

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: C Between B and D**

#### **Lesson: Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

*3 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

**(Slide 1)** Life is often called the "C" between "B" and "D." In other words, life is made up of numerous choices between "B" for Birth and "D" for Death. Put simply, we make many choices from the moment we are born until we take our last breath.

From the moment we wake up in the morning, we make choices about what to wear, what music to listen to, which TV program to watch, what food to eat, and whom to meet. Children choose from the multitude of toys scattered on the floor which ones to play with in the morning. Students decide which activities to engage in, which sports to enjoy, which school to attend, what major to study, and what profession to pursue. Moreover, each of you has chosen a life partner from among numerous people, and I hope your spouse is one of the best choices in your life. Additionally, during election seasons, we contemplate whom to vote for, which insurance company is the best fit for us, where to live, which house to choose, what car to purchase, and more.

Looking at life through this perspective, the idea that life is a journey filled with countless choices between Birth and Death seems compelling. Within the array of choices, some are excellent, some are just passable, and others not so great. Making choices can be easy at times, but in certain situations, discerning whether it's a good choice or not can be challenging. It's often difficult to determine in the moment whether our choices were good or not, but as time passes, we can reflect on how those choices have impacted our lives and discern whether they were indeed beneficial or not.

There was a time when my attempt to save a little money ended up costing me a lot, leading to some unexpected challenges.

It happened during our honeymoon trip to Europe. Our itinerary began in Paris, France, continued to the southern part of France, and concluded with a visit to London, England, before returning to the United States. Despite being my first trip to Europe, everything was going smoothly. After our adventures in France, we reached our accommodation in London, only to find the city more humid and colder than anticipated. One afternoon, I decided to try a bratwurst from a street vendor, and perhaps due to the damp weather, it seemed a bit off. After eating it, I experienced severe stomach issues and developed a fever. I was in too much pain to enjoy our time in London, and it came to the day when we had to head back home. Despite the discomfort, I managed to pack everything in a rush. Then, we had to decide whether to take the subway or a taxi to get to the airport.

While I don't recall the exact details, I remember the taxi fare to the airport was around \$100. The subway was significantly cheaper than the taxi. If it were me now, I probably wouldn't hesitate to save time and take the taxi, even if it meant spending \$100. However, at that time, I felt the taxi fare was expensive. Despite my condition, I chose to take the subway to the airport. Unfamiliar with the London subway system, I faced unexpected situations, and by the time we eventually arrived at the airport after various twists and turns, our flight had already departed. Opting for the subway turned out to be one of the worst choices. We ended up paying a much larger amount than the \$100 we were trying to save.

We are Christians. We are people who believe in God. The difference between believers and non-believers lies in whether our choices and decisions align with the will of God when we choose something. Non-believers follow their own thoughts and plans. However, when we choose something, we need to discern whether our choices and decisions are in line with the will of God or simply our own thoughts.

**(Slide 2)** Jonah was a Jew. He took great pride in being Jewish. He strongly believed that only Jewish people were chosen by God, and he believed that God was with them. His strong pride in being Jewish led to intense prejudice

against other races and nations. However, God's love and plan for us were very different from Jonah's perspective. God's love and desire for salvation embraced everyone, transcending cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Therefore, God appeared to Jonah and commanded him to go to Nineveh and proclaim the good news to the people there. However, Jonah hesitated as Nineveh was a foreign land where people worshipped idols. Instead, he desired them to face punishment from God. Although he professed belief in God, he failed to discern whether his thoughts aligned with God's will. He believed his own thoughts were right. Consequently, he boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction, towards Spain, opposing the journey to Nineveh.

While reading this passage, one question crossed my mind: Jonah rejected Nineveh as Gentiles, but why did he have a favorable view of Spain? For Jonah, both Nineveh and Spain would have been considered Gentiles.

One main reason for this was that, during that time, Nineveh invaded and ruled over Israel. Jonah really disliked the nation that had taken control of and oppressed Israel. So, he wanted Nineveh to experience God's judgment. Even though both Nineveh and Spain were seen as Gentile nations by Jonah, his strong dislike for Nineveh made him choose the opposite direction, towards Spain.

However, his trip to Spain didn't go well. Soon after he got on the ship, disobeying God, a big storm came, and the ship was almost sinking. Everyone on the ship was scared and worried. They prayed to their gods for help, but the storm got even stronger. To survive, they started throwing things from the ship into the sea. Then, they found Jonah sleeping inside the ship. They asked him, "Why are you sleeping when our ship is about to sink? Pray to your God to save us." Jonah realized that all these bad things were happening because he didn't follow God's words. He told the sailors that if they threw him into the sea, it would become calm. So, reluctantly, the sailors threw him into the sea, and indeed, the sea became calm.

Even though Jonah didn't follow God's command, God had a plan prepared for him. As soon as Jonah fell into the sea, a large fish, as if waiting for him,

swallowed him. When Jonah woke up, he found himself inside the belly of the fish. In the dark, cold, and smelly belly of the fish, he cried out in repentant prayer to God: "God, I'm sorry. I will follow your will."

After praying for repentance inside the fish's belly for three days, the fish eventually spat him out onto dry land. That place happened to be Nineveh.

Even though Jonah didn't want the people of Nineveh to believe in God and be saved from judgment at first, he later understood it wasn't what God wanted. From the day he arrived in Nineveh as God commanded, he told people to repent and believe in God.

Though his words weren't fancy, God touched the hearts of the Ninevites, leading them to repentance. After hearing Jonah's message, everyone in Nineveh, even the king, knelt before God, repented, and started believing in Him.

Friends, when we make choices, we can't always know how our decisions will impact our lives, We don't know whether they are good or not. In those times, what we should do is strive to discern whether our choices align with God's will.

Discerning between our plans and God's will is not easy. That's why, to understand and discern God's will, we need to open our spiritual eyes. We can never know God's will with our worldly thoughts alone. Only when we are spiritually awake can we discern the right direction between our plans and God's will.

**(Slide 3)** During this Lenten season, we will focus on our spirituality by reading the "Dynamite Prayer" book. This is the book that Bishop Jung recommended us to read. We will concentrate on opening our spiritual eyes to discern between our plans and God's will. If any of you haven't yet added your names to the Lenten book list, I kindly but strongly encourage you to do so. In the countless choices that make up our lives, I pray that you may open your spiritual eyes to discern God's will and make good choices. Amen.