

Prayer, Repentance & Mercy

1. Most Christians are aware that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days; however, according to Jewish reckoning, the simple use of the phrase “three days” could have meant a continuous period of time that included parts of three days (note: it seems significant that the Text mentions three days and three nights, which would be something between slightly more than 24 hours and not more than 72 hours).
 - a. How long was Jonah in this horrible situation before he turned to God (v. 1:17-2:1)?
 - b. What caused Jonah to surrender to God’s will for His life (2:2)?
 2. Amazingly, Jonah wrestled with God for three days in total darkness before he surrendered to God. It is hard to fully comprehend what it must have been like in the belly of the great fish. How did Jonah describe the difficulties he faced when he was rebelling against God (2:2-6)?
 3. Some Christians think that all a sinning brother or sister needs is love and acceptance, they shower them with love and try to gently witness to them of the goodness of God. Others think that the erring believer needs to be rebuked by the Word of God.
 - a. What did the prodigal son’s father do when his son wanted to live a life of wonton pleasure (Lk. 15:11-12)?
 - b. What caused the prodigal son to return to the Lord and his family (Lk. 15:13-18)?
 - c. What did the apostle Paul tell the Corinthian church to do to the immoral believer who was unwilling to repent (1 Cor. 5:1-8)?
 4. Jonah surrendered to God in the belly of a great fish in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea. Others have surrendered to God in less unusual places—all with the same results. What were some of the benefits Jonah received from God when he repented (2:6-10)?
 5. Chapter three begins, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.” God often has to repeat basic commands to His servants. Has there been a time in your life when you ignored one of God’s commands but later came to realize that God’s Word was a command to be obeyed, not a suggestion to be considered?
 6. What message did Jonah deliver to the people of Nineveh (3:4)?
 7. It is interesting that the king commanded everyone to turn from his evil ways and from the violence that was in his violent acts. The Assyrians were known for their acts of barbarism, especially toward their enemies in times of war (note: history records they skinned their enemies alive, nailed others to walls, and even shot the heads of their decapitated enemies over the walls of besieged cities to intimidate them).
 - a. The king’s knowledge of the character of God is surprising since the city of Nineveh had been a heathen stronghold just prior to the revival. What did the king know about God and His nature (3:7-9)?
 - b. In addition to the proclamation of God’s Word by Christians, what else does God use to bring about a general knowledge of His will among the people of this world (Jn. 16:7-11; Rom. 1:18-20, 2:14, 15)?
 8. God used Jonah’s simple message of coming judgment to bring conviction to the people of Nineveh (4:1). The people repented and God was merciful and withdrew His judgment (3:10).
 - a. What does the Bible teach us about God regarding mercy (Ex. 20:6; Ps. 107:1; Eph. 2:4)?
 - b. Like Jonah, many believers perform acts of mercy but they are not really merciful people. They are prideful, judgmental and critical of others. How did Jonah respond when God extended mercy to the people of Nineveh (4:1-3)?
 9. In Micah 6:6, the question is asked, “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God?” This question was meant to confront the Israelites’ mindless presentation of endless sacrifices that are given by those whose hearts were apathetic toward God. What three things does God require of His people (Mic. 6:8)?
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Read: Jonah 4

Monday

v. 1 — “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” This verse is key to understanding what was going on in Jonah’s heart. What was Jonah angry about (3:10)? Why would any believer become angry when sinners repent? What should have been Jonah’s attitude (Lk. 15:7)?

Tuesday

v. 1-3 — Read James 4:1-3. What was at the “root” of Jonah’s problem? Jonah didn’t get what he wanted so he threw a childish hissy-fit. Consider this saying: “I want what I want, so I do what I do.” Jonah’s heart was not right with God and his hatred of the Assyrians had become an idol. What did Jonah know about God (v. 2)? Read Ephesians 5:1. How was Jonah doing in regards to this verse?

Wednesday

v. 3,4 — Do you think Jonah really wanted to die? I doubt it. He was simply acting like a pouting child. Jonah, who hated the pagan Assyrians, was acting like a pagan trying to manipulate God. He was saying, “If I can’t get what I want I might as well die!” Jonah was angry about God’s mercy to the Assyrians but he could not see God’s awesome mercy in his own life. God could have just as easily granted Jonah’s “request” and killed him. Praise the Lord that He does not grant our every prayer request, but answers our prayers according to His infinite wisdom.

Thursday

v. 5,6 — What do you think Jonah was hoping to see? Jonah was just as bloodthirsty as the Assyrians. Isn’t it striking that they repented and turned from their evil ways, but Jonah held on to his judgmental and bloodthirsty attitude. Doesn’t it seem like God was drowning Jonah with kindness (v. 6)? It can be easy to accept good from God but then forget that His love is not limited to you. Jonah was grateful for the plant but angry that God had that same compassion on Nineveh. Just like Jonah, God has drowned us with love, mercy and grace; shouldn’t we of all people then show that same love to others?

Friday

v. 5-8 — Can you see God’s mercy in verses 7 and 8? Do not make the mistake of seeing every negative circumstance as God’s judgment. God was using the wind and worm to teach Jonah some lessons. God could have simply killed Jonah if judgment was His intent. God’s mercy is sometimes poured out in ways that we would not choose but we can be assured God is good and He is working all things together for our good; even—especially—the hard trials of life.

Saturday

v. 9-11 — Why was Jonah angry about the plant dying? Would you say that Jonah was self-centered? Jonah really didn’t care about the plant, he only cared about the shade it provided to him. God was telling Jonah, “Look your mind is set on the wrong things. You care about a plant, which is nothing; your own selfish comfort; but I care about 125,000 people and all their animals. Wake up, Jonah!” It’s easy to adopt this same attitude. Our lives can be so busy today and our culture encourages self-centeredness. Stop today and consider the 200,000 people that live in the Cedar Rapids metro area. Would you take the time, today, to share the love and mercy of Jesus Christ with one of them?
