

## God's Great Love for the Homosexual

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When the subject of homosexuality comes up in our culture today, there are usually intense feelings associated with this matter. Some Christians have responded with hatred to this issue carrying signs that tout "God Hates Fags." These individuals claim to be Christians but the truth remains that we don't know whether they really are or not. Other supposed Christians respond with passivity and resignation that homosexuality is a merely another option sexually. They encourage individuals to accept that homosexuality is a gift from God and is not a sin. I can't say whether these individuals are Christians either unless I know more about them and what they believe.

Having experienced a complete change in my sexual desires, I obviously believe homosexuality is a changeable condition. I do not believe homosexuality is a behavior God desires for His children. My desire hopefully today is to communicate the heart of God regardless of what issue we address.

- How many of you have a friend or relative who identifies themselves as a homosexual?
- How many of you have ever struggled personally with this issue but have not told anyone in this church or any other church? Remember I used to be a member of this church and I know who came and spoke to me. This issue is not absent from any church. If you have more than ten people in your church, someone is bound to struggle with homosexuality.
- What is your first reaction to the issue of homosexuality?
- What do you feel like upon finding out that an individual standing before you, working in your office, attending your church, etc.?

I'm sure, as with any issue, we are going to get a mixture of response. Those that don't understand the issue at all, those that struggle personally with unwanted attractions, those that are gay and proud of it, those that are repulsed.

I'd like to spend time this morning talking about a man who claimed to follow God yet lived in a way that didn't reflect the heart of God. And I think you'll find that his struggle is not too dissimilar from the issue of homosexuality and how it's been handled in modern day Christianity.

### PRAY

I'd like to take you to the familiar book of Jonah. You know Jonah! He's the popular figure of the Bible that lived in the belly of a large fish for 3 days. I'm sure many would doubt whether this truly happened or not but I could care less about the reality of whether Jonah actually survived in this fish or not. I'm more intrigued by Jonah's interaction, his relationship, with God. Why don't we look at this book together and make some observations about Jonah's heart and about God's heart. In reality, this isn't just about Jonah's heart; this is a story about us.

The first observation I'd like to make takes place within the first chapter. Let's read together:

## Jonah 1

1 The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.”

3 But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish.

4 But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. 5 Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. 6 So the captain went down after him. “How can you sleep at a time like this?” he shouted. “Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.”

7 Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit. 8 “Why has this awful storm come down on us?” they demanded. “Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?”

9 Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

10 The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. “Oh, why did you do it?” they groaned. 11 And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?”

12 “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

13 Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn’t make it. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah’s God. “O LORD,” they pleaded, “don’t make us die for this man’s sin. And don’t hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.”

15 Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! 16 The sailors were awestruck by the LORD’s great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

17 Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

As I read through this first chapter, what seemed to jump out at me most was that Jonah was content with his sin. That's my first observation: It's possible to be content with your sin as a believer. Look at verse 5. Jonah is so content about how he's handling the situation that he's asleep in the midst of a tumultuous storm!

How so like the Church of modern day America! In our country, evangelical Christians often pride themselves on living godly lives, not getting drunk, not being addicted to drugs, not sleeping around, not dancing – smoking- playing cards – laughing – whatever! Yet, we are content with racial barriers in the Church. We are content with others living in poverty around the world. Or we're willing to give money once we've determined we're as comfortable as we need to be. We are content to reject or dismiss those individuals who have sought help in the past for their unwanted same-sex attractions. Some churches are content to sin by believing that homosexuality is not a sin while priding themselves on being tolerant. And Churches from both sides of this issue are content with calling each other Nineveh instead of looking at their own sin. The homosexual community is not stupid! They've seen the hypocrisy and sin of the Church. They are not completely accurate about everything they say but neither are they completely wrong! And neither are we wrong when we say homosexuality is a sin but we are wrong when we feel we can communicate it any way we want with any sinful attitude in our hearts.

Isaiah 58 reflects God's indignation at the hypocrisy of Israel. They fasted and kept the ceremonies of God's law. He, however, reveals His true heart – “the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them and do not hide from relatives who need your help (vv. 6-7).”

When I was doing street outreach in Chicago, I often had conversations with men who had gone to the Church for help and were either asked to leave or were given simple platitudes like you need to read your Bible more, you need to pray more, are you tithing? One man said he went to his pastor for help and the pastor said, “You might as well kill yourself because there is nothing you can do to overcome this problem.” Can the love and hope of God be reflected in this response? Now I believe that this pastor was either tremendously ignorant about the transforming power of God or he struggled himself and had given up hope. The bars were filled with men and women who were once in the Church. Isn't it interesting how we kick people out of the Church and then condemn them for living sinful lives? Is this the kind of life God has called us to?

I think it's also interesting in the first chapter that Jonah's sin resulted in other people suffering. Look at verse 12. Jonah claimed that the storm was his fault and it was proven true by the fact that the storm stopped at once. That's my second observation: Our sin causes others to suffer.

Many of you may never have responded to a homosexual like Christians in the recent past but our brothers and sisters have responded in this way. And what are we experiencing today? The fruit of the sins of our forefathers. Can we honestly be angry at homosexual activists? Can we say that the sin we see in the homosexual community has no connection with us as believers?

Our sin has resulted in individuals dying from AIDS alone without any support from anyone. Some of these individuals used to be in the Church and there's no reason for them to die alone. Some people may never have chosen to live as a homosexual if they had been loved well by the Church. Then their suffering would have lessened had they a safe place to work through their struggles.

God has given us Scriptural guidelines to not point the finger unless you're willing to first pull the plank out of your own eye. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul states that we are NOT to judge non-Christians anyway. It's our job to judge those in the Church who are sinning.

Let's give the world a break and stop bringing suffering on others because of the sin of the Church. We can eliminate that. We can't always eliminate the impact of the sins of the world or the attacks of Satan but we CAN eliminate the sin in our own lives individually and that will automatically result in a decrease in suffering in the world. I know that if I stopped sinning, my wife and children would have a much nicer life, amen honey! Did you know that the industry of pornography would experience a mighty blow if Christians alone stopped using it?

One fascinating observation I noticed in chapter 1 is in verses 15-16: "Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him." Amazing! Because of Jonah's repentance, his willingness to admit his sin and repent, this led to the salvation of non-believers. That's my third observation: Our repentance can lead to the salvation of others.

Imagine that as being a part of our evangelism training courses. Step One: repent from your sins. We couldn't possibly imagine that this would be possible. We are so busy in modern day evangelicalism to try and live perfect lives that we end up disassociating ourselves from the world. I heard a sermon recently by John Ortberg in which he made this point: That the majority of people end up cutting themselves from any non-Christians within two years once they have become a Christian. I think there are a number of reasons for this but I believe one of them is that we are desperately trying to live perfect lives and we make that the goal of our living rather than just learning to be in relationship with Jesus and following His leading in our lives whether we're perfect or not.

Let me share with you an experience I had when I was single. I worked as a waiter at a Chinese restaurant for two years. I was a Christian at the time and during my time there, I developed some good friendships with my co-workers. There was a mixture of people. Most of the people working were foreign students from Taiwan, mainland China and other countries in southeast Asia. Several high school students bussed tables at this same restaurant. My heart was to be a witness to these co-workers and I constantly prayed for an opportunity to be a witness.

Each night we would eat dinner together as the restaurant was closing. We ate as if we were a family. We decided we didn't feel like Chinese food that night so we ordered pizza and had it delivered to the restaurant. You can imagine what kind of message that sends to the customers! As everyone was waiting for me, I had a conflict with one of the cooks. Aime refused to cook my order and I got angry with her. I left the kitchen and walked to the room where we had our meal together. A number of people were smoking and I blew up at them about smoking while I'm eating. They immediately put out their

cigarette butts with fright in their face! They all asked what was wrong and I explained what happened in the kitchen. I apologized and asked for forgiveness, and they were all very sympathetic.

That night as we were closing, two of the high school students just outright asked me how to become a Christian. I was flabbergasted. “Why tonight?” I cried out to God. Out of all the nights that anyone outright asked me about how to become a Christian, why the night that I failed in how I related to others. God basically said to me, “Because tonight these two kids finally felt closer to you. While you were trying to be perfect in how you lived, they felt so distant from you because they don’t live sinless lives. They felt closer to you, more like you, because they would be offended by the same thing you experienced. They would have felt and responded the same way as you and that enabled them to see that if there is hope for Brad (who is like me), then maybe I have a chance.”

Don’t think that you living a perfect life is going to draw people to Christ. I’m not advocating going out and sinning all you want that more may be brought into the Kingdom! I’m just saying, “Be yourself!” That’s what the world needs. That’s what the homosexual community needs. So many homosexuals have already faced judgment from their own individual pasts as well as from other Christians and sometimes even the world. They already have the concept well in mind that they are sinful. What they need to see is other people who are just like them, weak and in need of a Savior. That’s what will draw them to this church, real people who allow their weaknesses to show.

In Chapter 2, Jonah prays this great prayer to God about how he was wrong and now he’ll do right and praise God no matter what. Basically he repents and recommits to God’s plan. Then we see him obeying God in chapter 3 by actually going to Nineveh and preaching to the people. That is if you can call his sermon preaching. I don’t know if he said anything else than what’s printed in the Scriptures but it’s rather unimpressive. All he says is, “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!” He didn’t even mention, God will save you, all you have to do is repent and believe in Him. Not only was it really lame but everyone repented! What is up with that? Talk about failing the preaching classes in seminary – Jonah would have received an ‘F’. Eight words! Church would be out in less than a minute! Maybe that’s the Church of the future – you know, McChurch – sermons to change your life in less than a minute. I mean it worked then!

What is practically humorous is Jonah’s response to the repentance of Nineveh in Chapter 4! Let’s look at vv. 1-3:

1This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. 2 So he complained to the LORD about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. 3 Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.”

His response kind of makes you think that he purposefully made his preaching short and vague secretly hoping that nothing would happen. Then he could go to God and say, “See, I tried. These people are just really bad. I tried to tell them about God and they totally turned their backs on you.” His mind was

already set that he hated these people and even though he's going to obey God, he wasn't going to do a good job because his hatred was still controlling his inner life.

God, of course, took the measly morsels Jonah had to offer and He used it to do a miracle and have a mass repentance. How like God to take our little offerings and do something wonderful! How like Jonah, how like us, to harbor our inner hatred and give only morsels to the world because we won't repent of our prejudices.

That's my fourth & final observation: Nothing can stop the love of God, not even our sin! God's willing to show the world His great love, even with a Church that is broken and sinful. Sometimes I think we are tempted to think that any spiritual victory is because we are being so faithful, so good. God is not confused. He is the only One that's good and fruit comes because of Him and ONLY because of Him. Jonah's seeming compassion was a farce. The people didn't know his heart but God did. Jonah wasn't feeling remorse about being in the judgment seat. He sounded all spiritual in chapter 2 praying to God, repenting and recommitting to God's plan. But his heart was still impure, unchanged even while he preached. I want you to know that God is going to work anyway because He's good and He has love for everyone, even when you don't.

Did God know that Jonah was going to rebel? Yes. Perhaps this whole event was brought to Jonah to expose his sin. Oh and God saved all of Nineveh while he was at it but who knows if the main part of the story was purifying his own servant's heart. That tells me that God is not just concerned with all those sinful people out there in the world. God is just as concerned about the sin within His children's hearts.

What is your Nineveh? Is it the homosexual community? You don't have to wait to minister to the homosexual community if there are some members of First Free among you who have sinful attitudes towards gay people. God is still going to work. But I do believe He will deal with your sin as much as those to whom you minister. You know who my Nineveh is – rich, white people. Well, why rich people? Because these were the individuals who abused and made fun of me most when I was growing up. Now God is not content with any attitude I have towards rich people that's not good. He deals with my sin as much as those with whom I work but we all need to realize that each one of us has a Nineveh in our hearts.

The Nineveh people were ready. They were ready to hear the Word of the Lord and they responded with repentance. So many Christians think that homosexuals are so far from God that there's no hope. My experience has shown me that the homosexual community is a very spiritual community. Nearly every night I went out in the gay bars, I found open hearts to the gospel. For many, this was a familiar message. Many are looking for God and many are ready. Some are looking for believers who will live out the love of God. That will draw them. God's going to work whether you get in the way or not. But why not make the job easier by having a repentant heart and seeing repentance come in others because of our own. "Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?" That is God's heart.