

JONAH

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Jonah 3.6-10

Prepared by Paul White
paul@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x116

I. Connecting With One Another

What has your experience been like so far in this study of Jonah? What have you learned? How have you been challenged? What has resonated with you? Share briefly with your group. Before continuing, would you pray:

- a. Thanking God for the families and children who have been able to connect with God at our new Saturday evening and Sunday morning gatherings, and grow deeper in knowledge of Christian faith through the Foundations Class.
- b. For those leading our worship gatherings and those with Good Shepherd's children in their classrooms – that God would guide their planning, preparation and leadership,
- c. That God would use this study, this weekend's gatherings, and our continued communal life together to shape us into the likeness of Jesus.

II. Introduction to this Study

Our passage today (3:6-10) is part of "Scene 3" in the book of Jonah. In Scene 1 we witnessed God calling the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and "preach against it." Jonah responded by running away from this assignment, boarding a ship headed in the opposite direction (Tarshish), and being thrown into the sea. Scene 2 took us into great fish God "provided" to swallow Jonah up; we heard a grateful Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving. Scene 2 ended with Jonah being "vomited" back onto dry land.

Last week began Scene 3, in which a chastised Jonah finally obeys and heads to Nineveh to deliver God's message. Jonah proclaims to the people of that city, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The people hear God's message through Jonah, believe it, and respond to it by repenting of their wicked ways.

We pick up the story as word of Jonah's warning has made its way to the ears of Nineveh's king.

Study the Text

- a. Read Jonah 3.6-10. In verse 6 we are told that Jonah's warning had "reached" the King. The Hebrew word for "reached" means "reached"—not in the sense of "news that has traveled"—but that the king was touched/moved/affected by Jonah's prophesy. How does this affect how you see the king's subsequent actions?

Note: We don't know who this king was. One possibility that makes sense is Assur-dan III (773-756 B.C.). Assur-dan III was considered a weak king who ruled at a time when Nineveh was shocked and threatened by military encroachments, major unfavorable omens (The Assyrians attached great importance to events such as earthquakes, solar eclipses, and floods, believing them to be bad omens.), and riots. A king like Assur-dan III (and his people) would surely have been far more open to the possibility that Jonah's preaching was divinely ordained and authoritative.

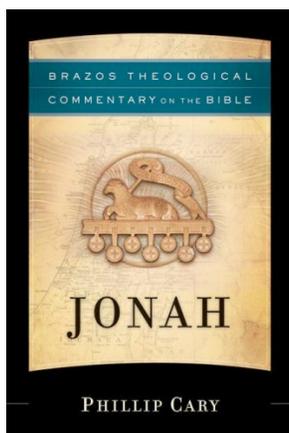
- b. The king is touched/moved by/affected by Jonah's warning. He moves from his throne to sit "down in the dust". He takes off his royal robes and replaces them with sackcloth. What

do you see as symbolic or significant about this king's actions? Do his actions remind you of those of another "king"? (See Philippians 2:5-8)

- c. It is interesting that "movement" of repentance in Nineveh started with the people and makes its way "up" to the king and not vice versa. What does this say, if anything, about how true change/transformation takes place within an institution/body?
- d. Next the king—and his nobles—issue a proclamation for all of Nineveh follow (3:7-8). What do notice about this proclamation? How is it different from what the people are already doing? In your mind, what significance is there to including the animals in Nineveh's repentance?
- e. The people are told to "call urgently on God." The Hebrew word here for "God" is the generic *elohim* (god) rather than the specific *Yahweh* (the God of Israel). The people of Nineveh—who worshipped many, many "gods"—did not specifically call out to the God of Israel and yet God heard and responded to their cries. What does this tell you about God? What does it tell you about the people's repentance?
- f. Read verse 9. Read also Joel 2:12-14, Jeremiah 18:7-8, and Isaiah 55:6-7. The king, ignorant though he may be of the God of Israel, seems to have a pretty good understand of how the Hebrew God operates. What characteristics of God do verse 9 and these other passages highlight? When you consider God do you tend to focus on His justice ("fierce anger") or mercy ("compassion")? Why or why not? Is it possible to separate the two?

III. Reflect and Respond

- a. The king of Nineveh, even though he was in a position of power and influence, was able to step aside and humble himself before God. Have you ever dramatically humbled yourself before God? What was that like? What was the result? What are ways you can keep yourself humble before the Lord?
- b. The king and his people are called to repentance before a just God. Even though Christians have been forgiven through Jesus, sometimes repentance is still needed. As you look at the Church in North America and the Church around the world, in what ways might It need to repent?
- c. The heart of this passage is God's love and compassion for the enemy. Who do you consider your "enemies"? What about the "enemies" of the Unites States? God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh (the Assyrians were the enemies of the Israelites) and ultimately had compassion upon them. How does this challenge your thinking about "enemies"? What did Jesus have to say about enemies? (Matthew 5:43-48)



A Quote Worth Quoting

What can the king of Nineveh do but hope that God—whichever God it is—will change his mind? Uninstructed, ignorant of the name of the LORD, the pagan ruler nonetheless gets it exactly right. His hope is like a groping hand in the dark, but he is unmistakably groping in the direction of the LORD, the God of Israel...Nineveh is following in Israel's footsteps without even a prophet to help them, but only a hopeful king—a king humbled, ignorant but wise, knowing he has access to no wisdom but that of humility and no hope but that of repentance.

- Phillip Cary, *Jonah*

