



READ: Jonah 3:1-4:4, 11 (NIV)

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 obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning 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. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing 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. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

"And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

ENTER THE STORY:

Have you ever been asked to do something you just did NOT want to do? This is how Jonah felt when God asked him to go talk to the people of Nineveh. You see, Jonah's people, the Israelites, and the people of Nineveh, which are Assyrians...well, they were NOT friends. Not even close. In fact, they hated each other, so when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn the people that God was REALLY, REALLY mad at them and was going to destroy them, Jonah ran away as fast as he could, and got on a ship headed in the opposite direction.

We didn't read that part of the story today, but running away from God didn't go well for Jonah. The ship he was on got caught up in a big storm. *Any idea who caused the storm? God, of course!* Once everyone on the ship found out it was Jonah's fault, they had no choice but to toss him overboard.

But that isn't the end of the story, because Jonah had a job to do...he was one of God's messengers after all, so God sent a giant fish to swallow him whole. Jonah spent three days in the belly of that fish with nothing to do but think and pray.

Can you imagine sitting in a dark, stinky fish belly with fish guts all around? No thank you!

When three days had passed, God spoke to the fish and it spit him out on dry land. This time, when God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh, he obeyed. Now, it seems like Jonah has had a change of heart, but this story is STILL not over!

Jonah went to Nineveh and told them exactly what God told him to say. Do you remember what his message was?

"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

- It's not the most eloquent gospel message, is it? But guess what? It WORKED!
- The people listened to Jonah's warning and they REPENTED! That means they STOPPED doing the bad things they used to do and STARTED doing the good things God wanted them to do. They also humbled themselves to prove to God how serious they were. They took off their nice clothes and put on itchy, stinky, uncomfortable sackcloth. They stopped eating and drinking, and they started praying! They called out to Yahweh and begged him to forgive them. God heard their prayers and saw their repentance and he forgave them. He stopped being angry towards their sin and he decided NOT to punish them.
- Now, you might think this would make Jonah happy because his message WORKED, but he was not happy at all. In fact, he was VERY angry. He hated the people of Nineveh and he didn't think they deserved God's mercy. He wanted God to punish them.
- Jonah did NOT understand that God loves EVERYONE. He thought God only loved his special people, the Israelites, but God's plan all along was to send a very special someone to bless the whole entire world. This person is WAY better than Jonah, because he did NOT run away when God asked him to do something he didn't really want to do. Instead, he obeyed God even though it required him to lay down his life.
- *Do you know who this special someone is? It's Jesus, of course!*
- *And just like Jonah spent three days in a dark fish belly...as good as dead, Jesus spent three days in a dark tomb... actually dead.*
- *And just like the big fish spit Jonah back out on dry land...the dark tomb couldn't hold the Light of the World forever, so after three days, it spit him out (metaphorically, of course) alive and well, because God raised him from the dead!*
- This season, let's be different than Jonah, who reluctantly obeyed, but didn't experience true joy because of his cold heart. Let's find joy in obeying God, even if he asks us to do things we really don't want to do.

■ **PRAY:** God, we are SO thankful that your love and mercy are for ALL who repent and believe. Help us have humble hearts that are willing to admit when we are wrong. Thank you Jesus, for being a much greater Jonah. Amen.