

Preach

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out at fccgreensburg.com.

But I'm so thankful that you joined us today in this audio broadcast. And I just pray that God will take his word and mold and shape your heart and mine more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

Now, there was an old man whose wife had passed away several years earlier. And being an outdoorsman, he spent a lot of his retirement days out in the woods or even fishing.

And one day he was in his boat relaxing with his line in the water. And suddenly he heard a woman's voice say, hey, you pick me up. Well, he looked around, just kind of shook his head thinking, well, maybe he fell asleep and dreamed that.

But then as he's looking around, he hears the voice again. Hey, you pick me up. Well, this time he knew he wasn't just hearing things. So he started to look around and finally he looked down next to the boat and he saw a frog.

[1 : 07] And as he's looking at this frog, it says again, hey, you pick me up. And just in shock, he says, are you talking to me? And the frog says, yeah, I'm talking to you.

Pick me up. Kiss me. And I'll become the most beautiful woman you've ever seen. Well, this old guy gently picked up the frog, looked at it for a few seconds, and then he put it in his shirt pocket.

Well, the frog, even more frustrated now, says, did you hear what I said? Kiss me. And you'll have the most beautiful woman you've ever seen. You'll be the envy of all your friends.

And that's when the old man thought for a moment and he said, you know, at my age, I think I'd rather have a talking frog. Now, guys, we're not going to spend any more time on a talking frog, but it's amazing in Scripture how God has used animals for his purposes.

And that great fish we've been talking about sure was impressive when it swallowed Jonah whole, housed him safely for three days, and then vomited him back up on the shore.

[2 : 12] So welcome back to the third week of our series over the book of Jonah called The Runaway. You can go ahead and start to turn with me here to chapter three of Jonah. And I just want to remind you of kind of where we've been so far.

You can describe the story of Jonah and the great fish this way. In chapter one, we see Jonah run away from God in rebellion. In chapter two, we see him run to God in repentance.

And then here in chapter three, he runs with God in redemption. See, this is a true tale about a wayward prophet who God called to preach to the wicked Ninevites.

But in his prejudice, in his rebellion, in his overly zealous patriotism, Jonah says no. And he boards a ship trying to get as far away from Nineveh as possible.

And yet in the words of Psalm 139, If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

[3 : 21] You know, Jonah couldn't escape God's love for lost people and even his call to preach to them. So when he wouldn't listen to the Lord's still small voice, more drastic measures had to be taken.

The storm on the sea intensified. The crew in the boat grew scared. And at Jonah's request, they threw him overboard, where he was swallowed by a great fish the Lord had prepared just for this occasion.

And three days in its belly, a lot of prayers and some real heart change later, Jonah's given a second chance. And this is when he writes the famous lyrics, Trust and obey.

For there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. No, I'm just kidding with you. Those words were written like 2,500 years after Jonah by John H. Samus.

But I bet you Jonah would have agreed with those words. But here's something really fascinating to think about, although we'll never know for sure. Some scholars have said that Jonah may have been covered in gastric juices from being in the stomach of a fish for three days, which would have bleached his skin whiter than me, even though that's hard to believe.

[4 : 41] So I guess you could say he was bleached, beached, and ready to preach. Okay? And today, I want to take our time to share one sentence with you that may just help us to better understand the Lord's call on each of our lives to share Jesus.

So if you have your outline, and don't forget, you can always go to the YouVersion, Y-O-U version Bible app. It is free to download, put on by a great church.

You can go to YouVersion Bible app, go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and then you can see our outline. But here's the first part of that sentence. We are called to preach. We, you and I, are called to preach. Now, for some of you, I probably just freaked you out because when you think of preaching, your mind automatically thinks of a preacher. Or if you go here to FCC, you think of the quirky, red-headed guy standing up in the pulpit each week. So you consider a stage with a trained pastor, minister, where they teach through Scripture and take you deeper into God's Word.

[5 : 56] And while the Bible talks about elders who are devoted to preaching and teaching, and that's important, I want you to see that if you are redeemed, if you are a child of God washed white by the blood of Jesus Christ, and you are walking in a relationship with Jesus every day, if you are a child of the King, you are called to preach.

Now, as you swallow that big lump in your throat, here's how dictionary.com defines the word preach. To proclaim, to make known, to deliver.

And then in parentheses, this secular source gives examples. So to proclaim, to make known, to deliver, the gospel, or it says good tidings.

Now, do you remember a couple weeks ago when we talked about God's general will versus His specific will for our lives? A specific will for me that God has made so clear, which shows His complete sense of humor for 20 years or so now, is that He has called me to preach and shepherd the flock in a full-time, vocational, this-is-my-job role.

And yet, a general will of God for all of us is to preach, proclaim, make known the good news of Christ. Mark 16, 15, Jesus said to His disciples, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

[7 : 22] So here's the thing. Whether you ever stand on a stage and present the gospel of grace or not, and some of you may be surprised that you will when you never thought you would, but whether you do or don't, whether it's your gifting to speak publicly or it's not, you are still called to preach, to proclaim in your world, to make known the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yes, you are called to be a good example. You're called to live a life that bears fruit. But don't let that stop you from speaking it also when the Holy Spirit opens that door.

Now, let's start here in Jonah 3, verse 1. Jonah having just been puked up on the shore, ready to finally obey the Lord. And here's what Jonah 3, verse 1 says.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh, and here's your key word, proclaim to it the message I give you.

So I guess you could say Jonah is a preacher getting a second chance to proclaim truth to a wicked people who also need a second chance. And ultimately, that says more about our God who is slow to anger and who is full of compassion, a God who pursues us even in our rebellion and whose amazing grace and perfect justice blend seamlessly.

[8 : 52] So we know what that looked like for Jonah. God said, go to Nineveh, preach a message of judgment, calling them to repentance, calling them to surrender and commit to Yahweh.

But for you, for me, what does that look like in our world? Now, if you're a student in the public school, your world as a follower of Jesus is not easy. And yet you're still called to speak life-saving truth into those around you.

God wants to use you. Maybe at work, whatever you do, you see people searching for hope in all the wrong places, winding up empty. Do you take those opportunities in the break room, around the computer, on the factory line to speak life?

You know, family, that's the hardest, right? But in grace and boldness, do you speak the gospel? And then there's technology. We could speak the gospel through social media and the list goes on.

And listen, if Satan can use it for evil as much as he does, God can use you on those platforms to proclaim his love. And in the words of the famous evangelist who made it his practice to share Jesus with someone every single day, D.L. Moody once said, Winners of souls must first be weepers of souls.

[10:09] So let me ask you this question. Are you willing? Are you willing? Does your heart beat for the lost, like Jesus' heart did?

And are you willing to be pushed outside of your comfort zone so that someone else may come to know the hope found only in Jesus Christ? But here's the thing about this question.

The measure of your willingness to share the gospel has everything to do with the level of your commitment to daily walk with Jesus. Let me say that again. I know there was a lot there.

The measure of your willingness to share the gospel has everything to do with the level of your commitment to daily walk with Jesus. Because the closer you and I grow to the Lord, the more his passion to seek and save the lost will also become the cry of our hearts.

And so we are called to preach. Now let's add another word to this sentence, okay? We're called to preach truth. So let's go back to the beach and let's focus this time at the end of verse 2.

[11:22] So we're going to read those first two verses again, but I want to focus on some different words, okay? Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it, now here's the key words, the message I give you.

While that message had some specifics for Nineveh, it mostly was the same message we see proclaimed throughout God's word, a message of repentance. Turn from your wicked ways, from your sin, from your selfishness, and make that commitment to the Lord, which leads to a true heart change, which then leads to a life lived for Christ.

Let me ask you something. Going back a few years to a different era, how many of you as kids had a newspaper route that you would do on your bicycle where you would literally ride your bicycle and throw the newspapers towards the door?

And yes, there was a day where that was some of the best technology on keeping track of the news, especially locally. Well, of course, less and less people get papers today. They're usually now delivered by car.

And while I never had a newspaper route because we lived in the country, I did have an original Nintendo. I actually still do. It doesn't work very good, but I still have one. And I would play this classic game that I know some of you have heard of called Paperboy.

[12:46] Paperboy. Well, as a delivery boy, delivery girl, as a paperboy, you didn't create the news. Your job was to deliver it.

And the same thing is true with God's word. We don't decide truth. The one who created everything out of nothing has already breathed out His truth to us who are but a vapor here today and gone tomorrow, as James 4 tells us.

Our job is simply to deliver the good news, the truth that will set men and women free. And as Jesus, as He is praying over His disciples, He said this as a part of His prayer to the Father.

John 17, 17. Make them holy by Your truth. Teach them Your word, which is truth.

And listen, we're called to share that truth, whether it's over a cubicle, whether it's from a pulpit at a hospital, during a family reunion, on Facebook, TikTok, or X, formerly known as Twitter.

[13:50] We simply deliver the truth in love. But here's the question. What is the truth we're supposed to share? Is it the positivity movement that tells us that you are powerful beyond measure?

You are enough. And you just need to believe in yourself and escape from all the negativity. Then your life will be sunshine and butterflies. No, that's not the answer.

Nor is it the gospel, even though a lot of people try to make it into it. So, to put it simply, the gospel sounds something like this. And I'm going to start from the beginning.

You and I are created in the image of our God. And we are loved beyond measure. And yet our sin, that all of us have committed, separates us from a holy and perfect Heavenly Father who cannot stand before sin and His righteousness.

And yet His greatest desire is to walk in a relationship with His children. So God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, came down off His throne in heaven, entered this bleak world in the most unlikely of ways to seek and save the lost.

[14:56] He grew up in a very blue-collar environment like most of us. He lived a perfect, sinless life, although He dealt with all the temptations, the trials that we walk through.

But even more, He taught us what the kingdom of God is all about, calling us to leave the worldly ways behind and to follow Him in obedience, to be His disciple in this world.

A disciple who makes disciples, shining Christ. And then because He didn't fit the religious agenda, He was mistreated, lied about, beaten, and forced to carry His cross to Golgotha where He died for your sins and mine.

But listen, the story isn't over. The grave could hold Him no longer. Jesus came busting out of the tomb on that third day to offer life to each of us who would dare do more than just play church, who would dare follow Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

But here's the thing. As we preach, whatever that looks like in your world, whoever God brings into your path, we must be careful to preach the whole gospel.

[16:08] Some just preach the message of grace or love. And listen, I love those things. I walk in God's grace every day. I would fall to pieces in a second without it.

But if that's all we share with people, then that's not the whole gospel. Because sadly, when that's all we share, it often gets morphed and added to where it becomes a message of, well, if you love people, then you're okay with whatever they do.

And we begin to accept things that God says, no, these things go against my heart. These things go against my design. See, we are seeing whole denominations and groups and organizations that were once carrying the banner for Christ, now starting to pick and choose what they believe from God's word to appease the mob.

Just choosing the positive things. And we're seeing so many who claim to follow Christ look more like the world, bearing no fruit, than they actually look like Jesus.

We're seeing a counterfeit gospel. Now, others go to the opposite extreme. They beat the pulpit. They scream. They yell in their fancy suits about God's wrath and God's judgment.

[17:19] Turn or burn, they say. And all they talk about are the rules, the do's, the don'ts. And like the Pharisees, they take God's word and they start adding their own rules to it just in case God didn't know what he was doing.

And it becomes this joyless, mean-spirited, power-hungry, rule-centered religion that's also a counterfeit gospel.

But you know, the true gospel of Christ starts with our sinful nature. It has to start there. It starts with our separation from a perfect God because of our own rebellion and sin.

And it calls us to repent and turn to a gracious God to receive forgiveness and hope in Jesus Christ alone. And that grace calls us to a holy life, walking with Jesus and pursuing godliness in his truth. See, the true gospel makes it clear that there are two places you go when your life comes to an end or if Jesus comes back first. You're going to go to heaven or hell. And it all depends, not on your good deeds, not on if your good deeds outweighed your bad deeds, which I think all of us would probably fall short if you use biblical standards, but it will come down to whether you made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, the sincerity of your commitment to Christ.

[18:44] And listen, I get it. That message can be a touch uncomfortable for folks, but it's so worth it to see a life transformed by the power of Christ. So here's the question.

Are you grounded in the word? Are you grounded in truth? Because we're called to preach truth. Now let's finish our sentence today.

We're called to preach truth, leaving the results to God, leaving the results to a God who is more than capable. Now look back at Jonah 3 with me.

Let's pick up in verse 3. And I want you to stay with me for a second because I want to read the rest of this short chapter. Jonah 3 verse 3 says, 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. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city proclaiming, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

[19:45] The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed and all of them from greatest to least put on sackcloth. 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.

Which by the way, this is how they mourn. This is how they show that they're repentant in their sin. Okay? And here's what it says in verse 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. 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. Who knows? Now this is the guy who doesn't know God yet, but he's beginning that process to surrender. Okay? He says, Who knows? God may relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their destruction, how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

[20 : 59] Wow. Now, I don't think we realize the magnitude of this moment. I'm not sure we comprehend the wickedness and the violent nature of these people. I don't think we get how impossible this is if God's not in it.

This would be like a Ukrainian preacher walking into Moscow, Russia and proclaiming God's judgment on them if they don't turn from their wicked ways and follow Jesus. And Putin and his anti-God government repent and become Christ followers.

That would be a decent equivalent. Okay? This would be like you or I going to the center of Muslim Iraq and calling them to put away their Korans, realize Muhammad is a false prophet, and commit your life to Christ.

Anybody listening to this ready to jump out of their seat and volunteer for that job? Probably not.

Now, can you see why Jonah tried to run 2,500 miles away?

And yet, that's the whole point. The Lord is looking for sold-out followers who are willing to go wherever He sends, do whatever He leads us to do in His name and for His glory.

[22 : 09] And listen, our job is not to make results happen, but to be obedient to the Lord and leave it in His more than capable hands.

Because listen, if Jonah would have went to Nineveh in his own strength, He would have been as good as dead in record time. And yet, when he went in the Lord's power, the Lord's protection, the Lord's leading, when he went in obedience with the message the Lord had given to him, God did what God does, and that is to seek and save the lost.

See, in Isaiah 55, verse 10, verses 10 and 11, actually, we're told, as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.

Verse 11, so is my word, God says, that comes out of my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it out.

Here's the great news for us delivery boys and girls. Our job is to be faithful. His job is to change lives. Our job is to plant and water seeds of the gospel at his leading.

[23 : 31] His job is to make them grow. That's a relief that I'm not in control or in charge of the results. So, let me make this personal.

In July, our oldest child, our only son, turned 10. And I'll tell you what, he's very special to us and we believe God is going to use his life for a great purpose.

And yet, while we've been holding off his six-year-old sister from being baptized, she'd been asking for like two years, it's never been something that he's really talked about much.

And so, Bethany and I have been praying for him because the reality is without Jesus, there's no hope. And our sin separates us from him, from Jesus. And we just don't want to raise preacher's kids who just feel guilty into giving their life to Christ because I guess that's what they're supposed to do.

We want it to be real. We want it to be sincere. And just the other day, he started asking questions and having some heart-to-hearts with us, especially with his mama. And on Tuesday, a couple weeks ago, he woke up and he ran to my wife, Bethany, crying, saying that he was ready to follow Jesus and get baptized.

[24 : 43] And as she talked to him and talked through the scriptures and tears were just running down both of their faces, the weight of his sin and his need for a Savior were overwhelming.

And today, in our church services, Bethany and I will get the privilege of baptizing him into Christ. See, more important than him getting an athletic scholarship or being a pro athlete, more important than him having a great job and making a lot of money, more important than him rubbing shoulders with big names and having a name that people even recognize, is him daily bowing before the God of the universe as a child of the King.

That is the most important thing for every person who lives. See, Bethany and I were starting to get just a little bit worried because he wasn't responding to the gospel.

When we were tempted, you know, as parents wanting our child, you know, if something were to happen to him, just the thoughts in our head, we were tempted to try to force this thing to happen. And yet, it wasn't happening until we turned it over to the Lord, a God that could move in his heart. See, we're called to preach truth, but we leave the results in the hand of our God because that's what he specializes in.

[26 : 06] And it was so cool to see how he moved in his timing in our son's heart. And now, he's going to be a follower of Jesus Christ. So here's the last question.

Are you trusting? Are you trusting God to take care of the results? So do me a favor. I'm going to say this sentence.

This is what we've talked about today. And then I want you to say it with me the second time. Here it goes. We're called to preach truth, leaving the results to God.

Say that with me. We're called to preach truth, leaving the results to God. And if God can transform a wicked city like Nineveh, He can change anyone's heart.

So, child of God, one command I leave you with today. Preach. Preach the whole gospel. preach, and God will take care of the rest.

[27 : 08] Pray with me. Father, we just thank you for your words of life that you have spoken over us today. And we just give you permission on these hearts of ours to do what only you can do.

Father, I don't know who's listening to my voice right now, but I know that you know them, you created them, and their mother's womb, and you love them as your creation.

And your greatest desire for each of us is to know you, to be forgiven by you, to be transformed by you, and to walk with you every day. And so, Father, I just pray over anyone listening to my voice who doesn't know Jesus as Lord and Savior that today will be a day of salvation as they surrender to your lordship and as they get baptized into you, just like your word teaches.

So, Father, have your way in our hearts. Grow us and help us to realize we are called to preach in our own worlds the whole gospel of truth.

We love you, Jesus. We pray all of this in your precious name. Amen. Now, I want to just give this invitation that I do every week. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

[28 : 29] And we just would love to connect with you if you'd like to talk about giving your life to Jesus. If you would like to just ask some questions about faith, maybe you just want to let us know that you're a regular listener.

That means a lot to us just to hear how God is using this program, His word, to change lives. And so, please do reach out. You can do that in a couple different ways.

You can call the church office 812-663-8488 or you can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you and I hope you have a great week.

Thank you. Thank you very much so we've olur mit,