

Wednesday 7/8/20

SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Can I Get a Witness? Pt. 1

“How much must you hate somebody to not proselytize them?” That is a harsh question, isn’t it? Think about how much those words sting. “How much must you hate somebody to not proselytize them?” – to try to change their mind about something.

This question likely stings each one of us today who is a follower of Christ. If you were to guess who originally asked this question, you’d likely guess a preacher or an evangelist. You might guess it’s a professor of an evangelism class at Moody [Bible Institute] or some other Bible college. But would you be surprised if it wasn’t a preacher, an evangelist or even a Bible professor? Instead, it came from an avid atheist; it came from Penn Jillette, from the famed magic duo Penn & Teller. Listen to this:

[Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6md638smQd8> Video Transcription (edited)]:

I want to talk to you about this. I get home from the show and at the end of the show, as I've mentioned before, we go out and we talk to folks and, you know, sign the occasional autograph and shake hands, and so on. And there was one guy waiting over to the side. And he walked over to me and he said, “I was here last night at the show and I saw the show, and I liked it.” He said nice stuff. And then he said, “I brought this for you.” And he handed me a Gideon pocket edition. It was Psalms from the New Testament, right. Or Psalms from just part of the New Testament: little book about this big, this thick. He said, “I wrote in the front of it and I wanted you to have this. I'm kind of proselytizing.” I mean he said, “I'm a businessman. I'm sane; I'm not crazy.” But he looked me right in the eye and did all of this. And it was really wonderful. I believe he knew that I was an atheist, but he was not defensive. And he looked me right in the eyes, and he was truly complimentary. It wasn't in any way; it didn't seem like empty flattery. He was really kind and nice and sane, and looked me in the eyes, and talked to me, and then gave me this Bible.

And I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a Heaven and Hell, and people could be going to Hell, or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, “Well, it's not really worth telling them this, because it would make it socially awkward.” And atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytize, just leave me alone; keep your religion to yourself. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody, to believe that everlasting life is possible, and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it - that truck was bearing down on you - there's a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that. And I've

always thought that, and I've written about that. I thought of it, conceptually.

This guy was a really good guy. He was polite and honest, and sane, and he cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible, which had written in it, a little note to me, not very personal, but just, you know, "liked your show" and so on. And then like five phone numbers for him and an email address, if I wanted to get in touch.

Now I know there's no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that. But I'll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man. And that's really important. And with that kind of goodness, it's OK to have that deep of a disagreement. And I still think that religion does a lot of bad stuff, but man, that was a good man who gave me that book. (Penn Jillette, *Penn Says: A Gift of A Bible* video, edited)

Now again, in case you're unfamiliar with the person in this audio, it is Penn Jillette, one-half of the magic duo Penn and Teller. He was handed a Bible after a show and was proselytized by a sincere and caring follower of Christ. This act impacted Penn, to the point of giving a battle cry to those who should be out sharing the Gospel with those who are far from God. Shocking and amazing: "How much must you hate somebody to not proselytize them?" That sounds like a question someone should have asked Jonah. He was a reluctant witness to a people he hated. You and I, we can be reluctant witnesses. We are reluctant to friends, family members, to coworkers, neighbors, to casual acquaintances and even to people groups as a whole.

But today is the day to put away our reluctance, because when we do, God will do amazing things. And that's what we want to talk about today in Jonah 3.

Let's begin now in Jonah 3, verse 1 (ESV):

[Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." \(Vs. 1-2\)](#)

You may not know this, but in Jonah Chapter 1, it says almost the same thing. The major difference is, now it says "the Lord came to Jonah the second time." Well, what happened before? Well, Jonah was a prophet. He spoke on behalf of God. According to Jonah 1, verse two, he was called, to call out against, or preach against, the great city of Nineveh. And according to verse 3, it says, *but Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish.*

Now this brings up a couple of important points. First it was unusual for God to call a prophet to preach against a pagan city. God's prophets often spoke against His own people, because they are His spiritual children who rebel, and who become disobedient, so it was unique for a prophet to go and preach against a pagan culture.

The second point comes out in verse 3, because Jonah had no desire whatsoever to preach against this pagan city. But the question is, why? Why would he want to run the other way? Well

the simple answer is, Nineveh was a very wicked and brutal culture. In fact, archaeology confirms this. They have discovered that the Assyrians from this area would bury their victims alive in the sand and drive a stake through their tongues, so that they would be essentially cooking alive, without any way of refreshment. They were known to tear off victims' limbs and hands. Archaeologists also discovered that they would flay their victims alive and they would keep great piles of skulls. This was a very wicked culture, and Jonah had no desire whatsoever to give a message of repentance to them.

So, Jonah's task was very unique and, humanly speaking, understandable why he would not want to go and deliver a message of the Lord to them.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's just stop here for a moment and ask my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney: We tend to think, why did Jonah behave this way? I mean, yet look at the atrocities of the Assyrian society at that time. Do you think we act any differently?

C: No, I don't. I think we're horrible. You know, I sometimes wish, Nat, that I could dangle people over Hell and say, "I told you so", but it doesn't work that way. We just have to love them, despite the ridicule and the destruction. I know that I'm horrible. Especially when I was part of the world, I was also horrible and destructive to myself and others. So we just have to remember that the people in Nineveh are sinners, who are lost apart from God's grace. So is Jonah, so are we; you can't hear of concern with others, if you're so concerned about yourself. And we can't expect nonbelievers to act like believers.

N: Yeah. I think that's one of the reasons why I enjoy Jonah so much, unfortunately, is because I'm a lot like Jonah: God tells me to go one way and I tend to go the other, sometimes. And sometimes He says, "I want you to do outreach with those people". And I'd say, "Ah, they're really not my cup of tea. Do you realize what they've done?" And then I have those moments of reflection, where I remember, "Oh wait, here are the things I've done, the sins I've committed. And yet God reached out and saved me by grace, and He desires the same thing for them." So I appreciate coming back to Jonah, because it's really a reflection of who I am at times, and what I struggle with. Arnie, you seem to share that same sentiment that Penn Jillette mentioned. Tell us a little bit about that.

A: Man, I think he said it so well is, if you just care enough when you do something, even if it's something so little as handing a tract, handing a Bible, if you really care; that's really haunting. I think to a lot of us, especially that do ministry is, when is it too much? When have you gone too far? But I think more often, it's you haven't done anything. When are you going to do something? And he epitomizes that argument.

Jonah was a reluctant witness. He disobeyed God. He ran the other way to avoid telling the Ninevites about God's judgment. Remember we are in a series called Character Over Compromise. We have to be keenly aware of our spiritual witness. God has called us to live a certain way and called us to do certain things. One of those responsibilities and privileges is being a witness. And Jonah, he chose compromise.

Because God loved Jonah, He disciplined Him by way of a giant fish. According to Chapter one, verse 17, after being thrown into the ocean by the sailors, he was swallowed up by a fish, and he found refuge in the fish for three days and three nights. And according to Chapter 2, verse 10, after those three days, the fish pukes Jonah up onto the shore.

(By the way, if you want to keep your kids or grandkids engaged in the Bible, read them this story. My kids cannot get enough of Chapter 2, verse 10. "Dad", they would say, "Read it again, read it again!" "Yes kids, the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited; it puked Jonah out upon the dry land." They love that part. But I have all boys, so it makes sense.)

Now I do want to pause here, because this brings up a lot of debate. Skeptics will say, well it's not possible for a man to be swallowed up and live in the belly of a whale or a fish for one day, two days, three days, or however many days. So, some would suggest – even inside Christian communities – that this is merely symbolic, or it's metaphor, or it's simply a great tale to inspire faith. But those claims are *not* based on truth! So, is there any reason why we should take this as literal?

There is and let me read it to you.

In Matthew Chapter 12, scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus and they ask Him for a sign. And this is His response beginning in verse 39: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this

generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior - the Man that virtually all people and all cultures respect – He said, *for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish*. In other words, He is saying that actually happened! You see, Jonah is the only Prophet whom Jesus likened unto Himself. And His example was the literal event. Is it a miracle? Absolutely. Is God deficient in his ability to create miracles? Absolutely *not*.

Having said all that, let's get back to the text of the day. So Jonah has been puked up onto the shore. We don't know where he was puked up. We don't know how long it is between his expulsion from the fish and when he receives this second chance from God to fulfill his mission. But we meet Jonah in verse 1 (Chap. 3), after his discipline.

And I want you to see something here. **God is the God of second chances for His children**. And if we're honest, God is the God of *many* chances. He gives us many do-overs! His mulligans are frequent. He is the God of second chances.

This is a huge blessing, because though we are forgiven – though we are new creations in Christ, we still sin. We still play Jonah, and tell God “no” to His ways. We say “no” to His authority in our lives and play God.

If we are not careful, we can default to the “I'm forgiven, so just chill out on all this obedience talk.” Some say, “As a Christian, you don't need to follow God. That kind of obedience sounds a lot like legalism.”

If this is what comes to mind when I say the word obedience, you've believed a lie. Legalism properly defined is, thinking your actions can save you and keep you saved. That's legalism – thinking you can do something, to earn or keep your salvation.

Obedience is the right and loving response of a sinner who is saved by the grace of God. Our grace-given salvation does not provide us the free pass to keep on sinning. This is why Paul said in Romans 6: **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”** (1-2).

God's amazing grace frees us from the burden to sin. It gives us reason to rejoice, when God's grace comes to us a second time, a third time, a tenth time and so on. But by no means does his many chances give us excuse to play Jonah, day in and day out.

But when we do sin, we must remember we're forgiven. God is ready to give us another chance, when we are ready and repentant.

There is a poem I have kept in my office for years. This poem is a beautiful picture of God's mercy and grace. Let me read you this poem.

It goes like this:

He came to my desk with a quivering lip,
the lesson was done.

“Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher?

I've spoiled this one.”

I took his sheet, all soiled and blotted
and gave him a new one all unspotted.

And into his tired heart I cried,

“Do better now, my child.”

I came to the throne with a trembling heart;
the day was done.

“Have you a new day for me, dear Master?

I've spoiled this one.”

He took my day, all soiled and blotted
and gave me a new one all unspotted.

And into my tired heart he cried,

“Do better now, my child.”

A powerful reminder of the many chances God gives us each day.

We have to remember that though we become children of God by the blood of Christ, we also become bondservants of our King. Jesus said, *whoever wants to be my disciple must pick up his cross and follow me*. In the Great Commission, Jesus said, *go therefore and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded them*.

Salvation is a free gift. We know that it's 100% free. And I believe it's the most expensive gift we will ever receive. Why? Because when we receive that gift, we get to be part of the greatest adventure ever. We get called on a mission that is unlike any other. Period. Because our mission has eternal value. Our mission provides us the opportunity to go wherever God calls and wherever he leads. Why? To disappoint us? to hurt us? No, to bless us, and to use us, and to let us see the difference Christ has made.

And in Jonah 3, that's where Jonah is at. He's got his second chance. The question now is, will he obey?

N: Let me now turn to Arnie and Cara. Arnie, was there a point in time when you got truly serious about sharing your faith? When was it and how did you start?

A: That's a great question. There were actually two events that radically changed me. The first, they had these things called men's banquets, and I was a new believer. And Pastor Steve came up and said, "You know, we'd like you to be the featured speaker at our men's banquet." And I said, "Man, I can't do that." And he says, "Well, why not?" And I said, "Well, you know, I've been divorced. You know, my life was pretty crazy." And he goes, "Well, Arnie, did you mess around with any of the wives that were of the husbands who are going to be in the audience?" I said, "Of course not, Steve. I became a Christ follower. My life has totally changed." "So you've been true to your wife. You're living the life now." "Yeah, yeah, of course Steve." He said, "Well then of course you can give your testimony."

So I was so ashamed of my past, you know; some guys brag about it, but I just, you know, life without Jesus, what's to brag about? You know, "What an idiot you are". And then the other big changer was all of my drinking buddies, and all of those people, saw the change and mocked it, and all of that. Until my best friend's dad died; they didn't know a pastor. They didn't know anybody to conduct the funeral. And so they called me out of Nebraska and said, "Would you come? You would be the perfect person to do the funeral." So those two things really kind of lit a fire early on in me, of sharing the faith. But it's, I'm not like Cara, where I can just share openly to the dishwasher repairman, or the plumber, or the waitress. It's just, that's, I'm not as much of an evangelist as she is. That's for sure.

N: Well, that's a perfect segue. Cara, do you ever get nervous about sharing your faith? I mean, because you just seem to be an evangelist, very comfortable, but I'm curious. Do you ever get nervous? And what do you do about that if it happens?

C: Of course I do. I just ignore it, because I care about the person more than my comfort, but also keep in mind, that most of the evangelism that I do is evangelism where I slip things into a conversation. So it's not a sales pitch; for me, it's relational almost every time. I am a creature of habit. Sometimes I purposely will branch out, so I can find new people to witness to, but I'll get

to know a waitress, get to know her name. In those cases, I suggest you tip well. When you come back, some question you asked her, do you have kids, or whatever, remember the names of their children. So you can say, "Oh, how is so and so doing?" Because it becomes this relationship piece, you are going to stand out and they're going to want to see you. And they're going to want to hear what you have to say. Now there are people who open air preach and do those types of things. And I think they do it well and they're called to do that. But for us normal people, I would say, know your audience. Don't walk around like some Bible thumping weirdo. Let the Spirit lead you, and God will put people in your path. So just make it conversational.

N: Yeah. And I think that's the best way to go. Be prepared to give an answer, right? First Peter 3:15, *do so with gentleness and respect*, but just meet people where they're at; talk to them like you would normally talk to them. And let your faith be naturally expressed and felt: sprinkle seed and water, wherever you go. Arnie, I have no doubt right now, there are some listeners who are listening to this conversation and thinking, "But you don't get it. I'm not an evangelist. I'm not like Cara. If I'd even open my mouth about my faith, I'm going to blow it." Or they're thinking that "I just don't know much." What encouragement can you give those people today?

A: I think the first and best thing, and Cara says it, and the times that I've had great success is, start out by listening to the other person, and listen, find out where they are spiritually. And it's not about you. I mean, come on, we're going to Heaven. That's great. It's about the other person. And just taking that approach of just listening, and listening and being available. And even in a conversation, even if it's somebody you don't know, you're sitting next to on a plane, you would be surprised how the Holy Spirit can lead that; where at the end of the conversation, you could end up even praying with the person.

N: And I say all the time, and again, what both of you have just prescribed is, being a neighbor, a friend, someone who is just there for people, asking questions, and sincerely caring and listening to them. Cara, for those who say "I'm afraid of what people will say or do to me, if I witness for Christ", do you think that's a reasonable fear?

C: Well, I don't think we should be fearful. I think there's legitimate concern. I think you need to know your audience, but we shouldn't be afraid. I mean, the Gospel is the one thing that you can be absolutely sure is right; it's true. I mean, there's not many other things that you're that confident about. But I think going into a crowd of people during a riot; probably not a safe situation for you to start talking about the Gospel, or you're probably going to get hit in the head

with a pipe, and that will be that. So you want to make sure it's an environment where you're going to be heard. But I would say, should we be fearful? No. No, there's nothing to be afraid about. You know, everyone puts themselves in this crazy circumstance, where they are going to, you know, be killed over their faith. But I mean, those are few and far between in America, and that's happening over in Syria, probably on a daily basis, but I don't think we should be fearful of anything.

N: Yeah. I think what you've just prescribed is exactly right. We shouldn't be fearful, but we should be wise. And knowing when to go, when to speak. I mean, even Paul, even Jesus, was very intentional about what was being communicated, and where it was being communicated, or where they would go. And I think the same is true for us. We also know that tribulation will come for our faith. Tribulation will come in general, but we know Christ has overcome the world. And even with our faith, people will reject us, because they rejected Christ. But do we need to be fearful? No. Arnie, what about you and your upbringing? I know your parents were missionaries. Did you see them sharing the Gospel? What was the impact on the people they were trying to reach? And what about on you?

A: So before I became a Christ follower, I thought my parents were incredibly crazy. My father was a dentist and sold his practice at 50, and they moved to Indonesia working with the Dani people, which were the last known cannibals, head hunters. And before that, we were in Honduras, in the jungle, where I got my love for horseback riding. That's another story. But I remember as a nonbeliever, that Mom and Dad had just wasted their life. My dad actually started a dental school there for the Dani people, because nobody wanted to give any kind of medical services. And you don't blame them, because the Dani people, their goal back in the day, before they found Jesus, was the best thing you could do is kill your best friend and eat their heart. That was like the top of their game. And what impact? It has changed them completely. The Dani people, many of them have come to know the Lord. They've stopped the cannibalism. And so it's had tremendous impact that I can see, and now as a Christ follower, truly appreciate, even though from a worldly standard, it really wasn't much, what they did.

N: That's quite the tough audience, I guess you'd say, of a group to witness to. And I feel like today, we're probably all feeling a little overwhelmed by the culture we live in, and at times, the hostility that there is to Christianity, our values, to God, and His Word. So I know that the people are getting excited though about getting out there, but I know that they could use just a little bit

more emotional and spiritual jet fuel. So Cara, get us motivated to get out there, to look and to pray for the opportunities to share God's Word today.

C: Well, I love Jonah. It's one of my favorite books in the Bible, because it reminds me of myself, and I say, "Arise, go". God asked Jonah, *is it right for you to be angry?* And so I asked myself, is it right for me to choose who hears the Gospel? As much as people can horribly embarrass us, or they can wound us, the Gospel is for them too. So see a soul in need of a Savior. God is slow to anger and he is rich in mercy. And sometimes we despise that, especially when He extends it to those we found intolerable, or people that cause destruction, or have something snarky to say, but we have got to have that same heart that God does for people. And remember that the grace He extended to us, we don't deserve it. So let's stop being so consumed by ourselves, and get out there and tell people about Jesus Christ.