

HE HAS MADE EVERY NATIONALITY

“Made in the Likeness of God”

by Daniel Davis

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Can you imagine your life without mirrors? You would never know what you look like. You would not be able to see easily if cars were coming up behind you as you took a turn or changed a lane while driving. You would never enjoy the smile of a child grasping the meaning in a reflection. Nor would you be able to laugh at a pet facing off against a fierce but familiar enemy.

Mirrors help us to get a sense of reality for places and things we otherwise could not see. Want to know if your hair is out of place? Use a mirror. The hair on the back of your head? Use two. Large mirrors are used in the Hubble Space Telescope and the new James Webb Space Telescope to help scientists and interested observers see and study stars and galaxies across the universe.

Not every mirror tells the whole truth, however. Perhaps you recall the need for the printed warning “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear,” especially if you are driving a vehicle being chased by a T-Rex. And some mirrors are intentionally altered for a fun house to skew the reflection in humorous ways. But if you want to see what is real, it is best to have a mirror that is flat, clean, smooth, and pure, not to mention aimed in the right direction.

IMAGE-BEARERS ARE MIRRORS

Mirrors in ancient times were crafted from polished metals. Not the best means for an accurate reflection. But today’s glass mirrors do an amazing job of displaying a truthful image.

Making a mirror involves a process called silvering, applying a metallic material, often aluminum, to the back of a sheet of glass.¹ Once complete, you can no longer look through the glass, but it becomes a looking glass. What was once transparent has now become reflective.

When God created human beings on day 6 of creation, He chose to make them in His image. Adam and Eve and all their descendants were to fill the earth, work it, and rule over it as God’s representatives (Gen. 1:26-28). All of humanity was designed from the beginning to reflect our Creator throughout His creation, even as that creation testifies to us about who God is (Rom. 1:20). We weren’t made to be empty, transparent windows but mirrors radiating the glory of God in the world.

But look around. Look at the people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Or better yet, look in the mirror, and what do you see reflecting back at you?

OUR REFLECTIONS ARE SKEWED

Though all human beings were made to reflect God's glory in the world, we do a very poor job of fulfilling our purpose. This is because of sin. Adam and Eve broke God's "law" in the garden of Eden and thus shattered humanity in their wake. Now we all fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), and our reflections distort the holiness of the holy God we were meant to image.

A mirror may have a solid backing material that reflects well, but if the glass that provides the structure for the reflective surface is dirty, warped, pitted, or cracked, then the image it puts off will be distorted. Similarly, we are made in the image of God, and that hasn't changed, but that image is skewed through our sinful nature and our sinful acts, whether we know it or not.

The Israelites knew of God's creation, they knew of God's law, and they knew their purpose to be a light to the world. But they chose rebellion and eventually would suffer the consequences. The Assyrians, on the other hand, didn't know their right hand from their left, meaning they were ignorant of the truth and reality of the God they were made to reflect (Jonah 4:11). Their sins caught up with them as well because the Creator God, though slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6-7), will not be mocked by His image-bearers (Gal. 6:7).

THE MINISTRY OF IMAGE-BEARING

The image a mirror is meant to reflect also can be skewed if the mirror is pointed in the wrong direction. You've likely been the victim, whether accidentally or on purpose, of a bright, directed flash of light into your eyes via a watch, a CD, a cell phone, or even a mirror. The rays of the sun catch the reflective surface and bounce into your face, temporarily scarring your vision. The purpose of our image-bearing as human beings compares well with this phenomenon.

When we have our spiritual gaze aimed upward at God, more specifically, at Christ our Savior seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-4), then the light of His perfect glory and character will more readily reflect through our words and actions in this dark world.

Jesus calls us upward
and lifts our gaze
that we should behold
Him in all His glory
and rightly reflect the
truth and reality of
the gospel.

Yet so often the mirror of our being is aimed not at Christ but at the distractions and deceptions of our gold- and silver-plated idols. This is the default state for all of humanity. Rather than look to our Creator to image Him here, we have lowered our gaze to try to see ourselves shining back at us in the idolatrous works of our hands. Then, caught in an endless reflection akin to a hall of mirrors, we become stuck, fixated on the seemingly infinite and hollow images of our sinful selves until we reap the judgment we deserve for our narcissistic pride.

But Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world as "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). He came to save us from our sin and to break us free from our self-made traps in this world. He calls us upward and lifts our gaze that we should behold Him in all His glory and rightly reflect the truth and reality of the gospel in a world that cannot distinguish its right hand from its left. As image-bearers of God, as mirrors reflecting "the light of the world" (John 8:12), let us shine forth and show all the world the glory of God in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

1. "Mirror," How Products Are Made, March 20, 2022, <http://www.madehow.com/Volume-1/Mirror.html>.



GOD'S HEART FOR THE NATIONS

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. A wayward prophet leads others to worship the Lord (Jonah 1:10-16).
2. A stubborn prophet draws others to repent to the Lord (Jonah 3:1-5).
3. A hard-hearted prophet receives compassion from the Lord (Jonah 4:5-11).

Background Passage: Jonah

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God loves all peoples and sends out His Word so that they might repent of their sin.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jonah was a prophet who rejected God's call, ran from his enemies, and eventually obeyed grudgingly. Jesus followed God's call, loved His enemies, and obeyed joyfully (Heb. 12:2). While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we were enemies who received God's grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news with everyone that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Many use the story of Jonah, a picture book favorite, as a cautionary tale of the consequences of disobedience. Yet the book of Jonah is more than a tale of a man on the run who ends up in the belly of a fish. God gave Jonah, a prophet during the rule of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC), the great honor and responsibility of declaring His words to His people. He enjoyed the role of prophet during a time of relative ease and safety. But when God called him to go and speak out against his evil enemies, Jonah bolted in an attempt to shirk the responsibility he had previously embraced.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to think about the people they love the most. Give them a moment to make a mental list. Then ask them to think about the people they have the least amount of love for, perhaps whom they even hate.

DISCUSS: **If God asked you to risk your life and sacrifice for those you love, how long would it take you to respond to God's call? How long if you were called to sacrifice for your enemies?** (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Whether for a different political party, a single spiteful neighbor, or a group of insurgents who threaten those we love, sacrificing for individuals we despise can seem like an impossible task. The prophet Jonah certainly struggled with this charge. Though there is much to learn from the negative example of this disobedient prophet, the book of Jonah primarily points us to the mercy and grace of a God who loves and pursues all people.



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POINT 1

A WAYWARD PROPHET LEADS OTHERS TO WORSHIP THE LORD (JONAH 1:10-16).

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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. **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. **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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Jonah 1:10-16** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10-12** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Instead of pointing others to the goodness of God through his **obedience**, Jonah’s selfish actions brought **confusion** to the pagan sailors.

DISCUSS: How have you seen the decisions of Christ-followers positively or negatively affect unbelievers around them? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 13-16** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Despite Jonah’s hard-heartedness, God still used him to reveal His **power** to the pagan sailors that they might **know** and **worship** Him.

TRANSITION: God can use even the most disobedient for His glory because the accomplishment of His will is not dependent on the merit of the messenger but on His goodness and power.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 10-12 / As we jump into the story of Jonah, it is tempting to point accusatory fingers at his rebellion and his choice to run from the presence of the Lord rather than obey the instructions he was given. However, it is easy to miss the depth of what God had called Jonah to do. Beyond the interruption to his current, comfy situation as a prophet in Israel who delivered a message everyone would have liked (2 Kings 14:25), he was now presented with a call to put his life on the line. Nineveh, where he was to go and “call out against it” because of their evil (Jonah 1:1-2), was a large, influential city of Assyria—an enemy of Israel. The Assyrians were a cruel people. They subjected their enemies to brutal physical punishments, such as flaying the skin of their enemies as a means of torture.¹

Under the delusion that he could successfully run from God’s call on his life, Jonah departed from Israel in the opposite direction from Nineveh and found himself in a boat on the sea in the midst of a life-threatening storm. While the pagan sailors desperately sought help from every god they could think of, the only man of God on the boat was asleep, seemingly at peace in his heart with his decisions but ignorant of the danger he had brought upon himself and others (Jonah 1:3-5).

Driven by the belief that this storm was a form of divine judgment, the sailors were in panic-mode. At first, they tried everything physical they knew to do to avoid being sunk by the storm, even throwing their cargo overboard. When this didn’t help their situation, they resorted to the casting of lots (similar in purpose to the modern-day flipping of a coin) to determine the spiritual offender. The lots fell to Jonah, who revealed that his God, “the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land,” was the source of the storm. Thus, the sailors’ worst fears were realized—the storm was indeed a means of divine punishment, not against them but for their passenger (Jonah 1:5-9).

Jonah came to the realization that his attempt to flee from God was in vain (see Ps. 139:7-12). His disobedience had caused the storm, so he reasoned his punishment and death alone would stop it. Therefore, he admitted his guilt before the sailors: While the men on the boat sought the help of their gods, Jonah was “**fleeing**” from his. But before God, Jonah continued to exhibit a glaring lack of contrition. Instead of seeing this trial as an opportunity to confess his sin to the Lord and return to his role as a mouthpiece of God, Jonah chose certain death and told the sailors to throw him overboard.

VERSES 13-16 / The sailor’s experience of the storm juxtaposed with that of the indifferent Jonah is filled with irony. As the sailors desperately prayed to any and every god they could, the one who had a special channel of communication to the Creator God was silent. While the sailors actively attempted to do right by God and avoid killing a man, Jonah passively ignored the obvious solution. The sailors frantically tried to save themselves and their passenger while Jonah withheld the truth that their only hope was in the God who saves.

At the end of all their efforts to try to save themselves, the sailors finally heeded Jonah’s advice, though they were afraid of those potential consequences as well. This time they prayed exclusively to “**the LORD**”—an act Jonah still refused to do—that they would be preserved from death in the storm and from death for consigning Jonah to death in the raging sea. And then they threw him overboard, hoping to appease God’s wrath.

What resulted as Jonah sank beneath the waves was a watery peace beyond understanding, and that scared them more than the storm had in the first place (cp. Jonah 1:5 and 16). But now they had a spiritual insight in light of Jonah’s reluctant witness—the Lord, not their gods, was in control. So in spite of Jonah, the pagan sailors worshiped the one true God.

POINT 2

A STUBBORN PROPHET DRAWS OTHERS TO REPENT TO THE LORD (JONAH 3:1-5).

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!”
5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Jonah 3:1-5** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-3A** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

God pursues sinners for their **good** and their **salvation**. He desires His people to obey and for **all** to come to repentance.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 3B-5** commentary to highlight how God desires to redeem all people through the gospel of Jesus Christ (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #47: *The Gospel:* The Bible teaches that the gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place at a specific point in **history**, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, the gospel is also the story of redemption that God has **planned** since before the foundations of the earth (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture, and which culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God’s people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict with one another, but together inspire us to a life of **devotion** and **mission**.

DISCUSS: Why might we give into the thought that some people are too far gone for God to redeem? (we think God’s mercy and grace, like ours, have limits; we have a hard time giving unlimited grace to others; we hold other people to a more strict standard than we hold ourselves; we lack or struggle with faith that God can change people’s hearts)

TRANSITION: If God can use Jonah, He can use us. Hopefully we will be obedient the first time He calls us. But even when we fail like Jonah, we will see that God is still compassionate to us because of His great mercy.

NOTES

NINEVEH

One of the greatest capitals of the Assyrian Empire, flourishing around 800-612 BC. The Ninevites were vicious people who tortured their enemies by dismemberment, skinning, and slave labor for those who survived. They were enemies to Israel and had a reputation for extreme evil.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Behind all our mission stands the unshakeable determination of God to be known throughout His whole creation as the living God.”²

—Christopher Wright

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3A / After Jonah was tossed into the sea, a great fish swallowed him up whole. What might appear to be a punishment was actually the Lord's discipline and mercy, and Jonah responded accordingly, praying and repenting. Then, after three days and nights, at the Lord's command, the fish spat him back out onto dry land (Jonah 1:17–2:10).

Back at square one, Jonah received a **“second”** summons from the Lord to **“arise,” “go,”** and **“call out.”** Jonah 3:1-2 is almost identical in wording to the Lord's first command in Jonah 1:1-2, but there is one major difference. In chapter 1, God gave Jonah the **“why”** of His command: the great evil of Nineveh now required the Lord's intervention. In chapter 3, God gave Jonah the **“how”**: he was to preach the message the Lord would provide.

One other difference is seen in verse 3—this time, Jonah obeyed the Lord. Instead of fleeing to Tarshish, Jonah went to Nineveh, which was over five hundred miles away from the coastal city of Joppa. This trip would have taken Jonah over a month,³ but with a newfound appreciation for God's presence and power, he made the trek to the city of his enemies.

God is relentless in His gracious pursuit of sinners. His heart is for His servants, be they obedient or disobedient, and for the people of this world who are lost in their sin.

VERSES 3B-5 / Nineveh was a **“great”** city, large and powerful. **“Three days' journey”** refers to the length of time it would have taken Jonah to walk around the city to proclaim God's message. Three days for Jonah to survive; three days for Jonah to suffer in obedience to a task he would rather have shirked. But it only took one day for Jonah's message to gain traction among the Ninevites.

There are many questions that arise at this point in the story. Is this all Jonah said when he preached God's message: **“Yet**

forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”? Was this the full message from God that was delivered or just a summary statement? And later we read that Nineveh repented and that God relented from the threat of disaster (Jonah 3:5-10). Did this mean God changed His mind or, even worse, lied when He had Jonah speak these words (see Num. 23:19)?

This brief record of the message may very well have been all Jonah preached. Perhaps this stubborn prophet purposely did not give the Ninevites God's full call to repentance in hopes that they would stay in their sinful state and thus incur the wrath of God.⁴ Chapter four will show that Jonah's heart was indeed this calloused toward the Ninevites. But even if these were the only words Jonah proclaimed, embedded within his short sermon was the opportunity for repentance.⁵ The forty-day time line implies an **“unless”**—Nineveh would be overthrown if they didn't repent of their evil ways. Certainly the Ninevites themselves hoped the statement included room for change, and they acted on that hope believing they had no other hope. Whether a word-for-word quote or a summary statement, Jonah's message must have been seen as a warning and not simply a prophecy.

Though the message spoke exclusively of judgment, the Ninevites believed the God behind the message and repented, as represented by the sackcloth and fasting. God's word prevailed, regardless of the motivation or the method of the stubborn prophet. Jonah approached the Ninevites with pride, prejudice, and a lack of compassion. But God's Spirit stirred the hearts of a sin-soaked people to repent and draw near to God as their only hope. No matter how far gone some people may seem, they cannot be too lost to be found by the great loving-kindness of God. And if a message of judgment accomplished such a repentance, how much more will the corresponding gospel message of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ reach the ears and hearts of sinners!

POINT 3

A HARD-HEARTED PROPHET RECEIVES COMPASSION FROM THE LORD (JONAH 4:5-11).

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. **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.” **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?”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Jonah 4:5-11** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-8** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The Lord had already used **nature** to show Jonah compassion and to **change** his heart, and He did so again with a plant as an object **lesson**.

DISCUSS: What are some difficult lessons you have had to learn from the Lord? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 12: IMAGE OF GOD** and the **VERSES 9-11** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

As much as we might care about **things**, God cares even more about **people** made in His **image** that they repent and believe in Him.

DISCUSS: How might we grow in our desire to see all people repent and believe in Jesus? (dwell on the truth that we are all made in God’s image; marvel at the undeserved mercy and grace of God that has saved us; make sure our priorities in life align with God’s; ponder the reality of God’s eternal judgment against sin and unrepentant sinners; pray for God to change our hearts to be more like His)

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COMMENTARY

VERSES 5-8 / Once again, the prophet Jonah found himself a witness to God's grace in action. The first time, Jonah was the desperate one, distressed and in need of deliverance. God miraculously saved Jonah from death in the sea, to which Jonah responded with praise and thanksgiving, noting "Salvation belongs to the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). The second time, however, Jonah's enemies were the recipients of God's grace, and the Ninevites were just as desperate for salvation from God (3:5-9). Yet instead of responding again with praise and thanksgiving, Jonah, who had recently received a salvation he didn't deserve, responded in anger that the Ninevites weren't going to get the punishment they deserved (3:10).

Understanding where things were headed with the Ninevites repenting of their evil ways, Jonah threw an angry, toddler-sized tantrum in Jonah 4:1-3. He complained about God's kindness, justified his initial flight, and then revealed that he would have rather died than see God spare the Ninevites. In response to this vile, ungodly tirade, the Lord rebuked Jonah with a simple question: "Do you do well to be angry?" (4:4). Then the Lord proceeded to show Jonah another round of compassion—this time in the form of an object lesson.

Jonah found a front-row seat outside the city to sit and pout and see if any destruction would come upon Nineveh. The hard-heartedness displayed by Jonah is profound. Instead of rejoicing over the repentance of his enemies or the mercy of God, Jonah held on to the hope that God might strike them down anyway.

While Jonah waited for a show of divine judgment to deal with the sin of his enemies, God addressed the sin of Jonah instead. The sovereign rule of God over nature is clear throughout the book of Jonah. With each "appointment," God used the physical to bring about a spiritual change. God caused the storm that would arrest Jonah's rebellion. He ordained the lots to fall on

Jonah and then calmed the storm once Jonah was thrown overboard, leading the sailors to see God's power and to worship Him with great fear. The Lord sent the fish to rescue Jonah from the depths of the sea, causing Jonah to recognize the depths of his sin and to praise God for His salvation.

Here we see God "**appointed a plant,**" "**a worm,**" and "**a scorching east wind.**" These were no accidents. They were careful, intentional acts by which God laid bare the sinful disposition of Jonah's heart. Instead of destroying the Ninevites and giving Jonah what he desired, God destroyed the plant to reveal the backwardness of Jonah's desire and his misplaced anger.

VERSES 9-11 / With the object of the plant having come and gone, now came the lesson, which began with the Lord returning to His previous question, only this time framing it in a different context. Was it right for Jonah to be angry about the plant? The prophet certainly thought so. At the end of his emotional rope, Jonah declared he was done and ready to die. Here the stubbornness, short-sightedness, and selfishness of Jonah is on full display.

God pointed out to Jonah that he cared about the plant even though he had invested nothing in its growth. Then God turned the tables: Jonah pitied the day-old plant, but God would have compassion on the people in the city of Nineveh—His image-bearers—who were praying for mercy.

In reality, Jonah was infuriated with God. The same God he claimed to follow. The same God he had prophesied for. The same God who had rescued him from death. Jonah had tightly held expectations of who God is and how He should act, but God's ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9), and He does not need our counsel (Rom. 11:33-34). God gently rebuked Jonah for his lack of compassion for his enemies and his resentment toward God. How did Jonah respond? We're not told. But more importantly, how will we respond?

MY RESPONSE

Because we were enemies who received God's grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news with everyone that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

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HEAD:

Though humankind often places people within categories of worth, God is a God of compassion for all people. It is easy to look at the wickedness of others and consider them unworthy of God's love. The reality is we are all wicked and unworthy of God's love. There is no one group of people that is more deserving of the gospel than another. Conversely, there is no type or degree of evil that excludes any sort of people from receiving the gospel if they repent and decide to trust in Jesus.

Who are some groups of people you need to see differently because God is a God of compassion?

HEART:

Jonah allowed his physical comforts and relational prejudices to take precedence over obedience. He lacked a compassion for the eternal destiny of the lost. Though our circumstances differ from Jonah's, perhaps the state of our hearts is closer to Jonah's than we would care to admit. Comfort and ease can make us forget that this world is not our home. Culture and pride can cause us to believe we are better than others. When God prompts us to cross cultural barriers and give up our comforts, how will we respond: like Jonah or like Jesus?

How will you seek to develop a compassionate heart for unbelievers in the world?

HANDS:

The work to which God called Jonah was difficult. Truthfully, it was not a task he could have taken up on his own. The work of the gospel is a supernatural work. It is a monumental task that is bigger than any one of us. However, this is God's will for us—to show compassion to all people in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He will do the necessary work within us that only He can do, which will enable us to choose obedience in this area of life.

What is one way you will show the compassion of Jesus this week?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God breaks down walls and leads His people out into the world with good news: forgiveness is possible through repentance and faith. Tribal attitudes melt away when constantly exposed to the warm embrace of our missionary God."⁶

-Trevin Wax

POINT 1: A WAYWARD PROPHET LEADS OTHERS TO WORSHIP THE LORD (JONAH 1:10-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“The verb for ‘fear’ occurs first in v. 5 of the sailors’ fear of the storm, then in v. 9 of Jonah’s claim to reverence the Lord, then in v. 10 of the sailors’ terror of the Lord, and finally here of their profound awe before the Lord (cf. Luke 8:22-25). The expression (literally) ‘feared the LORD with a great fear’ is the same as in v. 10 with the addition of ‘the LORD.’ The obvious difference is that fear for their lives had turned to submissive awe, which apparently manifested itself in some degree of repentance. These pagan sailors recognized the awesome capability of the God of Israel (cf. Isa 59:19; Mic 7:17; Zeph 2:11; Mal 1:14; 3:5) . . . While some would associate these actions on the part of the sailors with true worship of Yahweh, it is not clear whether these mariners had a conversion experience to Israel’s God. No doubt they became cognizant of the power of the Lord and learned to respect that power. Whether they went further than that we do not know. D. Stuart argues that the statement that they ‘greatly feared’ the Lord ‘would hardly mean to the ancient audience that the crew had been converted to monotheistic Yahwism. They had, however, been so convinced that Yahweh really could do “as he wanted” (v. 14) that they added Yahweh to the god(s) they already believed in.’ It is sad but true that there are some who seem to recognize the power of the Lord but refuse to receive him as Lord and Savior. It would be wonderful to know that these sailors continued in their fear of the Lord and ultimately came to ‘know’ him, but their ultimate end is unknown.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

Some of the most beautiful places are often the most dangerous. Yellowstone National Park is a telling example. Filled with stunning vistas, unique geological features, and incredible wildlife, it is indeed a wonderland, though it is also a perilous place. There are signs posted throughout the park warning of the dangers of the high cliffs, unpredictable animals, and geothermal threats (along with fines for violating the rules). Yet there are people who ignore the warnings. And when people don’t fear what is meant to be feared, trouble comes.

Though it is often seen as a negative, fear can be a healthy thing. Fear can keep people from taking unnecessary risks. When people have both a healthy fear and respect of what is right and good, it can be the very thing that saves lives. In many ways, a relationship with God starts with this healthy fear. It is a fear that recognizes the catastrophe caused by the deep sinful

EXTRA

state of all humankind. As a respect for God and His grandeur seeps into the soul, and as we recognize the absolute holiness of our Creator, the natural and right response to God is fear. This fear leads to placing faith in the only hope for salvation—the provision of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

POINT 2: A STUBBORN PROPHET DRAWS OTHERS TO REPENT TO THE LORD (JONAH 3:1-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“Jonah’s dialogue with God in the fourth chapter suggests that he may have preached this message with the secret hope that Nineveh would be destroyed. Fretheim states: ‘Jonah had just experienced the unmerited grace and goodness of God in his own life. Now he turns right around and makes it as difficult as possible for the Ninevites to experience God’s deliverance . . . a graceless message delivered by one living in the shadow of an experience of grace.’ Nevertheless, although Jonah apparently did not mention the possibility of deliverance in response to repentance, both he and his audience may have assumed it. At least his audience hoped for it. If this were not so, why had Jonah’s deity given them forty days? As Stuart explains, there was ambiguity in the message, for the forty days might be ‘simply to assure that the divine judgment was not far off.’ Also the word for ‘destroy’ . . . carries a certain vagueness, since it can mean either ‘turn’ or ‘overthrow’ . . . It can signify ‘judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart.’ In other words, Jonah’s words could mean either that in ‘forty more days Nineveh would be destroyed’ or that ‘in forty more days Nineveh would have a change of heart.’ Therefore the ambiguity in these words given by the Lord may have been what opened the door of understanding for the Ninevites and led to their positive response.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

The statue of David by Michelangelo is a masterpiece of marble. Handcrafted with careful detail, the sculpture is a well-known piece of art that is often described as a perfect one. Multitudes of eyes have seen the finished project. Many words have been written about its magnificence. Much has been stated about Michelangelo himself—his brilliance, his dedication, his attention to detail. He and he alone is credited (and rightly so) for the completion of the statue. The tools he used to accomplish this grand feat are a footnote. Though the tools are essential to the process, only in the hands of a master can they be considered part of a masterpiece.

Jonah was a tool used by God—a reluctant, pride-filled, resentful, and bigoted utensil for God’s work and purpose. God could have chosen someone besides Jonah. Yet God gave Jonah a second chance to be a part of something special. And even though Jonah was a very imperfect tool, in the hands of the Master, he was used by God, as God is able to use anything for His glory.

POINT 3: A HARD-HEARTED PROPHET RECEIVES COMPASSION FROM THE LORD (JONAH 4:5-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“The LORD God provided a vine (‘gourd’ AV). Like the great fish (1:17), the gourd is divinely commissioned to shelter Jonah, providing for him a welcome relief from the raging heat of the sun. The phrase to ease his discomfort (lit. ‘to deliver him from his evil/calamity’) may well contain a double meaning. The verb . . . ‘to deliver’ can also be read as . . . ‘to shade,’ and this is apparently how the translators of the Greek Septuagint understood the word. Furthermore, the phrase also contains the noun *rā’āh*, which is used elsewhere in Jonah to mean ‘distress’ (e.g. 1:8) or ‘wickedness’ (e.g. 1:2). Consequently, it is possible to interpret the phrase as meaning either, ‘to shade him from his distress,’ referring to the sun (cf. RSV, GNB, NIV), or, ‘to deliver him from his wickedness,’ referring to Jonah’s unjustified anger (cf. JB). Jonah’s response to the gourd is summarized in a phrase which, translated literally, reads, ‘Jonah rejoiced concerning the gourd a great rejoicing’; his mood is entirely transformed by the unexpected divine provision of shade.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

The 2008 Disney movie WALL-E follows the life of a robot trash-compactor on an abandoned, junk-filled earth. In the movie, we see humankind spending generations enjoying resort-style living, affixed in hovering lounge chairs fashioned with instant access to TV and video-chatting, as well as a constant provision of liquid food. With nothing to do but indulge themselves, entranced by continual stimulation and entrapped by their lazy lifestyle, humanity has become morbidly obese and unable to physically function.

We all enjoy and look forward to a relaxing vacation where we can get away from the daily grind. Nevertheless, a life of constant ease and comfort is not always what is best for us. When we treasure physical pleasures and freedom from hardship more than we do the presence of God and faithfulness to His plan, we miss out on the spiritual blessings of living a life of enduring value. We become a people of spiritual apathy and atrophy. In light of eternity, any comfort this world can provide is like the vine that springs up in a day and is lost in the next. However, if we can reorder our lives and put first things first—God, others, then ourselves—it will cultivate a spiritual life marked by obedience, health, and lasting purpose.

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