

A Mission From God

According to *American Miracle* by Michael Medved, the famous Texan Sam Houston had such a problem with alcohol that the Cherokees gave him the name “Big Drunk”. After two failed marriages, the family of 20-year old Margaret Lea was horrified by her interest in the 46-year old Houston. Friends and family continually shared the Gospel with Sam until he fell on his knees in sweet surrender to Jesus.

After Houston’s river baptism, a friend commented, “Well General, I hear your sins were washed away.” “I hope so,” Sam responded, “but if they were all washed away, the Lord help the fish below.” Sam and Margaret had eight children, the last born when Sam was 67 years old. No one is beyond God’s grace. Will you reach out to the ‘Sams’ in your life?

Four Lessons About Stepping Out and Sharing Your Faith:

1. A _____ **(Divine Appointment)**
 - a. *“The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.’”* *Jonah 1:1-2.* God called Israel to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6; 60:3), a motto the modern state of Israel adopted in 1948.
 - b. *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* *Matthew 5:14-16.* Don’t hide your light! Let it shine!

2. A _____ **(Dangerous Refusal)**
 - a. *“But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.”* *Jonah 1:3.* Nineveh was 500 miles east of Israel while Tarshish was 2,300 miles due west. Nineveh was a great city of over a half million with a barbaric reputation.
 - b. Has God ever given you a difficult assignment? If you reach out to love the unlovable, something good is going to happen.
 - c. If you run from God, you never get to where you’re going, and you pay your own fare (Jonah 1:3). When you go the Lord’s way, you get to where you’re going, and He pays the fare (Exodus 2:9).

3. A _____ **(Deadly Storm)**
 - a. *“Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each*

cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.” Jonah 1:4-5.

- b. Jonah is a picture of church, fast asleep while the world around us is perishing. The casting of lots reveals that Jonah is the reason for the storm. *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” Proverbs 16:33.* The storm forces a reluctant prophet to preach truth to the pagan sailors (Jonah 1:9). God often uses storms to get his people into position.

4. A _____ (Decisive Turning Point)

- a. *“Pick me up and throw me into the sea and it will become calm...Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm...but the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.” Jonah 1:12-17.* Jonah should’ve asked the sailors to turn the boat around but he didn’t.
- b. Instead Jonah is prepared to die rather than obey God. Ironically, pagan sailors, who didn’t know God, were prepared to die to save one man. But one man, called of God, isn’t willing to risk his single life to save an entire pagan city. What an embarrassment!
- c. A turning point occurs when God sends a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah survived the ordeal, just as James Bartley did after being swallowed by a whale in 1891. In the belly of the fish, Jonah finally cries for mercy.

The theme of the book of Jonah is compassion. In chapter 1, Jonah lacks compassion for a city full of pagans while a ship full of pagans has compassion for him. In chapter 2, Jonah prays for mercy for his disobedient soul, but in chapter 4, he is unwilling to extend mercy to a repentant city. Do you have compassion for the lost souls surrounding you? *“Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Jonah 4:11.*

Discussion Questions

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1. Have you known anyone like Sam Houston? Why was the family of Margaret Lea so horrified to hear of her interest in a man 26 years older than her? What were the steps in Sam's conversion? Why do you think some were reluctant to share the Gospel with Sam? What did he tell his friend about his baptism washing his sins away? Do you have any 'Sams' in your life? Will you reach out to them and invite them to Friend Day? Are you surprised to hear that 34% of unchurched people are likely to accept an invitation to a worship service?
2. Read Jonah 1:1-2. What kind of "divine appointment" was Jonah given? What does Isaiah 49:6 and 60:3 teach about the calling God has for Israel? What does Matthew 5:14-16 teach about the calling Jesus has for us? Are you ever guilty of "hiding your light under a bushel"? Why? How can you let your light shine for Jesus throughout the day? Are you willing to do that?
3. Read Jonah 1:3. Why do you think Jonah headed in the exact opposite direction from Nineveh? Has God ever given you a difficult assignment? Do you believe that if you reach out to love the unlovable that something good is going to happen? Can you give an example of this? What does Jonah 1:3 teach about paying your own fare and never getting where you're going? What does Exodus 2:9 teach about getting where you're going and God paying the fare?
4. Read Jonah 1:4-5. How is a sleeping Jonah symbolic of a sleeping church today? Do you sense that a storm is raging around us even now? What does Proverbs 16:33 teach about the casting of lots? Do you think God uses 'storms' today to get his people into position? Has this ever happened in your life? How?
5. Read Jonah 1:6-17. How should Jonah have replied when he was asked by the sailors what they were to do to calm the storm? How did Jonah respond? Have you ever known someone who was prepared to die rather than obey the Lord? What happened? What happened to Jonah? What was the critical turning point for Jonah? What kind of fish may have swallowed Jonah? What happened to James Bartley in 1891?
6. Do you agree that the theme of the book of Jonah is compassion? How did Jonah lack compassion in chapter 1? How did the sailors extend compassion? How did Jonah pray in chapter 2? How does he pray in chapter 4? What is the final lesson taught in Jonah 4:10-11? Do you have compassion for the lost souls surrounding you?