

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we talked about repentance. In **Jonah 3:5**, we read, **“The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”** Even the king of Nineveh humbled himself and repented of his sins and he commanded all of Nineveh to repent. Their repentance was more than words; they took action and turned away from their sins as well.



**Jonah 3:10**, **“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.”** God had compassion on the people of Nineveh and he showed them mercy. From there, we discussed how God always forgives nations and individuals who repent from their sins and turn to Him.



How do you think Jonah will respond to these events? Do you think Jonah will rejoice that his preaching was so effective that it brought the whole city of Nineveh to repentance? Do you think Jonah will give thanks for God’s mercy and grace? Let’s read Jonah 4:1-9 and find out.

## II. Scripture Reading (Jonah 4:1-9, NIV 1984)

1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. 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. 3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." 9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

## III. Teaching

Jonah was angry because the Lord had mercy on the people of Nineveh. He even says that the reason he tried to flee to Tarshish was because he knew God would show mercy to the people of Nineveh and he didn’t want that to happen. Jonah was also angry about his own discomfort. In both cases, Jonah was basically angry because he didn’t get what he wanted. Jonah wanted to sit in comfort and watch God destroy Nineveh. But instead, Nineveh had repented and now the hot sun was making Jonah miserable. Now Jonah wants to die.



It is very sad that Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to be saved. And, it was foolish for Jonah to be so upset about his own discomfort. Actually, if Jonah didn’t like sitting in the hot sun, all he had to do was get and move to a cooler place. He could even have gotten up and walked back into the city. The repentant people of Nineveh would probably have welcomed him into their cool gardens and homes. But Jonah just sits there and suffers. He is unable or unwilling to let go of his anger and get up and change his situation. The last words we hear from Jonah are, **“I am angry enough to die.”**

It may seem like Jonah doesn’t really have much to complain about. God could have condemned Jonah when Jonah tried to run away to Tarshish. Instead, God pursued Jonah with relentless grace and used

the occasion to bring salvation to the sailors on the ship. God could have allowed Jonah to drown in the sea or die in the fish's belly. Instead, God rescued Jonah and gave him a second chance. The people of Nineveh could have killed Jonah for his harsh preaching. Instead, they repented of their violent ways and let Jonah go in peace. Now Jonah's mission is finished and he is free to go home and rest.

But Jonah doesn't go home; he sits down outside the city and waits. It seems that he is hoping God will change His mind and destroy the Ninevites. The desert heat is terrible and Jonah suffers, but God provides a vine to give Jonah shade for a day. God is being patient with Jonah, giving him grace – a day to cool off, physically and emotionally. The next day, God sends a worm to chew the vine so that it withers. I think God was trying to tell Jonah that it was time to stop moping and get up and go home. But Jonah won't go. Jonah is holding on to his anger. He even claims that he has the right to be angry. At this point, Jonah would rather die than repent of his bad attitude and live.

Have you ever been where Jonah is? Have you ever been so angry or so depressed, that you wanted to die? I think many of us have experienced days like that, days when we choose anger over peace and misery over comfort. Sometimes we just choose to feel sorry for ourselves and sit in anger and bitterness. At such times there is often a little recording in our head that plays again and again. Maybe Jonah's went something like this, *"I can't believe God spared those horrible people. Nineveh has been our enemy for hundreds of years. They are cruel, wicked, idol worshippers. What's wrong with God? God spared His enemies and now He is cruel to me His prophet. I have served God for years, but He won't even let me have a plant for shade."* What was Jonah doing? He was listing his problems and counting his sorrows.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever sat in anger and listed your problems and counted your sorrows? Many of us have been there. But, if we are not careful, a bad attitude can lead to growing bitterness and a downward spiral that sucks the joy out of life and leaves us depressed and suicidal. In our hearts, some of us may even be in that dark and lonely place this morning. But we don't have to stay there. We can break free. We can change the recording in our head and begin to count our blessings and list the things we are thankful for. With the help of the Lord, we can escape from despair and learn to live in peace and joy.



Jonah could have chosen to rejoice in the Lord's mercy and grace. Jonah could have praised God and said, *"Wow, if God can forgive the Ninevites, then He can forgive my sins also."* Jonah could have listed things to be thankful for – God gave him a second chance, saved him from death in the sea, and kept him safe in Nineveh. Jonah could have given thanks to God that the vine was there for one day instead of being angry that it was gone the second day. Jonah could have rejoiced in life, peace, and freedom, but instead, Jonah focused on self-pity and thoughts of death.

We all make choices about our words and actions and we can make choices about the attitude of our hearts as well. If you have been on a downward spiral, then I want to encourage you today to change directions. Make some new choices. List things you can be thankful for instead of listing your problems. Choose a new recording to play in your mind, perhaps by memorizing a Bible verse or a praise song, or by counting your blessings. If you need help and prayer, then ask a brother or sister for help. Above all, spend some time in prayer and ask the Lord to help. As **Proverbs 4:23** teaches us, **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."**



The Book of Jonah ends with God's reply to Jonah's complaint. We don't hear any more from Jonah, but I think Jonah must have finally gotten the message and repented. After all, if Jonah had just sat in the desert until he died, we probably wouldn't have this book at all. At some point, Jonah must have realized that God was not just working through him to save others; God was also working on him, to change his heart.

We also experience this in our own lives. For example, in my own case, God has given me the privilege of serving as pastor here at OIC for the past eleven years. I am blessed and humbled to know that despite my many mistakes, the Lord has worked through me to minister to many people. But I am even more humbled when I reflect on how the Lord has been working on me, pursuing me with His relentless grace and changing my heart year by year. I'll be honest. Like Jonah, I sometimes wanted to run away. Like Jonah, I sometimes had the wrong



attitude. But the relentless grace of God always pursued me.

God does not give up on us. God pursues us to lead us to faith and salvation. After salvation, we still need to grow in our faith and in the knowledge and wisdom of God. God helps us in this; He helps to become more like Jesus. **Romans 8:29** teaches us: **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** Salvation from the penalty for our sins is just the beginning of God’s work in our lives. God continues to give us grace as He works to sanctify us by conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ.

One aspect of being sanctified is to have God’s heart for the nations. The Lord loves all people and wants them all to turn to Him and be saved. Jonah lived before the time when Jesus came into this world as a man, so Jonah did not know the Name of Jesus. But the heart of the Lord for the nations has always been the same. We can see this in the closing words of the Book of Jonah, words that must have touched Jonah’s heart deeply. **Jonah 4:10-11**, **“But the LORD said, ‘You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?’”**

Now we see how petty Jonah’s concern for his own comfort really was. Jonah was worried about the vine, but God was concerned for the city. Jonah was thinking that he wanted to die. But God was thinking of how to save many thousands of souls from death and judgment. The reference to not knowing the left hand from the right could refer to the moral ignorance of the people of Nineveh, but the more obvious interpretation is that God is speaking of a 120,000 small children in Nineveh who literally did not yet know left from right. I think God must have melted Jonah’s hard heart by pointing to these innocent children. But the Book of Jonah ends without saying anything about this. I think the author wanted to finish the book with God’s words so that His words would be a challenge to us as well.

God was concerned about the great city of Nineveh. And God is also concerned about our city as well. How many innocent little children are there in our city? And how many adults are there who need to repent of their sins? Osaka is much bigger than Nineveh was, and beyond Osaka we have the whole Kinki region on our doorstep. God wants to work through us to reach these people, and, at the same time, God wants to work in our hearts as we serve Him.



God loves each and every person in this great city, just as He loved the people of Nineveh. But, instead of sending a single prophet to the city, God has called all of us to this place. We are all Jonah. God has called us to preach in the city. Sometimes we may feel like running away or hiding from the task. Sometimes we have a bad attitude. But God still asks, **“Should I not be concerned about that great city?”**

#### IV. Conclusion

We are all called to proclaim the Name of Jesus in our city. That is what OIC is here for. And that is what we are here for. Now, since Karen and I are getting ready to leave, it may seem like we are running away to our own Tarshish. But the things I am saying really apply wherever we go. As Christians, we are meant to be salt and light to the world. Wherever we go, we all have the awesome privilege and responsibility of proclaiming the Name of Jesus. And, although Karen and I will be gone for a while, Osaka is still our home. Today is my last Sunday as the pastor of OIC, but we will back in Osaka in June to continue serving the Lord in this city. Let’s close with **1 Timothy 1:15**. **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.”**

#### V. Prayer