**May 7, 2023 Jonah 4:9-11**

***One Spirit Mobilizing All***

**Scripture:** *Jonah 4:9-11 NRSV*

*(9)But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." (10)Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. (11)And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?*

**Notes:**

1. Look at the ***heart*** of God toward the lost
   1. God was being ***gracious*** and ***merciful*** to them.
   2. God does not want any to ***die*** in their sin.
   3. God loves even these ***wicked*** people.
2. God is ***love***.
   1. Love is always manifested in ***actions***.
   2. Have you ***experienced*** the love of God?
3. ***Our*** hearts toward God and the lost.
   1. Jonah felt that they were sinners and ***deserved*** to die.
   2. Learn the importance of what we are doing and the heavenly ***value*** of missions.
   3. We reach out because we love ***Jesus***.
4. We must ***share*** the passion of Christ.
   1. Get up and pray to God for their ***deliverance***.
   2. ***Share*** the good news to those who are receptive
5. The ***heart*** of the Lost
   1. People are ***hungry*** for salvation and deliverance.
   2. God prepared the Ninevites before Jonah was ***obedient***.
   3. They acknowledged their sins and God was ***merciful***.
6. Our job is just to share the ***message*** of God.
   1. God is already ***reconciling*** the world to himself;
   2. Let us not grow ***tired*** of doing the good work because we will reap the harvest in due season.
7. What ***disturbs*** you so much that you must take action?
   1. God ***loves*** each of his creation so much
   2. Are you ***developing*** a heart like Jesus
   3. Do we see the lost and does it break our ***hearts***?

**Script:**

We live in a world that is constantly barraging us with troubles and difficulties. There are times when I worry about how I am going to make ends meet; how I will manage after I retire from preaching; and when Jan is able to retire so we can enjoy our golden years.

And I am sure that my worries are not unusual to most of you. How will our health hold out? How will we make ends meet: now and in the future? How will we survive if we find ourselves in a situation such as what is happening in Ukraine? What concerns you? What disturbs you so much that you just have to take action or speak up?

In our reading today, we see that Jonah, the prophet of God, was very concerned. In fact, he was so angry that he wanted to die. However, the reason for his distress is shocking. He is upset because God asked him to go and minister to the Ninevites, a horribly wicked and vile people. He was upset that the Lord was going to offer redemption to these people; but especially because God had asked him to be the vessel to deliver this opportunity. Turn with me in your bibles today, to Jonah 4:9-11.

*Jonah 4:9-11 NRSV (9)But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." (10)Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. (11)And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"*

In this story, God sends Jonah to the city of Nineveh. He is told to go and preach against their sins and warn them that God is going to destroy their city in forty days if they did not repent. However, Jonah, the prophet whose job it is to tell people what God said, decided that he did not want to go, so he boarded a ship to Tarshish, a ship traveling in the opposite direction. We are not sure why Jonah refused other than he had a dislike for the Ninevite people. Maybe he was afraid. Nineveh was a vast and vital city in Assyria. However, the people there were well known for their violence and evil behavior. Jonah might have feared for his life. Still, he decided not to go.

While on the boat, a big storm came up on the sea, and it was discovered that Jonah was running from God. The sailors threw him overboard, and a big fish swallowed him. He stayed in the belly of the fish for three days, and God finally had mercy and had the fish spit him out. Then, God came to him again and told him to go and warn Nineveh. This time Jonah did not argue; he went and preached for three days, and all the people repented and God did not destroy the city as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah.

However, the story ends strangely. Instead of Jonah rejoicing and praising God for the salvation of all those people, he ended up angry, concerned, and in distress. Jonah's concern ended in him sitting on a hill, wanting to die. But, on the other hand, we see God's concern that leads to the salvation of thousands of people.

We see three things in this story; the heart of God toward the lost, the condition of our hearts, and lastly, we will discuss the hearts of the lost. As we look at the heart of God toward the lost, we find that the people of Nineveh were wicked. We find that they were a violent society and they truly deserved punishment. But, God was being so gracious and merciful to them that he sent his prophet to warn them about their sins. We see how determined God was to not allow Jonah to mess up the mission. God brought a big storm, and a big fish, In order to direct Jonah to Nineveh.

Take a look at God's heart in chapter 4. Jonah sat on a hill watching for the destruction of Nineveh, but it did not come because the people repented. This made Jonah very angry. He sat there, sulking in the hot sun. So, God made a vine grow over him to shade him from the sun. Then God sent a worm to destroy the vine. Jonah was very upset about this and God "said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?'… Jonah said, “… I am so angry I wish I were dead.' 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. 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?*"' (vv. 9-11). God tells Jonah he is not worried about a tree when thousands of people are at risk of destruction. God did not want any of those people to die due to their sins. That is why he sent Jonah. He loved even these wicked people.

God is love. In the Old Testament, God is described as "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). John's epistle says "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16). "*Those who abide in love abide in God*" (1 John 4:16, NRSV). These are more than feelings. Love is always manifested in actions. The Father loves, so he gave his Son. The Son loves, so he lays down his life on the cross. Jesus is the expression of the lavish, faithful love of God. He is perfect for teaching this love in very practical ways. Trying to define the love of God is an impossible task. Like the songwriter, says: Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

The best way to think of what this love is; is to think about what the love of God has meant in your own life. How have you experienced the love of God? In 2 Peter 3:9 we learn, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness*. *Instead, he is patient with you*, *not wanting anyone to perish*, *but everyone to come to repentance*." God does not want anyone to perish, but he wants everyone on earth to repent and live in a loving relationship with him. The heart of God bleeds for those who have not heard the good news yet. *Jesus was filled with compassion as he looked over the crowds*, *and he said to his disciples*, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few*. *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore*, *to send out workers into his harvest field*" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Now, what about our hearts toward God and the lost? Jonah did not care about the people of Nineveh. He felt that they were sinners and deserved to die. Jonah got very angry with God when he realized that God would no longer destroy the city of Nineveh. This is very strange; remember, Jonah was a prophet before God sent him there. He was supposed to understand God's heart and share God's passion. But this was not the case. Jonah finally did what God commanded him to do, but did it with the wrong attitude. Jonah did what he was told out of his own selfishness So that he, himself, would be spared from God’s punishment. So often, we go about what we need to do, and we go through the motions because we don't have a choice, but we don't understand the heart condition required for this service. We pay our offerings, and sometimes we even pray. Still, we have yet to learn the importance of what we are doing and the heavenly value of missions.

In John 21:15-23 Jesus sent Peter three times to take care of his sheep, to feed his sheep. But before he gave Peter the mandate, he asked him, "Peter, do you love me?" He asked Peter three times to underline the importance of the heart of missions. We go because we love. We reach out because we love Jesus. We love him with our whole hearts as well as our minds and strength, and we love those he loves in the same manner. We share the passion of Christ. The sin and the pain and the suffering grieve us. We cannot be unmoved by those who are dying in their sins.

Have you ever seen a new, passionate, Christ follower? Their big hearts and warm smiles shine with love, their eyes fill with tears when they speak about the goodness of Jesus. They will share their Jesus experience to everyone they meet in taxis, planes, boats, and hotel lobbies. They will share about the beautiful love of Jesus. They are disappointed when others do not seem interested, but they shake it off, smile, and say: "At least a seed has been planted." To which I am sure, "God will make it grow." But when they find someone who is receptive to the gospel. Their faces glow and eyes filled with tears. This type of attitude exemplifies the heart of Christ, and that is what should mobilize us to reach out, even risking rejection and sometimes a rebuke.

In Jonah 1:6, God sent a big storm to redirect Jonah. Jonah is lying below deck, fast asleep. The sailors were in a panic, and they were all praying to their gods. But Jonah was asleep. The captain said to Jonah, "How can you sleep while we die? Get up and pray to your God on our behalf!" This is the sad situation we find in many churches. People are drowning like in the days of Noah, crying out to us: Pray to your God for our deliverance. However, to distract ourselves with many things, we miss the cries of the lost. We must get up and pray to God for their deliverance. We must share the good news to those who are receptive and even offer it to those who aren’t.

So that brings us to the heart of the Lost. I already mentioned that the people of Nineveh were evil and violent. That is why Jonah was so unwilling to go there. I am sure Jonah had some expectations when he finally went. He probably told himself: these people will never listen. This is a waste of time. They are going to kill me in a painfully slow way, and then they are going to continue in their evil ways. How do I know these things, because there have been times when I felt the same way; times when I felt the aggravation of tilling a soil that would not bear a crop; times when all of my effort was in vain. But I was wrong, and so was Jonah. The people of Nineveh were hungry for salvation.

The people of Nineveh were hungry for deliverance. Jonah did not know that Nineveh was in a time of national crisis. They were suffering from famine. They had experienced attacks from their enemies, and they even had internal revolts. Moreover, there was a total sun eclipse in 763 BC, and they might have believed that this was a sign that the gods were angry, a sign that calamity would come upon them.

God had prepared the Ninevites long before Jonah even decided to be obedient. This is reflected in how they responded to the message of Jonah. First, the king immediately tore his clothes and the King ordered people to fast, pray, and repent. Then, he commanded that they stop their evil and violent behavior and that they should call on the God of Jonah. They came in brokenness and repentance before God, and they saw the light of God's salvation shine through them. David says in Psalm 51:17, "*My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*" This was the disposition of the Ninevites. They acknowledged their sins and mourned in repentance and God was merciful to them.

Our job is not to prescribe how people will react. Our job is just to share the message of God. We must represent God's heart to the lost and trust that he is the Lord of the harvest. Because we never know how God has been preparing people for his good news. We all have people in our lives that leave us hopeless. We have tried talking, threatening, and even begging. Some stole from us, deceived us, and hurt us deeply. We can't help but want to write them off. However, could they be ready for salvation and deliverance just when we are about to give up?

God is already reconciling the world to himself; he continually works to save the lost. Therefore, let us not grow tired of doing the good work because we will reap the harvest in due season. Jonah sat on a hill, concerned about a plant that he did not even plant, while thousands of people were in mortal danger at the foot of the mountain. This attitude is contrasted with God's loving concern that spurs him on to warn them, forgive them, and save them. This story ends in this particular way because it means to challenge us, those who profess to be Christ's followers.

It poses the question; what disturbs you so much that you must take action? God loves each of his creation so much, so much that he would go to extreme measures to save it. God loves each of us so much that he is willing to give us another chance. God loves you so much that he’s willing to forgive you of the sin you committed. So what is the condition of our hearts? Are you developing a heart like Jesus? Have you asked for God’s forgiveness with a sincere and repentant heart? Are you willing to do the things that God is calling you to do? Finally, what about our hearts toward the lost? Do we see the lost and does it break our hearts? DO we desire to go to extreme measures to tell them about Jesus? Are you willing to risk your feelings to help those who are less fortunate?

We live in a dark and evil world. Our communities are filled with broken people with broken dreams. There are many who are hungry. Are we willing to feed them, are we willing to make the sacrifice it takes to fill their need, how far are we willing to go? We must not be afraid to do the things we are called to do. Step out in faith and trust that the Lord has prepared the hearts of those you speak to. Share the word of the Lord and what He has done for you; live in obedience to His will and His way.