

## **“Heroism and the God of Grace” - JONAH Part 6**

**Text: Jonah 3:1-10**

**~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on October 29, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** *“I am looking for someone to share in an adventure.”* So says Gandalf the wizard to Bilbo Baggins at the beginning of *The Hobbit*. But hobbits are not adventurers. They are certainly not heroes. They are short, hairy-footed creatures who enjoy nothing more than a warm hearth and a quiet meal in their hobbit hole.
  - Bilbo responds to Gandalf saying, *“An adventure? Now I don’t imagine anyone west of Bree would have much interest in adventures. Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things. Make you late for dinner.”*
    - Gandalf ignores him and says, *“Well, that’s decided. It will be very good for you...I shall inform the others.”* *“Inform who?”* asks Bilbo in frustration. *“Wha–no! No. No, wait. We do not want any adventures here, thank you–not today! Not–I suggest you try over the Hill or across the Water. Good morning.”* And with that he goes inside his house and shuts the door.
- When the 13 dwarves arrive at Bilbo’s home they also cannot believe that Gandalf has chosen this hobbit to play a part in the grand adventure to reclaim their underground home from the evil dragon named Smaug.
  - No one, least of all Bilbo, knows at this point in the story that this adventure will shape him and that he will perform heroic acts. At this point, Gandalf is just trying to coax him out of his hobbit hole.
- If you are a Christian here today, God has handpicked you to be a part of the greatest story ever told. It is an adventure of epic proportions. It is the story of how God is working to rescue billions of people from the evil dragon that has enslaved them. It is the story of how God is going to defeat this dragon and restore all things to the way they are supposed to be.
  - To our amazement God says to each of us, *“I have a specific role for you in my story. I have a purpose for your life. You will perform heroic deeds. Deeds like telling people about Jesus, the one who saves them from evil dragon. Deeds like loving your enemy, telling the truth, and working for good. Many of your deeds will not seem heroic. But they are all part of bringing my story to its glorious conclusion.”* Isn’t that precisely what Ephesians 2:10 says? *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*
    - But we are all like Bilbo. *“Um, Jesus I don’t think you mean me. I’m not a hero. I’m not a world changer.”* If we are honest most of us just prefer a quiet comfortable life at home. *“We do not want any adventures here, thank you–not today!”*
- But like Gandalf, Jesus is insistent and he knows better than we do what we need. This is where Jonah 3 is such an encouragement. In this chapter we see God use the most unlikely of men to bring about one of the greatest revivals in history. God intends to besiege and conquer this wicked city of Nineveh. But God does not send Michael the archangel. God doesn’t send a great military general with his vast army. No. God sent one man who had no interest in an adventure.
  - If you know the story of Jonah you know that at this point in the story it is hard to believe Jonah could ever perform any heroic act. He is very immature in his faith. Has no heart for lost people. He does not obey God. He can’t be counted on. He has failed time and time again. This is no hero. In other words, Jonah is a lot like us.

- And yet once God has shaped him, God uses him to change an entire city. God shaped his identity in chapters 1-2. Now that he knows God's grace and God's personal love for him, Jonah is ready for the task that God will give him.
- Here is the main point of Jonah 3: **(SHOW SLIDE 2) Since God uses weak people to accomplish heroic acts we must step out in courageous expectation to serve Christ.**
  - Today God is coaxing us out of our cozy lives. At the end of this message I am praying that all of us would, like Bilbo, be running out the doors shouting with joy, *"I'm going on an adventure."*
    - So let's develop this truth in three parts in order that we might serve him in whatever role he has for us.

## GOD USES OUR FAILED LIVES FOR HEROIC ACTS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** First, we must step out in courageous expectation to serve Christ because God will use our failed lives for heroic acts.
  - We pick up the story with Jonah back on dry land after the ordeal in the great fish. And then right away we read verse 1. **READ 1-2 – *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."*** Whoa. Hold on a minute. This is the same task God commissioned Jonah to in chapter 1. Jonah's response was to run away from God. God, why are you re-commissioning Jonah? Haven't you seen what a failure he is? Jonah is no hero.
    - In military terms Jonah is a deserter. He has committed treason against his God. He should be court marshaled and discharged for poor conduct. Yet God gives him a big assignment. Why?
- One author puts it this way: ***"God is more interested in the worker than he is in the work the worker does. He's more interested in you than in what you can accomplish."***<sup>1</sup>
  - This is obvious because clearly God did not need Jonah. He could have discharged him and used someone else. But this is not just about project Nineveh. It is also about project Jonah.
    - God intends to shape Jonah. God is not hindered by our failures and sins. In grace, he keeps pursuing us. Oh what grace there is in this word **"second"**: ***"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time."*** Jonah is not disqualified by his sins and failures.
- Some of you really need to hear this. Your past and present failures and sins do not disqualify you from serving Jesus. He has deeds for you to perform.
  - Think of the apostle Peter. There is a hero! He wrote a few books of the Bible. That qualifies as a great deed.
  - Jesus said he was the rock on whom he would build his church.
  - He was even crucified upside down for his faith in Jesus. What a hero!
    - But like Bilbo, you would never have known Peter would become this heroic man from his early days.
- On the night Jesus was crucified Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Not just once. Three times. The others deserted Jesus but Peter disowned him. After this event, Peter clearly felt disqualified from serving Jesus. We read that he went back to his old occupation of fishing.
  - But Jesus is not done with him. After he rises from the dead Jesus plans an encounter with Peter. It is designed around healing Peter of his past and calling him, for a second time, to follow Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Tullian Tchividjian, *Surprised by Grace*, Kindle, Location 1099.

- In John 21 Jesus meets Peter on the beach of the sea of Galilee, the very place where Jesus first called Peter to follow him. Just in case Peter doesn't remember the first day Jesus called him, Jesus works the exact same miracle causing Peter to catch a boatload of fish. And then Jesus cooks the fish over a charcoal fire to remind Peter of the charcoal fire that he was standing in front of when he denied Jesus. You can just imagine Peter sitting there eating the food. He can hardly taste it. Everything here points to his failure. He feels disqualified.
  - And then Jesus catches his eye and asks him a question: ***“Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”*** Peter had boasted that even if everyone else fell away from Jesus he never would. But he has been humbled. He does not compare himself to anyone else now. He simply says, ***“You know that I love you.”***
    - What will Jesus say? ***“Peter, you really failed me that night.”*** No he says, ***“Feed my sheep.”*** Jesus completely bypasses any rebuke. With these words Jesus is, for a *second* time, graciously calling Peter to serve him.
- But Jesus is not done. Again, he asks the same question. ***“Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”*** Surely now Jesus will rebuke Peter and say, ***“Peter, how can I ever trust you to serve me when you can't even say you know me?”***
  - No. Again, Jesus says, ***“Feed my sheep.”*** And then just as Peter denied Jesus three times Jesus asks Peter a third time if he loves him and for a third time calls him back into service.
    - Jesus uses all Peter's failings to shape him for the heroic acts that he will one day perform.
- Oh dear friends, Jesus is not looking for perfect people to serve him. None of us are heroes. The greatest missionaries, martyrs, and ministers were all deeply flawed people but God uses them for heroic acts.
  - Jacob was a terrible father but led his family to Egypt. Samson was an arrogant hedonist but he tore down the temple of Baal. Moses murdered a man but God used him to liberate Israel from Egypt. David lied, deceived, committed adultery and murder but did so many heroic acts we cannot even begin to list them. Peter denied Christ but became the rock. Paul murdered Christians but God used him to turn the world upside down.
    - If God can use a failure like Jonah, surely he can use you. So don't be paralyzed by your failings. Never second-guess if God can use you in his service. By all means, leave your sins behind. But step out in courageous expectation to serve Jesus knowing that God uses failed lives for heroic acts.

## **GOD USES OUR HALF-HEARTED OBEDIENCE FOR HEROIC ACTS**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Second, we must step out in courageous expectation to serve Christ because God will use our half-hearted obedience for heroic acts.
  - Chapter 3 of Jonah marks a turning point in the story. In chapter 1 God told Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh. We read that Jonah *arose* but he went *down* to Joppa. He then went *down* into the hull of the ship. In the storm he went *down* into the sea and further *down* into the belly of the great fish. The downward language points to Jonah's disobedience. But now everything flips.
    - Verse 2 begins with the word, ***“Arise.”*** And then in verse 3 it says, ***“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.”*** After all that has happened Jonah has finally learned to obey God.
- But even when we learn to obey we, like Jonah, still have a lot to learn. Although it is wonderful that he obeys it is only half-hearted obedience. How do I know this? Because he still a racist. He still hates the Ninevites and wants to see them and their city burn to the ground.

- His message in Nineveh is just doom and gloom. Look at verse 4. **READ 4** - *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* He offers no hope at all. Jonah is angry when God spares the city. Look over at chapter 4. **READ 2-3** – *“I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. <sup>3</sup> Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*
  - If Jonah knew how gracious God is and how he relents from sending calamity, why didn't he tell that to the Ninevites? It is clear: although Jonah does want to obey God, he is conflicted. He is torn. This is a hard assignment. The Ninevites are a wicked and violent people. They are Israel's enemy. But the point I am trying to show you is that despite Jonah's half-hearted obedience, God had a purpose for him. God used him to bring revival.
- What an encouragement to us. The adventure that God has called us to is not an easy one. His general purpose for all of us is to ***“go and make disciples of all nations.”*** Every Christian wants to obey Jesus but this is a hard task. Stepping out and serving Christ can be hard. It can be intimidating. We are torn. And when we have to choose between something hard and something easy, we usually default to the easier. And it's easier to just stay in our hobbit hole.
  - After the meal with the dwarves Gandalf tries again to coax Bilbo out of his hobbit hole. He says, ***“The world is not in your books and maps. It's out there.”*** But Bilbo says, ***“I can't just go running off into the blue! I am a Baggins of Bag End!”*** And then Gandalf says, ***“You are also a Took.”***
    - You see the Baggins side of Bilbo's heritage comes from his father's side. The Baggins in him prefers to just stay at home with a warm bed and good food. But his mother's side, the Took side, longs for adventure. And so Bilbo is torn.
- If we are honest we all have these two sides to us. Our spiritual side that has been reborn longs to live all out for Jesus. We want to follow him no matter how hard the adventure is because we know that the hardships are worth what is waiting at the end of the earth's adventure. We want to obey Jesus no matter the cost.
  - But our sinful nature, our Baggins side, just wants a nice comfortable life. We don't want to speak about Jesus because it might mess up relationships. We don't want to be known as Christians because it might be awkward. We don't want to take on a leadership role because quite frankly leadership is hard.
    - And so we feel conflicted. Our life is almost always filled with half-hearted obedience. But listen, even half-hearted obedience is a start. God could not use Jonah at all while he was running. But when Jonah took one step forward in obedience he became a world changer.
- So don't let your half-hearted obedience pull you back into your hobbit hole.
  - God has many purposes for your life. He will use you in many ways. Perhaps there is a role that he is calling you to serve in. Perhaps your heart is only halfway there because you are afraid you will not be effective. Step out in courage. If God can use Jonah for such acts, surely he can use your half-hearted obedience.
    - Step out in courageous expectation because God uses half-hearted obedience for heroic acts.

## **GOD USES OUR FALTERING WORDS FOR HEROIC ACTS**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Finally, we must step out in courageous expectation to serve Christ because God will use our faltering words for heroic acts.

- God’s purpose for your life includes far more than just speaking but let’s focus in on that for a few moments. One of God’s purposes for your life is to speak of, and for, Jesus. Every Christian I meet feels inadequate in their ability to talk about Jesus, whether it be in a small group or from the pulpit. Every Christian also feels inadequate to speak to non-Christians about Jesus.
  - But who can speak worse than Jonah? Seriously. Look at this sermon in verse 4. **READ 4** - *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* In his racism and bitterness Jonah only speaks half the message. He does not tell them of how gracious God is and how he relents from sending calamity. He is like the dodo birds in the *Ice Age* cartoon when they chant, *“Doom on you. Doom on you. Doom on you.”* This is the worst sermon ever.
- And yet look at the response in verse 5. **READ 5** – *And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.* Jonah’s message pierced their hearts. They did not hear Jonah. They heard God. Jonah’s success certainly had nothing to do with his presentation.
  - It is not like he had some great video clips, a PowerPoint presentation, and a great band. He didn’t started with a joke to warm up the crowd: *“I used to like sushi until I was swallowed by a giant fish.”*
    - This is the worst sermon ever and yet God used Jonah’s faltering words to bring about one of the greatest revivals in history.
- Oh we need to hear this. One of God’s purpose for your life is to speak for Jesus but we often feel like Moses when God told him to go and speak to Pharaoh: *“Who LORD? Me? Who am I that I should do this? What if they do not believe me or listen to me? O LORD, I have never been eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue...O LORD, please send someone else to do it.”*
  - *“We do not want any adventures here, thank you- not today!”* But listen to the encouragement of this passage. God uses our faltering words to bring new life to people.
    - This is such encouragement to me because it shows that it does not depend on how eloquent or persuasive I am. Our job is to be faithful in speaking. God’s job is to bring the results.
- Do we not know this in our own personal experience? Can you think of words that someone spoke to you that either led you to Christ or changed the entire way you were living? Perhaps the person who talked to you never even knew their words would make an impact. But God used them and they struck you to your heart.
  - Are you afraid of speaking? My advice is not to get all stressed out about this as if you need to just walk up to people and say, *“Do you know Jesus?”* Begin praying for opportunities. Ask questions to other people. Begin simply by asking questions in order to learn about this person. My first question is always, *“What are your spiritual beliefs?”* Then I ask, *“What do you believe happens when you die?”* Then, *“What do you believe about Jesus?”*
    - Is there someone that you can speak to this week? We must step out in courageous expectation to represent Christ because God will use our faltering words for heroic acts.

## CONCLUSION

- God uses failed lives. God uses half-hearted obedience. And God uses faltering words. But even after hearing all of this, I think that we still all have apprehension about really giving ourselves to serving Jesus. I won’t candy coat it for you. It can be hard to serve Jesus.
  - But at the end of the day is it not worth all the difficulties? The Took nature in you knows this. Aren’t the best things in life a struggle to attain? Hikers don’t see the breathtaking

views by staying at home. No great adventure happens by staying home and enjoying Second Breakfast. You have to be willing to risk, to step out, and to accept the reality of hardship.

- Every truly great story is filled with trials and difficulties. It's what makes the happily ever after so happy.
- It's like when Bilbo's nephew Frodo felt like quitting in the *Lord of the Rings*. Sam gave him courage by saying, ***"It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were...But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer...Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going."***
  - Dear brothers and sisters, you are part of a very great story. The happily ever after is promised to you but you are not there yet. How can you serve Jesus in this next season of life? How can you step out of your hobbit hole? Deep down, isn't this the life of greatness that you want?
    - And as Gandalf said to Bilbo: ***"You'll have a tale or two to tell of your own when you come back."*** Bilbo then asks, ***"And you promise that I will come back?"*** Gandalf replies, ***"No . . . and if you do, you will not be the same."***
- Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus has put in you a very great adventure. How can you serve him?
  - It will be hard. It will change you. You will not be the same.
    - But oh the tales we will tell in the happily ever after.
    -