

“A Whole New Kind of Obedience” // *Castaway*, #4 // Jonah 4:1–11

Evangelism is “two very nervous people talking to one another.” That’s what I told you last week; but if what we believe is true, what we believe is of the utmost importance and we can’t help but talk about it.

- I was listening to an atheist the other day who said, “A lot of my atheist friends get offended when one of their Christian friends tries to tell them about Jesus; I get offended when they don’t. How could they believe what they say they believe and not say anything?”
- I led a girl to Christ one time in her home...

The purpose of this study is to help you engage, personally, in the mission of God. Now, in addition to the teaching I’m giving you, there are 3 essential things you need to become effective at this, at least in my observation. You need:

- **Tools**—people don’t know how to start the conversation (Jesus in My Place; “Taste and See” Scriptures)
- **Models** (the videos; your small group leaders)
- **Opportunities:** I grew up where we knocked on doors, in what had to be one of the most socially awkward encounters, you’d always stand there hoping nobody answered, but if they did, “Hello, sir...” *Something about showing up at a stranger’s house asking them if they are ready to die... and we always thought you’d die at night.* Mostly fruitless in those I encountered, but very fruitful in me. For years I’ve wondered, how can we create opportunities like that? So after the service today at all of our campuses there will be buses to take you down to Southpoint where you can all share your faith... no, but you

have an opportunity to invite people this week... lots of baptisms, etc.

PRAYER

Jonah, our prophet, has a kind of disease; it’s a disease that most religious people have; in this final chapter you’re going to see the effects of that disease; and you’ll probably see these symptoms in your own life. If you don’t consider yourself religious, you’ll still probably see the symptoms of this disease in your life. At the end of the day, people, both religious or not, are made up of the same stuff. People ask me, “J.D., when you preach are you preaching to saved people or seekers?” I’m preaching to sinners. People, religious or not, are sinners.

If you remember, God had told Jonah to go preach to Nineveh...

[4:1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish;

- (Hear that? He’s still justifying himself. He may have consented to obey God because he knows you can’t fight against God and win, but in his heart he still disagrees.
- I’ve explained... **Metal bar.** Jonah’s behavior may have conformed, but his heart is still unmelted. More on that in a minute.

for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

- How awful! How dare you, God?

[3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

I love this... *[4] And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”* That is God saying, “Really, Jonah?”

Jonah's disease is two-fold:

1. **Jonah is an idolater:**

- Jonah 2:8... Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
 - Jonah's idol is that he loves his racial identity; he loves his status as a leader in a prosperous nation. The Ninevites threaten that, so he hates them. They threaten to take from him what he loves.
- *Let me review for you what idolatry is, because you still may have a problem seeing it Jonah (he's not bowing to a statue).*

A. **Idolatry is when you build your identity on something besides God.**

- We all have an identity—something that defines us. It's an internal dialogue where you tell yourself, "I have worth because... (fill in the blank): I am a good mother; I'm good at my job; I'm a good person; I'm successful in school; I'm a great athlete..."
- Me in high school: first, I gained worth from being an athlete; then as popular; then as academically successful. We all have something like that. Men define their worth by athletic; then sexual prowess; then earning capacity.
 - When you build your identity on anything other than how God feels about you, you are an idolater. Your identity is what the most important person in your life thinks about you.
 - And when your identity is built on anything other than God's love and acceptance in your life, you become fearful, and hateful. Because there is always something about you that you think makes you worthy, and anybody that threatens that about you, you hate and resent. So, for example, I've often been jealous of people who do the same things I do and seem to get more attention for it, I've often delighted in seeing them fall or struggle, not because I'm a vengeful person, but because I get my sense of worth from being held in high regard, and they are keeping the attention off of me.
 - Living by the stat sheet on Monday
 - Other signs:

- unforgiveness toward people who have hurt you or threatened you in those areas. You're full
- self-pity that people don't recognize your worth (my kids don't realize how much I've sacrificed for them).
- You see all these in Jonah.
 - The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard in his book *Sickness Unto Death* says that this is the essence of sin, basing your self-identity on anything other than your identity with God.

B. **Idolatry is when you desire something more than God.**

When I find more happiness in being successful in my career than I find in knowing God; more delight in being rich; more delight in the dream of being happily married. Jonah finds more delight in the prosperity of Israel and the destruction of her enemies than he does in knowing and delighting in God.

- *I gave you several questions to try and get at this... what are you most terrified of losing? What do you obsess about obtaining? What drives you? What is the one thing you could not imagine being happy without; the one thing that without that, life would not be worth living?*
- The symptoms of the disease of idolatry are what you see in Jonah's life here: worry and anger and jealousy and hate and unforgiveness.
 - Believe it or not, these emotions are precious. They help you see into your heart. I've often compared them to **smoke from a fire** you can trace back down... I don't like smoke in my house, but if it lets me know where a fire is and how to put it out before it burns my family up, I'm grateful for it! So, pay attention to these. **Idols are things we derive pleasure from more than God; things we seek refuge in more than God.**

Part 1 of Jonah's disease is that he's an idolater; Part 2 is...

2. Jonah is ignorant (of the grace God has extended toward him)

- **Vs. 2, Jonah** say, “I knew you were a God who was compassionate” and he is resentful of it.
 - Now, if Jonah is going to bring up the compassion of God, he should probably not be resentful of it, but grateful... because what character has received great grace in this story? Jonah.
 - But Jonah is resentful because he doesn't see himself in the category of those who need great grace.
 - If you see yourself as a basically worthy person; that God owes you good things; grace is shocking to you and generosity does not come naturally!
 - You get resentful when God seems to be blessing people in ways they don't deserve.
 - And when God commands you to be generous with others, you resist it? You may never say it, but you say, “Why, God? I earned my money. I deserve it.”
 - But when you see yourself as a recipient of great grace, then **God's compassion becomes His most precious attribute to you**, and you become compassionate to others.
 - So which is truer of you?
 - When you see God bless someone that you see as unworthy, and with a blessing you would like to have... how do you react? Are you like, “God... why them? Why do they get that blessing? Why are they getting married and still not me? Why did they get that recognition?” It is at that moment you are demonstrating how out of touch you are with grace. The person who understands God's grace toward them is amazed by it in their own life, and delights to see it in, and extended toward, others.
 - How generous are you with your money? If not very much, you probably think Jesus didn't really have to give that much to save you.
- If you give a tithe and think that basically does it, I don't think you understand salvation. Jesus didn't tithe his blood for you, He poured out it all. God has blessed my wife and I; we love to bless our family with his goodness; but we also love to show mercy to others because we have been the recipients of great mercy.
- If you are not forgiving with your spouse, or those around you, you probably don't understand grace. I've shared this with you often about my own marriage: I had a problem with forgiving my wife. I didn't see myself in the company of the guilty. But when I started to see myself as a sinner, first against God, and then secondly against my wife, I became much more forgiving. I was not a perfect person who needed no grace, I was an extremely undeserving person that God had given grace to, and so now, as a recipient of great grace, giving a little grace to my wife came nature. *'First sinner; second sinned against.'*
- Two people get married—sexual past comes up; can't deal with it. You know how you get over it? What are you like to God, and how much has God forgiven you of? I'm not saying it's easy; forgiveness never is; I'm saying this is where it begins.
- **Honestly, Jonah, probably saw his sin and Nineveh's sin in two different categories.** The Ninevites... “They are adulterers. They worship idols. They're murderers. They are cruel: they skin people alive. And they steal.” Jonah hadn't done that!
 - But what had Jonah done? He said “no,” directly, to God! Is their any sin greater than that one? The **original sin**, the one that damned the human race, was what? Saying no to God. The eating of a forbidden tree. The tree itself was not that bad. It was saying no to God. Direct rebellion. Blasphemy. That sin led to all the pain and

suffering and corruption that came into the world; it is the one that damned the human race to hell...

- And that's a sin that all of you, even religious people, have committed. You may not have lived the life that people on Jersey Shore live; but in some ways your sin is worse. Many of those people do it out of ignorance. You knew there was a God and you just defied Him.
 - It's like we learned the first week: you're never farther from God than when you're close to Him and say "no."
 - Jonah's sin was blasphemy of the highest order, but Jonah doesn't see that, and so He doesn't get grace.
- **A spirit of unforgiveness and a lack of generosity is the indication you are out of touch with the grace of God in your own life.**

This is Jonah's disease: idolatry and ignorance. **And all this, after he has consented to do God's will!** By Jonah 4, Jonah is no longer directly defiant of God. He's doing God's will.

- This is the picture of most religious people. Religious people are like, "Well, I don't want to go hell or be in the belly of a whale, so I won't defy God."
- But that doesn't mean that you have come to delight in God or be forgiving like God.
- Delight in God and a forgiving, loving, God-like heart things can't be produced by fear of the belly of the whale, they can only be produced by grace. Seeing that Jesus saved you from the belly of the whale; He went into the belly of the whale FOR YOU and paid every ounce of your penalty in your place.
- Last week I called it Christianity 1.0 and 2.0. 1.0 is where you learn to surrender. 2.0 is where you learn to love.
- God, as I've often told you, is not just after obedience, He's after a whole new kind of obedience!

There's more:

[5] Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

- Man, he's hoping. He's that their repentance wears off and God would go send a lightning bolt out of the sky and destroy them.
- Nothing would have made him feel better. You got somebody like that?

[6] Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

[7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." [9] But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."¹

- If I were Jonah's counselor, and he were telling me this story, and he got to his point where he says, "And God said," do you do well to be angry for the plant?" and I said, "YES I DO WELL DO TO BE ANGRY; ANGRY ENOUGH I JUST WANT TO KILL MYSELF AND DIE." Honestly, I would be tempted to laugh at this point. Then I would notice Jonah was not laughing and I'd remember what Brad Hambrick has taught me and I'd wipe the smile off of my face and say, "Wow, sounds like this plant was really important to you."
- This is the second time God has asked Jonah if he has a right to be angry. The first time was in vs 4 and Jonah has no response. This time he explodes back, "Your daggum right I got a right to be angry."

¹ Psalm 115:4-8 says that one of the effects of idolatry is blindness. 4:6 Jonah was **blind** to the plant being God's grace to him in the heat; 4:9 Jonah was **deaf** to God's repeated question (same as verse 4) trying to stir his conscience and awaken him to his sin.

[10] And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. [11] And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

- God says, "You are about a plant..." but Jonah, Nineveh is filled with people. People just like you!
- In fact, "120,000 who don't know their right hand from their left." Most scholars say that refers to, "children."
- "Jonah, how can you look at such a massive destruction of life, of sinful people yes, but people just like you... and even children, who are as precious to me as your children are to you... with no emotion?"
- I think the last line is thrown in for comic relief: God's like, "And you could at least care about the cows?"
 - (BTW, quick note here... more than just comic relief, that last line is in there, I think to indicate that ultimately the whole world awaits a salvation. Remember what I explained last week, that the cows mooing contributed to this general sense of mourning? The cows were groaning in agony over the sins of Israel. Romans 8 says all of creation is "groaning," awaiting the final redemption of the earth, and I think that's prefigured here.)

So how does Jonah end? What's Jonah's response? Look at your Bible... what does the next verse say?

There is no next verse. That's it. That's the end. It ends on a cliffhanger. **It ends with a question, because the book is a question for religious people like Jonah?**

Do you care? Do you care more for perishing people than you do your stuff? Stuff that is temporary, like the planet, and on the scale of eternity, pretty meaningless.

It's a question for you: What do you care most about?

- What are you most upset about?

- The tears you shed last year, what were they about? How much grief does the fate of lost people bring to you?
- Paul (Romans 9:1-3): I'm in anguish "every day."
 - For Jonah, the Ninevites were not people, they were a concept; a big enemy city. That's why God points out the 120K children. God thought of them as *individuals*.
- Do you know there are 2.2 billion individuals in our world who have yet to be warned about Jesus? Individuals just like you, made in the image of God like you? Who experience pain and sadness and fear just like you? Who love their children just like you? Who know what it's like to feel fear; to be hungry; to feel hopeless and alone, and for whom going to hell is every bit the tragedy for them it would be for you?
- And do you care?
 - *"But surely if any sin will lie with crushing weight on the trembling, shrinking soul when grim death draws near, it is the sin of turning a deaf ear to the plaintive cry of ten millions of immortal beings who, day and night, cry out, 'Come and save us, for we are sinking into hell.'"*
Adoniram Judson, 1831
- How could we not care? How could we not weep?

Why do we have so much passion for things that really don't matter at all and so little passion for the things that actually do?

- Retired

There's one other thing about Jonah I want to point out. I told you that Jonah is a literary masterpiece. All kinds of literary devices. One of them is the repetition of the word "great."

*1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that **great** city; 1:4 But the Lord hurled a **great** wind upon the sea and there was a **mighty** tempest on the sea; 1:10 ...the men were **exceedingly** afraid...1:16 ...Then the men feared the Lord **greatly**; 1:17 And the Lord appointed a **great** fish... 3:2 Goo to Nineveh, that **great** city... 3:3 Now Nineveh was an **exceedingly** great city...3:5 They put on sackcloth, from the **greatest** of them to the least of them. 4:1 But it displeased Jonah*

exceedingly, and he was angry. 4:6 So Jonah was **exceedingly** glad because of the plant. 4:11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that **great** city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons...

- The whole point of that is to show you the greatness of God’s mission. Nineveh’s wickedness is great; God’s grace is greater; Jonah’s hatred of the Ninevites is great; God’s compassion for them is greater. Have you felt the weightiness of this mission?
- It was said that Hudson Taylor could sometimes barely stand to be in a church in England where he as from and hear the sound of 1000 Englishmen sing the praises of God when there were untold numbers of Chinese... He said, “*Would that God would make hell so real to us that we cannot rest.*”
- **Is your life marked by the heaviness that comes from participation in that greatness?**
- Every year we take up the Lottie Moon offering...² We call it CMO, but the original name was “Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.” Named for a small American missionary named “Lottie Moon” who died in China of starvation 118 years ago this year?
 - “Moo-La-Dee.”
 - She went as a single. She *wanted* to be married. But knew that this is what God called her to. It wasn’t easy for her. In her biography she said, “I pray that no missionary will ever be as lonely as I have been.” (155)
 - **She gave undying devotion to the Chinese.**
 - When most missionaries fled China during the China-Japan war she stayed where she was; when the US gov’t asked all Americans to flee to a safe haven, she said, “Oh, don’t say that you don’t want me to return. Nothing could make me return. China is my joy and my delight. It is my home now.” (150)
- She struggled for years to get people in China to listen to her. A turning point came when one day the pastor of the small Chinese church she was involved in was captured and tortured. She rushed into the place, where the pastor was strung up, beaten very badly... with his scalp hanging off... she said, “stop! Beat me instead.” And she stood inbetween the guard and this man. The guard screamed, “Get away from him, you foreign devil!” But she wouldn’t move. Witnesses say that an incredibly peaceful look came upon her face, and a gentle smile. The guard didn’t know what to do and finally just dropped his sword and walked away. She rushe this pastor away to a hospital in another city and helped care for him several weeks until he recovered. When they returned several weeks later to her city, the tiny church had multiplied in size with lots of new believers. They were overwhelmed that this strange little white woman would give her life for a Chinese man. And this opened their hearts to the message about the sacrifice of Jesus, who had given away everything He had so they could be saved. (145)
- In 1911, a great famine swept her portion of China. Again, she refused to leave. During that time she wrote to American pastors pleading with them, can’t you give to help your brothers and sisters in China? She literally gave away her portion of food and died of starvation. They say she weighed only 50 lbs. at her death.
- The Chinese nurse that was with her when she died said that she started to sing “Jesus Loves Me,” and then she began to whisper, in Chinese, the names of those friends who had gone to heaven before her. With each name, her thin hands clasped together, then unclasped, in the Chinese form of greeting. She did it one final time, but

² Notes from Lottie Moon’s story recorded in *Some Gave All*, Ellen Caughey.

said no name. The nurse, a Christian, assumed she had seen the Lord Jesus at last.” (155)

- **Her whole life speaks of the weightiness of our mission.** The mission was worth her life. Jesus was worth any sacrifice. He was better than a husband; better than food; better than life. He was worth following to the ends of the earth.

So, again, Jonah ends with a question... does Jonah ever get it?

- I'd like to think that he does, because most scholars think Jonah himself wrote the book, which means he is posing the question, which means he gets it.
- But it's left as a question because it's a question for you and me: *Do we get it?*³

Are you engaged, heart and soul, in the mission of God? You see, you have a choice: you can either be part of the radical, self-sacrificial mission of Jesus, or you can walk in disobedience.

- There is no middle ground, which we all want there to be. We want there to be like a, “I'm obedient to Jesus but I'm not really pouring my life out in mission and I'm giving my tithe, I'm minding my business, but I'm not all radical and crazy...” That category does not exist.
- Jesus said that to follow Him you must take up the cross, which means to pour your life out. That's not an instruction for a special few; it's for everybody.
- Believers so often seem to be willing to appropriate some part of the Bible they like for themselves, but not all of it: We read a verse like, “Cast your cares on Me.” That's for me. I'm a mom of 3 kids.” “Take up your cross and follow me and go into all the world and preach the gospel;” (that's clearly not for me. That's for college students without jobs. I'm not called to do that.” We read, “Come unto me and I will give you rest.” “Oh, that's for me.” “Acts 1:8.” That's not for me, someone else. *By what right do we appropriate the*

comforts of Christ but not the commands? You're either an active part of going and sending or you are disobedient. *And if you don't naturally this way, is it possible you are completely out of touch with the grace of God? Or maybe you don't really believe the gospel? But if you do understand it and just don't care...*

Isn't this where you should begin to pray?

People to pray

³ Just like the story of the prodigal son ends with a question: *will the older brother ever come in and share the joy of the Father for the recovery of the lost son?*