

THE NAME: ENCOUNTERING THE GLORY OF GOD

Jonah 3 and 4

Read the Scripture passage above and then work through the introduction below to help guide your personal study.

In the sermon this weekend Pastor J.D. walked us through several passages to illustrate the magnitude of God's love. One of these stories, which we'll study further in small group, was that of the Prophet Jonah. Jonah was a reluctant prophet who had no interest in God's forgiveness for other people, especially his enemies. Only after surviving a terrible storm and a three-day ride in a whale's digestive system does Jonah begrudgingly go and deliver God's message to the Assyrian capitol of Nineveh. Even more shocking is Jonah's dismay with the Assyrians' repentance and God's mercy. Not only is Jonah disappointed that Nineveh wasn't destroyed, but he also begins to resent God's perfect love. From the description given in the text, it is obvious that Jonah knew about God, but had failed to embrace or experience his love on a personal level.

This story reveals the lengths that God will go to lavishing his love on humanity. The Assyrians were well known for their culture of violence and oppression, yet God called his chosen prophet to warn them of the wrath to come. Jonah disobeyed and resented God, but God continually guided and protected him. God spared the entire city of Nineveh because they called out to him for mercy. Like the people of Nineveh, we have sinned and stand guilty before God. Romans 5:8 tells us very clearly "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is because of this sacrifice that we can now turn and embrace God's love for us.

Embracing God's love for ourselves is not the last piece of the puzzle, however. Jonah felt entitled to mercy and love from God, but resented those same things when they were given to Assyrians. Jonah claims to be angry enough to die at the salvation of Nineveh. Jonah's tantrum probably brings to mind images of spoiled children throwing fits in public, but his response is a cautionary tale with serious implications. Truly experiencing the love of God means embracing his love for others as well, even your greatest enemies. God's love moved him to action for the people of Nineveh before they ever called out to him. God in his great love sent Christ to die for us before we were even capable of turning to him. To embrace the love of God is not just to receive for yourself, but to let it move you to proclaim the greatness of his name to others as well.

Work through these questions before you come to small group and be ready to interact with the Scriptures and questions below.

Study Questions

1. Pastor J.D. spoke to us about the love of God this weekend. In what ways do you understand his love differently after this sermon?

2. What about God's character stood out most to you from this sermon?

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3. What do you find significant about the Ninevites reaction to God's message? How would repentance be similar/different for a modern person?
4. Why does God relent from destroying the city of Nineveh?
5. How does Jonah describe God in chapter 4? Why does his reaction to these attributes seem so out of place?
6. Read Romans 5:8. What does the phrase "while we were still sinners" mean?
7. Pastor J.D. talked about embracing the love of God in his sermon this weekend. Is there anything that is preventing you from embracing God's love for yourself? Is there anything preventing you from embracing God's love for others?
8. What are some everyday practical ways that we can point others to God's love for them?

Prayer Guide

Pray through some of the ideas in the passage we studied and from Romans 5:6-11:

- "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." -Rom. 5:6
Thank God for sending Christ as the ultimate act of sacrificial love.
- "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
-Rom. 5:8 Pray and thank God for initiating this love before we were even capable of receiving it.
- "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." -Rom. 5:10-11 Pray that you would truly experience the love of God and be moved to share it with the world.