

You know him as the one swallowed by the big fish. You might know him as the one who ran away from God. You may even know him as the one thrown over the side of a ship to keep it from sinking. There was one reason why all these things happened to Jonah, he didn't want to preach God's Word to Nineveh.

Nineveh was a capital city of maybe 500,000 people. It was smaller than Oklahoma City, but much bigger than many cities of its day. It was the London or New York of its day. Nineveh was powerful in the world, and that brought money, trade, and of course problems. And the sins proved it. Prostitution, greed, idol worship all were just a few of the sins prevalent in Nineveh. It doesn't sound all that different from cities of today. No city deserved destruction from an angry God more than Nineveh.

Jonah didn't want to go. He knew Nineveh didn't deserve to hear God's Word because of how sinful they were. So when God gave him the directive, Jonah ran the other way. When God had him swallowed in the belly of a great fish, Jonah got some sense. We pick up the story in the first lesson with Jonah figuring disobedience of God's command hadn't worked, perhaps obedience would be better. Jonah and Nineveh's story provides us with the understanding that...

**God's Word works true repentance
Brought through a sinful man
Pleasing to God**

Piece of advice for the kids here this morning, don't try and outwit your parents. You won't. If you're asked to mow the lawn or dust the house, do it. Waiting to see if they forget, or ignoring the order to see what they'll do isn't smart. You'll just end up doing it plus they'll be disappointed with you for not listening. Jonah tried it with God and failed. But God isn't like your parents. God didn't show any sign that he was disappointed. **"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."** Jonah received the same command as before. God's mission hadn't changed. God was going after Nineveh and he would do it through a sinful man.

It might have been twenty five days of walking for Jonah to get to Nineveh. Each day he had to think about what he was going to do. He would preach to the people of Nineveh a message of condemnation. **"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."** One preacher, 500,000 residents, a message of doom. Nineveh was being held accountable for its sins. This Jonah liked. Destruction was in store for Nineveh if they didn't change drastically. Each one of the residents of that large city was facing eternal damnation and they didn't even know it. Now because of Jonah's preaching they couldn't say they didn't know.

After John was put in prison Jesus went out and started preaching his message. Did you hear it, **"The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."** Repent is a confrontational word. It means I look you right in the eye and tell you you're going the wrong way. We don't like it when people stand up to us and tell us we're in the wrong. Late partying can lead to drunkenness and sexual temptations. Parental authority isn't an excuse to verbally or mentally abuse your child. Financial freedom isn't a reason to spend foolishly gambling. Because of these and your many other sins you're facing eternal damnation. Repent, or you will be destroyed.

Even though Jonah's words were harsh, this stranger had no real power over the residents of Nineveh. His tough message of condemnation was really God's Word confronting them. The powerful Word of God came not just with the confrontational law but with the gospel. We don't necessarily have the entire message Jonah preached. But even in the little bit we do have there's a bit of gospel. The people had forty more days. God wasn't going to judge them immediately. There was a time of grace; a time where they could change and demonstrate to God that things would be different. God graciously allowed them more time to repent. It was the gospel of God's Word brought through Jonah.

God's Word to you is not just a condemning message over your sins. It's a message about good news. Good news about the one who spent forty days in the desert fighting off Satan's temptations and never once flinching or sinning. The one who spent hours in the garden of Gethsemane praying that he be given strength to endure for you the cup of suffering he was about to drink. The one who spent three hours hanging on the cross in darkness because he was carrying your sins. He carried your drunkenness, excuses, and foolish spending. He carried every one of your sins. Jesus is God's final Word of good news. Taking the punishment you deserved and willingly giving you his grace. That's the gospel of Jesus in God's Word.

They were given forty days to repent, they needed just one. The message of Jonah to the Ninevites so impacted them things changed almost immediately. Not for just a few, but for the entire city. One by one they spread the word. One by one they repented of their sins. Guilt was not in question; it's why they put on the sackcloth and ashes. In their sorrow over sin they hoped it wasn't too late for God to forgive them. **"The Ninevites believed God."** Not Jonah, not themselves, but God. They knew from Jonah's message God had forgiven them and they believed. God's Word then brought about God pleasing actions.

It's one of the greatest miracles in all of Scripture. A city of potentially 500,000 and every one of them from the greatest down to the least, from the king down to the peasant beggar, repented of sin and changed their life. Changed it right around. Was it their own doing? No it was the power of God's Word. What else could explain people turning from their evil ways? What else could explain God's decision? **"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."** They repented in full and God acted accordingly. They were sorry for their sins against God and against others. They turned to God for forgiveness giving up any hope they could save themselves. God saw what was in their hearts. He saw their trust in his mercy based on his promises of a Messiah.

If all you do is go around saying sorry for the gross and terrible things you do all day it's not repentance. Simply doing something wrong to someone and then saying your sorry isn't enough. Even if you covered yourself in ashes and ratty clothes to show how sorry you are it wouldn't be enough. That's only half of true repentance. You can't work true repentance in yourself. You can't do what's God pleasing alone. You need the power of God's Word. You need the promises of the Savior. You need the mercy God offers you in Christ. You need these as the backbone of a change that starts deep in your heart worked by God alone. True repentance isn't just being sorry for sins but it's also turning to Christ for forgiveness. That only happens in faith and faith is only something that comes from God. So true repentance is worked by God in you.

True repentance will mean a change takes place. Instead of doing the sinful things to others and then saying you're sorry and moving on, you'll strive to not do the sinful things in the first place. You'll seek to have greater control over your actions and words. You'll work harder to demonstrate love to others even if they don't show love back. You'll work to strengthen your relationships and grow in your knowledge of God's Word. The more you grow in God's Word the stronger everything else will be. These God pleasing actions are only worked through the true repentance God's Word brings about.

It doesn't matter if the Word of God is acting on 500,000 souls in a large city like Nineveh or one soul inside of you, the power of that Word is on display. The law cuts through the hardness of a sinful heart that doesn't want to hear what it's doing wrong. The gospel of Christ is applied to work faith in the heart to trust the promises of God. The power of the Word of God to work true and lasting repentance is a miracle when it happens to a whole city and when it happens in your heart. And it has by the powerful Word of God and the saving message of Christ Jesus.