

I. Introduction

- A. An elderly Florida lady did her shopping and, upon returning to her car, found four males in the act of leaving with her vehicle.
- B. She dropped her shopping bags and drew her handgun, proceeding to scream at the top of her lungs, "I have a gun and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!"
- C. The four men didn't wait for a second threat. They got out and ran like mad.
- D. The lady, somewhat shaken, then proceeded to load her shopping bags into the back of the car and got into the driver's seat. She was so shaken that she could not get her key into the ignition.
- E. She tried and tried, and then she realized why. It was for the same reason she had wondered why there was a football, a Frisbee and two 12-packs of beer in the front seat.
- F. A few minutes later, she found her own car parked four or five spaces farther down.
- G. She loaded her bags into the car and drove to the police station to report her mistake.
- H. The sergeant to whom she told the story couldn't stop laughing.
- I. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four pale men were reporting a carjacking by a mad, elderly woman described as white, less than five feet tall, glasses, curly white hair, and carrying a large handgun.
- J. No charges were filed.
 1. Sometimes, you can be wrong and not know it. Messed up. Off base. Heading for trouble. On the wrong track. And not know it.

II. Underdog

- A. Welcome to week five in our summer series called Underdog. We're asking what does God say to us, in the Bible, when the odds are against us. What does God say to the underdog?
- B. Could be you feel a little bit like that today? You have giants towering over your life. Financial giants. Health giants. Housing giants. Marriage giants. Relationship giants.
- C. You're an underdog, and you want to hear a word from the Lord. I'm so glad you're here. We do have a sure and certain word from the Lord, and it's written right here in the perfect, unchanging Bible.
- D. In a moment, we're going to read from the Old Testament prophet called Jonah, but before we do that, I want to push the underdog idea a little deeper.
- E. Sometimes, we become underdogs through no fault of our own. It's not your fault the economy collapsed. It's not your fault that a disease struck. Forces outside your control messed you up, and now you have to lean on God.
- F. That's one scenario. We've focused on that scenario for the first four weeks in this series.
- G. But here's another scenario.
- H. What happens when you dug your own knucklehead hole with your own meathead shovel and dove in airhead, pinhead, chowder head, blockhead, bonehead, dunderhead, lamebrain, pea brain, birdbrain, half-brain leading the way?
- I. In other words, what if it's all your fault?
- J. What if you messed up? And you're the victim of your own bad choices, and now you're the underdog?
- K. What does God say to you today?
- L. Here's our passage of Scripture:

III. *5 Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see if anything would happen to the city (Jonah 4:5, NLT).*

- A. Who is Jonah, and what city is he watching?
- B. Jonah was a prophet. Yes, this is the famous prophet that God sent to Nineveh.
- C. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Here's all you need to know about Assyria: the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible leads with this sentence about Assyria—"The ancient empire considered the symbol of terror and tyranny in the near East for more than three centuries."
- D. They were violent. They were cruel. They worshiped idols, and practiced human sacrifice.
- E. They burned down enemy cities. They impaled opponents on stakes and left them writhing in agony in the air, stuck on a giant spike. They were warriors. And they were historic enemies of Judah and Israel.
- F. The Assyrians stood out as the bad boys of the ancient world.
- G. And in a very weird way, they are going to be the underdogs of the story today.
- H. I want to take a different slant on the story of Jonah. I want us to put ourselves in the shoes of the Assyrians.
- I. What about that part inside you or me that is cruel; violently, emotionally, physically, and spiritually? What about the part of us that sacrifices humans, or worships idols?
- J. You have a dark side, don't you? Nod your head—if your spouse has a dark side. (Caught you!)
- K. You have a side that wants to go postal, but you restrain yourself, simply because you might get caught.
- L. What about your Inner Assyrian?
- M. When you are in this place, you are not happy. You are not living the life of your dreams. You are not experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised.
- N. You are your own worst enemy. And you are the underdog because of your own failures, and even your own evil.
- O. So there is Jonah, and God tells him to go preach the good news of a saving, forgiving, invisible God who is not worshipped with idols—but who is approached through a holy sacrifice.

- P. "Jonah, go tell the Assyrians about me."
- Q. So when God told Jonah to go and preach the gospel in Nineveh, to the Assyrians; Jonah boarded a ship heading the opposite way.
- R. Why?
- S. Was he afraid?
- T. No.
- U. He tells us why he didn't want to go to Nineveh.
- IV. *1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jonah 4:1-4, NKJV)*
- A. You see, Jonah knew something about God's heart for the bad guy underdog.
- B. I want to list the terms piled up there in verse 2:
1. Gracious: The Hebrew word *hannun* depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to someone in need. An action from a superior to an inferior who has no real claim for gracious treatment.
 - a) Gracious describes the kindness of God's heart.
 2. Merciful: The Hebrew word *rachum* indicates a deep love and natural pity for the helpless and needy.
 - a) Merciful describes the tenderness of God's heart.
 3. Slow to anger: The Hebrew phrase *arek appayim* literally means long of face, or long of nose. It means to have a long fuse—a tremendous capacity for patience.
 - a) Slow to anger describes the patience of God's heart.
 4. Abundant in loving kindness: The Hebrew word is *hesed*. God has overflowing *hesed*. Infinite amounts of grace. Kindness and goodness toward someone who hasn't earned it and doesn't deserve it.
 - a) This phrase describes the grace of God's heart.
 5. One who relents from doing harm: There is a tremendous promise in the Bible for anybody who feels caught being a bad guy or a bad girl.
 - a) *7 If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, 8 but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. 9 And if I announce that I will build up and plant a certain nation or kingdom, making it strong and great, 10 but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless that nation as I had said I would (Jeremiah 18:7-10, NLT).*
 6. And this is exactly where God found the Assyrians. They were evil, and deserved destruction. And He sent them, Jonah to warn them, because if they would switch tracks, they could be saved.
 - a) This phrase describes the forgiving nature of God's heart.
- C. But Jonah knew the heart of God.
1. The forgiving nature of God.
 2. The grace of God.
 3. The patience of God.
 4. The tenderness of God.
 5. And the kindness of God.
- D. And he didn't want the Assyrians to ever find out about this God.
- E. That's why he boarded a ship to Tarshish—the opposite direction from Nineveh.
- F. And that's why God sent a special submarine, a great fish of the sea to be in place for the great storm. And that's why the sailors threw Jonah overboard. And that's why Jonah got a ride in a first class cabin, all to himself, in the belly of a great fish. And that's why he ended up a pile of throw up on the beach.
- G. Why?
- H. Because God loves underdogs, even when it's your own fault. Even when the guilt is real and you blew it; you overspent, you under communicated, you acted in haste or selfishness or lust.
- I. Yeah, God still loves you.
- J. The Jonah's of the world might not. The churches of the world might not (tragically). The Christians of the world might not (tragically).
- K. But God does.
- L. And this is why God brought you here today. And even if it doesn't apply today, remember this truth, because it's going to apply someday. Tuck it away, and never forget it.
- M. God loves underdogs even when it's your own fault.
1. His mercy never stops, even at the threshold of your failure. There is hope. There is forgiveness. There is a new start. There is peace. There is wholeness. There is grace.
- N. And God will go to great lengths to offer this grace to you.
- O. He'll send you a Jonah—and He'll get the Jonah to you, even if the Jonah doesn't want to be there.

- P. Just as He sends us, into our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our crazy family trees, our hospital rooms, our classrooms, and offices, wherever He may send us.
- Q. Why—because the world's bad guys and good guys and everybody in between need to hear about the amazing grace of this amazing God.

V. The Gospel

- A. Here is what we teach and believe.
- B. If you can't put yourself in the shoes of the Assyrians, you can't be saved. Jesus didn't come into the world to save people who had their act together.
 - 1. *17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17, NKJV).*
- C. If you pass yourself off as righteous, you don't need Jesus.
- D. But if you can embrace the reality you are a sinner, that you are morally broken, that you don't live up to God's standards, that you don't even live up to your own standards—then Jesus is for you.
 - 1. I have been in full time gospel ministry now for 32 years; my 10 year anniversary here is 3 months away.
 - 2. And this is what I know. The older I get as a follower of Jesus, the more I realize what a sinner I am, and how undeserving I am—and the more I realize how enormously costly, and yet free, and undeserved is His love for me.
 - 3. Jesus loves me, and He likes me too.
 - 4. And that's what keeps me going.
 - 5. And I hope it keeps you going too.
- E. Jesus said He calls sinners to repentance. What is repentance?
 - 1. Is repentance moral reformation? No. You can't reform yourself. You can't fix your own malfunctioning heart. You are a fallen member of a fallen race, and repentance is not moral reformation.
 - 2. Is repentance that you stop sinning? No. You can't stop sinning; you are in your sins. Even your good stuff is tarnished with sin (Prov 21:4).
- F. Repentance means to change your mind. A deep change of mind in two parts:
 - 1. The first part is to change your mind about your own ability to save yourself. Good works. Religion. Morality. Rituals. Baptized. Confirmed. Confessed. Good things, but none of them can save you. And when you repent, you let them all go. You quit relying on yourself. You turn away from self-made faith—that's the first part.
 - 2. The second part is to change your mind about Jesus Christ, and turn to Him in trust, making Jesus your only hope. Have you ever done that? Have you ever emptied your hands of self-made religion so that you can grab hold of Jesus Christ?
 - a) He is the one who lived a perfect life, qualifying to be our Savior.
 - b) Jesus is the one who was nailed to the cross, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.
 - c) Jesus is the one who received into Himself the sin of the world. God reached into you and took out all your sins. He transferred those sins to Christ—so the Bible says, *"The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6).*
 - d) Jesus is the one who not only receive our sin, but our condemnation too. The wrath of God fell on Him for crimes He never committed. He died your death. He suffered your penalty. He was your substitute and mine, dying on the Cross.
 - e) Whatever had to happen to close the gap between a fallen, sinful YOU and a perfect, holy, infinite GOD—Jesus did it. He did it 100 percent. He did it completely. He did it perfectly. He did it once for all.
 - (1) And to imagine that there is any other salvation, or any other Savior, is the one sin that required repentance. Turning from unbelief in Jesus, to belief in Jesus as your only hope and Savior.
 - (a) Have you ever done that?
 - (i) You can do it today.
 - 3. That is why Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."
 - 4. And why did He go through all of this? Because He loves you. He loves you even though your mess is your own dumb fault. His grace and mercy are here, right now, offered to you, waiting for you to receive Him. To embrace Him. To enter a new life with Him. A free gift. You don't earn it. You don't pay for it. You just take it.
 - 5. And that is exactly what the people of Nineveh did, 2,700 years ago.

VI. *4 On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" 5 The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they decided to go without food and wear sackcloth to show their sorrow. 6 When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in sackcloth and sat on a heap of ashes. 7 Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: "No one, not even the animals, may eat or drink anything at all. 8 Everyone is required to wear sackcloth and pray earnestly to God. Everyone must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. 9 Who can*

tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us." 10 When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:4-10, NLT).

- A. What do you do when you're the underdog, and it's all your fault?
 1. REPENT—and turn from dead religion to the living and true God.
- B. This is what repentance looked like in the days before Christ, in the Old Testament; turning from idols, turning to the one invisible God who forgives.
- C. And this was Jonah's biggest fear. He hated the Assyrians. He didn't want them to get saved.
- D. So, when the story ends, he is pouting, sitting outside the city and watching to see what happens.
- E. And that's what makes his story so brilliant, and so challenging. This story is real. It is history. Even Jesus said so, 700 years later (Matt 12:40, 41).
- F. But the way the author tells the story is really clever. He makes you ask the question: who's the bad guy? It's not so clear.

VII. *5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left...and much livestock?" (Jonah 4:5-11, NKJV)*

- A. On the one hand, barbarous, murderous, violent people who turn from idols to the living and true God.
- B. On the other hand, a preacher and prophet, now angry at God for forgiving the bad guys.
- C. Who's the bad guy?
- D. All too often, God's own people assume the position of Jonah. We sit in judgment, rather than work for mercy.
- E. We forget that we all were once in Nineveh, guilty and ashamed and under a curse.
- F. And that somebody told us about Jesus and we believed.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. Dear church—no matter what God brings us through, no matter how many highs or how many lows Neighborhood Church may have. No matter our buildings or programs or staff or size or budget—no matter who comes or who goes—
- B. No matter who preaches or teaches or leads us in worship—
- C. These two things remain true:
 1. *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Timothy 1:15, NKJV).*
 - a) And—
 2. *Necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16, NKJV)*
- D. God put us here in this place, in this time, to rescue the perishing, to preach and teach and live out the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the grace of God.
- E. God put us here to give every man and woman and child of Redding and Shasta County and Trinity County and wherever God gives us a voice, a chance to turn away from self-made religion and toward the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- F. And we will do that, as long as God gives us breath. That is why we exist. That is what we strive for, and that is what we daily offer ourselves up to God to do.
 1. Dear Lord, please use us to reach this city of a 100,000 people who don't know their spiritual right hand from their spiritual left. They need Jesus, just as we need Jesus.
- G. We will not become a corporate Jonah, haughty and bitter and condescending.
- H. We will take our place alongside the lost, the hurting, and the messed up, the underdog.
- I. Yes, even when it's their fault.
- J. Because we know deeply that God took our side when it was our fault.
- K. That's the God we serve.
- L. That's the God we proclaim.
- M. Are you in? Will you take your stand with these people, this mission, and this Savior?
- N. God has us on a journey. Along the way, we are on a mission too. The mission of God, seeking and saving the lost, the least, the little, the last, and the dead.
- O. Seeking and saving the underdog.
- P. I'm all in, and I hope you are too.

