

“Jonah - the Unwilling Evangelist”

God takes our messes and turns them into masterpieces

2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV

Video: *We come into this world seemingly whole - complete and reliant on ourselves, but, in reality, we're simple jars of clay - fragile beings, living in a sinful world that get cracked over time, until finally, something breaks us - divorce, sickness, job loss, addiction, injury, infidelity, disease, rejection, death of a loved-one.*

When we surrender our hearts - our will - our broken pieces to God, He takes those broken shards of our lives - those jaded and seemingly unusable parts, and slowly, over time, God puts them back together. It's not a quick fix. It's not easy. Sometimes it's quite painful, but, in the end result, it's a beautiful yet broken vessel that the light of God shines through for all to see. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." - 2 Corinthians 4:7

We are human beings *being human*. We're living in a fallen world, and sometimes there are seasons where things are just hard and difficult, like dragging truck tires with ropes across a dirt field in August - just trying to *get* somewhere, but instead, feeling like we're held back. But, we can all breathe a little easier knowing that there are *no* perfect people on this planet. No perfect people are allowed here because there are none.

None of us can hide our scars for long. When we try, we're just causing others to feel bad, but sooner or later the wheels will come off - things will come unravelled for us too. Sometimes we get around *others* who seem to have it all together, and we think that we're the only ones hurting - but we're all going to have difficult times. That's *going to happen* as long as we're on this earth. We're not going to wake up someday on a high plateau where all of this just becomes *easy*.

In Christ, though, we become the broken vessel that God has put together again by his mercy and grace, like Humpty Dumpty. If we focus on our cracks and imperfections, we can become reluctant to serve God - or, if we do, it's not with our full heart or passion because we think we can't do it, or we're not good enough - where we see ourselves as Mr. or Mrs. Dumpty - not put back together, but just shards of an eggshell on the ground, thinking God can't use us.

We're talking about Jonah, a missionary evangelist and prophet from the eighth century B.C. Jonah had been obedient before then - he'd been used by God to speak life and encourage King Rehoboam II over the Kingdom of Israel. Then God called Jonah to do something, but he was reluctant, like we all may be at times in our walk with God. In terms of following God - doing what he asks - you can do it the easy way, willing and obedient, *or* you can do it the hard way - angry and ungrateful. The first way produces life and joy, the second produces anger and condemnation.

Isaiah 1:19-20 NKJV

"If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Sometimes we think it's all about *obedience* - even if it's with gritted teeth, or massive reluctance - we don't want to, but God's *making* us tell others about Jesus. But, God wants us willing, not just with our gritted-teeth obedience. The heart bent towards him is a willing heart, and that's what he's looking for. That's the *secret sauce* - that's the *key*. It can go easy or hard. One way brings *life* - and the other brings *not-life*.

Five simple movements on how this works:

Jonah 1:1-3 NIV

"A message from the LORD came to Jonah, the son of Amittai. The LORD said, 'Go to the great city of Nineveh. Preach against it. The sins of its people have come to my attention.' But Jonah ran away from the LORD. He headed for Tarshish. So he went down to the port of Joppa. There he found a ship that was going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board. Then he sailed for Tarshish. He was running away from the LORD."

Movement 1 - *Jonah Refuses to Obey*

When God commanded Jonah to preach in Nineveh, not only did he run away, but he went as far as possible in the opposite direction. Nineveh was 550 miles northeast of Israel, but he headed to Tarshish, located on the coast of Spain some 2,500 miles to the west! God wanted Jonah to go and point out Nineveh's wickedness so they would repent and turn to the Lord, but Jonah's response was to run away!

Jonah 1:17 NIV

"Now the LORD sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights."

Jonah 2:2 NIV

"He said, 'When I was in trouble, I called out to the LORD. And he answered me. When I was deep in the place of the dead, I called out for help. And you listened to my cry.' "

Movement 2 - God Intervenes in Jonah's Disobedience

Jonah is being transported to a dark place, and he had three days and nights to re-think his position on what God asked him to do.

Jonah 3:5-6 NIV

"The people of Nineveh believed God's warning. So they decided not to eat any food for a while. And all of them put on the rough clothing people wear when they're sad. That's what everyone did, from the least important of them to the most important. Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh. He got up from his throne. He took off his royal robes. He also dressed himself in the clothing of sadness. And then he sat down in the dust."

Movement 3 - Jonah Reluctantly Obeys

The Ninevites humbled themselves before God. Even the king sat down in brokenness and repentance. That can happen today as well, and we should pray and believe for it - not criticize.

Jonah 3:7-10 NIV

"Here is the message he sent out to the people of Nineveh. 'I and my nobles give this order. Don't let people or animals taste anything. That includes your herds and flocks. People and animals must not eat or drink anything. Let people and animals alike be covered with the clothing of sadness. All of you must call out to God with all your hearts. Stop doing what is evil. Don't harm others. Who knows? God might take pity on us. He might not be angry with us anymore. Then we won't die.' God saw what they did. He saw that they stopped doing what was evil. So he took pity on them. He didn't destroy them as he had said he would."

Movement 4 - Jonah's Anger vs Gratitude

Even the animals fasted. Revival was breaking out in the land and Jonah's mad. The spirit of religion was on Jonah as he threw a conniption fit.

Jonah 4:10-11 NIV

"But the LORD said, 'You have been concerned about this plant [that God made to grow up over Jonah]. But you did not take care of it. You did not make it grow. It grew up in one night and died the next. And shouldn't I show concern for the great city of Nineveh? It has more than 120,000 people. They can't tell right from wrong. Nineveh also has a lot of animals.' "

Movement 5 - *Jonah Refuses God's Grace*

God was trying to help Jonah understand his heart for people who had so repulsed Jonah. Not only did he not want to pray for them, he didn't want to deliver God's good news to them for fear that they might repent and God would *relent*. Jonah ended up as a bitter, angry, and reluctant evangelist-prophet.

Things are happening in our time right now. There are people that are getting so spun-up in their minds about the "trans" issue - the demonstrations, parades, children's library books - and then listening to the news of all that - we can become enraged and turn into Jonah. But there is something much larger going on than some political debacle, or gender-confusion - things we're being barraged with on a daily basis.

God has put on each one of us a call to bring the Good News to everyone, and if we can't get over our anger, prejudices, and religious bent of hatred towards different people groups that don't think like us - look like us - act like us - or worship like us - then we are *missing* the heart of Jesus for the world - and all we become is just another religious body calling out people and hating them - *and being proud of it*.

That is not the heart of Jesus. When we get spun up, we forget who we are. Jonah forgot who he was because of his rage, anger, and hatred for the Ninevites - like the disciples who asked Jesus if they shouldn't call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans. Rather, we need to go before the Lord and say, "*Lord, teach us to pray for those that we're repulsed by.*"

If we put the same emotional energy into prayer for those who repulse us, imagine the change that could happen because of our prayers? Imagine the Life that could happen. Imagine the *Love* that could happen. God is asking us to do *just that* - it's from his *heart*. We need to be honest about how we're looking at the world right now and pray. There are assignments against us to twist the way we see people so that we'll hate them and *not* pray for them - not love them past the surface stuff. Jesus said, "*I'm calling you out from them to be different - not to belong, but to be different.*" That's the call on our lives.

The story of Jonah didn't end well - it just stopped - with no resolution. Nothing is known about Jonah after this. We just know that Nineveh repented, and God relented. This is the kind of message that pierces our armor. We can get so spun-up in our culture and society - we're so inundated with news that is fake, false, or agenda-driven. We hardly know what the truth is in these current events.

We can lose our ability to think well - to process well, and to hear God's heart and voice clearly, but God is calling us back to Love - radical Love - *crazy Love* - that sees beyond the makeup and wigs, and sees beyond the pretense and media-enhancement of a story to see the people behind that are shattered like Humpty Dumpty... *and that no one's trying to pick back up again.*

Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us wisdom and grace to never be reactionary but to learn to be responsive. Lord, we repent for our own anger against those who You desire to hear the Gospel - those who may offend or anger us - You want us to win - to share the Good News with. Lord, we want to walk with You - and not end up in the belly of a fish - to not just be obedient through gritted teeth - but willing. That's Your heart for us.

Lord, we want to change our minds. Help us to see this differently - to not forget who we are in Christ the next time we're watching the news. Help us to clearly see people in 3-D - from every angle. Lord, give us grace and wisdom and the ability to walk in mercy towards others who we don't understand. We lay these things before You, and as we go from here, let Your Truth rein and set us free. In Jesus' name. Amen