

Reluctant: Taking Sides

Jonah 3

Small Group Discussion

Opening question (this question is designed to get everyone involved in discussion)

- How do you feel about the idea of God taking sides? Is it okay to pray for a certain outcome in a sporting event, or a political election?
- Going a bit deeper, do you tend to look at people in terms of “good guys and bad guys” with respect to how God relates with them?

Read Jonah 3:1-3, then discuss the following.

- Why do you think that Jonah immediately obeys God in this instance, in contrast with ch. 1?
- Why did God insist on sending *Jonah*, when he could have chosen anyone, in spite of Jonah’s rebellion?
- Why might Jonah have needed 3 days to go through the city of Nineveh? (Even in our day, one could walk across most American cities in 1 day, at most).

Read Jonah 3:4-5, then discuss the following.

- What was the content of Jonah’s message to Nineveh? How do you feel about that message?
 - How do you think you would respond if some foreign prophet came to your town, preaching this kind of message?
 - How might this message be considered a *loving* message?
 - What did Pastor Lou mean when he said, “Sin is the toxic poison that threatens the people God treasures?” Do you agree with this description of sin? Why or why not?
- Are you surprised by the reaction of the Ninevites in v. 5? Why or why not?
 - The phrase in v. 5, “from the greatest to the least,” implies that people at every level of society responded to Jonah’s message. Why is this a striking observation?
 - What signs of repentance do you see here? In our day, would the same signs of repentance be appropriate? If not, what would?

Read Jonah 3:6-10, then discuss the following.

- The “king of Nineveh” probably refers to the king of Assyria, the nation in which Nineveh was an influential city. He had multiple palaces, one of them being in Nineveh. This king was likely the most powerful ruler in the world, in an empire known for its cruelty and violence. In view of these facts, what is so striking about his response?
 - In what way does this vile king model good leadership, in this instance?
- At the end of v. 8, we see other expressions of repentance, beyond sackcloth and dust. What are they? What signs of repentance would be appropriate in our time and place? Would they be the same as here—“let them give up their evil ways and their violence?” Why or why not?

- How do you feel about God's response to their repentance, in v. 10? Does it strike you as fair, unfair, encouraging, infuriating, or some other description?
- In what way does Jonah's unappealing message turn out to be fruitful?

Application

- Pastor Lou said on Sunday, "The repentance is the real miracle of the story." What did he mean? Have you seen miraculous repentance take place—in your life or someone else's?
- What does it mean that "God sees the victim behind the villain?" (Hurting people hurt people, and God has compassion for the pain that leads them to hurt others.)
- When you see someone who has hurt you or someone else, do you tend to see them as victims or villains? How does compassion relate with the necessity of consequences in such situation?
- How might one of your relationships change if you took this perspective?
- How can we be empowered in these relationships by knowing that Jesus became the victim when we were the villain?

Share and Pray

- Pray for people who need to experience repentance, but who seem unlikely to do so, that God might bring them to repentance.
- If you see the need for repentance in your life or relationships, or our community, confess that.
- If you sense that there is some deep pain that is leading you to hurt others, acknowledge that and let people pray for your healing.
- Share other needs and pray for one another.