

SHARE YOUR STORY +++

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Well, hi, my name is Zach, and I'm a sinner. Welcome back to Sinners Anonymous, the finale week, and I think it's kind of perfect that finale week is also Baptism Sunday, where we're seeing 17 baptisms across our three campuses, five people remembering they're a baptized child of God. Can we just give God some praise and glory in all of this?

It has been quite the honor to lead you in this six-week class, and we've been doing a deep dive through the book of Jonah, and we conclude that. Today, if you were to type into Google or chat, GPT, or whatever search engine you use, who's the worst prophet in the Old Testament? That would be maybe at the very top, if not very close to the top of that list. His resume is comically bad. Is it not?

I mean, we've been looking at some of these things, right? God called him to go east to Nineveh, and he goes west to Tarshish. God says preach, Jonah says no. In chapter one, the people that are praying to God are the pagan sailors while Jonah is sleeping. He preaches what I've argued is the least enthusiastic sermon in all of the Bible, even after getting the second chance. And then when there was like an Old Testament revival, rather than being grateful and saying, thank you God for my second chance and for using me in such a mighty and powerful way, he's grumpy. He's grumpy. His resume is comically bad.

And today, by the end of the message, if I have presented my case well before you, I believe that you will see Jonah not as one of the all-time worst prophets, but one of the all-time greats. And you might even say, I want to be like Jonah, but we got a long way to go to get to that. So let's do a little bit of recap to bring you up to speed.

In addition to the book of Jonah, we've declared, of course, with biblical backing that we are all sinful. And rather than just living with our sin, God offers us not just forgiveness from sins, but freedom from a life defined by our sin. And so we've been borrowing the 12 steps made popular by Alcoholics Anonymous and replaced just one word, alcohol or alcoholics with sin or sinners. And we've been using these steps as a practical way to find freedom from our sin.

Last week, we ended on a cliffhanger in the book of Jonah. He had, again, just preached that really lackluster sermon that had an incredible response, citywide revival, led by the king of Nineveh of all people. And again, we would think Jonah would be happy that in the second chance God used him, but he's not. He's angry and not just a little angry. He actually told God he would rather die than see the Ninevites like really live. That's how much he hated the Ninevites.

And I love that in the back and forth that God had with Jonah of last week, he doesn't come down with condemning statements or exclamation marks, but rather he asks Jonah a question. Is it right for you to be angry? Last week we said, God doesn't rush the process. You getting past and through your sin, it's a journey, not a destination. God is with you all along. Having ended there, because we know how most books go, we would expect this to clean itself up and resolve itself. That's not what Jonah does.

Welcome to the strangest ending of a book in the Bible. That's what we're going to see today. Because right, what should happen is, gosh, is it right for you to be angry? God, you got me again. And no, it's not right. And gosh, I'm sorry. And thank you so much. And that's just not what happens. Verse five, Jonah doesn't answer, says, had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. And there he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

Is it right for you to be angry? No response. He goes and builds a shelter, looks at it from afar and watches what happens with the city. But if we're honest, we know that he's hoping God will change his mind again and that rather than mercy, the Ninevites will get God's wrath. And I think what's happening here is really two postures we can take in this world when it comes to sin.

We can take a passive position like Jonah does, where we build ourselves a shelter, where we move over to the side and where we look at everybody else and what everybody else has got going on and how everyone else is messed up and how their consequences are making my life miserable. And we can make ourselves out to live that way, always looking at other people, making ourselves out to be a victim in this world. That's one posture you can take.

Or you can take the posture we've been taking in this series, not passive, but proactive. And to say that I know that biblically I am a sinner and there are proactive steps that I can put in place in my life to help me become a healthy disciple follower of Jesus that can actually find freedom from my sin. And that's what these 12 steps are. And this is where we've been over the weeks.

We began as Jonah began in chapter one. He got a couple of these right at least and in chapter one, he admitted the reason they were in this storm. He says, this is my fault. I can't get out of this. I need some help, God. And that's where we started. I can't. There's power in powerlessness.

Because in powerlessness by yourself, you realize that yes, you can't, but we've come to believe in a higher power that's greater than ourselves. We call that higher power by name. His name is Jesus. I can't, but Jesus can. So I surrender. And so we've been working out what a surrender look like the next several weeks. Well, it looks like things like examining myself, confessing to God, confessing to somebody else, humbling myself, making amends, making everything right.

Steps one through nine really got us to today, if that makes sense. Like rectifying our past and doing as much as we possibly could to make right whatever we could from our past. Last week, steps 10 and 11 were great. Now that we're here, let's put some proactive habits in our life and let's keep coming back to church, to community, to God. And the coolest part about all of these steps, when I tell you to keep coming back, the thing we've seen over and over in this story is that before you ever came back, God is already here. That's what we've seen in Jonah.

God keeps showing up for his prophet, and he's going to do that again in chapter four. And he's been doing it, can we admit, through some unconventional ways. So far through a storm, a wind, and a huge fish. And if you thought those things were unconventional, it's going to get more unconventional in chapter four.

Here we go. Let's see what happens. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head, to ease his discomfort. And Jonah was very happy about the

plant. Finally he's happy about something, it's a plant. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm. This is crazy. Which chewed the plant so that it withered. And so then when the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. Again he wanted to die and said, it would be better for me to die than to live.

But God doesn't rush the process. Said to Jonah, is it right for you to be angry about the plant? Anyone else been angry at a trivial matter before? It's not the plant, it's not the trivial matter, it's the hundred things I stuffed in my relationship with you spouse that we didn't talk about that the plant is revealing. Spouses, can you relate? You know what I'm talking about. And to Jonah's credit, I love the honesty, he doubles down. Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? It is. It is. It is right that I'm this angry about the plant. And again, the third time, so angry, I wish I were dead.

What is the point of this? I heard Pastor Craig Groeschel say it this way before, that Jonah didn't want God's lessons, he just wanted God's blessings. Come on, that's some good Southern preaching right there. I don't want God's lessons, I just want his blessings. And that's how we, that's how we, if we're honest, come on, let's get honest. That's what we want too. Why? Because his lessons are painful. His lessons are painful. This one had a sun blazing so hot and a wind scorching that Jonah grew faint. He's getting sunburned.

And I don't know about you, I like to picture my Old Testament biblical characters in a certain way. And so I picture the hairstyle of Jonah very much mirroring the other teaching pastors on our King of Kings team. They'll get me in future weeks or on the Beyond Sunday podcast, where we go deeper with Sunday messages available wherever podcasts are streamed. Beyond Sunday. You should listen. But as funny as this scene is, God's doing something serious. He is exposing that Jonah's heart still got a long way to go. And he's going to use a plant, a worm, and a scorching heat to do more heart work.

Jonah built a shelter. He went outside the city, watching and waiting again, hoping that God would change his mind and bring wrath and judgment, not mercy and grace. I think in his anger, as he builds a shelter and gets underneath it to watch what God will do, I think there's something painfully familiar with that picture. That metaphorically, I believe that we create shelters. I believe that when something's not healthy in us, or when there's pain, or when we know there is sin, it is easiest for us to just stuff it, to live with it, to build a shelter around it, and to try as hard as we can to get comfortable with it. That way, nobody has to really know what's going on in my heart.

I believe that's the MO for too many of us Christians that call ourselves believers, is that we build a shelter, and we stand at a distance, and we hope that nobody gets access close enough to see that I'm actually a real mess, if you got to know me. And we mask it by the things that we build. I don't know what your shelter is. Maybe for you, your shelter is success and achieving. Maybe it's collecting money and wealth. Maybe it's using humor to get past all of the hard times in your life.

I don't know what your shelter is, but we tend to metaphorically build shelters around our sin so that we can keep living the way that we, well, are living. And we just hope beyond hope that nobody knows, and that in the shelter, we can hopefully have some comfort. And Jonah gets some comfort. He gets some comfort from a plant, some shade that comes into his life. And I think that happens to us as we build our own shelters, that sometimes we do get a comfortable moment. And so then we maybe start to believe the lie that maybe everything is okay. Maybe I can control this. It's not I can't, but I can. I can get my way out of this. Maybe something good happens, some good fortune. Maybe temptation goes

away for a little while. So we relax on some things and think, you know what, I've got this under control.

And here's the lesson that maybe we don't want is that sometimes all it takes is a little worm for everything to unravel. You can try to build your shelter and manage appearances, stuff things and hide things and tell yourselves, okay. But because not, not because our God is messing with us or Jonah, but because our God is gracious. He doesn't allow us to sit in our man made shelters.

The story is fascinating and it's more than a science project. It's actually God providing the plant and the shade for Jonah to give him comfort and relaxation. And I don't know what type of plant it was. I'm assuming it's not the one that does that. It's from Colorado that many people, Oh, okay. Come on. We're in a sinner's anonymous series. Y'all are going to act like you've never heard a weed supposed to be the joke, but whatever. Not that type of relaxation, but it gives them comfort. It gives them shade plants. Plants don't grow overnight like that.

And so here again, you have God controlling creation in this story. Who's ushered fish and winds and you could argue cows and waves and sailors and Ninevites is now helping a plant grow. But just as he has a plant, he provides, that's what the Bible says. An unconventional thing, a worm and the worm eats through the plant. And Jonah is so sad about this plant that he had for a few hours that he just again wishes that God would take his life. I'd rather die than see these nasty, no good Ninevites get favor, receive your blessing.

And here's how the book of Jonah concludes. You ready for it? Here it is. God responds to Jonah, but the Lord said, you've 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 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, em dash, and also many animals. That's it. What? And also many animals. That's how we're going to end this thing. That's how Sinners Anonymous concludes.

So maybe this whole thing isn't about people. It's about maybe, maybe my dog Ziggy will be in heaven with me when I die. I don't know. I don't know. Is that what this is about? Animals? I mean, there's a lot of animals in it. There's a whale or probably a whale, a large fish. There's cows and now a worm. Like is this whole thing about animals? That can't be the book of Jonah and what it's about. What a weird, crazy ending. Doesn't it feel frustrating?

It's challenging to get so invested in something to have that type of conclusion. I was thinking about a couple of TV shows, some of the old timers might remember the show ALF. This lovable furry alien that somehow got to live with a suburban family. And he always kind of made a mess of things, but he was again, lovable. And so the crowd loved him. And at the end of it, he was captured by government, apparently headed towards who knows what. And then the show got canceled. We don't know what happened with ALF and maybe that's the way the government wants it, by the way. I don't know. Thanks for watching.

Or maybe this one's a little more recent, but maybe still dating myself. The show, My Name is Earl, which strangely was a series about Earl doing steps eight and nine, making amends with those that he had wronged and making things right. And at the end of season four, after this big revelation, it literally has the words to be continued. And then it was canceled. That's brutal, right? You invest yourself in

these characters. You're trying to finally like wrap your head into it. And also many animals. That's the end.

Like did we not find Jonah chapter five in the Dead Sea Scrolls? Is there another chapter that's missing? Like what happens? What does Jonah say? How does he respond? Does he finally get it? Does he repent? Does his heart soften toward Nineveh? Does he walk back into the city and start loving the people he was hoping God would destroy? You don't get the answer and that can feel frustrating, but I'm going to contend with you that there's something greater going on here that is much better than a strange ending.

Because the reality is this book was never about Jonah. Even in the first week when I said, who is the book, the main character of the book of Jonah about? And you all screamed, Jonah. And one of you said the whale and you were all wrong. This is a book about God from beginning to end. Chapter one, verse one. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah and at the end of it, a question, Jonah, don't you know that I created, you're so mad about this plant that you had for a few hours. Don't you know I created each of those Ninevites fearfully and wonderfully. There's 120,000 of them and shouldn't I care about those that I've created Jonah.

It ends with this question that God gives to his prophet, Jonah, do you care about the people I care about? And that's actually where the steps take us. The steps one through 11 have very much been about how do I get free from this? And then step 12 is not about what's happening in me, but what happens through me. Here's step 12. Let's read it together.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sinners and to practice these principles in all our affairs. You see what, what this gets right is that our healing isn't just for us. It's to be shared with others. The story is not just about you getting right. It's about what God has done and how you can share that. So the question becomes after you've been healed and after you're finding freedom from your brokenness and from your past and from your sin, the question becomes, who can I help? Who needs to know about this?

And so I like to break down these steps in smaller pieces. And so step 12 is really share your story, share your story. You've got a story to share. And while the book of Jonah doesn't conclude nicely, I think we can make an educated, informal and reasonable guess at what happened next in Jonah's life. Remember how we started today? Jonah, he may be one of the worst prophets, comically bad resume, but maybe all of us have been looking at him in the wrong way.

I first ran into this idea in the book, The Prodigal Prophet by Timothy Keller over a decade ago. And I want to read to you the way he ends his book. And this is the payoff for the whole series. And so pay attention. Keller says it this way. As we have seen, the book of Jonah ends with a cliffhanger. We are never told how the prophet responded to God's final appeal. I propose, however, that we can make a reasonable guess about how Jonah ultimately responded to God.

How do we know Jonah was so recalcitrant, defiant and clueless? How do we know that he made the unbelievable, I hate the God of love speech? How do we know about his prayer inside the fish? Here it is. The only way we could possibly know these things is if Jonah told others. What kind of man would let the world see what a fool he was? Only someone who had become joyfully secure in God's love. Only someone who believed that he was simultaneously sinful, but completely accepted. In short,

someone who has found in the gospel of grace, the very power of God. If it can change Jonah, it can change anyone. It can change you.

Keller's argument, my argument is that the only reason we know about how much of a fool Jonah is, is because at some point he was step 12 in everywhere he went. And he was telling people about what God had done. He carried his message to sinners. He was so freed up by the grace of God. I love this, that he was fine with you seeing him as a fool in order that you would more clearly see God.

Here's the way I like to say it. Jonah is content with you seeing him at his worst in order that you would see God at his best. Can you get any freer than this? That in his story, he is telling you all, he is putting all his baggage, all his dirty He's telling you the worst of who he was, and he actually doesn't care what you think about him. I want to be like Jonah.

And even in Jonah, the step 12, him telling his story, I want you to see that as you share your story, your testimony isn't, look at how far I've come, guys, look at how great I am. I mean, celebrate that your progress, not perfection, right? Celebrate it. You should, but your testimony isn't look how far I've come. It's look what Jesus has done. And I'm cool with you knowing the worst about me in order that you see God. And I hope you've seen God.

Now, to be fair, you've seen him in really unconventional, strange ways. Think about the provision that has come in the book of Jonah. We've had a storm. We've had a huge fish, a plant and a worm, not the type of provision we usually pray for when we say, God, will you provide for me? And yet through all of that unconventional provision, through all of the strange provision, and even the strange ending that we see in the book of Jonah, it sets up what I would argue is the most unconventional provision that this world has ever seen.

Because it leads to the cross, a place where a perfect, sinless man said, I will go in your stead on your behalf for your sake. And where a bloodied and beaten Jesus would contend for his life and lose. And we would say to God in that moment, God, this feels like a strange ending. I thought he was your son. And I thought, I thought he had power. I thought he had the same power that could control creation and all the things of creation. And now, and now the one that I placed my hope in, the higher power that I believed in is dead. It's dead. What a strange ending, except for one thing, church.

There may be a book in the Bible that has a strange ending, but God doesn't write a book with a strange ending. Because that wasn't the end. And a chapter later, three days later, what do we have? Jesus rising from the dead out of the tomb. There may not be resolution in the book of Jonah, but there is resolution in the story of Jesus.

And so I think there's some of you that need to hear that, gosh, it feels like there's a strange chapter in my life. It feels like I'm going through strange things in my life. I don't know where God is. I'm not sure where he is. And what I'm trying to tell you is that he's here, he's there, he's showing up in unconventional ways all the time. But if you believe in our higher power, whose name is Jesus, if you believe I can't, but Jesus can, then here's the reality. Your story doesn't end with a question mark, but a declaration. Your story doesn't end strangely, but rather with beautiful resolution.

And I couldn't tee up Baptism Sunday even greater because today we're going to watch God promise and place the Holy Spirit of the living God inside of 17 people. Five people that have gone astray are

remembering that that same promise is still theirs today. They're going to like Jonah, go down into the water. Thankfully, they won't be beach barf coming up, amen? But they will be redeemed and they, you, we have a story.

You don't graduate. This isn't graduation. This is just a new chapter. There's a story to share. We each have a story to share. And I think sometimes this is kind of why I wanted to do this series. We feel like that we need to get our life fully in order, get all buttoned up and we do. We want to say like, look how far I've come and I'm not saying you shouldn't celebrate how far you've come, but you're not the point. You never have been. Jonah's not the point. He never was. But look at what Jesus has done.

You know, sometimes we think that someone can only see Jesus in my greatness. No, actually the Bible says that his power is made perfect, not in your greatness, but in your what weakness, the part of your story that sometimes we often leave out that can have the most impact in somebody else's life is the broken parts. And I hope that I continue to become, and I hope that you continue to become like Jonah. Someone who is so free and so content being able to talk about the worst parts of our story in order that others would see Jesus. Share your story.

These are the steps, and this is where we've been. So if you've been coming, thank you. Class is over. The homework never stops, by the way. It's an always and forever. Share your story.

Will you pray with me? God, we thank you that you provide, and we are sorry. We're sorry, Lord, for how we try to build shelters around our brokenness. We try to fake. Things are going pretty well in my life, and we look and seek for comfort that this world provides. God, we lay that down at the cross as a sin. We've missed the mark. We thank you that yet again, here, right now, your grace meets us, and we can have another chapter. God, give us boldness and give us courage as we share your story and how great you are. To you be the glory and all of God's people across all of our campuses say, amen.