

Read Jonah 1

He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." Jonah 1:9

So many coaches make the punishment for certain mistakes so clear, that often the players know immediately to begin their sentence. One football coach made it clear that if any of his players fumbled the football, they had to run a full mile on the track around the field. Another coach made his football players run the stairs of the stadium if they committed a personal foul penalty in the previous game. Their first practice back, that player headed straight for the steps. They never came in hoping the coach had forgotten. He hadn't forgotten, and he expected the players themselves to do what was right.

Jonah was a prophet of God and as such he should have been prepared to go anywhere God led him. But when Ninevah came up, Jonah went the opposite way. We don't even have to get into the whys yet, since Jonah himself will explain it later. We can examine his action on the boat. He stopped trying to run because now his sin was affecting other people. Maybe only one player on a football field commits a personal foul, but the entire team suffers the 15 yard penalty. Jonah finally realized that he needed to accept full responsibility for what was happening, and to his credit he completely does so. I'm sure he thought he would drown in that ocean and wouldn't be responsible for what happened to him. **But God doesn't let you go until He's done with you. I'm in the ministry and that's a call that will never be revoked. You're in your family and that's a call that will never be revoked. Let's prepare ourselves to be used where God calls and puts us. Let's admit that God has placed us exactly where we will be most effective.**

Read Jonah 2

I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars *was* around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. Jonah 2:6

The story of Jonah was always pretty straightforward for me until seminary. I had a Hebrew professor who said that after his study of the original text, he believed Jonah died when the whale swallowed him, mainly from this verse. His reasoning was because Jesus claims the sign of Jonah that just as Jonah was in the whale for three days, Jesus would be in the tomb for three days. However, many Muslims say that since most Christians believe Jonah was alive in the whale, Jesus must have been alive in the tomb. This sure sounded to me like a reasonable explanation and I have often shared both viewpoints, but never felt totally sure. Recently when talking to a friend about it, he said that his feelings are that Jonah was probably unconscious and near death, but didn't die. That is starting to make sense, because if Jonah died, his soul would have gone to Heaven even for those few days. I'm sure that three days in the presence of God in Heaven would have cause Jonah to have much more compassion than he eventually shows to Ninevah.

You know what the biggest lesson is for us in Jonah 2? Don't create fights where they aren't needed. A pastor once told me that there are only two issues worth fighting over: the trustworthiness of the Bible, and the deity of Jesus. Everything else is secondary. What if you meet someone who thinks that Jonah was alive in the whale, and someone

else thinks he died? Does that mean that we can't still worship and serve alongside each other? **If we believe the Bible is true, and Jesus is the only way, then the secondary stuff is not worth fighting over. No matter what you think happened to Jonah, it doesn't change the fact of what he did. Are you having foolish and stupid arguments with people over things that don't matter (2 Timothy 2:23)? Let's remember what's important and what's not. The Bible? Important. What denomination you attend to learn about the Bible? Less important.**

Read Jonah 3

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Jonah 3:3

I hate "what ifs". You get into a car accident and you think, "What if I hadn't gone this different way", or "What if I had left just a few minutes earlier?" A relationship breaks up and you think, "What if I had shown him/her just a little bit more attention?" What ifs will eat us up inside because we end up replaying an event that we can't change. It's the premise of one of my favorite books, H.G. Wells' "The Time Machine." An inventor creates a time machine in order to save his murdered fiancée, only to find that every time he tries to save her, something else terrible happens.

Do you realize that Jonah could have been just one chapter? Jonah 3 could have been Jonah 1, and the only chapter. The other three are all about Jonah's disobedience. But God doesn't play the what if game with Jonah. Jonah has learned his lesson on listening, and God calls him to Nineveh again. This time it says that Jonah arose and went to Nineveh. But notice how God calls him; the words are almost exactly the same as they had been in chapter 1. God doesn't say, "Now Jonah, if you're ready to stop disobeying me, go to Nineveh." **God doesn't bring up the past, but calls Jonah expecting him to make the right choice. Satan plays the what if game, but God says "what now?"** **Now that we have clearly seen our sin, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to do something different or continue the same way as we had before? Are you wondering what if? Well stop it. We don't live in the past, and God doesn't allow us to travel there. We can learn from it, but there's nothing we can do to change it. But, we can live differently so that our future doesn't turn into a carbon copy of the life we have lived thus far. Prepare yourself today to face your choices with righteousness.**

Read Jonah 4

The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" Jonah 4:4

Billy Sunday was a baseball player turned preacher. As a result of his previous popularity, people were willing to listen to him preach and he reached many people for Christ. He also left us with many terrific quotes ("Putting a person in church doesn't make them a Christian anymore than putting a wheelbarrow in a garage makes it a car."). But he also had a wonderful response to a woman who claimed that her anger was ok. She said she'd get very angry and blow up, but then it was all over. Sunday said, "So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind."

I don't like to hear believers trying to rationalize their sin. They claim that Jesus got angry once, but I would mention, "You are no Jesus Christ." Jonah got angry for a terrible reason...he didn't want to see the people of Ninevah repent. They had a terrible reputation and perhaps he thought they didn't deserve the forgiveness of God. But who does? God asks if Jonah has a good reason to be angry, but Jonah doesn't reply. In fact, God's words literally mean, "Is anger good for you?" **I level the question at us today. Are you trying to justify your anger? Has your anger ever been good for you? Even in moments that someone may truly be wrong, and you truly are right, does anger make them more likely to listen. Evaluate your anger. Is it constant? Do people fear it? And while so many justify a righteous anger, I've seen few that ever displayed one.**