



A Whale
And a
Tell of Forgiveness

A Sermon Series Devotional Guide on Jonah
By Rev. D. Derrick West

Journeying from Forgiveness

"But Jonah away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish"

Jonah 1
July 3, 2011

Journeying to Forgiveness

"In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me"

Jonah 2
July 10, 2011

Journeying with Forgiveness

"Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Ninevah"

Jonah 3
July 17, 2011

Journeying without Forgiveness

"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry"

Jonah 4
July 24, 2011

Journeying via Forgiveness

"For this son of mine was lost and is found"

Luke 15:11-32
July 31, 2011

“Forgiveness means bearing the cost instead of making the wrongdoer do it, so you can reach out in love to seek your enemy's renewal and change. Forgiveness means absorbing the debt of the sin yourself. Everyone who forgives great evil goes through a death into resurrection and experiences nails, blood, sweat and tears.”

- Tim Keller

Journeying from Forgiveness

Jonah 1
July 3, 2011

Background

Imagine this scenario: you are a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah and you lived in a concentration camp at Auschwitz. You witnessed the torture and murders of your loved ones. But you were spared from the murderous Nazi regime. You were liberated from the concentration camp by the allied forces of WWII on January 27, 1945. You go back to your life in Poland to pick up the broken pieces.

You have reconnected with some of your remaining family members and friends. All of you gather together every evening to watch the syndicated news anchor from America, Walter Cronkite, narrate the story of the fall of the Nazis from the small black and white television with money given to you by the gracious people at the Polish Baptist Association. You are eagerly waiting to hear him narrate the events of the Auschwitz Trial in Krakow and you look forward to hearing inform the world that the Auschwitz commander who tortured you and everyone you loved, Arthur Liebehenschel, will be sentenced to death by hanging.

Then the phone rings. It is a person from the Polish Baptist Association who informs you that he's been praying for you and that he feels you need to go tell Arthur Liebehenschel about repentance and the grace of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus if he repents before he is sentenced to death.

How would you respond? Would you go? Or would you say "how dare you even suggest such a thing"? I can tell you that those are not easy questions to answer for me. If I honestly was put in that situation, I probably would have reacted similar to Jonah. Jonah was a person that was put in that position, not by the Polish Baptist Association, but by God.

The Lord called Jonah to go and preach to the Nazis of his world who were located in Nineveh, which was the capital of the ruthless Assyrian Empire. They had a history of using, abusing, torturing, and even murdering, Jonah's people, the Israelites.

They embezzled money from Jonah's people (2 Kings 15:19; 2 Kings 18:13-15), they looted and destroyed their cities (2 Kings 17; Isaiah 36-37; 2

Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32). And they committed violent acts against Jonah's people. And they loved every minute of it!

This was the type of environment in which Jonah was called to repentance and forgiveness. I'm sure you won't be surprised, then, to learn that Jonah didn't want to do what God wanted him to in the first chapter. Read it.

Reflection Questions

1. The word "forgive" occurs 105 times in the Bible, mostly in the New Testament. Why do you think the Bible speaks so much about it?
2. Why is it so hard to forgive someone who has really hurt you?
3. Read Jonah 1:1-3. God is a forgiving God. As a result, He wants Jonah to be His spokesman of forgiveness to the people He runs. Why? What would you do if God told you to do the same thing?
4. Read Jonah 1:4-16, focusing especially on Jonah 1:8. How did Jonah's attitude of unforgiveness affect those around him? How did it affect Jonah?
5. Why can bitterness put you in danger? What can bitterness do to those around you if you continue going down that path of life?
6. Grace is the opposite of merit. Grace is undeserved favor. It is favor shown to someone who deserves the very opposite. It is what God is in the business of doing and when you understand it, it will set you free. Read Jonah 1:17. How did God show grace to Jonah when he was disobedient and deserved the very opposite? How has God shown grace to you when you deserved the very opposite? How have you shown grace to someone who deserved the very opposite?

Journeying to Forgiveness

Jonah 2

July 10, 2011

Background

The old whale and Jonah's presence inside his tummy tum tum has garnered a lot of attention over the years from preachers, teachers, scholars and Bible readers. The text, however, is not concerned with expressing *how* in the world it was possible for a whale to swallow Jonah. It is concerned, however, with *why* Jonah ended up in the whale's big ole belly.

He is there for a couple of two reasons: redirection and reevaluation. First, God has told Jonah to preach to Ninevah and Jonah ran in the opposite direction. As a result, God redirects him courtesy of a big ole fish. Second, Jonah is there for reevaluation. He is a prophet that doesn't want to preach God's message because he's hurt and bitter at the people he's called to preach to. The belly of the whale, therefore, is Jonah's sanctuary to wrestle, redirect, evaluate and decide if he's going be a spokeman for God who actually is willing to speak God's message. Is he going to surrender to God and what he wants him to do?

Jonah isn't alone in the Bible. Peter, a Jew who saw Roman Gentiles as evil people who threatened his own native folk, had a whale of a time wrestling with taking the Gospel to Cornelius, a Roman soldier (Acts 10). But God is a God of grace. He is a God of forgiveness. Period. Peter understood that when God reminded him of it. Jonah will to. He will come to terms with who God is - what His message is supposed to be about - and what he is called to be and do in light of it. He will, indeed, say "Ok, Lord, I surrender all." Read Jonah 2. It's the only biblical account we have of a prophet grumbling from inside a tummy.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to "surrender" something to God? What was the hardest thing that you surrendered to the Lord? How have you grown from surrender?
2. Read Jonah 2:1-5. Jonah confesses here the kinds of problems that result from disobedience to God and from bitterness. List some of the problems Jonah had that resulted from those kinds of attitudes.

3. Read Jonah 2:6. It describes God's grace in spite of our own disobedience and bitterness. It is a wonderful verse. What do you think it implies about how God works in your life when you have disobeyed Him?
4. Read Jonah 2:7. It describes Jonah's surrender to God. He gave himself up. "Okay God; if you want me to go, then I'll go. I will surrender to your will." List the words in the verse that might indicate Jonah's new spirit of surrender.
5. Read Jonah 2:8-9. It describes what Jonah learned about God and his own life from his brief time in the belly of a whale. What did Jonah learn? Make sure to spend sometime reflecting on these verses because they are rich in application to you.
6. Read Jonah 2:10. Jonah was ready to do what God called him to do. He still won't like it because his scars run pretty deep. But God had taught him from the belly of a whale. And Jonah surrendered. How has surrendering avenues of your own life opened up ministry opportunities for you?
7. Reflect on these words by the late great revivalist, Billy Sunday:
"Christian conversion is a complete surrender to Jesus. It's a willingness to do what he wants you to do." What areas of your life need to be surrendered to Him?

Journeying with Forgiveness

Jonah 3

July 17, 2011

Background

A poet known only to God wrote:

“If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.”

The word forgiveness means to pardon; to declare the guilty party as not guilty. Forgiveness is free; but, one thing is absolutely necessary in order to receive it – repentance, turning away from sin.

You see, forgiveness offers a sinner a second chance. It is forgiveness that Abraham received when he was prone to worship other gods and repented of it (Joshua 24:2-4). David received forgiveness after he repented of committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband, Uriah, killed in battle (Psalm 51). Paul received forgiveness, a second chance, when Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus for persecuting and killing Christians and he repented (Acts 8-9). It is this forgiveness, this second chance, which comes by way of repentance and turning away from sin, that Jonah is going to preach to the people of Nineveh. He is now going to journey to Nineveh *with* the message of forgiveness. How will the people of Nineveh respond? Read Jonah 3.

Reflection Questions

1. My kids sing an annoying song from the VeggieTales cartoon that is very truthful. The hook goes like this “God is a God of second chances.” What do you think this means?

2. The “second chance” motif runs all the way through Jonah 3. Look at Jonah 3:1-2. What “second chance” did God offer to Jonah? Why?
3. Read Jonah 3:3-9. How did the people of Nineveh respond to their opportunity for a “second chance?”
4. How do these two words relate to each other: (1) repentance; (2) forgiveness?
5. Read Jonah 3:10. How did God treat the people of Nineveh when they repented of their sins?
6. What does this chapter imply about God’s love and forgiveness? What does it imply about your calling to love and to forgive?
7. How can you give people a “second chance?” that may not deserve it?

Journeying without Forgiveness

Jonah 4

July 24, 2011

Background

I have often found two issues in my relationship with a forgiving God very puzzling. First, it would seem to me that God should judge anyone who can't live well, who is dishonest in his/her relationships and doesn't fear Him in life. If he did, this world would be a better place. However, the opposite seems true to me. Wickedness and evil seems to thrive, especially when bad people advantage take of good hearted people ("no good deed goes unpunished," right?). Second, common sense tells me that in an ordered and good creation, God would bring those guilty of abuse and violence to strict justice. They deserve it!

But the view of God portrayed in Jonah is that God forgives these wicked people when they turn to Him. I'm all for forgiveness, don't get me wrong. I need it everyday. But it doesn't seem fair in the economy of Derrick's theology that righteous and godly people like Jonah's suffer at the hands of the Assyrians, only to see God forgive them and not punish them.

Those issues are not easily solved, are they? It is what the Bible calls a paradox, which is something only God knows the answer to. Malachi had similar questions as me. He thought it was not fair for God to forgive such actions....because righteous people still suffered because of them (Malachi 2:17)!

In the final chapter of Jonah, you will see the prophet angry because God didn't give the people of Ninevah what they deserved. Instead, he showed grace. As a result, God asked Jonah a question at the end of the book that you must not miss or gloss over. It is a question that should ring loud in your ears because it is a question that God has designed to get you to think about who he is, not what you or I want him to be. Read Jonah 4. I'm sure you will sense Jonah's inner heart turmoil as you see the story unfold.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some questions that you would like to ask God?

2. Jonah 4 contains a series of questions by God to Jonah that are designed to get him thinking about His sinless nature and Jonah's sinful nature.
3. Read Jonah 4:1-4. Why was Jonah angry? (Hint: it has to do with how the people of Nineveh responded to the Gospel in Jonah 3)
4. Read Jonah 4:5. What do you think Jonah wanted God to do to the city even after they repented and received his forgiveness?
5. Read Jonah 4:6. God again shows grace to Jonah. The only time in the book Jonah is happy is when God deals with him on the basis of grace. But he is angry when God deals with the people of Nineveh on the basis of grace. How can a "better than you" Christian attitude be detrimental to the church's primary mission of sharing the Gospel?
6. Read Jonah 4:7-11. It contains two questions. The first is designed to get Jonah to think about his primary concern for himself. The second is designed to get Jonah to think about God's primary concern for the whole world. What would happen to the following areas of First Baptist Church of Vero Beach if we start becoming concerned about the things God is concerned about:
 - a. Evangelism
 - b. Baptisms
 - c. Church Growth
 - d. Relationships with church members
 - e. Love for one another

Journeying via Forgiveness

Luke 15:11-32

July 31, 2011

Background

Two concepts were ingrained in the minds of Jesus' hearers from infancy. It is how their society functioned. Their moral values were built from these concepts. They were the concepts of (1) honor and of (2) shame. Actions which were honorable in Israel's society were similar to the ones that bring honor today: honesty, integrity, respect for authority, respect for family, especially the father, fear of God. These actions were deemed honorable because they were the best actions people in Israel's society could take. It made Israel better. The people better. Families better. However, actions that were deemed "shameful" were those that brought disgrace to the person, his community and, especially, his father. When a person brought disgrace to their father through a selfish action, they "lost face" with their family and were viewed as a disgrace.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a parable that should be understood in light of the honor shame concepts that the original hearers who have been familiar with when Jesus was telling it. What kind of father would have accepted a son back who brought shame on himself, his community, his father and his family? Well, God would. You know why? Because he is a God whose love for sinners and compassion for them is absolutely so great that you can't even wrap your mind around it.

Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32. As you read it, make sure to note in your mind the actions that would have brought shame. More importantly, note in your mind how this son was received by the father when he came back. He didn't "lose face" at all!

Reflection Questions

1. The word prodigal means "wasteful" or "reckless." Prodigal behavior would be withdrawing a million dollars from the bank and spending it all in one fell swoop on jelly beans at the candy store. How would you react if one of your children did just that?

2. Jesus often taught deep theological truths about sin, forgiveness, grace and the like through parables. A parable is essentially an illustration from everyday life that taught a theological truth. Parables, however, were designed to shock religious experts who thought they were better than sinners. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (or more rightly - The Parable of the Forgiving Father) is such a parable. Read the context of the parable in Luke 15:1-2.
3. The religious experts had a problem with Jesus because he loved people and fellowshiped with those they wouldn't dream of. Why? Do religious people still shun "sinners" today?
4. Remember the concepts of honor and shame? Read Luke 15:11-16. What kinds of things did the prodigal son do that would have brought shame on himself, his father, and his? Would he have "lost face"?
5. Read Luke 15:17-20. How does the son's "coming to his senses" compare to the genuine repentance of the people of Ninevah in Jonah 3. In what ways does the son genuinely repent?
6. Read Luke 15:21-24. How does the father treat the son? How would have Jesus' hearers treated the son? (Hint: remember honor and shame).
7. The older son in Luke 15:25-30 stands for the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were puffed up with religious pride. How did he react to the father's forgiveness of his prodigal son? How would you react if our congregation was filled with reformed alcoholics and drug addicts who brought considerable shame on their family at one time, but have found Christ?
8. Now read Luke 15:31-32. What words does Jesus use that suggests the father loves the older son (Pharisees and teachers of the law) as well?
9. The point of the parable is this: God is love. Therefore, he wants to forgive. Period. His forgiveness, love and acceptance of those who repent and follow him are not limited to country, gender, race, economic or social status. It is a forgiving love so great, mighty, extravagant and

vast that you cannot even wrap your mind around it. As a result, answer this question: “if you have experienced this type of love and forgiveness in your own life, then will you commit yourself today to be like the father in Luke 15:21-24 and not like Jonah in Jonah 4? If you do, it will set you free, set those around you free and make you a highly effective ambassador for His kingdom. Radical forgivers. That is what God calls us to be. Will you be one today?

Pastor Derrick's Top Five Books on Forgiveness and Grace

1. Manning, Brennan. *The Raggamuffin Gospel*. Multnomah: 2005. (Read it once a year)
2. Keller, Tim. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. Penguin Group USA: 2011.
3. Zahnd, Brian. *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness*. Charisma House: 2010.
4. Connelly, Douglas. *Forgiveness: LifeGuide Topical Bible Studies*. IntersVarsity Press: 2005.
5. Stoop, David. *Forgiving the Unforgivable*. Gospel Light: 2005.

Coming in August

Taming the Gossiping Tongue: A Sermon Series