

# GLBC Lord's Day Sermon

June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## INTRO

I have been blessed to work with a younger pastor recently as part of what is required for his seminary education. Part of what I have had to do for him is listen to and assess a number of his sermons. One of the things I have encouraged him to work on developing is **the ability to prepare the congregation** for where he intends to take them with the sermon. When I prepare my sermons, that is what I work at, trying to do my best to prepare you for what I will preach, **sort of like giving you a roadmap for the sermon**. For today, that roadmap will come by way of **six words & three stops** which will provide the structure for our sermon today:

### 1. HE KNOWS

### 2. WHO KNOWS?

### 3. GOD KNOWS

If you can keep those six words in your head for the duration of the sermon, you will do well. He Knows, Who Knows, God Knows. In the first section of the sermon, the “he” who knows is **the king of Nineveh**, as we will begin by considering what he knows when he hears the preaching of Jonah which was summarized as “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (**Jonah 3:4**). Who knows? is **the question the king asks** in response to that message, and we will look at what he means when he says that. And finally, we will end at a great place to end, namely, by discussing **what God knows as we look at what He does** when Nineveh and her king responds to Jonah’s preaching. So, **the six words, the three stops** we will make in our journey through our text are **He knows, Who Knows?, and God Knows**.

And what I hope we will learn through our investigation of the text through the structure of these six words, through the three stops on our way to the end of the text, is that **we worship**

- a merciful and gracious God
- a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked
- a God whose plan is always accomplished

And surely, those three truths provide us with some necessary applications.

### **TEXT:** Jonah 3:6-10

So then, **last week we found ourselves at part two of the book of Jonah.**

Chapters one and two chronicle **God's first call** on the prophet's life, a call Jonah did not answer.

- God called Jonah to preach to Nineveh, and **Jonah instead ran away**, far away from Nineveh, jumping a ship to Tarshish.
- **God was not impressed, nor pleased** in anyway, with Jonah's disobedience and thus He sent a storm to the sea, then when Jonah was tossed overboard, He sent a great fish to swallow Jonah.
- Now, while we would be tempted to think that was the end of Jonah's story, which it should have been, it wasn't. **God either sustains Jonah** during his time in the fish, or Jonah died then God brought him back to life then commanded the fish to vomit him out

**which brings us to part two** of this short book of the Bible. Part two **begins much like part one**, with another call of God for Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, and **this time Jonah is obedient**, for in the verses which immediately precede our text today we read that:

“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” **(Jonah 3:4).**

So then, as we discussed last week, the message seems simple, respond rightly to this warning within the appointed time or face certain destruction. And as it turned out, **the Ninevites did respond rightly**, as Scripture testifies,

“the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them” (**Jonah 3:5**).

So then from the poor to the rich, from the popular to the picked-on, from the elite to the everyman, **from the greatest to the least, the Ninevites believed God**. This **brings us to our text for today**, and **the first stop** on our journey, **HE KNOWS**, where we will consider what the king of Nineveh knows.

## 1. HE KNOWS (6-8)

### a. The King's Heart

So then, in Nineveh, **the greatest, in terms of position and power**, was none other than **the king**. And you can be sure that if someone is wandering around town shouting a message of coming destruction that **that message would make its way to the king**, which it did as we read that **“The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes” (6)**. So, the message of Jonah went to the masses, then it made its way to the king, but **when the king heard the message he reacted to it first, then led the rest of Nineveh to do likewise**. This is significant, to say the least, for the king of Nineveh was a powerful man. As noted in a previous message, **politically, Nineveh was strong**, for Assyria's military was ruthless, which is to say, they were powerful and feared by all, so when the king of Nineveh responds to a message like Jonah's with humility people are going to take note. Thus far, **religiously, the Ninevites were idolaters**, worshippers of false gods, not worshippers of YHWH, so **why would we expect their leader to respond rightly** to a message from one of Israel's prophets? Generally, **we wouldn't**, but the king does respond rightly, for first **he acknowledges YHWH's authority** over Him by **getting**

**of His throne** and **removing his royal robe**, two things which demonstrate His power and authority. But then, instead of sitting on the throne, he **sits in ashes**, and instead of wearing his royal robe, he **wears sackcloth**, both being indications that the king was mourning over how he had offended the God of Israel, YHWH.

- He did not throw Jonah into a furnace because of the message he proclaimed.
- He did not look out over Nineveh and exalt himself for the great city he led.
- He did not deny the charges that YHWH leveled against him and his subjects.

No, the king of Nineveh received the message of Jonah as a message from God and **he humbled himself** before YHWH.

### **b. The King's Proclamation**

But the king of Nineveh was responsible for more than just himself, more than just his family; he was **responsible for all of Nineveh**, so **“he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands” (7-8).** I imagine that this **must have come as a huge surprise** to the people of Nineveh, **for thus far their king**

- had been committed to his evil and wicked ways
- had been the epitome of pride and arrogance
- was the idolater of idolaters

Yet now **something unexpected has happened, the king has humbled himself** before YHWH, and now he was **calling on all the citizens under his rule to do likewise**. If you recall, last week we talked about the **sackcloth and the fasting** of the people, but this week we discover

**whose idea it was**, namely, the king's. We also now know why they fasted in sackcloth, because the king told them to. And **no one was exempt, not even the animals** who were not given food and water and who were also covered with sackcloth. What a sight that would have been to see. The king was not taking any chances. It was **not as though the animals needed to fast in sack cloth**, as the animals had done nothing wrong. It was the Ninevite people who were evil, not their animals, but **the king wanted to ensure that God saw just how sorry they were for their wicked ways**. We see this also with the kind of fast it was, **a total fast**, which is to say, no food and no water. But this was not just about outward actions, not just about fasting in sackcloth, for not only did the king command the people to do such things, **he also told them to cry out to God and turn** from their wicked ways.

**Application:** So then, what we find here in how the Ninevite king responded to Jonah's preaching is **an example of good leadership**. The king of Nineveh had been a wicked sinner thus far, an evil leader, but when confronted by YHWH through the preaching of Jonah, **he humbles himself and repents, and commands those in his care to do likewise**. And why does he do this? **Because he knows some very important things**

- he knows that Jonah's message was from God
- he knows that he has sinned against YHWH
- and he knows that YHWH is to be feared
- and he also knows that as king his authority is from God
- and finally, he knows that his responsibility is to lead his people well

And the best way to lead your people is to be **the chief repentor**, like pastors should be in the church, like fathers should be in the home, like leaders should be in the workplace. **In whatever context you have been given authority, you should be the example of humility and repentance** to those you lead. When you become aware of sin in your

life, you should not justify it, nor ignore it, nor minimize it; you should repent of it. **Then you should lead those under your care and charge to do likewise.** This is what we should expect from our leaders, even our politicians. You see, the Scripture makes abundantly clear that the authority our government leaders have is given by God (**Romans 13:1-2**), and **when our government leaders reject this truth they reject God.**

- Instead of humbling themselves before God and leading Canadians to do likewise, our politicians exalt themselves and celebrate sexual sin and the murder of the unborn and the infirm
- Instead of repenting of sin and leading Canadians to do likewise, our government leaders promote sin and pass unjust laws

Like the king of Assyria, **Canada would be much better off if its politicians recognized that their authority** is from God and that **their responsibility** is to punish evil and reward good (**Romans 13:2-4**). Canada would be much better off if its leaders—whether fathers, pastors or politicians—would **humble themselves before God then lead those under their authority to do likewise.** God was gracious and merciful to send Jonah to Nineveh because he wanted the king of Nineveh to humble himself and repent and then lead the Ninevites to do likewise, and **God no less wants our leaders to humble themselves and repent** so that they can lead Canadians to do likewise, and thus we must pray to that end and vote to that end when given the opportunity.

## 2. WHO KNOWS? (9)

### a. What God Could Do

So, the king of the Ninevites knew that Jonah had spoken a message from God, he knew that he should fear God, and he knew of God's authority over him, but **there was something he didn't know,**

as he said “Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish” (9). The king of Nineveh knows he is a sinner in the hands of an angry God, but what he does not know is what God will do about it. When he says “Who knows?” he is acknowledging that he and his people still could face God’s wrath. The king did not know if God would turn from his fierce anger, but that didn’t stop him from humbling himself and repenting. The king did the right thing even though God could still destroy him and every single Ninevite under his rule. And God would have been entirely just to do so. He did not owe the Ninevites even one more breath. They had lived lives of wickedness, led by their king whose military terrorized the nations and whose religion was pure and simply idolatry. All that God owed the Ninevites was his wrath.

- He could wipe them out then and there, where they stood.
- He could destroy the entire nation in an instant.
- He could consign them to an eternity of condemnation.

That is what God could do, and the king of Nineveh knew it.

## b. What God May Do

But while the king knew what God could do, with the two words, Who Knows? he indicates that he also knew what God may do, that he may turn his anger away from them, that he may spare them, that He may not destroy them. In short, he knew that God may be merciful and not give them what they are owed, which was His wrath. He knew that he had no right to presume upon God, to say what He must do. The king recognized that it was YHWH’s decision, and His alone, to either destroy Nineveh or be merciful to them. And while we don’t know how long has passed since Jonah started preaching in Nineveh, it seems that the king wastes no time in responding rightly to that preaching. After all, he must be thinking, why would YHWH send

**Jonah to preach to Nineveh if there were not a chance God would spare them?** There had to be a chance that God might spare them, thus the king's actions and his proclamation.

**Application:** This then is a good reminder for us, that **we must hold in tension what God could do and what God may do.** In other words, we need to know what we deserve, that we deserve God's wrath poured out on us for all of eternity. We need to know that because we are born sinners, and that because God is holy, He would be perfectly and entirely just to send us to a place of eternal condemnation. We have offended a holy God, and **He would be just to judge us and condemn us.** He could send us to hell for all of eternity. He could do that, but **as He tells us through the prophet Ezekiel:**

“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?”  
**(Ezekiel 18:23).**

God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, and for that reason **He has promised that for all who turn from our sin and trust in Christ** as Saviour, **He spares us** from destruction and eternal condemnation. **That is what we were saved from, and that is what we must not forget,** for when we do we can only expect pride and arrogance to erupt within us. **When we consider what we have escaped** because God chose to save us, because Jesus redeemed us, because the Spirit regenerated us, there is **only one appropriate attitude for us to adopt, humility.** We are no better than anyone else, no more spiritual, no more deserving of salvation. **We know what God could have done,** what He would have been within His right to do, but **we also know what He did, and we know that He may do likewise with others.** It is for that reason that we must foster an attitude of humility and **why we must pray for and preach to unbelievers, for He may**



**do likewise for them.** We cannot presume upon Him to do it, for we do not know whom He has chosen to save, but **we can plead with Him to do it, and we must do so.**

- Do we know that He will spare our children? Ultimately no, but He may, so we must plead with God to save them then we must preach the gospel to them and call them to repentance and faith.
- Do we know that God will spare our friends and neighbours? No, but He may, so we must plead with God to save them then we must preach the gospel to them and call them to repentance and faith.
- Do we know that God will spare wicked leaders in our government, like Justin Trudeau? No, but He may, so we must plead with God to save them.
- Do we know that God will save any person He has put in our lives? No, but He may, so we must plead with God to save then we must proclaim the gospel.

**If you still have breath in your lungs, there is still a chance for you.** There is no one whose sin is greater than God's mercy. The king of Nineveh knew that, but he did not presume upon God, and neither must we. Our God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, thus **we must warn people of what God could do** to them, which is to punish them for their sins, **then we must tell them what He may do**, which is to save them by His grace and for His glory.

### **3.GOD KNOWS (10)**

#### **a. The Observation**

Which brings us to the end of our text where we find out what God's plan was for Nineveh, which is to say, we find out what God knows. For after all the people, led by their king, responded to Jonah's preaching, **"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it" (10).** Now, it is important that we understand what is going on here and what is not

going on. For that, it will do us well to be reminded that **God's knowledge is unlimited**, which is to say that He knows everything past, present and future; He is omniscient. If there was anything that God did not know, He would not be God for He would have limits. That being the case, **He does not learn anything, which means that He did not learn what Nineveh would do**; He knew what the king of Nineveh would do, and He knew what Nineveh would do in response to the preaching of Jonah.

## **b. The Plan**

God knew because that was God's plan, for **His plan was always to spare Nineveh if they repented**

- which is why God sent Jonah to them in the first place
- and why He sent a storm to get Jonah into the sea
- and why He sent a great fish to swallow Jonah
- and why He called Jonah to go to Nineveh a second time

**The king of Nineveh did not know if God would spare them** when he humbled himself and when he led the people to do likewise, **but we know** because we have all four chapters of Jonah. It was not as though God was going to wipe them out, then He changed His mind. **God did not literally change His mind because God cannot change His mind.** Spoken through the prophet Malachi, God Himself declares:

“I YHWH, do not change” (**Malachi 3:6**).

When the Scriptures say that God relents, that **does not indicate change in God, but change in us and how God deals with us.** God is using **accommodating language** to indicate how something appears from our perspective. One commentator puts it like this:

“From the human perspective, it appears that God changes His mind. But from the divine perspective, God was simply responding according to His purpose and promises to those who repent...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davey, Stephen. Wisdom Commentary Series. Charity House Publishers 2017.

Obviously, **God intended to spare Nineveh because that is what He did.** That was His plan from the get-go, and **God always accomplishes His plans.**

**Application:** And this is **the God we worship, the God whose plan is always accomplished.** His plan for the Ninevites was accomplished. His plan for us will be accomplished. **His plan for all of world history will be accomplished.**

- He will save every single person He has planned to save.
- He will guard and keep every person He saves.
- And He will raise up every person He saves from the dead to enjoy an eternity in His presence in the New Heaven and Earth.

And for that reason, it **should be our greatest desire and our greatest endeavor in life to live for His glory** by living a life of repentance and faith.

## CONCLUSION

Which **brings us to the end our text, and to the end of the journey which this sermon has taken us on.**

- Our first stop was at **HE KNOWS**, the “he” being the king of Nineveh. Among other things, he knew Jonah spoke God’s Word and that God had the power to destroy all of Nineveh and was in His right to do so.
- Our second stop was at, **WHO KNOWS?**, the question the king asked, indicating that he knew what God could do to him and his subjects, but he also knew what God may do, which was to spare them if they repented.
- And our last stop was at what **GOD KNOWS**, as we find comfort in knowing that God always accomplishes His plan.

And **the way He accomplished that plan was by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, the better Jonah**, who **lived** a perfect life, who **died** a sacrificial death, who **rose** from the dead, who **ascended** to the right hand of the Father where He rules and reigns, and who **will come again**, which is why with the apostle John, we pray, “amen, come Lord Jesus” (**Rev 22:20**).