

YOU

Sermon Series: Spiritual Disciplines: Becoming More Like Jesus

To be used with: Maintaining Focus on Jesus

Sermon Title Possibilities: Our Actions & God's Response

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-10

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *"Spiritual Disciplines: Becoming More Like Jesus,"* this sermon shows specific actions taken by a group of people and God's specific responses to these actions. God is aware of our actions and will respond accordingly.

Introduction: When we were growing up, we knew that there were things we could do in order to capture the attention of our parents. Saying "Yes, sir" and "No, ma'am" was always going to generate a smile and a look of affirmation. This smile and look did not mean that our parents loved us more or less in that moment. It did mean, however, that they were aware of our actions and wanted to respond. If this is true for parents and children, then it is also true between God and us. This story in Jonah 3 proves this.

1. The actions of the people:

a. They fasted (v. 5)

Fasting is a choice in which someone gives up something in order to draw closer to God. Many associate fasting with forgoing food and this would be accurate. One can also fast from social media, watching athletics on TV, or a host of other options. Fasting is a discipline for New Testament believers to embrace as Jesus told His followers in the Sermon on the Mount, "Whenever you fast, do not be gloomy like the hypocrites" (Matt. 6:16).

We see in today's passage that the king of Nineveh called the entire country to fast as a response to the message that Jonah proclaimed that day. The king knew that the message was difficult and he led his people to take significant action.

b. They put on sackcloth (v. 5 & 6)

The putting on sackcloth was a sign of personal humiliation. If someone had sackcloth on he was acknowledging personal sin within his life and was accepting responsibility for this sin. The wearing of sackcloth also indicated that the individual was actively choosing to no longer embrace the behavior that is causing the humiliation.

The people of Nineveh had just received a difficult message. Instead of putting together a committee in order to discuss how they should respond, they simply responded in repentance. They humbled themselves and did not make any excuses for their sinful behavior.

c. They prayed earnestly (v. 8)

The CSB says that they were to pray “earnestly to God.” The NIV says that they were to pray “urgently.” A study of this word in the Hebrew shows one who prays with force and strength while seeking to prevail in this request. The people of Nineveh knew that this was a crucial time in the life of their country and it was time for them to call out to a gracious God and they were not going to let anything stop them.

2. God’s response:

a. He saw their actions (v. 10)

We see at two extremely encouraging responses in the first part of verse 10. First is the fact that God saw the actions of the people of Nineveh. They heard the message from God which was delivered through Jonah and He was fully aware of their humble response.

The second piece of encouragement is that we do not see any delay between the people’s actions as a result of the message and God’s gracious response. Many have a false view that God is angry and out to get us. The truth is the exact opposite. God is gracious in even providing a warning. When we respond like the people of Nineveh, God is quick to action as well.

b. He relented (v. 10)

We serve an unchanging God. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:25). He is also a God who hears our prayers and responds accordingly. He had warned the people of Nineveh of their coming destruction. As a result of their actions, He relented and did not bring about their destruction. He is truly a gracious Father.

Conclusion: God was gracious then and He is gracious now. He saw the hearts and actions of the people of Nineveh and He sees our hearts and actions today too. If we have sin in our lives today and we choose to repent like the people of Nineveh, we too can experience His grace like they did. If we know that we are in need of a saving relationship with Him, we can earnestly call out to Him like the people of Nineveh. He will graciously receive us and change us from the inside out.

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