

Jonah

Introduction

I. When you think about outreach, what's your primary emotional response? What are the barriers keeping you from reaching out to others more intentionally?

II. Today we'll look at God's heart for the lost in the world and ask ourselves whether we have hearts that beat like God's heart for the world.

The Passage

I. Background

A. Historical Background

1. Written in mid 7th century BC
2. Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel
3. The Assyrian Empire was on the rise and threatening smaller nations like Israel. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria.

B. Literary Background

1. Jonah is historical
2. But Jonah reads like a parable: it has an exaggerated quality to it, it has a lot of humor and irony, and the punch-line comes right at the end.

II. Chapter 1: Rebellious Jonah

A. God's strange assignment (v. 1-2)

"Go into the heart of enemy territory and preach a message of judgment"

B. Jonah's response (v. 3)

Runs in the opposite direction!

C. God uses Jonah's rebellion to bring a group of pagan sailors to faith (v. 4-16)

D. God protects Jonah by providing a whale (v. 17)

III. Chapter 2: Repentant Jonah

A. Jonah's psalm to God (v. 1-9)

B. Jonah brought back to Israel safely (v. 10)

IV. Chapter 3: Repentant Nineveh

A. Jonah obeys God and preaches judgment to Nineveh (v. 1-4)

B. The amazing response of the Ninevites

1. The response of the people (v. 5)
2. The response of the king (v. 6)
3. The king's edict (v. 7-9)

C. God's response to Nineveh: compassion (v. 10)

V. Chapter 4: God's object lesson for Jonah

A. Jonah's disapproval of God's compassion on Nineveh (v. 1-5)

Jonah doesn't want God to have compassion on his enemies

B. The lesson of the vine (v. 6-11)

1. God provides comfort for Jonah and then takes it away (v. 6-9)

2. God shows Jonah how much more he should care for the 120,000 people in Nineveh than a plant that brings comfort
- C. The stunning contrast between Jonah's heart and God's heart
 1. Jonah's heart: just concerned about his own people, his own comfort
 - a. He cares more about a plant than about 120,000 people
 - b. He represents the Israel of his day
 - 1) God had chosen them to be a light to the nations, blessed them to be a blessing
 - 2) They had forgotten their missionary identity: they were keeping all the blessing to themselves, protecting themselves
 - 3) Jonah was written as a warning to Israel
 2. God's heart: deep compassion for lost people
 - a. God had invested a lot in the people of Nineveh
 - 1) v. 10: God tended Nineveh and made it grow
 - 2) v. 10: Nineveh had not sprung up over night—God had watched over it a long time
 - b. The people of Nineveh needed God's compassion
 - v. 11: "can't tell right hand from their left" = spiritually lost
 - c. God's question to Jonah: "should I not be concerned?"
 - d. God's heart of compassion
 - 1) God's essential character: v. 2 is a quote from Exodus 34:6
 - 2) God has compassion on all the characters in this story
 - pagan sailors, godless Ninevites, and Jonah himself

Conclusion

- I. With outreach, the fundamental question is a heart question:
 - = Do I see God's compassionate heart for lost people around me, and does my heart beat like his?
 - A. There's a little Jonah inside each of us that doesn't want to reach out in compassion but wants to stay safe, comfortable, insular
 1. It is easy to keep God's blessings to ourselves
 2. In the midst of our concern for other issues in our own lives, reaching out to lost people often gets lost in our priorities
 - B. Often the barriers keeping us from reaching out are really just hiding a deeper heart issue. When the heart is there, we tend to find ways through the barriers
- II. What would it look like to have God's heart for the lost in our own lives?
 - A. To see people the way God sees them
 - B. To prioritize our lives accordingly
- III. Spending time in prayer this week
 - A. Confessing: where we have hearts like Jonah's
 - B. Asking: God, help me see people through your eyes this week

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. How did you answer the two questions asked on Sunday: When you hear outreach/evangelism emotions do you experience? What are the key barriers keeping you from reaching out more intentionally?
3. How would you explain the interaction between God's compassionate heart for the lost and his judgment on sinful people?
4. Where do you relate to Jonah? How specifically do you see a Jonah-like attitude playing out in your own life?
5. If God suddenly gave you a more passionate heart for people who don't know him, what practical changes would you have to make to live that out more intentionally, given your unique life situation?