

Do you have a Bucket list? I do. One of the items on my bucket list was fulfilled last Christmas. I took my daughter, her boyfriend, and Dan Ebelt ziplining at Snowsnake in Harrison. For two and half hours, we hung from wires and traveled between trees on 10 different runs. What a rush! How exciting. Another item on my bucket list is to go to Hawaii oneday. Pastor Schweppe, over at St. John's had Skydiving on his bucket list. Well in the past year, He has checked that one off his list. He went skydiving. A Bucket list came into being several years ago with a movie that starred Jack Nicolson. In the movie the two main characters discover they have a limited time to live and so they jot down on a list, all the things they want to do before they kick the bucket. The movie shows us what life can be like when you get busy living, even in the face of death.

What would you do if you knew you had 40 days to live? Would you get busy living or get busy dying? Would you try to make the most of your 40 days or would you just wait for it to come? In our study of God's Word today, a large population in a town called Nineveh get the news that they have 40 days to live before they kick the bucket. Do these people sit around waiting to die? Or do they do all the things they've never been able to do? What is their primary concern before they kick the bucket. Consider today: "Are You Ready to Kick the Bucket?"

Our bucket list story opens with Jonah being told by God to go to Nineveh to preach. Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Assyria, ready to come in and conquer Israel and take her into captivity. Assyria, known for its atrocities, and bloodshed. Assyria, a modern day Iran or North Korea.

Consider the significance, then, of God calling Jonah - a prophet to ISRAEL - to go and preach to ASSYRIA! What was the message for Israel? "I have had enough of YOU! I am taking my message elsewhere." Even though Jonah may have been disgusted with his own people's lifestyles and rejection of God - he had even more disdain for Assyria. These people worshiped foreign gods - they didn't even have a scent of morality to them. And so, you know what Jonah decided to do. Jonah hopped a boat and headed for Tarshish. Instead of heading east, Jonah went in the exact opposite direction - toward modern day Spain.

At this point, God had every right to squash Jonah from any existence on the earth. He could have sent a hurricane to come and swallow Jonah in the sea. He could have sent sharks to swallow Jonah bit by bit. But instead, you know what happened. He had a huge fish of some sort swallow him whole, and spit him back onto shore. In his mercy, the compassionate and gracious LORD - slow to anger and abounding in love - spared Jonah's life. Not only did God spare Jonah's life, but He even went one step further - Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time. "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." God gave Jonah a second chance. Now Jonah goes although still with a grudge against the Assyrians.

He comes to the city of Nineveh. Our text describes it as "great," a "very important city." It took three days to hit the main spots or marketplaces of the city. People from all over the world came there to make money, to do what important people do.

But the city had spiritual problems. No one knew the true God. They thought they did. But the god they had created in their minds wasn't even close to the true God. The god in their

minds wasn't very holy. He was laid back about sin. As long as you don't do anything real bad, God doesn't care. You can be greedy. You can be immoral. You can lead any lifestyle you want. The more alternative, the better. It's alright to sin. Just don't hurt anybody. Am I talking about Nineveh? Or am I talking about our society today? Sound similar, doesn't it? Our society today doesn't know the true God. And so most people have concocted a god in their minds, a god who is not very holy. It's OK for me to be greedy. It's OK for me to be immoral. It's OK for me to live any lifestyle I want, because God is laid back about sin.

That is the world in which we live, isn't it? And it does affect the way we think about God. When the rest of the world around talks about God this way, it affects us. Maybe God doesn't really care if I'm greedy. Maybe God doesn't really care about morality. Millions of babies get aborted every year – maybe that's OK. Homosexuality – maybe that's OK. Living together outside of marriage – maybe that's OK. God is laid back. Do whatever makes you feel good, as long as you don't hurt anybody.

But then you come face to face with the true God in his Word. And you find out that he is much much holier than the way he is pictured in our world. The great, important city of Nineveh thought everything was alright. But then Jonah told them, "40 more days and Nineveh will be destroyed." God had had enough. He was going to wipe these people off the face of the earth, just as he had done to Sodom and Gomorrah.

You see, the true God is absolutely, positively holy. He is not laid back about sin. He hates sin. And God is very black and white in his Word on what he considers to be sin. The things that our society applauds, things like abortion or homosexuality or living together outside of marriage – these things, God in his Word calls sin. And what is even more frightening, is that when the holy God looks at us, he sees our sin too. "You are not pure enough," God says. "You have been tainted by the world." The all-seeing eye of God sees us. He sees how our morals have been eroded by the world. He listens to our excuses for our sins. And because he is perfectly holy - not laid back about sin – God says to you, "I have had enough of you. I will destroy you."

This was no idle threat. God really planned on destroying Nineveh in 40 days. There were no conditions to it. He didn't even tell them to repent. God had every intention to reduce the town to nothing. It was such a scary message that it only took one day for the message to get through the whole city. Even the king was scared to death.

And yet, the message had a hint of Gospel in it as well - and Jonah knew that. After all, if God cared nothing for this people, why would He have sent His messenger to warn them of this pending disaster? He must have cared something for them! If nothing could be done, then why would He give them 40 days notice?

You and I are in the same boat as these Ninevites. What are we to do? We meet the true God in all his holiness. We see his righteous anger. What are we to do? The people of Nineveh repented. They realized that they were on the wrong track. They declared a fast. They stopped their pattern of sinning. They looked to God for forgiveness. And that is what we can do as well. To repent means to stop being fake. To stop pretending that sin is OK. To repent means to put all your cards on the table, to admit to God every failure, every shortcoming. To stop making

excuses. True repentance means you stop doing the sins you are caught up in. You want to change.

And then God surprises you with his compassion. Look what he did for Nineveh: “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.” Surprised the people of Nineveh with his compassion. He freely forgave them. He cancelled the punishment he had planned for them

Here we see a beautiful picture of the grace of God. He’s much more merciful than people picture. Most people believe that God forgives, but only if you’re nice. You have to earn God’s forgiveness by being good. But look at what God does here. These people didn’t earn God’s forgiveness by groveling. All the groveling in the world never makes up for all the sins they had committed. God forgave them freely. He showed them undeserved love.

Why would God do this? God forgave these people because of his Son, Jesus Christ. You see, God knew that his Son, Jesus, would come. And Jesus would do what these people of Nineveh could never do – he would live the perfect life. And then, Jesus would let himself be punished for the sins of Nineveh. That happened on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he was being punished for the sins of Nineveh. He was letting himself be destroyed, so that these people wouldn’t be destroyed. Jesus let himself feel God’s righteous anger, so that these people wouldn’t have to feel God’s righteous anger. Because of Jesus, God declared the entire city of Nineveh “not guilty.” They were completely forgiven. What amazing grace, amazing compassion, God shows Nineveh in these verses.

This is the same compassion, same forgiveness, that God shows to you. You see, instead of destroying you for your sin, God forgives you. And this isn’t the kind of forgiveness the world pictures –the world says that God forgives you only if you’re nice. No! God forgives you freely! He doesn’t make you earn it. He doesn’t make you perform a list of good works to earn his forgiveness. God forgives you freely.

He does this because of what Jesus Christ has done for you. Jesus took upon himself all the sins you have committed in your life. Jesus even takes on that sinful heart that you have, that selfish, immoral heart that you’re born with - Jesus takes that on himself. And he goes to the cross. And he lets God punish him, so that God doesn’t have to punish you. Jesus lets God destroy him on the cross, so that God doesn’t have to destroy you. Instead, God forgives you.

What an amazing God we have – the one true God! He is much more holy, much more perfect, than the world says. And he is much more forgiving, much more merciful and compassionate, than the world says. What an amazing God we have!

So what is the number 1 item on your bucket list? Number 1 is to get to know God better. That means being in church, that means being involved in the reading of his Word. The Living water offered here will quench your thirst and help you to handle better the time when you and I do kick the bucket. And remember the last item on your bucket list eternal life has already been checked off for you by Jesus. So live on! Make the most of the days God has given you! He’ll take care of you and me, just like he took care of Jonah. Amen.