

Jonah 1:1-17 ESV 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.

- I. The Old Testament is divided into categories: books of law, history, poetry, and prophets (major and minor). The last subdivision (minor prophets) are so called because we know less about them than the major prophets historically, and their books are generally shorter in length. It's also safe to assume that many otherwise biblically literate people don't generally spend a lot of time in the minor prophets.
 - A. The book we're going to be examining in the next few weeks represents the exception. Almost everybody has heard the story of Jonah, especially if you have grown up in church. It was common fare in Sunday School and at bedtime. Even otherwise secular people know of the prophet swallowed by a great fish.
 1. But what does it say to 21st Century adults, especially in an age where science is so often pitted against faith? In a church that puts so much emphasis on the gospel of the New Testament, what can an old Jewish story of an ancient prophet teach us about ourselves and Jesus, our savior?
 2. These are things we are going to ask, and hopefully answer as we jump into the boat, into the ocean, into the fish, and walk across Nineveh with Jonah.

- B. There are three characters that we're going to look at today in the 1st chapter: Jonah, the sailors in the boat, and Yahweh, God of Israel.
- II. Jonah was a prophet from Israel, the northern kingdom of the people of God (after they separated from Judah, the southern kingdom). Jonah had a successful ministry as a prophet of God in Israel. **2 Kings 14:23 ESV** In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. **24** He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. **25** He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, ***spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai***, the prophet from Gath Hopher.
- A. Jonah knew what it was to hear the voice of the Lord. He knew what it meant to speak to the powerful in his Name and see them respond as they should.
1. He had been sent to wicked King Jeroboam II of Israel, spoken God's word to him, and the King listened; resulting in the restoration of lands to the kingdom of Israel, that had previously been lost by them.
 2. We'd expect that every assignment that he received from the Lord would be met with joyful expectation of a glorious result, no matter the audience.
- B. But in this story, we see just the opposite. **"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.' But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."** There is no faith, only defiance.
1. If you look at a map of the places in this story, Jonah doesn't just go somewhere different, he goes in the polar opposite direction that he was told to go. Nineveh was far to the east of Israel, Tarshish was far to the west.
 2. But there was something more problematic. The Bible doesn't tell us he was merely trying to flee his assignment, but fleeing "the presence of the Lord".
 - a) He wasn't just saying "no" to God, he was saying goodbye. He wanted nothing more to do with his Word, his covenants, his truth, or his call.
 - b) **Psalms 139:7 ESV** 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." No child of God is ever out of his sight, even if we want to be.
- C. But Jonah is a stubborn rascal. **"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"**. All believers have paid our fare and gone aboard ship at some point to flee from God's presence and Word.
1. We've done it when we've made excuses not to share the gospel with our perishing neighbors, like Jonah. We've done it when we've refused to forgive those who have offended us, and by choosing worldliness over holiness.

2. But God demonstrates his commitments to his purposes: **“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.”** This was no freak coincidence, but truly “an act of God”. He had spoken, and would not be ignored.
 - a) Jonah’s life, and the lives of all the other men on the ship were jeopardized by the rebellion and disobedience of one man.
 - b) Mom and dads, will the the kids sailing in the ship of your family drown because of your bad habits, your uncrucified character, your fleshly pursuits, and you unbending knee toward the will of the Lord?
- D. But where is Jonah while the vessel and crew are on the brink of disaster? **“But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.”** This isn’t like when Christ slept during a storm at sea. He slept in peace and trust; Jonah slept in indifference, selfishness and apathy.
 1. What a picture of the world we occupy! It is hammered by storms of sin and death, COVID-19 and rioting in the streets, yet the church, those who should have the answers, pointing to Christ, shining the light of life; are fast asleep!
 2. **Romans 13:11 ESV** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. May God’s church wipe the sleep from her eyes and do what the Lord has commanded!
- III. Let’s look at the second characters in the story: the sailors on the ship. They started their day like any other, beginning a voyage from Joppa to Tarshish. When God’s storm hit, it turned a bunch of godless mariners into religious fanatics real quick! **“Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.”** Each of these men had been in many storms before, but none like this one! Their hearts were pounding in their chests, as they wondered if they would survive the night.
 - A. They cried out to various pagan deities, hoping that one of them would hear and answer, sparing their lives. This is the normal religious course of mankind. I heard a Viet Nam vet say that while in country, he wore a cross, a star of David, and a St. Christopher medal, just to broaden his chances of survival.
 1. It is in the storm that we begin to try to appease God, to make deals and straighten up and fly right. But God is not is not looking for hasty reformations, but for hearts fully surrendered to Him in and out of the storm.
 2. This also tells us that all religious systems are not equal. They were calling out to idols and false gods who were being exposed as the frauds they were.
 - B. **“And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.”** In our storms, all of us try everything we can in our own strength to fix what’s wrong. “If I only had a little more money, better health, a new relationship, a greater position at work; then I wouldn’t be in this trouble I’m in.”
 1. Verse 4 says “the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea”. Now they’re hurling stuff overboard! Who do you think will win the hurling contest?
 2. Isaiah says God does not faint or grow weary. He will work his purposes through storm and calm long after all your stuff is on the bottom of the sea!
 - C. When the captain hears that the passenger is sleeping below decks while they fight the mighty tempest, he is indignant! **“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.” What a shame when the world must awaken us from apathy!

1. After Jonah awakens, the sailors decide to cast lots to find who is responsible for their trouble. The lot fell to Jonah. Horrified they ask, “What have you done?” Jonah tells how he was fleeing the presence of the Lord.
 2. Do you imagine that on the day of judgement that some of us will have to answer for those who have perished while we shirked our calling and our responsibility? And this while their eyes stare at us and wonder “why”?
- D. Now they know why they are in trouble; the next question is what to do about it. “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.’ 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.”
1. Notice that Jonah never repents of what he has done that caused the trouble. He never calls on the mercy of God and mends his ways. While acknowledging that he is the source of the trouble, he is saying he would rather die than do what the Lord had commanded him to do!
 - a) But God’s Will will not be so easily thwarted. He has already implemented a glorious plan to accomplish his purposes.
 - b) And yet the sailors dare not risk angering the God they have offended by murdering one of his prophets, so they row really hard against his storm.
 2. That never works. **Job 42:2 ESV** “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” God always wins, and always finishes what he starts. Galatians says “Don’t be deceived, God is not mocked.”
- IV. So exhausted and scared, the sailors pray a quick prayer for pardon to the God for what they are about to do, and with that they toss Jonah overboard. So what role did God play in this drama? It is summed up in two words: Absolute Control. The word we use to explain this prerogative of God is **Sovereignty**. It means God does what he wants, when he wants, how he wants, with whom he wants, for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and those purposes are never overthrown.
- A. In our text, God gave a command, he followed a rebellious, fleeing prophet; he hurled a great storm at the prophet and would have destroyed the ship and its cargo, killing the prophet and the crew to bring about repentance.
1. More than that, he used the lot (dice) of the sailors to expose Jonah’s guilt.
 2. **Proverbs 16:33 ESV** The lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord.
- B. But more than that, he used Jonah’s sacrifice to demonstrate to a bunch of pagan sea-farers, that he was the one true God. “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.” God proved to be Creator and Master of the wind and waves.

1. This was true conversion. They could no longer throw prayers to the pantheon of gods to whom they previously relied. They could no longer lay sacrifices before idols of wood and stone who neither heard nor answered.
 - a) Now they had seen the power and grace of the sovereign God of Israel, and they “feared (reverenced, respected)...exceedingly”. He had exposed their gods for the phonies they were, while revealing his own majesty.
 - b) Done with idols, they offered sacrifice God who had spared their lives. They made vows of commitment, because they had met the true God.
 2. Many people claim to be saved or converted, but they still cling to the same symbols of power and provision (lifeless as they may be). But true conversion is evidenced by the changed life and convicted, convinced heart that can only belong to one who has encountered the living God.
- C. Lastly, God’s sovereignty is seen in the final verse of the chapter, “**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.**” People struggle with the reality of this verse.
1. They say there aren’t any sea creatures that could or would swallow a man whole. It’s impossible! But isn’t that what makes it a miracle? Impossibility?
 - a) Some immediately dismiss this story out of hand. Others try to find a creature that could possibly do this. Others, stressed by the challenge, imagine a pre-historic animal as a candidate for an explanation.
 - b) But all of this is missing the point. The Bible says, “the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah”. Can you not believe that a God who can hurl a storm at a single man and cause the dice to fall just right couldn’t provide a simple fish to do his will, even create one for that purpose?
 2. If you insist in dismissing this story historically, you face a huge theological challenge. Jesus himself used this story to illustrate the reality of his own resurrection. **Matthew 12:40 ESV** 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. If Jonah is a myth, can we have any assurance that the resurrection is not? More on this next week...
- V. Jonah tells us that God is in control, that we can never flee from him if we belong to him, that he will stop at nothing to accomplish all his will, therefore the wise will say “Yes!” to him with a whole and joyful heart, no matter the obstacles.
- VI. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- VII. Benediction: **1 Timothy 1:17 ESV** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.