

Text: Jonah 1:1-16  
Target audience: Christians  
Topic: God's assignments  
Theme: Saying "Yes" to God's assignments  
My purpose for this message: To persuade Christians to always be prepared to say "Yes" to whatever God's assignment is.  
Delivered: July 10, 2005 @ KEFC

## "Yes" is Best When God Asks

### PRAY.

In his classic book *The Company of the Committed*, Elton Trueblood complained that the North American Church of his day (1961), wasn't having much impact on the world. Little's changed since. Some blame the lack of relevance, the methods. What Trueblood criticized most was the men; (the *people* who comprise the church).

*One of the most surprising facts about the early church was its fundamental similarity to a military band. This is hard for us to recognize today because the ordinary successful church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is about as different from an army as anything we can imagine. Instead of being under anything resembling military discipline we pride ourselves on our "freedom." We come and go as we like, as no soldier can do; we give or withhold giving as we like; we serve when we get around to it. Obedience is considered an irrelevant notion, and the theme "Onward Christian Soldiers" is so alien to our experience that some churches avoid the hymn entirely.*

*While soldiers are specifically under authority and may, consequently, be sent anywhere without the right of refusal, most people would smile at the idea of the Church sending them on missions which they could not refuse.*

Trueblood's words sound odd coming from a pacifist. But he's right. Paul urged Timothy to be a "good soldier of Jesus Christ," (2 Tim.2:3); he calls Archippus a "fellow soldier" (Phil.2); urges believers to put on Christ's armor (Eph.6:10-20). We're soldiers under orders in God's army. So, when he asks us to do something, the proper response is not "Whatever," but "Yes sir!"

FIND Jonah 1:1-16. Many people dismiss Jonah's story—as little more than a fairy tale. Even some Christians say it's just a parable: a made up story with a teaching point. But nothing in the book suggests it's just a sermon illustration. Down through history, no Jewish rabbi ever questioned the story's truthfulness. Jesus talked like Jonah's story actually occurred.

And so will I these next 5 weeks. I believe the God of truth inspired this as truthfully as the book of Genesis, Acts, or Colossians. Jonah is one of 12—what's called—minor prophetic books (OT). But there's not much prophecy in it: 5 words to be exact. Mainly, it tells the story of a reluctant missionary and how God dealt with him. READ.

### Story

Jonah grew up near where Jesus would grow up, 750 years later. He was a prophet to God's people during the years King Jereboam II (782-753 B.C.) ruled Israel. Interestingly enough, though the Scriptures this king say "did evil in the eyes of the Lord..." (2 Kings 14:24), there's no evidence this prophet ever spoke one word of criticism against him.

It's just a guess, but I wonder if it's possible that God said, "Fine, you won't speak for me against your own nation, I'll send you to another: go to Nineveh, Assyria's capital." To which Jonah said, "NO." If that sounds blasphemous, it should. What enlisted man would defy his commanding officer?

And yet we all have. Some of us who are Christians have learned painful lessons in the process. Or, have yet to learn them. On the other hand, if you're *not* a Christian,

you've been saying "no" to God *all* your life. God's message for you this morning is: that's futile.

Whether you know it or not, you've heard a lot about Nineveh the last 2 years. In Jonah's day, it was the largest city, standing on the east side of the Tigris River in Iraq: modern Mosul. Jonah looked the direction of Nineveh, and headed the other way, to Tarshish—probably in Spain. Why Jonah disliked the Assyrians, we don't know. They weren't the nicest folks, but at this point in her history, Israel had not encountered Assyria. 30-40 years later they invaded and defeated the northern kingdom but at this time, the nation was politically and militarily weak. In fact, it was struggling to defend itself against mountain tribes to the north which had pushed to within 100 miles of Nineveh.

Nevertheless there was some distaste Jonah had for the Assyrians as chapter 4 will tell us. Unfortunately, bigotry continues to root itself in us, doesn't it? What group of people do you wish God would forget about?

Last October, Iraq terrorists kidnapped Margaret Hassan, a British-born humanitarian with CARE. She was in her 60's and having married an Iraqi, had lived in the country 30 years. This was the first woman taken and I told Betty, "So help me, if they kill her, I think *I'm* going to enlist to fight these people!" They did. (One web blogger mused, "Now they've started abducting women; I wonder how long until they begin abducting children.")

Several weeks ago TIME magazine had a story on suicide bombers in training inside Iraq. A 20 year-old boy is on the cover, his face hidden except for his eyes. He says he can hardly wait to die by blowing himself up around Americans. I believe Bill Bennett's got it right: this is a war between civilization and barbarism. And I admit, I struggle to care about such folks.

What if God sent me on a mission of mercy, to them? That's what God did to Jonah.

But Jonah was running the opposite direction and apparently is not having any great attack of conscience. On board the ship, despite a horrific storm he was sleeping peacefully below deck. Up top, the sailors were pleading with their respective gods for help. The captain counted noses and realized one of his passengers wasn't at the prayer meeting. He was stunned to find Jonah sleeping through the ordeal and demanded he join them and call on *his* god.

Prayer meeting ended and now it's time to place blame. Not only pagans in ancient times, but Jews too, blamed all bad things on someone's sin. In Jn.9:2 Jesus' disciples asked Him why a certain man had been born blind: did he sin or his parents? Jesus said, "Neither. This was done so that God could be glorified." Job's so-called friends kept insisting that to be so badly afflicted, *he* must have committed some grievous sin. He said, "No. I've *sinned*, but no ongoing unrepentant sin." Which God later confirmed.

Not all evil that happens to me, is the result of my evil. But some is. God still *does* discipline. And when Jonah drew the short straw, he knew God had tracked him. "It's my fault. I serve the true and living God who made heaven and earth. And I'm running from His assignment. Throw me overboard and the sea will grow calm."

To their credit, the others were reluctant to shed innocent blood—even to protect themselves. So they kept trying to fight the storm but soon it became clear that they were out of options. They prayed first to this new and powerful, foreign God. "Since *You* did this, don't blame us for his death." Then they threw Jonah overboard.

And the storm stopped. *That* got the sailors' attention. *At this they greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.* (v.16)

Jonah's defiance of God's is in stark contrast to others in the Bible. In Gen.12:1, God told Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's household. Abraham answered "Yes, sir." When God told Ezekiel in Ez.24:15-17 that he was going to take the life of his wife and he was not to mourn. Ezekiel answered, "Yes sir!" And *every time* God gave His Son orders, the answer was always the same. "Yes, Sir!" (Jn.14:31: "...I do *exactly* what my Father has commanded me.")

All of us have known what it is to say "no" to God when he asks something. And certainly there's nothing we can do about yesterday but repent. But has God ordered you to do something *today*? Maybe like Jonah, he has given you clear marching orders to go someplace. Perhaps it's a mission on the other side of the globe, or on the other side of the continent, ...or, on the other side of the street. God is sending you to someone. Are you saying "Yes sir!" or are you below deck sleeping, bound for Tarshish?

The people God was sending Jonah were not just drawn from a hat. He planned a special work in them and Jonah was His chosen instrument. And maybe God has some people for you to go see. Maybe he has career missions in mind for you. Whatever your list of excuses is not an original; God's heard them all: I'm too old, I'm too young; I heard you have to go to school and I can't afford to; I don't want to have to raise money; I'm no good with languages; I'm something of a bigot.

God's already heard them all to which he responds

- 1) Didn't I make you? Can't I equip you for what I called you to?
- 2) Maybe you didn't understand: This is an order, not a request.

And mark Jonah's testimony: God always wins. He will not be ignored. We can run, but it is impossible to hide. READ Ps.139:7-12.

### Concl:

Sometimes God chases the deserter. Other times He picks someone else. Billy Graham has always believed that the man God intended to use in his role, was Chuck Templeton. At the time when Billy met him in the 1940's, he was Canadian pastor with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. In 1946, the two of them plus Torry Johnson, formed Youth for Christ. Templeton was the phenom. Crowds flocked to hear him. Newspapers wrote glowingly about his preaching. The NAE said he was one of the men "best used of God" in that year (Graham wasn't even mentioned). But in the early 50's, Chuck was losing his faith. He died 4 years ago, an unapologetic atheist. When God's call is ignored, he is not boxed in as if all other options are gone. But it's best to say "Yes" when God asks. For this is not a mild request from a game show host; it is the order of a commanding officer of the universe.