

“The Making of A Witness” // Jonah 3:1–10 // Castaway, #3

Chris choir explanation

Feb 10 & 11th; 10th anniversary. Ebenezer.

Jonah 3:1–10 [1] Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

- Aren't you grateful for 2nd chances? Some of you have been in the midst of difficulty. You wonder, “Can I come back?”
- The answer is always ‘yes,’—the word of God comes to you again, a second time.

[2] “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”

- Here's the thing about 2nd chances: God will take you right back to the place you said “no.”
- Sometimes you just want to ignore that. An irreconcilable difference you move on from. There are never irreconcilable differences with God. You were wrong. He was right.
- And God's not going to take you anywhere until you go back to the place where you said “no” to Him and say “yes.”

[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!”

- Now, get this picture... Jonah had been in the belly of the fish for 3 days with the gastric juices of this fish's stomach washing over him... he would have been bleached white! White hair. Glowing like an angel. That would have been a nice effect.
- He's got an 8-word message: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Actually, in Hebrew, 5 words: *Yode arba-eem venineveh yome nehpa-ket*

[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. [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.

- What made them believe? We don't know. It had something to do with the fact that God had sovereignly appointed this moment.
- Some historians talk about unusual astronomical activity and natural disasters that were taking place. But what is clear is that God's spirit took these 5 words and made them seem so real and urgent to these people that they repented.

[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,

- Man and beast: You say, "what had the cows done wrong?" Nothing. But you know what a cow does when it's hungry. It moos. Have you ever heard a group of cows mooing together? Loud. It contributed to this atmosphere of mourning.
- The same with sackcloth. That's not a fashion God prefers, but in those ripped clothing helped reflect an inner torment of heart.
- At the end of the message I'm going to allow you a chance to come forward again and put on sackcloth. Just kidding.

and let them call out mightily to God.

- Up until now they have boasted in being "mighty" in their army, mighty their strength, their riches. Now they are mighty in humiliation and repentance.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

[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.

- Why? Because God overflows with compassion and mercy. He never delights in judgment; He never delight in the death of the wicked; He delights in mercy.
- I love this picture of God. Give God half a chance, and He overwhelms you with mercy! Because He's like a Father.
 - (When I'm really mad at one of my kids, but I suddenly see real brokenness, repentance, not just sadness over being caught or being in trouble, my heart immediately breaks for them and goes out to them. God is like that for you.)
- If you would poke one hole in the dam of your pride He would burst through with overflowing mercy.

OK. There are a lot of different directions we could take this passage, but I want to use this passage to reflect a little on the nature of how God uses you to work in people's lives.

- You see, there are 4 big picture purposes of the book of Jonah: **(1)** One is **To show how God pursues sinners**; how He's pursuing you. We've talked about that. **(2)** A 2nd is **To contrast the difference in God's heart for lost people and ours**; Jonah is an indictment of the religious community; Jonah is Israel of His day; it's the Pharisees of Jesus' day; and most of the church is our day; **(3)** a 3rd purpose is **to give you a glimpse of the real savior, the true and better Jonah—Jesus**, who did everything that Jonah didn't do; and was thrown into the storm of God's wrath and swallowed up by the earth for 3 days *for us*; **(4)** a final purpose is **to show you how God uses His people in the world**. That's what we're going to focus on today.

God using you to bring people to Himself is what we call "evangelism." Now, I know that right there some of you who don't normally come to church say, "See, this is why I don't like to come to church, because you Christians are always talking about how to convert the rest of us." Rest assured that this makes most believers really uncomfortable, too. Most people in here understand social norms...

- **I've heard a definition of evangelism as: 2 very nervous people talking to each other**

Most of us are paralyzed when it comes to evangelism. You're like, *"I don't know where to start; I wouldn't know what to say."* You're terrified about saying something wrong, or creating some moment of incredible social awkwardness

- I have been in more socially awkward evangelism encounters than anyone in this room.
- **Me in Indo.** I'd been there 6 months and was just starting to get the basics of their language down. I was in a place where it was illegal to preach the gospel, so you couldn't show up and say you were a missionary. "They think you are a missionary"

God uses normal people to do His work. Not socially awkward people, but normal people. And you can become an effective tool for God to us, and you will, if you simply believe 2 things you see in this story. Becoming an effective witness involves believing only 2 things:

A. **"Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Jonah 2:9)**

- Jonah preached an 8-word sermon. And his heart wasn't even in it. And it wasn't even a good one. He didn't even draw the net or tell them to repent. Yet, the people responded massively in revival.

- Why? Because God had worked in their hearts.
- The Bible teaches us that God works in people to bring them repentance. That's not something we can do. He's the one that creates hunger in their hearts; He's the one who arranges circumstances so that they want to know about God; He's the one that gives them faith.
 - **1 Cor 12:3**, "No man can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit."
 - **John 1:13**, "To as many as received Him... He gave the right to become children of God—who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9**, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." "That" refers to the whole process of salvation; it's not of yourselves; Christ purchased your salvation, you didn't earn it; the faith to believe is not of yourselves, it also is the gift of God.
 - **John 6:37, 44**, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... all that the Father gives to Me will come to Me." That means people can't come unless God draws them; and, if God is drawing them, they will come.
- Now, that might make your mind hurt... and it might raise some questions, but it should also make you relax, because that means the weight is off your shoulders. It's not on you to convince them. God does most of the convincing and the persuading.
 - You can give the finest presentation of the gospel, ever, and if God is not working in their hearts, then what you've said won't have an effect. At the same time, you can give the lousiest presentation of the gospel, and God uses it.
 - Ex. Me preaching a great sermon (no response); me preaching bad sermon...
- People are not converted by our eloquent speech or the persuasive powers of the flesh, but by the power of God.
- You see, at the end of the day, we're not dealing with skeptics who need to be persuaded; bad people that need to be convinced to become good people; we are dealing with dead people who need to be raised to life. And that's something only the power of God can do.
- So, in one sense, relax... the pressure's off: it's not *on you*; salvation belongs to *whom*? Say it. ***Salvation belongs to the Lord.***

B. "Faith comes (only) by hearing" (Romans 10:17)

- God's instrument of life is His word. The word of God is not just information or commands; the word of God has a power in it; *it is a power.*

- All kinds of analogies in the Bible for this:
 - 2 Corinthians 4 says the Word of God is like the ray of the sun bringing life to the earth, and
 - 2 Timothy 3 says it is like the breath of God that creates life from nothing
 - 1 Peter 1 says it is like an imperishable seed of life that bursts into fruit in dead places.
 - Isaiah 55 says the Word is like the rain that comes down from heaven that makes the earth sprout and blossom; the Word of God is a healing rain on our hearts that brings life out of death.
- The Word of God is not only information or commands; the word of God has in itself the power for you to do those things.
 - Think of it like when Jesus looked at a lame man and said, “*Rise up and walk.*” That’s a command; but how does a lame man obey that command? I can command a lame man all day long to get up and walk and he won’t do it; but in Jesus’ words was the power to obey that command. His words had healing in them.
 - If you or me had made that command it wouldn’t have worked. Even if I’d told them eloquently or with funny illustrations that made him laugh, it wouldn’t have worked. But Jesus’ words, simple, unadorned, gave the lame man the ability to leap to his feet and run for joy.

So, here’s the important part for you:

- The word can’t do its work where people haven’t heard it. Which means that our objective is to get the word of God into people’s lives; to get them in the presence of it, because then God can do *His work*.
 - Our objective is not their salvation; only God can do that. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Our objective is to get them in the presence of the word of God; that’s it. God’s word does the work from there.
 - You say, “Well, shouldn’t our objective be their salvation?” Yeah, I understand what you mean by that, but this is where some of that unsustainable burden comes from. My objective is to get them in the presence of the word of God. (Isaiah says that God’s word will not return to him void; it will accomplish all that He has purposed for it.)

You see, God is at work all around you, like in Nineveh, but there’s a part only you can do! I think most people live with this myth that God is magically bringing people to faith in Christ and making them appear in church.

- God is at work all around you. But there’s one thing He will do only through us, and that is speak the word of God.

- Let me give you kind of a deep thought here: In Acts, the only beings who preach the gospel are humans. Acts has lots of stories about the wild, miraculous power of God. But the word of God has to be given by a human.
 - Acts 8 (Eunuch)
 - Reading a scroll
 - Teleports Philip
 - Acts 10 (Cornelius)
 - A guy seeking God. God sends an angel who basically says, “God has heard your prayers. Go find a guy named Peter and he’ll explain the gospel to you.”
 - Meanwhile, on the other side of the city, Peter’s on a rooftop praying when he slips into a trance where a sheet drops down from the sky and in it are all kinds of unclean animals (dogs, and squirrels and pigs—I call it Peter’s ‘pigs in a blanket dream’) and God’s voice says, “Peter, eat these.” And Peter’s like...
 - BTW, guess where Peter was in this story? Joppa. Where Jonah had run to, to get away from preaching to Nineveh.
 - Inbetween those is Paul, Acts 9
 - Ever think about this one? God knocks Paul, then Saul, off his horse. Why not just finish the deal there?
 - No, he sends him to Ananias to preach the gospel.

The point that is being made dramatically is that the word of God has to be spoken by a human. But God is all around you doing the rest. And if you’d just open your eyes to those 2 facts: (1) that salvation belongs to the Lord; and, (2) that faith comes only by hearing and hearing only by you; it would have the most profound effect on you and make you into a bold, confident and effective evangelist.

- Ivan: “and then, all the power of the HS left me, at that moment.” Melanoma. God is screaming at you! God is working. Probably doing more than you realize.
- I’ve had more cases than I could tell you where I started sharing Christ with one person only to end up sharing with another.
 - Bus trip... sitting next to a person. Girl behind me with tears in her eyes. “That was awesome.”
 - I call that “Ricochet evangelism,” where the word of God bounces off one hard hart onto another more receptive one.

If you get this, it should lead you to do two things:

1. Get the word of God into people's hands

- I'll give you a really simple idea to help you with this. Make for them a list of verses—some of your favorite ones; ones about salvation—ones we are giving you in this study—give them a list of these verses or their references; ask them to read them (a few a day over the course of a couple of weeks); ask them to reflect on them; to **write out** in a few sentences what they see as the main thought, and then, in a sentence or two, what it means to them; then arrange to get back together in a week or so to discuss. Get them in the presence of the word of God, and let God's word do the work.
 - BTW, I'm not talking about impersonal tracts, but in the context of a personal relationship you giving to people the word of God, and then being there to be their guide in it. That's what you see in Acts.
 - I'll make 2–3 pre-done lists of verses available on my blog and on the Equip site this week for you to use. Just the other day one of our pastoral team members had a friend who received Christ after 3 weeks of reading through these passages and answering the questions with them.¹
 - Get them in the Bible. When I was in Indo... (vs. Bruce's approach)
 - Don't count your win as when they trust Christ; count your win by getting them in the presence of God's word.
- Here's one more thing on this: Bring them to church. Take them out afterward. One of my goals in here is to raise questions that you can answer. You can hear it if you listen for it; I do it every week.

So if you understand that A. Salvation belongs to God; and B. Faith only comes by hearing, that will lead you, first, to get the word of God into people's hands. Jonah with all his failings and his ridiculous hypocrisies did that, and God used it amazingly.

The 2nd thing that understanding those 2 things should lead you to do is

2. Pray like crazy

- If salvation belongs to God, prayer, asking God to do what only He can do, should be our greatest resource.
- Now, here, Jonah is not an example of this... Jonah wasn't praying for the Ninevites' salvation... in fact, he was praying against it.

¹ http://www.jdgrear.com/my_weblog/2011/09/ruperts-30-ways.html

- In chapter 4 you'll see he was like, "God, I'm going to preach this message. Please help everyone to ignore it and close their hearts to my message."
- Jonah wasn't praying for the Ninevites, but Jesus was. What I thought of this week was Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them." Forgive the Ninevites for what they've done. And God granted it. John Stott points out that the Greek there means "continual action." Jesus repeated that over and over.
- Jesus was continually praying for lost people. When you pray, you are simply joining your prayers to His.
- BTW, those prayers Jesus prayed on the cross were *for you, too*. And that should inspire your prayers for Nineveh!
- If you understand that salvation belongs to God, then you'll pray like crazy. If you understand that Jesus prayed for you when you were His enemy, that will move you to pray.
- So, how many people are you praying for right now to be brought into the kingdom?
- ***Here's a question: If God answered, in one fell swoop, every prayer you prayed last week, would anybody new be in the kingdom?***
- If you don't have anybody, I would ask, "Do you understand the gospel at all?" How could you understand the gospel, of what Jesus has done for you, and what He's offered to everybody, and not pray like crazy?

My whole point is that God is at work all around you; God wanted to, and could, save the Ninevites. The obstacle was Jonah. God wants to, and could, save the people around you. For many of us, the obstacle is us. We've never shown up to give the word of God to them.

But before I close, there's one "objection" to this that I want to deal with... because some of you have the opposite problem. You're like, "Well, I've been giving this person the word; they are totally closed; nobody's listening to me. What does that mean?"

When you have a time of fruitlessness in your life, there are three possible responses:

- One is **a. self-doubt (bad!)**
 - There's something wrong with you, and your Christianity, and something God is mightily displeased with in you and that's why you can't be fruitful.
 - Ever felt that? I have. I've had times where I thought, "I'm spiritually sterile."
 - Of course. The gospel is that something was wrong with you and you were spiritually sterile and God was mightily displeased with you. But God gives His grace to those who acknowledge that.

- So of course you are spiritually impotent; that's Gospel 101; but the gospel is that for those who embrace that God gives them His power.
- In fact, only those who know they are spiritually sterile will have access to the mighty power of God; those who believe they have internal spiritual power will end up impotent.
- The other thing a lack of fruit can lead you to do is to **b. make more "demands" on God's grace (good!)**
 - Realize you may be uncomfortable with that word 'demand,' but I use it intentionally. Some of the greatest movements of God came from a bold, presumption on God's grace. Somebody praying, "God, why won't you do it here?"
 - Spurgeon: Don't you care?
 - Jesus said the kingdom of heaven would be taken by force.
 - Think:
 - Jacob: wrestling.
 - Moses, won't go up without you.
 - Luke 8:44, hem of his garment
 - Mark 7, woman who boldly asked Jesus
 - Luke 18: Jesus compares prayer to an annoying widow who won't let the judge go
 - Tony Evans in SC for an outdoor evangelistic meeting: As the sky grew darker and darker, the threat of cancellation was a valid possibility. A group of preachers and other church leaders decided to gather for a prayer meeting. Evans noted that all the preachers prayed what many would consider safe prayers—ones quite undemanding of God. Then, a woman named Linda spoke up, asking if she could pray. Linda's prayer went something like this: *"Lord, thousands have gathered to hear the Good News about your Son. It would be a shame on your name for us to have all these unbelievers go without the gospel when you control the weather, and you don't stop it. In the name of Jesus Christ, address this storm!"* And so ended the prayer meeting. Everyone took their places under the dark, threatening sky. The leader of the crusade told the people, "We'll go as long as we can." Umbrellas sprouted up among the crowd. A man sitting next to Linda opened his umbrella and offered to shield her as well. Linda refused. Evans says he and his wife watched as the rain clouds came up to the stadium and then split in two. The storm rained on both sides of the stadium and came back together on the other side. All of those gathered for the crusade stayed dry. As Evans points out: "How did Linda get what the preachers didn't? She had the boldness, the shameless audacity, to ask."
- Prayer, you see, is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of his willingness.

- The floods of salvation comes when you presume upon on the compassion of God; when you hold up God's compassion in front of His face;
- We are a Kingdom of priests.
- **c. wait upon God (good!)**
 - Some of the greatest movements of God happened after someone labored for years with no fruit. A. Judson, 7 years before 1st Burma convert; everything went wrong; then, they said, conversions came like rain.
 - Don't give up. **There's nothing wrong with you the gospel doesn't address** (in Christ, there is nothing you could do that would make God love, approve of, or be able to use you more; **keep holding up God's compassion in front of His face and making demands on it; and wait, wait upon God.**

Conclusion:

The bottom line is this:

- Jonah is what stood in the way of Nineveh's forgiveness. Their sin wasn't the obstacle. Jonah's failure to get them the word of God was.
- I told you **Jonah 2:8** was the key verse in Jonah. *Those who cling to worthless idols...* Here's the double-tragedy from that verse:
 - those who cling to worthless idols forfeit not only their own grace, but the grace God wants to extend to others as well.
- Are you keeping people from experiencing the grace that could be theirs by your failure to pray for them and get the word of God to them?