

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace

Jonah 1:2-3

9/26-27/2015

Illus I shared last week about the summer of 1985, and how I had walked far from the Lord and it showed in a number of ways. One of them was in my attitude with my father as I worked construction for him. It was Monday morning and his first job was to remove the forms in which I had poured concrete the Friday before. When they were removed, in plain sight were the holes and gaps giving evidence to my poor and shoddy work, and my father angrily handed me a ballpeen hammer and iron chisel and told me to chip all that concrete out and start over. That morning, I became the first and only person to ever quit in my father's construction company, and I left that construction site to begin an 18 mile walk home. For two weeks, he wouldn't talk to me, and I was fine with that. My heart was full of arrogance and stubbornness.

Jonah *'the prophet'* was about to walk out on God and we can learn from his mistakes
But importantly, this book is not most centrally about Jonah, and not really about Nineveh
It's centered on God, in fact He is mentioned 38 times
And though God's sovereign power is on full display, that's not His main characteristic we'll see
More warmly and beautifully, the book of Jonah is about God's relentless grace
And if you recall from last week, the first verse actually begins, in the original Hebrew, with the word *'And'*, indicating that there is a story that is already in motion when the book opens
That story is the rescue plan of God to save sinners and restore all things to Himself
We're going to see the assignment that God gives as well as Jonah's response

PP 1-Jonah's Assignment

'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city...' **Jonah 1:2**

God's assignments are given in verb form...they are commands to action
And this seems like such a tiny point to make, yet for so many Christians, it's the first point at which we fail in our service of God
We have a saying in our family that our kids know well, though groan when they hear it
Delayed obedience is disobedience
He enjoys this no more than us parents enjoy our kids delaying to do a job we give them
What delights God is an obedient heart that says like Isaiah, *'Here I am, send me'* **Isaiah 6:8**

The NIV omits the word *'Arise'*, yet it is the way Jonah's assignment began
Does it indicate that Jonah was in bed, having a dream from God or in a trance?
Over 600 times this word is in the bible, and 90% of the time it means to stand up from sitting or lying down, which is how it used when Jesus brought that little girl back to life, saying,
"Little girl, I say to you arise." **Mark 5:41**
Yet it is also used metaphorically like when God told Joshua to arise and take the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land
When God wanted Israel to break camp and get moving, He would commanded Moses to rise and go
He told Gideon who was stuck in hiding to 'Arise, go'
And Elijah who was camped by the Cherith Brook for 6 long months, 'Rise and go'

In each of these, the command was for a settled person or people, to get up and moving
 All of us tend to become dormant, mired into the affairs of this world, stuck in life
 We all skew toward a predictable and comfortable life, preferring our uninterrupted plan
 How easily we can find ourselves in the same place year after year, asleep on mission, until God
 calls us out of it with a command to *'Arise, go, and here's what I want you to do...'*
 There's a reason the word **'go'** occurs 49 times in Acts as a going church is a growing church
 And a going disciple is obedient to Christ: ***'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'***

We all can get stuck *off mission*, so maybe some questions to help us evaluate ourselves

PP Interact with these questions for a bit and rank yourself where you are: 5 for *yes*, 1 for *no*

PP ___ Do I plead for the salvation and restoration of the spiritually lost people in my life, as Abraham did for Sodom and Gomorrah?

PP ___ Do I begin each day by reminding myself that in everything I do that day, there is nothing greater than to serve God's purposes?

PP ___ Do I regularly review my day before going to bed to evaluate how well I served God?

PP ___ Do I leave the worship services of my church excited to serve God in my life?

PP ___ Does the way I manage my calendar reflect a yielded servant of God?

PP ___ Does the way I manage my money reflect that God's mission is my highest priority?

Jonah was to: ***'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city'***

Nineveh was about 550 miles northeast of Jerusalem, near modern day Mosul, Iraq

It was an ancient city, founded by Nimrod the son of Ham, the faithless son of Noah

It was massive, believed to be the largest city on the planet at that time, one that took 3 days to walk across, with walls 100 feet high, wide enough for 3 chariots to ride side by side

It was populated city, filled with 600,000 to 1 million people

It was a wicked city

PP ***"Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder— no end to the prey! The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end— they stumble over the bodies!" Nahum 3:1-3***

And Jonah was to go and ***'call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.'*** 1:2

A message of condemnation is not a grace-less message

God wrote the sermon for Jonah, a message of warning to move them to repent and be rescued

He isn't obligated to warn them, He does so because He is gracious, merciful and loving

Don't good parents give a warning to their children before they discipline them, appealing to them to change their behavior or attitude?

John the Baptist had a similar message to the people of Israel, ***"Even now the axe is laid to the***

PP ***root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*** Matthew 3:10

God was standing at the base of the tree of Nineveh, the axe of divine judgment in hand, and was right then measuring out His swing

'Call out against it' means to warn the city that God, the ruler over all, including Assyria, was not for them, but ***'against'*** them

The ***'LORD'***, Jehovah, is the self-existent ruler over all

When we read, *'their evil has come up before Me'*, don't get the idea that until some angel put a morality report on God's desk, He was blissfully unaware of Nineveh's evil
 You've likely heard the phrase, *'It stinks to high heaven'*
 Shakespeare is thought to have originated it in Hamlet when Hamlet's uncle said, 'O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven.'
 God originated it, as Nineveh's evil was a stench so bad it reached his nostrils, as had Sodom and Gomorrah's before them,
 What a parallel for us today who live in the greatest country on earth
 Yet as great as the US is, would any of us really deny how far from God she is?
 I would suggest we aren't that far off from Nineveh, making the question important, are we far off from what Jonah is about to do?

PP 2-Jonah's Response

The book of Jonah is a master storytelling that catches us and sweeps us along with it
 You feel the storm-tossed seas, the terror of the sailors, the dramatic demise of sinking to the bottom, the petulance of self-pity, you feel it all
 God told him to arise and go, ***"But, Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish..."***

Was fear of the brutal Assyrians the reason Jonah refused the assignment of God?
 It is not always easy for a prophet, nor a pastor to preach what will knowingly upset people
 God had to command Jeremiah, ***"But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them."*** **Jeremiah 1:17**

The truth is however, there is not any indication that Jonah was struggling with fear
 In fact, he himself gives the reason in **4:2** for why he refused God's assignment for him
"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."
 He knew God's heart is gracious, merciful and loving, and He didn't want Nineveh to be spared
 Jonah the prophet's heart looked very different from God's

He fled to Tarshish, intent on getting away ***"from the presence of the LORD."***
 Ancient pagan religion believed that a god had power only in a certain area and was limited to it
 But Jonah tells the sailors that his God ***'made the sea and the dry land.'*** **1:9**

PP He must have known David's Psalm asking, ***"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"*** **Psalm 139:7**

The Psalmist said that God is even at ***'the uttermost parts of the sea'*** **139:9**

PP **Jonah 1:3** literally reads *'Jonah rose up to flee from being before the LORD'*
Before the Lord is the place of a servant awaiting his master's command
 Jonah was not trying to escape the presence of God but the position of God's servant
 In other words, he submits his resignation letter and quit!

PP But he either doesn't know, or he forgets what the Apostle would later declare, ***"the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."*** **Romans 11:29**

“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.” Jonah 1:2-3

3 times Tarshish is repeated, making it crystal clear there's no way Jonah is going to Nineveh
But in refusing his assignment, he forfeited the favor of God and His protection and immediately the trajectory of his life begins to go '**down**'

He is going to do it his way, not God's, '*he paid the fare, and went down into it*'

A fare to Tarshish was substantial, again pointing at the comfortable life Jonah was living
'**Tarshish**' means *to smelt* and was likely a Phoenician mining town located in modern day Spain
A sea voyage there and back to Jerusalem is indicated in **1 Kings 10** to be a round trip of 3 years
It was the furthest place that Jonah could go, in the opposite direction from Nineveh

We have before us, a child of God who came to the place in life where he believed serving God was an option, and the assignment, his merciless heart refused

In the midst of these first 3 verses, we can already discover some mistakes we must not make

PP 3-Jonah's Mistakes

PP a. *Jonah was not a man of prayer*

It seems Jonah is like many of us, we suddenly turn to God when life comes crashing down upon us, but when the crisis passes we drift back to ordinary prayerlessness

Many of us tend to ***“[call] out to the LORD, out of [our] distress”*** **Jonah 2:2**

A person who doesn't sit often before God in prayer is one who is ruled by his own counsel
The counsel I give to myself always seems like good counsel

But when I am in communion with God, my perspectives and counsel shifts, corrected and sometimes even discarded totally because often they were wrong

God's call to Jonah, His assignment produced a crisis in Jonah, but he doesn't move to prayer
He doesn't present his complaint before God like Jeremiah did in Jeremiah 12, or spread his concerns out before the Lord like King Hezekiah did

Prayerlessness takes us to our Tarshish, urges us to rely on our fare-paying flesh, and quickly drives us down into misery

Friends, if God has given you an assignment that you are finding hard to accept, then pray!

If Jonah had done this, he would have received power from God to have victory over his heart

PP b-*Jonah was not a man in godly community*

He receives this assignment from God and does not pray, nor does he go to a godly friend for counsel

There is not anywhere in this book evidence that Jonah had a friend, counselor, or confidant

He talks in chapter 2 with some pagan sailors, but that's it, he's a solitary figure

He is 'the prophet' and apparently discovered what many do: *it's lonely at the top*

But that loneliness is one of our own making for it is not the way of living on mission

Where is Jonah when the storm hits on the Mediterranean Sea?

Down in the inner part of the ship by himself, asleep

PP *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

Are you living life with others, and do you have godly friends you turn to when your faith fails?
Do you know what is amazing?

It is frequent that people in our church ask me to pray that God will give them a good friend!
Some of my best friends have come through being in a life group together with them
Get in a life group, and learn to live life together, with the highs as well as the lows

PP *c-Jonah was not a man driven to worship*

Asaph, who wrote Psalm 73, resented prosperous, happy wicked people and he wrote that his feet had nearly slipped, he nearly left the path of the faithfulness
What restored his footing was he went into the sanctuary of God and discerned their end
It was public worship that shored up his mind of the realities of heaven and hell, the justice of God's plan and the generous grace of God for sinners like all of us

It is not too difficult to see that a prayer-less, friend-less, worship-less life has no power to live on mission

Yet God is about to pursue his westward heading rebel...and He always catches his prey
And His relentless grace will pour out on Jonah, but it will get far worse before it gets better
But He will get Jonah back on mission, for nearly a million people need to be rescued!
Perhaps God is pursuing you as well, and you may want to know that He will catch you
For He has a job He has chosen for you to do...so Arise, go and do it!

Pray