

Jonah 1:1-3

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port.

Jonah 3:1-3

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.

Last week we began a new sermon series entitled Road Warriors; it is about individuals who when they heard God's voice they hit the road, one way or another.

Remembering our Children's Sermon from last week about hearing the call? To me one of the most annoying things is a ringing phone. While in college, there was a fellow student on my hall, actually next door, whose girlfriend would call him every morning. She would call and let the phone ring and ring and ring. This would go on for ten or fifteen minutes, at least. This went on until he woke up and answered the phone, which never took place without other students beating on his door to wake him up. Today, when the phone rings at home, Patricia can be sitting right next to the phone ringing and just let it ring and if I say, "phone's ringing," she reply's "better answer it."

Her thought is people who answer the phone all day do not want to come home and do the same thing. Then there are those who wait and check caller ID before answering. I usually let the

phone ring twice just to see who's calling, so I can go right into conversation with them. This drives Patricia crazy. She says, "Just answer it!" I at least like to know who it is I am about to be speaking with. That is unless it say unknown then I just answer.

Keeping with answering the phone, have you ever answered the phone and then said, "It's for you?" Then you hear, "Who is it?" What should it matter who is it, they asked to speak to you. Then next they never fail to ask, "What do they want?" First of all how does the person answering the phone know what the caller wants, and then if you told them what the caller wanted they may ask you to tell the caller they and not there.

All this is central to this morning's message:

- *"The phone is ringing"*
- *"It's for you"*
- *"It's God"*
- *"He wants you to go forth and preach His word"*

Last week we heard about Samuel who heard God calling him; he heard God's voice and then reacted. Samuel, heard God's voice, but did not realize it was God speaking, because he did not know God, and by not knowing God Samuel did not know His voice. This week I want us to take a look at someone else that heard God's voice. The difference is he knew God's voice and he heard, but it's what he did. I want us to take a look at Jonah.

This story about Jonah is about someone who answered God's call and then hung up on Him. He heard what God had to say, and then he hung up and then ran. Much like many today! I believe we all hear God calling; it's just that we decide to hang up or worse go the other way rather than follow God's leading.

Jonah was lead, by God, to Nineveh to preach the word, in other words, his call was to follow God's leading, instead he chose to run. God had given Jonah a task – to proclaim God's message to the city of Nineveh, capital of the foreign Assyrian Empire. But Jonah didn't want the job. God said '*Go*'. Jonah said '*No.*'

Jonah took off running, and instead of heading for Nineveh as God instructed, some 500 miles east of Jerusalem, Jonah went sailing west towards Tarshish in Spain some 2000 miles away.

The question is: why? Why would he disobey? Why do we disobey? We can see some answers in the words of God's command: *"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preached against it because its wickedness has come up before me."*

(1) Maybe Jonah was afraid. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, a great enemy of Israel. It was great in size and status. It was also a wicked place, an evil place opposed to God. It was a place infamous for being brutal and merciless. I can hear Jonah now, "What will happen to me, a Jew, walking into that city declaring such a challenging message?" "No I'm not going!"

(2) Maybe Jonah was prejudice. Jonah thoughts probably went something like this: These people belong to a foreign and godless nation; they have rejected the true God.

They don't deserve God to have anything to do with them; why should they benefit from God? It's the Jews who are God's chosen people; the Assyrians have no place with Him. Sound familiar?

(3) Maybe Jonah was offended by God's grace. Jonah had enough knowledge of God; he had enough theological sense, to work out that God, by giving the Ninevites this warning, intended on blessing them! God is so gracious He intends to spare the Assyrians and Jonah could not be part of that kind of travesty. After all, these people are Israel's enemy, it's best they're left spiritually dead and out of God's grace. "No I'm not going!"

(4) Maybe Jonah was tired, maybe he thought he had been a prophet long enough and need some down time. Maybe Jonah thought it was time for someone else to be the prophet and he just decided he wasn't going to do it anymore. Maybe Jonah believed it was time for a break. "No I'm not going!"

So maybe, believing all this Jonah decided he'd run away from God and make tracks for Tarshish. Was he that spiritually naïve to think that he could get away from God? Surely he knew that God was everywhere and had knowledge of everyone and everything? **Psalm 139:11-12** lets us know God is there: *“If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”*

Jonah ran away from God in the sense, he excluded himself from God's favor and service. Any person, who chooses to flee from the presence of God, is refusing to serve God in the task they know that God has given them to do. This is what we see in Jonah's case.

When God asks us to do something and we don't want to do, we too run away. We run by not doing, by doing everything and anything but what God has impressed upon our hearts; we run by saying it's time for someone else to do this or that. We jump into

our jobs, we jump into outside activities, we jump into family projects, and we may even run by jumping into church. How many times has God impressed your heart to do something, or to avoid something, or go someplace, but you went ahead and did what you wanted anyway? As soon as we do what we want, we guarantee the outcome ... failure in God's eyes! But the important thing we need to learn about failure is not to stay a failure.

You may remember the Michael Jordan Nike commercial several years ago showing this nine-time All-Star, four-time MVP, two-time Olympic gold medalist, this once-in-a-century icon arriving at the game, heading to the locker room. His stride is easy, his smile secretive and knowing as he moves down the gauntlet of fans and well-wishers. He walks like a winner. After all, he's Michael Jordan, the man who made the impossible seem routine and the merely difficult look easy. Yet in the commercial he says: "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost more than 300 games. Twenty-six times I have been trusted to

take the game-winning shot...and missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” This must be Jonah’s lesson as well. It is important to continue until we do it right.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time in **Chapter 3:2**: *“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.”* Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Think about this for a moment, does God actually use those who have rejected His calling, turned a deaf ear to His word, and pursued a course of determined disobedience? The answer is an absolute, “Yes.” Jonah is now experiencing the unmerited grace of God! And there is a change in store for Jonah.

Jonah willingly runs with God, instead of running away from God. He had run away from; He had run back to; now it was time to run with God. So, Jonah goes to Nineveh, home of international outlaws, hated by the whole world. They were the Nazis of their day. Though Jonah’s opinion of the Assyrians has not changed, he

is convinced that God's message must be given. So Jonah proclaims the message God has given him even though he did not want to. After all who would listen?

Many years ago, The British Weekly published this letter in their Letters to the Editor section:

Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for 30 years and I have probably heard over 3,000 sermons. To my dismay, I recently discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent doing something else?

For weeks a storm of editorial responses poured in, and finally ended when this letter reply was printed:

Dear Sir:

I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals—mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I have

discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet ... I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago. Who knows how many messages the Ninevites had heard? But one thing is for sure, this one worked! We too are called to preach God's message, and if we have to we should use words. In other words our actions, the way we live, the way we treat others, the way we talk to and about others is our sermon to Nineveh, our sermon to the world, our world here in Landrum.

The speaker at the Big "C" Tour last Sunday evening showed us **Acts 1:8** "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Jerusalem would be like Landrum, Judea would be Spartanburg Co., and Samaria South Carolina. We are all called to God's witnesses to the ends of the earth. More to the point we are His witness, question is what kind of witness.

God has called us to go forth to be gracious and compassionate to everyone, no exceptions. We are called to love, not hate. We are called to care, not be inconsiderate. We are called to be of good courage, not be afraid. We are called to faithfully proclaim God's message, whether by words or deeds, not by tearing down. We are all called and working for God has no age of mandatory retirement nor is there a clause which says after this long it's time to step aside. Remembering Paul's words to the **Roman's 10:9**, *"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

My challenge this morning for all of us is to be of strong courage go forth and proclaim God's message in all we do. *"Carpe Diem"* which means seize the day, seize the opportunities set before us to confess Him with our lips and witness to all the world. Are you going to answer that?