

Jonah | Lesson 3

Read Jonah 3:1-4.

1. God might have chosen a different prophet to go to Nineveh since Jonah had disobeyed him before, but God sent Jonah again. Was that an act of God's justice or his mercy? Why?
2. Each word the Bible uses for preaching carries its own slant. What would the word "proclaim" emphasize? Why is it important for pastors and congregations to remember that preachers are proclaimers?
3. Jonah's message was, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Is that law or gospel? Do you think that was all he preached? What happens when only law is preached? when only gospel is preached?

Jonah becomes one of numerous biblical examples of failures who were given a second chance to make good. This time he went where God sent him and preached what God sent him to say. How excited Jonah was about this turn of events remains to be seen.

Sinners see their lost condition

Read Jonah 3:5-9.

1. "The Ninevites believed God." Did they just believe their city would soon be destroyed, or did they actually come to saving faith in the one true God of Israel? Can you tell from the story? How does Matthew 12:41 help?
2. "All of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth." Do both the "greatest" and the "least" in your community repent and believe? Is the gospel more attractive to life's important or unimportant people? to the wealthy or to the poor? Why?
3. Are God's plans set so firmly that we can do nothing to change them? Or will God adjust his actions based on people's responses? See Genesis 18:22-33; Jeremiah 18:1-11.

Luther said that it's easy to know how to divide law and gospel on paper, but it's not such an easy thing in real life. What did he mean by that? What must pastors and teachers keep in mind in their sermons and classroom presentations?

The Ninevites responded to Jonah's preaching in ways neither he nor we might ever have imagined. While his contemporaries Amos, Hosea, and Micah encountered widespread apathy and rejection—among Israelites!—Jonah was "successful" among these different, unlikable foreigners.

God's forgiveness is given

Read Jonah 3:10.

1. What do you understand "compassion" to be? If you have a concordance, look for other places where God "had compassion" or Jesus "took pity" on people.
2. In Matthew 12:41 Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it." Why? Would he say the same thing about this generation in America? Why?

Can we assume that Jonah preached in an energetic, interesting way to the Ninevites? To what extent is the success of preaching based on personality of the preacher, organization of the message, style, flair for the dramatic, or being "interesting"?

God shows us that his mercy is far wider, higher, and deeper than we sometimes imagine or give him credit for. He doesn't just save people like us, that is, people from our tribe, color, ethnic background, or denominational pedigree. Are we learning to be as compassionate as God is?

Summary

Of all the successful missionary stories in or outside the Bible, Jonah must be rated at or near the top of the list. Alone, in a foreign culture, and among people who were known for their fierce warfare methods and their worship of other gods, Jonah's preaching sparked a national change of heart.