

Text: Jonah 3:1-5

Theme: Welcome to Life!

January 21, 2018

Those of you who have traveled through Nebraska have undoubtedly seen the sign as you crossed the state line, "Welcome to Nebraska, the good life." Now, if Nebraska actually offered the good life, a life better than any other state, wouldn't everyone have already moved to Nebraska? In our text, we're reminded ever so clearly of life in Nineveh, and, to be quite honest, life in our world today. So, as we consider our text, we focus on our theme: Welcome to Life!

I. When God created the world, He intended life to be far different than what we experience. A. As we look at Nineveh and our world, we see a major departure from God's plan. 1. As we look, we see self-centered people. In Nineveh, no one cared about anyone else. No one had time for their neighbor. For lack of a better explanation, Nineveh was a selfish, self-centered city filled with self-centered people. Is life around us really any different? Self-centered, selfish, no concern for anyone but themselves. Doesn't that describe our community? We'd like to think life is better, that we've improved over the years, but one glance and we could easily say, "Welcome to Nineveh."

2. As we look, we see a lack of value for human life. Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh because he knew what the ruling power was like. They thought nothing of burning people at the stake or impaling people alive. To the Assyrians, life had no value and Jonah knew it. Maybe we're not burning people at the stake, but our value of life at all ages and stages has dramatically decreased. How many babies have not been given the opportunity to live in the past year? How many of our elderly have been deemed useless to society? How many innocent lives have been snuffed out by a random shooter? Like Nineveh, life today is easily discarded as useless.

3. As we look at Nineveh, we see people who desperately needed Christ. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh the first time, Jonah attempted a detour. As far as Jonah was concerned, those people didn't deserve Jesus or a message of comfort and hope. They deserved to die, to end up in hell, and Jonah did what he could to see that it happened. But after a few days of rethinking the matter inside the fish and reconsidering the grace of God, Jonah realized that Nineveh needed Jesus. Looking around, it's easy to think, "Why bother? They don't care. Besides, they don't deserve it." Yet whether Nineveh or the present, those people still need Jesus.

B. Reflecting on the condition of our world, we respond. 1. We respond by demonstrating the value of life. When your son or daughter, your grandson or granddaughter was born, how precious was their life at that moment? If someone had walked in and said, "I'll take that baby because we don't need another child in this world," would you have let that happen? When a teenager is pregnant and doesn't want the responsibility, when an elderly person doesn't remember who you are, when anyone does anything that diminishes the value of life, we can do nothing less than show them and remind them that all life is precious in God's eyes.

2. We respond with Christian love. By our estimation, did the people of Nineveh deserve Jonah's message? Isn't it easy today to think certain people don't deserve our words or acts of love? It may be easy, but our hearts won't allow us to take the easy route. Instead, our hearts keep saying, "Demonstrate Christian love. Show

them that you care. Make time to demonstrate compassion because that's exactly what Christ did for you!" As we remember what God did out of love, we know what to do. We know that love is the proper response, that deserved or undeserved isn't the determining factor. We extend love in whatever way we can because God first loved us.

3. We respond by demonstrating forgiveness. As Jonah entered Nineveh prepared to die before the day ended, forgiveness was his message. Several years ago, as some of you may remember, there was a shooting in an Amish schoolhouse. As a demonstration of forgiveness, the families of those children went to the home of the shooter and extended their forgiveness. What a demonstration! What an incredible act of forgiveness, an act that affected the hearts and lives of people all over our country as that incident made the news. Maybe our situations are different, but forgiveness is the right move. It's what we do because it's what Christ did for us.

C. Aware of our reluctance at times to respond, what motivates our response? 1. We're motivated by the love of God toward us. Look at Jonah. When Jonah fled his responsibility, what could God have done? Aware of the ugliness of Nineveh, what should God have done? Because of our selfishness, those times when we have turned to run the other way, what should God have done? As we realize what God should and could have done, we realize that God did the exact opposite of what we would have done if we were in His shoes. We see love where we thought love didn't belong, where we thought revenge was a better response. We see God doing the unthinkable.

2. We're motivated by the knowledge of heaven. Why did Jonah step into Nineveh? Was it merely out of fear of what God would do next or because he thought Nineveh was the lesser of the two evils at the moment? Jonah stepped into Nineveh prepared to die because those people, evil as they may have been, needed to know about a place dramatically different than their present world. Today, as we look at our world and say, "Welcome to life," we see Nineveh. Yet with hearts moved by love and the knowledge of heaven, we step into our community to offer Christian love with the express goal of one more person arriving in heaven because of us.

3. We're motivated by God's compassion toward us. Jonah was given a second chance. That's evidence of God's compassion. The people of Nineveh were spared disaster because of God's compassion. You and I, we shouldn't be alive today. God should have destroyed our world years ago. He should have turned His back on us and watched us self-destruct. Instead of "Come, follow Me," He should have said, "Get away from Me." His compassion, His willingness to go looking for us when we have wandered, to forgive when we surely deserve anything but forgiveness, that's our motivation to encounter our world with love until Christ calls this world to an end.

4. The good life - it wasn't found in Nineveh and it isn't found in Nebraska or any other state. Even so, as we stand with God at our side, we continue to say, "Welcome to life" and more importantly, "Welcome to my next opportunity to touch hearts and change lives." Amen.