

How Do We Respond To Jesus' Call

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[0 : 00] As we come to study God's Word this morning, maybe just while I'm doing the introduction, turn to the book of Jonah in the Old Testament.

I'm just going to read the first three verses in the book of Jonah. Just as you turn there, maybe try and explain something of what it is God's laid in my heart to share with you this morning.

I think it's fair to say that as we gather here this morning, as we come from our different homes, while we gather as one congregation, there are two groups that gather here this morning. There are those that have accepted the call to come to Jesus, and there are those who have not. And as you sit there this morning and as these words penetrate your heart, you know yourself where you're sitting.

You may have been attending here for years, months. It might even be your first time here this morning.

[1 : 16] God is called for each one of us to be here. And whatever group you consider yourself to be part of this morning, there'll be one thing in common.

We're here to hear God's word. And God's word, as it's read, as we sing it, and as we break it down, it'll speak to each and every one of us.

And as you listen to it, and before you leave the building here this morning, you'll make a choice, consciously or subconsciously, you'll make a choice.

Either to accept Jesus, to come to Him as He calls you to come, or if you've been walking with Him, you've already made that commitment, it might be that this morning there's a wrestle in your heart as to what it is that God's calling you to go and do for Him.

And what we'll do is, as we read God's word, and as we break it down, we'll look at what is the word of God? What's it saying to us this morning?

[2 : 39] What the similarities between the passage that we read in Matthew and what God says to Jonah and says to each one of us this morning?

And how do we respond? What's the response that we have to God's word? And as we respond, what direction does that then take us in?

And what's the cost? What's the cost to each one of us? So as we look in Jonah, Jonah chapter 1, and just the first three verses, now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the Son of Amity, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

That Jonah rose to flee, to Tarsus from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarsus, so he paid the fare, and went on board to go with them to Tarsus, away from the presence of the Lord.

Just pray before we turn into God's word. Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you would still our hearts, that as we come into your presence, that we would know where it is to be still, and know that you are God.

[4 : 11] That Heavenly Father, as we have read your word, as we seek to look at what your word says to us. That Heavenly Father, that for this time allotted to us, that we would lay aside the things of the world, the things that have maybe been bothering us in this past week, the challenges that we had even in getting out the house this morning, that you would help us to focus on you and your word.

Recognising that every time the word is opened, every time the word is read, that you seek to speak to us. So we pray even as Jesus said to the people, that those that have ears to hear, let them hear.

That our hearts and our minds may indeed be open as well, to be receptive and responsive to your word. Whatever you may be calling us to do, or commanding us to do this morning, in your Son's

name.

Amen. The word, what is the word of the Lord?

We read there, now the word of the Lord came to Jonah. Many of you will be aware that in the second question, some of you may be learnt it in Sunday school many years ago, the second question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, it tells us there that the word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures, of the Old and the New Testament, is the only rule given to directors on how we may glorify and enjoy God.

[5 : 53] If our chief end, as the first question says, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, the Bible, as we've been given it, as we have it here in the Old and the New Testament, is the only rule that's been given to directors on how we may glorify and enjoy God.

In 2 Timothy 3 and 16 it says, all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.

And as we think about God's word this morning, as we've heard it read, do we find it profitable? Are we being taught through it?

Is it correcting our walk with Jesus as we hear it and as we read it? Or is it helping us and training us for the righteousness that we're called to? The story of Jonah, it's a well-known story.

We teach it in Sunday school, we probably learned it in Sunday school. Jonah was a prophet who was called by God to go to Nineveh and he went in another direction.

[7 : 17] And we maybe thought, Jonah was a silly man. I would never have done that. I would never do that. Let's not be too quick to judge Jonah, but let's see what we can learn from Jonah's response and the direction that it took him in as we consider God's word this morning.

Why did I read two passages? As I said at the beginning of the service, at the beginning of the sermon, there are two groups of us here this morning, those that have come to Jesus and those that have not.

In the first passage we read in Matthew, Jesus spoke to the crowd directly and he said to them, come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What we have to do is, we can't just grab that text from the Bible and think that's what we need to hold on to. What did Jesus say to the people that were gathered there before he actually gave that call for them to come to him?

In the passage that we read in Matthew and the passage that we've got before us here in Jonah, there's a similarity and that similarity is that there's a call to repent.

[9 : 08] Verse 20 in the book of Matthew where we read, Jesus then began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. Woe to you Carazan, woe to you Bethsaida, for if the mighty works done and you had been done entire inside and they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you it is more bearable in the day of judgment for tire inside and for you.

And you Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to heads for if the mighty works done and you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than it is for you. Why do I read these verses?

Why are these verses there for us? Are they still relevant to us today? If we reflect back probably within the lifetime of some of you here this morning, if not in your own lifetime certainly within the lifetime of your parents and grandparents, where there was great blessing poured out through revival on the west side of Lewis.

Jesus was here this morning and he was reading or speaking to the communities here. Would he be saying woe to you Kalanich, woe to you Shobas, woe to you Carly.

[10 : 49] If the mighty works that had been done in Carly had been done in tire and siding. When we reflect back, not just on God's word but on what God has done within our communities, do we look to see where that has taken us today?

Because the message is exactly the same. No matter where you are this morning, the command and the commission that Jesus has is to come to him, to come to him and stay with him. We may have come to him many years ago, we may have wandered and the burden that we're carrying this morning is heavier than we can bear. The message is exactly the same.

Come, come to me and take my yoke upon you. The word of God, it speaks to each and every one of us.

Jonah was asked to go. Is God asking any of you this morning to go for him? To go and do his work. Might not be to go to a great city, it might be to be involved in the ministry here in Carly, whether it be as a Sunday school teacher, a youth leader, whatever ministry the congregation is involved in here.

Has God been laying it upon your heart for you to go, to go and speak to your neighbour? How are you going to respond?

[12 : 47] How did Jonah respond to God's work? One of the things that we see about Jonah here is the first thing that we find is the diarrhoea, which indicates that he was in a position maybe of prayer, that he'd been on his knees, but he arose. And we might have thought he's going to go and do what God asked him to do, but very quickly what we find is that he didn't go.

He didn't go in the direction. He sought to flee. Now why did he want to flee? Did he think that the job before him was going to be too great a task?

He was getting asked to go to a big city. We later on find that in that city the number was way beyond what we have here in the Western Isles.

Over 120,000 souls. Let's just pause for a moment. Census figures for 2022.

26,140 people registered as living in the Western Isles. Of that 26,000, 7,828 people registered at the last census that they had no religion. That's an increase in over 56% of the population in the space of 10 years.

[14 : 38] People drifting away from God. When you add the figure of those that have claimed that they have no religion to those that just didn't answer the question, takes that figure to over 9,000.

So one person and three within the island has either got no interest or just quite flatly denies that there is any religion.

We don't need to go to Nineveh to share God's word. There's a mission field right in our own doorstep. It's God asking you to go. It's God asking you to get involved.

To be able to share the word that he lays upon your heart in your place of work or with your neighbors.

What is the word of God saying to you this morning? Are you hearing God asking you to come or is there a wrestle there for you to go?

[15 : 48] Go with the word and share that message of the need to repent and come to Jesus. Just something of direction.

Jonah rose so he got up. What did he then do? He sought to flee from the presence of God. We sang that first Psalm, O Lord, thou hast me searchin' known.

You knowest my sitting down and my rising up. The Psalm goes on, From thy spirit, whether shall I go or from thy presence fly. I send thy heaven low, thou art there, there if in hell I lie. Take I the morning wings and dwell in utmost part of sea. Even there, Lord, shall thy hand me lead, thy right hand hold shall me. Jonah would have had the Psalms.

Jonah would have known that he couldn't flee from the presence of God. What was he trying to do? He was trying to get as far away from the place that God had spoken to him as possible.

As many of you know, I was in the police in a previous life. And back when I started at the beginning of 1990, there was obviously various different wars taking place, that the British forces were involved in in various places.

[17 : 25] It wasn't uncommon to turn up at work and be given a briefing at Corporal Smith, Lance Corporal, whoever, had gone AWOL. They'd been served the commission, but they had gone absent without leave from the army.

They decided that they couldn't do what they'd been asked to do and they wanted to get as far away from it as possible. We would then have to go and look for them. Very often we would find them.

And there would be a penalty that they would have to pay. They would get taken back. They would have to deal with the consequences of having fled. And we see here with Jonah, that Jonah got up and he sought to flee from the presence of God.

But what do we then find out is he went down, first of all he went down to Joppa, and then he went down into the boat. And we read later that the bottom of the boat wasn't far enough away.

And because of the choices he had been made, he had made, he was thrown over into the depths of the sea. How many of us in responding to God's word, the direction that it takes us, is down?
[19 : 05] Down into the depths of despair because we've turned away from God. We may have been here at the last communion. You'd made the promise, this is the time. I'm going to go forward.

I'm going to make a public profession. But the communion's come, the communion's go. And yet you don't make that profession.

How does it make you feel? You're down, you're disappointed, you're away from God. I gave the comparison of a soldier going AWOL and running away.

But the soldiers, the military police, sorry, and the national police are asked to go and look. If God is calling you this morning, why are you going to run?

Why are you going to try and run from God this morning if He's calling you? As Burgeon says, if the hound of heaven is sniffing you out, he will find you. God has taken you here this morning.

[20 : 27] It's laid it upon your heart to get up this morning and come to church, to hear a message, to either come to Him or to go for Him.

Why then are you going to run away? Why are you going to run away and face the consequences of being down and away from God?

What's your response to God's word going to be? And what direction is it going to take? Take you in this morning?

I said about a cost. Jonah went down to Joppa and he had to pay the fare.

Paid a fare to go on a boat for a trip that he never completed. Soldier who goes at the A-wall, runs away, tries to take far away as possible, pays his own fare, leaves with where he's got on his back until he finds whether it's home that he gets to.

[21 : 42] If that soldier had accepted the commission that he was given, he'd have been given a travel warrant for his journey, he'd been given food for his journey, he'd been given a uniform to wear and at the end of his commission he may even have been given a medal.

Jonah had to pay his own fare and he almost paid with his own life for running away from God.

What cost are you prepared to pay for not following Christ this morning?

What's the price going to be for you for not coming to Jesus or going for Jesus if he's laying it upon your heart to go for him this morning? Are you going to go A-wall again?

Or are you going to come and be equipped to go with that message? We learn that all that Jonah goes through that he does go and he goes to Nineveh and he preaches a message and the nation repents and sat cloth and ashes.

Who's God laying upon your heart this morning to go with a message? To tell them about Jesus, tell them of their need of Jesus that you're shying away from him.

[23 : 20] What will they say? What will they do? What if they say no? What if they close the door in my face? So I've probably said here before it's not you that they're rejecting, it's Jesus. But your commission is to go.

If you love the Lord, go and tell somebody. If you're concerned for the well-being of somebody's soul, go and tell them. God is laying them upon your heart.

Because what's the cost of not following Jesus? Jonah went down. He went down. He went down.

Are you going to leave here this morning? And before you even reach the door, is your heart going to be down? Because you know you've rejected that call, that offer that's been there before you once again to come.

Come unto me, take my yoke upon you. Why do we keep referring to it as a yoke? When farmers in past days used to put a yoke upon their cattle, they would put an older one with a younger one. The older one would carry the burden.

[24 : 47] The younger one, although flighty, would be kept because of the strength of the older one. And over time, they would learn to plow the field and keep the furthest straight.

What's your fear in coming to Jesus? That you'll be on your own? The promise is take my yoke. My yoke upon you says elsewhere in Scripture, I will never leave you nor forsake you. That we have to be bold and we have to be courageous. We spoke about the importance of God's word, to keep God's word upon our lips, to meditate on it and to walk with Him. God's calling you this morning.

If He's calling you to come to Him, or if He's calling you to go for Him, don't pay a price that's beyond what you can bear by running away this morning. Come and come to Jesus. Let us pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that as your word goes forth that our ears would indeed be open and that our hearts would be receptive and that, Heavenly Father, that we would use our mouths to call upon you and that we would recognize that as we come and as we sing that I am poor and needy, yet the Lord of me a caret of take, that Lord that you would take no tarrying and that you would come.

Come to us now as we seek to call upon you. In Jesus' name. Amen.