

MBC - 1/27/2019 - Pastor Doug Thompson
 Jonah: A Story of God's Relentless Grace
 #2: "Jonah Meets His Match"
 Jonah 1:4-16

Let's get right to our study this morning. Let's look at the first chapter together:

- Jonah 1 ¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." ³But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. ⁴But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." ⁷And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" ⁹And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. ¹¹Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹²He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." ¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. ¹⁷And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

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Intro: "The Story of Jonah:" Produced, written, and directed by Jehovah God.

Most of you know how Bible stories go:

- Noah preached to his wicked neighbors for 120 years that the judgment of God was coming. They didn't listen, judgment came in a flood.
- God had His fill of Sodom and Gomorrah's sins, He sent in Lot to rescue his family, even some of them didn't listen, judgment came in fire and brimstone.
- God sent His prophets to Israel and Judah to warn His people to repent of their idolatry. They didn't repent, judgment came in the form of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

So following the biblical pattern, how would we write the story of Jonah?

God commands Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh, Jonah immediately obeys—after all, he’s a Hebrew prophet. The wicked Ninevites don’t listen, God destroys the city and all the people in judgment. Jonah is tired from preaching, schedules a vacation cruise to Tarshish. Along the way a storm comes, Jonah witnesses to the pagan sailors, they don’t listen, God judges the sailors, they all fall overboard and a whale swallows *them* up. And this time the whale doesn’t vomit. Jonah goes on with his well-deserved vacation, and only gets a slight sunburn.

Moral of story: God blesses good people and judges bad people.

But beloved, God wrote, directed, and produced the story of Jonah, and what actually happens in this story is the opposite: God’s own prophet - the guy in the white hat - continually disobeys his God. He preaches repentance grudgingly, through gritted teeth, and *yet*, godless, idolatrous Nineveh actually repents and finds mercy from God - at a time when God’s own nation of Israel was far from Him. Along the way, Jonah is God’s instrument for saving some pagan sailors while he is running from God’s command to preach to pagans.

- And we would think that at least the story would end with Jonah seeing the light, and maybe starting a Fundamentals of the Faith Bible study in Nineveh, along with the pagan sailors and their wives. But no: the story ends with Jonah, the world’s worst missionary, still unrepentant and pouting over the fact that God saved sinners. And *then* we would think that at least God would give Jonah some sort of spiritual spanking - strike him with leprosy or hemorrhoids or something, but God is still showing disobedient Jonah compassion right to the end of this story.

Moral of the story? Sovereign grace triumphs over human defiance every time.

And God *delights* to save the most unlikely people, not just good people, but very bad people, and not just white people in North America, but a multitude from every nation, tribe, and tongue on this globe. *And He will have His way!* Rom 9:15,16 . . . *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. Aren’t you glad that it depends upon God and not us? And aren’t you glad that He is merciful and abounding in lovingkindness?

Let me say this: The story of Jonah is not a parable, it’s *history*. We know this because the Lord Jesus compared His own resurrection with Jonah’s 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of that creature - both really happened. But it’s also a literary masterpiece: it reads like a play because God wrote the script, and directed it as well. You can practically see His invisible hand moving people and props so that everything happens exactly the way He wants.

And do you notice that *everything* in this story does the will of God, from wind to whales to worms?

What about Jonah? Did he do God’s will?

- Warren Wiersbe was a great preacher and Bible teacher. He said: “God could control the wind and the waves in ch.1, the fish in ch.2, the gourd, worm, and wind in ch.4, but He could not control Jonah without the prophet’s surrender.”

What? “Warren, my man, you’re WRONG!” God could and did control Jonah, with or without his surrender, right? Jonah played his part exactly the way God wanted it played! When it

served God's purposes for Jonah to obey, he obeyed, and when it served God's purposes for Jonah to disobey, even Jonah's disobedience served God's sovereign purposes in this story!

- The story of Jonah turns our thinking upside down, doesn't it? Maybe you've heard people say, "Oh, God can only use Christians whose lives are holy. He needs a clean vessel." Well Jonah demolishes that theory. In ch.3 that God used disobedient Jonah, the world's worst missionary, to bring about the greatest revival in human history!

We don't control God, He controls us, and if He so wills, He will use us in spite of our sins. He used sinful Babylon and Assyria to punish His people, then He turned around and punished Babylon and Assyria for what they had done.

- He spoke His word through the pagan prophet Balaam - He even spoke through Balaam's donkey! I have known people who were led to Christ by people who turned out to be unbelievers themselves!

The big story behind the story of Jonah is that our God is in the heavens, and He does whatever He pleases, and our response should be to fall on our knees and worship such a massive, almighty - and *compassionate* God. Because remember, God's sovereign purpose in this story is to *rescue* sinful pagans and sinful prophets.

So let's pick up the story in v.4:

I. Vv.4-6: "But Jonah . . . *but the Lord.*"

So God gives Jonah the command to go preach to his enemies. V.3 begins, "*But Jonah . . .*" He's not going to Nineveh, he's going 2,000 miles in the opposite direction to Tarshish - he thinks. V.4 begins "*But the Lord . . .*" Can you *really* run away from God? Can you *really* hide your actions, or even your thoughts from Him? David said,

- Psa 139:2-4 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

Jonah had met his match, and it wasn't a big fish, it was God! God's sovereignty trumps human rebellion every time. Aren't you glad? My friends, the only way any sinner *ever* receives salvation and eternal life is by God overruling his or her rebellion, right? It reminds me of what we read in Ephesians 2:

- Eph 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins - like Jonah, running away from God.
- Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy . . . saved us out of rebellion by His loving grace.

Amazing.

So Jonah is doing his best to run from God, V.4: "*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.*" That's violent language. It's the same Heb. word used when Saul hurled a javelin to pin David to the wall! Jonah was in God's crosshairs - a red laser dot was on his chest! He might have booked this cruise on Expedia, but God *cancelled* it.

- V.5, The sailors on this ship were terrified. They cried out to their pagan gods, and threw their cargo into the sea - this was their profit for this trip, so they really thought that they were going to die.

And where was Jonah? In the bottom of the ship - fast asleep! You think, "How could he sleep?"

- I think that he was 'fleeing' again. He wanted to escape from his thoughts about what he was doing. He was in a rebellious stupor. Ever been there?

The Captain comes and wakes him up - and he uses exactly the last words Jonah had heard from God - look at v.6: "*Arise and call out to your God!*" That's what God had told him to do in Nineveh! And Jonah got this: God was using a pagan sea captain to preach to him. And this pagan is pleading with the prophet to pray to his God to save them - which is exactly what Jonah was running away from doing!

**Jonah must have thought, "I didn't get away from God at all!"*

And notice unbelievers are praying, but Jonah is not - God's prophet. So the pagans are acting like believers and the believer is acting like a pagan! Ever seen that? That's convicting, isn't it?—

- And this is a recurring theme in the Scriptures: God often disciplines or shames His people by using unbelievers, or outsiders, or Gentiles to convict them. Romans 11 says that God is doing that right now by calling Gentiles into the church to provoke the Jews to jealousy.

II. Vv. 7-10: Jonah's awful witness.

- Jon 1:7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Now these guys are just being who they are, superstitious pagans, hoping that their gods will point them to the one who had sinned against his god. They want to know what god they're dealing with.

But Proverbs says that the lot is in the lap of the Lord - so God decides to sovereignly work through their superstition, and it lands on Jonah. And they ask him what's up:

- Jon 1:9-10 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

These sailors worshiped little provincial deities: the god of the trees, the god of the seas, the god of the clouds - **they're like Roman Catholics praying to St. Christopher or St. Jude and their saints**, but Jonah says, "My God is the God of all Gods: heaven, sea, and dry land!" And they look around, and the heavens and the sea are in an uproar - they can't even see the land anymore, and they realize that Jonah's God really is *the* God of all Gods, and they were "*exceedingly afraid.*" They said to Jonah, "*What is this that you have done!*" And this is amazing: God had these sailors use exactly the same Hebrew words that God said to Eve in the garden after her sin. Jonah was convicted again - by unbelievers.

- And Jonah wasn't giving some brave confession of faith to these men. He was just saying, "You have your gods, I have mine." And he had already told them that he was running from his God. He is still defiant. I mean, talk about an open door to share the truth about the true God - they practically asked him to witness to them, and he didn't.

But don't miss this: the more Jonah defied the true God, the more these unbelievers feared the true God.

III. Vv. 11-16: Prophet overboard.

- Jon 1:11-12 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."

They are still operating on their superstitions: "bad things happen to bad people."

That's not what was happening here: God wasn't throwing a tantrum because he was angry at Jonah, He was working out His plan to save 1000's of people in Nineveh who all would have perished for eternity apart from what He was doing in this storm.

- Question: Why did Jonah tell the men to throw him into the sea? Was he suicidal due to remorse? Or did he just have a really big heart and wanted to sacrifice himself to save others? From what we read, he wasn't remorseful, and he didn't care a thing about other people.

We find the reason why in 4:3; "*it's better for me to die than to live,*" and in 4:9, "I'm angry, angry enough to die!" Jonah would rather die than obey God and see Assyrians saved. He was still in defiance against God. That's why he told them to throw him overboard. He would rather die than see God show mercy to people he hated. Wow. That is hard-hearted.

*Before we leave this section, I want you to notice a Gospel note here: God revealed to these sailors one way that they could be saved: *one man would lay down his life so that they could live!* And at this point, they resisted - they would rather trust in their own human efforts to save them than trust in the sacrifice of one man . . . that's all of us until God changes our hearts, right? We want to do something, have some part in saving ourselves.

And the most amazing thing in this chapter is how God did change the hearts of these men as they came to end of their own strength—

IV. Vv. 13-16: True believers.

- Jon 1:13-16 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. (Doesn't this sound like a line out of the Gospels?) Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

Now these sailors were in a tough spot: they believed that Jonah was a prophet of the true God who had caused this perfect storm, and he just told them to throw him into the sea. They feared doing what Jonah said, and they feared not doing what he said.

They knew almost nothing about the true God, but look at their prayer in v.14:

They know that God is just, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life,” and they also know that He is compassionate, “lay not on us innocent blood.” And they know that He is sovereign over everything: “*You O Lord have done as it pleased You!*” Amazing!

- “Lord, *You* are Lord over the wind and the waves, and *You* allowed us to be in the same ship as Your prophet. *You* put us in this hard situation, and now we put ourselves in *Your* sovereign, merciful hands!”

God had opened the eyes and hearts of these men and given them the gift of faith. This was the prayer of men who had become true believers - and Calvinists to boot.

- Jon 1:15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

You know that if you are at the ocean or even a lake during a storm, when the winds stop, the waves continue. But God stopped the winds and the waves immediately, supernaturally. And they went from being dead men to being rescued in a moment. The danger was over, and notice what it says next—

- Jon 1:16 *Then* the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

So this wasn’t the fear of being in danger - the danger was over. This was the trembling awe of knowing that they had just experienced the presence of God who had absolute power to cause a storm, hear and answer their prayers, and cause that storm to cease in a second. This is godly fear that reverences God and takes Him with utter seriousness. It is the fear that comes from faith, from believing God and His Word. And it is the fear of God that led these men to worship this awesome God.

The Bible says a lot about this kind of fear, doesn’t it? It says that it is the beginning of wisdom. It says that it casts out all other fear, because it acknowledges that God is God over all creation, all circumstances, over Satan and his demons. To fear God in this way gives peace in any situation.

- Remember what Jesus told His disciples: He said they shouldn’t fear men who can only kill the body, but they should fear God who has authority over body and soul. He wasn’t saying, “If you think men are scary, God is much scarier!” No, He was saying, “If you belong to the God who has this authority over the bodies and souls of even the worst of men, you have nothing to fear. If this God is for you, who can be against you?”

Oh my brothers and sisters, when you stand in trembling awe of God, you won’t fear any person, or any circumstance.

- I have no desire to watch horror movies, or slice & dice movies - partly because I believe all the gore and carnage is dishonoring the image of God in man. But also because, they just don’t scare me. Psychos with hockey masks and chains saws? The end of the world coming through tidal waves, or aliens? Zombies? Nuthin’. I’m just not scared of any of that stuff because I’m so sure that my God is on His throne in heaven, and He can kick their behinds. I know how the story ends, and no one can successfully defy the sovereign purpose of my God.

David had this kind of fear of God that takes away all other fear: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Can you say this?

*No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck, me from His hand;
'til He appears, or calls me home, here in the power of Christ, I'll stand!*

So these men became believers in the true God *in spite of* Jonah, and we know that because of the way they worshipped God—

- Now we've all heard of foxhole conversions: A soldier is in the heat of battle and promises God that if He will save his skin, he'll get religion, he promises to never cuss again. And as soon as the battle is over, so are the promises. People come and go from church for the same reason—the trouble has passed, no more need for God.

But these men worshiped God *after* the danger was past, when they were safe. The word for 'sacrifice' is the same Hebrew word used of the animal sacrifices of the Jews. And for these guys to take one of their precious animals they brought for food and sacrifice it to the true God was a big deal.

So understand what we read in this first chapter: Jonah is running away from God because he hates the idea of pagans receiving God's mercy, and in the process of his running away, God uses him to be the instrument of salvation in the lives of - pagans. Match goes to God. And the story isn't over yet. But let's close this morning with—

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V. Two lessons.

A.) *Unbelievers bear the image of God too.*

You just can't get around the fact that in this story, unbelievers behave better than a prophet of God. Twice in this book Jonah finds himself in an encounter with people who are racially and religiously different than him - first the sailors, then the Ninevites - and both times, the pagans act better than he does. Why would God write the story like this?

First, to humble His own people. Christians can get too big for their britches (as my mom used to say), and we think we are better than other people. By God's grace, and His indwelling Holy Spirit, we should *act* better than those who don't know Christ. But the truth is that often: unbelievers at their best are far better than Christians at their worst.

- The world *should* see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16) - Do they? We should be humbled when unbelievers outshine and out-serve believers.

Have you ever thought about Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan? Jesus was teaching what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, and the example He used was an unbeliever - a Samaritan - *not one of God's people!* Wow. That deserves some lunchtime conversation. God's people should hang their heads and examine their hearts when they read that story.

But the second reason God did this was to teach us that every unbeliever also bears His image - just as much as any Christian. And because of that - listen - *unbelievers can also reflect God.* We need to let that sink in. It's true. The theological term for this is “common grace:” this isn't saving grace, but it refers to the gifts that God gives all image-bearers: creativity, intellectual gifts, gifts of governing, even goodness and compassion. And God's children are the recipients of these gifts - Amen?

- And sometimes God uses His common grace in unbelievers to shame believers who have His special saving grace. Think about this: The sailors were concerned for everyone in the boat, including Jonah. Jonah was only concerned with himself. The sailors prayed to their gods, and were open to praying to Jonah's God - Jonah didn't pray to any god for anyone.

Jonah was rebuked by that pagan captain for not caring about others! Why wasn't he using his faith in God for the good of the others? Only Jonah could truly pray to the true God who would hear - and he wasn't doing it!

*All of us, believers and unbelievers, are "in the same boat" in this world - but do God's people care about everyone in the boat? We are co-humans, co-image-bearers with *all* people, and as God's people, we should seek the good of all people, and the good of our own nation - unbelievers don't have God's ear, but we do!

And don't forget that we all start out as unbelievers! But it turned out that those pagan sailors were the elect of God just as much as Jonah was - huh. They will be in heaven with hopefully all of you and me.

We're going to see this as we move through this little book: ***God is very concerned that we treat people of different races and different faiths - as image-bearers, not enemies.***

2.) We can't escape from God's sovereign will, but we should respond to it with trust and worship.

- Mar 4:35-38 On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to His Disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Now the Disciples knew the story of Jonah. They might have even had it memorized, and they realized that they were in the same kind of storm trying to wake up the one Person who is sleeping through it! No coincidence! And God stopped the storm again—

- Mar 4:39-41 And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Who is He? He is Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the same One who stopped the storm in the story of Jonah, He is the sovereign King over all creation, and over you and me. The Bible calls Him one greater than Jonah, and as Jonah went into the belly of that fish for 3 days, Jesus was crucified and dead for 3 days before He rose from the dead. One man was thrown into the storm of God's wrath so that you can be saved if you will trust Him and worship Him as God's Son. Do you trust in Jesus Christ?