

Jonah 3:1-10 – From Repentance to Revival – Lesson Summary

I remember being chased by a girl on the elementary school playground every day. At that age, boys didn't want to be chased by girls and I repeatedly made that known to her and everyone else within ear shot. Yet every day she would continue her pursuit despite my best attempts to flee. She was relentless. I can't help but think of this experience while reading Jonah. No matter how hard or far Jonah flees, God continues to pursue him. In Jonah 3 we see a picture of God's pursuit of His people as He repeats His call on Jonah's life and transforms Nineveh. God is a God of pursuit, repetition, and transformation.

The book of Jonah began with a personal call from God the Creator to His servant Jonah. God speaking to us is a beautiful picture of God's personal pursuit of His people. No other religion has a god who pursues their followers. Other religions are based upon man's responsibility to seek after god, earn their acceptance, or find truth. Christianity says that God seeks us, that salvation is given not earned, and that He puts His truth in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. God's pursuit of Jonah included hurling a storm to stop his boat, providing a fish to swallow him, preserving his life in the fish, and having him vomited onto dry land closer to God's original destination. Despite running, Jonah cannot outrun a God of relentless pursuit.

God's pursuit also came with a familiar call. As God does throughout Scripture, He repeats His call to Jonah to "arise and go to Nineveh". Consider this. God gave Jonah a command that he ignored and now God is giving him the same command. Jonah isn't demoted to JV. God's not calling him to go to a lesser city. He's not kicking him off the team and picking someone else. He simply repeats His call and allows Jonah to be a part of His mission in Nineveh. God's repeated call reminds me of Christ's restoration of Peter. He denies Jesus 3 times prior to Christ's crucifixion but upon His resurrection, He restores Peter 3 times as He commands him to feed His lambs, tend His sheep, and feed His sheep. How often have we experienced this in our life? We actively disobey God, yet He continues to call us to be a part of His restorative work. This is a storyline present throughout Scripture. God pursues, He repeatedly calls, and then He transforms His people.

Everything changes as a result of Jonah's obedience to God's call to preach to Nineveh. There's complete revival from the greatest to least, the richest to poorest, and the educated to uneducated. Even animals are commanded to fast as all in Nineveh are told to call out mightily to God, turn from their evil ways, and cease the wickedness of their hands. A spiritual revival leads to social revival among the Ninevites. The best social reconciliation programs, educational systems, and economic policies created will never work without our country first experiencing spiritual revival. It's the same with our hearts. No behavioral practices, sound theological understanding, or personal commitments are lasting unless they are grounded in a revival of our wicked hearts. So, what changed Nineveh? What changes our hearts? Only the Word of God.

Nineveh was transformed by the Word of God. The Word came to Jonah and he spoke it to Nineveh. God's Word moved those in Nineveh to turn from their wickedness. Through grace He spares their lives. He does the same for you and I. His Words call us, His Words exposes our need for Him, and His Words breathes life into our deadness in sin. Revival and transformation happen because the Word of God works with power. When we proclaim God's Word, lives are transformed. God's grace for the graceless displayed through Christ and His Word changes lives. Grace changes hearts, cities, cultures, because it first changes people.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are some of the practical ways we have seen God pursue Jonah? What are some of the ways that you have seen God pursue you?
- 2) When you consider just how evil Nineveh was, how do you struggle to understand God's grace toward them? However, when you consider just how sinful our hearts are, how do you struggle to understand or believe in God's grace toward you?
- 3) Consider our culture and our world today. Do you believe that true spiritual revival is possible? Why or why not?