

A Whale of a Tale

A Sermon Aligned Study of Jonah

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Session 1 | Jonah 1:1-3

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 09.22.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Just as Jonah initially fled from God’s call to go to Nineveh, you might face moments of resistance or reluctance when called to follow God’s direction in your life.

Head Change: Understand that avoiding God’s calls or commands often leads to complications and setbacks and recognize the importance of facing such calls with obedience.

Heart Change: Confront any inner resistance or fear about pursuing God’s will, allowing yourself to trust in His guidance and embrace the purpose He has set before you.

Life Change: Commit to following God’s direction with trust and willingness, even when it feels challenging, and make decisions that align with His will instead of avoiding them.

OPEN

What are some reasons people run from God?

Lee Stroebel, an avowed atheist, was an award-winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune. His life was characterized by a hedonistic lifestyle, concerned only with meeting his own desires. His own daughter dreaded his arrival home at night. A neighbor led his wife to Christ, but while Stroebel wasn’t impressed, he felt that it could do no harm to accompany his wife to church...once.

At that service, he heard a message about the resurrection and, as a journalist, decided to research the authenticity of that claim. After two years, Stroebel stopped running and gave his life to Christ. He has since written several books, including, “The Case for Christ” and “The Case for Faith.”

What are some possible reasons why people stop running from and decide to submit to Christ?

READ

Read Jonah 1:1-3

Today's session deals with disobedience. Do we have the right to decide that what God says to us is invalid? Or is God's truth absolute and unchangeable?

DISCUSS

Jonah 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai

We live in a society where many people reject the idea that there is such a thing as absolute truth. We often hear people talk about “my truth,” even when what they are saying is clearly false. Despite what some people say or think, there are things that are always true, and there are things that are always false. The way that we can tell the difference with certainty is the Scriptures. The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. Psalm 119:160.

In Old Testament times, most people had very little access to the written Word of God. Instead, God spoke directly to prophets like Jonah, giving them assignments and messages to deliver for Him. Every one of those messages was true.

Whatever God said was completely reliable and trustworthy. What was true of God’s Word spoken to the prophets is true of the Bible we have today—the words God inspired human authors to record are true.

When we do what God says, we will be blessed as a result. While getting blessings is not the main reason for our obedience, it is something that follows. When God speaks, He is not giving us suggestions but commands to be obeyed. Our trust and belief in the Word of God is shown not so much by what we say but by what we do. We have been given a trustworthy message from God, and it is up to us to live by what He says.

Why do so many people today reject truth and reality?

How does having the complete Word of God impact our faith?

What are some examples of blessings that come from obeying God?

Jonah 1:2 (ESV)

2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”

Nineveh was famous for all the wrong reasons. It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which was noted for its cruelty to the nations they conquered. The Assyrian Empire was focused on expansion, and their soldiers were feared across the Middle East. The main deity they worshiped was Ashur, the god of war. The people in Israel hated and feared the people of Nineveh. They had been attacked many times, and eventually, it would be the Assyrian Empire that conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and dispersed the people across their empire.

Despite their wickedness and cruelty, God still loved the people of Nineveh and wanted them to be offered the chance to repent and turn to Him rather than suffer the judgment they deserved. God's mercy and grace are not just for a select few but for every nation and people. 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 (2 Peter 3:9) So God told Jonah to go there and give them His warning and the opportunity to repent.

There are no groups of people who are too sinful for God to save. There are no groups of people we should not be willing to reach out to with the Gospel. There are no groups of people we should look down on or treat with contempt. We are not better than anyone else because of our nationality. God looks at everyone in the same way, no matter where they were born or where they live, no matter what possessions they have or their situation. God loves the world, not just a select few special people.

Why is it so easy for people to look down on other groups of people?

How does God's desire for everyone to hear and accept the Gospel change the way we look at others?

When have you had the opportunity to share the Gospel with someone across barriers?

Jonah 1:3 (ESV)

³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah knew why God wanted him to go to Nineveh, and he wanted no part of it. He did not want the people there to be warned of coming judgment and given the opportunity to repent. He knew that if they did repent, God would be gracious to them and not destroy them. To keep that from happening, Jonah found a ship going in the opposite direction and got on board. He thought that he would be able to disobey God successfully, but that never works.

God commands our obedience. Any time we go against what He says, we will suffer the consequences, but when we obey, we will reap the blessing. *“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.”* Joshua 1:7 It is not what we know but what we do that determines our level of success in the eyes of God. Someone said, “What you do with the Bible determines what God does with you.”

The Lord knows better than we do how we should behave. He has given us His Word as a guide by which we can and should live. We must trust His knowledge and follow His will rather than deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong. The lie Satan told Eve was that she would be able to make the choices for herself if she ate the fruit God had forbidden. God does not want us to live

by our wisdom but by His instead. The story of Jonah is a vivid illustration of what happens when we choose to go our own way.

How can the way we feel about others impact our obedience to God's instructions about them?

When have you chosen to obey God instead of doing what seemed easier or better?

How can we learn the Bible better so that our obedience will increase?

LAST WORD

Jonah's initial flight from God's presence teaches us the futility of running from God's will. No matter how far we try to go, God's presence is inescapable, and His plans for us remain steadfast. Jonah's journey reminds us that resisting God's call leads to turmoil, but when we align ourselves with His purpose, we find peace and fulfillment. As we face our own Ninevehs, may we choose obedience and trust, knowing that God's plan is always for our good and His glory?

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Remember that God still blesses obedience to His Word.

Heart: Am I willing to reach out to others across the barriers that separate people groups?

Life: View each person you meet this week as someone God loves and wants to be part of His family.

Sermon Notes

Session 2 | Jonah 1:4-11

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 09.29.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Just as Jonah’s disobedience led to a storm that impacted everyone on the ship, recognizing God’s sovereignty in such situations can lead you to seek His guidance, make amends, and align your life with His will.

Head Change: Understand that God’s sovereignty governs all circumstances, and your choices, especially in disobedience, can create turmoil that affects those around you; acknowledging this can guide you toward seeking His direction.

Heart Change: Feel a sense of responsibility for the impact of your actions, recognizing God’s grace in providing opportunities for correction and realignment with His will, leading you to approach Him with humility and repentance.

Life Change: Actively take responsibility for your actions and seek to correct any negative impacts by aligning your decisions with God’s guidance, allowing His sovereignty and grace to inspire a life of obedience and worship.

OPEN

Why is partial obedience actually disobedience?

I (John) was serving a church in downtown Atlanta and we lived thirty miles away. It soon became apparent that we needed a newer car, so my wife Ruth and I both prayed individually about

what car payment amount we could afford, and God gave us each the exact same number! On Friday, we found the car we needed for the price God had revealed to us, but the dealer said, “For only four dollars more per month, I can put you in this car...” it had leather seats and a sunroof, and we were enamored by how cool we would look in that car, so we bought it.

I went out of town with our pastor that weekend, so the first chance we had to drive the car was Sunday morning. After church, I was leaving the parking lot when I saw one of our musicians leaving in his car. Every fender was a different color, and hubcaps were missing. I quickly slid behind a truck and waited, embarrassed by my fancy car. And then I began to feel guilty. On Monday, I felt remorse all day; on Tuesday, I was sick to my stomach, and on Wednesday, I was totally miserable.

Arriving at my church office early, I got on my knees and confessed my pride and disobedience to the Lord, begging Him to help me make things right. I called the dealer and told him I had made a mistake and needed to trade for the first car we had looked at. “Mr. Gage, I am sorry, but once the paperwork leaves my desk, it is out of my hands! But I will check for you.” Within minutes the phone rang. “Mr. Gage, I can’t believe this, but the paperwork was never processed and is still on my desk! Come on down, and we will trade cars.”

What are some ways God helps us get back on track when we step out of his will?

READ

Read Jonah 1:4-11

We all face storms: some are due to unforeseen circumstances, and some are a result of our own poor choices. In today’s session, we explore a life-threatening storm and how pagan sailors dealt with the challenge.

DISCUSS

Jonah 1:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

Jonah's plan to run away from what God had told him to do started off badly. When we refuse to obey God, we should not be surprised that things can quickly go wrong. God never tells us what to do to keep us from enjoying good things or having a good life. He issues commandments designed to protect us from evil and danger. He knows what is best, and our job is to do whatever He says, whether it is what we would choose or not. When we do not, God punishes us just as a loving parent corrects a child, not out of anger but from a desire for them to have what is best.

That does not mean that every time something goes wrong, it is a judgment of God. We live in a world broken by sin, and sometimes bad things happen to good people—not because they have sinned, but because that is how the world is. As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² *And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* ³ *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."* (John 9:1-3)

When difficult circumstances come into our lives, we need to be alert and pay attention. Jonah went down into the ship and went to sleep, even though the storm was raging. The devil is delighted when we close our spiritual eyes to what is going on around us. God calls us to be alert and on guard all the time. This is especially true when we are experiencing His correction. We need to pay attention to what He is trying to tell us, or things are likely to get much worse.

Why do we find it easy to justify not doing what God has told us to do?

Why do you think the sailors were afraid and took immediate action when the storm hit, while Jonah was sleeping? What does this tell us about how different people respond to crises?

What happens if we sleep through a storm God has sent to get our attention?

Jonah 1:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.” ⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

The sailors came from several different nations and worshiped different deities. Even though their religions were false they took

them seriously. When the storm started raging, they cried out for help. Jonah worshiped the one true God, but he was not praying. He was sleeping instead. He had a solid and firm basis for faith, unlike those around him, but he wasn't interested in talking to God right then. When we are harboring sin instead of confessing it, we are not likely to want to be in God's presence. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:10-11)

The impact of sin does not change our family relationship with God. Those who have trusted Christ as Savior are still His children no matter what. But sin definitely changes our fellowship with God. He is still a loving Father when we sin, but He is also perfectly holy, and sin is more offensive to Him than we can imagine. The devil whispers to us that our sins aren't really that serious, but there are no small sins in the eyes of God. Our sin sent His Son to the cross, and He takes every sin seriously.

Jonah had been told to go to Nineveh, but he was also a representative of the God of Israel to a crew of heathen sailors. They would form their opinion of Jonah's God based on the way Jonah spoke and acted. The poet Annie Johnson Flint wrote: "We are the only Bible the careless world will read." We carry God's name with us everywhere we go. All that we do and say reflects on Him, and it is our privilege and responsibility to honor and glorify Him with our lives.

Is the faith of the world around us in false things stronger than our faith in true things?

Why does sin impact our relationship with God so severely?

How does the way we live change the way people think about God?

Jonah 1:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. ¹¹ Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.

Every sin has consequences. Some of those are more severe than others, depending on the sin, but there is no way to avoid them. God has put the law of sowing and reaping in place, and we cannot expect to break His commandments without suffering the result. All of our control is upfront. We choose what we do, but we do not control what follows. A person who jumps off a bridge may regret it on the way down, but that will not change the law of gravity. It is certain.

Sin would be a horrible deal if the consequences only impacted our lives, but they often impact the lives of others as well. The sailors on Jonah’s ship were not the cause of the storm, but they suffered from it anyway. When Achan took the treasure from the city of Jericho despite God’s command that it all belonged to Him, he no doubt thought he had gotten away with his sin. Yet dozens of other people died because of what followed. *“Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity.”* (Joshua 22:20)

The temptations we experience always focus on the short term, and the devil does his best to blind us to the ultimate result of sin. Some sins remain hidden from people, even for many years. But God sees everything we do. Even if we hide inside a ship

sailing directly away from where God told us to go, He knows where we are. He allows us to experience the consequences of sin not because He is angry at us and wants to get even but because He knows that is often the

What do you think the sailors thought about God based on what Jonah did and said?

How does thinking about the future consequences of sin change our response to temptation?

Why is the devil so successful selling the lie that we do not need to fear the consequences of sin?

LAST WORD

In the narrative of Jonah 1:4-11, we witness the profound sovereignty and omnipotence of God as He orchestrates a storm to redirect Jonah from his disobedient path. The violent tempest not only reveals God’s control over nature but also His patient grace in giving Jonah and the sailors an opportunity to turn back to Him. This divine intervention underscores the seriousness of straying from God’s will, while simultaneously highlighting His gracious patience in guiding us.

Recognizing God's sovereignty in our lives can lead us to seek His guidance, make amends, and align our actions with His will. In doing so, we learn to take responsibility for our choices, seek correction, and live a life of obedience and worship.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Remember that sin always produces consequences, and we do not control them.

Heart: Is there a sin hidden in my life that is impacting my fellowship with God?

Life: Make certain that all you do and say this week reflects positively on the God whose Name we carry.

Sermon Notes

Session 3 | Jonah 1:11-17

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 10.06.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Just as Jonah's sacrifice of being thrown into the sea calmed and saved the crew, taking responsibility for your mistakes and making amends can bring resolution and healing to situations affecting others.

Head Change: Understand that facing the consequences of your actions and making necessary sacrifices can lead to positive outcomes and restore balance in your life and the lives of those around you.

Heart Change: Develop a willingness to take responsibility and make amends, recognizing the importance of your actions in bringing about reconciliation and peace.

Life Change: Be proactive in addressing issues you've caused, even if it requires personal sacrifice. Seek to restore and improve situations by aligning your actions with what is right and just.

OPEN

What are some possible reactions to tragedy or difficult circumstances?

Joseph Scriven was a quiet, caring man, devoted to his mother and to providing for others. Born in Ireland, he was raised in a devout home. At the age of 25, he was engaged to be married, but the day before the wedding, his fiancé was thrown from a horse into a lake and drowned.

Reeling in grief, he moved to Canada, where he cut firewood for widows and helped the less fortunate. Ten years later, he was once again engaged to be married, but shortly before the wedding, his fiancé contracted tuberculosis and died.

When Joseph heard that his mother had fallen ill, he penned this poem and sent it to her, never intending for it to be seen by anyone else. It was found on her bedside nightstand:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and grief to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

*Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

Should consequences that result from our disobedience compared to trials over which we have no control be handled any differently?

READ

Read Jonah 1:11-17

In today's passage, Jonah and the sailors on his ship were facing a life-threatening challenge. As the crew explored their options, they had to make a difficult decision. Let's see how they decided to solve their problem.

DISCUSS

Jonah 1:11-13 (ESV)

¹¹ Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and

more tempestuous.¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”¹³ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

The sailors on Jonah’s ship were not happy when he told them that their only chance to survive was to throw him overboard. They threw out the cargo to lighten the ship which was a desperate measure for men who made their living delivering merchandise. They tried rowing to overcome the wind. The harder they tried to avoid doing what they had been told, the worse the storm got. Sometimes we respond in the same way to the storms of life. Only after we have tried everything else we can think of do we turn to God and obey what He has told us.

God has given us His Word to tell us how to live. We did not get Ten Suggestions but Ten Commandments. Doing what God said is not optional, and obedience is the foundation for a safe and settled life. “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24-25)

Knowing what the Bible says is important, but doing what the Bible says is even more important. Not everything God tells us to do is easy or pleasant. Sometimes it is very hard indeed. But it is always the right thing to do. We are not wiser than God is, and we do not know better than He does what we should do. Rather than following our own judgment we must submit to whatever He has spoken. In every case, doing what God says is the only right thing to do.

Why are we tempted to put our experience and ideas ahead of God’s commands?

How does our view of the Bible change the way we respond to what it says?

How does disobedience to what we know is right change our fellowship with God?

Jonah 1:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

As soon as the sailors threw Jonah overboard the storm stopped. These were experienced men who had seen many storms before. They had never seen anything like the sudden ceasing of this storm, and it confirmed to them that the God of Jonah was real and powerful. They saw His power in action and made promises to Him. God’s power is real, and the fact that He can and will do all that He promises is the foundation of our faith in Him.

Nothing that we face poses a challenge to God. Things that are impossible for us are no obstacle to Him. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Romans 4:19-21

When we look at the way God has worked in our lives in the past, it encourages us to trust Him more for the future. God is just as able to work today as He has been throughout history, and all His promises are still faithful and true. Much of what God tells us to do makes no sense to the world around us, but it is always reliable. God's way is best, and our faith in Him leads us to walk as He commands, regardless of how out of step with the world it may be.

Why is it so important for us to remember what God has done for us in the past?

How can we keep our circumstances from limiting our faith?

What has seeing God work in the past encouraged you to attempt to do for Him in the present?

Jonah 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah was sent to Nineveh because of God's grace and mercy to offer them a chance to repent. Jonah was thrown overboard

to save the sailors from the storm. Jesus came willingly to this world to be our Savior. He did not have to be coerced or forced into being the sacrifice for our sins. But Jesus did have to be that sacrifice because there is no other way for us to come to God except through Him. He spent three days and nights in the grave and then rose in victory to assure our hope of Heaven.

Jonah is the only person from the Old Testament Jesus directly pointed out as a picture of His own life, death, and resurrection.

⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ 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)

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He was focused on that purpose despite knowing what it would cost Him. Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to have a chance to repent, but Jesus came to offer salvation to everyone who would accept it. It is our responsibility to take that message to those around us. No matter if they are from a different ethnic background, social status, culture or religion, everyone needs the Gospel because Jesus is the only way to Heaven.

What does this verse reveal about God's power and His ability to intervene in our lives, even in unusual ways?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt "swallowed up" by circumstances? How did you see God working in that situation, even if it was challenging or uncomfortable at the time?

LAST WORD

Jonah's journey from rebellion to surrender, the sailors' transformation from fear to faith, and the miraculous provision of the great fish all serve as powerful reminders of God's control over every situation and His willingness to extend mercy, even when we least deserve it. As we reflect on these verses, we are encouraged to trust in God's plan, take responsibility for our actions, and embrace the opportunities for redemption that His grace provides.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on how Jonah's experience teaches that God's interventions, even when they seem harsh, are designed to guide us back to Him. Acknowledge that God's discipline is an expression of His love, aimed at redirecting us from destructive paths and leading us to growth.

Heart: Embrace the belief that God's mercy is intertwined with His discipline. Just as He provided a great fish to save Jonah from drowning, believe that God's interventions in our lives, no matter how challenging, are acts of mercy intended to bring us back into alignment with His will.

Life: In your daily life, when you encounter difficulties or corrections, instead of resisting or resenting them, pause and reflect on what God might be teaching you. Use these moments to turn back to God with a repentant heart, committing to follow His lead more closely.

Sermon Notes

Session 4 | Matthew 14:22-33

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 10.13.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Jesus' walking on water and Peter's experience of faith illustrate the importance of trusting Christ during life's storms. This passage teaches us that Jesus' presence and power are greater than our fears.

Head Change: Understand that Jesus has authority over the storms of life and is always present, even when circumstances seem overwhelming.

Heart Change: Feel a deep sense of comfort and courage in knowing that Jesus is with you during your toughest moments, and allow this truth to ease your fears.

Life Change: Commit to stepping out in faith when Jesus calls you, even when the situation seems impossible, trusting that He will guide and sustain you.

OPEN

Imagine being in a situation where everything seems to be going wrong, and no matter what you do, you can't seem to fix it. Now, imagine in the midst of that chaos, you hear a voice telling you, "It's going to be okay—trust me." Would you believe it? Would you take that step, even when it feels like the last thing that makes sense?

Share a quick story about a time when you had to trust someone or something, even when it didn't make sense, and it turned out better than you expected.

When was the last time you felt like everything was out of control? How did you respond?

Have you ever had to take a step of faith in a difficult situation? How did it turn out?

READ

Read Matthew 14:22-33

Today's session deals with disobedience. Do we have the right to decide that what God says to us is invalid? Or is God's truth absolute and unchangeable?

DISCUSS

Matthew 14:22-24 (ESV)

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

In these verses, Jesus compels His disciples to enter the boat and journey to the other side of the sea while He disperses the crowds and retreats to pray. His actions are intentional, emphasizing the necessity of prayerful solitude. Jesus, though divine, models the importance of withdrawing to seek the Father's presence. This act of withdrawing to the mountain,

specifically after a day of teaching and miracles, reflects the deep intimacy Jesus shared with God, urging us to carve out moments for quiet reflection and communion with God amid our busy lives.

Simultaneously, the disciples find themselves in a difficult situation. Although they obeyed Jesus' command, they encounter a fierce storm that obstructs their progress. It's significant that this storm arises not because they are outside of God's will but because they are following it. This situation illustrates how obedience to God does not exempt us from life's challenges. Rather, we often face storms that test our faith and reliance on Him in the midst of following God's direction. The storm reflects the unpredictability of life's trials that can come even when we are faithfully walking in obedience.

Moreover, this passage reminds us that in moments when we feel distant from Jesus—when the "boat" of our lives seems far from the shore and battered by the winds—Jesus is still interceding for us. Just as He prayed on the mountain, Jesus continues to intercede for us today (Romans 8:34). This truth encourages us to trust in His sovereignty and care, even when we are battling life's storms and feel as though we are struggling against the wind.

What storms have you encountered while being obedient to God's will?

How can you take time to pray and seek God's presence amid your busy life?

How does knowing that Jesus is interceding for you affect the way you handle life's challenges?

Matthew 14:25-27 (ESV)

²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

The "fourth watch of the night," between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m., is a period when the disciples have been battling the storm for hours. Jesus comes to them in the darkest and most challenging part of the night, demonstrating that His timing is purposeful, even if it seems delayed to us. His arrival during the storm, walking on the water, reveals His authority over nature and His divine ability to transcend the natural order. It underscores the truth that Jesus is sovereign over all creation, and nothing is beyond His control.

Yet, the disciples' reaction is not one of relief but terror. They mistake Jesus for a ghost, a reflection of how fear can distort our perception of God's presence. When we are consumed by fear, we often fail to recognize Jesus working in our midst. The disciples' fear of Jesus walking on the water reminds us that in moments of crisis, our human understanding can limit our ability to see God's supernatural work. Their cry of fear reveals the depth of their distress, yet it also sets the stage for Jesus' comforting and reassuring words.

Jesus immediately responds with words of comfort: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." His declaration "It is I" carries echoes of God's self-identification as "I AM" in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14). Jesus' words remind the disciples that He is God and that His presence is enough to dispel their fear. His call to "not be afraid" reminds us that faith in Him can calm our deepest fears, even when the storms around us rage on. Jesus' presence, not the absence of the storm, is the key to overcoming fear.

What fears tend to distort your perception of Jesus' presence in your life?

How can you practice recognizing Jesus' presence, especially in difficult times?

How does Jesus' power over nature encourage you to trust Him more deeply?

Matthew 14:28-32 (ESV)

²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Jonah knew why God wanted him to go to Nineveh, and he Peter's bold request to walk on water reveals both his faith and his need for assurance. His desire to step out onto the water reflects a deep trust in Jesus' power, yet the phrasing of his request—"if it is you"—shows that Peter still seeks confirmation. Jesus' simple response, "Come," is an invitation for Peter to act

on his faith. As Peter steps out of the boat, he experiences the miraculous firsthand, walking toward Jesus on the water. This moment is a testament to what can happen when we take steps of faith in response to Jesus' call.

However, as soon as Peter shifts his focus from Jesus to the wind and waves, his faith falters, and he begins to sink. This scene powerfully illustrates the importance of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, especially in the midst of life's storms. Peter's fear overtakes him when he allows his circumstances to overshadow his trust in Christ. His cry, "Lord, save me," is a desperate plea for help, and Jesus responds immediately, reaching out to rescue him. This moment is a reminder that even when our faith falters, Jesus is always faithful to us.

Jesus' gentle rebuke, "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" encourages Peter (and us) to reflect on the source of doubt. Faith, as demonstrated here, is not just about stepping out once but maintaining trust in Jesus even as the storm rages. When they return to the boat and the wind ceases, it is a powerful reminder that Jesus is Lord over both the storm and our fears. His presence brings peace, and our faith is strengthened as we learn to trust Him more fully in every circumstance.

What steps of faith is Jesus calling you to take today?

What are the "winds and waves" in your life that distract you from Jesus?

How can you maintain your focus on Jesus when life's storms seem overwhelming?

LAST WORD

Jesus' miraculous walk on water and Peter's attempt to follow Him illustrate the reality of life's storms and the necessity of faith. While storms will inevitably come, Jesus' presence provides the comfort and assurance we need to overcome fear. Like Peter, we will have moments where we falter, but Jesus is quick to respond when we call out to Him. Our faith grows as we continually step out in obedience, trusting that Jesus is always near, even when the wind and waves seem overwhelming.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on Peter's experience and understand that Jesus is always present during life's storms. Recognize that He has authority over your circumstances and trust Him to guide you through.

Heart: Allow Jesus' presence to calm your fears. In moments of anxiety or distress, remind yourself that Jesus' words, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid," are meant for you, too.

Life: Step out in faith, even when the path seems uncertain. Whether in relationships, decisions, or challenges, commit to walking toward Jesus, trusting that He will sustain you even when you feel like you're sinking.

Sermon Notes

Session 5 | Jonah 2:1-10

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 10.20.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Jonah's prayer from the depths of the fish reveals the transformative power of repentance and the boundless mercy of God. His journey from despair to deliverance underscores the importance of turning to God in our darkest moments, trusting in His ability to rescue and restore.

Head Change: Understand that even in the most desperate situations, God hears your cries and is capable of bringing you from despair to hope. Recognize that repentance opens the door to God's deliverance.

Heart Change: Feel a deep sense of gratitude for God's mercy and grace, which are extended even when you feel far from Him. Let this gratitude cultivate a renewed commitment to trust in His faithfulness.

Life Change: Make it a habit to turn to God in prayer, especially in times of trouble. Embrace repentance as a pathway to experiencing God's deliverance and use your experiences of God's mercy to encourage others who are struggling.

OPEN

In what ways could prayer be considered worship?

“Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; Confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine.” C.S. Lewis

Why is confession the starting point to a relationship with God?

READ

Read Jonah 2:1-10

Jonah finally does what he should have done at the beginning of the story: he prays. Today we will explore his prayer and will discover how his attitude changed when he suffered the consequences of his disobedience.

DISCUSS

Jonah 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying,

**“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.**

**³ For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me.**

Jonah’s prayer begins from a place of profound distress. Trapped inside the fish, he recognizes the gravity of his situation and turns to God in desperation. His prayer, “In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me,” reflects both his dire

circumstances and his faith in God’s ability to hear and respond. The imagery Jonah uses—“from deep in the realm of the dead”—highlights the severity of his situation, likening his experience to being in the very depths of Sheol, the place of the dead. Yet, even from this seemingly hopeless state, Jonah affirms that God listened to his cry.

The language Jonah uses underscores the overwhelming nature of his circumstances. He describes being “hurled into the depths” and being engulfed by swirling currents and crashing waves. This vivid portrayal of his ordeal in the sea emphasizes the powerlessness he felt as he faced the consequences of his disobedience. However, Jonah’s acknowledgment that these forces are “your waves and breakers” also reflects his understanding that God’s hand is at work even in his discipline. This recognition is crucial, as it marks the beginning of Jonah’s repentance, acknowledging both God’s judgment and His sovereignty.

When you find yourself in difficult situations, how do you usually respond? Do you turn to God in prayer, or do you try to handle things on your own?

What does it mean to you that God listens to your cries, even when you feel like you’re in the “depths”? How does this shape your understanding of His presence in your life?

Can you recall a time when you felt overwhelmed by your circumstances but found hope through prayer? How did this experience impact your faith?

Jonah 2:4-6 (ESV)

**⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.’
⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
⁶ at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord my God.**

In these verses, Jonah continues to recount his harrowing experience, describing a profound sense of separation from God. His statement, “I have been banished from your sight,” reflects his deep despair and the feeling of being cut off from God’s presence. Yet, even in this state of despair, Jonah expresses a glimmer of hope: “yet I will look again toward your holy temple.” This phrase signifies Jonah’s determination to seek God, despite feeling distant and abandoned. It is a turning point in his prayer, where hope begins to emerge from the depths of his despair.

Jonah’s description of his descent—engulfing waters, the deep surrounding him, and seaweed wrapped around his head—paints a vivid picture of his near-death experience. He sinks “to the roots of the mountains,” a metaphorical expression that emphasizes how far he has fallen, both physically and spiritually. The phrase “the earth beneath barred me in forever” suggests a sense of finality, as if Jonah believes he is beyond rescue, trapped in a place of no return. However, this is not the end of Jonah’s story.

The turning point comes with the powerful declaration, “But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.” This verse captures the essence of God’s mercy and deliverance. Despite Jonah’s sense of hopelessness and the overwhelming nature of his circumstances, God intervenes. The “pit” symbolizes death and despair, yet God’s power is shown in His ability to rescue Jonah from this seemingly inescapable situation. This moment of divine intervention serves as a powerful reminder of God’s capacity to save, even when all seems lost.

Have you ever felt distant from God, as if you were “driven away from His sight”? How did you navigate that experience, and what helped you find your way back to Him?

What does Jonah’s hope in the midst of despair teach you about the importance of looking to God, even when circumstances seem dire?

Can you identify a time in your life when God “brought your life up from the pit”? How has that experience shaped your faith and your relationship with Him?

Jonah 2:7-10 (ESV)

**⁷ When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.**

**⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.**

**⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the Lord!”**

**¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out
upon the dry land.**

As Jonah's life was slipping away, he experienced a pivotal moment of remembrance and repentance. "I remembered you, LORD," he says, indicating a shift in his focus from his dire circumstances to the God who is able to save. This act of remembering and praying marks a return to faith, as Jonah's prayer rises to God's holy temple, symbolizing a restored connection with the divine. Jonah's prayer is not just a plea for help but a declaration of faith in God's power to save, even from the depths of despair.

Jonah contrasts his renewed faith with those who "cling to worthless idols." This statement reflects his realization that idols, whether literal or metaphorical, offer no real hope or deliverance. In turning to God, Jonah rejects these false sources of security and acknowledges the futility of relying on anything other than the LORD. This realization is accompanied by a commitment to worship and obedience: "But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you." Jonah's promise to fulfill his vows underscores his transformation—from a prophet fleeing God's call to one who now embraces his mission with renewed dedication.

The climax of this passage comes with Jonah's declaration, "Salvation comes from the LORD." This powerful statement encapsulates the core message of his prayer and the entire narrative. It acknowledges that only God has the power to save, whether from physical danger, spiritual despair, or the consequences of disobedience. In response to Jonah's prayer, God commands the fish to release him, and Jonah is delivered onto dry land. This miraculous deliverance not only spares Jonah's life but also marks a new beginning for his mission. God's mercy is vividly displayed as He gives Jonah a second chance, reinforcing the theme of divine grace and redemption.

What does it mean to you to "remember the LORD" in times of crisis? How does focusing on God help you navigate difficult situations?

How do you identify and reject “worthless idols” in your life? What steps do you take to ensure that your trust is placed solely in God?

In what ways have you experienced God’s deliverance, both physically and spiritually? How has this shaped your understanding of His power and mercy?

LAST WORD

Jonah’s prayer in Jonah 2:1-10 is a powerful testimony to the transformative power of repentance and God’s boundless mercy. From the depths of despair, Jonah’s recognition of God’s sovereignty and his return to faith lead to his miraculous deliverance. This passage reminds us that no situation is too desperate for God’s intervention and that repentance and faith can bring us from the pit of despair to the light of hope and restoration.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on God’s ability to hear and answer your prayers, even in the darkest moments. Trust in His power to deliver you from any situation.

Heart: Let the experience of God’s mercy deepen your gratitude and commitment to Him. Allow this awareness to strengthen your faith and your willingness to turn to Him in all circumstances.

Life: Make prayer and repentance a regular part of your life, especially in times of trouble. Encourage others by sharing your experiences of God's deliverance, pointing them to the truth that salvation comes from the LORD.

Sermon Notes

Session 6 | Jonah 3:1-4

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 10.27.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Jonah's renewed mission to Nineveh underscores God's relentless pursuit of both His people and the lost, revealing His desire for repentance and restoration. This divine call reflects the broader biblical theme of the Missio Dei, God's mission to redeem humanity, and anticipates the Great Commission given to all believers.

Head Change: Understand that God's mission is continuous, and His call to share His message of repentance and redemption extends to all believers. Recognize that God's purposes are persistent and unwavering, even when we falter.

Heart Change: Feel a deep sense of gratitude for God's willingness to give second chances, both to you and to those who have not yet responded to His call. Let this compassion inspire you to actively participate in God's mission.

Life Change: Commit to responding obediently to God's call, sharing His message of redemption with others. Engage in His mission with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing that your efforts are part of His larger plan for the salvation of the world.

OPEN

What are some possible ways to react to someone who has experienced a failure?

Winston Churchill was once asked what had best prepared him to lead Great Britain through WWII.

Churchill responded, “It was the time I repeated a class in grade school.”

Incredulous, the interviewer said, “You mean you flunked a grade?”

Churchill replied, “I never flunked in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right.”

Share a situation where you were given a second chance to get it right.

What are some reasons why we should give someone who has failed a second chance?

READ

Read Jonah 3:1-4; Genesis 3:15; Matthew 28:18-20

In today’s session, Jonah is given a second chance to obey. Let’s explore his opportunity to make things right together.

DISCUSS

Jonah 3:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ 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. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

The passage opens with a significant statement: "The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time." This underscores God's persistence and grace, offering Jonah another opportunity to fulfill his prophetic mission. Despite Jonah's previous disobedience, God does not abandon His plan for Nineveh or His prophet. Instead, He reaffirms His call to Jonah, demonstrating that His purposes are unyielding, and His mission to bring a message of repentance to Nineveh remains unchanged. This moment highlights God's willingness to use imperfect people to accomplish His perfect will.

Jonah's response is notably different from his initial reaction to God's call. This time, Jonah obeys and sets out for Nineveh, showing that he has learned from his previous experience. The description of Nineveh as a "very large city" emphasizes the magnitude of Jonah's task. The detail that "it took three days to go through it" reflects both the size of the city and the significant effort required to deliver God's message. Jonah's journey into Nineveh marks the beginning of his obedience, as he carries out the divine mandate with a renewed sense of purpose.

The content of Jonah's proclamation is direct and urgent: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." This message, though brief, is a powerful warning of impending judgment. The use of the number "forty" often symbolizes a period of testing or judgment in the Bible, further emphasizing the seriousness of the message. Jonah's declaration leaves no room for ambiguity—Nineveh faces destruction unless it repents. The urgency of Jonah's message reflects the urgency of God's call to repentance, highlighting the critical nature of the situation for the people of Nineveh.

How do you respond when God gives you a second chance to fulfill His calling? What can you learn from Jonah's change in attitude?

What does the size and significance of Nineveh teach you about the scope of God’s mission? How does this shape your understanding of the tasks God calls you to?

How does the urgency in Jonah’s message challenge you to share God’s message of repentance and salvation with others?

The Missio Dei - Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

**¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring[a] and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.**

In Jonah’s mission to Nineveh, we see a reflection of the Missio Dei, or the “mission of God,” which is the overarching narrative of Scripture, beginning with God’s promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15.

This verse, often referred to as the “protoevangelium” or “first gospel,” reveals God’s plan to defeat sin and evil through the offspring of the woman. It marks the beginning of God’s redemptive mission, a mission that would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ but is also foreshadowed in the prophets’ calls to repentance, including Jonah’s.

Jonah’s reluctant obedience to God’s call is part of this larger divine mission. His proclamation to Nineveh is not just about the impending destruction but about offering the possibility of repentance and redemption, which aligns with God’s long-term mission to restore humanity. The fact that God sends Jonah a second time underscores His commitment to this mission—God is

not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Jonah's journey to Nineveh is a microcosm of the larger narrative of God's relentless pursuit of humanity, beginning with the promise in Genesis and culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

How does understanding the Missio Dei change your perspective on Jonah's mission to Nineveh? How does it influence your view of your own role in God's mission?

What parallels do you see between God's promise in Genesis 3:15 and His call to Jonah? How does this continuity of God's mission throughout Scripture impact your faith?

How does recognizing God's relentless pursuit of humanity inspire you to participate more actively in His mission?

The Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jonah's mission to Nineveh also connects with the theme of the Great Commission, which is rooted in God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. In this passage, God promises to make Abraham a great nation and to bless all the peoples of the earth through him. This covenant established Israel's role as a light to the nations, a mission that ultimately extends to all believers through Christ's command in Matthew 28:19-20 to go and make disciples of all nations.

Jonah's call to preach to Nineveh, a Gentile city, prefigures this broader mission. Despite Nineveh's status as a non-Israelite city and a symbol of wickedness, God's concern for its inhabitants reflects His desire for all nations to know Him. Jonah's reluctant mission is an early example of God's inclusive love and His plan to extend His mercy beyond the borders of Israel, a theme that is fully realized in the Great Commission. By sending Jonah to Nineveh, God is acting in line with His promise to bless all nations through Abraham's descendants, showing that His redemptive plan is universal.

How does Jonah's mission to Nineveh expand your understanding of God's promise to bless all nations? How does this inform your view of the Great Commission?

What does Jonah's obedience, even if reluctant, teach you about the importance of participating in God's mission to reach all people?

How can you align your life more closely with the Great Commission, knowing that God's mission has always been to reach every nation and people group?

LAST WORD

Jonah's second chance to fulfill God's call is a powerful reminder of God's persistence in His mission to redeem the world. From the promise in Genesis 3:15 to the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, God's desire to bring salvation to all nations is evident. Jonah's journey to Nineveh is part of this larger narrative, reflecting both the Missio Dei and the Great Commission. As believers, we are called to join in this mission, sharing the message of repentance and redemption with all people, confident in God's unwavering commitment to His plan.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on the continuity of God's mission throughout Scripture and your role in it. Recognize that you are part of God's ongoing plan to reach all nations with His message of salvation.

Heart: Let the understanding of God's relentless pursuit of humanity deepen your compassion for those who have not yet responded to His call. Allow this compassion to drive you to engage more fully in His mission.

Life: Actively seek opportunities to share the message of the gospel with others, knowing that you are participating in God's broader mission. Embrace the Great Commission as your personal calling, and take steps to reach those around you with the love and truth of Christ.

Sermon Notes

Session 7 | Jonah 3:5-10

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 11.03.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: The people of Nineveh's response to Jonah's message shows the power of repentance and the depth of God's mercy. Despite their wickedness, God extends grace when they turn from their sins, demonstrating His readiness to forgive all who seek Him sincerely.

Head Change: Understand that genuine repentance has the power to avert judgment and bring about divine mercy. Recognize that no one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness.

Heart Change: Feel a renewed sense of humility and gratitude for God's willingness to forgive those who turn to Him, regardless of their past actions. Let this realization inspire you to approach God with a repentant heart.

Life Change: Commit to living a life of continual repentance and obedience, knowing that God's mercy is always available to those who sincerely seek it. Encourage others to turn to God, sharing the hope of His forgiveness.

OPEN

List some reasons why God often uses difficult circumstances to initiate personal change.

On July 2, 1505, Martin Luther was riding his horse toward the law university where he was a student. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck very close to him, almost costing him his life. Taking this as a sign from God, he devoted his life to a deep study of the scriptures that ultimately resulted in an expose of false Catholic doctrine, initiating the Reformation.

What event or circumstance in your life caused change?

What are some things God uses in our lives to help initiate change?

READ

Read Jonah 3:5-10

When Jonah obeyed, God worked. Today we will discover that when Gods Word is faithfully preached, repentance and renewal follow.

DISCUSS

Jonah 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ When Jonah obeyed, God worked. Today we will discover that when Gods Word is faithfully preached, repentance and renewal follow.

The verse opens with a remarkable statement: “The Ninevites believed God.” This immediate response to Jonah’s warning is a powerful testament to the effectiveness of his message and the

work of God’s Spirit in their hearts. The people of Nineveh, notorious for their wickedness, do not merely hear Jonah’s words; they believe them. This belief is not just intellectual assent but is evidenced by their actions—proclaiming a fast and donning sackcloth, traditional signs of mourning and repentance in the ancient Near East. The phrase “from the greatest to the least” indicates that this response was universal, cutting across all social strata. It highlights the collective acknowledgment of their sin and the communal desire to seek God’s mercy.

The act of fasting and wearing sackcloth reflects the Ninevites’ deep sorrow and humility before God. By depriving themselves of food and dressing in coarse garments, they physically express their inner contrition and desperation for forgiveness. This communal act of repentance signifies a profound spiritual awakening among the people, demonstrating that genuine belief in God leads to tangible change. The Ninevites’ response serves as a powerful reminder that repentance is not limited to an individual act but can become a movement that transforms entire communities.

How do you respond when God gives you a second chance to fulfill His calling? What can you learn from Jonah’s change in attitude?

What does the response of the Ninevites teach you about the importance of genuine repentance?

How does the Ninevites’ immediate belief in God challenge your understanding of the power of God’s message to transform lives?

Jonah 3:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ 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, ⁸ 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.

The repentance of Nineveh reaches its pinnacle with the response of the king. Upon hearing Jonah’s warning, the king takes dramatic action: he steps down from his throne, removes his royal garments, and puts on sackcloth—a striking symbol of humility and repentance. By sitting in the dust, the king demonstrates his acknowledgment of God’s supremacy and his own unworthiness. This act is not only a personal gesture but also sets the tone for the entire city, signaling that true repentance begins with the leadership.

The king’s decree extends the call to repentance to every corner of Nineveh, including both people and animals. The command for all to fast and wear sackcloth reflects the seriousness of their situation and their collective desire to avert divine judgment. The inclusion of animals in the fasting and mourning rituals underscores the totality of their repentance, leaving no aspect of life untouched by their plea for mercy. The king’s command to “call urgently on God” emphasizes the intensity and sincerity of their repentance, urging the entire city to abandon their evil ways and violence. This collective turning from sin is a vivid demonstration of the power of true repentance to bring about change at every level of society.

What can you learn from the king’s example of humility and repentance? How can you apply this attitude in your own life?

How does the king's decree for everyone, including animals, to participate in fasting and repentance surprise you? How do we discern genuine repentance and avoid doubting an individual's life change?

What steps can you take to lead others in repentance, following the king's example in Nineveh?

Jonah 3:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

¹⁰ 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.

The king's proclamation concludes with a powerful expression of hope: "Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." This statement reflects the king's understanding of God's character—His capacity for both righteous anger and deep compassion. The king's words suggest a recognition that repentance, while necessary, does not automatically guarantee deliverance; it is ultimately up to God's sovereign will. Yet, the king's hope in God's mercy is clear, and this hope motivates the city's repentance.

God's response to Nineveh's repentance is both merciful and just. He "saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways," and as a result, "He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened." This verse underscores the transformative power of repentance and the willingness of God

to forgive even the most wicked when they turn to Him with sincere hearts. God's relenting is not a change in His nature but a consistent expression of His justice and mercy. The people of Nineveh's decision to abandon their evil ways leads to a dramatic reversal of their fate, illustrating the profound impact that genuine repentance can have on both individuals and entire communities.

How does the king's hope in God's mercy encourage you in your own moments of repentance? What role does hope play in your relationship with God?

What does God's response to the Ninevites' repentance teach you about His character? How does this shape your understanding of divine justice and mercy?

How can you incorporate the principles of repentance and hope into your daily life, knowing that God is both just and compassionate?

LAST WORD

The repentance of Nineveh and God's subsequent mercy serve as a profound example of the power of genuine repentance and the depth of God's compassion. The transformation that begins with the belief of the people is led by the humility of the king and is

consummated by God's relenting from destruction, demonstrates that no one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness. This story reminds us that God is always ready to extend His mercy to those who sincerely seek Him, calling us to live lives marked by continual repentance and hope in His unfailing compassion.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on the story of Nineveh and recognize that God's mercy is available to all who turn to Him in repentance. Allow this truth to deepen your understanding of divine forgiveness.

Heart: Cultivate a heart of humility and gratitude for God's willingness to forgive. Let this awareness inspire you to approach God with a sincere and repentant spirit.

Life: Live a life marked by continual repentance and obedience, knowing that God's mercy is always available to those who seek it. Encourage others to turn to God, sharing the hope of His forgiveness with those around you.

Sermon Notes

Session 8 | Jonah 4:1-4

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 11.10.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Jonah's displeasure at God's mercy towards Nineveh reveals the danger of self-centeredness, which blinds us to the depth of God's compassion and love for all people. Recognizing this, we are called to align our hearts with God's infinite mercy and extend it to others.

Head Change: Understand the importance of avoiding self-centeredness in your relationship with God, realizing that His love and compassion extend far beyond your personal preferences and judgments.

Heart Change: Feel a deep sense of humility and gratitude for God's boundless love, which embraces all people, regardless of their past actions. Let this awareness soften your heart toward others.

Life Change: Commit to embracing God's perspective of mercy and compassion, actively rejecting self-centered attitudes, and striving to extend His love to everyone, including those you find challenging to love.

OPEN

Describe a time when you experienced disappointment. How did you react?

Sonia O’Sullivan of Ireland trained for many years to become an Olympic athlete. By the time of the Barcelona Olympics, she was at the top of her game, but she finished fourth in the 3,000 meters final and failed to qualify for the 1,500 meters final. In Atlanta four years later, she was favored to win gold in the 1,500-meter race, but an upset stomach kept her from competing. By the Sydney Olympics she held two World Cross Country titles, but could only manage the silver medal, finishing behind Romanian Gabriela Szabo. In Athens she qualified for the 5,000 meters final, but a bout of illness resulted in a last place finish.

What are some possible ways to deal with disappointment?

When things don’t go your way, why is it important to keep on trying?

READ

Read Jonah 4:1-4

Unbelievably, Jonah is disappointed when God convicts the Ninevites to repentance. In fact, he is so mad that he wants to die. In today’s session, we will see how God reacts to Jonah’s attitude.

DISCUSS

Jonah 4:1-4 (ESV)

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

This passage begins with Jonah’s profound displeasure and anger at God’s decision to spare Nineveh. Despite having just witnessed a miraculous act of repentance and divine mercy, Jonah’s response is one of frustration rather than rejoicing. His anger stems from a self-centered perspective—Jonah was more concerned with his own desires and expectations than with God’s overarching plan of grace and compassion. He confesses that he fled to Tarshish precisely because he knew God’s character—gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. Jonah’s reluctance to see these attributes extended to Nineveh reveals his struggle with self-righteousness and an unwillingness to embrace God’s broader vision of mercy.

Jonah’s prayer is revealing: he would rather die than live in a world where God shows mercy to those he deems unworthy. This attitude exposes the danger of allowing personal biases and self-centeredness to cloud our understanding of God’s infinite love. The LORD’s response, “Is it right for you to be angry?” challenges Jonah to reflect on his attitude. It’s a question that invites introspection, urging Jonah—and us—to consider the legitimacy of our anger and whether it aligns with God’s heart. This verse serves as a powerful reminder to guard against self-centeredness and to align our emotions and judgments with God’s boundless compassion.

When have you found yourself angry or frustrated when God's actions didn't align with your expectations? How did you reconcile those feelings with your understanding of God's character?

How does Jonah's response to God's mercy towards Nineveh challenge your perspective on forgiveness and compassion?

What steps can you take to avoid self-centeredness in your relationship with God, ensuring that your heart aligns with His desire to show mercy to all people?

Matthew 18:23-35 (ESV)

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,

and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

In this parable, Jesus illustrates the importance of extending the same mercy we have received to others. The king represents God, and the servant who owed an unpayable debt symbolizes each of us, weighed down by sin. The king’s act of forgiving the servant’s immense debt mirrors God’s grace in forgiving our sins. However, the parable takes a dark turn when the forgiven servant refuses to extend similar mercy to a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt. His refusal to forgive reveals a deep hypocrisy and self-centeredness, similar to Jonah’s reluctance to see Nineveh spared.

The king’s judgment against the unmerciful servant highlights the expectation that those who receive mercy must, in turn, show mercy to others. Just as Jonah was angry that God extended grace to Nineveh, the unmerciful servant fails to recognize the need to share the forgiveness he received. This parable emphasizes that God’s love and forgiveness are not just for us to receive but also to pass on to others. The connection between this parable and Jonah’s story lies in the recognition that self-centeredness and a lack of compassion can lead to severe spiritual consequences. We are called to reflect God’s boundless mercy in our relationships with others, avoiding the trap of withholding forgiveness out of pride or anger.

How does the parable of the unmerciful servant deepen your understanding of Jonah's reaction to God's mercy towards Nineveh?

In what ways can you ensure that the mercy and forgiveness you receive from God are reflected in your interactions with others?

What are some practical steps you can take to overcome self-centeredness and embrace a heart of compassion and forgiveness?

Luke 15:11-32 (ESV)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

The parable of the Prodigal Son offers another profound illustration of God’s endless love and compassion. The father’s response to his wayward son mirrors God’s readiness to forgive and restore

Those who repent, no matter how far they’ve strayed. The younger son’s journey from rebellion to repentance highlights the transforming power of God’s grace. However, the older brother’s reaction to his sibling’s return bears a striking resemblance to Jonah’s attitude toward Nineveh. Like Jonah, the older brother is angry and resentful when mercy is shown to

someone he feels is undeserving. His self-righteousness and sense of entitlement prevent him from rejoicing in his brother's restoration.

The father's gentle correction of the older brother invites him to share in the joy of forgiveness and restoration, much like God's question to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Both stories emphasize that God's love is not limited by human boundaries of fairness or merit. The older brother's anger, like Jonah's, reflects a self-centered view that fails to grasp the full scope of God's compassion. The father's response reminds us that God's mercy is cause for celebration, not resentment. This parable, alongside Jonah's story, calls us to align our hearts with God's expansive love, rejoicing in the grace He extends to all who turn to Him through repentance.

How does the older brother's reaction in the parable of the Prodigal Son reflect Jonah's response to God's mercy towards Nineveh?

In what ways can you cultivate a heart that rejoices in the mercy and forgiveness extended to others, even when you feel it's undeserved?

What does the father's response to both his sons teach you about God's love and how you should approach others who seek forgiveness?

LAST WORD

Jonah's anger at God's mercy towards Nineveh, like the unmerciful servant and the older brother in the parables, warns us against self-centeredness that blinds us to the depth of God's love. We are called to embrace God's boundless compassion, extending it to others with the same generosity and joy with which it has been given to us. By aligning our hearts with God's mercy, we reflect His love in our interactions with others, fostering a community marked by forgiveness and grace.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on Jonah's anger and the parables of the unmerciful servant and the prodigal son. Understand the importance of aligning your heart with God's expansive love and rejecting self-centered attitudes that hinder forgiveness.

Heart: Cultivate a heart that rejoices in God's mercy for yourself and others. Let the stories of Jonah and the parables soften your heart towards those who seek forgiveness.

Life: Live out God's compassion in your daily interactions, striving to extend His love and forgiveness to everyone, especially those who are difficult to love. Embrace the joy of sharing in God's mercy, knowing it reflects His heart for the world.

Sermon Notes

Session 9 | Jonah 4:5-10

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 11.17.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: Jonah’s experience with the vine teaches us that God’s compassion extends to all creation and that we are called to share in His concern for others. God’s challenge to Jonah reveals the importance of aligning our hearts with His, embracing His mercy, and rejecting attitudes of indifference or self-centeredness.

Head Change: Understand that God’s compassion is boundless, encompassing all of creation, and that we are called to care for others with the same concern and love that God shows.

Heart Change: Feel a deep sense of connection to God’s heart of compassion, allowing it to shape your attitudes towards others and the world around you.

Life Change: Commit to living out God’s compassion in your daily life, actively seeking to care for others, and aligning your concerns with God’s broader vision of mercy and love.

OPEN

God has given each believer a gift for the purpose of strengthening the church. What do you think your gift is and why?

Cary Weistling was a gifted artist, creating advertising posters for blockbuster movies. One Sunday, while attending church with his girlfriend, the pastor handed out blank pieces of paper. “If God’s given you a talent that you could use to help us out at church,” he said, “Write it down, including contact information, and turn it in.”

Suddenly the words “if God’s given you a talent” grabbed his attention. He had taken credit for the success he enjoyed as an artist, but now he realized that his ability as an artist was a gift from God. From that point on, the purpose of his artistic talent shifted. He began to create paintings promoting the sanctity of life, or reconciliation. When he realized that God had given him the gift, his response was to honor God with his talents. (from Focus on the Family; Lydia McMullen, Nov. 24, 2020, accessed July 5, 2024)

What are some possible consequences for failing to give God the credit for what He has done?

If you sang a solo in church, and afterward, people complimented you, how would you respond?

READ

Read Jonah 4:5-10

In today’s session, God guides Jonah to realign his priorities. We will see the object lesson God used to encourage Jonah to see things from God’s perspective.

DISCUSS

Jonah 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

After God's merciful decision to spare Nineveh, Jonah retreats outside the city, still clinging to the hope that judgment might fall. He builds a shelter and waits, perhaps expecting that the city's repentance might falter or that God might change His mind. Jonah's actions reveal a deep-seated reluctance to fully embrace God's compassion. He distances himself physically and emotionally from Nineveh, unwilling to share in the city's joy over God's mercy. Jonah's choice to sit and wait highlights a significant internal struggle—his heart remains closed off from the compassion that God has shown, preferring to nurse his disappointment rather than align with God's redemptive plan.

Jonah's attitude here is one of indifference, even as he remains focused on his own desires and expectations. This self-centered stance prevents him from celebrating the transformation of Nineveh and blinds him to the broader implications of God's mercy. Jonah's retreat to the outskirts of the city symbolizes a retreat from God's heart of compassion, challenging us to consider whether we too distance ourselves from God's work when it doesn't align with our own preferences.

When have you found yourself hoping for a different outcome than what God has chosen? How did you respond?

In what ways do you distance yourself from others when God's actions challenge your expectations or desires?

How can you ensure that your heart remains open to God's compassionate work, even when it challenges your personal feelings or expectations?

Jonah 4:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

In this passage, God continues to teach Jonah through a series of events involving a vine. God causes a leafy plant to grow quickly, providing Jonah with shade and comfort, which makes him "very happy." This brief moment of comfort reflects Jonah's attachment to his own well-being rather than to the greater good of others. However, God's lesson is not complete. The next day, God sends a worm to destroy the plant, and Jonah's comfort is stripped away. The scorching east wind and blazing sun exacerbate his discomfort, leading Jonah to despair once again.

This sequence of events underscores the transient nature of Jonah's happiness, which is tied to his immediate circumstances rather than to a deeper alignment with God's will. Jonah's reaction to the loss of the plant—wanting to die—reveals how deeply his contentment is rooted in self-interest. God's orchestration of the plant's growth and demise serves as a vivid illustration of how Jonah values temporary, personal comforts over God's eternal, compassionate purposes. Through this experience, God is teaching Jonah (and us) about the fleeting nature of self-centered concerns and the enduring significance of God's compassion.

How does Jonah’s reaction to the vine and its destruction reveal the transient nature of self-centered happiness?

What “vines” in your life might you be clinging to that prevent you from embracing God’s broader plan of compassion?

How can you shift your focus from temporary comforts to aligning with God’s eternal purposes, especially in times of discomfort or disappointment?

Jonah 4:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ 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.” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?”

In these final verses, God directly confronts Jonah’s misplaced anger and challenges his perspective. God’s question, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” mirrors His earlier question about Jonah’s anger over Nineveh. Jonah’s response—

asserting that his anger is justified—reveals the depth of his self-centeredness. He is more concerned about the loss of a plant, which he neither planted nor tended to, than he is about the fate of an entire city.

God’s gentle rebuke highlights the stark contrast between Jonah’s concern for a single plant and God’s concern for a city full of people and animals. The phrase “people who cannot tell their right hand from their left” likely refers to the spiritual ignorance of the Ninevites, underscoring their need for God’s mercy. God’s final question, “Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?” is a powerful reminder of His boundless compassion, which extends to all creation. This passage challenges us to examine our own hearts—are we more concerned with our personal comfort than with the well-being of others? God’s compassion is far-reaching, and He calls us to share in His concern for all people, rejecting attitudes of indifference or self-centeredness.

How does God’s question to Jonah challenge your own perspectives on what is truly important?

In what areas of your life might you be more concerned with personal comfort than with God’s broader work of compassion?

How can you cultivate a heart that reflects God’s concern for others, especially those who are spiritually lost or in need?

LAST WORD

Jonah's experience with the vine and God's final challenge reveal the dangers of self-centeredness and the importance of aligning our hearts with God's compassion. God's concern for Nineveh, contrasted with Jonah's concern for a mere plant, underscores the breadth of His love for all creation. We are called to embrace this compassion, rejecting attitudes that prioritize personal comfort over God's redemptive work in the world.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on Jonah's misplaced anger and God's challenge. Understand the importance of aligning your concerns with God's heart, prioritizing compassion for others over personal comfort.

Heart: Cultivate a deep connection to God's heart of compassion, allowing it to shape your attitudes towards others and the world around you.

Life: Commit to living out God's compassion daily, actively seeking to care for others, and aligning your concerns with God's broader vision of mercy and love.

Sermon Notes

Session 10 | Matthew 12:38-42

Recommended in coordination with FBCBA Sermon from 11.24.24

SESSION GOALS

Every Session has a point, a biblically rich truth that should allow us to walk away from the discussion with greater comprehension, motivation, and execution for the glory of God.

Main Idea: In this passage, Jesus addresses the Pharisees' demand for a sign, revealing their unbelief and pointing to His death, burial, and resurrection as the ultimate sign. This teaches us the importance of recognizing God's work in our lives and responding with faith rather than skepticism.

Head Change: Understand that true faith doesn't demand constant proof from God but trusts in His revealed truth.

Heart Change: Feel a deeper conviction to trust in Jesus' words and works, especially in times of doubt.

Life Change: Commit to recognizing and responding to God's presence and work in your life without requiring constant signs or wonders.

OPEN

Have you ever found yourself wanting a clear sign from God before making a decision?

What do you think drives people to ask for signs from God? Is it a lack of faith, fear, or something else?

Imagine you're at a crossroads in life, unsure of which direction to take. You wish there were a clear sign—a flashing neon arrow pointing the way. You pray for a sign, but nothing seems to happen. Frustrated, you wonder why God isn't answering your request. But then you recall the many times God has already guided you, provided for you, and shown His presence in your life. Maybe the problem isn't that God isn't giving you a sign; maybe it's that you're not recognizing the signs He's already provided.

This scenario reflects the struggle of the Pharisees in Matthew 12:38-42, where they demand a sign from Jesus, but He challenges their lack of faith and points them to the greatest sign of all—His resurrection.

READ

Read Matthew 12:38-42

DISCUSS

Matthew 12:38 (ESV)

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”

The Pharisees and scribes approached Jesus with a request that seemed simple on the surface: they wanted to see a sign. However, their request was rooted in unbelief and skepticism. Despite having witnessed or at least heard of Jesus' miracles—healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead—they still demanded more proof. This indicates that their hearts were not open to believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Their request wasn't a genuine desire to confirm their faith but rather an attempt to challenge Jesus and justify their own disbelief.

This passage reveals a deeper issue that goes beyond just asking for a sign. The Pharisees represent those who have hardened their hearts to the truth and will always find a reason to doubt no matter how much evidence they receive. This attitude is contrasted with those who, despite not seeing physical miracles, believe in Jesus based on His word and the testimony of Scripture. Jesus' response to the Pharisees is not

just a rebuke to them but a warning to all who would follow in their footsteps, demanding signs rather than trusting in the revelation already given.

Furthermore, this moment underscores a broader theme in the Gospel: that true faith is not about constantly seeking miraculous proof, but about trusting in God's character and promises. The Pharisees' demand for a sign can be seen as a symptom of spiritual blindness—a refusal to see and acknowledge the divine work already at hand. In our own lives, this challenges us to examine whether we seek after signs and wonders as a condition of our faith or are willing to trust in God even when we do not see immediate, tangible proof of His work.

Have you ever asked God for a sign? What motivated that request?

Why do you think some people struggle to believe in God without constant signs or miracles?

Matthew 12:39-40 (ESV)

³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ 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.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees is striking. He labels their generation as "evil and adulterous," a strong rebuke that points to their unfaithfulness and spiritual infidelity. The term "adulterous" here is particularly potent, symbolizing how the

people have been unfaithful to God, much like an unfaithful spouse in a marriage. Their demand for a sign is not just a matter of curiosity; it reveals a deep-seated rejection of God's revelation and a preference for their own understanding and desires. Jesus' words echo the prophets of the Old Testament who often condemned Israel for their unfaithfulness to God.

Jesus then points to "the sign of the prophet Jonah" as the only sign that will be given. This reference to Jonah serves as both a foreshadowing and a typology. Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the fish prefigure Jesus' own death, burial, and resurrection. This "sign" is the ultimate proof of Jesus' identity and mission—the victory over death and the validation of everything He taught and proclaimed. By pointing to this future event, Jesus shifts the focus from the immediate demand for miracles to the most significant event in human history: His resurrection. This is the definitive sign that validates Jesus' claims and offers hope to all who believe.

In mentioning the sign of Jonah, Jesus also highlights the gravity of His resurrection. It is not just another miracle, but the cornerstone of Christian faith. The resurrection is the event that confirms Jesus as the Son of God, conquers sin and death, and offers eternal life to all who believe. For those demanding signs, Jesus is essentially saying, "Look to the resurrection—this is the sign that matters." This challenges us to ground our faith in the truth of the resurrection rather than in the pursuit of continuous miraculous signs. The resurrection is the ultimate proof of God's power and love, and it calls for a response of faith and repentance.

What does the "sign of Jonah" mean to you in the context of Jesus' resurrection?

How does Jesus' resurrection serve as the ultimate proof of His identity and mission?

Matthew 12:41-42 (ESV)

⁴¹ 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. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

In these verses, Jesus continues His rebuke by comparing the Pharisees to two groups: the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (or Queen of Sheba). Both of these groups recognized God's work and responded appropriately. The Ninevites, who were notoriously wicked, repented at the preaching of Jonah, a prophet who was reluctant and imperfect in his mission. Despite Jonah's flaws and the brevity of his message, the people of Nineveh recognized the truth of God's warning and turned from their evil ways. This stands in stark contrast to the Pharisees, who, despite witnessing Jesus' miracles and hearing His teachings, refused to repent and believe.

The Queen of the South, a foreigner who traveled from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon, also serves as a powerful example of someone who recognized and honored God's work. She journeyed far, motivated by a deep desire for wisdom, and when she heard Solomon, she praised the God of Israel. Jesus uses her example to underscore the irony and tragedy of the Pharisees' response. Here were people from outside Israel who responded to lesser revelations with faith and repentance, while the Pharisees, who had direct access to Jesus, the embodiment of God's wisdom and power, remained unmoved.

Jesus' statement that "something greater than Jonah" and "greater than Solomon" is here is a profound declaration of His identity. He is greater than both the prophet and the king—greater in message, in power, and in authority. This declaration would have been shocking to the Pharisees, who prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture and their connection to the great figures of Israel's history. Yet, their inability to recognize and respond to Jesus exposes their spiritual blindness and hard-heartedness. This serves as a warning to us as well: if we fail to recognize and respond to Jesus, we risk missing out on the salvation and wisdom He offers.

Why do you think the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba were able to recognize God's message while the Pharisees couldn't?

How can we ensure that we are not missing God's message in our lives today?

LAST WORD

The passage in Matthew 12:38-42 reveals the dangers of demanding signs from God as a prerequisite for faith. Jesus challenges us to trust in Him based on His life, death, and resurrection—the greatest signs of all. Like the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba, we should respond to God's message with faith, recognizing that Jesus is greater than all others. Our faith should not be dependent on constant signs but rooted in the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done.

LIVE IT OUT

Head: Reflect on areas of your life where you might be demanding signs or proof from God before acting in faith. Challenge yourself to trust in His revealed truth instead.

Heart: Let the truth of Jesus' resurrection deepen your trust in Him. Meditate on the "sign of Jonah" and how it affirms Christ's power and promise.

Life: This week, act in faith in an area where you've been hesitant. Trust in God's presence and guidance without waiting for a "sign" to move forward.

Sermon Notes