

# JONAH GO!

TEACHING NOTES #3

## THE MESSAGE WE MUST PROCLAIM!

I heard about an old codger who liked to sometimes go fishing. He was sitting in his boat the other day when he heard a voice say, "Pick me up!" He looked around and couldn't see anyone. He thought he was dreaming when he heard the voice say again, "Pick me up!" He looked in the water and there, floating on the top, was a frog! The man said, "Are you talking to me?" The frog said, "Yes, I'm talking to you. Pick me up, then kiss me and I'll turn into the most beautiful woman you've ever seen. All your friends are envious because I will be your bride!" The man looked at the frog for a short time, reached over, picked it up carefully, and placed the frog in his front pocket. The frog said, "What, are you nuts? Didn't you hear what I said? I said kiss me and I will be your beautiful bride." The old man opened his pocket, looked at the frog and said, "Nah, at my age I'd rather have a talking frog!"

Talk about missing the point! We now are in the second half of the Book of Jonah. To me, this is the real essence of the book. People tend to fixate on the storm and the whale and miss the whole point of the book.

## THE BOOK OF JONAH IS ABOUT A MAN WHOM GOD USED TO BRING ABOUT A MASSIVE REVIVAL.

This revival was one of the greatest in human history. The whale is but a footnote, only 3 verses. Jonah was called to preach to Nineveh, which God described as "a great city" (see Jonah 1:2). Jonah refused and the Lord sent "a great wind" on the sea (see Jonah 1:4). Jonah was thrown overboard and was swallowed by "a great fish" (see Jonah 1:17). But the ultimate story of Jonah is of the great God who showed great love for a lost city like Nineveh, offering them forgiveness, and for a disobedient child, Jonah, offering him a second chance.

Have you messed up in life, feeling like the Lord could never use you? If Jonah's story tells us nothing else, it tells us this: God gives second chances! God told Jonah to "go and preach to Nineveh." In the same way, we too have been called to preach, not to Nineveh, but to our country. Not only are God's orders the same for us as they were for Jonah, but so is the method. And what is that method? Preaching. The Bible says, "Go into all the world and preach" (Mark 16:15 NKJV). God takes the Great Commission seriously, and so should we.

Jonah's preaching brought revival. Let's look it and see what we can learn about seeing revival in our time.

Jonah 3:1-2

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you' (NKJV).

## TO REACH OUR CULTURE WE MUST PREACH THE GOSPEL.

God did not tell Jonah to go to Nineveh and simply “be a good example.” No, He told him to preach. Now, this immediately intimidates us because we think that means yelling or having to address a huge crowd. It could and it may include that, but boiled down, it simply means verbal articulation. God’s primary way of reaching a lost world is through the preaching of the gospel.

2 Timothy 4:2-3 says, “Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not” (NLT). This is so important, because many churches are getting away from biblical preaching. But the early church, the church that changed the world, had preaching and teaching. “They continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine” (Acts 2:42 NKJV). They offered theology without apology.

Jesus himself was a preacher of the Word. We read that when Jesus began His ministry, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 4:17 NKJV). Then Jesus sent His disciples out to preach as well.

Matthew 10:7 says, “And as you go, preach saying, ‘the kingdom is at hand’” (NKJV). Preaching is God’s primary way of reaching lost people. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (NKJV).

There are many ways God could have come to us. He could have dropped down visual images like photographs or paintings to describe what He wanted people to know. And certainly God speaks to us, to some degree, through the testimony of nature. We read in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship” (NLT).

In the Old Testament, God spoke primarily through the preaching of the prophets. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and others who fearlessly preached His word. In the New Testament, God called the apostles and even common untrained people to preach.

I know this is true also from personal experience. I have had the privilege of speaking for 40 years, in great stadiums and arenas. Trust me when I tell you, the last thing I ever wanted to become was a preacher. I was never a speaker in school; in fact I dreaded giving a speech.

## WE ARE TO PREACH THE MESSAGE HE HAS GIVEN.

**V2.** *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.*

Jonah had experienced the second chance himself, so it was real to him. Paul said, “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you” (1 Corinthians 11:23 NIV). Nothing gets to someone else till it has gone through you first! It’s one thing to read the Bible through and through. It’s another thing when the Word of God has gone through you. It’s not how you mark your Bible, but how your Bible marks you.

And what was he to preach? “The message God gave him” (Jonah 3:2). What are we to preach?

**Answer:** the gospel!

It is not for us to update, edit, or in any way tamper with the gospel. Our job is simply to deliver it. Here was Jonah’s message, given to him by God, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4 NKJV). This was a very simple message, yet these eight words were important to God. In the same way, our job is to preach it and let God work.

Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (NKJV). Listen, there is explosive power in the essential message of the gospel. We need to just let the lion out of the cage!

There are many lessons from the prophet Jonah for us.

What is a prophet? Someone who speaks for God. The Bible says that in the last days, the sons and daughters will prophesy! (see Acts 2:17). Now, we may not be full-blown prophets in the strictest sense of the word, but we are all called to speak to our generation.

Here are four takeaway truths about the person who speaks for God:

1. **God’s representative or prophet is usually an ordinary person.** God seems to go out of His way to use unlikely candidates so He will get the glory. God is not looking for flawless, fearless people. Look at Elijah. One day he was standing boldly for the Lord on Mount Carmel and the next day hiding in a cave because his life was threatened. Scripture reminds us that Elijah was a man just like us (see James 5:17). Sometimes prophets are least appreciated in their own homes. Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country” (Matthew 13:57 NKJV).
2. **God’s prophet will be an obedient person.** Jonah was not always obedient. In fact, he was disobedient. Jonah 1:3 tells us that he rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord. But now, Jonah is an obedient servant, and look at the results! Why are we so afraid to do what God tells us to do? Blessings will follow!
3. **God’s prophet or representative is speaking for someone else.** The word he gives is not his own. When we do our crusades and I do interviews, I tell them I am a delivery boy! I used to deliver newspapers when I was a boy. I had the bags mounted on my cool stingray bicycle, and I got pretty good at hitting my targets with those papers. It was not my job to make the news or even write it, but to deliver it. Our job is the same with delivering the gospel. I might add, if our message is rejected we do not take it personally. Nor do we take it personally if it is accepted. We understand this is between people and God.
4. **The true prophet recognizes that results are not up to him.** When we do a crusade, we do everything we can to achieve good results. We put major effort into every detail, from promotion to follow-up. Most importantly, we have massive prayer efforts in place. But when I step into that pulpit, I realize it is God’s job to save people, not mine. Sometimes the response is large, like when Peter preached on Pentecost and 3000 were saved (see Acts 2:41). Sometimes the response is small, like when Paul preached on Mars Hill and only a handful followed (see Acts 17:34). God does not require success, but faithfulness, from us. And ultimately, that is what we will be judged for.

Another thing to note about Jonah going to Nineveh: he did not procrastinate!

**Jonah 3:2-4**

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’” (NKJV).

Jonah had a very specific message entrusted to him from God. Having looked at the messenger, let’s now look at the message we must deliver. Here now are three marks of a true and authentic message.

**1. Our message must be delivered with urgency!**

Note that it says Jonah cried out (see Jonah 3:4). This is not the first time he cried. He also did so in the belly of the fish. Jonah 2:1-2 says, “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish’s belly. And he said: “I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and he answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice” (NKJV). Jonah took the desperation he felt in the belly of the fish to the people he spoke to.

D.L. Moody has said the “winner of souls must first be weepers of souls.” Jonah had been transformed in that whale’s stomach. There was an urgency, a passion to what he was doing. Paul said in Romans 9:3 “For my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them” (NLT). Thankfully, we don’t have to go to hell for others to go to heaven. Jesus Himself already did that on the cross. He died so we can live.

But listen, sharing starts with caring. I know that sounds like something a Care Bear would say, but do you remember how Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem and wept? Luke 19:41-42 says, “But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to weep. ‘I wish that even today you would find the way of peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from you’” (NLT). Jesus, being God, knew their future, the attack of Titus, and thousands to be slain. It broke His holy heart.

I have a question for you, have you ever wept over a lost soul?

There was also an authenticity in Jonah’s voice. He was a changed man. (He was also probably a bleached man smelling of vomit.) And the people of Nineveh saw it. A.W. Tozer said, “The world is waiting to hear an authentic voice, a voice from God—not an echo of what others are doing and saying, but an authentic voice.” Jonah delivered his one message given to him by God with passion and clarity.

**2. Our message must be clear and definite.**

Any child could understand that message. Far too often we unnecessarily complicate the message of the gospel. Did not Jesus say we should become as a child to enter the kingdom (see Matthew 18:3)? Scripture says of Jesus, “The common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37 NKJV). Our message is not simplistic but it must be simple.

**3. Our message should be authoritative.**

No apologies, just proclamation. Some see the Bible from the viewpoint of the world. Others see the world from the viewpoint of the Bible. That’s called having a “biblical worldview.” Jonah’s message was

not some toothless feel-good pep talk. It was an unapologetic biblical directive from God almighty. And so is the gospel! Not offered as one of many options but offered as the only possibility. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 ESV).

God promises His word will not return void but prosper in the place where He sends it (see Isaiah 55:11). To see the power of an authoritative message, look at Jonah 3:5, “So the people of Nineveh believed God” (NKJV). It does not say they “believed Jonah.” Perhaps the greatest revival in the history of the world came to Nineveh because Jonah preached God’s message and not what the people wanted to hear.

### **BY THE WAY, THERE WAS HOPE IN THIS MESSAGE.**

God could have just leveled Nineveh without any warning. But in His love and mercy, He warned them first. He gave them time to repent. He gave to them a final opportunity. Nineveh would be overturned. The judgment of God was coming. Yet, there is this message of mercy.

We see the same in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (NKJV). Where is the message of love? “For God so loved the world that He gave . . .” Where is the message of judgment? “Whoever believes in Him should not perish . . .” We see the same in Romans 6:23. First, the message of judgment “For the wages of sin is death.” Then the message of love, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Whenever God gives a warning, that’s a good sign.

For Sodom and Gomorrah, there was no warning, just the evacuation of Lot and his family. There was no prophet Jonah walking through her streets because it was beyond that. It just happened. And a judgment of fire and brimstone fell.

### **WE TOO HAVE A MESSAGE TO DELIVER.**

If God could bring a mighty revival in Nineveh, with no better representative than Jonah and no more gospel than what he preached in their streets, He surely can do the same thing for America. But what is it we are to go into the world and preach? Answer: the gospel!

Let me say something now that may surprise you. I don’t think most Americans, much less the rest of the world, have really heard the gospel. For that matter, I think there may be a surprising number of people in the church itself that do not actually know what the gospel message really is. The general American public certainly does not.

Seven out of ten adults have no clue what John 3:16 means. Barely one-third of all adults (31 percent) know the meaning of the expression “the gospel.” Only 4 percent of adults could define the Great Commission, quote John 3:16, and define the gospel. Can you? What exactly is the gospel? What elements must be in it for it to be accurate? For the gospel to come in power and do what it does it must have certain elements in place—because there is also a false and counterfeit gospel.

Galatians 1:6-8 says, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we

or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (NIV).

So what are the elements that must be present for the gospel to be the gospel? Let's explore that together right now.

## A TECHNICAL DEFINITION OF THE WORD GOSPEL IS "GOOD NEWS."

We've all heard the expression, "I have some good news and some bad news." You may have heard about the doctor who said to his patient, "I have some good news and bad news." And the patient asked, "What is the good news?" The doctor said "You only have three weeks to live." To which the patient replied, "If that's the good news, what's the bad news?" And the doctor said, "I should have told you two weeks ago!" When sharing the gospel we must present both the good news and the *bad news*.

"The bad news" is the fact that we all stand as sinners before a holy God. No matter who we are, we have all sinned, sometimes in ignorance and often on purpose. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NKJV). In 1 John 1:8 we read, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (NKJV).

God gave us His law, the Ten Commandments, not to make us righteous. Rather, to show that we all fall miserably short. The commandments are like a moral mirror that show our flaws and sin. They shut our mouths and open our eyes. Sometimes, when sharing the gospel, I will go over some of them and ask the person, "Have you ever broken any of these commandments?" "Have you ever stolen, lied, or taken God's name in vain?" Scripture says if we offend in one point of the law, we are guilty of all of it (see James 2:10).

The point of all of this is to show that everyone needs Jesus. Why? Because everyone has sinned, and no one is good enough to get to heaven. This idea of all of mankind being utterly sinful is very hard for many people to stomach. So many believe in the innate goodness of man. "As the Scriptures say, 'No one is good—not even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one'" (Romans 3:10-12 NLT).

This does not mean man does not do commendable things. There are people who are great humanitarians or heroes. The soldier who throws himself on a hand grenade to protect his brothers. A person who helps hurting people is good in the sense of human kindness. To say, "There is not one good, no not one," does not mean there is no good in man, but that there is no good in man that can satisfy God.

## GOD IS HOLY AND HE REQUIRES HOLINESS FROM US!

1 Peter 1:16 says, "It is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (NKJV). Man is not basically good; he is basically bad. Very bad. But even as a jeweler will display a beautiful ring or necklace against a dark velvet background to accentuate its beauty, God has sought to show us just how good the Good News is by telling us the bad. So, we see our complete weakness, our inability to do anything whatsoever.

## GOD DID THE ULTIMATE FOR US.

Romans 5:6-8 says, "When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (NLT). Because there was no other way to satisfy the righteous demands of God.

Because of our inability to improve ourselves, much less save ourselves. Because we faced a future in hell because of our sin.

God, in His great love, sent His own Son to come down from heaven and die on the cross in our very place. I love the way Paul personalized it when he said, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me!" (see Galatians 2:20). There was no other way to resolve this serious sin issue we all face.

We know God is perfect. We know man is imperfect and sinful, so Jesus, the God-man, was uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between man and God. He was the only one who could ever do that. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 we read, "All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others" (NLT).

## IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT I DID TO PLEASE OR REACH GOD. IT'S ABOUT WHAT GOD DID TO REACH ME.

By the way, this is why Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father! Christ is the only way to the Father because He Himself said it. John 14:6 says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (NKJV). The apostle Peter echoed these words in Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved" (NLT). Paul said the same thing in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (KJV).

Listen, for us, as Christians, to say anything else is wrong and a misrepresentation of the gospel! There on that cross all the sin of the world was poured upon Jesus Christ as He became the sin sacrifice for us! In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (NKJV). At the cross, Jesus took the penalty for every sin I have ever committed.

The gospel in a nutshell is: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised on the third day. Now there are other elements I will bring out, but this is the cornerstone: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Someone once asked C.H. Spurgeon if he could put in a few words his Christian faith. He said, "It is all in four words: Jesus died for me."

## THERE IS POWER IN THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS, WHICH IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Corinthians 1:17 says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (NIV). My concern is that, in our attempts to crossover, we don’t bring the cross over!

In 1 Corinthians 2:1 we read, “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (NIV). Look, there are hard questions nonbelievers can fire at you, but you need to know that the essence of this gospel message is the cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (NIV). I have shared the heartbeat of the gospel with you. So to put it in a nutshell, what is the gospel? The gospel is:

- The message that we are all separated from God because of our sin.
- The result of this sin is an emptiness, an ever-present guilt and a certain fear of death.
- But because God loved us, in spite of our rebellion, He sent His own Son to die in our place and bridge the gap between Him and ourselves.

Now, what must I do to come into that relationship with God?

- I must turn from my sin and turn to God by faith.

If you will take this simple information I have shared with you, God will use it. You will find that you are armed and dangerous! This world is looking for authentic people who will tell the truth—changed people who tell others how to find that same change. Our job is to simply be those delivery boys.

## THIS MESSAGE BROUGHT REVIVAL TO NINEVEH. COULD THE SAME MESSAGE BRING REVIVAL IN AMERICA?

Has America really heard the gospel? I don’t think so. That is why we are doing Harvest America. This all happened because a man got right with God. Let a Jonah get right with God and the entire city of Nineveh gets saved. Let a woman at the well drink of the living water and she brings the whole town.

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