



Nineveh, We Have a Problem!

Jonah 1-4

Summary:

The book of Jonah is in many ways a satire. The reader is meant to laugh at some of Jonah's antics because they're utterly ridiculous. Ordered to go to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance to Israel's hated enemies, Jonah ran in the opposite direction, fully knowing that he can't outrun the Lord. When God sent a storm to remind Jonah of his power as a message to turn around, Jonah went into the hull of the ship to take a nap. When the ship threatened to break apart and the sailors discovered that their danger was caused by Jonah, Jonah told them to throw him overboard to die rather than turn the ship around and do as he was told. Yet Jonah's reason for disobedience was due to his belief that the Ninevites were undeserving of God's mercy and justice. To modern readers it may be difficult to see ourselves as Jonah. After all, his antics are comical. Yet we'd fit right in with the Israelites of Jonah's time, who while knowing that Jonah was ridiculous, vehemently supported his refusal to take God's message to the Ninevites. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, which was one of the most brutal empires in history. If they existed today they'd be comparable to the Nazis of WWII. They posed a dangerous and constant threat to the national security of Israel. Therefore, none of the Israelites would have supported Jonah's mission to Nineveh. In the same way, there are many groups of people as well as individuals that we deem unworthy of God's mercy and justice. Those we consider evil, who often are perpetuating evil actions, are still worthy of God's mercy and

justice! We often think of justice as “you get what you deserve”. However, God’s justice goes hand in hand with his mercy. In fact, the greatest display of God’s justice was Jesus’ death on the cross! God desires that all would know his mercy and justice, yet like Jonah and the Israelites we often refuse to offer it to them.

Discussion Questions:

- Share a story about a time you saw someone receive something they didn’t deserve.
 - What were your thoughts and emotions when this happened?
- What was Jonah’s motive for refusing to go to Nineveh? What did he think would happen if he went?
- If Jonah knew that God was the God of the land as well as the sea, why might he have attempted to flee via ship?
- Jonah ends his prayer in chapter 2 with thanksgiving yet is incredibly upset in chapter 4. What might be the cause of his emotional/spiritual fluctuating?
- The Ninevites repented immediately upon hearing Jonah’s message. How does that compare to our response to being convicted of sin?
- Who do Christians often deem unworthy of God’s mercy and justice? Who do you personally deem unworthy of God’s mercy and justice?
- How might we respond better to God’s compassion than Jonah did?