

Jonah: Hide and Seek from God

Part 4



Jonah 3:1-10

As we look at Jonah chapter 3, what I want us to see is that through the message of God comes the power of God. The big idea that I want us to leave here knowing is that the kingdom of God is invading the kingdom of this world, not through sticks and stones, wars and violence, but through words, powerful words, life-changing words. We've been doing this series called, Jonah: Hide and Seek from God, and we've been looking at a prophet who was commissioned to go to Nineveh. Instead of going to Nineveh, he rebels against the Lord. He goes away from His presence. Then last week we saw this rescue, this miracle of the fish where God's judgment and grace meet. Instead of going into death and dying, he goes into death and gets a resurrection. He gets vomited out. We saw that point to the gospel. Then in the gospel, instead of getting death, we get resurrection. So we saw the miracle of the fish, and what I think we see in chapter 3 is an even greater miracle. It's going to be the miracle of Nineveh where we see a renegade prophet walk in with a very short message and a whole city repents and turns to God.

Scripture

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

(Prayer)

Father, we pray that from this text we see the power of Your Word, the power of Your message because Your message is connected to Your power that is mighty to save. We pray this in the good name of Jesus, amen.

As I was reading and rereading and studying through Jonah chapter 3 to think about what is the big theme here, what is the big message that God wants us to get, I kept going back to the Word of God and its power when it is proclaimed. Here we see this huge miraculous thing that happens at

Nineveh, where the messenger takes the message and a miracle happens. What I want us to do this morning is to look at those three things: the message, the messenger, and the miracle.

The Message

What exactly was the message that God gave to Jonah? It says the word of the Lord came to Jonah and he said I've got a message for you to go and take to Nineveh. As we look at the message, here is the message. In forty days, you're going to be overthrown. Now in Hebrew, it was five words. So Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh, this great city, huge city. It took three days to walk through it. Can you imagine how massive that city was? So you've got one guy going into the city with a really short five-word message. What do you think Jonah thought was going to happen when he went into Nineveh and proclaim this message? I mean, it doesn't say, but I kind of think he was probably doubting a little bit that anything was going to happen. He probably thought no one would care, no one will listen, or if they do care and they do listen, they're going to kill me. That's probably what Jonah had in his mind. Nineveh is in no way ready for this message that God is declaring to them. They looked like a very unlikely people. Just imagine a for instance. You sent me, commissioned by this church, to go to New York City. That would be kind of like our Nineveh. You sent me, and I said, guys, I've got a message from God. Here it is. In forty days, New York City will be overthrown. That's the message. I'm going to go tell them, and I've got great confidence that the whole city is going to turn, and turn to the Lord. How many of you guys would pat me on the back? You go, but you're really thinking...*nothing is going to happen; he's going to be very disappointed.* Imagine I go on the Today Show, and I grab a mic, "I've got a message from the Lord. Welcome to New York City. In forty days, you're going to be overthrown." How many of you envision all of the hosts dropping their mics, and the people behind the cameras bowing down, and everyone repenting all throughout New York and turning to the Lord? How many of us think that would actually happen? We've got to imagine this is exactly what Jonah was probably feeling as he was walking into Nineveh. I'm going into Nineveh, this horrendous city that's full of violence and wickedness, who are completely away from the Lord, have no knowledge of the Lord, and here I'm going to proclaim this

message from the Lord, a five-word message. I'm probably thinking nothing is going to happen, or I'm going to lose my life. You see, what I think Jonah probably thought is this message was completely irrelevant to the people of Nineveh. I think probably for us, some of us really believe the message of the gospel, the message that we've been commissioned to take is irrelevant to the culture we now live in. It's just irrelevant. It just doesn't connect anymore. Maybe it did in the past, but it just doesn't anymore. We have drifted away. We're no longer in a place where this message of God became a man and died on a cross, rose three days later for the forgiveness of sins, if you call upon His name and make Him Lord, that message is not going to have an effect in our culture. It's not relevant any longer. We think maybe we should just change the message. Make it more of we will just try to be good and God will love you, Jesus just wants you to follow His teachings, Jesus loves everyone, so just come to church and we'll love the world, and everything will be great. Our temptation sometimes is to maybe change the message, make it more appealing to our culture, or it's just to stop telling. Let's just huddle up, keep the message to ourselves, we're the crazy ones, no one else will know, and let's just live out our days because it's really not relevant anymore.

What I want us to know is the truth is the gospel has never been relevant to any culture in the history of the world. The gospel has never been relevant. See, we think it's not relevant, but back then when Paul was there, everybody connected to the gospel. It was relevant in that culture because they believed in that sort of thing. But if you go back to that culture, according to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul says we're going to Jerusalem and telling the Jews about Jesus, and they think we're crazy. To them, Jesus is a stumbling block. It's this obstacle that they trip over. There is no way they're ever going to believe that the Messiah, the King, was executed on a Roman cross, and He rose three days later. That's not how the kingdom comes. To the Jews, the people that would have most connected to the gospel, it's a complete stumbling block. It's irrelevant to them. It makes no sense to them. Then, Paul says, then I go to Rome, this pagan nation, and do you know what the gospel is to the Romans? It's complete foolishness. They're laughing at us when we're sharing this. They're saying, really Paul; God became a man and died on a cross to

redeem you from your sin and He rose from the grave. That's nice, but that's crazy. They didn't believe it. It was complete foolishness. It didn't connect to their culture. They were no more ready for the gospel than our culture is ready for the gospel. It made no sense. It was a stumbling block. It was foolishness. Do you know what Paul says? We didn't change the message. We didn't stop telling the message. Do you know what we did? We kept preaching Christ crucified everywhere we went because even though to some it was a stumbling block, to some it was foolishness, to those who were being saved, who God was calling through His power, it was the power of God to salvation. It was power. It was beautiful news. It's the only news that makes sense of the world, and they accepted it and they believed it. The first century was no more acceptable of the message of the gospel than the twenty-first century is. It wasn't popular then, and it's not popular now. Do you know what our obligation is? It is to tell the message because through this message, there is power, the very power of God to save.

Jonah walks into Nineveh with five words, and the whole city repents. That's not a strong message; that's a strong God behind the message! That's what we have. We have a message that behind it is the very power of God. So I want us to be clear on what exactly our message is. We can see Jonah's message; what exactly is our message. If you remember, I took us to Matthew chapter 12 last week where Jesus uses Jonah. Let's go back there again because Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, and He rebukes them because they're not believing in Him. He says Nineveh is going to condemn you on the Day of Judgment because they repented at the preaching of Nineveh, but behold something greater than Jonah is here. What is Jesus saying there? I think He is saying the Ninevites repented because Jonah proclaimed a message, but you're not repenting and the content of the message is standing before you. What Jonah was proclaiming was really Jesus, and here He is, in the flesh. He's before them. The content of the message is there for the people, and they're not accepting Him. I think it gives us insight as to what our message is. You see, what our message is, is it's not a plan, not like seven bullet points that we memorize. No, the message is Jesus. Our message is a person. The content of the gospel is a person, and His name is Jesus Christ. I think if

we make that connection, it will help us in the way we share the message to those around us. When it's a person, it makes it a little easier. I don't know about you, but it's never hard for me to tell people about my wife, Katie. It's just never hard for me to tell. When I meet somebody, within a little bit of time, my wife just comes up. We start talking about her and I can tell them about how much I love her, what we do together, and I can tell them things about her, the way she makes me feel, the way we're living our life together, and all these different things. I have no problem talking about Katie. Why? Because she's a person that I love. Why should it be any different when it comes to sharing with people the message of Christ? We're talking to them about a person. We're talking about them to someone we love, and someone who has redeemed us, and someone we know. It's not just these things that have happened; it's a person and an event that we point people to. What we see here is a message, but it's not just a message; it's a message that comes with power. I want us to know that we have a message, Jesus Christ, and when we talk about Him, it's not just words; it's powerful words. It is life changing words that God can change lives with.

The Messenger

But with a message, there has to be a messenger. What I want us to see next is God's messenger. If you have a message, you have to have a messenger. Those two are dependent on one another. A message can't be known unless there is a messenger, and you can't have a messenger without a message. So for God's message to get out into the world there has to be a messenger. This is where you and I come in. we, like Jonah, must be the messenger, the mouthpiece of God. I want you to notice Jonah because I think he gives us a lot of hope. It says that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Why does it say that? Why does it say it came to him a second time? It is because the first time, he rebelled against the message. The first time, he disobeyed. The first time, he went away in sin. The first time, he was a rebellious prophet. He ran. He didn't obey. He wasn't faithful. But then something happens...a rescue took place. God rescued him, and now he's in a place where the word comes to him a second time. I don't know about you, but for me, that is such good news that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Do you know

what it tells me? God uses people who have been given second chances. God uses people who have completely blown it. See, what we would probably imagine is that God takes His message through the people who have always had it together, the people who have always lived the perfect Christian life since they were little. They've got all this credibility. They don't have any skeletons in the closet. Yeah those people have the right to take the message. But do you know what this tells us? Those aren't the people that God tells to take the message. Yes, it is those people, but it's also people who've been given second chances, the people who have completely blown it, that God has rescued. Because they've been rescued, now they have a story to go and tell. You see, as we see this message coming to Jonah a second time, Jonah has a choice. Either he can dwell on his past mistake, or he can chase God into the future. Those are his choices. When the word comes, he could say I can't, God. You see that I've already rebelled against You. I've already sinned. I've already done it. Everyone knows it. They saw the big fish. My reputation is ruined. I have no credibility. I can't now take Your message. I'm just going to go away and hide, and live out the rest of my days being unused by You. That's not what he did. No, it says this time he arose and went. He arose and went. Why? Because he experienced a rescue, and because of the rescue, he realized that even in the second chances, God can use him to fulfil His mission to take the message to the world.

I think that's such good news for us. No matter what we've done in the past, it has no bearing on our reliability to carry the message into the future. Our past doesn't cancel our future. Look at Jonah, renegade prophet running from the Lord, not used to share His message to the world. Some of you this morning aren't going to your Nineveh, you aren't sharing His message, and you aren't living out His gospel because you believe God can't use you. Look what you've done in your past. Everybody knows it, so God can't use you. You're in this congregation, and you're saying I can't take the message of the gospel because look at my past. I've had a divorce in my past. In my past, I've had a child out of wedlock. I've been involved in sexual immorality in my past. I've had unhealthy relationships in my past. I've actually abused my family in the past. I've been addicted to substances. The people I around now know who I used to

be. They know how I would get drunk every single weekend. They know I was addicted to pornography. They know that, people know that. It's a reputation that I have. They know who I used to be. The girls know that I was the leader in gossip. I was always tearing people down. The guys know I had the worst mouth ever. I was completely foul and perverted in everything that I said. I was a complete liar. I was a complete cheat. Everyone knows my reputation. Everyone knows my past. God can't use me. I have no right to share His news. I have no right to spread His message. See, that's what Satan wants you to believe.

Do you know what God wants you to be reminded of this morning? Yes, you have a past, but you have been rescued. You've had a fish moment. You've gone into death, and instead of dying, you've had a resurrection in Christ. So all of that past has been nailed to the cross, and it's been done away with. You bear it no more! Just like Jonah who was a renegade prophet, now, because of his rescue, he gets a second chance to fulfil God's mission. That's our story! That's what God does; He uses people who blew it in the past but that He's rescued to carry His message of rescue to the world. Think about Paul, who used to be Saul. He used to murder Christians, and now he's an apostle. Talk about someone who doesn't have credibility; it's Paul. But God is using him to build His kingdom. Peter, the man who denied Jesus to His face in front of a little girl, now has the privilege to proclaim the gospel and to build the Lord's church. You see, God uses broken people who have messed up horribly in their past because God redeems us and rescues us through the gospel. Through the rescue, we have a message. Yes, I was lost, but now I'm found. Yes, I was broken, but now I've been redeemed. Yes, I've got all kinds of skeletons in my closet, but Jesus died for all of those and I bear them no more, and let me tell you how you also can be redeemed. Let me tell you how you can also experience what I've experienced, this great rescue. This is great news. God uses those who've been given second chances. God uses people who have absolutely blown it to carry His message who are likewise broken and need desperately to know the message of Jesus. That's you, and that's me. We're messengers who have blown it, but we've been rescued. There is not a one of us in here who can say I've got too much in my past. No, Christ has done away with all of that, so you can run with God into the

future as a messenger who takes His message. The message has to have a messenger, and we are God's messengers. I don't know why He did it like this. Sometimes I contemplate...God, could you not have done it better? Just imagine if God sent all of the angels of Heaven to come down and proclaim Jesus. I think that would have been a better plan. I think more people would believe. Imagine if God came to the footstool of everyone's bed and said, hey, I'm God, here's Jesus, believe in Me. don't you think that would be effective? I know for me it would be effective. Why didn't God do that? Why does He send us, broken people who have been rescued to declare His message? Paul says in 1 Corinthians that it's because it's His pleasure. He likes to redeem people through the foolishness of what we preach. He likes using broken messengers. That's what He has ordained because it's not our words, not our eloquence, not our tactics; it's God's power in our words that produce life change to those we tell them too.

The Miracle

We see God's message; it's Jesus. We see God's messenger; it's us. Lastly, we're going to see God's miracle. It really is a miracle. We find what is not going to happen, happens in Nineveh. What we read is not the Ninevites slaughtered Jonah, or they all laugh at him. No, we see that the whole city repents and believes. The whole city, from the peasant girl to the king, the whole city repents and believes in God. As we look at that, we try to think ok, how did that happen? We try to reason through it. What brought that kind of a change? It's got to be circumstances, maybe Jonah had something magic going on here...he told them a little bit more. He had a really good inroad. He had that really great conversation starter that really gripped them so he really contextualized it well. How in the world did this happen? If you read the text, there's only one explanation...God. Period. That's it. A renegade prophet goes to a people with a five-word message, and the whole great city repents and believes. The only reasonable explanation is God because with God's message, and through God's messenger, comes God's power. It is God who is mighty to save. I really want us to believe that this morning. We don't just have words; we have God's power working through us and through our words. When we proclaim them, yes, some will think it's foolish, some will think it's a stumbling block, but in some people, God is working and that power is

working. God will bring them to salvation because it's His pleasure to do so.

I remember the first time I saw this really play out. I was in Brazil on a mission trip. I was on the evangelism team. We went from hut to hut sharing the gospel. I had it down. I had the perfect in, the perfect question, and I had it all memorized, all the Scriptures. I was like Mr. Evangelist. I had my Bible, I went into the first hut, and I shared it. I'm like, yes! The whole family...here we go...repentance, baptism; this is great! Do you know what they did? They just looked at me. They shook their heads...yeah, that's great. That's great. Nothing...nothing happened! I was so crushed because I had the perfect written out script. I mean, it was perfect...but nothing happened. I went to the next village, and it was the same thing. Nothing happened. I went to the next hut; it was the same thing, nothing happened. I went the next hut, the next, one, the next one, and nothing happened. I think that I'm sharing this incredible demonstration of the gospel, what's going on? I've got eloquent words, all of the things I need to say, and everything should be happening and nothing is happening. Then I went into another hut and spoke to a fourteen-year-old girl. I began sharing with her the routine, not thinking that anything was going to happen, but as I began to share, something happened. You could see it in this girl's eyes. You could feel something was going on. The exact same message that I had been proclaiming to ten different huts, when it found her, it wasn't just words, it was the power of God. I saw this fourteen-year-old girl just absolutely melt at the word of God. She repented and believed, and we took her down and baptized her. She was excommunicated from the community because she believed in the Lord. Why? Because the power of God comes with the message of God. See, it's not our words, it's not how well we present it; it's when we present it, God's power and presence shows up. He's in control of salvation, and He is mighty to save.

What I want to feel this morning is an encouragement, that number one, we have a message that really does have the power of God, and number two, and we're messengers that need to take that message to broken people. God's link between His salvation and broken people is you and it's me as His messengers. He uses second chance messengers. He uses

broken messengers to take His Word to people who desperately need it. I want us to feel a little bit of weight off of us because it's not our eloquence, it's not how much we know, or how good we present it; it's that we present it. It's that we speak because in speaking, God can change lives.

I want to just give you one really easy way to connect people to Jesus. I will leave you with this: Use your story to tell His story. That's just a real easy way. Paul did it all the time. When Paul was on trial, he would just tell them what Jesus did to him, and then he would say, and He can do it to you too. That's really what we do! Look at what God has done to me in Christ; He can do it to you. We have a story of rescue. If you're a believer, you have a story of rescue. You have Jesus, who has redeemed you. So what you need to do is connect your story to people who are lost, and in your story, tell His story. Those people around you who are broken, those people who are hurting, who you know need to be connected with God, you can identify with them because you, too, were just like them, broken, needy. You can say I've been there. I've been broken just like you. I've faced that exact moment just like you, but I have a redeemer and His name is Christ. He died for my sins, and He rose again. I don't know how it all works, but He redeemed me, He saved me, He changed me, and He took all of my brokenness and He's making it whole. He can do the same for you. It's not this complicated, hard, exhaustive thing. Yes, you're going to talk to people and they're going to think you're crazy. You're going to talk to people and they're going to think it's a stumbling block, but you're going to talk to people, and to them, that message of Jesus is going to resonate, it will be power, and they will repent and believe because with the message comes the power of God.

We're just messengers, and I hope we've seen there is a kingdom that is invading the kingdom of this world. It's coming, not in sticks and stones, but it's coming through words, powerful words, life changing words, words that can change your family, change your friends, your co-workers, our community, our country, and the world. It's a message with God's power, but what a message needs is messengers, and that's where we come in. yeah, but I've got a past. So did Jonah. Jonah got a second chance, and God's asking you, hey, I know your past; I've dealt with it, now go and run

with Me into the future. Take My Son and just proclaim Him to the people you love so that I can do this mighty act of salvation through you and them by the message of the gospel.