

The Adventures of Jonah
“Go to the City”
November 22, 2009 by Kevin Haah



I. Introduction

Welcome to New City.

Say something about the vision of New City.

We’re looking at the book of Jonah. We are studying Jonah because he’s a guy who ran away from God, but God brought him back. He ran but God pursued. That’s about sin and grace. We’ve been talking about what happens when we run away, and how God brings us back.

My life has been like Jonah. That’s what Kaetlyn told me the other day. “You didn’t obey God when he called you the first time to be a pastor?”

When I was in high school, my youth pastor, who disciple me, told me to pray about going into full time ministry. After I was done laughing at him, I decided to pray. Not very sincerely, but just a short prayer: “God, I don’t want to be a pastor. That’s the last thing I want to do. If you want me to be a pastor, you better convict me really bad or I am not going to be a pastor.” About 6 months later, during the summer before college, I was at this youth retreat where I became a Christian three years earlier, and Sharon Park, a friend, shared with me her favorite Bible verse. She said it was 1 Timothy 4:13-14. She said she received it from God at the retreat 3 years earlier. We read it together and she asked me what I think it means in her life. I didn’t know. I asked her how she knows it is from God. She said she just knows. She can’t get rid of this conviction. That night, Sharon experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit. She was drunk in the Spirit. She was laughing and crying and talking at the same time. She started to say things to people that broke them down into tear. Then, she said, “Kevin, Kevin, open up to the passage we read earlier. Read it!” Then, she said, “it’s for you, not me. It’s for you!” And I read it: “Until, I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect the gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” When I read this out loud, it just struck me that God was answer that half-baked prayer that I prayed a few months ago. He was calling me into ministry. I broke down and cried. I asked Sharon later why she said what she said, and she told me that she just couldn’t control what she was saying. I kept this experience in my heart.

Then, in college, I had another experience of God calling me into ministry. I am not sure what sparked it but I had this sense that God wanted me to commit to going into ministry. I had no peace. I felt this pounding over and over again for a couple of days straight. I could even sleep; so, I remember sitting at a deep corner of the library at UC Davis, and I committed my life to God. I said, yes, Lord, I will obey. I will go into ministry. Then, I remember the peace of God just came over me. I went home and slept like a baby.

Then, during college, things happened. I messed up. During my senior year, I actually left the faith because I couldn't make sense of the faith anymore. Intellectually, it didn't make any sense. Even after I came back to faith, I ran away to law school. I ran away to practicing law for 12 years. I thought if I am faithful as a church member, tithe, serve in ministry, and even in leadership, that would be okay. BUT, God had a specific call on my life. I knew that. I knew I was called. Then, the LORD called me the second and third time. He kept calling me. I remember my mentor telling me, "Kevin, you are so bold . . . to disobey God."

God changed my heart. Before, it was a calling that I didn't want. Later, if I didn't do this, I knew my life was going to be less than what it was supposed to be. I finally, decided to go.

That's what happened to Jonah. He ran away but God brought him back.

II. Then, God called him the second time.

Chapter 3:1-2: "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.'

A. **When the word of the LORD came to Jonah for the second time, God said to GO.**

"Go" is one of the most basic verbs in the Christian faith. "Go" appears 1,514 times in the Bible. It appears 233 times in the New Testament, 54 times in Matthew's Gospel alone. Jesus said: "Go to Nineveh. Go to the lost sheep, go and tell John, go and invite all you meet, go make disciples."

Unfortunately, so often we focus solely on the opposite word, "stop." I've spent much of my life thinking God's basic call on my life was to stop doing this, stop doing that, stop, stop, stop.

It is really a good thing to stop behaviors that are sinful or harmful or not of God. But, if that's all you focus on, you're missing out. The heart of Christian discipleship is not the word

stop. If it was, we'd all be better off just staying home and hiding in the closet. The heart of Christian discipleship is the word "go."

When God calls Abraham, he says, I want you to leave behind your city, your family, your stuff.... and "Go." When God calls Moses, I want you to stop being a shepherd in Midian and "Go" back to Egypt. Before Jesus ascended, Jesus commanded his followers, "Go and make disciples!"

At the heart of Christianity there is a movement, an outward focus. Why did God save Jonah? Why did God save you? He saved you not only for fellowship with you but also so that you will GO.

GO where?

B. Go to the great city of Nineveh. Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of that time.

Let go to verse 3: "Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now, Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days."

It was a large city. Assyria, of which Nineveh is the capital, had ravaged a lot of territories. They killed and plundered a lot of people along the way, including Israel. It was the most hated enemy of the Israelites. It was also a very violent city. Crimes were rampant. Sexual immorality was rampant. There were prostitutions, rape. Sorceries. All kinds of evil. It was a scary place.

It was not the most comfortable place for Jonah to go and minister at. In fact, it as the most uncomfortable place you can ever imagine. God does that sometimes. He is not about saving you so that you can be comfortable in your life. He saves you and commands us to GO to the most uncomfortable place. Our God is not a God of comfort zone. He leads us into places of discomfort. Just think about Jesus. When God sent Jesus, he came to the most uncomfortable place for him. He left the fellowship of the Triune community of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the glory of heaven, and came to this dusty planet. God calls us to go. Don't think about where is the most comfortable place. Think about where God is calling you to go.

Theology of discomfort: Comfort is self-focused. But, not being comfortable for the sake of other is love.

I recently read an article in the Atlantic magazine about the prosperity gospel that is so prevalent in Christianity. I hate to say it but so many people preach that God wants us to be blessed with wealth. If you want to be blessed with money, a bigger house, a faster and cooler

car, a better job, more money in your bank account, if you want to be blessed by God, you better be faithful, pray hard, give money to the church, and you'll see God bless you with riches of this world. This was never the view of Christianity over the years, but in the 80s, there was a movement of preachers who preached that God wants us to be rich. A bunch of televangelists came up with the idea that if you "seed" money to God, meaning you give to their ministry, God will bless you 10, 20 times what you give in material blessings. I want to let you know, this is bunch of crock! It's baloney! I believe that God will provide you with what you need, but the call of God is not to material comfort! It is to GO to Nineveh, a place of discomfort, but a place of tremendous need to hear the word of God. If God blesses you with material blessings, he is blessing you so that you would use it for the Kingdom of God. He is not blessing it so that you will just live in comfort.

You see, *if* you seek God to be blessed with material riches, *if* you seek God to be blessed with good things in life, *if* you tithe to get rich, *if* you are faithful to God to get something, **that something is your real God.** That is your idol. Your comfort is your idol. Your house is your idol. Your relationship is your idol. You must seek God for God and obey God no matter where it leads you. Not just to comfort.

God wants to lead you to something great! He does. All throughout the book, what God does is associated with the word "**great.**" It starts by God saying to Jonah, "I want you to go to the **great** city of Nineveh;" Jonah runs the other way, so the Bible says God sends a **great** wind, and it produces a **great** storm. And then these pagan sailors or converted through a **great** fear. Then God appoints a fish for Jonah. Does anybody want to guess what adjective the Bible uses to describe the fish? It is a **great** fish. God is doing something **great** in the story. And God wants to do something **GREAT** in your life!

Jonah, on the other hand, messes everything up. If the main word for God in this book is 'great,' the main word for Jonah, the one that keeps popping up, is the word '**down.**' Jonah is going **down.** God says, "Go to Nineveh," and Jonah goes **down** to Joppa, this port city. Then he goes in a ship **down** to Tarshish. Then, in the ship, he goes **down** into the bottom of ship when he is sleeping. Then he goes **down** into the water in the storm. Then he goes **down** into the fish. Jonah has hit bottom.

Have you hit bottom yet? Are you waiting to hit bottom? Are you on the trajectory of hitting the bottom? God wants to do something great through you! He will provide for you but his purpose is not as shallow as mere material comfort. He wants to you to do something great

for God. It reminds of what William Carey, the great missionary said: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

C. Now, what is the great thing that God was calling Jonah to do? Verse 2: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it **the message I give you.**” Then, in Verse 4: **“Jonah started into the city, going a day’s journey, and he proclaimed: ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.’”** That was the message God gave Jonah.

It’s more than a message of God’s judgment and wrath. It is a warning. God wants us to know about the reality of sin and the consequences of it. That reality is still true. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. It means that sin leads to separation from God. And the more you sin, the more you are separated from God, and at the end, you end up in hell.

Many of us are uncomfortable with a God who has wrath and anger against sin. My God is never like that. He is always loving. You know what I say to that? I agree...your god would never judge sinners, never demonstrate a wrath, because your god doesn’t exist, he is a figment of your imagination.

The Biblical God is a holy God. When his righteousness is revealed, his beauty is revealed, when his glory is revealed, when his purity, his holiness, perfection, and power is revealed, and we are naked in front of him, we cannot help to admit our ugliness, our sins, our weakness. We must realize our ugliness. We have to come face to face with reality!

When Jonah preached, something amazing happened, see verse 5: **“The Ninevites believed God.”**

The Ninevites actually faced reality!

Read on to 10: **“They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news 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. 7 Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”**

Jonah preached the word that God gave him. What word do you think God would give to us to preach to the great city of Los Angeles? If we see it from God's perspective, what do you think God is thinking? There's a lot of people lost, a lot of people in darkness, a lot of people committing evil acts, a lot of people running away from God. How do you change this in the GREAT city of Los Angeles? How do we most radically change the city? What God told Jonah to say is what I believe God would want us to preach! That is to preach repentance.

We went to the Juvenile Hall yesterday to sharing a Thanksgiving meal with the kids. Unlike last year, we ministered to kids who were being tried as adults. Some were facing decades in prison. 10 years. Some 20 years. One person was facing 50 years in prison and he got reduced to 20 years. We can share a lot of things, but as I walked away, I remember thinking that the fundamental need of these kids is repentance and forgiveness. They need to turn away from sin and turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. They need God. They need a new life in Jesus!

I think it is the same in our city. The fundamental way to resolve the problem of this city is through repentance.

We need to repent of the sin of greed. We need to acknowledge that we have been using God to spiritualize greed. We have been seeking God for material prosperity. It's not wrong to ask God for things. It's not wrong to ask God for money or job. But, if we reduce the gospel to the gospel of material prosperity, we need to repent and turn.

We need to repent of the sin of pride. Looking down at certain kind of people. Thinking that you are better than others.

We need to repent of serving the God of image—of being cool. Getting our life from what others think of us. Image is not everything!

We need to repent of our sin of being self-absorbed. We are so self-absorbed. Many times I get like that. I get so absorbed in what I am doing that I don't see the suffering of other people. God has to wake me up from time to time to see the suffering of this world.

We need to repent of our sin of selfishness. It's all about us. Our comfort. Our pride. Our feelings. Me. Me. Me. It's so hard to think about others.

We need to repent of our sin of sexual immorality. We are called to sexual purity because God is pure. The teaching on this is clear in the Bible. If we are living in sin, we need to change direction or get married. If we are living a promiscuous lifestyle, we need to repent

and turn away from the sin. If we are addicted to pornography, we need to turn away. Get accountability like Covenanteyes.com.

We need to repent of our sin of homophobia. We are called to love all people. Homophobia is sin. It is a sin of hatred. There is no love there.

We need to repent of our sin of racism, classism, sexism, violence, hate, unforgiveness.

The moment you feel like the sinners are out there is the moment you become a Pharisee. You are religious and proud. You are legalistic. You create rules to help you feel righteous. Hypocrisy! Examine your heart. Are you running away from God in any part of your life? Is there a sin that you are hiding?

Repentance is not just remorse. It is a part of it. But that's not all of it. It is seeing the reality of sin and the consequences that it has. It is turning away. Changing direction.

Then, people sometimes make the mistake of going on a performance treadmill. We become moralistic. We've got to change now that I've repented. YES, but before you run off to change your life, you've got to connect to the source of power for change. Otherwise, you're going to run out of steam. You're going to burn out. You're going to end up in a vicious cycle of repentance and sin and you're not going to want to repent anymore.

The power for change comes when you come to realize God's grace and unconditional love for you. God loves you more than you can ever imagine!

A. God loves us so much, that he came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and ultimately died for our sins.

He took our sins, failures, messiness, bondage, emptiness, and took it upon himself and paid the price justice demanded of our sins. That's why the death of Jesus Christ is the focus of the gospel. It is the ultimate demonstration of the love of God that while we were still sinners, God would send his only son to die for us.

- So that we can be cleaned.
- So that we can be restored into the presence of God.
- So that we can be filled with His Spirit.
- So that we can live in the joy of his company.

B. Jesus not only died for us, but also lived for us.

Theologians call this double imputation, meaning that I don't simply have a clean slate because of Jesus, I have a righteous record of Jesus. I have God's forgiveness AND righteousness. Whatever Jesus did right, God see that in you. You are clothed with His perfect righteousness.

- If you've failed in something, have faith that God does not see a failure in you, he sees the success of Jesus in you. He sees you as though you were obedient to the end because of Jesus.
- If you are struggling with being a good spouse, have faith that Christ is the perfect groom who loves His bride perfectly and has never failed, that God sees you as already perfect in His sight. You are not a failure because Christ did not fail.
- If you are struggling with lust, have faith that Christ never had an adulterous heart and never lusted. He kept God's law perfectly and therefore you are counted as perfectly righteous in Christ. His record has become your record and God sees you as righteous now!
- God was always Jesus' first love and He never failed to love God and live faithfully to Him. He perfectly pleased the Father and because you are in Jesus, God sees you and I the same way. He delights in you! He is blessed by you. He wants to commune with you as His adopted children as He desires to commune with His son Jesus. As He says to Jesus, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," so He says to us, "this is my beloved son and daughter _____, in whom I am well pleased."

IV. Conclusion

This is the twin turbo engine of the gospel: (1) as we face the reality of sin in our lives, it makes us honest about ourselves and our depravity—that we are a lot more messed up than we thought we were, which leads us to humility, but (2) the gospel helps us see, understand, and receive God's unconditional love that came through Jesus—that Jesus died and lived for us so that we are clothed with his righteousness, which leads us to confidence.

It gives us this amazing dynamic of humility and confidence at the same time. And this gives us freedom, honesty, transformation, security, and JOY!

Prayer:

-Go: where is our Nineveh?

-Repentance starts with us.

