



This Week's Message
February 18, 2024

Jonah: What Is Success?

The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:5
(New International Version)

Sunday's Scripture Reading
Jonah 3:1-10

¹*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:*

²*"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

³*Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.*

⁴*Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."*

⁵*The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

⁶*When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.*

⁷*This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.*

⁸*But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.*

⁹*Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."*

¹⁰*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

On Sunday, I will continue the series of messages from the book of Jonah, as we turn to chapter 3.

Last week, in the course of my message, I said that what Jonah really feared was not so much the mission that God had given him, but that the mission might succeed. Well, it did succeed, and it succeeded far beyond what Jonah could have imagined. Upon hearing Jonah's call to repentance, the people of Nineveh *believed God*. Talk about revival! A revival of major proportions came to the city of Nineveh.

The astounding response of the Ninevites to the message was not well received by Jonah, unfortunately. Jonah would have preferred that the people did not repent and that, in response, God would have destroyed the city. We will talk more about that next week, when we study the final chapter in Jonah's story. For now, we will talk about the definition of success. What is success? And perhaps more importantly, how do we define success, and who gets to decide the metrics by which we determine what is and what is not success?

Jonah was given a task by God, a task that he did not want and one from which he fled.

Questions to Consider –

* The obvious question, when the message is titled *What Is Success*, is to ask, *how do you define success?* Do you feel like a success in life? Or, to ask more specifically, in what ways do you feel successful and in what ways do you feel unsuccessful?

* As difficult as it can be to determine success in our own lives, how do we determine what constitutes success for a church? Do the traditional measurements of attendance and offering still provide the best metrics for defining how to define success for a church?

* What is the difference between “drawing power” and “sending power” in churches? Is a church more successful when “drawing” a lot of people to their building, or more successful when they are “sending” a lot of people out to minister and serve?

* Verses 5-6 tell us that the residents of Nineveh, from the greatest to the least – including their king – have a change of heart upon hearing the message of Jonah and they immediately repented. Why do you think they responded so quickly? Could that happen today, do you think? Why or why not?

Jonah was a very reluctant messenger of God, and he did not want God’s plan to succeed, but it did, thankfully. That it succeeded to such a great extent did not go well with Jonah, who would have preferred that God’s plan failed, because Jonah’s hope was that the Ninevites would be destroyed. Obviously, God’s definition of success and Jonah’s definition of success were quite different.

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In our day and age, some find it quite easy to measure success. In their eyes, success is measured by career advancement and financial gain; in the view of many, that would certainly be considered the greatest standard of success. That is not, however, a measurement of success ever put forth by Jesus. For Jesus, success was measured more in terms of love, as he says in Mark 12:30-31, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*” *The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.* For Jesus, financial gain – the great sign of success in the eyes of so many – was suspect as a way of measuring success, as he says in Mark 8:36, *what good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*

So how do we measure success? In a world of social media influencers, where “clicks” and “likes” are a measure of success, what does that mean for the rest of us, who have little or no social media presence? Does that make us failures? And in a world of tech billionaires, who rise to wealth, fame, and power after inventing new tech objects in their garages, or design the latest software apps in their basements, where does that leave those of us who struggle simply to sign into our email accounts? And for the small church without the latest tech, without a rocking praise band cranking out hit after hit on the Christian music charts, and without a celebrity pastor, what does it mean for them, when they are down the street from a megachurch with all of that and much more?

We’ll talk about all of that on Sunday – God bless you!