

Fighting Life's Biggest Battle Conquering Myself

Lessons from Jonah

Student Workbook

Name: _____

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*Orville Vaughn
August, 2017*

Jonah

Lesson 1

Introduction

*“It eluded us then, but that’s no matter – tomorrow we will run faster,
stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning—”*

The Great Gatsby

Lesson Goal:

To look for and consider the broad and specific applications found in the book of Jonah.

Text:

Jonah

Commentary:

Each of us faces a battle every day. We may not recognize it as a battle and we may not think of ourselves as warriors but, recognize it or not, every day we go to battle. This is a fierce battle and the stakes could not be higher. The fate not only of our lives but also our souls hang in the balance. What makes this battle doubly difficult is that we know our adversary very well and he knows us. We live together, work together, and play together. We are inseparable. As the wise philosopher Pogo said years ago...



How can this be? How can I be my own enemy? Don't I always have my best interest at heart? Aren't I constantly looking out for number one regardless of the cost? Yes, this is true for most of us but this constant focus on ourselves and on our wants, desires, and interests is exactly the thing that shackles us and defeats us time and again. We lose sight of others and the bigger perspective of what life is all about. By focusing solely on ourselves we miss the big picture and end up frustrated, confused, and lonely. By focusing on what we want to do and ignoring God and His plan for us, we find ourselves constantly wanting more, never quite content, and never completely at peace.

Have you ever been there? Haven't we all? Let's look at a famous person who seems to have been constantly fighting against himself (and against God). Let's look at Jonah.

From the time we first meet Jonah it is apparent he has a battle going on. God gives him a command in verse 2 and he decides not only to ignore it but to blatantly go his own way (verse 3). Jonah knows what he needs to do (God's command is very clear) but he decides he isn't going to do it. This is sin. *"Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17). Jonah disobeys God and goes his own way. How did that work out for him? We know the story. Nothing good ever comes from sin.

Jonah may have thought, with all of the other problems in the world, that God really didn't care if he obeyed Him or not. He actually might have thought that he could just slip away and go unnoticed *"...so he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"* (verse 3). Adam and Eve also thought they could hide themselves *"from the presence of the Lord God"* (Genesis 3:8). Like Adam and Eve Jonah finds out that it is not possible to hide from God. Like it or not, we must take responsibility for our actions. God requires an account. We don't know what Jonah was thinking but we do know the results of his actions. He has a terrifying experience in a brutal storm at sea, faces certain death in the belly of a great fish, is protected by God and eventually delivered from the fish after 3 days. This would be an inspiring story of repentance and God's mercy if it ended there but the story does not end there. There are two more chapters in the book and they may in fact contain the most critical lessons about Jonah and about each of us today. Jonah repents and God forgives him just as God forgives us when we repent. Jonah demonstrates his repentance by doing what God had originally commanded. Except, that is not what Jonah wants to do. Once again, he is faced with a battle to do what God commands or to do what he wants. Surely he has learned his lesson. He has but not completely. He obeys God's command and does what God said but he does not obey from the heart. His obedience is superficial. It is only outward. When, as a result of his preaching, the great city of Nineveh repents it makes him very sad.

Fast forward to today. Isn't Jonah's battle the same battle every man and woman faces? Will I listen to God and obey Him or will I simply do what I want? Will I look for a greater meaning and purpose for my life or will I be content with simply pleasing myself and perhaps even feel sadness when good comes to others? The little book of Jonah is much more than a children's story. It is a powerful book about the battle constantly raging inside each of us. It is God's warning to us about ourselves.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you know about the book of Jonah?
2. From your previous studies, name 3 important lessons you have learned from the book of Jonah.
3. Do you see any application today for Christians from the book of Jonah?

4. How many times did God tell Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to it?
5. How many times did Jonah go to Nineveh and preach God's word to them?
6. What happened as a result of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh?
7. What was Jonah's reaction? In your opinion, why did he act like this?
8. Does Jonah's reaction surprise you?
9. Do you see any similarities between Jonah's battle to do right and your battle to do right?
10. Is there a great fish described in the book of Jonah? If so, what is that all about? Is it the primary theme/message of the book?

Making Application

Do you ever have conversations with yourself? Sometimes that can be very healthy (if you are honest with yourself). The mind is a very powerful thing. Unless we control it, it can convince us to do things we should not do. The mind can cause us to justify things that are not right; even things that directly disobey God's commands. One of my many favorite Bible verses is Proverbs 3:5 "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding*". This week, if you have conversations with yourself, be sure they always include (and end with) "is this what God wants me to do? Am I following His Word and His Will even if it conflicts with my own will? Am I trusting God with all of my heart?"

Jonah

Lesson 2

Outline of the Book and Historical Perspective

*“...An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign,
and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”*

Matthew 12:39

Lesson Goal:

To consider the context of the book of Jonah and its central themes.

Text:

Jonah

Commentary:

When studying any book of the Bible, it is always good to understand the context.

- Who wrote the book?
- To whom was it written?
- What were the circumstances at the time of the writing: government, political, economic, religious, war, famine, etc.?

By taking time to answer these questions, one will get a clearer understanding of the book's message not only to us today but also to those at the time of its writing.

Jonah was a prophet of God. He lived in Israel around 780 B.C. when Jeroboam II was king. A prophet is a spokesman for someone else. When Moses complained about being slow of tongue (a poor speaker), God told Moses that Aaron would be his spokesman or prophet (Exodus 4:16; 7:1). The prophets in the Old Testament were God's spokesmen. He literally spoke through them. We have no need for prophets today since God speaks through His Holy Word. The closest thing to a prophet today is a preacher who proclaims God's Word. And, just as under the Old Covenant there were both faithful prophets and false prophets, so today there are faithful preachers and false teachers/preachers.

Jonah is mentioned one other time in the Old Testament (2 Kings 14:25). In this passage, he is named as a prophet of God to Jeroboam II and, through God's grace, some of the land that Assyria had taken from Israel was reclaimed during the reign of Jeroboam. The exact time/date of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh is uncertain but it appears it happened some years later.

The book of Jonah is a historical book. Jonah was not preaching to God's people to repent and return to worshipping God (as did most of the prophets). His preaching was to be to a heathen nation: Assyria. He specifically was to go to the great capital city of

Assyria: Nineveh and preach to the people there. Because this is a historical book, the events described are historical or, in other words, literal events that happened at this time as recorded by Jonah. Because of the fish story, some do not want to accept this book as historical. They believe it is an allegory, a parable, or a prose poem. However, Christ certainly regarded it as historical when he referenced it in Matthew 12:39-41.

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as the prophet Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.’”

The City of Nineveh

“Greater Nineveh was about 30 miles long and about 10 miles wide. It was protected by 5 walls and 3 moats (canals) built by the forced labor of unnumbered thousands of foreign captives. Jonah’s mention of 120,000 babes (Jonah 4:11), suggests it might have had a population of near a million. Notes on Nineveh from *Halley’s Bible Handbook*.

A simple outline of the book:

- I. Chapter One – Jonah’s Disobedience and Punishment
 - II. Chapter Two – Jonah’s Repentance
 - III. Chapter Three – Jonah’s Obedience
 - IV. Chapter Four – Jonah’s Selfishness
- The Author
 - Commonly accepted to be Jonah the son of Amittai.
 - To whom was it written?
 - A historical narrative teaching all of God’s people lessons on love, selfishness, obedience, repentance, and forgiveness
 - Political and other circumstances in 780 B.C.
 - Jeroboam II was king in Israel
 - Adad-Nirari was king in Assyria
 - The northern ten tribes of Israel paid tribute to Assyria but were allowed to live mostly in peace.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do a little research about the Assyrian Empire at this time (900 – 600 B.C). Also learn what you can about the city of Nineveh.

2. How would Jonah, a Jew and a prophet of God, feel about going to a heathen nation to extend to them God’s mercy and grace?

3. Are there similarities to Peter preaching the gospel of Christ to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10)? Explain.
4. Who was king in Israel at this time? Describe his reign.
5. Would you consider this book a historical book (events described actually happened) or a parable (symbolic)? Why?
6. Did Christ ever mention Jonah? If so, what was the context? Did He consider the events found in the book of Jonah as actual events?
7. What is a miracle?
8. Would Jonah being swallowed by a great fish (and living for 3 days in its belly) be considered a miracle?
9. What was a prophet? What did they do? Are there prophets today?
10. What other prophet prophesied exclusively against Nineveh? His entire book was about Nineveh. Did he live prior to or after Jonah?

Making Application

God loves all people. He is no respecter of persons. The Israelites, the descendants of Jacob, were special people to God because through them the savior of the world would come (as was promised to Abraham). When God showed mercy to other nations, many of the Jews had great difficulty with that. What about you and me? Do we ever feel smug about our relationship with Christ? Are we quick and happy to share the gospel of Christ with others regardless of their race or social standing? Confront your personal prejudices this week. Be honest and resolve to love as God loves. Determine to truly love all people!

Jonah

Lesson 3

Jonah's Disobedience and Punishment – Part 1

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

Jonah 1:2

Lesson Goal:

To better understand Jonah's disobedience and the punishment that followed.

Text:

Jonah 1:1-5

Commentary:

God's commands are not difficult to understand. When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, His commands were simple: "... of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat..." (Genesis 1:16-17). None of the Ten Commandments God gave to the Children of Israel through Moses were strange, confusing or in need of interpretation. In fact, most of them were very short statements containing five or six simple words e.g. "You shall not murder," "You shall have no other gods before Me," "You shall not commit adultery," etc. (Exodus 20:1-17). Likewise, when Christ gave commands for salvation, they were short, simple, and easy to understand e.g. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

Man's difficulty lies not with understanding God's commands, but with doing them. Adam and Eve lived in paradise but lost it all when, of their own free will, they chose to disobey God's simple command. The Children of Israel prospered greatly when they obeyed God but their disobedience led to their downfall and captivity. It is no different today. Our lives are simpler and more peaceable when we obey God. We will have trials and conflict but we will have a peace that escapes the world, a "peace that passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Regarding obedience, Christ simply said "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Like so many before and after him, Jonah had a problem with obedience. God gave him a simple command but he refused to obey it. Not only did he refuse to obey it, he went to great lengths to do just the opposite of what God commanded. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Nineveh was about 500 miles northeast of Samaria, where Jonah was a prophet to the northern ten tribes of Israel. Verse three indicates that, instead of starting on his journey northeast to Nineveh, Jonah went southwest to the city of Joppa which was on the Mediterranean Sea (see map in the appendix). He then paid the fare and boarded a ship that was headed to Tarshish, a city on the coast of Spain. It seems that Jonah wanted to get as far away from his responsibility as possible. In fact, it seems he thought by physically removing himself from Israel, he was also removing

himself from God “...so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” Of course, it is not possible to flee from the presence of the Lord. Likewise, it is not possible to run from our responsibilities. We may choose to ignore them, just as we may choose to disobey God, but our responsibilities follow us. They do not go away just because we do not like them. Jonah would soon learn this difficult lesson.

*“Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, behold You are there,
If I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.”*

Psalm 139:7-10

Everything seemed to be just fine with Jonah. In fact, he was so content with himself that he made a nest in the lowest part of the ship and fell asleep. All was working out. He was finally free from his troubles, worries, and burdensome responsibilities. He would do what he wanted to do.

STOP AND THINK!

Have you ever tried to escape responsibilities rather than face and address them (no matter how difficult)? How did that work out? Can you think of an instance in your life where it was better to flee responsibilities rather than face them? No one likes difficulties but they can make us better people. “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (Hebrews 12:11).

“*But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea...*” Jonah’s life was about to be turned upside down – quite literally. A constant theme in this short book is God’s presence and work in the lives of men. He will never take away our free will (He always allowed Jonah the choice to obey or disobey) but He is never far from us and will from time to time intervene to help us. “*...but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13). A violent storm and a great fish may not seem like “*a way to escape*” temptations but, to Jonah this is exactly what they proved to be. Notice God’s hand throughout the book.

- God prepared a way for Nineveh to repent – 1:2
- The Lord sent out a great wind – 1:4
- The Lord had prepared a great fish – 1:17
- The Lord God prepared a plant – 4:6
- God prepared a worm – 4:7
- God prepared a vehement east wind – 4:8

Questions for Discussion:

1. Which direction was Nineveh from Samaria? Which direction was Joppa from Samaria? In which direction did Jonah go?

2. What was God's command to Jonah (1:2)?
 - a. Stay in Samaria and preach to the unfaithful Israelites.
 - b. Go to Mount Carmel and wait for my instructions.
 - c. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it.
 - d. Take a vacation and do some sailing on the Sea of Galilee

3. Do you think Jonah understood God's command?

4. Our minds can help us justify our actions (even disobedience). How do you think Jonah might have justified his actions?

5. In verse 3 it states "*...He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from*
_____."

6. How severe was the storm that God sent?

7. Have you ever been in a bad thunderstorm? How did that feel? Have you ever been in a storm on a lake or large body of water? How is that different from a storm on land?

8. How did the sailors react to the storm?

9. What was Jonah doing while the storm raged? Does that seem a little strange?

10. The storm (verses 4-5) is the beginning of a series of events that allow Jonah a second chance to be obedient. Why do you think God gave Jonah a second chance?

Making Application

Read Hebrews 12:5-11 and think about a time (or times) when you were a child and your parents disciplined you. Did you like it? Did you learn from it? Think of a time when you, as a parent, disciplined your children. Why did you discipline them? What was your motivation? Now think of a time when God has disciplined (or chastened) you spiritually. How does discipline (chastening/correction) help us as children of God?

Jonah

Lesson 4

Jonah's Disobedience and Punishment – Part 2

"...For I know that this great tempest is because of me..."

Jonah 1:12

Lesson Goal:

To better understand Jonah's disobedience and the punishment that followed.

Text:

Jonah 1:6-16

Commentary:

The crisis had reached a tipping point. There was nothing else the sailors could do. They had tried everything their training and years of nautical experience had taught them but to no avail. Their last resort was to cry out to their gods for mercy and deliverance but this too had no effect on the storm. Their crying out to their gods is reminiscent of the prophets of Baal crying out on Mount Carmel in their contest with Elijah (1 Kings 18:20-40). Their cries went unanswered for the simple reason that there are no other true gods besides Jehovah. Trusting in anything or anyone but the one true and living God is futile. So, the captain of the ship sought out Jonah and, implored him to call on his God. They were desperate! What could they do? Their religions or superstitions led them to think this storm had been sent as a means of punishment. If this was the case, which of them was the evil doer? Who was the cause behind this storm that threatened them all? Following an ancient practice when seeking divine guidance, they cast lots.* They could have saved time by simply asking Jonah first.

STOP AND THINK!

Were the sailors correct in thinking that the only cause for suffering and calamities is sin? Was this the view that Job's friends had (Job 4-37)? Were they correct? See also John 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5.

When Jonah told them who he was and why he was on their ship, it raised their anxiety level even further. *"Why have you done this?"* and *"What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"* Whatever response they were expecting (bind me, take me prisoner, etc.), they were not prepared for the answer Jonah gave them. *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."* When faced with the stark consequences of his actions, Jonah did not try to make excuses. He accepted full responsibility. Jonah knew he had sinned against God *"To him who knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

The sailors were not eager to toss Jonah into the raging sea. This at least is a testament to their character. They did not jump at the chance to take another man's life even if it meant saving their own. *"Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land..."* But they were fighting against God. Their efforts were futile. Jonah must be sacrificed. He knew it. The sailors knew it. There were no more options.

*"So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea,
and the sea ceased from its raging."*

In an instant, the raging tempest that had brought them to the edge of death and destruction, ceased its raging and became a calm, placid sea of glass with hardly a ripple on it. These sailors must have felt very much like Christ's disciples when He *"rebuked the wind, and said to the sea 'Peace, be still!' and the wind ceased and there was a great calm."* (Mark 4:39). In the gospel of Mark, it says *"they feared exceedingly."* In the book of Jonah it says *"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly."* As frightening as the storm was in both of these instances, the calming of the storm was equally frightening. God is at work. And, even though Jonah has been thrown into the sea, God still has great plans for him. In fact, Jonah's work has just begun but first he must learn obedience.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why did the captain of the ship come to Jonah during the storm? Jonah wasn't a sailor. How could he possibly help?
2. Why did the sailors cast lots? To whom did the lot fall?
3. Consider again the STOP AND THINK QUESTIONS. Do you have further thoughts on this? Additional scriptures to consider?
4. How did Jonah describe himself in verse 9?
5. What effect did this have on the sailors (verse 10)?
6. What was Jonah's response when the sailors asked him what they should do to calm the storm?

7. Did the sailors immediately do as Jonah instructed? Why or why not in your opinion?
8. What happened after the sailors threw Jonah into the sea?
9. Who is the master of the wind and sea? (Mark 4:37-41)
10. What did the sailors do when the storm ceased its raging? Do you see any significance in this?

Making Application

Things are not looking good for Jonah as chapter 2 nears an end. In fact, his death is nearly certain. No one would survive being cast overboard into the vast Mediterranean Sea even on a calm day, much less during a raging storm. However, God is at work. He has a plan for Jonah. He has determined to give Jonah a second chance. Our God is a God of second-chances. He is patient and kind and “*not willing that any should perish.*” Can you think of a time in your life when God gave you a second chance? Did you make good use of it? And, are you also willing to give others a second chance? That’s something to think about this week.

*This was a common practice in ancient times. It was a way of asking God to intervene and provide direction. Casting lots is mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament but only 7 times in the New Testament. Why don’t we cast lots today? Should we?

Jonah

Lesson 5

Jonah's Deliverance

"...He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

Hebrews 5:8

Lesson Goal:

To better understand how God spared Jonah leading to his repentance

Text:

Jonah 1:17 – 2:4

Commentary:

What do you do when all hope is gone? Jonah had abandoned hope when he left God and decided to set out on his own. Even in the most trying times, if God is with us, we have comfort and hope. I am reminded of a story about a young boy who was a passenger on an airplane in a very severe thunderstorm. The plane was being tossed about very much like a ship on a stormy sea yet, through it all, the boy continued to play his video game and showed no concern. Finally, the man seated next to the boy, nervously asked "how can you be so calm, why aren't you afraid?" The boy looked up and calmly replied to the man "There is no need to be afraid. Everything will be all right. My dad is the pilot." Unfortunately, in his time of greatest need, Jonah was his own pilot. Much like the prodigal (Luke 15) he had left the peace and protection of his father's home and set out on his own. He was certain that he could find his way without God but all he found was disaster and despair. His quest (like the prodigal's) ended when he had given up all hope. Jonah was resigned to his fate: he had abandoned God and now God had abandoned him. As his body crashed into the raging sea, Jonah's thoughts were not on deliverance but on a swift death.

There is a saying that the darkest hour is just before dawn. One could not imagine a darker hour for Jonah but, against all odds and defying any human explanation, Jonah would indeed see another dawn. His life would be miraculously spared. The events that follow actually happened (they are historical). Don't spend a lot of time trying to reason and explain how they could have happened. There is no explanation. It was simply a miracle. No greater or less than the miracles Jesus performed: causing the lame to walk, the blind to see and the mute to speak (Matthew 15:30-31); bringing the dead back to life (Luke 7:11-15; John 11:38-44), etc. "*All things are possible with God*" (Matthew 19:26).

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah." As Jonah tumbled violently into the sea, a fish was ready and waiting to swallow him. The fish swallowed Jonah not to devour him but to protect him. The fish was the vehicle by which God would protect Jonah from the sea and ultimately deliver him back onto dry land. This was not a quick process. Jonah spent "*three days and three nights*" in the belly of the

fish. When Christ referenced Jonah while rebuking the Pharisees who wanted a sign, he drew the parallel that, like Jonah He would be buried for three days (Matthew 12:39-40). Unlike Jonah, His body would be buried in a tomb in the earth and on the third day He would rise from the grave. Note also Romans 6:4 *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* Christ conquered death through his sinless life. He rose because the grave had no power to hold Him. We are given a new life when we enter the watery grave of baptism. Likewise, Jonah was given a new life. God was/is merciful. Christ told Nicodemus that, in order to see the kingdom of God, he must be *“born again of water and the Spirit”* (John 3:5). It is interesting to note that water also played a part in Jonah’s re-birth. Christ was buried to rise again. Jonah was buried to rise again. We are buried (in baptism) to rise again and live a new life.

Three days was a long time to be trapped in a fish. Even though he certainly knew that God’s hand was in this, Jonah still did not know his fate. Would the fish eventually devour him? Would he be released from the fish only to drown in the sea? Jonah had seventy-two hours to contemplate his fate. Once he collected himself, and realized that he was still alive, he had the presence of mind to pray. He cried out to God from this watery grave (Sheol) and God heard him. This was a prayer from the heart. This was a cry for mercy. In our times of deepest distress, it is good to have God’s Word close by. Jonah knew the scriptures and he knew the Psalms. He recalled them and used them to bring comfort and hope in his darkest hour. There is much we can learn from this.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you think were Jonah’s thoughts as he was thrown into the sea?
2. Did God prepare and send the fish to devour Jonah or to protect him? Why?
3. How long was Jonah in the belly of the fish? Where in the New Testament is Jonah referenced and what is the parallel/application?
4. Any thoughts on why God determined this length of time? Why not one day or eight hours?
5. Read Romans 6:3-4. What is the lesson found in these verses? What application is there (if any) between Christ’s burial and resurrection, the believer’s baptism and resurrection, and Jonah’s burial in the sea?

6. When he came to himself, what did Jonah do (2:1)?

7. How would you describe Jonah's prayer?

8. Read Psalm 18:4-6 and see if you find these words or thoughts expressed in Jonah's prayer.

9. Read Psalm 31:22 and Psalm 42:7 and see if you find the words or thoughts in these Psalms expressed in Jonah's prayer.

10. Why would Jonah go to God's Word at a time like this? Is there a lesson for us today?

Making Application

While memorizing God's Word is good, knowing God's Word is even better. It should be every Christian's goal to be so immersed in the scriptures that their message and application are never far from us. Too often, when faced with temptations or stressful situations, we call on our own wisdom and strength to carry us through. Sometimes this may be enough but eventually our own strength will fail us. Make a determined effort this week (and going forward) to rely less on your wisdom and strength and more on God and His Word. "*...that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Romans 15:4)

Jonah

Lesson 6

Jonah's Repentance

*"Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls;
All Your waves have gone over me."*

Psalm 42:7

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about true repentance and how/when Jonah repented

Text:

Jonah 2:2-9

Commentary:

Trapped in a deep, dark grave, Jonah appears to be completely helpless. He cannot call on anyone to save him and he cannot save himself. His salvation and deliverance can only come from God. Although it appears he is helpless, in fact, he is not. He is still alive and as long as one has life there is hope. He can call on God to deliver him. He can acknowledge his sin, repent of his disobedience, and seek God's mercy (and he knows that God is a merciful God). In many ways, Jonah's situation mirrors that of the Prodigal (Luke 15) who was unable to deliver himself from his deplorable circumstances and had no one to help him, so he repented and looked to his father for mercy and a morsel of bread. And the lesson continues today. When your health is failing and your money is nearly gone. When all of your friends have left you and each lonely day is followed with an even lonelier night. When you have not spoken with God for years and the spiritual training you received as a youth is a distant memory. When there is no one to help, there still is One who will help. Look up!

*"I will lift up my eyes to the hills---
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord."*

Psalm 121:1

Like the Prodigal, Jonah decided to truly repent and turn to God. *"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction"* (vs. 2). *"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried"* (vs. 2). *"I have been cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple"* (vs. 4). *"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord;"* (vs. 7). The first step toward repentance is to acknowledge one's situation and turn to God (Luke 15:17). In his prayer, Jonah repeatedly looked to God as his savior and deliverer. He acknowledged his helpless situation and his complete dependence on God (5-6). If one is to escape the pits of sorrow, sin, and despair then acknowledging one's sin is essential but it is not sufficient. Repentance is more than just saying "I am sorry." Repentance is a change that sets one on a completely new path headed in a new direction. In his prayer, Jonah

repeatedly confesses his sin, and looks to God as his only source of deliverance but his actual repentance comes in verse 9.

*“But I will sacrifice to You
with the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay what I have vowed.
Salvation is of the Lord.”*

Jonah determined to completely change his attitude and his life. No longer would he be running away from God. He would now run toward God and with God. He would pay what he had vowed. He would obey God. He would go to Nineveh. The result of his repentance is seen in verse ten. God is a merciful God.

Questions for Discussion:

1. While in the belly of the fish, was Jonah helpless? Why or why not?
2. “As long as there is life, there is _____.”
3. To whom did Jonah look for his help?
4. Did his sorrow and confession appear to be genuine? In which verses do we find his acknowledgement of God and his confession of sin?
5. Is praying to God and saying you are sorry, sufficient to have your sins forgiven?
6. What is repentance? Does repentance require action?
7. What happened in verse 9?
8. What happened in verse 10?

9. Regarding the Prodigal, In Luke 15:17 it reads “*But when he came to himself...*” Was this:
- a. Acknowledging sin
 - b. Confessing sin
 - c. Repentance
 - d. Forgiveness
10. What happened in Luke 15:20(a)? What happened in Luke 15:22-23?

Making Application

Many today believe that salvation can come by just believing on Jesus as Lord. This doctrine is commonly referred to as “faith only.” According to this teaching, acting on one’s faith is not required for salvation. This doctrine was not taught by Christ or His apostles. Christ taught that one must keep His commandments in order to be saved (Matthew 7:21). Similarly, many today believe that confessing one’s sins is sufficient for a believer to receive forgiveness. But scriptures teach that true repentance requires action. One must “*put off the old man and put on the new man*” (Ephesians 4:20-24). Challenge yourself this week to live as a Christian not just in word but also in deed.

Jonah

Lesson 7

Jonah's Obedience – Part 1

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and lean not on your own understanding.”*

Proverbs 3:5

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the importance of obedience and the nature of Jonah's obedience

Text:

Jonah 2:10 - 3:1-2

Commentary:

Jonah has survived. Against all odds, he has lived to see a new day. Now what? So far, Jonah's story has been a wonderful lesson on the consequences of disobedience, the possibility of repentance, and the certainty of God's mercy. But this story and its many lessons is not yet finished. As the radio commentator Paul Harvey would say “now you will hear the rest of the story.”

As we begin to study the second half of the book of Jonah and consider the rest of his story, it is important to note a few things about obedience.

- God's command and expectation has not changed.
- God's forgiveness is absolute; He still entrusts Jonah with a great work.
- When given a second chance, Jonah chooses to obey.

Let's look a little more closely at these parts of obedience and consider their significance to Jonah and to all of us today.

GOD'S COMMAND DID NOT CHANGE

In chapter three verse two, God's command to Jonah is the same as the original command He gave to Jonah in chapter one verse two. *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it...”* God forgave Jonah but that did not absolve Jonah of his duty to obey. God is happy to forgive us today of our sins but that does not give us license to continue in sin and not obey His commands. Christ's message to the church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:10) says it best *“Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life.”* We should also note that God's commands do not change. They, like Him, are perfect and eternal. They cannot be improved upon. God is not a man who writes one thing one day and then learns more tomorrow and revises what he wrote. God's Word needs no enhancing or improving. When we enhance or change God's Word we are putting ourselves in the place of God and questioning Him and His divine wisdom. We are not God. We are God's servants. It is our duty to listen and to obey. *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say ‘We are unprofitable*

servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). I don’t think that Jonah was surprised to learn that God’s command to him had not changed.

GOD’S FORGIVENESS WAS ABSOLUTE AND COMPLETE

How hard it is for us at times to forgive completely. We harbor grudges and doubts. We may forgive but then put the person on probation to see if they perform up to our requirements. We forgive outwardly but not inwardly. It is not so with God. When He forgives it is as though the disobedience had never occurred. *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us”* (Psalm 103:12). God still had work for Jonah to do and He intended for Jonah (and not someone else) to do it. He didn’t put Jonah on the bench (to think about what he had done wrong) and put someone else in the lineup. No, this was Jonah’s task to either complete or fail. How refreshing is God’s forgiveness and confidence in us. It is like a loving father who patiently helps his child learn, grow, and accomplish difficult tasks. The father does not change the task nor does he perform the task for the child but he patiently guides him, helps him, and equips him until the child can perform the task on his own. There is much we can learn from God about forgiveness.

WHEN GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE, JONAH CHOSE TO OBEY

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord” (3:3). Sinning, as horrible as it is, is something we all will do (Romans 3:23). The question is not if we will sin, or disobey God, the real question is what will we do when we sin. Will we make excuses and try to justify our actions? Or will we pick ourselves up (with God’s help) and get back on the narrow road? The choice is ours. When given a second chance, Jonah chose the road to Nineveh and obeyed God’s command. As we saw in an earlier lesson, this would be a long journey (over 500 miles) and he would have much time to think along the way. Surely, whatever awaited him at Nineveh, could not be any worse than what he had been through already. He had been in the belly of a fish for three days. Now he was on his way to preach to a godless nation of barbarians; sworn enemies of Israel. But he was still alive and he was determined to *“pay what I have vowed.”* He would obey and now his challenge was to trust God.

Questions for Discussion:

1. After He forgave Jonah and delivered him from the fish, in what ways did God’s command to Jonah change? Why?
2. Talk about the immutable nature of God’s Word. In what ways is God’s Word different from any other book?
3. In the roughly 2,000 years since the beginning of the New Covenant through Christ, has God’s commands for us changed? Why or why not?

4. Describe how God forgave Jonah.
5. Does God forgive us in a similar way today?
6. Should we forgive just as God forgives? Why or why not?
7. What challenges do most of us face when it comes to forgiveness?
8. What did Jonah do when given a second chance?
9. After his ordeal with the fish, do you think it was easy for Jonah to obey God's commandment? Why or why not?
10. What challenges do we face when God give us a second chance?

Making Application

The mind is a very powerful thing. In our mind, most of us can justify just about any action we take. We can blame our circumstances or environment. We can blame those around us and their bad influence. Or we can say that "everyone else is doing it, so what's the big deal?" But, in the end, we must answer to God for our actions. *"For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil"* (Ecclesiastes 12:14) and God is a righteous God who cannot accept sin. Our excuses will do us no good when we stand before God (Revelation 20:12). Determine today to be completely honest with yourself and, when you find yourself starting to justify something that is wrong, stop! Picture yourself standing before the throne of God. Empty words mean nothing when you stand before God. Your actions mean everything.

Jonah

Lesson 8

Jonah's Obedience – Part 2

“So Jonah arose and went...”

Jonah 3:3

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the importance of obedience and the nature of Jonah's obedience

Text:

Jonah 3:3-4

Commentary:

In verse 3, God describes Nineveh as *“an exceedingly great city.”* It was great in many ways:

- It was great in size. Nineveh was probably the largest walled city ever built. At its zenith (about 80 years after Jonah) it was much larger and (some historians claim) more magnificent than Babylon. Its walls (100 feet high) extended around the city. On top of the walls were 1500 towers each of which was 200 feet tall. The walls were so thick that 3 chariots could be driven side by side on top of them. This was indeed an exceedingly great city.
- It was great in sheer numbers. It is estimated that the city proper had a population of nearly 1 million people. In chapter 4:11 God says that *“there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left.”* This is typically seen as an indication of one hundred and twenty thousand innocents or children.
- It was great in military power and might. At its height, the Assyrian Empire stretched from Egypt to the Persian Gulf on the south to modern day Turkey and Greece on the north and west. The Assyrian Empire (ruled from Nineveh) was vast and far reaching.

Into this exceedingly great city, Jonah came preaching God's message and that message was one of doom. His message was short and simple: you have 40 days to repent. At the end of the 40 days, this exceedingly great city will be overthrown. This must have been a curious sight. A lone Jew has journeyed all the way from Samaria (some 500 miles) to tell the citizens of Nineveh their great city would soon meet its demise. What was he talking about? Samaria had no power or might. They were no threat to overthrow Nineveh and who else would dare? Assyria not only ruled most of the known world, they ruled with an iron fist so that no one dared even to think of crossing them. To the citizens of Nineveh Jonah must have seemed like a flea on the back of a dog. Who would take him seriously?

Many parallels can be made between Jonah's preaching to Nineveh and the preaching of the gospel today. The world most of us live in is very similar to Nineveh.

- The size of our cities is amazing. Although they are not walled, many of them extend for miles and miles. Great pride is taken in the buildings, the architecture, and the arenas.
- The sheer numbers of souls is mind boggling. There are millions of souls in the cities and in the countryside and millions of innocents who cannot discern between their right hand and their left.
- Many countries take great pride in their military might. Even smaller countries (e.g. North Korea) like to flaunt their nuclear capabilities in an attempt to intimidate other countries.

When countries are prosperous and strong militarily, there is a tendency not to look to God for help. There is a tendency to ignore God altogether. How frustrating and discouraging it is for Christians to carry the message of Christ to a world dying in sin yet altogether oblivious to their deplorable state.

*“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy,
and have need of nothing’ –
and do not know that you are
wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”*

Revelation 3:17

To Jonah’s credit there is no mention of him complaining about his task. He traversed the streets and public squares of the city crying out the message the people needed to hear. We must do likewise today. Ours task is to sow the seed. God will provide the increase. When faced with the challenge of preaching to a sinful and unrepentant people, Isaiah cried out to the Lord “how long?” God’s answer is found in Isaiah 6:11

*“Until the cities are laid waste
and without inhabitant,
The houses are without a man,
The land is utterly destroyed.”*

In other words, there is no quitting. For all of his flaws, Jonah did his job and paid what he had vowed (2:9). And his preaching was about to produce amazing results.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How mighty was the Assyrian Empire at this time?
2. Describe some of the fortifications that protected Nineveh.
3. How might the preaching of Jonah be perceived?

4. Is it easier today to preach the message of God or was it easier for Jonah?
5. Why do people today resist the Gospel of Christ?
6. If people don't like the message, should we change the message? Was Jonah allowed to change the message?
7. The world around us appears to be getting more and more sinful. How long should we keep sowing the seed to a wicked nation?
8. Read Isaiah 55:8-11 and comment on how this passage might also apply to Jonah and to us today.
9. Do you see any significance to the 40 days God allowed for Nineveh to repent?
10. Was a prophet's work easy or hard?

Making Application

In many ways, today's world is very much like the city of Nineveh to whom Jonah preached. On the whole, the city (and the country of Assyria) was rich, powerful, and prosperous but something was missing. When they heard the word of God it struck a chord. Like a missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle, they recognized what was missing in their lives: the true and living God. And they recognized that without Him they would never truly be rich, powerful, and prosperous. There is a void in all of our lives that only God can fill. Today we, like Jonah, need to share the pure (but powerful) word of God with a people who are rich physically but poor spiritually. When God's word falls on tender and honest hearts, it bears fruit. Determine to sow the seed where you live. God will provide the increase.

Jonah

Lesson 9

Nineveh Repents

*“For the word of God is living and powerful
and sharper than any two-edged sword...”*

Hebrews 4:12

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about repentance and specifically Nineveh’s repentance

Text:

Jonah 3:5-9

Commentary:

How would you react if you were told you had 40 days to live? Some would be bitter and defiant. Others would lament “why me?” And some would blame God for being cruel and unjust. The citizens of Nineveh may have had all of these reactions when Jonah pronounced the judgment of God on them but they listened. Somewhere, deep inside, they knew that what Jonah said was right. They were living immoral, ungodly lives. They were cruel and selfish. Their thoughts were continually on evil. When confronted with the stark reality of their sinful lives, they had a choice. They could deny the truth, justify their actions and continue in sin or they could repent, and ask for God’s mercy. What were the odds that the voice of one man (essentially “*crying in the wilderness*”) could change the course of their lives? “...*With God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). The people of Nineveh (from the greatest to the least) took the message to heart and determined to change. They declared a fast and humbled themselves by laying aside their fancy garments and clothing themselves with sackcloth. When word came to the king, he too had a choice. He could arrogantly override the citizen’s actions and declare that they ignore the message sent from God and get on with their lives, or he too could humble himself, repent, and seek God’s mercy. In the course of history, there are not many kings who have chosen humility (power has a way of corrupting and creating a false sense of importance). Once again, against all odds, the king of Nineveh chose to repent. “...*and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.*” In addition to the fast the citizens had started on their own, he issued a binding decree requiring the entire city to fast and pray to God for mercy “...*let everyone turn from his evil way...*”

*“Who can tell if God will turn
and relent, and turn away
from His fierce anger, so that
we may not perish?”*

Similarly, today when God's word convicts us of sin, we have a choice. We can deny it's truth. We can try to justify our actions. Or we can humble ourselves, repent of our sins (put away sin and change the direction of our life), and ask for God's mercy. And God is a merciful God. In the next lesson, we will look more closely at God's mercy for the city of Nineveh and for mankind today but, in this lesson, please consider these three points:

- **God is the God of all.**
 - Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Assyria was an enemy of Israel and Judah. God's love is for all of His creation. Jonah was sent to preach to a city that did not know the true God because God loved them.
- **The people of Nineveh exhibited true repentance**
 - Repentance is more than simply acknowledging one's sin and saying "I'm sorry" or "I'll try to do better." True repentance is changing one's life completely. When Peter told the Jews who had assembled in Jerusalem to observe the Pentecost to "*repent and let everyone of you be baptized...*" they had a choice. They could continue to do what they had always been taught and believed to be right or they could change their lives completely. Three thousand chose to repent and their lives were never the same. They were not simply sorry that they had crucified the savior, they were determined to put on the new man and wear the name of Christ.
- **Who is a "good prospect" to repent?**
 - Too often we may not share the good news of Christ with those we deem to not be "good prospects." I doubt if Jonah thought the people of Nineveh were good prospects. They were heathen. They were immoral and corrupt. They did not know anything about God's Law nor did they care. They were idol worshippers. However, God had breathed life into each and every one of them and their souls were precious to Him. We (like Jonah) are told to go and preach.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think that Jonah believed the citizens of Nineveh would repent?

2. Normally, God led the Israelites in war against their enemies. Why do you think God sent Jonah to preach to this heathen and Godless city?

3. What would be the most likely reaction of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's preaching? In fact, what was their reaction and the result of his preaching?

4. Why do you think they repented?

5. What is true repentance?

6. How significant was the repentance of the king of Nineveh? In your experience, is this repentance of someone great and powerful rare? Why or why not?

7. Find some examples of repentance in the New Testament. What were the circumstances? How was repentance demonstrated?

8. Is there any nation or people that God does not care about? Explain this.

9. Who was Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:10-11, 6:20, 7:1-28, Genesis 14:18-20) and in what ways does he demonstrate that God is the God of all?

10. How do you determine who is a good prospect to receive the gospel?

Making Application

How hard is it to change? Have you ever tried to break a habit (especially a bad habit)? Change is hard. It takes effort and commitment and determination to stick with it when you are tempted to go back to the old ways. Even though change is hard, it is necessary for the child of God. We must put off the old man and put on the new man (Ephesians 4:21-24). This takes effort and hard work but God is with us and gives us the strength we need to make the change in our lives and to sustain it. Determine to do your part. Make new friends, create new habits, worship with fellow Christians at every opportunity. *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21).

Jonah

Lesson 10

Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness

“For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’”

Romans 9:15

Lesson Goal:

To explore the difference between Jonah's reaction to Nineveh's repentance and God's reaction and why they reacted differently.

Text:

Jonah 3:10 – 4:4

Commentary:

The final chapter of this book really gets at the heart of Jonah's problem: he did not love like God loves. He did not see people lost and hurting and like sheep without a shepherd. He would not bring himself to love his enemies. His love was selective. He offered compassion and mercy to those whom he deemed worthy. This malady is common among men and, as Christians, the cause for some of our biggest struggles. Too often our focus is inward on ourselves when it should be outward focusing on and caring for others.

Note the contrasts:

- God saw their works of repentance and had mercy.
 - Jonah also saw the city repenting and he became angry.
- God gladly offered His forgiveness.
 - Jonah, whose life had recently been miraculously spared by God, blamed God for showing mercy to these people (hypocrite?)
- Jonah recognized God's righteous traits: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, one who relents from doing harm.
 - Instead of praising God for His goodness, Jonah used God's goodness as justification for his lack of compassion/love.
- God continued to show patience with Jonah.
 - Jonah was impatient with God, became dramatic and demanded immediate action: either destroy Nineveh or destroy me.

What is happening here? God loves His creation perfectly while Jonah is apathetic about others and concerned only about himself. For most of us, the message strikes very close to home. Let's look at the text verse by verse.

Vs. 10 (chapter 3) – God “*saw their works.*” God sees our works. He is not a distant God who is too busy to notice our conflicts, struggles, and victories. And, the people of Nineveh were busy. They took action. What a scene this must have been: an entire city clothed in sackcloth and crying out to God for mercy. This is one of the best examples of true repentance found in the Bible. Another good example of repentance is found in Matthew 21:28-29. Both instances of repentance involved the person(s) taking action. “*And God relented from the disaster that He said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*” Our God is a merciful God. He truly wants all to repent and be saved. “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

Vs. 1 (chapter 4) – Jonah may be the only preacher in recorded history to become angry when his preaching moved his audience to repent. This is proof that it is the message and not the messenger that has the power and pierces the heart like a sharp two-edged sword. One would think that, after all Jonah had been through, he would be happy that his preaching to the citizens of Nineveh had borne good fruit (repentance). But he was not happy. Indeed, their repentance and God’s mercy displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. What caused such a strange reaction?

Vs. 2 – This verse reveals Jonah’s true feelings and why he refused initially to go to Nineveh and preach to them. He was a patriot of Israel and he knew Nineveh to be an immoral and heathen city who, in his estimation, was not worthy of God’s forgiveness. He also knew that God is a merciful God and, if people show repentance, He is quick to forgive. And Jonah knew (even before he came to Nineveh) that there was a possibility (maybe very slim) that the people would repent. Jonah did not want this to happen. So even now, after all he had been through, he could not rejoice in his deliverance but was still strongly prejudiced against this Gentile nation. But God is a God of all people (not just Israel) and His care is for all of His creation. This was a lesson that the Jewish Christians would also need to learn in the first century. “*What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone*” (Romans 9:30-32). Jonah’s reaction, though odd, is not unique. Note others whose reactions were very similar to Jonah’s:

- The spirit of the elder brother who was angry that his younger brother had returned home alive to enjoy the father’s favor and forgiveness (Luke 15).
- The spirit demonstrated by the Pharisees in bringing the woman taken in adultery to Jesus to be condemned (John 8).
- The very mercy of the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for the mercy He manifested to sinners, publicans, and harlots.
- The spirit too often unrecognized, but present, that manifests itself today in the lives and hearts of many who profess to be disciples of the Master.

Vs. 3 – Jonah did not want to see this heathen nation spared and prayed to God that He would take his life so that he would not have to witness Nineveh’s deliverance. After all

he had been through, Jonah is now demonstrating the maturity of a six year old. “If I don’t get my way, I’m going to pout.” Jonah is impatient and demanding. But God is patient.

Vs. 4 – As a father would chide his child, God asks a rhetorical question “Is it right for you to be angry?” The answer is obvious. Jonah was acting childishly and his anger was not justified. While sparing the great city of Nineveh, God is also teaching his servant Jonah a lesson. We are not told if Jonah finally learned the lesson but hopefully he did.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What was God’s reaction to Nineveh’s repentance? Why?
2. What was Jonah’s reaction to Nineveh’s repentance? Why?
3. What was Jonah’s justification for originally trying to run away from God and go to Tarshish?
4. What qualities did God demonstrate in these verses?
5. What qualities did Jonah demonstrate in these verses?
6. How would you describe Jonah’s reaction in verse 3?
7. How would you describe God’s response to Jonah in verse 4?
8. Are there any other instances in the Bible when someone was upset or angry because someone else did the right thing? If so, what are those instances and what is the lesson?

9. Jonah was very demanding of God. When things don't go the way we planned (or wanted) are we also sometimes demanding of God?

10. What are the lessons that we can learn from God's kindness and Jonah's anger?

Making Application

Most of us have a difficult time understanding the love of God. His love is perfect. It is complete, unconditional, without bias or any pre-conceived influence. *“For God so loved the world that He gave...” “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* God's love always involves action. He gives. He prepares. He protects. He guides. Etc. Resolve this week to love more like God loves. We will never reach His state of perfect love but, in striving for it, we will make a huge difference in the lives of others and in our own lives.

Jonah
Lesson 11
Jonah's Battle Within
The Problem with Self

"Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

Job 38:2

Lesson Goal:

To explore the underlying cause of Jonah's anger at God's mercy and why this attitude is not uncommon.

Text:

Jonah 4:5-11

Commentary:

(Take 5 minutes and read lesson one again.)

Have you ever questioned God's justice? Have you ever made the statement "life isn't fair"? From our perspective, things may not seem fair but that is when we need to trust God and realize that our perspective is very small and limited. He sees all and knows all. And He is perfectly just and righteous in all that He does. After much suffering and despair, Job began to question God's justice. God reminded Job that he knew very little and how could one with so little knowledge question the One who created all things, rules over all things, and knows all things? Job could not answer. Now the prophet Jonah lashes out at God with harsh accusations of injustice (how could God save a heathen nation that had shown no mercy to God's people). And God asks him *"Is it right for you to be angry?"* or put another way, "do you really understand or do you just think you understand?" The difference is huge. Man thinks he knows. God knows.

Jonah is losing the battle with himself. He cannot see beyond his own selfish interests. He cannot see a vast city of precious souls. He only sees enemies and sinners. He has no compassion for their souls only hatred and spite. He would love to see them all die. In fact, the scriptures say that he went out of the city and sat (probably on a hill) east of the city waiting. What was he waiting for? No doubt he was waiting (and praying) for God to destroy the city. His work was over. His preaching had brought the desired results (the results God desired). There was no reason for him to remain in or around the city of Nineveh. He should be going home to Samaria. But he stayed. In fact, he made himself a shelter to sit under so he would be more comfortable. However, it must not have been much of a shelter since God provided some sort of vine or tree to provide better shelter for Jonah. *"So Jonah was very grateful for the plant."* Once again, God is teaching Jonah a lesson. When God provides the comforts of life to us, we gladly receive them and enjoy their pleasures but, when they are taken away, we do not say that we are simply the way we were before God provided the gift to us. No, we bitterly

complain that we lost something precious and wonderful as though we had worked for it. When, in fact, we had not labored for it at all. It was a gift.

“Man can become greatly concerned and disturbed when that which directly affects him is touched by the finger of providence; but he can be utterly indifferent, even hard, to that which may be of infinitely greater value when this does not affect him.”

Homer Hailey

Jonah had not labored for the vine. He had not planted, watered or cared for it. It was a gift from God that came up in a night then, just as quickly was taken away. God prepared both the vine and the worm that damaged the vine. Then, when Jonah was most vulnerable, God prepared a strong east wind to intensify the rays of the sun until Jonah grew faint and, once again, wished for death. God’s reply was also the same: *“Is it right for you to be angry?”* Jonah, do you really understand? Do you understand what just happened? I gave you a gift and you loved it dearly. I took away my gift and you mourned it greatly. The people of Nineveh are my creation. They are the fruit of my labors. You had pity for something which had cost you absolutely nothing. But you say that I should not have pity for souls that I have made in My image. Jonah do you understand why I sent you to Nineveh? I greatly desired to show mercy to the inhabitants of this city but I also wanted you to learn some things about yourself.

- We may not always understand the reasons for God’s commands but we obey them.
- Repentance is necessary but not sufficient. One must continue to fight the battle.
- Bitterness and anger toward others are not from God.
- If we seek forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive.
- Selfishness and pride are at the root of most of our problems.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What did Jonah do when God decided not to destroy Nineveh?
2. What do you think was Jonah’s motive/reason for acting like this?
3. What did God prepare to give Jonah protection from the sun?
4. Why was it obvious that this protection was from God?
5. Why did God protect Jonah? Was Jonah grateful to God or simply glad he received protection?

6. What happened to this protection? What was Jonah's reaction?

7. Does this ever happen to us? Good things come upon us but we fail to thank God or acknowledge His gifts to us. Then bad things occur in our lives and we are bitter and accuse God of injustice.

8. What happened to Jonah when the east wind and sun beat upon him?

9. When hard times come to us, we can either turn to God for help or simply throw up our hands in despair and pity ourselves. Which did Jonah do?

10. Jonah had pity on:
 - a. A plant
 - b. The people of Nineveh
 - c. Himself

Making Application

Jonah's focus was inward when it should have been outward. One of the best remedies for the blues is to get up and get busy. It does wonders for the heart to help others. Is life getting you down? Go find someone to help. Stop wallowing in self-pity and go help someone. Change your focus. Stop looking inward. Start looking outward. You will be much happier and others will benefit from your kindness and love.

Jonah

Lesson 12

Comparisons With the Prodigal's Brother

*"It was right that we should make merry and be glad,
for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found"*

Luke 15:32

Lesson Goal:

To explore the similarities between Jonah and the Prodigal's brother.

Text:

Luke 15

Commentary:

In the opening verses of Luke chapter fifteen, the Pharisees and scribes are complaining that Jesus "*receives sinners and eats with them.*" In response to their criticism, our Lord spoke three parables. In each of the parables, a person had lost something of value. In the first parable, a man had lost a sheep (one out of one hundred). In the second parable, a woman had lost a coin (one out of ten). In the third parable, a man had lost his son (one out of two). In the first two parables, that which was lost was property (an animal and some money). In the last parable that which was lost was a person: a son. The first two people searched diligently for their lost property until they found it but the man who lost his son could only wait, hope, and pray that his son would "come to himself" and come home.

The scribes and Pharisees could not understand why Christ would bother to spend His time with sinners, the outcasts of society. His answer, through the parables, was simple: they were lost and He needed to find them and call them to repentance. In another instance, when asked why He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, Christ answered "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners, to repentance*" (Luke 5:31-32). If the scribes and Pharisees could see that it made sense for a shepherd to look for his lost sheep and for a woman who had lost a very valuable coin to sweep her house until she found it, surely they could see that Christ should look for His lost sheep who were far more valuable than any earthly possession. Sadly, they would not allow themselves to see the obvious. They still would not associate with tax collectors and sinners and continued to condemn Christ for doing so. Does this sound a lot like Jonah?

The third parable (the prodigal son), although fitting perfectly in this sequence of three parables to answer the scribes and Pharisees, contains even more far reaching lessons. This is one of Christ's most well known parables (along with the parable of the sower) and is often quoted and used in sermons and Bible studies. Let's look at one specific (and often overlooked) lesson from this parable and apply it to our study of Jonah. Let's look at the other son and his attitude.

- *“A certain man had two sons.”* vs. 11
- The younger son asked for (or demanded) his inheritance and the father gave it to him. vs. 12
- Seeking to please himself, the younger son wasted all of his inheritance in a far country. vs. 13-16
- The younger son *“came to himself,”* determined to return home and demonstrated true repentance by taking action *“he arose and came to his father.”* vs. 17-20
- The father gladly received his son back with no reservations. In fact, he clothed him with the best clothes and prepared a great celebration in his honor. vs. 20-24
- The older son was away working when his brother returned and learned about the celebration from a servant. vs. 25-27
- *“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.”* vs. 28
 - Picture in your mind Jonah full of rage when he first learned that God had repented about destroying the city of Nineveh and Jonah’s anger at God’s mercy; essentially declaring that God was not just.
 - Just as the father in this parable, God gently answered Jonah with a rhetorical question. Why are you angry?
- *“So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.’”* vs. 29
 - Jonah most likely had similar thoughts. “I have been faithful to you all of my life. With one little indiscretion, of which I repented, I have done all that you have asked of me. I have kept your commandments. I have paid what I have vowed. I have made this long journey to this vast city of heathen people who You know I utterly despise. I have preached to them. I have endured much and been faithful. Where is my reward? You show mercy to these people and give them far more than they deserve. What have you given to me, your faithful servant?”
 - **STOP AND THINK!** Do we every have similar thoughts and feelings?
- *“But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”* vs. 30
 - Jonah had to be thinking along the same lines. “As soon as these sinners (who had been guilty of atrocious crimes against your chosen people) repented and turned from their evil ways, You relented of the devastation you had prepared for them.” In a very real sense, God had killed the fatted calf for Nineveh and now there was great rejoicing in the city. Everyone was rejoicing except for Jonah. Likewise, when the prodigal repented and came home everyone rejoiced and made merry except for his brother.
- *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”* vs. 31-32
 - I think this is the key point that both the prodigal’s brother and Jonah missed. We who are faithful to God are living a blessed life. Every day we have access to our Father’s love, grace and mercy. We truly are rich. He protects us and provides for us and helps us in ways we don’t begin to comprehend. Jonah was richly blessed. The prodigal’s brother was richly

blessed. But neither of them either understood or appreciated all that they had. And they had an even greater problem. Like the scribes and Pharisees, they could not bring themselves to rejoice when good things happened to other people. Caught up in their own self-pride (I keep all of your commandments) they “*neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith*” (Matthew 23:23).

- Jonah (like the prodigal’s brother) lacked true justice, true mercy, and true faith. This is what the Lord requires of each of us (Micah 6:8).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why were the scribes and Pharisees criticizing Christ in Luke 15? What was He doing that bothered them?

2. How did Christ answer their criticism?

3. What were the lessons of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son?

4. What was the attitude of the father when the prodigal son returned?

5. What was the attitude of his brother when the prodigal returned?

6. Why the difference in attitudes?

7. In what ways was the attitude of the prodigal’s brother similar to Jonah’s attitude?

8. What blessings do we enjoy today as children of God?

9. Did the scribes and Pharisees show justice, mercy, and faith (see Matthew 23:23)?

10. Did the prodigal's brother and Jonah display justice, mercy, and faith?

Making Application

How are you helping others? To please God we must have the heart of a servant. It is not enough to keep ourselves pure and unspotted from the world. Following the example of our Savior, we must not only keep ourselves pure from the world but we must *“visit orphans and widows in their trouble”* (James 1:27). When asked which was the great commandment in the law, Christ answered *“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:36-39). Determine today to spend more time serving. If Jonah had possessed the mind of a servant, his view of Nineveh would have been much different.

Jonah

Lesson 13

Summary and Lessons Learned

*“A broken and a contrite heart –
These, O God, You will not despise.”*

Psalm 51:17

Lesson Goal:

To summarize the key points and lessons from our study of Jonah

Text:

Jonah 1,2,3,4

Chapter Summaries:

Lessons from chapter one: **Jonah’s Disobedience and Punishment**

- God’s commands are not difficult to understand
- Man’s difficulty lies not with understanding God’s commands, but with doing them.
- Like so many before him, Jonah had a problem with obedience.
 - God gave him a simple command but he refused to obey it.
- Although Jonah tried, it is not possible to flee “from the presence of the Lord.”
 - Likewise, it is not possible to run from our responsibilities.
 - We may choose to ignore them, just as we may choose to disobey God, but our responsibilities follow us. They do not go away just because we do not like them.
- A constant theme in this short book is God’s presence and work in the lives of men.
 - God prepared a way for Nineveh to repent – 1:2
 - The Lord sent out a great wind – 1:4
 - The Lord had prepared a great fish – 1:17
 - The Lord God prepared a plant – 4:6
 - God prepared a worm – 4:7
 - God prepared a vehement east wind – 4:8
- The sailors tried in vain to save themselves and Jonah from the storm but they were fighting against God.
- When faced with the stark consequences of his actions, Jonah did not try to make excuses. He accepted full responsibility. Jonah knew he had sinned against God.
- As frightening as the storm was, the calming of the storm was equally frightening to the sailors.
- Even though Jonah had been thrown into the sea, God still had great plans for him.

Lessons from chapter two: **Jonah's Deliverance and Repentance**

- As his body crashed into the raging sea, Jonah's thoughts were not on deliverance but on a swift death.
- Even in the most trying times, God is with us.
- Jonah's deliverance was a miracle. "*All things are possible with God*" (Matthew 19:26).
- The fish swallowed Jonah not to devour him but to protect him.
- Jonah had seventy-two hours to contemplate his fate.
- Once he collected himself, and realized that he was still alive, he had the presence of mind to pray.
 - Jonah knew the Psalms and he used them to bring comfort and hope in his darkest hour.
- Although it appears he is helpless, he is not. As long as one has life there is hope.
- Like the prodigal (Luke 15), Jonah decided to truly repent and turn to God.
- Jonah determined to completely change his attitude and his life.
 - He would pay what he had vowed.
 - He would obey God.
 - He would go to Nineveh.

Lessons from chapter three: **Jonah's Obedience; Nineveh Repents**

- God's command and expectation has not changed.
 - God forgave Jonah but did not absolve Jonah of his duty to obey.
 - I don't think that Jonah was surprised to learn that God's command to him had not changed.
- God's forgiveness is absolute; He still entrusts Jonah with a great work.
 - He did not put Jonah on the bench and send someone else to do his work.
 - The task was still Jonah's. God trusted him to do it.
- When given a second chance, Jonah chooses to obey.
 - When we sin, do we make excuses and try to justify our actions?
 - Or do we pick ourselves up (with God's help) and get back on the narrow road?
 - Jonah had determined to obey now his challenge was to trust God.
- Jonah obeyed God and preached to that exceedingly great city, Nineveh.
- Many parallels can be made between Jonah's preaching to Nineveh and the preaching of the gospel today.
 - The size of our cities is amazing.
 - The number of souls in the cities is mind boggling.
 - Many countries take great pride in their military might.
- To Jonah's credit, there is no mention of him complaining about his task.
- For all of his flaws, Jonah did his job and paid what he had vowed (2:9).
 - His preaching was about to produce amazing results.
- The people of Nineveh, (from the greatest to the least) took the message to heart and determined to change.
 - God is the God of all.
 - The people of Nineveh exhibited true repentance.
 - Who is a "good prospect" to repent?

Lessons from chapter four: *Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness; Jonah's Battle Within; Comparisons with the Prodigal's Brother*

- Jonah did not love as God loves.
- God saw their works of repentance and had mercy.
 - Jonah also saw the city repenting and it made him angry.
- God gladly offered His forgiveness.
 - Jonah (whose life had just recently been spared by God) blamed God for showing mercy to these people.
- God continued to show patience with Jonah.
 - Jonah was impatient with God and demanded immediate action: either destroy Nineveh or take my life.
- Jonah is losing the battle with himself. He cannot see beyond his own selfish interests.
- We may not always understand the reasons for God's commands but we must trust him and obey His commands.
- Repentance is necessary but not sufficient. One must continue to fight the battle.
- Bitterness and anger toward others is not from God.
- If we seek forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive.
- Selfishness and pride are at the root of most of our problems.
- Jonah (like the prodigal's brother) lacked true justice, true mercy, and true faith. This what the Lord requires of each of us (Micah 6:8).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you see any application today for Christians from the book of Jonah?
2. What happened as a result of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh?
3. What was Jonah's reaction? In your opinion, why did he act like this?
4. Did Christ ever mention Jonah? If so, what was the context? Did He consider the events found in the book of Jonah as actual events?
5. Which direction was Nineveh from Samaria? Which direction did Jonah go initially?
6. What is repentance? Does repentance require action?

7. Describe the city of Nineveh's repentance.
8. What was Jonah's biggest challenge?
9. Do we face similar challenges today?
10. What is the most important lesson you learned from your study of the book of Jonah?

Making Application

Make a list of what you believe are the key lessons from the book of Jonah. Evaluate how you are doing in each of these areas. If you are lacking in some areas (and most of us are), make specific goals with action plans to help you focus your efforts and determine to improve. God has given us the book of Jonah for a reason. It is much more than a children's story. Learn from it and in so doing walk closer with God and make a difference in the lives of others.

God Bless.