

Belonging To An Elite Class Of Losers

Jonah 3:10- 4:11

The country song, "**Better Class of Losers**" is a single co-written and released by American country music singer Randy Travis. Released as the third single from his 1991 CD, *High Lonesome*, it peaked at #2 in both the United States and Canada. Travis co-wrote this with Alan Jackson. The second stanza begins:

...these high-class friends that you like to hang around
When they look my way they're always looking down:

Jonah learns that looking down on whom God has accepted can make life pretty miserable. He joins an elite class of losers who has the distinction of learning the hard way.

Let's begin with some unique and interesting features about Jonah's life.

1. **Jonah is the only prophet of the Old Testament known to attempt a seagoing excursion.** 2. **Jonah is the only prophet in the books of the Minor Prophets known to have delivered a prophecy outside of Israel.** 3. **None of the other prophets in the books of the Minor Prophets rebelled against God and attempted to flee.** 4. **The book of Jonah is primarily a narrative. It is not a collection of prophecies.** 5. **The other books of the Minor Prophets do not record any miracles that directly involved the prophets.** 6. **Jonah is the only minor prophet who was mentioned by Jesus, as a**

sign for a wicked and adulterous generation (Matthew 12:39, 40).

Zechariah was also cited by Jesus (Luke 11:51), but not everyone agrees that that man was one of the minor prophets, for there are about 30 people in the Old Testament with that name.

Summary: Jonah disobeys God's command to preach in Nineveh, and boards a ship for Tarshish. When the ship is threatened by a terrible storm Jonah admits he is the cause and insists the terrified sailors throw him overboard. A great fish that God has prepared swallows Jonah. From inside the belly of the fish Jonah prays a prayer of submission and the fish hurled the prophet on dry land.

Given a second chance, Jonah now travels to Nineveh. Trudging through its suburbs he begins to announce that the city is to be destroyed. Amazingly, the people of Nineveh believe the foreign prophet's message, and the king decrees both a ritual fast and moral repentance. God then yields, and withholds the predicted destruction. But Jonah is angry and frustrated. The prophet feared that Nineveh might repent, for Jonah *wanted* Nineveh destroyed. Eaten up with anger and bitterness Jonah waits outside the city, still hoping to witness its destruction. To "ease his discomfort," the Lord causes a vine to grow and provide shade. But the next day

the Lord sends a worm that destroys the vine, making his despondent prophet upset enough to want to die.

The beginning of chapter 4, Jonah experiences his worst nightmare with his eyes wide open. Nineveh repented and God relented. (Larry, there has to be a song there somewhere.)

In 3:10, Jonah records: When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Israel is God's chosen people. But, something that you don't want to lose sight of when studying the Old Testament: God clearly cared about the Gentiles during this time in which the Jews were his chosen people. God's heart was moved with compassion for Nineveh and its inhabitants.

Though moved with compassion, the Ninevites were responsible for their actions, and God judged them when they sinned. It is clear from the response of the Ninevites that they were aware of what constituted wickedness. While God may not have held them responsible under Israel's Law, they were being judged on the basis of the light they did possess.

Notice Jonah's description of God's character in 4:2: **a gracious and**

compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Lamentations 3:22, Jeremiah writes:

²² Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed,

for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

A parable character in the New Testament that exemplifies God's love and compassion is the father of the prodigal.

This man had two sons. Both were wayward. The younger couldn't wait for dad to die for his inheritance. The older, more loyal son, had no compassion on the younger when he returned penniless. The father expressed loyal love to both sons by restoring the younger and being slow to anger with the older.

Jonah received a second chance after refusing his mission to Nineveh. Now, he is about to blow it again by acting like the prodigal's older brother. How many second chances does he think he is going to get? Apparently none. He asks to die.

Jonah joins a long list of those who blew it. Here are some second chancers that make the top of the list.

1) Abraham blew it: In spite of the fact that God promised him he would have a child with his wife Sarah, he blew it. He took bad advice and fathered a child through his wife's servant. But God didn't give up on him. After Abraham came back

to God, He still became the "Father of many nations."

2) Jacob blew it: he was liar and stole from his own family, but after he came back to God, he was given the name "Israel" and became the namesake for the entire nation of God's people.

3) David: David committed murder and adultery, but after coming back to God, he became known as "a man after God's own heart."

4) Peter: In the presence of many people, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. But, when he came back to God, he was given the privilege of being one of the Early Church's greatest leaders.

5) Paul, once known as Saul: Paul had spent his entire life persecuting Christians and blaspheming Christ. But, when he came to know God, he was used as God's missionary to the Gentiles and to become, with the exception of Jesus, the greatest leader in the New Testament; perhaps the entire Bible.

That's a pretty good list of second chancers, isn't it? All of them blew it, but God didn't give up on them.

One of the saddest facts I know is that there are millions of people out there who think that God has given up on them. They've blown it, they've fallen and they think that God doesn't want them anymore; or that he could never forgive

them for what they have done. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

Be ready to tell the people that you meet who think that God could never use them or forgive them Abraham's story; Jacob's story; David's story; and your story. I know that you have blown it, we all have.

If only people would understand that if God didn't give up on Abraham, Jacob, David, and a long list of others, he certainly would never give up on them.

God won't give up on you! What a marvelous and comforting truth we learn from the list of second chancers, including Jonah.

Jonah was having a bad day. He had just preached the greatest revival ever and is now sitting under a makeshift shelter, waiting to see what is going to happen to the city. He was mad at God. Let's pick up the story in verse 6 of chapter 4:

Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. ⁷But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

⁹But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"

Jonah was hot. But it wasn't just from the east wind and the blazing sun. He was

mad that God was not going to nuke the Ninevites. He was mad enough to want to die. The picture here is that he was gulled. He had diaper rash of the spirit.

God asked him if he had any right to be angry? (Verse 4) Jonah, how is it any of your business if I choose to show mercy on Nineveh?

God, I know that you are forgiving and now look what happened! The very attribute that saved him, Jonah didn't want the Ninevites to receive.

So God gave Jonah yet another chance with an object lesson.

God provided a vine. The shade from the green plant, possibly covering the makeshift shelter and Jonah with its dense foliage, protected him from the rays of the hot desert sun. The fact that the plant grew overnight shows a more-than-usual rapid growth; another miracle to benefit God's fickle prophet. Jonah was happy about the vine.

The next morning, God sent a worm that destroyed the vine, and the self-centered prophet shows his true colors once again.

Have you noticed that in your own life, as well as in others, that when the heat is on, when the pressure cooker of trials whistles, that's when true colors show.

When every thing is easy; when everything is going our way, being a disciple is so easy, even a cave man can do it. But, life is just not that way, is it? Life is a pressure cooker at times, isn't it? Is God trying to embarrass you in front of

your friends and family; pushing your buttons, sending you off the deep end? You might think at times that he enjoys seeing you go bezerk just for some entertainment, Heaven being so peaceful and all.

But, you know that's not the case. It's not about Heavenly entertainment. It's about being more like his Son. And, for most of us, that means more time in the cooker than out.

Had you or I been writing this last chapter, we may have shown Jonah in the city of Nineveh, carefully teaching the people and helping them in their spiritual decisions. But God does not write it that way. Instead of meeting a rejoicing preacher, we meet a rebellious preacher, angry with the people and angry with God. We see an adult acting like a child, a believer acting like an unbeliever. We see Jonah sitting outside the city, trying to make himself comfortable, and actually hoping that God's judgment will fall on the people. Here is an amazing thing: God sent a great awakening under the preaching of a man who did not even love the souls of the people he preached to! (More time in the cooker for Jonah.)

As the book concludes, Jonah was angry, depressed, hot, and faint. And he was left to contemplate God's words about his own lack of empathy and God's depth of compassion.

Here is God's message to Jonah:

- (a) God is gracious toward all nations, toward Gentiles as well as Israelites;
- (b) God is sovereign; he doesn't need anyone's counsel;
- (c) He punishes rebellion;
- (d) He wants His own people to obey Him, to be rid of religious sham, and:
- (e) To place no limits on His universal love and grace.

Here is the key lesson of the book: **God's love and compassion for lost souls.** Jonah felt sorry for himself, and even felt sorry for the plant that sheltered him and then died, but he had no heartfelt love or sympathy for the multitudes in the city of Nineveh. How is it possible to serve the Lord and yet not love the people? How unlike Jesus Christ he is, for Jesus looked upon the city of Jerusalem full of lost souls and wept.

This week, you may rub elbows with someone who needs to hear that God has not given up on them. They need to hear that he is more than willing to show them that he is **“a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”** (4:2)

Be ready to tell them Jonah's story; Abraham's story; Jacob's story; David's story; Peter or Paul's story. Be ready to tell them your story, how God never gave up on you. Help them join the long list of second chancers; an elite class of losers

that has had to learn the hard way, just like
them, that no matter how bad they've
blown it, God has not given up on them.