

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series through the Old Testament book of Jonah, which is a masterfully told story with a lot of relevance to our lives today. Last week we looked at the first three verses of Jonah and talked about how God calls us to find our identity and purpose in Him and to share His message with others. Jonah, like many of us, rejected that call. Instead of submitting to that call and finding true purpose and freedom, he decided to run as far as he could from that call. This morning, we are going to read all of chapter 1 to see what happened as a result of his disobedience and what that has to do with our lives today:

Jonah 1:1-17 - *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." ³ But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. ⁴ Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship **threatened to break up.** ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." ⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the **lot fell on Jonah.** ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" ⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." ¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) ¹¹ The sea was getting **rougher and rougher.** So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" ¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." ¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have **done as you pleased.**" ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. ¹⁷ But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.*

As I mentioned last week, there is debate about whether to take this story is meant to be read as history or as a parable. Jonah was a historical figure; we read in 2 Kings 14 that he was a prophet who lived around 780 BC during King Jeroboam II's reign in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Either way, this story is meant to hold up a mirror to Israel and to us about the way we relate to God and to those who do not know God.

I see four main themes in this passage that are relevant for us:

1) The omnipresent sovereignty of God

In this passage, Jonah is called by God to go to Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria, which is in modern day Iraq. Ninevah was a violent enemy of Israel, and call it to lay down its violence and repent of its sin. But Jonah refuses. We aren't told why just yet, but we do know that he decided to catch a ship to get as far away from Ninevah as possible. But in this passage, we see that although He might run away from the face of God, he can not escape him, and God sends a storm. The sailors eventually discern that the storm is due to Jonah's disobedience, and Jonah asks them to throw him into the sea in order to save the rest of them. And God provides a great fish to swallow Jonah.

In other words, you can run from the face of God, but you can not run from the presence or sovereignty of God. You can rebel against Him, treat Him as though He didn't exist, but that does not stop Him from doing His thing. He is omnipresent. And He is sovereign.

Psalm 139:7-12 - Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

There is one God – nationality and religion went together in the Near East, but He is the Lord of the heavens, who made the land and the sea and rules over it all.

Matthew 10:29 - Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

We may not fully understand how God exercises His sovereignty, but we can rest in knowing that He is omnipresent and sovereign, and we can recognize that there is nowhere we can go to flee from His presence.

2) The universality of sin

God has called him to share a message of God's judgment and a call to repentance. But as we see in this passage, this message is not coming from some incredibly holy man. In this chapter, Jonah is painted in a terrible light. The pagan sailors are clearly much more noble than He is. They at least are calling out to whatever god they can think of in the hopes that someone will save them. Jonah is asleep in the boat.

Sin is running away from God as the center of your life. It is rebellion against God. It is kicking him off the throne and enthroning yourself or something or someone else as god.

Romans 3:19-24 - Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

There is very good news in that passage, but also very bad news: all have sinned. All have fallen short. No one can make themselves right with God by their own religiosity or good works. **We are all in the same boat before God, spiritually bankrupt and unable to save ourselves.**

Even in this passage, the sailors can not be saved by their religiosity, no matter how sincere, or by their own efforts, throwing their cargo overboard. The only thing that can save them is the sovereign God.

This seems to be a major theme in Jonah. Israel saw themselves as superior, because they were God's people, and looked down on others. But they forgot that it was all the grace of God, not something that they had earned.

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 - *When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you-- a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant-- then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

And we sometimes do the same.

1 Corinthians 4:7 - *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

But it is all grace. An undeserved gift. We are just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

3) The harmful effect of our sin on others

Not only is sin universal, but there is no such thing as a private sin. In this passage, Jonah's rebellion has consequences not just for him but for Ninevah, the city he is refusing to bring God's message to, and now for the sailors, who experience the storm. Everyone suffers because of Jonah's sin. **This is never more poignant than when we see the sailors crying out in the storm to their own gods and experiencing no relief, while Jonah, the only one whose God can save them, is sleeping in the dark, oblivious to their cries and the storm.**

There is no such thing as a private sin. Every time that we ignore God's call and go our own way, we will experience consequences, as will those around us.

There is a great book of Puritan prayers called the Valley of Vision. Listen to a portion of a prayer from this book:

“Searcher of hearts,
It is a good day to me when thou givest me
A glimpse of myself;
Sin is my greatest evil,
But thou art my greatest good;

I have cause to loathe myself,
 And not to seek self-honour,
 For no one desires to commend his own dunghill
 My country, family, church
 Fare worse because of my sins”

That last line haunts me. Read it carefully. He is not saying “My country, family, church fare worse because of me” like George Bailey in “It’s a Wonderful Life” saying “Everyone would be better off if I had never been born.” This is not some cry for pity and sympathy, as if we are looking for people to tell us that we’re a good person. No, this is an honest admission that our sin has terrible consequences, not just for us but for those around us.

I began serving this church as pastor in 2006 at the age of 30. I did such a stellar job that after only a couple of years, we made the decision to hire an outside mediator to come in because I had made such a mess of things as the pastor with regards to the leadership. My sins – particularly my struggle to deal well with conflict and my poor communication – threatened to destroy this church and my family. People left the church wounded because of my poor leadership. And while we made it through that time by the grace of God, that last line still holds true: **my country, family, church fare worse because of my sins**. You all have no idea how many times my wife has had to pick herself up off the mat and out of her sacrificial love for God, for me and for this church, continue to serve, never looking for recognition or honor. **Sometimes I look back at my journal from that time so I won’t forget**. My country, family, church fare worse because of my sins.

I regularly do marriage counseling, and one the most important goals I have in marriage counseling is to encourage spouses to resist the urge to get defensive or to argue back, but to truly listen when their spouse tells them how something they have done has hurt them. As uncomfortable as it might make you, as much as it might hurt, do not look away. Do not rationalize, do not minimize, do not blame-shift or explain it away, but listen humbly until you understand the depth of how your sin has affected the one you love. Why? So that everyone might know that everything is your fault? No. So that there might be repentance and reconciliation and peace.

Sin has consequences, not just for ourselves but for others, and often for generations. A self-centered decision to disobey God and choose what feels right to us can set into motion a chain reaction of terrible pain and brokenness. Think about David in 2 Samuel 11:

2 Samuel 11:1 - In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing.

David, the king, was supposed to be out with his army on the battleground, but he decided sinfully to stay home instead. He gets out of bed in the evening. He sees a woman bathing. And he sends for her, sleeps with her, and impregnates her. Just think about the chain of events that was put into motion by David's sinful decision not to be with his army, where he was supposed to be. He commits adultery with Bathsheba, has her husband killed, and in the process loses God's favor and undoubtedly some of his own integrity of leadership. Soon his family is falling apart: **rape, incest, murder, suicide, betrayal, insurrection, war, and exile**. Within two generations the kingdom of Israel is split into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Do you think David would have gone back and made a different choice if he could have?

Look your sin full in the face this morning and do not look away. It was your anger, your greed, your lust that has harmed the ones you love. It was your abuse, your affair, that damaged your spouse, that wounded your children. It is your cruel words and actions that hurt your siblings, your friends. It is your disobedience of God that has kept others from knowing Him more. Do not minimize it this morning. Do not rationalize it, blame-shift, or explain it away. Feel the full weight of what you have done, the evil you have inflicted on others, the abuse, the neglect, the betrayal, the hurt, until it breaks your heart. This is more than confession; this is a sober-minded, gut-wrenching comprehension of what your sin has done to yourself, to others, to Jesus.

So now let's stop and ask the why question. Why would anyone do this? Why not just build yourself up about how great you are? Why not show yourself compassion – hey, nobody's perfect, you're trying the best that you can. Why not just focus on the positive and ignore the negative? Consider what Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 7:8-10 - Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it-- I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while--⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not

harmled in any way by us. ¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

According to Paul, there is a worldly sorrow that leads to death, but there is godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation and leaves no regret. Worldly sorrow is just despair over our brokenness and the brokenness of this world, but there is no solution. No forgiveness, no grace, no hope, no comfort. But Godly sorrow, a sorrow that comes from truly seeing the depth of our sin and the reality of what it has done to our lives, to the lives of others, and most importantly to God, **leads us to repent, to change, to resolve not to be different, to be the man or woman God has called us to be**, and ultimately to find God's comfort and salvation.

Romans 7:24-25 - *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Look at the effect that Jonah's sin has on others, and resolve to seek God, not just for your own soul, but for the sake of those around you.

4) **The saving discipline of God**

God sends a storm, but it is not the punishment of a vengeful God. It is the discipline of a loving Father. He will not let Jonah follow his sin to his and others' destruction. He will send a storm not to kill Jonah but to wake him up to the chaos he is causing through his sinful disobedience.

The truth is that it often takes a storm to wake us up to our need for God.

C.S. Lewis – *“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”*

Not all suffering is discipline. Some is just the product of living in a fallen world. But at times, our loving Father allows suffering in order to discipline us:

Hebrews 12:4-12 *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not **disciplined by his father?** ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes*

discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

The only way Jonah will be saved is to submit himself to the storm, to the Father's saving discipline. It will not kill him, despite his sin, because God is a gracious and compassionate God. Jonah's descent into the water points us to the supreme act of our gracious God:

Matthew 12:38-40 - *Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." ³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

God is greater than our sins. Jesus took the punishment. He was thrown into the sea of God's judgment to save us. Submit yourself to Him and find salvation, grace, and love.

Let me close with another portion of a prayer from the Valley of Vision:

Grant me never to lose sight of
 The exceeding sinfulness of sin
 The exceeding righteousness of salvation,
 The exceeding glory of Christ,
 The exceeding beauty of holiness,
 The exceeding wonder of grace.