

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace

Jonah 1:1

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Illus My mother told me a few years ago, she knew early on I would be a pastor, but I never once before August 1992 even thought of being a pastor. I had put my faith in Jesus Christ as a young boy, and a love for God's word consumed me relentlessly for years, until midway through my senior year of high school, I fell away from God and embraced the world. I was stripped of happiness and purpose and left hollowed out and broken. Throughout that dark journey I could hear the patient, unmistakable steps of God in pursuit, never hateful, never frustrated, just a constant whisper calling me back to Him. But I wouldn't return, not until He removed what I valued the most at that time away from me, and I finally gave up. And when I did, I handed Him back the control of my life, realizing that He never truly had lost it. He began to rebuild me and utterly surprising to me, called me into His great mission as a pastor

I've always been able to identify with Jonah because, well, I am a lot like him
 Yet my life, more importantly, Jonah's life, shows us the relentless grace of God, Who never gives up on us, He has an unending love for us, and not only us, but all people
 I invite you to turn to the book of Jonah and let's begin our journey with verse 1
 And the way it begins is extremely important: ***"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah..."***
 In the ESV it begins with '**Now**', while in the NIV and NASB it starts with '**The**'
 Yet in the original text, it begins with the word '**And**', a conjunction, a connecting word
 If you opened up a novel and its first word was *And*, you would wonder if part of the book had been lost, that you may have missed the first part of the story
 The word '**And**' places our first step right into the stream of God's grace that has been flowing through the whole bible
 The fountain head of this stream was in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3, and it began to pour out over all humanity as God began a rescue mission for lost sinners
 It's about to flow straight into a massive city called Nineveh where people desperately needed to be saved from the wrath of God, and Jonah is the one God chose to speak good news to this doomed people

Let's pause at this point, in order to begin locating ourselves into the story
 Every person here in this sanctuary, identifies either with Jonah, or a resident of Nineveh
 You are either a servant of God whom He has given a mission, or a sinner in desperate need of rescue
 If you are among the latter, here is what has happened
 Like me, you were born into sin and no one ever had to teach us to defy God, to lie or selfishly hoard our toys or argue with our parents...it all came naturally to us
 And as we age, we all become more sophisticated at sinning, and all the while, there is a breach, a separation between the sinner and God and the sinner cannot repair it
 The end of a sinner's life, if he or she is not rescued is eternal hell
 But what is so terrible about sin that God would give someone that sentence?
 Isn't sin just some stupid rule that somebody made up, that stands in the way of happiness, of self-fulfillment, of self-realization?
 In our language, if something is better than good, we say it was sinfully good
 So this sin message, to the unbeliever, is the oppression of religion controlling the masses

The problem with this thinking is that it starts off with a wrong step and never corrects course
It begins with thinking that men and women are the measure of all things, that we create the rules
That we define morality through enlightened self-interest, so we *follow our hearts*

The correct step begins another-radically different-way: *God created the heavens and the earth*
He defines the universe, not us, we come into a universe already created, already defined, with
intact morality, and God is its source, its owner, its definer
Every sin we are capable of is high treason against He Who created it all, defined it all
Sin is my will at odds with God's will, at war with Him, the desire that there be no higher
authority than myself
In other words, sin is the quest to be god, to define my reality, but we aren't...He is!

It is into this war, this conflict that God steps, but not to destroy and annihilate but to rescue
God disempowers the fight in us with His grace, which begins by showing us the end of the road
should we continue to wage war against Him...eternal destruction called hell
Do you remember my story at the beginning...God brought me to the point of emptiness and loss
of control that showed me the miserable course I had set my life on
But our treason, our sin, deserves our death, and even God cannot wink His eye and give us a
'good ol' boy pass'...no mulligans for sin
If you want to earn your salvation, then you must have total, sinless, womb to tomb perfection
But we aren't capable of this, for sin is a contagion, affecting every effort so that even the best of
what we do fall short of God's perfection and purity
It's like having mud-covered hands trying to wipe a dirty window clean...it won't work
Someone with clean hands is the only one Who could make our souls clean
That leaves One being capable of this saving act...God Himself, Who has never sinned, pure
But our sin-ripped breach can only be repaired by Someone dying in our place

PP For '*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*' **Hebrews 9:22**

My blood shed would have accomplished nothing, muddy hands only smudging the window
The blood of Someone who lived total, womb to tomb perfection was necessary, His death could
pay for the debt our sins had created

PP "*For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life.*" **Leviticus 17:14**

Perfect life for blackest death, the great exchange of the cross as the Son of God died for sinners
When a sinner acknowledges his/her sin, believes in Christ, accepting His Words as true, God
takes those sins, and transfers them into the account of Jesus and He became the guilty
sin bearer for us

But that alone won't save us...another transfer immediately took place
God took the total womb to tomb perfection of Jesus, His righteousness and transferred it to the
account of the forgiven sinner
God wiped away the muddied window of our souls, rescues us, and welcomes us into His family
The debt of sin paid in full, the sinner forgiven and right before God, and now on mission to
serve this glorious great God

What did all that have to do with the word '**And**' that begins the book of Jonah?

'**And**' tells us that this rescue plan I just shared is already in motion and it is about to stream
toward a wicked nation of people in a city called Nineveh

Jonah is a story of our relentlessly gracious God on a mission to rescue a desperate people
 Each of us here right now, will identify either with Jonah, or the people of Nineveh
 You are either a forgiven person or you are in need of rescue
 And if you belong to the former, then God has placed you into His mission to rescue lost sinners
 He will choose and send you like he is about to choose and send Jonah, and we now meet him

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying” **Jonah 1:1**

PP The name ‘*Jonah*’ means dove, which was a symbol of *peace* and *mourning*
 Jonah by profession and by name should be a messenger of peace, one who bravely and lovingly
 speaks the truth of God’s Word to those in need of rescue

PP After all, he is the ‘*son of Amittai*’, a father whose name means *truth*
 He is a prophet of God, meaning he spoke to the words that God gave him to speak

PP ***“For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.”*** **Amos 3:7**

You can see how they could terribly lead people astray, so their message must 100% of they
 were a false prophet and would be executed

Now listen to what I’m about to tell you as I believe it factors into how Jonah responds to God
 Jonah was a rock star among prophets at that time

Early on in his ministry, God chose to give him a scoop that skyrocketed his career
 The northern kingdom called Israel had steadily territory to their enemies, Syria and Assyria
 But Jonah prophesied, foretelling that God would restore their boundaries and it happened!

PP ***“[Jereboam] 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.”***

2 Kings 14:25

Did you catch the very precise wording there? ...‘*the prophet*’, not *a* prophet!

That land restoration propelled Jonah to fame, comfort, respect and glory

There is a whispery seduction in a comfortable heart that believes we can choose to accept what
 assignments from God we want

Illus When I first decided to ride in this past August’s Restoring Hope Ministries bike tour, I
 knew I had to kick it in gear and get on the bicycle and ride. Among the things I’ve learned
 about distance riding, is that the legs get lulled into a false ease. When pedaling a relatively flat
 road it feels effortless, and rhythmic, but when you hit a hill, you experience a sharp protest of
 burn and you wonder how you’ll make it up that hill.

Go out from a house of A/C into a 100 degree, humid day to work...jarring contrast

But prosperity and ease are often enemies of faithfulness, for Israel and for today

PP ***But, “Nothing is more disturbing to a comfortable faith or a comfortable church than God’s passion for the world.”*** Colin Smith

Verse one had to be electric to Jonah...***“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah”***

Yes, tell me what you want me to say and do Lord...the last time made my career!!

Good, because Jonah, I want you to “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” **Jonah 1:2**

What?? ...’go to Nineveh’?????? Get the heck out...

That face of eager joy, turning almost immediately to one of fear, to disappointment, to refusal

Now, think about this personally for a moment

Look at verse one again and reword it for a moment: ***“Now the word of the LORD came to (insert your name), saying, ‘Get up, go, do’”***

Every Christian will receive assignments from God, as He engages you into His plan of rescue
And often they will be difficult ones that you cannot fathom having the ability to complete, and often ones that will go contrary to what you want to do

It may be to give up a lucrative career to take a job that feels like a step back

That’s what happened to the Apostle Paul as he was well on his way up the career ladder of a Pharisee, but God called him off it to become the least of the apostles

Maybe God gives you an assignment that no one understands like telling Noah to build an ark for a great flood when no one had ever seen water fall from the sky yet

He may move you to speak truth to someone who has the power to bring you harm, like Elijah who was sent to confront the king of Israel

He might tell you to go after that person who hurt you yet again, and forgive, like He did Hosea with his wife unfaithful wife Gomer

Or He might ask you to rebuild a relationship that is in ruins, like Nehemiah did with Jerusalem

This is the starting point of our sermon series...God chooses our assignments, not us!

And they are not always going to be easy, or glamorous, or sensible to us

Yet when God speaks to us, which He will to every believer, it will always be to show your part in His plan of rescue and redemption

He doesn’t ask, it is the ***‘word of the LORD’***, Jehovah

A name for God that reveals His eternally self-existent right to rule over all that there is

We are again back to the already flowing stream and the word ***‘And’***

Jonah stepped into that stream in the 8th century BC, we step into it in the 21 century

God wants to save and rescue people around the world, and we, like Jonah, like Israel, are sent on this mission with the powerful message of the One Who died in our place

But we also, like Jonah, may have grown comfortable and lazy, choosing our own assignments
And one of the most important things I can tell you as we begin our journey through Jonah is this
The call to Jonah had two purposes: to bring salvation to Nineveh, and to shame Israel who forfeited the rescue mission God had given her

And it is the same exact two purposes for us here today!!

The word of the Lord is coming to you and me today!

And He is calling us to join God’s mission, to get up, go and witness to those in need of rescuing

And you can do this at your jobs, your schools, your dorms, your neighborhoods, your hobbies

But God will call us out of our lives of comfort and ease, and if we respond like Jonah and run away, He will pursue us with His relentless grace to bring us back, even if takes years!

He allows injuries to end promising sport careers to start a new path, aligned with His mission

He allows disease that puts us flat on our backs, unforeseen complications with a baby, sudden end to a dating relationship, financial setbacks, all and more to get us on His mission

These are His interruptions and they always seem frightening and unfair at first, but they end up being what He uses to give us a life of purpose and supreme joy

PP *“When God calls you to something new, He is always up to something good!”* Smith

It was the summer of 1985 when God took every friend I held dear out of my life, all in the space of about 60 minutes

My plan involved living the high life with my closest friends, but God had other plans

He took them away, leaving me with no options other than college, where He brought me new friends who helped me spiritually grow

And 6 years later, He gave me an assignment to enter ministry, which at the time seemed a gigantic career step back, but ended up being the path to mission God had for me

Is there really anything more amazing than God's relentless grace?

Amen!

Pray