

## **“One Greater than Jonah”** (Jonah 2:10-4:2)(1.2.22)

Jonah 2:10–4:2 (NIV84)

<sup>10</sup>And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

**3** Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup>“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

<sup>3</sup>Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. <sup>4</sup>On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” <sup>5</sup>The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

<sup>6</sup>When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup>Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup>But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up

their evil ways and their violence.<sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

<sup>10</sup> 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.

### *Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion*

**4** But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.<sup>2</sup> He prayed to the Lord, “O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

## **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“One Greater than Jonah”**

INTRODUCTION:

On Friday, I received this article from Church Leaders.com. The title is “7 Excuses for Not Doing What God Calls Us to Do” By [Ron Edmondson](#).” I had already finished my studying and notes for this Book of Jonah and had begun to piece together

this message. It was perfect timing because Jonah did not want to do what the Lord had commanded him to do. Ron Edmondson wrote:

“ There’s always an excuse if we’re looking for one for when God calls us.

I’ve made so many excuses in my life. For years I may have sensed God was calling me into [vocational ministry](#), but I knew I had to provide for my family. Also, I would be leading with the limps of previous failures—how and why would God use me? I didn’t have the most pastoral qualities either. For example, I’m far more of an organizational developer than I am a caregiver for the sick. There were a dozen others. If anyone had an encouragement for me to be in ministry—and I received lots—I had an excuse why it wasn’t a good idea.

Even when we are certain God has called us to something, we will stall because an excuse is always near. But when God calls, we need to listen.

And, most excuses seem reasonable at first glance. [Common sense](#) even. Here they are:

1. I can’t! 2. I don’t know how! 3. I don’t have time! 4. I’m all alone! 5. I’m afraid! 6. I can’t afford it! {Edmondson explored each of these

excuses and gave biblical examples to demonstrate: Esther, Elijah, Noah, Gideon, and Moses.}

#7. I won't!

This may be the boldest excuse. With this excuse you simply refuse. You may disguise it lots of ways, but the fact is you're doing things your way—instead of God's way. You can combine all the other excuses here, because you won't even give it a try. In fact, if the truth is known, you'd rather run some more. I did this one for years. (**How did this excuse work for Jonah?**)

There will always be an excuse not to follow the dreams God lays on your heart. Obstacles in life are plentiful. You can keep making excuses, or you can address them one excuse at a time. The one who achieves most is often the one most willing to overcome excuses.

**What excuse are you using to stall on God's plan?"**

BODY:

Yes, Jonah said, "I won't." But why? We find the answer in chapter 4 verse 2: "He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to

Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

Jonah had conflicting priorities: **Country or Creator**. At one time, Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. They were a ruthless conquering army and God had used them to discipline Israel for Israel’s failure to remain true to the Lord Almighty. So naturally, Israel saw Nineveh as the evil empire.

At first glance you might think that Jonah would have welcomed God’s commission in the opening two verses of this account: Jonah 1:1–2 (NIV84)<sup>1</sup> The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:<sup>2</sup> “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

So, Jonah confesses in the fourth chapter that he knows the character of our compassionate God. He was afraid of the very thing that happened. Jonah wanted to see Nineveh **destroyed not restored**. Unfortunately, he did not share the gracious heart of his God – slow to anger and abounding in love.

Not only did Jonah know this from the beginning, the sovereign God of love gave Jonah a personal demonstration. Even though Jonah knew better; even though he openly defied God; even though he

tried to escape God; our Lord saved Jonah. The Lord our God is a God of second chances... and more.

Have you ever been given a second chance? I know that I have. In a sense, we embrace that need for a second chance every New Year as we make our resolutions: a fresh start; a chance to change; an opportunity to be who God created us to be. Because our Bible is about real people, we see second chances abounding: Moses, David, Peter, Paul, Israel, Jonah, and even wicked Nineveh.

Too often, God's Chosen People have forgotten two critical things. First, The Lord said to Abraham, Genesis 12:2–3 (NIV84)

<sup>2</sup> “I will make you into a great nation  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and **you will be a blessing.**

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and **all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”**

They forget that the Chosen People will be used by God to bless ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH. Have we forgotten?

Second, they forget what God has done for them personally. When we truly appreciate what the Lord Jesus has done for us, we realize the love and compassion that we owe those around us.

Our Call to Worship today is a portion of Jonah chapter two, when he prays while inside the great fish. There is no doubt that Jonah will die there if the Lord does not intervene. Jonah calls it "the depths of the grave (Sheol)." All through Jonah's prayer, he is quoting scripture. Jonah knows God's word and God's nature and still he rebels against the mission God gave him.

We read this and we wonder how is it possible. When we read our Bibles, we see that Jonah isn't the only one. When we look at churches throughout history and church people today, we see that Jonah isn't the only one. If we are honest, when we look at our own lives, our own walk, or swim, with God, we see Jonah isn't the only one. Yes, our God is gracious, compassionate, and loving.

The Lord hears Jonah's prayer and caused the great fish to vomit Jonah out upon the dry land. Think about the imagery. It is a dramatic picture.

Note that in God's sovereignty, Jonah ends up on dry land. Can you imagine how terrible an experience Jonah went through? Sometimes it takes severe circumstances of correction to bring someone to their senses. Now, Jonah was ready to obey the Lord.

If you ask, "What was the great miracle in the story of Jonah?" Most people will talk about Jonah surviving being swallowed by the whale or great fish. I tell you, the great miracle was the greatest recorded revival recorded in human history. It is off the scale, superseding even Pentecost many times over.

Nineveh is described as a great city multiple times and even an exceedingly great city. It was large geographically, seemingly a three-day journey across. There was also a large population of at least 120,000 people. And, don't forget all the cattle.

Finally, Jonah is preaching, proclaiming God's message to Nineveh: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned (or overthrown)." Some scholars and preachers speculate that Jonah must have preached more than those few words. Logically, he must have explained things, he must have told more about God.



I agree with the other scholars and preachers. It would have been easy enough to indicate that a "fuller message" was given, but the text is silent on this. Then consider that Almighty God could execute the miraculous with the one word sermon, "Repent!" In support of this argument, I also offer up the response of the Ninevites actually recorded: **They believed God.** Not, they believed Jonah. They believed God – the Lord Jehovah is the primary actor.

There are some scholars that think Jonah's appearance may have been striking. There have been anecdotal reports of men that have been rescued from inside of a whale. The reports in one case said that all the man's hair on his whole body was gone. His skin was completely bleached due to the high temperatures and acidic environment inside the whale's stomach.

This Jewish foreigner would have certainly stood out in a crowd. "Hey Jonah, what happened to you?" "Let me tell you my story," Jonah might reply. "I ran from God. He brought a terrible storm against me. I was swallowed by a great fish. I prayed. God showed mercy and rescued me from the fate I deserved."

The Revival started with the people. Then it reached the king in the palace. With the sanction

and endorsement of the recognized authority, the groundswell continued to grow. The city became unified in their fasting and mourning their sin. Even the animals were wearing signs of repentance: sackcloth and ashes. They didn't know Yahweh, Jonah's God, in the way that Jonah did. The king of Nineveh responded, "Who knows, perhaps, God may spare us." They understood their sin, wickedness, and violence offended the Supreme Being, but how and why now? The Spirit of God must have moved mightily.

After all Jonah had been through, you would have thought that he would have been ecstatic over the results. Unfortunately not. If you read the rest of chapter four, you will see that Almighty God continued to work on Jonah's heart. His gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity, demonstrated His longsuffering.

We are quick to judge Jonah; but, maybe we should do some introspection. How often have you and I failed to be grateful? We are quick to complain, but slow to thank God. We see our enemies good fortune and we steam. When those who have mistreated us suffer, we enjoy a level of satisfaction.

It seems highly likely that Jonah did repent and come into a proper relationship with his loving God. Certainly, if Jonah was the author of the book, his telling of it speaks of humility as he exposed all of his warts. Another compelling argument is that Jesus commended Jonah, which also validated the Old Testament scriptures.

Matthew 12:38–41 (NIV84) *The Sign of Jonah*

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”

<sup>39</sup> He answered, “**A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.** <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, **and now one greater than Jonah is here.**”

Jesus himself, is saying that Jonah was a type of Christ. In chapter one of Jonah, in the midst of a great storm, the captain finds him asleep in the bottom of the ship. That should remind you of the

disciples waking up Jesus because they feared the storm would capsize their boat.

Jesus parallels His time in the tomb to Jonah's in the belly of the great fish. Obviously, this speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection. And, it is our great hope. Of course by hope, I use the biblical definition: "The confidence that, by integrating God's [redemptive](#) acts in the past with trusting human responses in the present, the faithful will experience the fullness of God's goodness both in the present and in the future." Jesus' resurrection was the sign that led the fledgling Christian Church.

Then Jesus goes on to say that the Jews who did not receive Him are condemned by the Ninevites that turned to God in response to Jonah's preaching. Jesus had done many miracles that were widely proclaimed and demonstrated His Messiahship. But to the hardened heart, there is never enough proof.

Jesus started His mission with a short exhortation just like Jonah: Mark 1:15 (NIV84) "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus was on a rescue mission: John 3:16-18 (NIV84)

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall

not perish but have eternal life.<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

## CONCLUSION:

Today is Epiphany. The early Church's celebration of Epiphany predated the celebration of Christmas. In short, it celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the world. That is the true significance of the arrival of the Magi to visit Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. They brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the greatest gift ever given.

The angel had proclaimed to the lowly shepherds working in the fields at night, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for **all the people**.<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.<sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The Christ came **for all people**. We cannot keep this good news to ourselves. Every follower of Jesus has been called by God to go to Nineveh. Why? Because we know that our God is a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and

abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Though it is a mystery, the Lord Jesus also appears to us in the celebration of Holy Communion. Emmanuel, God with us. Let us prepare our hearts. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.