

September 3 - The Story of Jonah: Part III

Jonah 4:1-11

1. In chapters 2 and 3 of Jonah, one might assume that Jonah has changed, that he now fully trusts in God. Chapter 4 gives a more complex picture. It begins with his anger. What causes Jonah's anger?
2. Jonah shares an often-repeated biblical description of God, that God is "gracious...and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (4:2). But remember that the Assyrians had perpetrated violent acts of destruction on the people of Israel. How is it that God's grace and mercy can be offensive?
3. Has doing the right thing ever made you angry?
4. Read Jonah 4:6-8. How does this episode with the bush (RIP) relate to the overall story of Jonah?
5. Jonah's journey is not a simple, straightforward path. Has your spiritual journey been straightforward, or more winding and complex? If so, how?
6. The story of Jonah ends on an unresolved note with a question from God: "And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals." How do you think Jonah would respond to God's question?
7. What are your thoughts about God including *animals* in the description of Nineveh?

8. Imagine God speaking to you the same words God speaks in Jonah 4:11 about a place or group of people you've had problems with. Would this change how you feel?

9. Jonah is a prophet struggling with God's grace and mercy shown toward his enemies. After reading the story, why do you think this story is included in the Bible?

August 27 - The Story of Jonah: Part II

Jonah 2:1-10; 3: 1-10; 2 Chronicles 7:14

1. Jonah prayed to God inside the belly of the whale. Recount a time in your life when you were desperate. Did you cry out to God in your distress?
2. Jonah was inside the belly of the fish for three days and nights. What similarities do you see between Jonah being in the belly of the whale for three days and nights and Jesus being in the heart of the earth for three days and nights? (See Matthew 12:40.)
3. It has been said that people don't look up to God until they have hit rock bottom. How is that true of Jonah? Is there a time in your life where you were at rock bottom? What did you do? How did you get out of that dark place?
4. The Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah on dry ground. Afterwards, the Scripture says, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time" (Jonah 3:1). How many opportunities or chances does God give us to respond to the things he asks us to do?
5. The Scripture says that "Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh" (vs. 3). How important is obedience in the Christian life? In what particular ways is God asking you to be obedient?
6. Jonah went to Nineveh and announced God's judgment upon the Assyrians. They put on sackcloth as a sign of penitence. The king issued a decree that everyone give up their violent and evil ways and turn to God. People responded. God saw how they turned from their evil ways, and he had compassion on them. God changed his mind and did not bring destruction upon them. Our God is a loving and compassionate God. How has God demonstrated his compassion in your life? In your community? In the world?

7. How does God's decision to demonstrate compassion and mercy align with 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

8. This promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is conditional upon people humbling themselves, seeking God's face, and turning from their wicked ways. Will God honor this same promise in our lives and country today?

August 20 - The Story of Jonah: Part I

Jonah 1:1-17

1. Describe your familiarity with the Jonah story prior to this series. Do you think this story is for all ages?
2. Have you ever felt that God was asking you to do something crazy? What was your response?
3. The character of Jonah is complex. He's a prophet of God who decides to run from God. Have you ever tried to run from God?
4. Geographically, Jonah first flees in the *opposite* direction of Nineveh, where God asked him to go. Why do you think people—even those who consider themselves God's people—try to run from God?
5. History tells us that the Ninevites in Assyria had a reputation for being violent and bloodthirsty, and that their conquests included the brutal torture and killing of Jews. How does this historical fact shape how you think about the story of Jonah?
6. On the ship in the storm, which characters obey God?
7. Have you ever experienced a hardship in life that led to better outcomes you could not have predicted?
8. Do you see any similarities between the first chapter of Jonah and stories from the life of Jesus?