

Into the Storm
Jonah 1: 1-17

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

January 3, AD 2021
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Mark Twain said that “The two most important days in your life are the day that you were born, and the day that you find out why.”

Why were you and I born?

I believe that this question has less to do with what you do and more to do with who you are.

What is it that drives you?
Why do you do what you do?

I used to think that this question was one that was simple. I used to think that once I got it I would have it forever. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for us, as it was not the reality for many great characters of the Bible.

For example: Adam knew he was made for fellowship with God. But after he ate the forbidden fruit, hid from God in the bushes of the Garden of Eden. Moses knew God had called him to lead the people out of slavery. But he tried to get out of his call by suggesting his brother was a better leader. And, as we will see in our Scripture this morning, the successful prophet Jonah heard God tell him to go tell the pagan Ninevites to repent of their sin. But Jonah ran in the opposite direction from where God told him to go.

The reality is that we are prone to run from the real reasons why we were born. This morning we are going to study why Jonah did this, how Jonah did this, and what Gods response was to him doing this, with the hopes to better understand our God and ourselves.

Before we dive into this incredible story, let us pray that we will hear God’s words over Noah’s this morning, and that he will guide us to find deep truths about who he is and who are.

Pray

Read Jonah chapter one.

To better understand the question that I believe Jonah chapter one is urging us to ask ourselves, *why were you born?* I have broken up the story into three episodes.

The episodes are:

1. The boat of sin
2. The storm of grace
3. The great fish of love

The boat of sin

Jonah would have been considered a Godly man who had his life together. He was the well-respected advisor to the King of Israel. He was an upright man who followed Gods laws very well, but he was so incredibly far from God and as a result far from who he was made to be.

This speaks to one of the most common problems in the church I believe. We often think that because we are a “good person” or “not as bad as them” we have value. We find our identity in what we have done and are doing in our lives and when we do this, we could not be further from God.

Although Jonah was an upright man, he was just as lost as the Ninevites because he answered the question, *why were you born?* The same way that they did.

Although the Ninevites answered this question in a more obviously wrong way through open lust, violence, and debauchery. Jonah was just as wrong, but it was hidden.

Jonah answered the question *Why were you born?* The same way they did, to please himself, to serve himself, and even to worship himself.

The person in church who seems to have it all together but does not see their need for a savior is just as lost as the person sitting in Angola on death row, maybe even more so.

Jonah was prideful and hateful and just because he was good at hiding it does not mean he was any closer to God.

Jonah's answer to the question *why he was born?* Was to love himself, please himself, and serve himself, but God gave him a new answer.

When God Called Jonah to Nineveh he was calling Jonah to redefine the way he answered the question *why was I born?* God wanted Jonah to love his enemies, as he does, Jonah being one of them, but this meant dying to the pride, comfort, and false security that Jonah had built his life on. This meant humility, surrender, and trust and Jonah did not have any of them, so he got on a boat to Tarshish and ran from the true reason he was born which was to live for the eternal rather than the temporary.

Do you ever find yourself trying to prove that you are valuable to God and to yourself?

Do you ever look down on others saying things like, "Wow they are so lost" Or "I would never do that"

What boats do you use to run from God? What are the things that you use to prove your value to God and to yourself?

I ask you again friends, *Why were you born?*

Is it to make a lot of money?

Is it to be loved by those around you?

Is it to raise good children?

Is it to be respected?

Is it to be comfortable?

Is it to have a family?

Is it to be beautiful?

Is it to make someone else proud?

What quiets that voice in your head that says, "You're not good enough."

What is that thing that if only you had, you feel you would be content?

We are often just like Jonah and just like the Ninevites. We constantly answer the question *why were we born?* the wrong way, and when God calls us to something greater, we often run. We use the incredible blessings and gifts he has given us to build boats and flee far from him.

You weren't born to make a lot of money!
You weren't born to have everything together!
You weren't born to be beautiful!
You were not born to be a father or mother or son or daughter!
You weren't born to make someone proud!
You weren't born to be loved or excepted or comfortable!

Although these are incredible gifts, they cannot be how you answer the question *why you were born?!* You were born for so much more than yourself, and when we don't believe that... storms come.

Which leads me to my next point,

The storm of grace

Francis Thompson referred to God as the hound of heaven. I love this expression because it reveals a deep truth about who God is and who we are. We are runners and he is a chaser. We are foxes on the run, but by his grace we will never get out of his scent no matter how far or how many times we run from him.

This is revealed in verses 4-5.

“But the Lord Hurlled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his God. And they hurlled 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 laid down and was fast asleep.”

When we run from God, no matter the boat we use, we deny the essence of who we are and who he is. He is a God who we can trust, and when we fully trust him with our lives, we go where we were made to go, and we become who we were made to be.

When we deny him, he allows our ships to break apart so that we can begin to realize that we were made for much more than we think.

The beauty of the storm that God sends to Jonah is that it was to save him not to sink him. The only way that Jonah would have sunk is if he kept running. God loves us too much to allow us to live for the temporary when we were made for the eternal.

I want to acknowledge that it is easy for us to peer into Jonah's story from afar and look down on him amidst his storm. Why did he go to sleep in the middle of it? Why doesn't Jonah understand that it is by God's grace that he isn't allowing him to get to Tarshish?

It is easy for us to look at others and Jonah in the middle of their crisis and say things like:

Just trust God.

Just don't give up.

Just remember that God is allowing this because he loves you.

We act like it is so simple for everyone else but ourselves. We say just toughen up, just pray more, just put God first, but how do we react in our storms?

What do we do when the boat that we have built our life on begins to crack apart amidst the storm of God's grace?

What do you do when your hope is crushed?

When your family begins to fall apart.

When you don't get the job.

When you lose your beauty.

When you lose your strength.

When the one thing that you thought you needed most is gone.

If you are anything like me or Jonah, you may just go to sleep amidst the storm. You may just keep sailing to the bottom of the sea. You may decide to never hope again or try again or care again. You may just hop on the next best boat. But he will never stop chasing you and sending storms because he wants you to know that you are valuable and important not because of what you have, but because of who you are in him.

Even though Jonah slept amidst the storm it was not the end of his story, and if you are asleep, or running, or sinking, it is not the end of yours. You are actually closer to seeing your true purpose when you feel like you have lost the things that gave it to you.

Which brings us to my last point of Jonah chapter one.

The great fish of love

After Jonah is awoken by the captain and they draw lots to see who's fault the storm was, something incredible happens. Jonah transitions from the antagonist to the protagonist. Jonah begins to repent, and the way he does this is so important for us to understand.

The sailors ask Jonah who he is, and his response shows us the true path to redemption.

Verses 8-9 "Tell us on who's 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?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Jonah is confronted once again with that daunting question... Why were you born? Who are you? Only this time his response is different and if it weren't for him running in sin and seeing god chase him in grace, it wouldn't have changed.

Jonah gets it for the first time, and it is so incredible! He says, "I am a Hebrew, And I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Through looking upward instead of inward He feared Gods power instead of losing his. In seeing who God was, he finally began to see who he was.

Jonah is teaching us to do the opposite of what we think we need to do when our ship is sinking. Stop looking at the ship and ourselves and start looking at God. I think Jonah went to sleep because he felt overwhelmed and his ability to fix the ship was no match for the storm, which it wasn't. When we stop looking at our ability to solve our problems and focus on the power of God instead of the power of our sin, we can then wake up.

Through the boat, and the storm, and the capitaine, Jonah finally wakes up and sees that who he is and what he has doesn't matter as long as he isn't running from God anymore. He realizes that what he has been looking for can only be found in submitting to God. He realizes that building his life on anything but God will only bring death to him and those around him.

When we look to the greatness of God, our perspective changes and our problems become small in comparison to his glory. It is only then that we are able to be healed and start running towards him instead of further away. It is only then that

we are able to truly answer the question: Why were you born? It is only then that we become who we were made to be.

God is trustworthy, and we were made to trust him. By focusing on the character of God, Jonah was able to do the only thing that would get him through the storm, the hardest thing that we are all called to do.

Jonah allowed himself to be thrown into the raging sea. Jonah fully gave his life to God no matter what the consequences were. Jonah died to himself and his pride and his comfort. His action screamed whatever you have Lord, may it be done!

Sometimes when we find ourselves in a storm, we don't know what to do. We feel like we have tried everything and just want to numb out the storm with sleep or whatever else we have. We pretend like it is not there because we feel so overwhelmed by it. What Jonah is teaching us here is that when we find ourselves here, buried under the consequences of our sin we should look to him instead of ourselves and simply do the next best thing. Jonah allowed himself to be thrown into the sea to save the sailors. He didn't figure out all of his problems and he sure didn't fix them all, but he looked to God and did the next best thing, and God blessed that.

Imagine with me that it is you flying through the salty air into the violent waves. Imagine expecting the weight of your sin to crash down on you crushing your life away with an angry vengeance. Imagine letting go of everything but trust in your creator to do what he wills with you even if it means a violent death. Imagine throwing yourself into his justice and finding nothing but love.

Jonah did not drown when he hit the water, and neither will you. He did not find death beneath the waves, he found life. Just as God sent the storm to show Jonah his glory and justice, he sent the Great fish to show him his compassion and love.

Conclusion

Mathew 12: 39-40

“But he answered them, an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah. 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.”

Jesus says that the one sign he will give us is the sign of Jonah.

This means that:

When we are scared to let go

When we feel like we can't face the waves

When we are scared to face the God from whom we have run.

We can know that the waves will not overcome us because they have overcome him.

Imagine again with me that you hit the water, but this time no great fish comes. You are crushed by the waves and cast into the depths. Imagine the panic of drowning, calling out to God with no response sinking deeper and deeper into the blackness.

This is what our God did for us. So that when the storms come, we can know that justice has been served and there is love beneath the waves. He took drowning so that we could breath, he took hell so that we could get the great fish, he took our lives so that we could get his.

Our sin is no match for his glory, our shame is no match for his grace, our hate is no match for his love.

If you have never done it or have done it countless times and need to do it again, I urge you to throw yourself into his waves and see that he will catch you. Trust in who he is, and he will show you who you are. He will take you where you need to go, and he will be with you every step of the way.

Isaiah 43:1-2

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

Let us pray.