

Part 1

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Jonah Chapter 1

1 Now 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." 3 But 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.

4 But 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. 5 Then 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. 6 So 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."

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. 8 Then 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?" 9 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." 10 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.

11 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. 12 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." 13 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. 14 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." 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

This is a good right?

It's exciting.

Have you forgotten how great this story is?

It has everything.

It's fast paced,

there's a twist right at the beginning because the main person we're introduced to is deeply flawed, the guy that God picks is the bad guy, some of the guys who are supposed to be the bad guys are kind of good guys, all of our expectations are being thrown out the window right at the start.

There's this storm to end all storms, the sailors are panicking, throwing stuff off the ship, the bad guy becomes good at the end and sacrifices himself to save people he doesn't even know and then the chapter ends with the guy being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant sea creature.

The book of Jonah tells a better story in one chapter than Avengers Endgame did in three hours.

What a story.

Let's talk about the Fish

Now this morning, I'm actually not going to spend a lot of time on this.

I'm not going to talk about fish biology or speculate on what type of fish this was.

Whether it was a whale or some creature that God made for this specific moment in history.

And I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this for one very good reason:

The Bible doesn't spend a lot of time on the great fish.

There are 3 verses, just 56 words in the book of Jonah that talk about the fish and, I think, that sometimes when we've heard this story or told this story, we've made the fish the main character and think of Jonah as a story just for children.

But that's not what Jonah is about. The fish is important to the story.

It's appointed by God to rescue Jonah and keep him alive.

And, connected to the gospel in a miraculous way, Jesus says that Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish is a shadow of his three days in the tomb following his death on the cross.

But more on that a little later.

So I know we're just one chapter in, but I have a question for you,

Who is the main character in the book of Jonah? It's not the fish. It's not even Jonah.

The book of Jonah is about God.

It's about His love for people. For All people.

It's about God's patience and mercy and grace. It's about him not wanting any to perish in their sin. It's about people far from God being brought to God or restored to God. It's about how God is using every situation in life, even the deepest trials for our good and the good of others and for his glory. This book is about how God's plans are always good, and that there is nothing in this world that can stop them, or stand against them.

I've been calling this a story, and that's what it is.

It's the story of what happened, the story of what God really did.

It's not a fable or a legend or a morality tale.

The book of Jonah isn't a fish story, it's a God story.

And this story points to a greater story.

The story of Jesus, the better Jonah.

Who was called to go to his enemies, sinners, and bring salvation. Jesus was obedient to his call, even to death because of the joy he possessed in being the author and perfecter of our faith.

But let's let turn back to the first Jonah. The disobedient prophet who runs from God.

For most of us in the room, what we know about Jonah is found in the book of Jonah.

But Jonah, the son of Amittai, has shown up in the Bible before.

In 2 Kings 14:23-25 it says,

23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. 24 And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. 25 He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

Jonah, the son of Amittai, is a prophet of God in the court of the king before he's ever called to go to Nineveh. The reign of Jeroboam II was between 786 and 746 BC and at this time the nation of Israel had divided. There was the Kingdom of Judah in the South and the Kingdom of Israel in the North, and that's where Jonah and Jeroboam II were.

The only prophecy that we have recorded in Kings from Jonah is regarding a military victory and the enlargement of the kingdom. And so Jonah is not only in a privileged position as a prophet and a close advisor of the King, he's a prophet who has been bringing good news to that King. Jonah's prophecy isn't God's judgment on Israel for their sins like some other prophets.

So Even though 2 Kings tells us that Jeroboam II did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, Jonah doesn't bring a message of discipline. He brings a message of blessing.

Israel at this time was not what it used to be. With the nation divided, it was weaker than it had been and it had enemies all around it. One of the most powerful forces in that area, that was hostile to Israel, was the Assyrian Empire. And the capital of this empire was Nineveh.

The Assyrian Empire was renowned in the ancient world for its military might and its brutality. To have them as an enemy, was a dangerous place to be. Jonah, as prophet, as a military advisor, would have done anything he could to protect Israel and weaken the strength of Nineveh.

And this is where the word of the Lord comes to Jonah.

1 Now 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." 3 But 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.

Now knowing a little bit of the history of Jonah and of this time period, Jonah's response to God seems to make even less sense.

Like I said before Jonah would have done anything he could to protect Israel and weaken the strength of Nineveh and in this moment of God's call, the message that Jonah is asked to deliver to Nineveh is one of God's judgment against their sin.

We see this even more clearly recorded in Chapter 3 Verse 4
And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

This seems like the kind of message that Jonah would love to bring to the enemies of Israel. He wants Nineveh to be destroyed.
The problem is that Jonah knows what God is like.

Later in Chapter 4 Verse 2, Jonah lets us into his head at this Chapter 1 moment when God's call came to him.

2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

Jonah is angry at the potential that the Ninevites might experience God's mercy. And he thinks that what they have done is just too bad, too heinous, too evil to ever be forgiven.

He knows that, like it says in proverbs 9:10, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And that if Nineveh understands their sin in the light of a holy God that they might plead with God for mercy and receive it.

And here is our First Point for today.

God Cares About Everyone

When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came into this world and lived as a man, his social and ministry circle consisted of shepherds, wise men, kings, peasants, fishermen, tax collectors, roman officers, teachers and faith leaders, prostitutes and thieves.

From the highest to the lowest. From the most revered to the despised. Jesus, our lord, cared for them all.

And he demonstrated for us the truth of 2 Peter 3:9

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Jesus came near to all.

The invitation of the Gospel, God's way of being right with him through faith, is not for the few but for the many. It doesn't matter who they are or where they come from, God loves it when people turn from sin and turn to him.

Like it says in Luke 15:7

there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The New Testament is filled with the message of hope that everyone who turns from sin, believes on Christ and calls on the name of the lord will be saved.

This message is still astounding and radical for us today on this side of cross.
For Jonah in his day, it was unimaginable.

There are many other prophets that God used to speak through and most of them were used by God to communicate to his covenant people Israel about Israel. A few have prophecies that reveal God's judgment against other nations. Fewer still, like Isaiah, speak of some kind of hope for those outside of Israel.

But Jonah is unique as a prophet, because his primary call here is to preach to Gentiles. Go to Nineveh. Call out against it.

For the first time, Gentiles, outsiders, have been given a missionary. God's man is sent to tell them that there is one God and that they've sinned against him.

I said at the start that we'd be seeing God's grace in some unexpected places today. And in Jonah's day, Nineveh is the last place a Hebrew would expect God to show his grace.

Nineveh, which is modern day Mosul in Iraq, was not just the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It might as well have been the capital of the world. Over 120,000 people lived in this ancient city. And the people of Nineveh could not have been farther from God in their sins.

And yet as Jonah is called to go, he is realizing that **God cares for everyone**. As a Hebrew, and a prophet, he has surely always known this in a theoretical sense.

He knows God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

He's read the psalms

Psalms 86:9

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Psalms 22:27

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.

Psalms 82:8

"Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance."

God cares about everyone.
But **seriously**, God, *Nineveh*?

Now in this story, Jonah is disobedient to his call to go with God's message, but when it comes to our stories, I want to share something important today. Obedience is not enough. God wants our hearts all in when it comes to his mission. That's why he told Hosea in Chapter 6, verse 6:

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

You will never evangelize with joy if obedience has become your only motivation, but if deep in our hearts we believe that God cares about everyone and wants to save sinners, that will change everything.

When we know and believe deeply that God cares about all people, No longer are we duty bound to shoe horn the gospel into conversations for the sake of easing our own consciences.

We can instead treat people with deep love and dignity and compassion, tell them what the Lord has done and done for us, and call them into a restored relationship with God where every longing of the heart finds its satisfaction in the knowledge that God has loved us and proved it for eternity at the cross.

Let me ask you, Is there anyone in your life that you think is too far from God to be saved? Their hearts are just too hard. They're too far gone. They've done too much damage to themselves and others. Have you ever given up on anyone?

What would it look like if God changed your heart on this?
How might **you** be different, how might **your prayers** be different?

Even worse than giving up, have you carried hate or bitterness in your heart and chosen to resign someone to God's judgment so that they'll get what they deserve.
This is where Jonah is at. And this is why he runs from God.
We can almost get inside his head and see his train of thought.
"If I'm God's prophet and I go as far away from Nineveh as possible, then Nineveh won't see the depth of their sin, they won't repent and God will destroy them. And even if I die in the process, it means that Nineveh goes down as well."

So Jonah begins his journey down. Away from the presence of the Lord.
Down to Joppa, this is the port city of Tel Aviv now.
Down to the docks, down to the ship, down to the inner part of it,

where he goes down to sleep, on a journey down to Tarshish a city as far away from Nineveh as possible in the known world.

I think the author is trying to tell us something. Jonah is going down.

When we know what God has called us to, and we run from it,
We are running down into danger.
We have not positioned ourselves to receive God's peace or blessing.
We've instead positioned ourselves to receive God's gracious discipline.

4 But 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. 5 Then 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. 6 So 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."

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. 8 Then 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?" 9 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." 10 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.

11 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. 12 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." 13 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. 14 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." 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

In this part of the passage we see Jonah's testimony to the sailors borne out.
God is indeed the Lord of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

Effortless in his control over the world, God hurls raging storms and he quiets them completely. With perfect precision he escalates the danger but the situation is never out of his control. The wood, the tar and the nails, creak and groan, but the boat does not capsize. It holds. The Lord is the lord of the storm, the ship, and the souls of the men worried for their lives.

God shows us his power over creation here in Jonah as well as later in the Gospel accounts. The contrasting parallel here is stunning between Christ and Jonah.

Let's turn to Mark 4:35-41

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 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?" 39 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. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 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?"

Both are God's man, prophets with a message to end wicked rebellion.
Both are asleep in the middle of a great storm
But Jonah is fleeing from God, away from his mission.
Jesus is following God to his next stop.

Both are awoken and confronted by the ship's crew.
But when Jonah is begged to cry out to his God that the storm may stop, he stays silent.
Jesus awakes, opens his mouth and commands his creation to be still.

In both cases, with Jonah and with Jesus, these storms are brought to display God's power.
And for the sailors on Jonah's ship, this encounter with God changed their lives.

They have seen storms before.
But this one is different.
And grace has come to a second unexpected place.

Jonah had gotten into this boat as a part of his anti-missionary journey but nevertheless, by the end of the storm these pagan sailors are worshipping the one true God. Every other god they knew had failed them. Every other name proved impotent against the power of the true God.

It was God's judgment against Jonah's sin that brought this storm near to the sailors and here we see our second point for today:

God is Using Everything

Nothing in this world is outside of God's control.
And that means that God is using it all for his purposes.

When the mariners got on the USS Tarshish that morning, none of them expected that by the end of their journey they would have an encounter with the God of the universe that led them to worship in fear and reverence. In God's tapestry of salvation that he is piecing together, he is using every experience, even using the consequences of the sins of others, to make himself known, to glorify himself in this world and to open the eyes of the blind to see the glorious refuge of faith in Christ.

In this room today, there are storms in people's lives. Maybe you've been running from God and the consequences of your sin are stacking up perilously on top of one another and you're wondering when it's all going to come crashing down. You've been running for as long as you can remember and you're tired.

If that's you, today, Christ can be a refuge. Confess your sins to God. Ask for help and God will make something beautiful come out of the brokenness behind you. The problem seems too hard for you to fix yourself because it is. But is not too difficult for God.

Put your life in the hands of Jesus, believe that he died and paid the penalty for your sins so that you might be restored to God. Cast your anxieties about the cost of changing on him and believe that Spirit of God will renew your mind and heart to see that pain of facing your sin now will become the most precious gift when you look back on a life lived for the Glory of God. God cares for all people. Even you.

Maybe you haven't been running from God and yet sickness, disease, and death feel like they've surrounded you. Maybe you've been sinned against and the consequences regularly overwhelm you with their weight and pain. Today, Christ is a refuge for you in the storm. He's using it all. All of it. And you may not always know how.

God doesn't create every overwhelming trial in our life, but he does use and redeem them all, as our hopes in this life turn pale when compared to the glorious truth of an eternity with him.

In the midst of the storm the sailors ask in verse 11:
What shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us?
Jonah says that they must hurl him into the sea.
There is something to be said here for Jonah's stubbornness.
He suggests that he should be thrown into the sea to please God.
This is despite the fact that God has never demanded human sacrifice and has always condemned nations that took part in it. Jonah could've said: "turn the boat around. I need to go to Nineveh. I need to stop running." But Jonah is still hard hearted against God's mercy coming to Nineveh.

And yet despite Jonah's stubbornness, this is the scene:

We have God's man, his prophet traveling with a message of the cost of sin, sent to gentiles - people far from God, and he willingly lays down his life so that others might live - and when he does this, these far off people see the power of God and are brought into a relationship with him that they did not have before.

This little book of Jonah has so many shadows of the Gospel, but they're just shadows. Jesus is the better Jonah. He was willing to go to his enemies, his salvation wasn't from a storm, but from all of God's wrath and punishment from sin, when Jonah saved the sailors they got to go home to their towns, but when Jesus saved us we were given the right to go home to eternity with God, fully redeemed and fully restored, forgiven of our sins to the praise of his glorious grace.

God is using Jonah to bring the message of his grace to outsiders, despite Jonah's very best efforts. We cannot stand in the way of God's plans.

Jonah thought that he had successfully run away from God when he got on the boat and went to sleep. He was wrong.

And I'm sure that as the men picked him up to throw him overboard he thought to himself that he would finally be away from the presence of the Lord. He was wrong again.

And now, swimming through the deep, we've come to the last unexpected place where we see God's grace in this text.

After everything. The disobedience, the stubbornness, God is still gracious to Jonah.

And this brings us to our last point for today:

God is with us Everywhere

Let's look at the last verse of Chapter 1 before we move on to Chapter 2 and begin to close.

17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah waits 3 days and 3 nights to pray to God.

It was dark, wet, cold, i'm sure it smelled awful.

No food, No drinkable water.

I wonder if Jonah even knew that he was still alive?

Did he think that this is was death was? That this was what Sheol was like?

Is that why he didn't immediately pray. God save me! God forgive me!

We don't know why Jonah waited three days, but we know what he prayed.

Jonah Chapter 2

*1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying,
"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.
3 For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me.
4 Then I said, 'I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.'
5 The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
6 at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord my God.
7 When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.
8 Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the Lord!"*

10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

While the belly of a fish is a very unexpected place to see God's grace show up, even more astounding is that we begin to see a change in Jonah and a God who is merciful to him in spite of all he has done.

Jonah understands now that his quest to run from the presence of the Lord is impossible. Maybe, in his distress, he finally remembered Psalm 139

Psalm 139:7-12

7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?

*Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.*

Jonah knows that God can hear his plea anywhere. That no matter how far he has run, God stands nearby. He knows that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

And the grace that Jonah has not wanted the people of Nineveh to experience, is the very grace that Jonah himself cries out to God for.

And God hears him, causes Jonah to remember his grace. To remember his vows.
And in a moment of worship, Jonah proclaims as clearly as he can that
"Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

God had to take Jonah in the belly of fish to the roots of the mountains before Jonah could see that God was **his** hope for salvation too.

Where did God take you?

Do you remember where you were or what that season of your life was like when the Holy Spirit of God arrested you in your sin and revealed the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus?
Do you remember how beautiful the hope of Christ was to you when you saw that nothing else could save you?

Remember today the joy of the salvation that belongs to the Lord, and was given to you!
Jonah was the Ninevites hope for salvation
But we have such a greater hope.

Jonah knew that God was with him everywhere because the Lord heard his cry from the belly of the fish, but we know that God is with us, because Jesus, Emmanuel, literally God with us, came to earth, took on humanity, rejoiced and cried with us and ultimately died in our place rising again and now the holy spirit of God lives in heart of every believer helping us each day live lives that are more and more pleasing to God.

Don't follow Jonah, Follow Christ and walk in the love, light, and wisdom that Tyler beautifully preached about last week and trust that God will be with you, blessing your efforts and steps toward obedience as you take the Gospel into your home, into your neighborhood and to the ends of the earth.

And trust that each day, God is everywhere, using everything, because he cares for everyone.