

**Gone Fishing**  
**Week 3**  
**Jonah 3:1-4:4**  
**“The God of Second Chances”**

**Introduction**

***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.*** **1 John 1:9-10**

As soon as that old fish spat Jonah out onto the shores of the sea, God repeated His earlier directive to the old prophet.

***The Word of The LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you.”*** **Jonah 3:1**

This time there was no hesitation, no attempt to head in the other direction. Three days inside the belly of the whale had pretty much laid Jonah’s rebellion to rest. So, he immediately headed for Nineveh.

There have been other documented accounts (some have been disputed by the critics as they always are) of people who actually survived being swallowed whole by whales in the ocean. The witnesses claim that after their rescue those men were never the same. The digestive acids in the whales stomach had bleached their skin and left them hairless over their entire bodies. So I would imagine that Jonah would have been a frightening sight as he entered the city of Nineveh to bring the word from the LORD.

Perhaps it was his “new look” that God used to get the people’s attention, or simply the fact that his remarkable story of being ingested and subsequently regurgitated by a great fish struck terror in the citizenry there. For you see, the Ninevites, like many of their Canaanite contemporaries, were worshippers of Dagon (pronounced dah-gahn’) and his feminine counterpart Nanshe. These pagan gods were “fish gods” with Dagon actually having the upper torso of a man and his lower half resembling that of a fish. In short, the statues of these gods look very much like mermaids of ancient sea lore.

The Philistines, who were coastal people and were the enemies of Israel during King David’s time, also worshipped Dagon, for when the Ark of The Covenant was captured by the Philistines (**1 Samuel 5**), they place it in the temple of Dagon. The next morning the statue of Dagon was found laying prostrate before the Ark. The Philistine priests picked up their god and placed it back on its stand. Which begs the question; *what kind of god has to be helped up off the ground and why on earth would you place any faith in it?!* The next morning when the priests came into the temple they found Dagon once more lying upon the ground, but this time the statue was beheaded. So, after this, it didn’t take the Philistines very long to realize they were in over their heads and needed to return God’s Ark to its rightful caretakers!

When Jonah arrived in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, with his frightening looks and amazing testimony, needless to say, people stopped to hear what he had to say! The story spread like wildfire among the people. And very soon 120,000 people had heard the message from the One True God. It was a revival that started with the message of a street preacher, for Jonah walked around the sprawling city for three days sharing God’s Word and warning of coming judgment!

As I read this story, I am reminded of Christ’s parable of the prodigal son (**Luke 15:11-32**). Many people miss the true meaning of this great parable, for it is more about the son who stayed home than it is about the one who left. Both men were equally lost, and The Father loved both of them, as any good father should. Jonah thought he was in right standing before God. But just as the son who stayed home in The LORD’S story, Jonah had much to learn about being a child of our Heavenly Father. But fortunately for him, our God is The God of second chances!

So let us look together at this powerful story of rebellion and revival, for there is much for us to learn in our own walk with The LORD. For those who would be our enemies today, may well be our brothers and sisters tomorrow. Therefore, we must love while we can and leave judgment to God, Who alone is qualified to judge. This was a lesson that Jonah was very slow to learn, but I believe he came to understand in the end. Today's message is one of both hope and conviction, rebuke and forgiveness, for we are all but sinners in desperate need of God's mercy and grace. It is a message of *Sermons*, *Sackcloth*, and *Sour Grapes*.

### **Sermons (3:1-4)**

**The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the Lord's command.**

**Now Nineveh was an extremely great city, a three-day walk. Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"** **Jonah 3:1-4**

Now, I have heard some tough, hard hitting, and depressing sermons in my day. In fact, I'm sure I've preached a few of them myself, but that is about the harshest one ever! I don't know if Jonah even mentioned the word "repentance" at all. All we know is that he walked around the city for three days straight and told everyone that they were pretty much toast!

People nowadays don't really care for hard truths in their sermons. In fact, you preach about sin, brokenness, and repentance too much in the modern day church, and you'll see a mass exodus of heading for the exits. Yet another sign that we are living in the last days. Paul describes it this way:

**I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, Who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of His appearing and His kingdom: Preach The Word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from truth and will turn aside to myths.** **2 Timothy 4:1-4**

Gone are the days when preachers unapologetically warned of the judgement of sin and the need for brokenness and repentance. These days, in what is commonly referred to as "*the seeker church movement*", people are told that God is pleased with them just as they are, and all He desires is to make their lives better by pouring out endless blessings upon them. It's an appealing lie, but a lie nonetheless. God does indeed want to bless us, but He cannot, and will not, unless we repent of our sins and follow His commands. The people of Nineveh didn't need to hear how great they were, they needed someone to speak the truth to them. And no real revival has ever taken place without first a brokenness over sin.

It is no great secret that Jonah despised the Assyrians who dwelt in the city of Nineveh. It is also not unknown to us that he wanted God to remove them from the face of the earth. But God wanted to deliver them. He, unlike Jonah, takes no pleasure in destroying the wicked. God's desire is to save the sinner and not condemn him.

**Tell them, 'As I live — this is the declaration of The LORD GOD — I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live. Repent, repent of your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?'**

**Ezekiel 33:11**

We must never forget that God has great patience with sinners (**2 Peter 3:8-9**), desiring nothing but their reclamation. I am once again reminded here of the story of the Prodigal Son. That boy's Father saw him coming home from a long way off. That means he was actively looking for that wayward child to come home. I imagine him every morning going out on the front porch of the house and looking down the road as far as the eye could see, just hoping for a glimpse of his returning lost child. That is how The Father loves! So listen carefully to me this morning. If you hear nothing else that is said: if you have wandered away from God, He wants you to come back home. He has never, and will never stop loving you. So come home... before it is too late. Sin wants to destroy you, but God wants to restore you.

**There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.**

**Proverbs 14:12**

Old Jonah was hoping that God would destroy Nineveh. But God, Who is rich in mercy, wanted Nineveh to turn from death unto life (**Ephesians 2:1-10**). So hear the word of The LORD this morning, **"Come home!"**

### **Sackcloth (3:5-10)**

**Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth — from the greatest of them to the least.**

**When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he issued a decree in Nineveh:**

**By order of the king and his nobles:**

**No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. Furthermore, both people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing. Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish.**

**God saw their actions — that they had turned from their evil ways — so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.**

**Jonah 3:5-10**

Talk about a revival service! It is possibly the greatest revival in the history of the world. Did you realize that at Pentecost, there were three thousand people who were saved (**Acts 2:41**). What a revival service they had on the day of Pentecost! But Nineveh? That is a whole different level of spiritual awakening. When Jonah finished his short little sermon, 120,000 people repented of their sins and asked God for forgiveness. I cannot even begin to imagine such a revival service.

*The Bible* says that they all dressed themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth is a coarsely woven fabric, usually made of goat's hair. It is scratchy and extremely uncomfortable. It is symbolic of anguish and submission. Basically, the thought behind dressing in sackcloth was to be as outwardly uncomfortable as remorse over sin made them feel on the inside. The people of Nineveh were genuinely broken over their sin, and they cried out to God for mercy.

A careful examination of the Hebrew in the book of Jonah will give two distinct Names for God. When we see the all capital *LORD*, the actual name given is the covenant Name of God to His people Israel, Namely *YHVH*. We see the sailors in Chapter One crying out to this Name after Jonah revealed that Name to them (**vs. 1:14**). But in the city of Nineveh The Word of The LORD (*YHVH*) comes to Jonah, and then the people cry out to God (*Elohim*). *Elohim* is the Hebrew word for Most High God.

Apparently Jonah never even mentioned God's Covenant Name to the people of Nineveh. More than likely because he never wanted them to truly know God at all!

But the people cried out to God as best they could in their own ignorance. They may not have known as much about Him as Jonah did, but they certainly took Him at His Word and repented of their sins. I find this truth to be striking. For one thing I have learned about our God, is that you do not have to be a *Bible* scholar to come to Christ. You simply have to take Him at His Word and place your faith in Him and He *will* save you. Then you will come to know Him more and more as you walk with Him and abide in His Word (**John 15**). Listen to the words of Jesus to His disciples the night before He was crucified.

**The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and WILL REVEAL MYSELF TO HIM.** **John 14:21** (emphasis added)

Following Christ is a journey. And the journey begins by taking Him at His Word and following accordingly, namely by repentance and then obedience. It is a relationship not a religion. And as we walk with God, we learn more and more of His nature. I am reminded here of Abraham. As he faithfully followed The LORD more and more Names of God were revealed to Him: Adonai, El Shaddai, El Roi, El Olam. There are more than 20 different Names of God listed in *The Bible*. And each of them reveals His character and nature to us in increasing detail. Those who have walked with The LORD for many years have come to know many of these Names personally. How many of you this morning know Him as Your Savior, your Healer, your Friend, your Prince of Peace...? And the list goes on. The point being, the Ninevites didn't know everything there was to know about The Most high God, but when they cried out to Him in brokenness and repentance... He heard them, and He forgave them. And He will do the same for you! So do not delay. Come to Jesus in faith and repentance. Come to Jesus... and live!

#### **Sour Grapes (4:1-4)**

**Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. He prayed to The LORD. "Please, LORD, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's why I fled to Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and One Who relents from sending disaster. And now, LORD, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." The LORD asked, "Is it right for you to be angry?"** **Jonah 4:1-4**

Recently in our church, we concluded a *Bible Study* of *1 and 2 Peter*. In the writings of both Peter and Paul, there is a word that is often used. The word is usually translated "godliness" in the English translations of *The New Testament*. The word in Greek is *eusebeia*, and it carries with it the meaning of acceptable worship or piety towards God. The best way that I can describe *eusebeia* is— Doing the right thing, for the right reason, with the right attitude. In other words, its not just about doing what is right in the eyes of God, but also the why and how of what we do.

Did you realize that we can do the right thing for all the wrong reasons? Of course we can. Just look at Jonah's response. He "technically" had obeyed God, but he had only done so because he didn't want to go back into the fish's belly! He still did not share God's compassion for the people of Nineveh. In fact, later on in the fourth chapter, we see him climbing a hill overlooking the city in the hopes that he could witness its destruction (**vs. 5**)! Jonah may have obeyed The LORD's command, but his heart was still not right with God. And He was about to learn a powerful lesson in regards to his own callus heart.

You see, God not only wants our obedience, but our love as well. And to love God is to long to be like God. Jonah actually accused God of being far too loving and forgiving! What an incredibly arrogant attitude to have! We are supposed to obey God's commands, because we love Him, and not because it will simply work out better for *us* when we do. I am reminded here of one of my favorite *Bible* verses. It is found in the book that actually comes after Jonah in *The Bible*.

**What should I bring before The LORD when I come to bow before God on high? Should I come before Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Would The LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring of my body for my own sin? Mankind, He has told each of you what is good and what it is The LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.** **Micah 6:6-8**

So what does this passage mean exactly? It means that God desires for us to be like Him. To have a heart like His. To obey Him out of love and the desire to love as He loves! Yes, Jonah was obedient, but was he godly? Answer: No, he was not.

As we discussed last week, we live in a divided country. There are many voices out there who are diametrically opposed to everything that we stand for as Believers. But our God, in Jonah's own words, is "**slow to anger, abounding in faithful love and one Who relents from sending disaster...**". He wants to rescue those who would destroy us. And if we are to be *godly* (eusebeia), then we are to love those who do not love us in return. Christ said this over and over again, and He demonstrated it by praying even for those who crucified Him. I must admit that I struggle with this kind of love. I'm much better at retaliation than I am at turning the other cheek, as it were. However, if I want to be like Him, then I must learn His ways and rely upon The Spirit to change my heart. Don't be a Jonah. But desire to love as God loves.

There is a day coming when God will judge this wicked world. Even Nineveh was eventually judged and subsequently destroyed by God when they returned to their evil ways. But only God is qualified to write people off. Make no mistake, when His judgment comes, it will be both swift and sure, but in the meantime, let us be about sharing His good news. **For God so loved... the world!** And to be like Him is to love, as He loves. That is piety and *right worship* before God!

TRUTH!!!