

## 001 The Reluctant Missionary – Part 1

Jonah 1:1-17 (1-3)

January 1, 2023

This morning we begin a NEW YEAR and we have found it very fitting here to always begin our new year with what we call “Missions Month”.

It is good to remind ourselves that the church remains here on this earth for ONE MAIN PURPOSE and that is to share the gospel.

Every other mandate of the church can be better achieved in heaven.

- Personal holiness will be easier in heaven
- Worship will be better in heaven
- Singing, giving, praying, loving one another...
- All of that is easier and better in heaven and the church will do it much better there.

But you can't tell a lost person about Jesus in heaven.

It is your purpose for remaining on this earth.

We often times see people in pain and suffering or in depression and despair and the frequent question is, “Why would God leave me here?” “Why doesn't He just take me home?”

And I know the answer to that question.

- If you are lost it's because He is extending you time to repent.
- If you are saved it's because He is not finished using you for a testimony to His gospel and His kingdom.

This is why we are here.

We remind ourselves of THE GREAT COMMISSION:

Matthew 28:18-20 “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This is the mandate.

It's not simply the mandate for some, it is the mandate FOR ALL.

AND YET so many in our world call themselves followers of Jesus

And yet have no willingness to share the gospel with anyone else.

They are more concerned about temporal comforts and riches

Than they are about the command of Jesus.

Did you pick up on that quote on the mission video?

Leonard Ravenhill

“Today Christians spend more money on dog food than on missions.”

That is a pretty telling quote.

That quote forces some self-evaluation:

- Just how invested am I in this mandate Jesus gave us?
- How important is it to me that the gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed throughout the world?
- And perhaps more importantly: What part am I playing in this great battle?

We need to be reminded that we are here for a purpose

And that purpose is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So to that end this month we are going to study the BOOK OF JONAH.

I've called this study: "A Heart Out Of Rhythm"

Because that is ultimately what we have here.

- We have a man, a prophet of God no less.
- And his heart is not beating anywhere close to God's heart.
- He is totally and absolutely out of touch with who God would have him be.

He is a negative example of good missions.

And it just might be that he is a convicting example to us.

NOW, TO BEST UNDERSTAND THE BOOK OF JONAH

You first need to have at least a basic understanding of the heart of God.

To understand the point being made here

And to understand Jonah's great folly

You really need a basic idea of who God is.

So let's make a really basic and general observation.

We remember that God led His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

- They had crossed the Red Sea.
- They had arrived at Sinai.
- Moses had gone to receive the Law of God.
- And the people fell into idolatry.
- God threatened to abandon His people.
- Moses interceded and pleaded for the presence of God.

It was during this dialogue that Moses asked God to

"Show me Your glory!" (let me see You)

You'll remember that

- God told Moses that no man could look on Him and live
- But He would hide Moses and the cleft of the rock
- And allow Moses to see His back as He passed by.

And on the day that God would present Himself before Moses

God introduced Himself in this way.

Exodus 34:6-7 "Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

This is God's own self-assessment.

This is not what men say about God,

It is what God says about Himself.

And God announced that He Himself is:

"COMPASSIONATE"

It is (RA-KHOOM) in the Hebrew

And it is a word that is ONLY EVERY USED about God.

It can also be translated "merciful"

Nehemiah 9:17 "They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God

of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them.”

Psalms 78:38 “But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger And did not arouse all His wrath.”

Micah 7:18-19 “Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old.”

Psalms 103:8-10 “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

This is who God is.

- He is compassionate to weak and sinful and failing men.
- He is merciful toward sinners.

So many times humanity has offended God  
And yet God delights in forgiving sinners of their offense.

He has mercy and compassion.  
That is who He is.

Paul actually calls Him the “Father of mercies” to the Corinthians.

God also announced Himself as  
“GRACIOUS”

If compassion is the sentiment then grace is the result.  
Because God feels mercy and compassion for humanity  
He responds to them in grace.

He gives what humanity does not deserve.

In fact, in all those passages we just read where God is called “compassionate”  
You see “and gracious” immediately following.

The two cannot be separated.  
One is the cause the other is the effect.

He has mercy toward men and so He treats them better than they deserve

God also announced about Himself that He is  
“SLOW TO ANGER”

You’ve probably heard it as “long suffering” or even better as “patient”.

- He is not hot-headed or quick-tempered.
- He does not fly off the handle.
- He isn’t reactionary.

God takes much offense at the hands of sinners  
And yet remains willing to forgive even the greatest of offenses.

We think of what Peter writing about how:

1 Peter 3:20 “...the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark”

- In was in Genesis 6 when God announced His frustration with humanity for there wickedness, and decided to flood the earth.
- But it was another 100 years before God sent the flood as He patiently waited for Noah to build the ark, and to preach righteousness to his wicked generation.

And God also announced about Himself that He is  
 “ABOUNDING IN LOVINGKINDNESS AND TRUTH.”

It is interesting that the word “abounding” there is also translated “great”

As in:

Genesis 6:5 “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Where as man abounds in sin, God abounds in lovingkindness.

We think of what Paul wrote:

Romans 5:20 “...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,”

This “lovingkindness” is God’s CHECED  
 Or “loyal covenantal love”

And God says that He has it in gobs!

NOW, THIS IS HOW GOD DESCRIBES HIMSELF.

He is a merciful and gracious and patient and loyal God.

It is not His chief desire to destroy sinners,

It is His desire to save sinners.

Through Ezekiel He said it clearly:

Ezekiel 18:32 “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

And again:

Ezekiel 33:11 “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”

And hopefully you understand this about God.

He is compassionate and gracious and patient and loyal.

He delights in saving sinners.

As David Livingstone stated in that video:

“God had only one Son and He made that Son a missionary.”

THAT IS THE VERY HEART OF GOD.

We think of the famous words of Jesus.

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

- That is who God is.
- That is what God is about.
- He saves sinners.

He is self-defined as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.”

YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT FIRST

Because it will help you better understand the book of Jonah.

And namely you need to know this.

Jonah also knew that God was “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.”

In fact, Jonah hated that about God.

AFTER he preached to Nineveh and AFTER they repented

And AFTER God relented concerning the calamity He had declared, we read:

Jonah 4:1-2 “But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”

Jonah is a missionary who hates that God saves sinners.

Sounds backward doesn't it?

- That's like a day-care operator who hates kids
- Or a nursing home operator who hates the elderly.

Jonah is a missionary who hates sinners

And he hates the fact that God loves them.

You can't get anymore backward than that.

BUT LET ME ASK YOU THIS,

How did Jonah express his hatred for sinners?

How did Jonah express his disdain for the mercy of God?

- Did he attack sinners? No
- Did he curse at them? No

WHAT DID HE DO?

- He refused to share the truth of God with them.

And we have to come face to face with the reality that

We may have more in common with Jonah than we care to admit.

- What use is a missionary who hates sinners?
- But then again what use is a Christian who won't share the gospel?
- What use is a Christian who won't participate in the great commission?

YOU SEE THE PROBLEM.

God IS compassionate and gracious and patient and loyal

And we are commanded to be imitators of God.

But it is very easy for us to fall into a sinful rut

And actually be exactly the opposite of what God commanded.

THE BOOK OF JONAH TELLS THE STORY

About a prophet whose heart was out of rhythm with God's heart

And it is a story that allows each of us to evaluate ourselves.

Now that's the difficult part (necessary but difficult)

The beauty and glory and wonder of the book is that

Even though Jonah was a selfish and rebellious missionary

God still uses Jonah to save everyone around him.

## IT IS REMARKABLE!

One of the things that you must notice when you study the book of Jonah is who the catalyst of all things is, and it is certainly God.

You are constantly seeing that the book of Jonah is about God at work.

- (1:1) – “The word of the LORD came...”
- (1:4) – “The LORD hurled a great wind...”
- (1:17) – “And the LORD appointed a great fish...”
- (2:10) – “Then the LORD commanded the fish...”
- (3:10) – “Now the word of the LORD came...”
- (4:6) – “So the LORD God appointed a plant...”
- (4:7) – “But God appointed a worm...”
- (4:8) – “God appointed a scorching east wind...”

## GOD IS AT WORK.

- The sailors on Jonah’s boat get saved.
- The Ninevites get saved.
- And God uses Jonah as the vessel through which He saves them.

The tragedy is that God has to use Jonah  
As an unwilling vessel as opposed to a useful one.

God saves the sailors and the Ninevites in spite of Jonah.

## AND THAT IS A COMFORT AND A TRAGEDY.

It is COMFORTING to know that

- Even in my weakness & sinfulness that I can’t thwart the sovereign plan of God.
- God has sovereignly chosen whom He will save and no carnal missionary can stop that.
- That is a comfort.

But it is also a TRAGEDY to know that

- In my selfishness that God would have to save men in spite of me.

I would prefer to be useful.

I would prefer to be a blessing.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

I would much rather be that sanctified and useful vessel for God  
And not be a vessel that He must use in spite of my corruption.

## JONAH IS THE LATTER.

He is a terrible missionary example

But even bad examples can be useful to us

So for our missions month we are going to study this convicting book.

So let’s get started briefly this morning.

We can break this first chapter down into 6 points,

But we won’t get through all of them this morning.

## #1 DISOBEDIENCE

Jonah 1:1-3

The disobedience is obvious here in the text.  
God tells Jonah to do one thing and Jonah does exactly the opposite.

Perhaps we can dig a little and see what God was asking,  
And perhaps why Jonah was so unwilling.

We read:

(1-2) "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

FIRST we must always marvel at the intervention of God.  
"The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai..."

God SPOKE to Jonah!  
God INTERVENED in the lives of humanity!

We marvel at the realities of what is called GENERAL REVELATION

Psalms 19:1-6 "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat."

There you see there the natural elements of God's creation spoken of as missionaries of sorts.

- "The heavens" tell.
- The "expanse" declares.
- "Day to day" speaks.
- The "night" reveals.

But it is a SILENT sort of revelation  
David says, "There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard."

That is to say that they are speaking a message  
But it is not an audible one.

What do they reveal?

- Things like "the glory of God"
- Or "the work of His hands"
- Or "knowledge"

When David considered GENERAL REVELATION he wrote Psalms 8.

Psalms 8:3-8 "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas."

David looked at creation and was mesmerized  
By the HUGENESS of God and the INSIGNIFICANCE of man.

He looked into the starry night of the solar system and felt really small,  
Prompting him to ask God, "what is man that You consider him?"

- Why do You care about humans?
- But you clearly do because you have given them dominion on the earth to rule over everything else.

David learned of the majesty and glory and even mercy of God  
Simply by evaluating creation and man's place in that creation.

Paul speaks of the message of GENERAL REVELATION.

Romans 1:20 "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

- Paul says you can learn about God's "power" through creation.
- He says that it is clearly seen.

This is all GENERAL REVELATION and man should certainly search it out.  
Man is in fact accountable to learn of God through this general revelation.

But GENERAL REVELATION also has VERY DEFINITE LIMITATIONS.

- While you can learn something of the majesty and power and even grace of God through creation, the stars will not articulate the gospel. (The best a star ever did was point to the Christ child)
- While you can learn something of the power and strength and fury of God through creation, the heavens won't articulate the coming judgment.
- While your conscience (part of general revelation) can give you guilt and teach you a basic sense of right and wrong, even your conscience can be corrupted and won't perfectly align with the holiness of God.

And THE SIMPLE POINT is that

If all God ever gave us was general revelation

We might certainly be in awe of God, but we would never be saved.

- We would never know about God's holy standard.
- We would never know about the reality of judgment.
- We would never know of the Savior who came and fulfilled the Law and died in our place.

NO MAN IS EVER SAVED FROM ONLY HAVING GENERAL REVELATION.

And that is even important to know as we study missions.

This is why we must go to the far-reaching places of the globe

And take the gospel to the people.

- They have the heavens,
- They have the sun and moon,
- They see storms and the power of God.
- They have a conscience,

But if they don't hear the gospel

They cannot call on the name of the Lord and they cannot be saved.

Well that is one of the real remarkable things of the story here.

It was not God's plan to leave the Ninevites with only a general revelation.

God wanted to give SPECIFIC REVELATION to them.

And Specific Revelation is His word.

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

God had a special revelation for Nineveh.

- You have sinned
- I am offended
- Your judgment is on its way

They could not know that if someone did not tell them.



- God pierced the darkness.
- God broke the silence.
- God determined to warn the Ninevites of their impending doom.

That is always redemptive.

If God wanted them dead, all He had to do was nothing.

- God didn't want them dead.
- God wanted them to repent.
- God wanted them saved.

So God determined to send Jonah to explain their sin  
And to warn them of the coming judgment.

THAT IS GRACE RIGHT OFF THE BAT.

AND WE MIGHT ALSO POINT OUT

That grace was revealed through a message of judgment.

"go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it"

And that IS a gracious message.

- Our world thinks any mention of sin is to be judgmental or cruel.
- No, seeing a person headed for judgment and not warning them is cruel.
- This is grace.

WE MIGHT ALSO POINT OUT

That in order for Nineveh to hear this gracious message Jonah would have to "Arise" and "go to Nineveh"

There is RELATIVELY NO CHANCE

That the Ninevites are ever going to come find Jonah.

Missions and evangelism is far more

Than just hanging a "Welcome Sign" on the church building.

You've got to go to them.

Even in our day

- We understand that few nations have the resources or even the opportunity to come to America to hear the gospel,
- But Americans have the resources and the opportunity to go to them, and we have to go.

All of that is just a basic missionary understanding.

We have the specific revelation of God

And so we must take it to those who do not.

Romans 10:13-15 "for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'" How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

That is Missions 101

It really is that simple.

AND THAT IS WHAT WE SEE HERE

In the opening 2 verses of the book of Jonah.

And what we expect is an Isaiah moment.

We expect an "Here am I, send me!" from Jonah.

But that is not what we get.  
Instead we get DISOBEDIENCE

(3) “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

- The Lord commanded Jonah to go.
- Jonah said, “No”.

NOW FIRST allow me simply to remind you that  
Disobedience is NOT A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

John 14:15 “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

John 14:23 “Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

John 14:30-31 “I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.”

1 John 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

So just to make sure we are clear on this.  
Telling God “No” is not something a Christian does.

The command of God is to go and preach.  
This is a command for all believers.  
Jesus made it clear in His great commission.

John Piper said:  
“You have three choices in world missions: be a joyful, sacrificial goer, be a joyful, sacrificial sender, or be disobedient.”

Far too many Christians choose option 3.

Well that’s the one Jonah chose.  
God said to go to Nineveh.  
“But Jonah arose up to flee to Tarshish...”

And I’m sure you’ve heard that Tarshish  
Was in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh.

But do please notice something.  
Jonah is NOT fleeing from Nineveh.

“Jonah arose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

- And again at the end of the verse, “from the presence of the LORD.”
- And again later in verse 10, “the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD...”

Jonah isn’t running from Nineveh, he is running from God.

So let's MAKE SURE WE UNDERSTAND  
What a refusal to participate in missions really is.

It is NOT to run from your neighbor or coworker or some distant land.  
A refusal to participate in God's commission is to run from God.

You will find out later in chapter 4 that

- Jonah actually disdains God.
  - Jonah actually finds fault in God.
  - He thinks God is wrong to want to warn the Ninevites.
- 
- Jonah thinks God is too compassionate and too gracious and too patient and too loyal.
  - Jonah thinks God too quickly lets sinners off the hook.

Are you ready for this?  
JONAH HATES THE GOSPEL

So let's peel back the onion.  
Let's examine WHY God's people  
Don't participate in missions and evangelism.

For Jonah it is because

- He hates sinners
- He hates the gospel that offers them forgiveness;
- And so to some degree he even hates that God would be so willing to offer it.

At this point we are even forced to consider  
If Jonah is actually redeemed at all.

And I'll be honest – At least at this point in his life, I think I'd have to say "NO".  
(His tune will change a little in chapter 2)

But in chapter 1, Jonah appears to be a phony believer.

- Jonah was certainly an Israelite, but plenty of them were lost.
  - Jonah has certainly heard from God, but so did Balaam.
- 
- Jonah hates the lost.
  - Jonah hates the gospel.
  - Jonah is at the very least frustrated with God.
  - Jonah has determined not to do what God has said.
  - Jonah is fleeing from God.

Those are not Christian attitudes.

Jonah sounds more like a Pharisee from the New Testament than a disciple.

Luke 15:25-32 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

That actually sounds more like Jonah.

We're going to have to continue this next time,

- But this morning let's simply set the precedent that saving sinners is the very heart of God.

- And if our heart is not set to that same frequency then our heart, like Jonah's, is clearly out of rhythm.
- And a very real possibility here is that if you have no missionary desire at all then you are not saved.

But it is also true that even genuine believers can become misguided.

Luke 9:51-56 "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village."

Certainly James and John were saved.

- But on that day they looked nothing like Jesus.
- On that day they were following the wrong spirit.
- On that day they had totally missed the point.

And so we can say with certainty.

If I am not willing to obey God to join Him in His missionary efforts  
Then I am either lost or walking in terrible disobedience.

Either way, my heart is out of rhythm with God's heart  
And this must change.

So we'll start there.

And for each of us this becomes a time where we can repent and ask forgiveness and commit our lives to whatever God has in store for us.