

Jonah, the Lukewarm Prophet (Jonah 3:1-10)

Intro: The prophet Jonah stands in front of Nineveh after soaking in the stomach acid of a great fish for three days. A short time ago, he tries to run from God, because he doesn't want God to have mercy upon his enemy. The LORD deals with the prophet by appointing a fish to swallow him. Then when God tires of listening to Jonah's manipulative prayers, He causes the fish to vomit the lukewarm prophet out of its mouth. Finally, he approaches Nineveh burnt and bruised. *As Christians we should not just partially obey God's plan unless we want to endure the following two trials: 1) God placing higher expectations upon us; and 2) God accomplishing His intended plan without us.*

Let's consider the first trial arising from partially obeying God:

I. God will place higher expectations upon us (Jonah 3:1-4).

1. God may require more from us when we manifest a lukewarm attitude (Jonah 3:1-2).

a. God requires much more from Jonah the second time. He originally commanded the prophet to preach judgment against Nineveh, but now He tells Jonah to speak to Nineveh. In Jonah 3:2, God changes the message and tone of the first proclamation (Jonah 1:2). Otherwise, why would He include "the proclamation I'm going to tell you" (Jonah 3:2)?

b. Jonah fears that the Ninevites will repent when he preaches the message of judgment against the city in Jonah 1, so he runs from God. Now the prophet actually stands in front of the city gate. God tells him to proclaim a message to the Ninevites rather than against them. This would definitely increase the odds that the wicked city would repent of its sins.

c. If we only partially obey God's Word, we face the risk of greater expectations from God the second time He tells us to do something. God will carry out His plan despite our attempts to sabotage it with a lukewarm attitude. He might require us to face our deepest fears when we walk in partial obedience. With Jonah, this meant he might be God's chosen instrument that brings about the salvation of his enemies.

2. God's higher standard tempts us to sink further into disobedience (Jonah 3:3-4).

a. Jonah didn't follow through with God's command. The prophet Jonah only obeys God in the fact that he finally arrives in Nineveh. The great city takes

three days to walk (Jonah 3:3). Jonah, however, only began to go into the city a walk of one day. When he enters the city, he pronounces five Hebrew words of judgment. "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be demolished" (Jonah 3:4).

b. The prophet doesn't want any part of God's revised message of mercy to Nineveh, so he simply speaks a few words of condemnation against them. Soon his attitude festers into a raging temper tantrum. We must not forget that Jonah prophesied to the Israelites. They considered him a true prophet. Even a tried and true prophet who steps out of God's plan risks much. How much more careful should we be in fully aligning with God's plan?

c. If we really mess up and God's expectations become more intense, we need to comply with His will. Otherwise, we will pay a high price for our rebellion. God will throw our emotions into a world of chaos. He will not let us experience a moment of peace until we bend to His plan. Despite this outcome, Jonah resolves not to share his God with Nineveh.

Let's consider the second trial arising from partially obeying God:

II. God will accomplish His plan without us (Jonah 3:5-10).

1. When we avoid sharing God's intended message, we still release His Word with its life changing power (Jonah 3:5-6).

a. The prophet Jonah reluctantly preaches five words of judgment. Jonah doesn't confront the Pagan King first as do most of the Old Testament prophets. Nor does he preach God's revised message to the city, but the Ninevites believe in God anyway. When Jonah finally does preach, he doesn't reveal Yahweh to the foreigners. Instead he tells them about God (Elohim).

b. Hearing the words of judgment, the Ninevites cry out for a fast. Every single person in the city from the youngest to the oldest participates. They also put on sackcloth in surrender to this unknown God. The people spread the message throughout the city. The King hears the Word, rises from his throne, puts on sackcloth, and sits in ashes. All signs of deep repentance.

c. At times we share the Word of God in such a way that prematurely judges people. As Christians, we pronounce judgment rather quickly. Some pastors even practice this against non-Christians from the pulpit. God's intentions may be different than our agenda, so we must represent the heart of God with truth. His

Word has life changing power. God can shatter our preconceived ideas instantly whenever His truth transforms the heart of our enemy.

2. If we don't carry out God's plan, He might use our greatest enemy to fulfill His will (Jonah 3:7-10).

a. As an Israelite, Jonah's worst enemy would be the Ninevite King. The King fully obeys God and makes a proclamation that calls every human and animal within the city walls to repent of evil and turn to God with all their strength. He commands every living to put on sackcloth and fast before God. The King preaches a more complete Gospel and to more people than Jonah does. As a result, the city repents of its history of violence.

b. Since Jonah doesn't preach about God's mercy to the Ninevites, the Pagan King can only guess that God will not judge them if they repent. The King hopes that the city's acts of deep humility will cause God to repent of His anger towards them. When God repents in Jonah 3:10, He expresses remorse for His prior decision to judge Nineveh. God hasn't committed an act of immorality; rather His heart now feels compassion for Nineveh instead of anger.

c. Our attitudes could lead to our replacement. After God transforms our enemy, He might assign this despised person the responsibilities He originally intends for us. If we persist in rebellion, refuse to share God's grace with our enemies, or stubbornly fight for our agenda, we might live to see our greatest fears come to pass. Our worst enemy might take our spot in God's plan which means this individual will receive our blessings God intends for us as well.

In conclusion, *we should not just partially obey God's plan unless we want to endure the following two trials: 1) God placing higher expectations upon us; and 2) God accomplishing His intended plan without us.* God doesn't need us to fulfill His plan, but He will deal with us accordingly if we try to do our part with wrong motives. More specifically, He will wreak havoc on our emotions leaving us burnt and bruised with no peace. If we continue yet in stubbornness, we may even see our worst fears come to life. God might use our insincere message to transform the heart of our enemy and then elevate him to a higher spiritual status than us. He may even go so far as to assign this person our part in His plan. Our lukewarm attitude could rob us of every blessing God intends for us.