



Jonah and the City Oct 22: Loving Who We Need to Love

Series Summary: The book of Jonah can feel so foreign to us. A prophet long ago sent to a faraway land was swallowed up by a whale. What could this have to do with us? Everything. Just as Jonah was, we are called to go where God calls us to, wrestle with our own sinful motives, and love difficult and even hurtful people. In this series, we will both see ourselves in Jonah's life and learn from his mistakes.

Big Idea: Loving others isn't always an easy thing. However, we cannot become consumed with ourselves to where we determine if loving our neighbor is right or wrong, or if they "deserve" love or not. We need to work towards loving the way Jesus loves us.

Schedule:

- Live teaching
- Small group

LIVE TEACHING

Series Lead in: The book of Jonah can feel so foreign to us. A prophet long ago sent to a faraway land was swallowed up by a whale. What could this have to do with us? Everything. Just as Jonah was, we are called to go where God calls us to, wrestle with our own sinful motives, and love difficult and even hurtful people. In this series, we will both see ourselves in Jonah's life and learn from his mistakes.

JONAH'S SECOND CHANCE

Quick recap: Chapter 2 ends with Jonah being upchucked out of the whale, with a second chance to follow the Lord's instruction...and a second chance at life in general.

Jonah 3:1-2 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

Jonah was getting a second chance. He was not only being forgiven of his sin but he was being reinstated for ministry.

Jonah 3:3-4 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. **4** Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Jonah has learned his lesson. He was going to obey what God had commanded him to do. He was now submitting to the will of God. However, you may have noticed that the message he was delivering was a bit...blunt to put it kindly. He essentially said in forty days you will all die. No words about repentance, definitely nothing about the grace and mercy that he himself had just described and experienced. You think he'd mention that right?

Illus: Maybe you can relate to when your parents tell you to do something, and you do, but you do it with an attitude? That is what this feels like. There is obedience, but there is not joyful obedience. It feels like an obligation.

Jonah 3:5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

And yet revival broke out. How? Because God was moving among the people. No one could get the credit but God. Jonah was no golden pastor, and yet a pagan people were repenting of their sin with an urgency that neither Jonah nor his people, Israel, were doing.

Jonah 3:6-9 (Summary) Even the leader of the people, the king, who himself was worshiped as a god by his people, was repenting of his sin and commanding his people to do likewise.

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

This was a perfect ending. Hollywood could not have written a happier ending with the credits rolling and the hero riding off into the sunset. Yet, Jonah...

Jonah 4:1-2 a But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2** He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish.

And just like that, the good time tune stopped playing. The Prophet of God, who was sent to lead the pagan nation to repentance, is furious that the pagan nation has repented.

Transition - Why could Jonah possibly be mad? Don't worry, he makes that abundantly clear.

Jonah 4:2b-3 ...I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3** Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Why was Jonah mad? **He was mad that God was compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love.** Who would ever be mad about that? Well, no one is mad when the characteristics are to their benefit. Jonah celebrated those very characteristics of God just one chapter later.

Before we condemn Jonah completely, let's be honest with ourselves. Is it not possible for the same thing to happen in our hearts? We love it when God is patient and kind towards us. **But what if God was kind and compassionate towards somebody you despised?** Maybe God somehow blessed someone in your life that left you asking, "Why, God, would you ever choose to bless them?"

Transition - In this case, God answered that very question.

Jonah 4:4 But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

In other words, is this feeling welling up within you good and right? Is this anger something that is godly? Should you be acting upon this? What's crazy is that Jonah still doesn't get it.

Jonah 4:5-11 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7** But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." **9** But God said to Jonah, "Is

it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

God had one key message for Jonah...you are not God.

1. **You are not God... and I do not answer to you.** You did not make the plant grow, and yet you are mad about what is not yours to dictate. You did not bring Nineveh to repentance, and yet you feel as if I, "God," must answer to you. You are not God!
2. **You are not God...and yet you worship yourself.** You see, what comes across as selfishness is so much more than that. This is the kind of selfishness that becomes idolatry because it is the worship of self. You are the only one that matters. When you are the only one that matters, it is impossible to selflessly love others as Jesus did.

Despite all that Jonah had witnessed God do, he could not bring himself to love who God desired him to love. Why? Because he did not understand God's abounding love for him.

This life is not about myself. It never was to begin with. Do not make this life about what God can do for me, because He has already given more than enough which is Jesus, His death & resurrection, and His grace and mercy. If we live this life thinking to ourselves "God deserves to give me ____" then we will always have an immature faith and understanding of God's love.

- This life I have is about obeying and glorifying God with all He instructs me to do. In this case to love others regardless if we think it's right or not. We shouldn't view it as an obligation, we should view it as a privilege to tell others about the grace and love that God first showed me.

Transition to Small Group: I want us to see together how understanding the depth and nature of God's love for us frees us to love who God deeply desires us to love.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What do we learn about God and His nature based on how he interacts with the Prophet Jonah throughout the book?

Leader Note: “God chooses to give Jonah a second chance at fully submitting to his will. God reasons with Jonah. He is patient with him. Why? Because that is God’s nature. As Timothy Keller put it, “God does not just accept Jonah and leave him alone. He does not allow Jonah to remain undisturbed in his foolish, wrongful attitudes and behavior patterns. God sends a storm, a fish, a plant. He commissions him again and again and in the end counsels and debates with him directly. Here we see God’s righteousness and love working together. He is both too holy and too loving to either destroy Jonah or to allow Jonah to remain as he is, and God is also too holy and too loving to allow us to remain as we are.”¹

When was a time in your life when God was patient with you? How often do you think God is patient with you?

Prodigal Son recap: The younger son runs off with his inheritance after greatly disrespecting his father. He blows all of his inheritance on wild living, and then hits rock bottom by working with pigs (thought of as very unclean animals), and has to eat the pigs’ food. He decides to go back home with his tail between his legs only to be greeted by his father with a celebratory and redemptive love. The father treats his son like royalty and throws a party for him to celebrate his return. However, the older son has a sour reaction to his father’s actions...

READ Luke 15:25-32 together as a group

What was the older son's mindset? How did he view his younger, rebellious brother?

Leader Note: The older son's language says so much about how he views his brother, “But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” Do you notice how he does not refer to him as “my brother,” but as “your son”? Even though the young prodigal son had wronged his father vastly more than he had his older brother, the older brother was the one who harbored resentment and bitterness. So much so that he no longer referred to his brother as his own. The comparison to how Jonah viewed the people

¹ Keller, Timothy. The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy (p. 132). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

of Nineveh is nearly identical. When we adopt mindsets that keep us from showing mercy to others as we have been shown mercy, we are on very dangerous ground.

How did the older brother view his relationship with his father? Specifically, why did he feel he deserved better treatment than his brother?

Do you think the older brother had any valid points? If so, what were they?

Leader Note: The older son pointed out some very valid facts. He had, in fact, remained at home and obeyed his father. Something the younger son could not claim. But the question is, why did he do it? The answer seems obvious. He felt that he had earned more of his father's favor and love through his obedience. In his eyes, he had a contractual relationship with his father. If I do "this", you will give me "this" kind of relationship. In his case, I give you obedience, so you should give me more love and blessings. But that is not the kind of relationship that God has established with us. He has established a covenant with us (Heb 9:15-17). In this covenant relationship, he has shown us immeasurable love, kindness, and mercy freely, not in response to our obedience but in spite of it. We did not earn God's love and mercy, and we can not add to it via obedience.

Do you see any similarities between the older brother in this parable and Jonah?

Leader Note: There are many valid comparisons between the two men. Some have already been mentioned in the leader notes. The one that sticks out the most is the refusal to love one's neighbor. Why did both men fall short of this biblical command? Because they did not fully understand the Love of God. We must love God and love people. But the order of those two commands matters. It is not until we fully understand how, why, and to what degree that God the Father loves that we ever stand a chance at loving our neighbor as ourselves. God's love is a perfect, eternal, and sacrificial love. Agape (uh-gah-pay) Love.

What does it look like for us to make the same mistakes? How do we tend to think the same way as the older brother?

Both the Book of Jonah and the parable we just read end on the same note. Two men angry at God are utterly alone with no clear signs of repentance. Both men were angry at God's undeserved mercy and kindness. **What must we begin to do so that we do not find ourselves in the same situation?**