

Jonah: The Grumpiest Missionary

Week 8: Jonah 3:1-9

Last week, we finished the walk-through of Jonah’s prayer in Jonah 2, especially highlighting the spiritual connections that Christians make to the words of Jonah (many of which align with the Psalms). We also did not get to our final questions last week, “Does Jonah 2 belong as a reading on Easter Sunday? Why or why not?” It is right now; should it be? Let’s read the whole prayer together with those things in mind.

In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.

From the belly of the grave I cried out, and you heard my voice.

³You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas.

The currents swept around me. All your breakers and your waves swept over me.

⁴I said, “I have been driven away from your sight.

Nevertheless, I will once again look toward your holy temple.”

⁵Waters engulfed me so that I was near death. The deep surrounded me.

Seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶To the roots of the mountains I sank down. The earth locked me behind its bars forever.

But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord, my God.

⁷When my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord. My prayer came to you, to your holy temple.

⁸Those who cling to worthless idols forsake the mercy that is theirs.

⁹But I, with a shout of thanksgiving, will indeed sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed, I will certainly pay in full. Salvation belongs to the Lord!

Another way to ask our question: Imagine you are a worship planner. What makes Jonah a fitting reading for Easter Sunday? What might give you pause as you consider making it part of the Easter service?

Jonah 3:1-2

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יֹנָה שְׁנִיית לְאַמֶּר:

קוּם לֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרְא אֵלֶיהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ:

So it was that the word of the Lord was to Jonah a second (time), saying:

“Get up and go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to her the proclamation which I tell to you.”

1. Despite his escape attempt, in what ways would this second appearance be comforting to Jonah?
 - a. Think about the second chances that the Lord gave to his disciples—Thomas (**John 20:24-29**) and Peter (**John 21:15-19**). What are these second chances meant to show about God?
 - b. Has God ever granted you a second chance to do something that you had previously failed at? What did you learn from that “second chance”?

2. Each word the Bible uses for preaching has its own slant. What does “proclaim” emphasize?

- a. For what reasons is it important for pastors (and all Christians) to remember that we are called to be proclaimers?

Verse 3

וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה כַּדְבָר יְהוָה וַנִּינְוָה הָיְתָה עִיר-גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים מִהַלָּךְ שְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים:

So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was a great city to God, a walk of three days.

While Jonah’s response in chapter 1 was shocking (although maybe not so shocking considering our own sinful natures), this verse leaves no doubt: Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord (for now).

3. The Holy Spirit wants to get the point across that Nineveh was a great city, even including this comment about three days. While the meaning isn’t abundantly clear, every translation has agreed in their own way that the city would have taken three days to walk through.
 - a. Also consider this footnote from the Concordia Study Bible: *Archaeological excavations indicate that the later imperial city of Nineveh was about eight miles around. The fact, however, that “a visit required three days” may suggest a larger area, such as the four-city complex of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen mentioned in Gen. 10:11-12. Greater Nineveh covered an area of some 60 miles in circumference. On the other hand, “three days” may have been a conventional way of describing a medium-length distance (see Gen. 30:36; Ex. 3:18; Jos. 9:16-17). Or the term may refer to a “preaching circuit” through the city’s gates and plazas.*
 - b. Ultimately, we don’t know exactly what “a walk of three days” means, but the original Jewish readers would have known; all we really need to know is that Nineveh was, in fact, great in size.
 - c. For what reasons do you think the Spirit is making ample mention of Nineveh’s stature as a city? (Of course, we can’t read God’s mind, but the fact that the greatness of the city is made clear must have some impact).

Verse 4

וַיֵּחַל יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְעִיר מִהַלָּךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַנִּינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת

And Jonah began to go into the city, walking for one day, and proclaiming, “Still forty days and Nineveh will be overturned!”

Again, the “one day” comment isn’t clear. Did he walk for one day, stop, and start preaching? Did it only take one day to preach and then it was clear he didn’t need the other two days? Is this just what happened on the first day of his preaching? All are viable options. What we do know: Jonah proclaimed God’s message on this one day.

4. Is the message Jonah proclaimed law or gospel?

5. Luther said that it’s easy to know how to divide law and gospel on paper, but it’s not such an easy thing in real life. What did he mean by that?
 - a. What does that mean for pastors and teachers as they prepare to share the Word with larger groups of people?

 - b. A good saying to remember about proclaiming: “Good preaching (and teaching) comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.”

We will take the next couple verses all together since it’s all really one scene, asking questions at the end.

Verse 5

וַיֵּאֱמֵינוּ אַנְשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּאֵלֵהֶם וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוֹם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים מִגְדוּלָם וְעַד-קָטְנָם:

Then the men of Nineveh believed God. And they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.

Verse 6

וַיִּגַע הַדָּבָר אֶל-מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה וַיָּקָם מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶדְרִתּוֹ מֵעָלָיו וַיִּכַּס שָׂק וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-הָאָפֶר:

When the word reached to the king of Nineveh, he stood up from his throne, put off his royal robe from himself, covered himself in sackcloth, and sat down in the dust (or “sat in ashes”).

Verse 7

וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְוָה מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלָיו לֵאמֹר הָאֲדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבְּקָר וְהַצֹּאן אֵל-יְטַעְמוּ מֵאֵימָה אֶל-יָרְעוּ וּמֵאֵל-יִשְׁתּוּ:

Then he called out and said in Nineveh (he made a proclamation): “From the judgment of the King and his great ones (his officials), it is said, ‘Man and beast, herd and flock shall not taste anything; do not let them feed, and do not let them drink water.

Verse 8

וַיִּתְכַסּוּ שָׁקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָהּ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדֶּרֶכוֹ הָרָעָה
וּמִן־הַחַמָּס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפְיָהֶם:

But let them be covered in sackcloth—man and beast. And let them call out with strength to God. And let them turn from their evil ways and from the violence which is in their hands.

Verse 9

מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנַחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֶאֱכָד:

Who knows? God may turn and relent. He may turn from the burning of his nose (Hebraism for being angry) so that we will not perish.”

6. Some might question if the Ninevites actually had true saving faith or not—they could have simply believed the fact that God was going to destroy their city. What do you think? What clues can you draw from in these verses?

- a. Look to **Matthew 12:41**. Does this add any insight?

7. The greatest to the least put on sackcloth in Nineveh. Do the “greatest” and the “least” in our society equally repent and believe? Is the gospel “more attractive” to life’s important or unimportant, the wealthy or the poor? What scriptural backing can you give to your answer?

8. This is one of those places where we can talk about the will and plan of God: is it so firmly fixed that nothing can change God’s mind? Or does God adjust his plan and actions based on people’s responses and prayers? Consider both **1 Samuel 15:29** and **Jeremiah 18:1-11**.

9. Can we assume that Jonah preached in an energetic and interesting way? To what extent is the success of preaching based on the preacher’s personality, organization, style, flair, etc.?

Closing Prayer Create in Me and Clean Heart (sung)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit. Amen.