

Series: **The Courageous Life** – week 5

CDOBC – beginning on 9/13/15

Today's Title: "**Courage to Accept God's Grace**"

October 11, 2015 ~ Jonah

OBJECTIVE: To help believers know the love God has for all people and our mission to share the Gospel with all people.

Opening prayer

This morning is week #5 in our series: The Courageous Life – and today's sermon is titled: "*Courage to Accept God's Grace*" – and we're going to look at the O.T. prophet Jonah.

The Assyrians were evil people who were vicious in battle and known for their extreme cruelty toward their enemies. They would put people up and peel their skin off as people were still alive. They would often impale their victims and leave them as displays of their power and might.

The Assyrians were enemies of Israel – and as Assyrian power grew, the Jewish people became more convinced of Assyrian evil. No doubt many Jewish prayers were asking God to defeat and judge the Assyrian kingdom.

During this time in history (8th century), there were many prophets who proclaimed God's Word to the Jewish people. Jonah was one of these prophets – and some of his contemporaries were Amos, Isaiah, Hosea and Nahum.

Jonah grew up in a small town which was located north of Nazareth in Galilee (Gath Hepher – 2 Kings 14:25). He was a prophet

of the one, true God, but he had a major problem. Jonah had tremendous hatred in his heart. Jonah believed certain people were more deserving of God's love, grace and forgiveness than others.

When Jonah looked at his fellow-Israelites, he was convinced of their goodness...convinced that they deserved God's special favor.

But when Jonah thought of the Assyrian people, he was filled with hate because of their blatant and extreme evil.

The book of Jonah is only 48 verses long – 4 short chapters – and it's a revealing look at hatred in the human heart, hatred that is justified on the grounds of religion and morality. At the same time, the book of Jonah is a revealing look at the love and compassion of God toward all people.

The book of Jonah shows us the great concern of God for all people – it shows us how much He wants all people to hear the Gospel and to have the opportunity to repent.

The book of Jonah demonstrates something that we don't talk about very much in the church:

- Some Christians hate people/group who they view as an enemy / problem.
- Some Christians want this people/group to go to hell.

- Some Christians don't want certain people/group to hear the Gospel –they don't want to share God's grace – the Gospel with them.

This is the intent of today's message – you must have "*Courage to Accept God's Grace*" for all people – even those who are actively rejecting God and persecuting you!

The book of Jonah begins with God sending him on a very unusual mission. You see, every other prophet of God was given the Word of the Lord – a message from God to give to the Jewish people – to the nation of Israel. But God had a very different message for Jonah – God sent him to a foreign nation – but not just any foreign nation – the worst nation on the face of the earth in his day – the nation of Assyria – and to their capital city – the city of Nineveh.

God's 1st call to Jonah – he does the opposite 1:1-3

Jonah 1:1-3

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."

Nineveh was northeast of his home in Galilee – about 400-500 miles.

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."

Instead of heading northeast, he first heads SW toward the port of Joppa.

Last summer, we were in Joppa – located just south of Tel Aviv, Israel – on the Mediterranean coast.

Once in Joppa, he boards a ship that is headed west – about 2,700 miles west – to Tarshish which was located in what we know as modern-day Spain! He flat-out did the opposite of what God told him to do! Why? Why would he do the opposite of what God told him? We’ll see the answer to that later.

Jonah heads the opposite way in an attempt to run away from God and to avoid the clear mission God gave him. However, you can’t run from God – we often try...but we can’t run away from an omnipresent God.

The Psalmist writes: (139:7-8)

“Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.”

Jonah tries...but he can’t run away from God’s presence – and through some miraculous events, which are recorded in chapter 2, God gets his attention and Jonah has some quiet time to reflect on his choices. Then, in chapter 3, we read about:

God’s 2nd call to Jonah – he obeys 3:1-4

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city -- a visit required three days.

4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

I love vs. 1 – "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time..."

Grace is all over vs. 1!!!!

We serve a God of 2nd chances...3rd chances...4th chances...and some of us have lost count of how many chances God has given us – and continues to give us. The truth is...we all need more chances than we can count.

Jonah learns a lesson – although not the full lesson yet. In fact, we're not sure if he ever learns the lesson which the book of Jonah teaches us. It is the only book in the Bible that ends with a question!

After running from God and in the opposite direction of the mission God had given him, this time, he went to Nineveh – and he proclaimed the message God had given him:

"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

As a preacher, I'm not a big fan of vs. 4...because it seems to indicate Jonah's sermon was about 1 sentence long – and the result is possibly the greatest revival in the entire O.T.! My sermons are certainly not 1 sentence long...but I digress.

Jonah obeys God – and preaches a sermon of judgment...and God uses his message to touch the hearts and minds of an entire city!

Jonah preaches and Nineveh repents! 3:5-10

“The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

7 Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.’

10 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.”

All God wanted Jonah to do is ‘sow the seed’ – to proclaim the Word of God.

God calls each of us to do the same thing with our *Circle* – our family, friends, neighbors and co-workers – He wants us to share the Gospel with the people in our life – to invite them to church – tell them you are praying for them as they endure a difficult time in life. When we do this...God will do His work.

Jonah preached a message of impending judgment – and the entire city repents!

Then we see in chapter 4:

Jonah is angry because of God's grace 4:1-3

Jonah 4:1-3

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Here is the reason Jonah tried to run away from God in chapter 1 – He didn't want the Assyrian people to escape God's wrath and judgment!

He wanted them to be punished – to be condemned to Hell!

Jonah 4:1-3 (The Message)

Jonah was furious. He lost his temper.

2 He yelled at God, "God! I knew it - when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!

3 So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!"

I believe Jonah's heart lives in the heart of many Christians who are angry and afraid of the changing world around them – especially the changes in our nation.

As the culture has moved further and further away from God – as the culture has rejected the commands of God and is becoming more intolerant of Christians – there are a number of Christians who have responded not with love, compassion or with the Gospel – but with anger, hatred and tremendous bitterness toward those they see as the enemy. They have the heart of Jonah.

Let me ask you 3 questions that I believe are at the core of the book of Jonah.

Are you offended by God's grace? 3:10-4:4

God sees what the people of Nineveh did...how they repented from their evil ways, and He withholds His judgment of them.

This angers Jonah – the Hebrew word has the idea of “burning” – He was red hot with anger...seething over the repentance of the city and God's grace toward them.

Do you understand the amazing nature of God's grace?

Do you realize that you and I are no more deserving of God's grace than any other person you can think of?

Think of the worst person you know – maybe someone you actively hate – maybe it's someone in your life – maybe it's someone you see on the news – keep the mental image of that person in your mind – and understand that God loves them – He became flesh/incarnate so He could die for their sins. In addition, God has given us the mission of 'going' to them and sharing the Gospel with them – to make them a "disciple" of Jesus.

Instead of hating them – and praying for God's wrath and judgment on them – pray for their salvation – pray they would have ears to hear and eyes to see the truth and grace of Christ.

"God dispenses gifts, not wages. None of us gets paid according to merit, for none of us comes close to satisfying God's requirements for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell... In the bottom line realm of ungrace, some workers deserve more than others; in the realm of grace the word 'deserve' does not even apply."

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Phillip Yancy, p. 62)

God's grace is offensive if you believe your standing with God can be earned or deserved.

If you look at someone who has greater amounts or years of sin than you do – and in your heart you think God looks upon you with more favor – that you are 'ahead' of them in a spiritual hierarchy – then you don't understand God's grace – you're caught in a theological works mentality.

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 -- not by works, so that no one can boast.”

I believe grace is one of the reasons why God hates the sin of pride so much – because pride gets in the way of grace – and pride puts itself in front of grace – pride believes it's the reason grace is given!

Are you *focused* on your own *comforts*? 4:6-9

In vs. 6 of chapter 4, it says:

“Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and **Jonah was very happy** about the vine.”

The only time we are told Jonah was happy, was when he was more comfortable.

The only time Jonah was happy was when something good happened to him / for him.

The most amazing thing just happened – the entire city of Nineveh repented...

Jonah had survived a fierce storm on a ship...

Jonah had been rescued as God sent a large fish to save Jonah...

When the great fish vomited Jonah onto the beach, it doesn't say he was happy! If there was a time in the book for Jonah to be happy...that would be it!

Jonah was not only prideful about his standing with God – he was also selfish.

I believe Jonah looked at his faith as something for himself.

I believe Jonah viewed his faith as something God did for his benefit.

I believe Jonah viewed God's love and grace as something he could enjoy.

Of course the salvation you have in Christ is for you...

Your salvation is something God has done for your benefit...

The love and grace of God for you is a source of great joy...

But your faith – your salvation is not only for you – it's so you can share it with others!

Eph. 2:10

“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God blesses us so we can be a blessing!

Are you concerned about others? 4:10-11

Let's look at some examples of Jesus. If anyone had the right to look upon sinners with disgust, it was Jesus – who was holy – sinless.

But we see a much different picture of Jesus in the Bible than a harsh and judgmental God.

Mark 6:34

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

When a woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus and all the religious people wanted to stone her for her sin, Jesus was gracious toward her, and said to the angry crowd: “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

When Jesus met a slimy, swindling, embezzling, back-stabbing, tax collecting little man named Zacchaeus, instead of rebuking him, Jesus said *‘Let's have dinner together!’*, and Zacchaeus' life was transformed by the grace of God.

As Jesus hung on the cross, one of the thieves hurled insults at Him, but the other thief realized

Jesus was innocent – and that He was the Messiah. Here was a convicted and condemned criminal – yet Jesus tells Him “...today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

“Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.”

(What’s So Amazing About Grace, by Phillip Yancy, p. 71)

John 3:17

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

1 Timothy 2:3b-4

“...God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Apply it...

Celebrate God’s grace toward others.

Share God’s grace with others.

Accept God’s grace for yourself.

Psalm 103:12

“...as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”