

The Greatest Story (Part 34):

A Love For The Lost

Jonah

Memory Verses: Matthew 12:41

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

I remember being a very young and new believer sitting next to a young boy on the school bus and remember God distinctly asking me to share the Gospel with him. Now as a young man and a young believer I knew that I didn't have all of the right lingo, but I knew that God had saved me and that he wanted me to tell others of his salvation. Right there in that school bus in 1989 I was able to lead my first person to Christ.

I also remember God very specifically asking me to share the Gospel with the guy who was installing my storm door and I remember being frozen in fear and refusing to step out in boldness to answer the Lord's call for me to share the Gospel.

Sometimes God calls us to share the Gospel and it's easy, and sometimes God calls us to share the Gospel and it's not so easy at all. Sometimes we readily answer the call to evangelize and sometimes we run away from that responsibility as fast as we can.

What makes the difference? What variables play into whether we answer the call to share the Gospel or not? Today I want to submit that our desire to share the Gospel or refrain from sharing the Gospel is primarily based upon who we love the most; Christ & Others, or ourselves. If we love ourselves the most then there will be times when we will refuse to share the Gospel because it will make us feel uncomfortable, or it will cause us to sacrifice our own desires. If we love Christ and others the most; more than we love ourselves, then we will be able to look past our indifference, persecution, inconvenience, roadblocks, and excuses and do what must be done for the Glory of God.

So let me just ask the big question here at the start; Do you love Christ and Others more than you love yourself? This question is easy to answer... examine your life. If your love for Christ and Others outweighs your love of self then you will answer the call to share the Gospel. If your love for your self outweighs your love for Christ and others then you will refrain from answering that call. **The Easiest Way To Recognize Whether You Love Christ & Others More Than Yourself Is How Easy It Is For You To Share The Gospel With The Lost.**

This morning I want us to look at a guy in the Bible who struggled with this just as much as any of us do; Jonah. And as we read through

his book this morning I want us to see some of the scenarios that can challenge our love for Christ & others and truly reveal to us if our love for ourselves outweighs our responsibility to share the Gospel with those who don't know Christ. Then I want us to look to a strategy that we've been talking about a lot lately and see how we can share the Gospel to the lost people that we love.

So go ahead and turn with me to the book of **Jonah** and let's read the entire book starting in chapter 1.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want us to notice is that... **A Love For Christ & Others Supersedes Prejudice.** If you look again at **4:2** you will see that the main reason that Jonah fled to Tarshish instead of obeying the Lord and taking the Gospel to Nineveh was because of a strong prejudice against the Ninevites. He truly didn't want God to forgive them and relent from his punishment because he had already pre-judged the Ninevites. In fact that is exactly what prejudice is... it is pre-judging someone without true factual cause. Now you may say that Jonah had pre-judged the Ninevites correctly; they were an evil people who were deserving of the wrath of God; and all of that is true, but I want you to notice something else. What Jonah had failed to realize is that we are all evil and we all deserve the judgement of God. To say that someone deserves the wrath of God while others don't is a false or undeserved prejudice.

It was also correct for Jonah to assume the mercy and love of God which would redeem Nineveh if they repented, but the fact that he saw this as unfair was also evidence of the shortsighted selfishness of the prophet. Yes it is unfair that God would forgive and have mercy on evil people like the Ninevites, but it is unfair that God would forgive any of us for we have all sinned and we have all fallen short of God's standard and we all deserve hell. It is this great mercy which says I will spare you from what you deserve and let the injustice be against me; God rather than justice be on you; mankind.

The point is... Jonah didn't see the Ninevites as equals. In his eyes they were not equally guilty of sin, they were way more guilty. And, in his eyes they were way less worthy of God's forgiveness and mercy than he was. And this is simply not the case. Jonah was prejudiced. And this isn't something that just Jonah struggled with. This is something that all of humanity struggles with, and many of us in our culture have struggled with. We often struggle to see people of color, or people from a different social class, or people from a different country or culture, or even people of a different gender as equals.

And of course we know that this is wrong and that this should never be because Christ sees us all on the same plane; he only sees two types of

people; those who have believed on him and are covered by his blood and those who have not believed and stand in danger of his wrath. You see; Christ died specifically to unite us all under one banner... the banner of salvation through faith in Him. In doing so he had destroyed all other prejudicial barriers. He so loved the world that he gave his life for them. Get this... the son of God; God himself, came to humans breaking the holy barrier. He came to a people completely and utterly different than he was breaking the cultural barrier. As a man he would spend much of his ministry counseling and caring for women, like the woman at the well and Mary Magdalene, breaking the gender barrier. As a Jew he served Samaritans, healed Romans, and came to save all Gentiles, breaking the racial barrier. And as a poor working class carpenter he led rich and poor alike breaking social and financial barriers. With Christ there was no prejudice... and there can be no prejudice with us either. **Christ's love for others has shattered all prejudicial barriers... our love for Christ and other's must do the same.** If you love Christ and you love others you will not allow selfish prejudicial barriers to keep you from sharing the Gospel with them... you can't! **The Easiest Way To Recognize Whether You Love Christ & Others More Than Yourself Is How Easy It Is For You To Share The Gospel With The Lost.**

The next thing you need to see here is that... **A Love For Christ & Others Supersedes Personal Comfort.** Look again at **4:5-11**. Here we see a very strange ending to this story. There is no real closure here. God see's that Jonah, though obedient to go to Nineveh, still is selfish and unloving towards the Ninevites. So God causes a plant to grow and provide Jonah with a shade for his comfort. But, then God causes the plant to die... and when this happens Jonah is so distraught that he wants to die. Jonah just sounds like a big selfish cry baby if you ask me. All Jonah was concerned with was his comfort. It was comfortable to go to Tarshish rather than Nineveh. It was comfortable laying down in the belly of that ship sleeping while everyone else was fearing for their lives. And it sure was comfortable sleeping under the shade of that tree. God if you would just let me be comfortable.

But this life is not about us being comfortable. This life is about doing whatever it takes to finish the mission of bringing God glory in this world. If you haven't figured that out yet you are still being misguided. Being a Christian isn't about being comfortable; it's not a vacation or holiday – its a war. Which means that as a believer you aren't a tourist, you are a soldier. Which means that you aren't in the business of recreation, you are in the business of recruitment. You aren't here for you... you are here for Him. Way too many so called believers treat Christianity like it's all about them... but until we take our eyes of ourselves we will never be effective at actually being followers of Christ;

we will merely be effective at being followers of ourselves.

Look at how this played out with Jonah. Jonah was so selfish that he would rather die than see the Ninevites be redeemed. Jonah was so selfish that he'd rather die than be uncomfortable at all. God looks at Jonah like a parent looking at a spoiled child and says; kid... you are more angry over your discomfort from the heat than you are at the fact that these people are destined for hell without my salvation. This is the epitome of selfishness. And the point is simple... if you are ever going to reach the lost you must quit pursuing comfort.

Yes, It's uncomfortable to share a controversial message. We are afraid that we may be rejected, or that we may not say the right things, or that we may lose friendships or reputation. But, a love for the lost has to overcome your discomfort of reaching them. You have to become more uncomfortable with people going to hell than you are about anything else. In other words... **sharing the Gospel becomes more comfortable when the idea of our friends going to hell discomforts us more.**

The last thing I want us to notice here is that God said to Jonah there were 120,000 people in Nineveh who were lost. That 120,000 people's lives were on the line and Jonah needed to wake up. God is saying the same thing to us... except he's telling us that there are over 4 Billion people world wide who's lives are on the line and those include your neighbors, your co-workers, your family members, and your friends... and if they are going to be reached you need to wake up. **The Easiest Way To Recognize Whether You Love Christ & Others More Than Yourself Is How Easy It Is For You To Share The Gospel With The Lost.**

Application (Resolution, You)

So how does this apply to us today? What can we do? Well, I think we should adopt a motto for our transition time as a church. We've talked about it a little bit so far but this morning I want us to formally launch this spiritual campaign. Each One Reach One. **A Love For Christ & Others Says I Can Reach One.** Yes, I am asking you to become uncomfortable today. We're asking you to become uncomfortable for the sake of reaching people for Christ. But we aren't asking you to reach 30 or 40 people. We aren't asking you to start a new awakening at your school or office. We aren't asking you to become the next Billy Graham or D.L. Moody. All we are asking is that if you truly love Christ and if you truly love others... step out of your comfort zone and just reach one! Step 1: commit to the Lord that you are willing to step out of your comfort zone and reach one person with the Gospel this year. Step 2: start praying for God to reveal to you who that one person is if you haven't done so already. Step 3: once you know who your one is... figure out how to begin a regular relationship with them where you have the opportunity for real conversations. Step 4: once you have had

a chance to have real conversations you can start a Bible study with them, go over a Christian book with them. Step 5: share the Gospel and invite them to church. It's that simple. Just one person! Each One Reach One. There are two opportunities within the next year where you should aim to invite your one to church... 1 would be the launch of our new church and 2 would be Easter. So you have some time... but you need to commit to this today! **The Easiest Way To Recognize Whether You Love Christ & Others More Than Yourself Is How Easy It Is For You To Share The Gospel With The Lost.**

Conclusion

Finally, I have to let you know how the story of Jonah connects directly to the Gospel. Look at **Matt 12:38-41**. Here Jesus tells the lost that the only sign they need for salvation is the sign of Jonah. What does this mean? Well, first it shows us that Jonah is not known for his love of people and his zeal for evangelism – but rather for being in a fish's stomach for three days. Secondly, it shows us that where Jonah failed Jesus will not. Even though Jonah was raised to a new life after three days in the fish and still did not love the Ninevites, Jesus will likewise be raised to new life after three days in the grave but he will love the lost. Jesus died and rose again because he loves us and wants to save us. He loves us and he loves those in our community, state, country, and world... and he wants us to share that love with all 4 Billion of them. **The Easiest Way To Recognize Whether You Love Christ & Others More Than Yourself Is How Easy It Is For You To Share The Gospel With The Lost.**