

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

God's Will (Part 2)  
Jonah 3:1-10  
September 29, 2013

## INTRODUCTION

Last week we looked at three different phases of God's will. In the story of Jonah, we see his intentional will. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah didn't want to go. That was God's intentional will for Jonah. God's intentional will is always best for us, but Jonah just couldn't see it. Then we saw Jonah move into the area of God's permissive will. God tolerated Jonah going in a different direction. This is not the best place for us, but with Jonah God used the situation anyway to bring a boat crew to repentance. It's at the permissive will point where human experience shows us that we may very well miss out on God's blessings by not being obedient. Human experience shows us that when we disobey God, God will just raise up other people to accomplish his will, but in this case, God wanted Jonah. So, Jonah thought it would be better to drown than to go to Nineveh, but in God's mercy God provided this great fish to keep him alive. Then, we see God's ultimate will. This is when God accomplishes what he wants with or without us. In Jonah's case, God wanted Jonah to be the one to deliver his message. God told him to go a second time to Nineveh.

There was quite some period of time from the time Jonah left his hometown, got on the boat, headed to Tarsus in the wrong direction, and then made it to Nineveh. Then, he spent 40 days waiting for God to destroy the town.

## SCRIPTURE Jonah 3:1-10

*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

*<sup>3</sup> Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be*

overthrown.”<sup>5</sup> *The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

<sup>6</sup> *When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.* <sup>7</sup> *This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:*

*“By the decree of the king and his nobles:*

*Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.* <sup>8</sup> *But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.* <sup>9</sup> *Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”*

<sup>10</sup> *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

Jonah went to Nineveh. Last week I talked about Assyria. Assyria is Syria as we know it, but this Nineveh, the way the lines are drawn, is actually right inside northern Iraq. The ruins of Nineveh are still there today. People have excavated the ruins of Nineveh, and it was far away from Jonah's hometown. He was a forthcoming Hebrew prophet showing up proclaiming the message of the living God.

It took three days. Archaeologists have estimated that because of the size of the city of Nineveh, the way it is today, the ruins of the border, the brick wall that goes around Nineveh, it would take three days to go in and out all the neighborhoods in the different areas to proclaim any message. So, Jonah gave this message. The Ninevites no doubt had heard about this Hebrew God and the mighty things that he was capable of doing. Jonah gave this message, and the people repented.

**SCRIPTURE** Jonah 4:1-11

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.* <sup>2</sup> *He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and*

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*compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

*<sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”*

*<sup>5</sup> Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant<sup>[a]</sup> and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”*

*<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”*

*“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”*

*<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”*

Jonah found out what God wanted him to do. He did it effectively. The people believed. They declared a fast so effective that the king got involved. I want you to see what Jonah missed out on. Jonah missed out. He missed the point that it was God’s will for him to be the messenger only.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

It's better to do one thing and do it well than to do many things poorly. Companies sometimes have to sell off assets when times get tough. Then, they always return to the one thing that they do well, usually the one thing that got them started in business in the first place. In Jonah's case, God gave him one thing to do. Wow! He did it well. The king of Nineveh and the Ninevites were caught up in all types of

idolatrous worship. The location of Nineveh was such that it was next to a great river, and it was the crossroads for a lot of trades. So, there were all the elements right there in the town of Nineveh and all different religions going on in Nineveh, but none of them were worshiping the one true God.

When this king heard the prophecy of this Hebrew named Jonah, he had a sense of urgency so much so that he even wanted the animals to have the appearance of fasting. He called the whole nation, the whole city to a fast. They put on this sackcloth as a symbol of mourning. So, we have all the people, even the animals, having this repentant spirit. That's pretty convincing for a prophet. The prophet just showed up, stated one sentence, went to another neighborhood, and stated the sentence again, went to another neighborhood, spit it out again. No doubt that his prophet report card would have had an "A+ job well done."

In the Bible, many times, people did not listen to prophets. Micaiah was a guy most of us don't know about. He was a prophet. He prophesied the doom of King Ahab. King Ahab had 400 false prophets to tell him that he should go into battle and that he would come out victorious. He called on one other prophet that he knew was a prophet of the Lord—Micaiah. He said, "Micaiah, what will happen if I go into battle? Micaiah said, he answered in this way, "All the four hundred prophets are wrong." So, Ahab said, "Put Micaiah in jail until I come back." Well, guess what, Ahab didn't come back. So, we have an example of a man who did not listen to a prophet. Then there were people that had to be convinced that a prophet was right. Nathan had to convince David that God would punish him for adultery and murder, and God did.

But with Jonah's prophecy, he didn't have any difficulty, the people just repented. Now, when a prophet said that something was going to happen, and it didn't happen, the people could stone the prophet; they would kill the prophet. So, here we have Jonah showing up, and he says that in 40 days God is going to destroy Nineveh or it will be overturned by an enemy. If that didn't happen, if that didn't come true, people could call Jonah a false prophet. He told them they'd be destroyed, but instead God had compassion. God changed his mind, and there are some scriptures that indicate times in the Bible where God changed his mind. That's hard for us as little minded humans to understand, but if God wants to change his mind, he can change his mind. So, God had compassion for these people.

For God to change his mind would have been a big deal. Listen to what Deuteronomy 18 says about prophecies that don't come true. God said, “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.”

Jonah was mad because his reputation was at stake. He promised destruction but now there was none. They could stone him, or they could just not take him seriously, which for a prophet was probably worse than stoning or killing him. Not taking him seriously would mean the unemployment line for the prophet.

## **APPLICATION**

Just as God had Jonah's best interest in mind, he has ours in mind as well. If we've been obedient, when we do what he wants us to do, we should not worry about our reputation. It's our job, like Jonah, to be the messenger of God. Maybe we don't have the message of destruction. It's up to us to be God's messengers, his messengers of love. It's up to him to do something with that message. Jonah missed out on the fact that his direction from God was to just tell the message and leave the rest up to God. Next, Jonah missed the point.

God's will was for the people to correct their ways; that was the purpose behind the message. Jonah didn't get it; he did not want them to repent. He wanted to sit back and watch the show. He wanted to see death and destruction. He wanted his prophecy to come true as he envisioned it. It was the only thing that Jonah was missing here on the outskirts of town. He had the little shelter that he built so he could sit there and watch the show. The only thing that Jonah was missing was a was a tub of buttered popcorn, but God is a merciful God. Jonah was mad at God. He said, “That's why I didn't want to go because I knew you would do this!” It just didn't happen like Jonah thought.

Jonah had an anger problem. He did not have compassion. He should have been thrilled when God had compassion. He could have been satisfied with a job well done. Instead, he became angry with God. Think of it. This would be like a preacher preaching about hell and then hoping no one repents and that everyone would go

there. Perhaps he wanted to see fire come out of heaven like the story of Elijah. After all, look at what Jonah survived in order to deliver this message. Jonah had a sense of entitlement. He thought God owed it to him to destroy Nineveh.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

There was a preacher in the 1700s in America called Jonathan Edwards. Some of you may have heard of him. He preached a famous sermon called *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, but really with Jonah the sermon would have been titled *God in the Hands of an Angry Sinner*. God had one mission for Jonah—to tell the people he would destroy or overturn them in 40 days. That was it. He had no other mission for Jonah. At this point, Jonah got angry with God and said several times that he wanted to die.

What happened to the prayer of Jonah in chapter 2? It's like a different person from when he was in the belly of that fish, and he prayed this beautiful prayer, and then he obeyed God. What happened? Well, if Jonah got an A for doing his job; he got an F in deportment. For younger people who don't know what deportment means, it means attitude. There used to be report cards where you'd have your grade and then your deportment. You better not come home with a lower deportment grade than an academic grade.

## **APPLICATION**

It's hard to believe that Jonah got angry because a group of people repented, but he did. Whatever we do for the Lord, whatever we say for the Lord, we should do it well, and we should leave the results to him. We may start in a direction, and the end result may be different than we envisioned. If God's in control, we should have no worries about it.

Jonah missed the point that God's main objective for Jonah was to learn to trust him. God was working on Jonah, not just using him to work on 120,000 people. God was working on Jonah from the beginning. Jonah should have trusted the Lord with the fearful Ninevites, the fierce people that dealt ruthlessly with people. Having a message like he had, he should have trusted the Lord with his own insecurities. He should have trusted the Lord with the message, those who received

it, and what God would do with the people. He should have trusted God with his own reputation. He should have trusted God with his feelings, with his anger, but Jonah just didn't get it.

Throughout the Bible—Adam Noah, Joseph, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the fiery furnace, Daniel and the Lions Den, Elijah, Elisha, Abraham, the disciples, Mary and Martha, the Apostle Paul, John on the island of Patmos—all of these and hundreds of others of people in the Bible all have a clear common denominator. It is that God wanted them to trust him. That's what it's all about. In the belly of the fish, Jonah seemed to have a crisis of belief. His prayer is sincere. He realized that God spared him from drowning, and God gave him a second chance.

Henry Blackaby, who wrote the book *Experiencing God*, was missing this week. I don't know if you know about that or not, but he was missing for over 24 hours, and they found Henry. Henry had a heart attack, as I understand it, while he was driving, and did not have his diabetic medicine with him and became confused. They were able to find him because he used his credit card to buy gas somewhere, but I think Henry's okay now. Henry wrote a dynamic book called *Experiencing God* that comes with a study. Henry wrote, “When God invites you to join him in his work, he has a God-sized assignment for you.” This is under Henry's writing called “The Crisis of Faith” or “The Crisis of Belief.” He wrote, “You will quickly realize you cannot do what he's asking you to do on your own. If God doesn't help you, you will fail. This is the crisis of a belief when you must decide whether to believe God for what he wants to do through you. At this point many people decide not to follow what they sense to be what God is leading them to do. Then they wonder why they do not experience God's presence and activity the way other Christians do. The way you respond at this turning point determines whether you become involved with God in something God-sized that only he can do or whether you will continue to go your own way and miss what he has purposed for your life.”

Jonah had his own set of conditions that he expected God to meet. Jonah only reached that crisis of faith when he was in the belly of the fish, but that quickly passed. God will bring all of us to that moment, that crisis of faith, the crisis of belief. Once again, God will show us, as he did with all these great people in the Bible, that his relationship with them and his relationship with us has not changed

through the centuries, through the eons. It is just that God wants us to trust him. Isn't that hard for us to do?

Jonah didn't have the Biblical record. The people in these stories didn't have most of the Biblical record we've got, and we still struggle with trusting. But again, that's the common denominator of everything. God wants us to trust him. Jonah missed the point. He thought that the point was something that it was not, and I want you to take what I'm about to say here. Let this become part of your life. It is so true. Sometimes what we think is the point is not the point.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

One day I was stuck at the driver's license place. I didn't really want to be there, but I had no option. Just a handful of employees were doing a great job, but it was a full house that day. I knew that there would be a wait, but I didn't know how long. The minutes became hours. Then it became lunchtime. I didn't want to go get and get out of my place in line and go to lunch. So, I called Susan and asked Susan to bring me something. She was off work that day. So, she drove all the way over there and brought me some lunch. Sitting next to me was a woman with a baby. This baby was restless and crying, and I'm sure 60-seconds seemed like an hour. The people were restless. A couple of hours went by. More hours went by, and I asked the woman, "Can I hold the baby?" and she said, "Would you please?" She had a bottle, and I fed that child. I bounced that boy on my knees. I made all those silly faces that people make at children, and then I burped that boy. That little boy calmed down in my arms, but the mom didn't ask for the baby back. So, I continued to hold him. Then she began talking about her life, just random things, and she started talking to people around her. She was enjoying herself, and I had nothing better to do that day because I was waiting in line, even though we were in chairs. She enjoyed the break. Eventually, she took the child back in her arms, and it was time for me to go to the counter. I took care of my business, and I left. Six hours had passed from the time I got there. I ended up having to call it a vacation day at work. Well, here's what happened. Later on, I found out it was a mistake. I shouldn't have been there that day. I was mad, because I had wasted the whole day. I'm sure my family heard me rant and rave. Then it hit me. I was not there to take care of personal business. I was there because a mother needed a break and conversation with some adults.

Another time I was in Chicago for my job. I missed the bus I was supposed to take, and I waited for another bus. I was so impatient. I was standing with my toes off the edge of the curb, as if that's going to make the next bus come faster. Other people were waiting to get on the bus. I got on the bus, and it was standing-room-only. People were holding on to the pole and holding onto the little vinyl straps. When I got on this bus, there was a tiny, elderly woman standing next to me, and she saw this cross on my uniform. She started talking with excitement; there was only one problem. I did not understand her language. It sounded Slavic or Polish or something, but really, I wasn't sure. She talked as if I understood her, excited and pointing to the cross on my uniform. I had no idea what she said, but I knew she wanted me to understand. So, on that public bus, I did something I've never done before. I took my hands out, and I just put them right on her tiny head, right there, and I bowed my head, and she did too. I just prayed a prayer that God would bless her life. My thought while I was praying out loud was, "Lord, don't let the bus driver slam on the brakes right now." But, after that prayer she looked up, and she said what sounded like "thank you" in another language. The bus arrived at the destination, and as she got off the bus, she was saying what sounded like, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I thought I had missed the bus, but that was the bus I was supposed to be on. There was another bus for me to be on that day.

I've come to the conclusion in life that when the unexpected happens, when it starts stacking up, when your day starts stacking up like you didn't plan, you better watch out, because either you're going to be a blessing to someone else, or you're going to receive a blessing. Don't be like Jonah and miss it by being angry. The story ends with an angry prophet telling off God, saying he wished he was dead. "I'll show God. I wish I were dead!"

Jonah accomplished God's will, but he did not see that the overall plan was to bring a nation to repentance. Let's not be so inward focused that we miss God's plan individually. Corporately, as a church, let's not be so inward focused with what we want to do, what we want to see happen, that we miss the point of what God has for us. I really believe that perhaps in heaven God may just open up the closet of blessings and show us what would have been ours if we just believed and trusted. I don't want to miss out on it. I don't want to miss out on being a blessing, and I sure don't want to miss out on God's blessings coming at me.

The question that I have today for you is this, “Are you truly seeking the Lord? Are you pouring yourself out as an offering, or are you holding something in reserve for yourself?” It's hard to believe how people try everything except the right thing. If you look in the yellow pages and look up churches, you will see that every religion, everything is right here in Nashville. We could probably be the most religious town on earth. People are trying everything. People are trying everything to find satisfaction in every conceivable way except God's way. Maybe you've tried every way but God's way. Maybe you're angry with God because he didn't come through like you thought he should have or could have. Maybe you're angry at God because just like Jonah, the circumstances didn't turn out like you thought they would, but you know that God's grace and mercy are sufficient.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA