

## The One That Almost Got Away

### Part 4 – The Greater Jonah

#### Intro

We all have those stories of the *one that got away* – whether it was a fish, a deer, or a relationship. And then there are those moments where a person, an opportunity, or game *almost* got away – but somehow, we held on, stepped, did the right thing, or make the correct decision, and it didn't. We held on just barely with the tips of our fingertips.

#### Jonah's Story

Over the past several weeks, we have seen a man [named Jonah] experience a truly unbelievable series of events in his life. God called Jonah to leave his hometown and travel to a city called Nineveh. This was the city of all cities. She was a shining example of human endeavor. Everything that was happening in the world [at that time] likely had its origin in or had been strongly influenced by Nineveh.

However, there was a problem for Jonah. The people of Nineveh were wicked, evil people. They lived in direct rebellion and opposition to God. Their words were harsh, their lives were rough, and their desires were perverse. Wanting nothing to do with them, Jonah ran the [literal] opposite direction. He was not only running from Nineveh; more importantly, he was running from God.

Jonah had a suspicion about what God might do to the people of Nineveh. Because of their wickedness the anger and wrath of God was coming to overthrow them. Jonah was sent to warn them. Jonah, however, knew that God did not always act in anger or wrath, but that He was also kind and compassionate.

On one hand, Jonah was afraid of what the people of Nineveh might do to him. On the other hand, Jonah was likely afraid of what God might do to [for] the people of Nineveh.

Either way, he was out. So he ran. He boarded a ship to get away from the place and people God was leading him to. As a result, a strong wind tossed the boat back and forth, causing the sailors to finally toss Jonah overboard so that the sea would calm. As Jonah found himself sinking to the bottom of the sea, he was swallowed [whole] by an enormous fish – and spent 3 days in the belly of this fish – until finally he changed his mind and had an open, honest conversation with God.

#### Compassion on Nineveh

This next part is HUGE:

**Simply because Jonah ran from God's call in his life, God's desire and calling for Jonah's life never changed.**

After being released from the belly Jonah made his way to Nineveh and began sharing with the people about this God and how He desires to know them and have relationship with them...that He has done all of the work to make this possible. They simply need to repent and believe in Him. Jonah, in his wildest dreams never thought these people – *THOSE PEOPLE* – would ever admit their brokenness and sin.

Surprisingly, the *entire city* believed in God. Jonah could not wrap his head around it all. Honestly, he didn't want to believe it.

#### **4:1**

**But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.**

Not only did Jonah not believe the people of Nineveh would repent and believe in God, he didn't want them to. In his mind, *those people* didn't deserve it.

Who in the world gets angry about people placing their trust in God and receiving forgiveness for all of the stuff in their past? Jonah. And so do we. For too long, the church has presented freedom, forgiveness, and inclusion to people who are like us. We don't want anyone else to come in and mess up what we've got.

#### **4:2**

**And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.**

I love so many parts of Jonah's story, but this might be my favorite [and most disappointing] part.

#### ***Favorite***

It might be my favorite because it displays the true heart of God for people. His compassion for mankind is so great that even the greatest [wildest] sinner – most rebellious person – is showered with His mercy, love, and kindness. This is Jonah's declaration of God's true character – almost like unveiling something you already knew, but just received further confirmation about.

***The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

***II Peter 3:9***

#### ***Disappointing***

It might be the most disappointing because - instead of being angry with the wickedness of the people of Nineveh, Jonah is ticked at the overwhelming forgiveness, grace, and compassion of God. He wants God's wrath and anger to come quickly on these people.

Fortunately, there is someone *greater* than Jonah.

***For just as 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 at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.***

***Matthew 12:40-41***

Where you and I struggle with showing compassion toward people that aren't like us, there is someone who never runs out of compassion for those who no one else thinks deserve it. Jonah's story is a picture of One who would [has] come that is greater than Jonah. One who would come to mankind [like Nineveh] with a message of hope [like Jonah], who would spend 3 days in the grave [belly of a fish], and would overcome that darkest moment to bring freedom and salvation to anyone who would repent and believe. Jesus is the greater Jonah.

#### **4:3**

**Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.**

*Woah!* Jonah just went all nuclear. He would rather die than see people set free from their pain, addictions, shame, guilt, fear, and sin!! Especially people he feels don't deserve it.

**Jonah wanted to die *because* wicked people believed. Jesus died so *that* wicked people could believe.**

#### **4:4**

**And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"**

My paraphrase – *How's that working out for you?!?*

This whole idea of compassion is hard for a lot of us. We like to lay out judgment based on other people's work and behavior. We have an internal honing beacon attuned to catch the missteps of others. Combined with our critical eye and sense of justice, finding the heart to display compassion toward others can be a near impossible task.

However, where our honing beacons fail us...and where our sense of right and wrong falls short, is when it comes to our own need for [and receipt of] compassion. While adeptly aware of other's shortcomings, we are wildly misguided and blind when it comes to our own.

#### *Israelite People*

Jonah has quickly forgotten how his entire people have been the main recipients of God's grace and compassion over the years. They were an extremely rebellious group of people that God loved dearly, yet they continually turned away from His plan and purposes for them. But every single time God kept chasing after them, giving them more of His grace and favor.

Jonah witnessed a period in his people's history where Assyria – the ruling power of the day – had been threatened and attacked on many fronts, thus weakening their power and shifting their focus. As a direct result, Jonah's people experienced freedom and expansion they hadn't attained in a long time.

**Jonah witnessed first-hand the restorative compassion of God extended to his wayward people.**

**ESV Study Bible**

#### **4:5-8**

Instead of remembering God's compassion on him, Jonah instead throws a pity party. He goes outside of town and makes a small place for himself to sit. The Lord causes a plant to grow up beside Jonah to cover his head with shade - *to save him from his discomfort*. God is continuing to show compassion toward Jonah even when he is acting like a selfish baby.

Then God appoints a worm to come along and eat the plant, likely to get Jonah to see the ridiculousness of his temper tantrum. Later, the Lord brings a scorching wind, as the sun beat down on Jonah's face. My guess is to get Jonah to get up and *move* - quit pouting over your circumstance and start doing what I have asked you to do.

**4:8b-9**

**And he [Jonah] asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”**

Jonah was more concerned about a plant that perished than he was about the people of Nineveh who might perish without God.

**4:10-11**

**And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”**

God’s desire is that His people would learn to show and display compassion:

- 1) to others like He has shown us
- 2) for the things that He shows compassion toward