



RECAP

Jonah, God's rebel prophet, is a fascinating story. Everything in it is upside down! God's prophet confesses He works for the God who creates the seas, and then tries to run away from Him via the seas He created! In the same part of the story, we see the pagan sailors, who know absolutely nothing of the Hebrew God, end up essentially worshipping this God.

God then provides a large fish to transport Jonah back in the direction He originally intended him to go. While in the belly of the fish we read about Jonah's tremendous prayer. However, most of the prayer focuses on his 'head knowledge' of who God is and we are drawn to realize that Jonah's heart may not still be in the right place as he never actually 'repents.'

Eventually Jonah finds himself in Nineveh and he utters his 5-word sermon. His hope is that Nineveh will be overthrown by God in His wrath. But that's not how the story goes. The hated Ninevites repent. They turn their lives around and turn towards God. As a result, God 'relents' (Hebrew verb used here is the same verb for 'repent'), extends His compassion, and He spares the Ninevites.

Jonah can't handle it.

We learn that Jonah never wanted to go and preach in Nineveh because he knew God was a compassionate and loving God and that He would not crush the Ninevites if they gave Him the slightest reason not to. And so, God's prophet, the one called to turn people to the Lord, throws a temper tantrum because God was true to His character and did not destroy the hated Ninevites.

Pretty ironic. God's prophet played the role of the pagan, and the pagans played the role of God's people/prophet.

What are we to learn from this fascinating prophet? It seems relatively clear that the reader is to know, without a doubt, that God's love and compassion knows no bounds. It extends to everyone, including Israel's greatest national enemy at the time. In this season of history that we are living today where the dividing lines of "Us vs Them" becomes thicker and thicker, today's reader should come to the recognition that God is in the business of breaking down walls of division. The message of Jesus is nearly the same: Jesus shows His love for the Ninevites of His day (namely the gentiles, 'sinners,' prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, etc. etc.) in story after story.

The question before us Christians is simple: Do we look for ways to bring people to Jesus and His love and mercy? Or do we think there are some that are 'too far gone' or 'too repulsive' and fail to recognize that God's love and compassion extends even to 'them'?

**SHARE (5-10 min)**

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you feel like you've made a fool of yourself as a follower of God.

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Jonah 4

1. Regarding this sermon, is there any truth that stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
2. Describe a time where you feel like God called you in one direction and you intentionally went in a different direction.
3. Why do you think Jonah didn't technically 'repent' while in the belly of the fish?
4. The author makes it abundantly clear that the prophet of God runs while the pagan sailors and pagan nation (Nineveh) repents.
 - a. What does this stir up within you?
 - b. What are the areas in your life that you are 'running from God' today?
 - c. Who are the 'Ninevites' in your spheres of life today?
 - i. What might God be asking you to do differently with regards to your interactions with them?
5. How would you have responded if you were Jonah and the episode with the plant (Jonah 4:5-11) happened to you?
6. Do you resonate with Jonah or are you repulsed by Jonah? Explain your position.
7. God's compassion knows no limits. Are you OK with this concept? Why or why not?
8. Who are the 'thems' in your world that you sometimes struggle envisioning that even God can love?

SUPPORT

Share and Pray: Break up into 2's or 3's to pray for each other. Share, as you feel led, about what you feel God is calling you to turn from. Also share about who might be the "Ninevites" in your life today. Pray for each other accordingly.