

Jonah 1v1-16

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Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: None

[0 : 00] Now, when you think of the book of Jonah, what do you think of? You think of a big fish, don't you? Jonah is swallowed up by a big fish at the end of this chapter.

And that is often the main thing we take away from Jonah, isn't it? But I want us to see over the next few weeks, the book of Jonah is about so much more. It's about something amazing.

The book of Jonah is about God's mercy. This book is about God not giving us what we deserve.

That's what mercy means. God not giving us what we deserve. Now, this book is filled with miracles. Incredible events happen. There is a big fish. But at its heart, this is all about God and his mercy.

So in every chapter, we will see something about what we as humans, as sinners, what we deserve. And then we will see how good and compassionate and merciful God is in how he treats us.

[1 : 07] And so it's no surprise how this book opens. It opens with God. Verse 1. Now, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai. God speaks, and he speaks to a man named Jonah.

Now, Jonah is a real man. He's a prophet, someone who God uses and speaks through. And you can read about Jonah in 2 Kings 14. This is a real man, a real story.

This is history. And look what God says to Jonah. He commands something. Verse 2. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

God says, I'm sending you on a mission trip. I need you to go preach. Paul Levy sometimes sends me to Hammersmith to go preach. Well, God sends Jonah to preach to a city called Nineveh.

Now, Nineveh is a city east of Israel, about 10 days' walk. And it's not a friendly city. It's a city that belongs to one of Israel's big enemy nations, the big bad Assyrians.

[2 : 20] And Nineveh was the central hub of the Assyrians. So it's not friendly. In fact, it's an evil city. Call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

God is saying to Jonah, go into the heart of the enemy and preach. This would be like a British preacher in 1940 being sent to Nazi Germany.

Arise, go east, head to Berlin, and preach against the Nazis. Tell them about their sin. Tell them about God. This is Jonah's task.

Now, let's just pause for a second here. Do you realize what this says about God? God sees the evil of Nineveh.

Look what he says. Their evil has come up before me. It's like the stench of their lives comes up to heaven and God can smell it.

[3 : 26] God knows and sees what they do. And he's disgusted. It's evil in his eyes. God sees what everyone does.

God knows and sees all the world. God knows and sees what they do. Every person, you and me, our lives are not hidden from God.

He's not oblivious to what we do and think and how we live. He sees it. He cares about it. And he judges it.

He examines our lives and he calls things good or evil. This world, our lives, all play out before God's eyes.

And it comes up before him and it matters to him. Just like Nineveh. Which is why he wants Jonah to go out, to go and call out against their evil.

[4 : 28] And this is quite a remarkable thing in the life of Israel. Pretty much for the whole Bible up until now, God's focus of salvation has been on Israel.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel. That's been the focus of God's work. But in this moment, God's work is expanding. He wants to speak, not just to Israel, but to Nineveh.

Another people. And he's not letting them stay in their evil ways. He wants to call out against their evil. This is a call to repentance. God is offering mercy to Nineveh.

And this is God's command for Jonah. Arise, go, bring my mercy to that people. But look how Jonah responds, verse 3. But.

Now, whenever God commands something and the next sentence begins with but, that's never a good sign. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

[5 : 38] He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. God commands Jonah to preach.

And what did Jonah do? He ran from God. And this brings me to my first point today. Sin is running away from God.

Sin is running away from God. Where does it say Jonah fled to? Tarshish. Now, what you need to know about Tarshish is that it's in the opposite direction to Nineveh.

Nineveh is east and Tarshish is west. It's like if I asked you to go to Berlin, but then instead you jumped on a ferry and went to Belfast.

That's what Jonah is doing here. Whatever God said, Jonah is just doing the opposite. And so, you don't need to look into Jonah's heart to see what's going on here.

[6 : 45] You don't need to look into his heart to see his sin or to see his disobedience here. No. You just need to look at a compass. God says east.

Jonah says no west. This is the blatant and obvious disobedience by Jonah here. The direction he's going in couldn't make it clearer.

And notice, he's not just fleeing his duties, is he? He's not just running from his job. No, look what's happening. Verse 3. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

He got on a ship to sail to Tarshish, again, away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah is not just running away from his job.

He's running away from God. I don't want to do what you say, God. In fact, I don't want to be anywhere near you. I don't want you watching over me.

[7 : 48] I don't want you in my life. Get away from me. And so Jonah runs in the opposite direction. And that is what disobedience is.

This is what sin is. Sin is running away from God. And this is what Adam and Eve did in the garden, didn't they? When they ate the fruit and God came to the garden, what did they do?

They hid in the bushes, didn't they? They ran from God, away from his presence. Running from God, it really captures what sin is. This is what Adam was doing.

This is what Nineveh was doing. This is what Jonah was doing. And this is what the world is doing right now. As you look around at the world, a world in chaos, a world that is living by its own rules, a world that thinks it can define its own reality, that is a world running from God.

In our sin, we're not trying to get to God, but we've just got lost along the way. No, we're running straight away from him. We don't want anything to do with him.

[9 : 11] We push him aside. We pretend he doesn't exist. In Romans, it says we suppress the truth of God. We push it deep down inside of us, and we pretend he's not there.

We pretend he's not watching. We make up lies about this world, and we say that there's no God. We make up other gods, and we convince ourselves the true God isn't there. We try to live our lives like there's no judge over us.

And that is a world running away from God. For every unbeliever here today, God sees you, and he sees you running.

And even for the Christian, we feel this too, don't we? You know when we're in that spiritually dry place, maybe a spiritually dark place, and maybe you're in a pattern of sin, and you know it's wrong, but you keep doing it, or you're sinning in secret, or you've started that relationship, and you know it's wrong.

How do we feel in those times? It feels like we're running away from God. I know how I should live, Lord, but I'm not going to do it.

[10 : 29] And so we kind of shut him out, don't we? We try not to think about him. We don't pray, because then we'll have to acknowledge him. We go through the motions of church, but we don't really want to come into his presence.

It's like we're running away from him. And that is sin. Sin is running away from God. But just think, is this actually possible?

Jonah gets on a ship, he sails in the opposite direction, trying to escape from God's presence. But is that even possible? Can we actually run and hide from God?

Well, look at verse 4. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so the ship was threatened to break up.

But God saw Jonah the whole time. God was there the whole time. We cannot escape God. We can run, but we cannot hide.

[11 : 37] And you might want to say to Jonah in this moment, Jonah, what are you thinking? Do you actually think you can run away from God? Where do you think you're going to?

You think about Jonah, and you think that this is crazy, isn't it? But we do exactly the same. This is what we need to ask ourselves. Do you actually think you can run from God?

God is always there. God is here right now. He's watching. We're in his presence now, and we cannot escape.

And if we try to, everything falls apart. And we see this with Jonah. Because when you run from God, you run into his judgment.

And this is my second point today. When you run from God, you run into his judgment. Look what Jonah meets when he runs.

[12 : 39] A storm. God sends a tempest. A huge storm. So big that the ship could fall apart any moment. It's being rocked.

It's being battered. And even these experienced sailors are terrified. Verse 5. That they start panicking and calling out to their gods. That they go to the cargo and throw it overboard.

That maybe if the boat is lighter, maybe then we'll survive. That they're on the brink of death. It's mayhem on deck. And look where Jonah is. Verse 5. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship.

And had lain down. And was fast asleep. He's having a nap. He's even using sleep to escape the reality of God. We often use sleep to escape our troubles, don't we?

Take a nap and hopefully the problem will disappear. But it never does, does it? And so the captain wakes him up. What are you doing? Wake up.

[13 : 41] Call out to your God. Do something. Maybe he'll listen. Maybe he'll help. Maybe we won't die. Do something, Jonah. These sailors aren't Israelites. They don't worship Yahweh.

But they know something. Something that Jonah is trying to ignore. They know this storm is no ordinary storm. They know this storm is a divine event.

That's why they call out to their gods. That's why they cast lots in verse 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. Casting lots is basically like picking the short straw. So these sailors probably had like dice and you throw the dice and it would highlight someone. And whoever that would highlight, that's kind of like picking the short straw.

And they do this because they want to find out who on this ship has done something wrong and brought this storm on everyone. And so while Jonah is trying to ignore God, these sailors are really right about something.

[14 : 48] They're right that this storm is from God. And they're right that this has come because of someone. Who? And the lot fell on Jonah.

This is God pointing his finger down into the world at Jonah and saying this storm is because of him.

Jonah is running from God and this storm is God's judgment on Jonah. Jonah has run from God. And when that happens, there's only one place that path leads into God's judgment.

Whenever you run from God, you run into his judgment. And this is what is happening with the world right now. The world is running from God and it's running into his judgment.

The world cannot stand being in God's presence and it's trying to escape. It's got its hand up to God. Get away from me, God.

[15 : 59] And God is furious. And so God has hurled a storm upon this world. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against a world that is running away from God.

The misery of this world, the sadness all around us, the pain, the war, the fear, the suffering, death itself.

That is the storm that God has unleashed onto this world. This is God's judgment on the world. And the storm we're experiencing right now, that is just a taste of where this world is going.

The judgment now is just a sign of where the world is really running to. Because when you run from God, you're running into final judgment.

And just like the world pretends God isn't there, the world pretends it's not running into judgment.

[17:12] And that is the great lie of this world. We hear this everywhere. Boys and girls, you will hear this a lot. The world will tell you, you can live however you want.

You can live the life you want. That's what you'll hear. The world will tell you, you can be like Jonah and run in any direction you want. Forget about what God says.

Forget about where God tells you to go and how to live your life. No, the world will tell you, follow where you want to go and then you'll be happy. Then you'll have a more meaningful, authentic life.

Run that way and you'll be happy. That's what you're going to hear. But boys and girls, are you listening? This is really important. I need you to hear this. What the world is telling you is a lie.

Because when you run away from God, you will not be running into a better life. When we run from God, we run into his judgment.

[18:16] And this is where the world is heading. Now we need to know, for everyone in Christ, there will never be judgment.

But there will be fatherly discipline. And if we have those times of running from God in our Christian journeys, we won't be running into God's judgment.

But we will be running into his discipline. We may feel the painful consequences of our sin. We might feel the darkness and loneliness of not being with God's people.

Our secret sins and our dry spiritual life, it may make for a worse life. Our consciences might eat away at us. God might send a storm to stop us in our tracks.

But realize what that is. That is God saying, don't go any further. That is God saying, I love you too much to let you keep going on like this.

[19:21] That is God's fatherly discipline on the children he loves. That is God's mercy. And one of those storms is falling on Jonah right now.

As the storm rages around them, the lot falls on Jonah. And the sailors interrogate him, don't they? Verse 8. Who are you? Where have you come from?

Who are your people? Come on, tell us. Tell us, Jonah. And Jonah answers them. Verse 9. I am a Hebrew. And I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

And that's when things click. These men have heard of the Lord. They've heard about Israel. They know who this God is. And they know Jonah was running from him.

And so now they're even more terrified. What have you done, Jonah? They ask in verse 11, what should we do with you? What are the next steps now?

[20:24] And Jonah realizes what needs to be done. Look what he says. It's the only sensible thing we've had from Jonah so far. Verse 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. Jonah knows he needs to die. He knows judgment needs to take hold of him.

But the sailors don't do it at first, do they? They try to row back to shore, but it's no use. The sea just grows more and more tempestuous against them. And so they all then realize there's only one option.

It's the only option. Judgment only ends when someone dies. And this is my third and final point today. Judgment only ends when someone dies.

Look at verse 14. The sailors realize the gravity of what they're about to do. Verse 14. Therefore they called out to the Lord, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life.

[21:31] 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 as soon as he went overboard, what happened next?

And the sea ceased from its raging. It's all quiet. The storm ends. Judgment is over.

Do you see what it takes to end the judgment of God? Someone needs to die. And this goes for all of us.

We have all run from God. And that is not a light thing. And God's justice and his judgment demand something from us. It demands our death.

And there's only one way to end that judgment. Only one way. Judgment only ends when someone dies. And this is precisely why Jesus had to die.

[22 : 40] The only thing that could end this storm was handing Jonah over to God's judgment. And the only way to end the storm of God's judgment over your life is for the Son of God to die for you.

This is what is happening. This is what was happening on the cross. Jesus was handing himself into the storm of God's judgment.

He was throwing himself overboard to end the storm of judgment, hanging over a people who have run from God. Men and women, boys and girls who have been living their life running from God, but who trust in Jesus.

For them, Jesus threw himself into that judgment so that the storm over your life will end forever. And brothers and sisters, that is what has happened to you.

While God's judgment rages against this world right now, it does not rage against you. Jesus has ended it. God's anger against you is finished.

[23 : 48] As calm as this sea was at the end, that is like God's anger over you now. Calm. Quiet. Do you realize this?

God is not angry with you anymore. You are no longer heading to judgment. In fact, you were once running from God, but you have now returned back to the living God to worship him forever.

Did you notice what happened to the sailors at the end? Verse 16. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. Through the death of Jonah, these men who were worshipping other gods, through the death of Jonah, these men come to worship the living God.

As they look at the death of Jonah, they look up and see this is the true God of heaven. This is the God who sees all.

This is the God you cannot escape. This is the God who has spared their lives. This is the God who has shown them mercy.

[25 : 04] And as we look at the death of Christ, that is the same God we see. The God who sees our lives, who knows we have run away from him, who knows our hearts wander away from him again and again.

But the God who has brought us back to himself by sending his son to die. In the death of Christ, we see God's mercy.

And whoever you are today, you need this death. This is the only way to escape God's judgment. You can try running anywhere else, but it will not help you.

There is nowhere else you can run to. Christ's death is the only thing that can calm the judgment of God on this world. And so if you are running from God today, you need to change direction right now.

And you need to run to Jesus Christ. And when you do, you will not run into more judgment. You will not run into a scolding. You will not get what you deserve.

[26 : 13] No, you will run into the mercy of God. And we, brothers and sisters, we need this death. When our hearts wander, when we feel like we're running away, it's not too late to come back.

Run to the death of Christ and God will always show you mercy. His mercy has brought you safe this far. And his mercy will lead you home.

Let me pray.