

Jonah 1

The God Who Pursues

Today we are beginning a brand new study in the book of Jonah.

A)Jonah is a fascinating study!

B)But when most people hear the name Jonah – they think it is a story about a big fish –

1)The Fish shows up in 3 verses 1:17 ¹⁷Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

2)2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly

3)2:10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

C)People read those verses and say – that is a whale of a story!

1)How could a whale swallow a man?

Not as hard as you think

A)It takes 2200 lbs of food to fill a Blue Whales stomach – extremely large – about the weight of a small car

B) There is a story of a sailor on a whaling ship – 1891 James Bartley who fell over board and was swallowed by a Sperm whale

1)He was found to be alive – days later when the whale was captured

C)There has been a lot of speculation about that story being true –

1)but it has never been disproved -either

But note this: It doesn't say – a whale – says God prepared a great fish –

A)Not sure what this was: One time thing

B)But more importantly – **JESUS validated the story of Jonah**

C)For that reason ALONE I have no problem believing the Jonah story!

See **Jesus quotes the story of Jonah** as an historical fact that really happened

A)Matthew's gospel – religious leaders asking for a sign.

Matthew 12:39-41

“Jesus answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For 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.”

B)Because Jesus rose again from the dead after 3 days –

1)I can believe everything that Jesus said to be true!

C)Jesus claimed to be God in Human flesh – The only way –

1)and Jesus said – Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a big fish

Everything Jesus said and claimed is found to be trustworthy by the mere fact that He rose again from the dead

A)Jesus can't be right about being God – the only way and be wrong about Jonah!

B)If Jesus is wrong about Jonah than he is not God

C)So if you have a problem with Jonah – you really have a problem with JESUS

Reminds me of the story

A little elementary age girl was talking to her teacher about whales and how she had heard in Sunday School about how a whale had swallowed Jonah.

A)**Public school** – the teacher was not a Christian – said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small.

B)The little girl remained steadfast in her position and reiterated that indeed, a whale had swallowed Jonah.

C)Irritated, the teacher again stated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible.

D)The little girl said, "I'm not sure how it happened, but when **I get to heaven I will ask Jonah.**"

E)The teacher replied smugly, "What if Jonah isn't in heaven?" **What if Jonah is in Hell?**

1)The little girl replied, "Then you ask him."

Really, The story of Jonah is not the story of a big fish –

A)But it really the story of a Big God who has a big heart for people – all people.

B)Including A wicked group of people known as the Ninevites

1)as well as for his prodigal prophet – named Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

A)Jonah’s name means Dove – or the peaceful one – His father is Amittai his name means Truth

B)Great name for a prophet -the son of truth!

C)Nineveh was the city that he was commanded to go and preach to.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and Nineveh was Israel’s absolute foremost worst enemy.

A)Israel hated the Ninevites, ¹This is the usual way to begin an account about one of the biblical prophets.

B)God used prophets to convey his words and messages to Israel, especially in times of crisis.

C)But this is the first time that God actually sent one of his prophets to go and preach to a Gentile city

D)**Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos** all pronounced a few prophetic oracles addressed to pagan countries,

1)they are brief, and none of those other men was actually sent out to the nations in order to preach.

E)Jonah’s mission was unprecedented.

It was even more shocking that the God of Israel would want to warn Nineveh,

A)Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire,

B)Assyria was one of the cruelest and most violent empires of ancient times.

C)The Assyrians were a ruthless and wicked people – not to gross you out –

1)but to help understand the seriousness of the assignment

2)Consider the cruelty of these people

Take prisoners – cut off their legs and one arm –

A)leave one arm so they could shake the victims hand in mockery while he was dying.

B)At other times they would skin their victims alive and display their skin on the city wall.

C)They forced friends and family members to parade with the decapitated heads of their loved ones elevated on poles.

D)Then they would take the heads and build a pyramid with them out side of the city –

1)to say to the rest of the world – This city has been conquered by...

E)Surviving women and even little girls were rapped.

Their brutality was so horrible and so widely known

A)that sometimes whole cities would commit mass suicide if they heard that the Assyrians were coming

B)Because they would rather die than experience what was coming

C)They were a ruthless and cruel people who deserved to be destroyed

1)So the fact that God would send a man to go and preach to the very people that they feared and hated most – **made no sense at all!**

D)Jonah going to Nineveh could be seen as asking him to betray the wellbeing & interest of his country!

1)But that was the mission that God was calling Jonah to!

I have been a Christian for over 44 years –

A) I have found God sometimes asks me to do things I don't want to do?

B) Anyone else – experience that?

C) But to be honest this call for Jonah seems extreme!

D) In a deliberate parody of God's call to "arise, go to Nineveh,"

1) Jonah "arose" to go in the opposite direction V.3

But Jonah arose 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 from the presence of the LORD

Why did Jonah Run?

A) Fear? – That would be our first guess and that would seem logical –

B) Picture Jonah arguing - **are you crazy – They will kill me – skin me alive – torture**

C) Be as crazy as parachuting into Nazi Germany during WWII and saying to Hitler and the 3rd Reich – REPENT

But there is nothing in the story that leads us to believe that fear of the cruelty of the Ninevites-made Jonah run in the opposite direction

A) Jonah was afraid of the mercy of God!

B) Jonah was afraid that the Ninevites would receive his message – REPENT **and God in His mercy would forgive them.**

C) Jonah had no intention of seeing the people of Nineveh blessed

1) He didn't want to see them **blessed** – he wanted to see them **blasted!**

D) He didn't want to see them come into **salvation**, he wanted to see them suffer! –

1) He wanted to see them annihilated!

Jonah wanted revenge, not restoration! –

A) it is something that is in all of us

B) When Jonah heard the Word to go to Nineveh, instead of going east toward that city,

1) he **went West** in the direction of Tarshish

C) Side note here about Open doors – Praying God opens a door- that will be my sign –

1) Not every open door is a sign from God –

Jonah found an open door to go in the opposite direction God wanted him to go.

A) An open door will never contradict God's revealed word!

B) End a marriage without Biblical grounds – Praying open door –

C) that door that opens isn't going to be from the Lord – will not contradict HIS WORD

JONAH FLEES and God pursues

⁴ But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

A) Jonah runs but God won't let him go! Jonah ran from God, but a storm pursued him

B) Understand Whenever we disobey God, we are violating our own design, since God created us to serve, know, and enjoy him..

But here is what Jonah failed to realize – God is fully concerned about all People.- Not just some people.

A) This really is the POINT of the Story of Jonah – **PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD!**

B) See when Jonah fled – when Jonah rebelled and ran from the call of God. **God had other options**

1) He could have chose Hosea, Joel, - Amos

C) But God pursued His rebellious prophet- because Jonah mattered to God.

D) That is why God pursues you – Hound of Heaven

1) You matter to Him – He loves you – doesn't want to see you get wrecked by your rebellion

E) Send a storm – Storms are often the result of sin (Not always as in Job)

1) But often – and sometimes the storm is God pursuing – wakeup call – get your attention

See God wasn't just interested in the work that He was going to do in Nineveh,!

A) He was ALSO focused on the work He wanted to do in Jonah

B) This is what we are going to see – Jonah knows about the grace and mercy of God intellectually – 1) but not experientially.

C) Something happens when you experience God's grace personally – CHANGES

D) TAKE Peter: Bold self-confident – judgmental of others – until he blows it - Experiences Grace

E) Ends his letter 2 Peter 3:18 – Grow in – holiness – grow in steadfast – grow in dedication? No

1) Grow in Grace !!

Something is going to happen to Jonah – experience God's grace – it starts when God sends a STORM!

⁵ Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

A) Jonah is deep in the hold of the ship, sleeping soundly.

B) The nineteenth-century Scottish minister Hugh Martin says Jonah was sleeping “the sleep of sorrow.”

C) Many of us know exactly what that is—the desire to escape reality through sleep, even for a little while.

D) Jonah was profoundly spent and exhausted, drained by powerful emotions of anger, guilt, anxiety, and grief

⁶ So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

V.6 Captain – Arise Again

A) Same word again – arise – Oh No !

B) God speaking the same message to you! – Sermon here

1) Next day radio – Friend – Devos - He loves you enough to tell you more than once

C) God in his grace is repeating the message because he is trying to get your attention.

D) So God is trying to get Jonah's attention- Sends a Storm – The Captain uses the same word – ARISE

E) God sent his prophet to point the pagans toward himself.

1) Yet now it is the pagans pointing the prophet toward God.

Watch what happens next V.7

⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

A) The sailors conclude that the storm was a punishment for sin, and they cast lots to discover whose wrongdoing it might be.

B) Casting lots was a common practice but it was purely random

C) God allows the Lot to fall on Jonah –they begin to pepper him with questions

⁸ Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

Essentially they were asking three things—his purpose (what is your mission?),

A) his place (from where do you come? what is your country?), and his race (who are your people?)

B) These are identity questions.

1) They were asking – Who are you – whose are you and what is your purpose.

C) Those are three questions every one of us needs to be able to answer

Here is something that is interesting about Jonah. The first time he is mentioned in the Bible is 2 Kings 14:25

A) There we are told that Jonah ministered during the reign of Israel's King Jeroboam II (786–746 BC).

B) In that text we learn that, unlike the prophets Amos and Hosea, who criticized the royal administration for its injustice and unfaithfulness,

C) Jonah had supported Jeroboam's aggressive military policy to extend the nation's power and influence.

D) So to the people of the nation of Israel - Jonah would be viewed as intensely patriotic, a highly partisan nationalist.- HERO

E) I think this also sheds light on why Jonah didn't want to pursue this mission.

1) He is worried about how others in his country are going to view him – especially if Nineveh is spared

Notice how Jonah answers the questions – Who are you, who's are you and what is your mission.

⁹ So 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."

A) Keller insight - Since Jonah identifies himself first by his nationality, then religiously,

B) We may infer that his nationality is foremost in his self-identity

C) And if his race was more foundational to his self-image than his faith,

1) it begins to explain why Jonah was so opposed to calling Nineveh to repentance.

D) If Jonah's relationship with God was not as basic to his significance as his race.

E) When loyalty to his people and loyalty to the Word of God seemed to be in conflict,

1) he will choose to support his nation over taking God's love and message to a new society.

That is why the first and greatest question that any of us can answer is the question – Whose are you.

A) Who do you belong to?

B) There is a fundamental truth that unfortunately even many Christians forget!

C) Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that all men are created in "the image of God"

1) There can be no image without an original of which the image is a reflection.

C) "To be in the image" means that human beings were not created to stand alone. We must get our significance and security from something of ultimate value outside us. To be created in God's image means we must live for the true God or we will have to make something else God and orbit our lives around that. Timothy Keller – Prodigal prophet

That is why the first and greatest question that any of us can answer is the question – Whose are you.

A) Who you belong to will determine what your identity is as well as what is your mission in life

B) If we realize that we belong to God – our identity i.e. who we are is going to be found in that relationship

C) And we will realize that our mission in life is to bring Him glory! –

1) No matter our profession – our nationality our background – etc.

D) We exist to bring him glory – by being image bearers of who He is

1) in the way that we live our lives and conduct ourselves/ treat others

If the question of whose are you – is left unanswered you will live what Keller refers to as a shallow Christian identity.

A) "You may sincerely believe that Jesus died for your sins, and yet your significance and security can be far more grounded in your career and financial worth than in the love of God through Christ." - Keller

Shallow Christian identities explain why professing Christians can be racists and greedy materialists, addicted to beauty and pleasure, or filled with anxiety and prone to overwork. All this comes because it is not Christ's love but the world's power, approval, comfort, and control that are the real roots of our self-identity. Timothy Keller

B) People with a shallow Christian identity tend to be pre-occupied with self-care

1) and overly critical of others

C) Let's see how this plays out

¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled 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 be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

¹² And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

Now is this repentance? It might have been but Jonah is not thinking Rescue – thinking death

A) Just Throw me over board – he is not thinking about going to Nineveh- He wants to die.

B) SO Throw me into the storm {let me face my fate

¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, (pagans are more gracious than Jonah) but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴ Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows

C) Amazing: Jonah's sin results in the conversion of these sailors

V.17 Final Pursuit: Storm / Captain Arise / Next God prepares a great fish!

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

A) The next thing that God does with Jonah is he works in the miraculous

B) He works in the supernatural – Fish swallows Jonah – We will leave him there until next time

**Question have you been running from God ?
What has he done to pursue you ?**

A) Calm Now? – Know this, the storm is coming –

B) Whom the Lord Loves- He chastens

C) Prodigal son – good times / famine / pig pen – Your pig pen is approaching – question is will you survive that long

D) God pursues you not because He is out to get you – But he wants to restore you

Don't wait for the storm –

A) heed God's word today and Arise today – Return

B) Waiting with arms outstretched – Father to welcome you Home

C) Communion – Consider - Jesus, our greater than Jonah

➤ **Jonah ran from the wicked**

➤ **Jesus runs toward the wicked**

➤ **Jonah's sin results in a storm**

➤ **Jesus enters the storm caused by our sin**

➤ **Jonah spends 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish because of his sin.**

➤ **Jesus spends 3 days and 3 nights in the grave because of our sin.**

➤ **Jonah comes out of the fish because of God's grace**

➤ **Jesus comes out of the grave to give us God's grace**

Whose are you?

A) God wants you to surrender today – Meet you – Arise