make it in the natural. This is God! All the credit is His.

If you remember from the earlier lesson – the Scripture doesn't tell us whether Jonah prayed when the captain of the ship told him to. I'm guessing Jonah didn't pray at that time – but what about now? Now that he has been thrown into the sea – now that he has seen the jaws of a great fish sweep over him – now that he no longer can see anything but the darkness inside this great fish?

Read Jonah 2:1 and make notes:

Anyone think it is time to pray? Shown the consequences of his disobedience, Jonah prayed to God for the first time since he began running away from God. Jonah was originally told to cry out (qara) against Nineveh (1:2); he now cried out (qara) to God without anyone telling him to do so.

Read Jonah 2:2-3 and make notes:

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No problem picturing what Jonah experienced as he was thrown into the stormy sea. Can you imagine the waves of emotions that must have swept through Jonah's soul once inside this fish – to realize “hey, I'm alive?”

Just a few verses earlier, the text tells us that the sailors threw Jonah overboard. Jonah declares in this verse that God had thrown him there. God's demonstration of power and sovereignty becomes greater and greater as Jonah descends deeper and deeper. “You hurled me into the deep” – is a good metaphor for the difficult troubles from which we cannot free ourselves.

The word translated “depth” in more clearly the “far bottom.” Can you imagine finding yourself in any situation that could appear more final and hopeless than Jonah being in the depths of the sea, in the belly of a great fish designed to completely digest that which it has swallowed?

Read Jonah 2:4 and make notes:

Jonah had been swept into a dark place! Interesting isn't it – Jonah had been trying to run away from God - Now he finds himself inside a fish – one that we could all imagine might swim to great depths in the sea – while it digests you and makes a mid-day snack out of you.

How much further from God can a person get - and yet – at this great distance from God – even feeling as though he has been placed in a location where even God cannot see him – Jonah sets his heart to pray to Yahweh. The God he has rebelled against – the God he has been disobedient toward – “I will call to him.”

Read Jonah 2:5 and make notes:

The image of what Jonah must have looked like right then is either very funny or very sickening depending upon your sense of humor.

Read Jonah 2:6 and make notes:

Jonah - 03 - Elite Christianity

It seems doubtful that Jonah could be aware of just how deep the fish swam – but emotionally and spiritually – he could just see this fish taking him to the bottom of the ocean. The place that is the lowest on earth – the place far below the mountains where only the roots of the mountain exists – to be in the bottom of the ocean – certainly one would be “barred in” by the earth - “BUT, you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord MY God!”

Read Jonah 2:7 and make notes:

At the moment when my life was simply slipping away and there was nothing I could do to hold onto it – I remember You, O Lord - And my prayer rose to You!

Read Jonah 2:8 and make notes:

God has a “Grace” in store for everyone – God has a Grace with your name on it - God has this “Grace” that He wants us to have. The people who cling to the idols of this earth – they forfeit the Grace that “could be theirs.” How many times - and in how many situations – do you suppose we have forfeited our Grace?

Read Jonah 2:9 and make notes:

Jonah has great disdain for the Gentiles, who practice idolatry. At the same time, he regards himself as one of the elite, one who worships the true God by means of the sacrifices which God has appointed. Jonah, as an Israelite, views himself as superior to the idolatrous Gentile heathens.

Jonah’s words do not square with what we have seen in chapter 1, however. The heathen prayed - Jonah did not. The heathen were eager to uncover sin - Jonah was not. The heathen wanted to practice their religion - Jonah did not. The heathen had compassion on Jonah - yet Jonah showed none toward them.

By virtually any standard, the Gentile sailors looked spiritually superior to Jonah from all that we have read in the first chapter, and yet Jonah can unabashedly tell God that he is somehow superior to the heathen.

The only promise which Jonah makes is the promise to offer a sacrifice to God at the temple - "That which I have vowed I will pay."

Salvation is from the LORD. If Jonah had vowed to go to Nineveh, why is it necessary for God to repeat the command to do so in the first verses of chapter 3? When Jonah said, "Salvation is from the LORD," he was merely giving God the credit for his physical deliverance.

The substance of the vow which Jonah refers to is spelled out in the first part of verse 9. Jonah intends to go to Jerusalem, where he will offer a sacrifice of praise to God. Making a sacrifice was normally promised in a vow.

Don't you know that Jonah would have gladly said farewell to his place, the belly of the fish - gone to dry land and then hastily returned to the land of promise, where he would have offered a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Jonah was saying that he would not sacrifice to the Lord with empty words. The thought here is of one who vowed an animal to the Lord but substituted an inferior animal when it came time for the actual sacrifice. Jonah tells the Lord that he would not do that. Rather, he would pay with the fullness inherent in true thanksgiving "what he had vowed to the Lord."

Jonah's payment to the Lord contrasts clearly with the payment he had previously made to the sailors in his escape attempt. There, Jonah only reaped a trip to the deep with that payment.

Read Jonah 2:10 and make notes:

The fish – just a creature – being nothing at all like a human – was obedient to God's command. I do find this interesting – the fish didn't just spew Jonah out close enough to the shore for him to wade through the shallow water to land. The fish "vomited Jonah onto DRY land." This fish had to come close enough to shore that he could heave to dry land. Jonah didn't even have to walk in the water get ashore.

There are 3 things I believe God wants us to take home with us from this text:

1. We don't get too far to be restored.

The fish parallels the ship, the belly of the fish = the inner recesses of the ship. The ship represented Jonah's plans for himself – the fish represented God's plans for Jonah. Jonah thought he was in control and could manage his rebellion against the Lord. Jonah's managing his rebellion was only the beginning of his descent. Jonah was no different than any other person.

We all think that we can manage that "little white lie" or that "small indiscretion." Then, at some point things unravel and spin out of control and the results are bigger than anything we anticipated. And in our case - as well as Jonah's - God brings about the unraveling. He causes the unraveling of our best laid plans in order to bring us back to Himself.

It is not unusual to find a person that is at a place of deep trouble from which we can not see any means of escape. Sometimes we are brought to this place by our own doing, like Jonah. At other times we are brought to this place by others, as was Joseph when he was sold into slavery and wrongly put into prison. And occasionally, Satan brings us to this place, as he did with Job.

When we enter these extreme difficulties it can seem as if we trek through an inhospitable and alien world and we can feel so very isolated. But in all cases, God is in control and does not abandon us. Indeed, He tells us, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:2a).

2. Let Go Of The Elitists Attitude

Jonah's psalm reveals his disdain for Gentiles and a smug self-righteousness as an Israelite. We have already been informed of the faith of the Gentile sailors in chapter 1, and of their obedience to all that they knew they were to do. In Jonah's "psalm of praise," we find no mention of these sailors, of their physical deliverance from death, or of their newly-found faith in the God of Israel.

We can safely assume that Jonah did not find any of this to be a source of joy or the cause for praise to God. We can press this point further and conclude that Jonah really despised Gentiles and would have preferred their death and damnation to their deliverance and salvation.

Jonah's psalm contains no repentance and no confession of sin, even though chapter 1 makes it clear that such was needed. Jonah had much to confess, but he has confessed nothing in his psalm. Even when depicting the cause of his danger in verse 3, he does not attribute his being an outcast in the sea to his own sin, but instead declares that to be the sovereignty of God!

Jonah typified the stubborn rebellion of God's people, Israel. Just as Jonah disobeyed God's order - Israel disobeyed God's law. Jonah refused to carry out his task of preaching to the Gentiles - so did the nation Israel. Jonah called on God for deliverance, yet without genuine repentance - so did Israel. Jonah had the outward trappings of righteousness, the right forms and the right terms, but lacked genuine righteousness - so did Israel.

The rejection of Christ and of the rejection of the gospel by the Jews proved to be the occasion for the salvation of the Gentiles, just as Jonah's disobedience was the means of God bringing the sailors and the Assyrians to salvation: Salvation is exclusively from Yahweh.

The implication for Jonah was that salvation was not the sole possession of the Jews. The same truth holds true for all Christians today. Jesus said, "no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6b).

This simple truth is foundational to being a Christian. Yet some groups qualify Jesus' statement by asserting that no one can come to Jesus except through their group. By saying this, they are declaring themselves to be the guardians of access to Jesus, and therefore they guard access to God.

This attitude existed in Jonah and the Jews of his day and sadly, it still exists in several "exclusive" Christian groups today; they find it inconceivable that God would work with anyone outside of their group.

Once the Apostle John complained to Jesus, "'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.' But Jesus said to him, 'Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you'" (Luke 9:49-50).

No one acts as the guardians of Jesus and salvation. Yahweh Himself holds access to salvation exclusively through Christ. All can approach Christ independently of any group affiliation.

While there are some similarities between Jonah and Christians today – let me point out one significant difference between Jonah's thinking and ours today. Jonah, thinking with the mindset of the Old Testament Jew, rested and relied on his election as an Israelite, but he failed to see his relationship to God in terms of grace, he saw his relationship with God only in terms of some kind of intrinsic worth, based upon his race and perhaps even on his calling as a prophet. Today we tend to presume upon God's grace. We use the grace of God as an excuse for our disobedience.

Jonah tended not to see himself as sinful, as much as, the heathen are; we, on the other hand, see ourselves as depraved, and admit this as part of our human condition, but we view God as somehow committed and thus obligated to forgive.

The common element, then and now, is viewing God as obliged to bless "His people," regardless of their rebellion, and to view "heathen" sins as more reprehensible to God than "sacred sins," like our disobedience.

3. The thing that appears to have swallowed us – just might be God’s deliverance.

The salvation of Jonah reminds us that God’s means of saving us are often not those we would have chosen. God does not save us according to our preferences, but according to His provision. The great fish would not have been Jonah’s choice of accommodations, but as unpleasant as the belly of the fish was, it did the job.

I’m sure Jonah would have much preferred a dramatic search effort, employing a Coast Guard cutter, helicopters, and skin divers. He would rather have been hoisted aboard a ship and given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by a beautiful female sailor. God did not flatter Jonah in the means by which He saved him because pride was one of this prophet’s principle problems. God’s means of saving men has often been something less than flattering.

Spending 400 years as slaves in Egypt was not flattering to the Israelites, - entering into the Red Sea or the river Jordan, - slaughtering an innocent animal and pouring out its lifeblood on God’s altar, - while not flattering - these were the means which God provided. Looking up to a brazen serpent was not a flattering way to be healed from the bite of a serpent, but it was God’s way.

Trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of a rejected king, the Lord Jesus Christ, isn’t man’s preferred means of finding the forgiveness of sins and of entering into eternal life, either. Nevertheless, this is the means which God has provided for man’s eternal salvation. This is the only means.

If you have not experienced His salvation, you may have to be brought very low, as low as Jonah, so that any means of salvation is gladly received. But bringing each person to the lowest depths of great despair is not God's desire. He prefers to offer a loving invitation and see us gladly accept.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 04 - Can't Escape The Call

At the end of the last lesson – we left Jonah – having been vomited up onto dry land. The truth is that we don't know what Jonah did next. I know that a great many people think he took off running toward Nineveh. But I am not sure he did.

As I read the book of Jonah, I get the picture of a servant of God that has something of a wrong attitude toward the Gentiles. He didn't want to take the message to the Gentiles at Nineveh. He felt so strongly about this that he attempted to run away from God and away from his calling.

I don't read of any repentance on Jonah's part even while inside the great fish. It may be that he stood around on the shore for a while trying to decide what he is going to do next. I can't help but think – if Jonah had come out of that fish with an attitude of being obedient – Chapter 3 might have started out a little differently. It reads as though Jonah had to be told again, where to go.

Read Jonah 3:1 and make notes:

We don't know how much time passed before chapter 3 begins, but one of the important things to note here is that the Lord called Jonah “again.” This shows the amazing love of God to His wayward people. Though Jonah did everything he could to resist the first call of God, - and even though Jonah knowingly disobeyed God - God called him again.

It is important for us to note that God was under no obligation to do this. He did it out of mercy and grace.

And it certainly isn't that God's plans are dependent upon human beings. When Jesus entered Jerusalem and was hailed with Messianic references, He told his critics that the stones themselves would announce Him if the people did not (Luke 19:40).

God was determined to do the work through Jonah, so He did not give up on this reluctant prophet. God is just as committed today in doing His work through the one He calls.

When Jonah ran from his assignment - God did not just write him off and call another to take his place. God was insistent upon using Jonah for this mission. He wasn't interested in finding a replacement for the disobedient Jonah. There were probably several other prophets God could have chosen and some who would have willingly preached to Nineveh.

Why would God insist on Jonah – one so out of sync with God's heart - for this mission? It probably was just as important for Jonah to go and learn - as it was for the people of Nineveh to hear God's Word. Jonah was in need of some ministry – every bit as badly as the Ninevites, - he just didn't realize it.

Jonah - 04 - Can't Escape The Call

It's one of those marvelous things God does. The one he sends to do the ministering - gets blessed as much as those being ministered to. While it may be in a different way – maybe even in a different area - Just as blessed.

Perhaps the reason lies in Jonah as a type for Israel. When the Apostle Paul gave his defense before the people in Jerusalem - everyone listened to his testimony with interest - until he said that the Lord had told him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. When they heard that, the Jews reacted with disgust toward Paul - and started calling for him to be put to death (Acts 22:22).

Whatever practical reason we think we can come up with – there is a Biblical principal we need to be aware of. It is expressed in Romans 11:29, “God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.”

I know that there are those today who tell people “if you don't use it – you lose it.” And that's true about some things. But as you can see from this Scripture - that isn't true about our Spiritual Gifts - and it's not true about our Spiritual Calling.

Read Jonah 3:2 and make notes:

God, showing his grace and mercy – and showing the unchanging calling He gives us - reissued His original instructions to Jonah. He still wanted to use Jonah, but this time God gives Jonah a slightly changed set of instructions. “Jonah, go to Nineveh, - and when you get there, preach to Nineveh the message that I tell you.”

Instead of telling Jonah to cry out against Nineveh, this time God simply tells Jonah to go there and basically wait for further instructions. God frequently works this way with us, and our flesh often finds it irritating that He does. But the truth is that many of us just go berserk when God tells us the whole plan. Or at least we start getting in His way. So God gives us just “the next step” – and no more. When we show ourselves faithful and obedient with that one step – then He gives us the next step.

The story of Jonah demonstrates why God so often leads us one step at a time without telling us more. When God told Jonah – at the first call – what he would say in Nineveh, Jonah rejected the call. It may be that Jonah knew about the reputation these people had - Jonah probably did know just how brutal and cruel they were to their enemies. And when God said go to Nineveh and preach against it - Jonah reacted – in much the same way as many of us would if someone told us to go and take a stick and hit that hornets nest several times - “what – or you nuts – that will make them mad” - “have you got any idea what they do when they get mad?” God frequently ONLY tells us what we can handle at the time.

Jonah - 04 - Can't Escape The Call

Jonah demonstrated a common attitude of many of the Jews of that day. They found it really disgusting that anyone would even suggest God would reach out to the Gentiles. They would ask: "doesn't God hate the Gentiles because of their idolatry, immorality, and disregard for God's Law?"

That sounds similar to the attitude we find within the Church today. Some ask: "doesn't God hate materialists, homosexuals, and atheists?" Those who asks such questions, simple haven't read their Bible enough. Just look at what God says in both the Old Testament and the New Testament:

Read Ezekiel 33:11 and 2 Peter 3:9 and make notes:

Jonah's mission to Nineveh was proof enough that God's love extended to all people. Otherwise He would have destroyed them without warning.

It is a very faulty image of God – to tell people that God is just standing on the ready to smash to oblivion a person when He sees them mess up. God takes NO pleasure in the death of the wicked! NONE !

That's why God is so ready and willing to save each and every person who is willing to turn from their wicked ways. And that is why God sends people with a message to some of the meanest – most vile – most disgusting people - Because the wages of sin is death - and God does not want anyone to die. God wants everyone to have life forever - Live with Him forever.

Here is one of the things to take home with you:

God uses us in His work, but He is not dependent upon our actions to save anyone.

If we neglect the mandate to go out into the world to preach the gospel - then we are the losers.

The wicked servant in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) exemplifies this principle. In that parable a master entrusted his wealth to his servants and then left on a long journey. After the master returned to collect on his investment from his servants, one wicked servant told the master, His response to his master was "I know you reap where you did not sow" - "I was afraid, so I hid what you entrusted to my care" - "See, right here I have what is yours" (Matt 25:24-25). The servant shirked his duties and responsibilities and that servant was the loser in the deal.

If we neglect the Lord's command, - the Lord's work will still get accomplished (see Isaiah 55:10-11), - but we will lose out. We will forfeit our blessings – just like those who worship idols.

Jonah - 04 - Can't Escape The Call

Nineveh had ignored the evil growing in them, but had undoubtedly reaped some of their bitter harvest one way or another. Fortunately for them God knew that they were not beyond hope. While others just saw cruel and mean people when they looked at the Ninevites - God knew they were ripe for repentance.

People can learn from sin at three different levels. In the first, and highest level, - The Best Way we can learn by listening to advice and observing the mistakes of others. That can be enough to convince some of correct actions. In the second level, a person disregards advice and examples and decides that that they can commit a wrong without repercussions. But one close call convinces them to change their ways. In the third level, a person ignores several close calls, and changes their ways only after suffering from the consequences of their actions.

But then there are those that ignore advice, examples, close calls, and ignore the suffering of consequences and still refuse to change their ways. Only God knows if these folks are beyond hope. If God tells us to minister to them - Let's be obedient and leave the results up to God.

And here is the second thing we need to take home with us from this text:

We can run – but the call isn't revoked! Run from the call – run from God - But the call will still be there. So, why not go ahead and do what God calls us to do?

Jonah was afraid of being skinned alive – or worse. Why are we afraid to share the gospel with those we meet? Are we Running from our Call? Are we Shunning our Call?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Did Jonah learn the lesson that resisting the will of God is both futile and counter-productive? I don't know – but now he obeys the call and goes to Nineveh.

Read Jonah 3:3 and make notes:

Nineveh was a very important city - a visit required three days. The idea behind this statement probably refers to how long it would take to walk around the city of “Greater Nineveh” – the metropolitan area around the city. It took three days just to walk from one end of the city to another.

Read Jonah 3:4 and make notes:

Though Nineveh required three days to properly visit it - Jonah wasted no time touring or visiting the city. On the first day in the city, Jonah began delivering his message: God will destroy this city in forty days.

Many have wondered if this was the entire text of Jonah's message. Did he mention the fact that they could escape destruction by repentance? Probably not. It's kind of obvious that Jonah personally didn't care even a little bit if they were destroyed.

I have heard it suggested that his appearance after stewing in the fish's digestive juices would have been pretty appalling, too. That may have been true. It is well known that extreme stress or trauma can turn a person's hair white almost overnight. But let's not forget that this was a special fish – it had been “prepared” by God for housing Jonah for 3 days. It might not have changed his appearance at all.

He preached a simple message of judgment. In that one day it is recorded that he said only five (Hebrew) words to them. It is translated into English as: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Jonah emphasized to the people of Nineveh what was going to happen – the city would be overthrown in judgment.

Some commentators suggest that Jonah must have preached a more extensive message. Others suggest it may have been that it was that his coming was announced days or weeks before he arrived. If any prior announcement of Jonah's arrival was given to Nineveh it likely came from the sailors or those who heard the sailors' story and not from Jonah himself.

Was this Jonah's whole message to the people of Nineveh? I don't know, but at least it was his emphasis. The sheer brevity of the proclamation seems to line up Jonah's attitude. It illustrates the bare minimum effort that Jonah performed. Jonah didn't have the disposition to "go the extra mile" - at least not for the Gentile Ninevites.

Indeed, he did not go one iota beyond his obligation. His attitude was probably something like: "These are such sin soaked heathens; surely they won't repent." "What a waste of time, preaching repentance to a self-serving, godless people."

However, God took this meager message and bare minimum effort and used it to awaken the people of Nineveh's consciences. The threat of judgment alone was enough to do this. In spite of Jonah, salvation was all God's doing from beginning to end.

Why did God delay forty days? Wouldn't it have been less hassle for God to just destroy Nineveh outright and save Himself the trouble of sending a difficult character like Jonah to them? A hope for repentance is embedded within the forty day time delay. But more than that, a HOPE for repentance is contained within the word "overturned" itself.

It is the Hebrew word "Haphak" which fundamentally means "change." It can mean change for the worse, as in "destroy" - or it can mean to change for the better, as in "transform."

God announced, through Jonah, that things would change in Nineveh – for better or worse – things are going to change. Other Hebrew words could have been used if God was intent on destroying the city - such as "shachath" which strictly means to "ruin" or "destroy" - But haphak contains a hope of repentance for Nineveh.

A lot of people completely misunderstand – The purpose of Prophetic Warnings. A passage from Jeremiah should help:

Read Jeremiah 18:7-10 and make notes:

If we considered no other passage from Scripture than this one from Jeremiah - This should be enough to nullify the teaching that certain people are going to be blessed regardless of how they live - simply because they are descendants of a person who was told by God that their offspring will be blessed.

Today I bring up this passage from Jeremiah to explain why sometimes Prophesied doom, does not come. And why sometimes Prophesied blessings do not come. Both the blessing and the doom are dependent upon the responses of the people.

God did not desire for the people of Nineveh to be destroyed for all their wickedness, though it was great. God's greatest desire was for these wicked people to repent and be saved – and be spared destruction.

This simple but so very important point is the reason God has preachers telling people about the eternal placement into hell for all those who reject Christ Jesus. God does not simply desire to punish people for their sins – even if they are great and numerous sins. God's greatest desire today is still that sinful people will repent and be spared the eternity of hell.

Let's bring this lesson home with us:

Notice, the LORD's basic command to Jonah has not changed. The prophet was told to go to Nineveh and present the message which the LORD would give to them. The first time Jonah received this call – rather than heed the command of God, he fled in the opposite direction.

Now, two chapters later, the prophet is again faced with the command of God. This time, he goes - "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Let's consider Jonah's message for a moment.

Jonah didn't preface his message with a "thus says Yahweh." The Ninevites wouldn't have known who Yahweh was anyway. And He didn't endow his message with authority by proclaiming "the God of the heavens, creator of the sea and the dry ground says," - which was the phrase he had used with the pagan sailors.

How different the message Jonah brought to Nineveh is from the message which is preached in so many places today. Jonah didn't do a study to see what kind of music the Ninevites liked - and then used that music in a play to get the Ninevites attention. Jonah did not survey the community to find out what the people thought they needed - and then try to address those concerns in his sermon. Jonah didn't appear to show any sensitivity to the "un-churched" peoples hang ups concerning sin - and then try to find some way to sugar coat it. Jonah didn't even hold a conference with the experts - and get their advice on how to best reach the young people of Nineveh. Jonah didn't tickle anyone's ears; - he didn't water down the message; - he proclaimed God's wrath upon those who had walked wickedly.

Jonah went the second time he was called. Maybe now he was happy to preach hell and damnation to the Ninevites because that is what he hopes will be their end.

I know, that sounds like an ugly motive, but let's hold up the mirror to ourselves – before we become too harsh in our judgment of Jonah. Remember, God is concerned with the heart, more so than with our actions. In God's dealing with Jonah He is actually trying to get Jonah to have a compassionate and non-judgmental attitude.

Please, don't confuse what God is doing in Jonah with what God is doing in the Ninevites. Speaking the truth in love must be the motive of all good preaching and Jonah seemed to lack the love part – but the Truth is precisely what the Ninevites need to hear – and the Truth can sometimes sound hard and unloving.

Jonah - 05 - Truth In Love

At various times preachers have wandered into error on one side of this or the other. They speak only the love of God and sell the truth short, - or they delight a little too much on the hard consequences of the truth and neglect compassion and mercy.

It needed to be said to the Ninevites and just maybe it even needed to be said in the way it was said. These people were so far gone that maybe they would not hear the gentle voice. Like Jonah, we may need to say the hard things to some people – especially the lost, but unlike Jonah we need to say them out of a heart of love, mercy and grace.

We need to examine ourselves. Are we so caught up in love that we neglect to tell people the truth? Are we so looking forward to these people getting what they deserve – that there is no love in our voice or our words?

When Jesus said, “Go into all the world – teaching my Word and making disciples” - That wasn't just an instruction for those first century Believers. The Great Commission didn't pass away with the first apostles. So we simply must tell people about Jesus today.

This experience of Jonah was recorded for a purpose. It is not just a story of “what happened a long time ago.” God wants us to learn something from it.

Are you willing to make a commitment today? Are we willing to make a commitment - that from this day forward - we will not allow ourselves to be distracted from telling the people we meet - The truth of God's Word – The whole truth of God's Word – And nothing but the truth of God's Word? And we will commit to make sure we tell them the truth – In Love !

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

When Jonah came to Nineveh he cried out to them. Telling them that in forty days, this city was going to be overturned by Yahweh. The Hebrew word is “qara.” Jonah “qara” to the people of Nineveh. Qara can carry with it a sense of invitation. But coercion was not a factor in “qara” – crying out or pleading for repentance is the best interpretation.

It appears that people of Ninveh took to heart the message Jonah was proclaiming – and they went and told everyone they knew that “we need to repent!” A metropolitan area so large that it would take 3 days to adequately see all of it - and because the people picked up the message and began to proclaim it along with Jonah - the message was carried to everyone in a little more than one day. You know the old saying - If you want to get the word out in a hurry: “telephone – telegraph – tell a Ninevite!”

Read Jonah 3:5 and make notes:

Those who heard the message and repented. Then invited everyone to repent along with them. No one was exempted from the invitation. The rich were not exempted because of their riches. The intelligent were not exempted because of their intellect. The leaders were not exempted because of their authoritative position. And the respected among society were not exempted because of their status or special skills. The poor, the unintelligent, the obscure, and the outcasts were not exempted because of their disadvantages. All were invited to join in this mass repentance.

The people of Nineveh . . . proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth and they did it from the highest to the lowest. Folks, “Repentance” means doing something. If repentance is anything, it is not business as usual. When real repentance comes, something has to change and something has to be different.

In the case of the people of Nineveh it meant they took off their normal clothes and put on sackcloth. Sackcloth is a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat’s hair. Wearing sackcloth displayed the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures. The wearing of sackcloth indicated great sorrow and humility. Sitting in (or covering oneself) with ashes or dust was a very similar message. It was a public show of repentance – or at least humility. When a person put on sackcloth and presented themselves in public - it was making a statement that “I lay down my pride”.

Read Jonah 3:6 and make notes:

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

Word of this made it to the king of Nineveh. When the king heard the message, he arose from his throne, and he took off his robe, and then covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. When the words of the repentant Ninevites reached (literally, "touched") the king - he changed his throne for a pile of ashes - and he changed his robe for sackcloth.

The king set aside his symbols of pride, position, and accomplishments and sat in worthlessness, for this is what the word epher (ashes) figuratively means. That the mighty king of Nineveh did this is astounding - we don't even know that he spoke personally with Jonah. The way this account reads – the king probably heard the message from one of his subjects rather than from Jonah.

Read Jonah 3:7-8 and make notes:

A national crisis existed in Nineveh. A fierce and terrifying storm of evil raged there. It may be that some, oblivious to their precarious situation, still slept in unconcern - much like Jonah had earlier slept through the storm at sea. For those who still slept in unconcern the king wanted to wake them so they too could assist in averting the inevitable disaster. The leaders of Nineveh decided that everyone should show their repentance by fasting and wearing sackcloth.

And their repentance was not just for show. The king, with the backing of his court, ordered the people to fast, to pray, and "give up their evil ways and their violence". Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth: Even the animals were included in this demonstration of mass repentance dressing them as if the animals were in mourning for the dead.

The Ninevites had many animal deities – the inclusion of animals in their repentance indicated that the Ninevites symbolically subjugated their heathen gods before Yahweh God. More than just having man and animals wear sackcloth - and merely having the appearance of repentance or mourning – all of the men and animals were to “urgently” call out to God.

The strong Hebrew verb used here denotes force and violence. Formerly, an evil violence emanated from Nineveh up before God's face. Now a good violence was rising from Nineveh into God's presence.

Read Jonah 3:9 and make notes:

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

Did Jonah tell these people what to do? Probably not. Like the sailors, these heathen were guided by the conscience God placed in all mankind. Furthermore, the king made no assumptions that they would mollify God with their good intentions. With no guarantees, just on the outside chance that God would accept their sacrifices and prayers, they acted in obedience to the voice of God.

Have you noticed – that in this account of Jonah being called to take a message to Nineveh – just about everybody in this account was more obedient to the voice of God than Jonah?

I will include myself in the number – when I say that many people have marveled - when they have discovered some minister being disobedient to God – and yet God saved people through that ministry. God met the needs of the people – even through the ministry of a servant who is not doing right.

That is very much the case here – The servant of God – Jonah – is doing what he “has to do” in actions to be obedient. He is very disobedient in attitude – But the sinful and wicked people – are being obedient to God.

Read Jonah 3:10 and make notes:

One simple definition for faith is: believing God enough to do what He says. When God saw the faith of the Ninevites – demonstrated by what they did, God declined the plan to destroy them.

The word for "repented" in the RSV - and "had compassion" in the NIV - carries the sense of "sighed with relief." The hearts of the people were turned to the LORD. And God “sighed with relief” that He no longer had to destroy them. They ceased their violent and evil ways, and with penitent hearts, - having been warned of the coming destruction on account of their wickedness, - they cried out to the LORD. The people repented, and as a result of that repentance - God relented.

The big miracle was not that a fish swallowed Jonah - The big miracle was that an entire city repented of their sins!

God's destruction of the world by a flood - God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - and God's pronouncement to destroy Nineveh, - shows that there is a limit to the sin that God will tolerate on the earth.

This is something so many people seem to be ignorant of today. There is something of a wonder of divine grace in the repentance and reformation of Nineveh, upon the warning given them of their destruction approaching. The word “repentance” isn't in this passage; but what these people did certainly was repentance.

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

Chrysostom (about 400 A.D.) suggested these barbarian and foolish people had not heard teaching on God's ways; and they had never received God's precepts. However, in just three days, the Ninevites did not merely give up some or even most but completely turned aside from "all their wicked ways." When we consider what Chrysostom pointed out, it puts us to shame - when we claim to have been a Christian for years and we still have not put aside "all" of our sinful ways.

Point #1: Wickedness brings judgment! - Repentance brings mercy!

The people's repentance allowed our righteous God to extend His mercy to them. Fasting and putting on sackcloth were symbolic of repentance. Because Nineveh turned from its evil ways, God did not execute the judgment upon her.

In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; Repentance describes the very process of turning to God. When we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him. And it is important for us to realize that we do not obligate God to forgive us when we repent. Instead, repentance appeals to God's mercy - Repentance does not appeal to God's justice - Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God. It hopes that God will relent and that the repentant people will not perish. Repentance means coming to God with passion and seriousness about our sin and our need for His mercy and forgiveness.

So much of modern "repentance," - with its claim of excuses and reasons why we sinned, - isn't really repentance at all. It is only an attempt to justify and excuse our sin. We sinned or we didn't sin. If we did, there is no excuse, and if we haven't, there is no need to repent.

Repentance and excuses simply don't belong together. Repentance means turning from our evil way - AND from the violence that is in our hands. Repentance means to change our mind - AND to turn from our previous sinful actions.

How much did the people of Nineveh believe God? When they believed, It appears that they were not completely sure, But they repented. They put on sackcloth, the sign of mourning and began fasting, a sign of commitment. They took care of their own spiritual condition and called on others to do the same.

The people talked about God. They didn't talk about Jonah & his faults or his shortcomings. They didn't even talk about how much they hated the Jews.

God honored their repentance, even though their past sin was reason enough for an outpouring of judgment. God mercifully relented from judgment against the people of Nineveh.

Nineveh's "evil ways" denotes a well-trodden path of wickedness that they traveled. Their specific sins are not identified in the Bible - we only have the word "violence" (chamac) - which means "violence," "cruelty," "robbing," and "injustice."

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

The Assyrians, with its capital of Nineveh, were notorious for their cruelty. It wasn't just the blatant physical manifestations of violence and cruelty that God is concerned with. In fact, God is primarily concerned with its manifestation in the heart.

We see this principle when Jesus said that, to God, hate was equivalent to murder. Hate is the heart condition that potentially leads to physical violence. The commandment to not murder (Exodus 20:13) is already broken with hate before there is any physical expression. In the same way, violence originates in the heart and can sometimes manifest itself only in the imagination.

The call was for the Ninevites to turn away from "their violence that is in their hands." The word here denotes that which was in their control. When God saw from their actions that they had turned away from their evil ways. What was it that God saw?

When Samuel looked at Jesse's sons - to see which one the Lord had chosen to be the king of Israel - the Lord told Samuel that, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (I Samuel 16:7).

The actions of the Ninevites reflected the real work that had occurred in their hearts; and that is what God saw. The actions they performed to show their repentance didn't justify them before God. What they sincerely did in their hearts – opened the mercy of God unto them.

Let's consider Jonah's message again: The greatest revival in recorded history was Jonah preaching to Nineveh, since the entire city repented... So what did Jonah preach in order to get such amazing results. Jonah didn't even want them to repent, he wanted them destroyed because Nineveh was a wicked and cruel nation.

That underscores the second point of today's message:

Point #2 If you share the Word of God - God will honor it.

The prophet Zechariah declared - It is not in man's wisdom, power, or might. . . Jonah preached but one sermon, and we do not find that he gave them any sign - it doesn't appear that Jonah performed any wonder - by which his word might be confirmed. How was it that Nineveh repented so quickly at such a meager message? Their response proved that their consciences had not become seared beyond hope.

Jonah was very successful in his missionary efforts to Nineveh. But it was certainly not because of his work ethic and his superior skills. In fact, Jonah only traveled through a third of the city to preach his message. He didn't succeed because of his communication skills. His audience didn't understand Hebrew, they spoke Assyrian.

We also learned that his message wasn't riveting. It was short, but not sweet. Jonah's sermon was only 5 Hebrew words. His message probably wasn't tempered with mercy – as far as his tone of voice. Jonah was successful because he was obedient.

Jonah - 06 - Repentance Brings Mercy

Bottom line - God demands obedience from his followers. Since we know that the wickedness of man will, in time, bring God's judgment and destruction. Let us speak to our friends, neighbors, family members and our communities about the need to repent of our wicked ways; the need to turn to God and cry for His mercy. If the people will repent, then God will relent.

Things are too serious today for any more watered down preaching and the consequences too severe for any more messages that simply tickle the ears. The LORD's message is not one to warm the heart, but it is to save the soul.

Around us on every side, - there are people engaged in evil at several levels and unless we, like Jonah proclaim the justice of God, destruction for them is eminent.

So, what will we do? Will we keep silent – and allow them to face destruction? Or will we share what God has done for us – And give them a chance to turn?

Are we doing nothing and saying nothing because we have heard from Satan that we are not good enough? - That we are not talented enough?

I doubt that any of us could be less enthusiastic in serving God – than was Jonah. Probably the only way we could do less – Is to do nothing at all. So why don't we say what we can say - And do what we can do - And allow God's mercy and God's grace - To do what God CAN do - When God's people are obedient?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

We left the people of Nineveh in a time of fasting and calling out to Yahweh. And God saw their hearts and had compassion on them.

Read Jonah 4:1 and make notes:

It would appear Jonah recognized the repentance of the Ninevites. The way Jonah acts, gives the impression that he thinks giving mercy to these heathens would somehow “cheapen” God’s Mercy – and he deeply resents it.

Jonah knows about the bad behavior and the evil actions of these people. Bad behavior deserves bad consequences. Jonah held to the attitude that many believers have today - mercy and forgiveness should be reserved for God’s people!

Somehow, Jonah has failed to take any cues from God’s examples. To this point, we don’t see even a hint that Jonah is trying to be like God in attitude.

We have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story – and we know some of the details of the story before Jonah arrived at Nineveh. Isn’t it interesting – Jonah who has personally received God’s forgiveness and Mercy – resents the idea that God might give Mercy to others?

Read Jonah 4:2 and make notes:

It says Jonah prayed to the Lord – but this certainly doesn’t read anything like a prayer of thanksgiving or a prayer of praise. We learn a little detail here about something that happened in chapter 1 – but it wasn’t recorded in chapter 1. When the Lord originally told Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry out against Nineveh – we are told here that Jonah complained to God about how God was Merciful and forgiving of people who repented.

Jonah is saying, “the thing I feared most has now happened”! - “I was afraid that if I preached” - “the people of Nineveh might repent” - “and if they repented – you might forgive them.” Whatever people might think about Jonah – we learn in chapter 4 that Jonah actually knew God pretty well, didn’t he.

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

In reaction to God's anticipated act of compassion, Jonah began to complain to God: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD?" - "That is why I ran away to Tarshish!" - "I know that you were a gracious and compassionate God," - "I know you are slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love" - "I know how easily you can cancel your plans for destroy people."

Jonah knew that because of the gracious nature of God, - God could change his mind concerning the evil that was about to be inflicted upon the wicked people - and God could replace it with good - the very moment the wicked people repented.

What kind of God does not punish people who deserve to be punished? A God who is concerned for people, - A God who genuinely loves people even when they are evil and wicked.

Yahweh's great love and compassion for people moves him to withdraw the divine judgment when people are willing to repent from their evil ways. However, this is not the nature of God that is portrayed by some today. We want to blame false portrayals of God on the secular media - and they do some of it - But people calling themselves Christians - more often are the ones who portray a very different God than the one portrayed by the Bible.

Some people claim the God they read about in the Bible is constantly killing innocent people - and God demands the murder of innocent people. These people seem only to read about some of the judgments God handed out, - but they fail to read about the many times God dispensed Mercy and Grace - where justice was clearly called for.

In our society people are judged when they break human laws - and they are required to suffer penalties. But what happens when people violate divine laws? There are those who believe that people and nations are not under divine laws - and they just can't accept divine sanctions when violations of these laws occur on a grand scale.

It strikes me as odd that people can consider man's laws as requiring penalties to be paid - and at the same time consider God's laws as optional. The divine laws of God are more surely enforced than any or all of man's laws. And it is tragic that so few people today understand this. There will be a divine reckoning.

It is also sad when we consider the contrast between God's feeling on the repentance of Nineveh towards Him, and Jonah's feeling on the repentance of God towards Nineveh. This really seems strange from one who was himself been a recipient of mercy when he repented!

Jonah was grieved at the prospect of Nineveh's preservation, after he had just proclaimed God's judgment. Was Jonah concerned that he might be seen as a false prophet? Jonah doesn't mention the failure of his prediction as the cause for his disobedience: He only mentions the thought of God being slow to anger.

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

This was what led him to flee to Tarshish at his first commission. It wasn't the likelihood that his prediction might not come to pass - for he wasn't told to foretell Nineveh's downfall, - He was only told to "cry against" Nineveh's "wickedness" as having "come up before God."

If Jonah had seen his mission as to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh - He would surely have been considered a great success. But this was not what Jonah considered his commission to be. And the fact that it was taking place - Sorely displeased Jonah!

In these first two verses of chapter 4 - we see Jonah contrasted to God in two ways. First, as God's displeasure and anger subsided Jonah's displeasure and anger rose up – even surged. Secondly, God speaking was enough to cause the fish to swallow Jonah and vomit him up again. Jonah referred to himself as saying "isn't this what I said."

It would seem that Jonah thought his speaking forth had the same weight as God's words. Jonah told how he anticipated God's intent and actions and it sounds as though Jonah felt he knew better than God. Jonah sounds altogether quite upset with the idea that God's grace might be extended to Nineveh.

Jonah had become an inverse imitation of God - in his displeasure, - his anger, - and his arrogant attitude towards the authority of his own words. Jonah was anticipating and second guessing God, - and Jonah was demonstrating contempt for God's sovereign grace. Overall Jonah had become an absurdity. And yet God still dealt with him graciously.

This misguided attitude we see in Jonah is not all that uncommon. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the older brother was quite ticked off when we saw his father extend mercy and forgiveness toward his wayward younger brother. And as God did not abandon Jonah but still dealt with him, so does God not abandon His people today - but continues to deal with them.

Don't be too quick to put a bad label on the Jews. If God had chosen any other nation besides Israel - to give His Law to and make His covenant with, - the results for that nation would probably have been the same as it had been for Israel. The point is that any nation, not just Israel, would have rebelled against the Lord and ultimately rejected their Messiah. It is a factor of our fallen human nature and not about nationality at all.

If it had been Egyptians, or the Mongolians, or any other people, had been the chosen of God, they too would have failed as Israel did. So it is not a matter of finding fault with Israel in particular.

Take home with us:

#1 Our Perceived Goal May Not Be God's Goal.

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

When we get busy doing the ministry we believe God has called us to do – We can get so upset – so angry – so hurt – so disappointed - Because the people around us are not responding the way we thought they should. We, like Jonah, can anticipate and interpret what God desires in the way of results - And when the results start turning out differently that what OUR CONCEPT is – We can get pretty upset.

I have heard many minister really let people have it when the responses of the people are different from what we thought they should be. Missionaries have chastised the people for not supporting them as fully as they thought. Evangelist have condemned people for not responding in the way they had envisioned. Pastors have fussed at the congregation - Elders and deacons have fussed at the people - Men's leaders – Women's leaders - Children's leaders .

They just know God has called them to head up a particular ministry - And they KNOW that God has called their church to provide this ministry - And they have a clear picture in their head of how it is supposed to look - how the whole congregation is supposed to surround this ministry with support - how that so many people are asking to help that you have turn people away - that so much money is given to support the ministry - that you have to ask people to please give a little less - and when it turns out something less than this - we get really angry – angry enough to fuss at God!

Here's a clue: When we find ourselves getting that upset - Because things are not turning out the way we envisioned - We need to stop and ask God to please give us his vision of how it is supposed to be.

This second point may strike you as a little odd at first pass - But please consider it for a moment before you reject it.

#2 Ask God To Give Us The Level Of Faith That Jonah Had.

I know, we have pointed out several times - How Jonah has a really bad attitude. But did you notice the kind of faith Jonah had?

In spite of the bad attitude and prejudice – Jonah had enough faith - That he Knew if he preached – people would probably repent - And if they repented – God would forgive. Jonah had so much faith in this - That he was willing to be disobedient and attempt to run from God - Just to keep it from happening.

Since we are all so sure that we have a much better attitude than Jonah did - Since we all know that we are not prejudice like Jonah was - Tell me, How often do we expect people to repent - when we share our testimony? How often do we actually expect people to respond to the gospel when we share it?

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah - 07 - Misguided Faith

(this page for additional notes)

Jonah - 08 - Justice Oriented Believer

Everyone who ministers – at any level – needs to consider the message of these verses from Jonah. It was beginning to look like God was not going to destroy the Ninevites after all. Jonah became very angry. I think we can all see why.

God had sent Jonah to Nineveh. God told Jonah what to say. Jonah told the people in Nineveh that God would destroy their city. Now it looked like this was not going to happen. Jonah felt like God had let him down. When we think more about our ministry than we think about giving glory to God, we can easily wind up feeling like God has let us down.

Jonah knows the grace of God. Jonah says that this is why he had set for Tarshish in the first place.

Read Jonah 4:3 and make notes:

There are a couple of good possible views on this verse: One is to see Jonah trying to play the part of the “noble martyr” - “oh, it would be better for me to die.” We sometimes hear that from another person when we are trying to work out a problem in our relationship – and the other person doesn’t want to work things out – they just want you to do what they want – when they want it – the way they want it – so they say “it would be better for me to just die – then you wouldn’t be troubled anymore.”

The other view, and the one I think is the correct one, is the “justice motivated believer.” It’s the attitude that says, “I would rather die, than to see this person receive mercy” - “It just kills me to think this person – or these people – might receive God’s mercy.”

Here is the prophet of God - Jonah, - this is the kind of statement that is coming out of his mouth. He is a person who has just been given a new lease on life – because of God’s mercy. It would appear that Jonah has some kind of death wish.

We first saw this when Jonah suggested to the sailors that they throw him into the sea. And here, as before, Jonah certainly didn’t make any effort to take his life and attempt to commit suicide, but he looked to others to end his life for him.

Earlier, he wanted the sailors - and now he wants God - to act as his Dr. Kevorkian, and cause his death to take place.

Read Jonah 4:4 and make notes:

Here is this man who is called to be a prophet of the Lord – He is to be an advocate of righteousness – He is to be an announcer of Divine judgment – and he has allowed himself to fall into a disgraceful attitude – Throwing aside all the dignity of the divine office – and he would rejoice over the destruction of the wicked - instead of rejoicing over their repentance.

God is so wonderful – he doesn't slap Jonah across the face and yell at him. God doesn't speak words of condemnation. God just asks Jonah a simple question – “do you have any right to be angry?” While Jonah is very angry and talks with disrespect towards God – God isn't angry – and He talks kindly to Jonah.

God didn't fulfill Jonah's death wish - but instead only asked him "do you have any right to be angry?" This simple question – plants a very interesting seed within Jonah. This will provide Jonah a wonderful opportunity to learn from the events that are about to take place – if only Jonah will pay attention and allow his heart to be teachable.

In the Book of Romans we are told that “Our God is the God who gives life to the dead” (Rom 4:17). God had given life to the sailors (1:15). He has given life to the people of Nineveh (3:9). He had given life to Jonah when he was as good as dead (2:2,6,7). Yet now Jonah prays for God to take his life away.

In verse 4, God asks Jonah to think again. There are some times when it is right for us to be angry. More often, however, it is wrong. When we find ourselves being angry about the ministry we need to ask ourselves WHY we are angry. I'm sharing this as one who has, in the past become very angry about the ministry - not as one who is accusing – or pointing fingers.

Read Jonah 4:5 and make notes:

Some believe Jonah stayed in Nineveh for 40 days – and then these events took place. The last part of V5 is the reason I am convinced Jonah did not stay in the city for 40 days. It says – he “waited to see what would happen.” If the 40 days had passed, then he already knew destruction had not come. Jonah leaves the city that he hopes is doomed because of its wickedness – probably very glad to shake the dust of this place off of his feet. He is troubled – at least disappointed – that these wicked people are repenting and fasting and calling upon Yahweh. He finds a good place where he can see the city and to see whether God will still send the destruction. If so, he will be able to witness it from this place.

Jonah wants to see if it is going to happen by an earthquake – or maybe fire from heaven like Sodom – or maybe there will be an invading army that catches them off guard – or might it be that some horribly painful plague will decimate the city. Jonah just wants to see it happen. Jonah didn't know anything more than it appears a suspension of judgment is about to be granted to Nineveh.

Jonah was a stranger among the Ninevites – he probably didn't know these people well enough to be sure if their fasting and praying was sincere – or if they were just good at the showmanship of religious activity. Perhaps Jonah is hoping God will see that all this fasting and repenting on the part of the Ninevites is just not sincere. And that God will go ahead and destroy Nineveh.

Jonah makes a booth – a temporary hut of branches and leaves, so slightly formed as to be open to the wind and provide only minimal protection from the sun's heat. Jonah did what God had asked him, but his attitude towards the Ninevites remained unchanged since the beginning. He sat on the edge of the city waiting – hoping that God would not accept their repentance and would destroy them.

Jonah knew God well enough to know that He is a God of mercy – but obviously there were some things Jonah did not yet know about God! God let Jonah's booth become a school of discipline to give him more enlightened views.

Jonah was not unique in this desire to see destruction of the wicked. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy them - but Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:51-56). And here God rebukes Jonah in the form of a set of object lessons.

Jonah's attitude appears to be one of just demanding God destroy these wicked Gentiles. So God begins putting things in place – to allow Jonah to experience something that will clearly illustrate an important kingdom principle.

Take Home With Us:

We need to make an Attitude, Of The Heart, Check!

Jonah was angry, and it was probably because Jonah was thinking more about his ministry than he was about God's glory. Jonah had a great success and yet he feels bitter about it.

We minister to others. They get the blessing. Yet there may seem to be nothing in it at all for us. And if our focus is more upon “us and our ministry” - even when there is a success in ministry - we are very likely to feel bitter.

It is to God's glory when heathen people pray to Him. It is to God's glory when the people turn away from violence and sin. It is to God's glory when they hear what God says to them. It is to God's glory that they obey His message.

When we find ourselves getting angry - when wicked people receive God's mercy – This is an indicator that we are reaching out from a heart of flesh - rather than from God's heart! Everything we do should be done for God's glory - and never for our own glory!

Jonah - 08 - Justice Oriented Believer

We need to check our attitude from time to time. If we find ourselves thinking “I would rather die, than to see this person receive God’s mercy” - We need some help !

Is our attitude really that we will rejoice over the destruction of the wicked - And get angry at the repentance of the wicked?

The sad truth is that there is a little bit of Jonah in every Christian - until we grow and mature spiritually. It is our fleshly nature to want to cry out for others to receive justice – while we ourselves have been the benefactors of divine grace and mercy.

How different Jonah’s attitude was - from the one we call the father of faith, Abraham. When Abraham was faced with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - he bargained with the Lord – offering decreasing numbers – asking God if just these few can be found who are righteous – will you spare the city? Basically, Abraham asked God if at least even a small community of righteous remained in the city, would he please spare the whole horribly wicked city.

God tested Abraham to reveal whether he had the heart of God in him or not, and Abraham passed the test. Jonah, on the other hand, sorely failed the very same test.

Is the attitude of our heart more like Jonah - or more like that of Abraham? Would you like some help in finding out? Don’t think of the person you think is the most wicked person in the world - just think of the person that has treated you most wrong. Try to imagine them receiving God’s Grace and Mercy - Try to imagine them becoming saved – Try to imagine them hearing God say, “I forgive all of your past sins” – “You don’t need to do any more penance.” Now, what is it that you feel? ? ?

When we answer this question honestly, then we know how we are doing.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jonah 9 – Not About Me

Have you ever looked back at a time in school – or perhaps a time in some training course that was offered – and now realize, that you wasted your time and the teacher or instructor’s time - because you simply did not pay attention to what was being taught? And you didn’t learn anything from it?

In the last lesson from Jonah – He had gone outside the city of Nineveh – to wait and watch – to see what God would do to this city of evil people. Jonah had built a small hut to get in out of the hot sun.

God had planted a little seed in Jonah –by asking, “Jonah, do you have any right to be angry?” And God uses this little hut Jonah has built for himself - as a school house in which God will offer a valuable kingdom lesson. Will Jonah listen to the teacher and learn - Or will Jonah waste his time and the teacher's time?

Read Jonah 4:6 and make notes:

We first observe - Jonah provided his own shade by building a make-shift shelter (4:5). Then God provided a better shade for Jonah (4:6). In a similar manner as Adam and Eve – what Jonah selected for a covering was not sufficient – so God provided something better.

Jonah is the one who earlier declared God to be the God of the sea and the God of land. This God who can produce a great fish to swallow Jonah without harming him – can also produce a plant that can protect Jonah from the devastating heat.

Jonah is pleased that God provided a vine to give him adequate shade from the baking rays of the sun. Perhaps Jonah thought God was pleased with him after all. Jonah thought that he was right to wait outside Nineveh.

The plant is a lot like the ship (1:3). Jonah spent the night there. Once again, Jonah has been rescued from a time and place of distress by Merciful Yahweh. This vine is every bit as special as the great fish. It didn’t take weeks, or even days, for this vine to become large enough to provide shade. This vine came up and grew to maturity over night!

In the beginning Jonah thought he could find a place where God did not reign. But he discovered, the Lord is sovereign over everyone and everything – including evil, violent men like the Ninevites.

The purpose of the shade was to deliver Jonah from his displeasure (4:6). “Ra”, the word translated as "displeasure" in that verse - can also be translated as "evil." So, we could translate 4:6 to read that the shade was provided to deliver Jonah from his evil.

Jonah 9 – Not About Me

God is in the business of delivering us from evil. Nineveh was delivered from its evil through the warning of their impending destruction. And God sought to deliver Jonah from his evil also. God designed lessons for Jonah through the plant, worm, sun, and hot east wind - to rescue him from his ungodly disposition and show him that all things come under God's jurisdiction.

The shade was the beginning of this lesson. Furthermore, if we understand Jonah as a type for Israel - and the plant as a symbol for Nineveh, - we can say that Nineveh was raised up as a dominant world power - to be an affliction to Israel - for the purpose of delivering them from their evil.

The Lord sent them prophet after prophet to warn them of the consequences of forsaking the Lord. God used the captivities of Assyria and Babylon to deliver future generations of Jews from the path of total destruction that would have otherwise been theirs. In verse 6, the two names for God, Jehovah and Elohim come together.

Read Jonah 4:7 and make notes:

Jonah's shelter proved inadequate; - God came through and provided good protection for Jonah's head, making Jonah extremely happy (4:6). But unlike the previous parallel event, - God here took his workable solution away. The plant and its shade were removed so that the sun and the hot east wind afflicted Jonah (4:7-8).

In this little scenario God taught Jonah an object lesson about everything he had experienced since God first spoke to him in the beginning of the book. And, as we shall see, it is a difficult lesson to receive.

The sun came up the next day. Then God (Elohim) prepared a worm. Its just a worm – its so small – and the vine is so big. But God sent the specific kind of worm that has the ability to chew through a vine. And God sent the worm to the specific place on the vine so that if chewed here – the whole vine will be deprived of life sustaining liquid - and if anyone has ever raised squash – you know how quickly a vine can wither if it is punctured or cut near the base of the vine. The plant quickly dried up and died.

Jonah had been demanding God destroy these evil people of Nineveh. Maybe Jonah had never experienced destruction personally – maybe Jonah has only read about - or has only heard about destruction coming upon the wicked. Surely a person wouldn't demand destruction come upon another person or people group – if they knew what destruction felt like - having experienced destruction themselves.

Jonah 9 – Not About Me

God, allows Jonah to experience some destruction, - God allows destruction to come to the vine that marvelous, divinely inspired vine.

Jonah was enjoying this vine so much! While a great deal of what the people of Nineveh did was truly evil - the enjoyment they experienced was every bit as high on the enjoyment scale - as that which Jonah experienced from this wonderful vine.

It takes so little to make our creature comforts wither. I personally know a number of Believers who know exactly what it feels like - to have creature comforts and some feeling of security - And then seemingly overnight – to find all the security and creature comforts just simply to be gone.

Read Jonah 4:8 and make notes:

This is not like the stormy wind of chapter 1. This is a hot, steady, and dry wind. If the worm had not been bad enough – the vine withered quickly and the divinely provided shade had disappeared – Now there is this scorching east wind.

The shelter that Jonah made for himself – while providing a minimum of shade – had proven itself to be inadequate. This same shelter in the presence of this scorching east wind – now has become a blast oven. After a while in this scorching heat – Jonah may be feeling some of the symptoms that come about at the onset of heat stroke – or at least heat exhaustion.

And just what we would expect from a prophet of Yahweh – right? Here comes the pity party - “wanh – wanh – wanh – I just want to die” - “everybody would be better off if I was dead.” This is the general attitude Jonah expressed back in V3

When Jonah is experiencing divine blessings of mercy - Oh, how happy he is – oh, how he enjoyed life. But let the divine blessings go away – “I would just rather die.”

This plant had protected his head one day. But with the removal of the plant his head is afflicted by the hot east wind and the blazing sun. The image of the hot sun beating down on Jonah's head is rather obvious.

The east wind has a connotation of adversity associated with it. In Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream, the seven ears of corn were scorched by the east wind (Gen 41:6,23,27). The plague of locusts that came upon Egypt before the Exodus was brought by the east wind (Exodus 10:13). The Psalmist tells us that the Lord broke the ships of Tarshish with the east wind (Psalm 48:7).

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There are some exceptions to this image of the east wind – but as the east wind is used here, the context strongly implies the connotation of adversity because of its association with Jonah's affliction. Particularly because of Jonah's link as a type for Israel, the most suitable image of the east wind appears as a metaphor of God's judgment upon Israel.

Hosea spoke along this line concerning Israel, - Ezekiel also used the east wind as a metaphor for the judgment of Israel - Jeremiah said “a scorching wind” would come upon Israel as punishment.

We can see that God has done to the plant - the very thing that Jonah wanted God to do to Nineveh. Jonah is suffering from the heat from the sun - and once again he says that he wants to die. Isn't this an interesting heart for a Servant of God? Jonah was sorry for the plant, - but he wasn't sorry about the impending destruction of the people in the city?

Read Jonah 4:9 and make notes:

At the earlier instance in V3 when Jonah whined that he just wanted to die – God asked Jonah if he had any right to be angry – and there is no record that Jonah even tried to reply to that question. But this second time – when Jonah began his pity part – God asked the very same question again – “do you have any right to be angry?” This time Jonah is all fired up and he shoots back a very quick reply - “you better bet your boots I have a right to be angry!” - “and I'm so angry I could just die!”

God wants Jonah to care for Nineveh and for the people who live in it. So God asks Jonah whether he has a right to be angry about the plant. God knows why Jonah is so angry. Jonah is sorry that the plant has died. He has lost his shade.

Read Jonah 4:10 and make notes:

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After allowing Jonah a little time to consider the question - God gives some reasons why Jonah is wrong to be angry about the plant. Jonah didn't look after vine or make it grow. God really starts to explain to Jonah that He cares for Nineveh. People built Nineveh by long years of hard work. So it was worth more than the plant. Perhaps Jonah should think that Nineveh is like a plant, which God cares for.

You can just hear the tone of God's voice at this point - probably take on the sound of a gentle and loving counselor - "well Jonah – let's examine this anger of yours" - "Jonah, let's see if we can find out what is at the root of all this anger you seem to have" - "it sounds at first pass as though you are angry at me Jonah" - "and that doesn't seem to make sense" - "Jonah, I'm the one who rescued you from the belly of a great fish" - "I'm the one who provided you with a vine for shade, - when the shelter you made wasn't sufficient to protect you from the sun" - "Jonah, are you really mad at me?"

"And this vine Jonah – were you really so attached to this vine that you are grieving over it's loss?" - "Jonah, did you plant this vine?" - "Jonah, did you water – feed – or cultivate this vine?" - "Surely Jonah, you don't expect me to believe you have the feelings toward this vine that a gardener would have who planted and cared for a vine" - "Jonah, this vine went away, just like it came – overnight."

Read Jonah 4:11 and make notes:

God continues His counseling session with Jonah - "Jonah, unlike you and that vine you are so upset about" - "these people of Nineveh are precious to me" – "and I have known them for a very long time" - "Jonah, I have put forth a great deal of effort regarding the people of Nineveh" – "unlike the total lack of effort on your part concerning that vine" - "Jonah, if you think you are suffering over the loss of that vine" – "try to imagine the pain and suffering" - "I am experiencing over the potential loss of these people."

Jonah is told there are more than 120,000 people "who do not know their left hand from their right." Is this the number of inhabitants of Nineveh? Or, is this the number of "innocent" people, such as little children? If it is the latter, then God is basically saying because of the purity of the innocent ones, He will spare all the guilty ones. If this is the case, what words could we use to properly speak of God's Mercy?

The people of Nineveh were not Israelites, - but they were under the sovereignty of a God who is the God of all nations. Jonah changed his feelings from pleasure to anger because of a plant. Merciful God also changed his mind out of love and compassion for the people of Nineveh.

Jonah 9 – Not About Me

The people of Nineveh were ignorant of what God expected – while Jonah and the other Israelites had been told over and over. The Ninevites didn't have any of the spiritual advantages that the Israelites had enjoyed.

The attitude Jesus expressed upon the cross – is just a reflection of the attitude God had toward the Ninevites - “Forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.” Now, this is the God of the Bible that people need to meet, - the gracious and compassionate God, - the God who is slow to get angry and who is filled with unfailing love, - the God who changes his plans about punishing people when they repent from their evil ways. Yet Jonah is reckless as to their destruction and that of innocent children.

God has authority over the rising up and tearing down of all things, including little plants and great cities. All the great things of the world - including a great city like Nineveh - are transitory. God is eternal and greater than anything we esteem as lasting or great anything we call wonderful in this world.

Jonah has to learn that Jehovah, his God, is not only the God of the Jews. He is the God who rules all the world. He is the God who cares for men and women everywhere. He wants His people to care for others, even their enemies.

That means that He wants us to go and take His Word and His truth to them. God sent Jonah to preach at Nineveh. This was because He wanted the Jews to know that the nations would listen to the message of God's love and grace to sinners. So the Jews were much worse off if they did not listen to this message.

There are 4 things we should take home with us:

.1. Man's Provision Is Not Adequate!

A contrast can be drawn between the shelter that Jonah made for himself and the shade that God provided. This contrast parallels several previous events in the book where humans attempted their own solution, only to have it fail, with God coming through with the only solution.

One contrast was the ship that Jonah provided for himself to escape, and the fish that God provided to bring Jonah back. Another contrast was the attempt of the men to save themselves from the storm by tossing things overboard, and God calming the storm after they tossed Jonah overboard. Still another contrast was the effort of the sailors to reach dry ground by their own efforts by rowing, and them reaching the dry ground after they threw Jonah overboard. In each case God provided the only workable solution.

.2. God Uses Evil People - Sometimes.

How can God use godless people and yet not violate their free will? We have had two examples of this earlier in Jonah.

The first was the captain of the sailors who told Jonah to "Get up!" (qum) and "Call!" (qara), echoing God's exact words to Jonah in the beginning (compare 1:2 and 1:6). God used the captain to remind Jonah of his obligation, though the captain thought of himself as acting only according to his own will.

The second was when the men threw Jonah into the sea. In Jonah's prayer he stated that it was God that had thrown him into the sea (2:3). So Jonah acknowledged that the sailors had really acted according to God's direction.

You see, God knows the nature of individuals as well as the nature of groups of people, and God directs them to accomplish what He wills. In much the same way as we harness the attributes of nature to accomplish what we desire without violating the laws of physics so God directs people and events without violating people's free will.

.3. Don't Be Selfish Regarding The Things In Our Life.

Jonah's regard for the things God had brought into his life depended solely upon whether he personally benefited from them or not. Jonah was happy when God provided the plant to give him shade but angry when God removed the plant and let him become stricken by the sun and east wind. Many Christians today tend to be like Jonah who only appreciates the things God brings us in life because of personal benefit and are ready to give up when the benefits to us are removed?

When God removes some protection that we have enjoyed and exposes us to the winds of oppression - do we say, like Jonah, - "I have a right to be angry – and I just want to die?"

.4. God Has The Last Word.

God had the last word in the Book of Jonah. But beyond that, God was the first to speak in the book (1:2) - AND He is the last to speak.

This little inconspicuous feature augments some themes we've observed running throughout the book of Jonah. One theme is God's sovereignty. God has the first and last word in everything; nothing exists or happens without authorization by His word.

Jonah 9 – Not About Me

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: