



# Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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## God Loves Obedience

SERIES: *Jonah*

*“The best way to do theology is with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other” --Karl Barth*

It is true. As Christians we need to be students of God’s Word and of our culture. Have you seen the headlines in the newspapers lately? From the *SF Chronicle*: The War in Iraq. A bicyclist killed recently in an accident. The economy, foreclosures, Beijing, Israel. Local news about protests, and on and on and on.

Read several major headlines from the paper and then ask: Do you ever feel as a Christian that the problems of this world are too large and too big? Do you ever feel overwhelmed with how secular, anti-God and evil our world can be? Maybe if we were honest, some of us wonder if God really cares about the things we read about in the newspaper. Maybe you are the only Christian at your workplace, at your school or in your neighborhood and day in and day out you try to live for Christ but you wonder if you are really making a difference. How do we as Christians respond and live in a world that is broken and whose problems seem to be too big?

Today we find our repentant prophet cleaning himself up on a beach on the Mediterranean Sea. He just spent three days and three nights in the belly of a very large fish. Jonah is emotionally exhausted and physically spent. He has been running from God only to find himself at the bottom of the sea in a fish. Now he is thinking to himself, “OK God, what next?”

What we are going to see today is why God loves obedience.

### I. JONAH’S OBEDIENCE WAS FOLLOWED BY GOD’S POWER.

**“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth” (3:1-3).**

God gave Jonah a second chance. He’s the God of second chances!

*“The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings” --George H. Morrison*

Jonah obeyed! When God says go...what do you do? You go now! Jonah was to go to the “great city.” The author of Jonah makes it clear; Nineveh was a “great city.” Let me paint the picture here a little more clearly of what Jonah was up against in Nineveh:

- The capital city of the kingdom of Assyria.
- One of the largest and most important cities of Jonah’s time.
- Assyria was Israel’s number one enemy!
- Nineveh was an evil city.
- These were “hardcore heathens.”
- Assyrians were known for their terrorism and brutality.
- These were violent people.
- Remember how Assyrians would deal with their enemies? **“Woe to the bloody city, all full**

**crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of**

**corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies! And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and her whorings, and peoples with her charms”** (Nahum 3:1-4).

The task was enormous, overwhelming, and seemingly impossible: Preach against their evil, call them to repentance, and do it alone.

Picture Jonah walking up to Nineveh. His heart is pounding, sweat is dripping down his forehead. He is tired and weak from the long journey. He sees the city from afar and the size of the city takes his breath away—he’s never seen a city like it! The city looks like a huge fortress. The walls were a hundred feet high and broad enough for three chariots to run around them and within the walls were gardens and even fields for cattle to graze in. Archaeologists tell us that one wall alone had 1500 towers! The city was roughly 60 miles in circumference with its suburbs. The Khoser River ran through the enormous city. Assyrian’s armies lived there. The city itself is estimated to have at least 120,000 residents, and when the suburbs are added together there were a whole lot more. Imagine what Jonah was thinking and feeling as he takes in this city. Why was Jonah in Nineveh? OBEDIENCE!

*“Ministry is all about obedience” --Missy Hall*

Jonah’s obedience was followed by the outpouring of God’s power. God loves obedience because it shows that we trust Him! In what areas do you still need to obey God? If you do not sense God’s power in your life maybe there are areas of disobedience that need attention. Do you spend time with Him in the Word? Is your job overwhelming and you have not been spending quality time with your spouse or kids? Have you not been the spiritual leader of your home like you know you should be? Maybe God has specifically told you to do something and you still haven’t done it?

## **II. NINEVEH’S OBEDIENCE LED THEM TO REPENTANCE.**

**“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! 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”** (3:4–5).

The belly of the fish was Jonah’s preparation for the greatest sermon he’d ever preach. “God makes the man/woman before he makes the ministry.” God uses a broken and rebellious man to lead one of the greatest revivals the world has ever seen! Raise your hand if you find that encouraging.

Jonah’s message is God’s message. His sermon was not necessarily a proclamation of doom but of hope: There is a new way of life; change is possible; they could live for God.

How did Nineveh respond? They believed God! In Jonah’s time this would be the hardest verse to believe. They fasted and put on sackcloth made from goat’s hair. Fasting and sackcloth were hallmarks of true repentance. The entire city did this! What if we heard that Las Vegas was closing down their strip clubs and casinos because a major revival took place? What if a movement of God took place right here on the Peninsula? Google begins to use its resources and technology to share the Gospel all across the world. On Sunday every church is jammed packed with people.

*“Although Nineveh was not overturned, it did experience a turn around.” --Wiseman*

**“The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh,**

**nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call from his evil way and from the violence that turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish” (3:6–9).**

How did the King of Nineveh respond to God? He removes his royal robe and issues a proclamation that everyone should fast, even animals! They should call out to God and turn from evil and violence. Repentance was specific! A modern day equivalent would be Tom Cruise becoming a Christian preacher or Howard Stern doing a Christian radio show!

Like Jonah, like Nineveh, like the King, we too need to repent (turn away) from sin and turn to God. The Ninevites turned away from specific sin: evil and violence. What do you need to turn away from? Our turning from sin and turning to God is only possible because of God Himself (Salvation belongs to the Lord!). God's justice and love are paramount in Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price for evil and bore our judgment. Romans 5:19: **“For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”** Our response to God's great love in Jesus Christ is to turn from sin and turn to Jesus alone for forgiveness.

Jonah obeys God and God's power is unleashed. The Ninevites obey God and turn from sin and finally...

### **III. OBEDIENCE IS THE VEHICLE FOR GOD'S GRACE.**

**“When God saw what they did, how they turned the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” (3:10).**

God's mercy, compassion and grace are poured out to Nineveh as God sees their true repentance and life change. God's Grace: We deserve nothing, yet we receive everything, even when we foolishly turn from it! The sailors were spared; Jonah was saved, the Ninevites were spared. The Nineveh God threatened to destroy—the evil, wicked, sinful and lustful city—had passed away. The new Jonah preached God's message and a new Nineveh—humbled, crying out to God and repentant—emerged. God could have and had every right to destroy this evil and wicked city, but He chose not to.

*“Justice is better served by reformed characters than by corpses” --Leslie Allen*

Why did God relent? God loves obedience. Why does God love obedience? It shows we love God (If you love me you will what? "If you love me you will keep my commandments" - John 14:15) It shows we trust God. Obedience is our demonstration and thankfulness of the God who loves us! Obedience is learned over time. The Holy Spirit enables and empowers us to obey.

### **CONCLUSION**

Grab the newspaper again...How do we as Christians respond and live in a world that's broken and whose problems seem to be too big? OBEDIENCE!

The kingdom of God moves forward and enemy ground is taken by small, individual acts of our obedience. Obedience is when we...love God obey Him, read His Word, forgive, feed the poor, clothe the naked, take care of the orphan, preach His word, run from sin, live lives of holiness, turn away from materialism, be generous with our resources, pray, repent, change, fast, give, serve, sacrifice, bring peace, have joy, are patient, kind, gentle, display self-control, speak truth, raise our kids to know Christ, love our spouses, selfless.

When millions of Christians across the globe obey God, the kingdom of heaven advances, we take enemy ground, we bring

heaven to earth, and the problems, fears, and troubles of this world do not seem so large and so big, because God's power and grace is unleashed and we get the amazing privilege to be God's hands and feet to a dying and desperate world.

Let me close with this illustration from Henry Blackaby's book, *Hearing God's Voice*:

"The first funeral I ever conducted was for a beautiful three-year-old. She was the first child born to a couple in our church, and the first grandchild in their extended family. Unfortunately, she was spoiled. While visiting the little girl's home one day, I observed that she loved to ignore her parents' instructions. When they told her to come, she went. When they said, sit down she stood up. Her parents laughed, finding her behavior cute.

"One day their front gate was inadvertently left open. The parents saw their child escaping out of the yard and heading toward the road. To their horror, a car was racing down the street. As she ran out between two parked cars, they both screamed at her to stop and turn back. She paused for a second, looked back at her parents, then gleefully laughed as she turned and ran directly into the path of the oncoming car. The parents rushed their little girl to the hospital, but she died from her injuries.

"As a young pastor, this was a profound lesson for me. I realized I must teach God's people not only to recognize His voice but also immediately to obey His voice when they hear it. It is life."

Why does God love obedience? When we obey it releases God's power; obedience leads to repentance; it is the vehicle for God's grace.

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