

I. Introduction

Happy New Year! Last week we started a new study in the Book of Jonah. Let's read Jonah **1:1-3** to refresh our memories. **"The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."**

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD." The word of the Lord came to the prophet Jonah. But instead of obeying God, Jonah ran away. He boarded a ship for Tarshish, which was the opposite direction from Nineveh.



It is always best to run to the Lord with all of our problems. Yet, if we stray - or even run away, God does not easily give up on us. His relentless grace pursues us. The Book of Jonah tells how the grace of God pursued Jonah, the Ninevites, and even, as we will see today, the crew of the ship Jonah boarded to try to run away from God. Let's read Jonah 1:4-17 and see what happens next.



II. Scripture Reading (Jonah 1:4-17, NIV 1984)

4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." 7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" 9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." 10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" 12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." 13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased."

15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. 17 But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

III. Teaching

Let's think about this passage from several perspectives. First of all, let's consider the sailors on the ship. No doubt, they were rough and strong men. The



sailing life is a hard life and it hardens the men who come to it. The small, wooden ships of those days made sailing dangerous work. We don't know exactly what kind of ship Jonah was on, but this model of a cargo ship of that time might be something like the ship Jonah boarded.

The captain of the ship and his men were trying to make a living hauling cargo and passengers back and forth on the Mediterranean Sea. When the violent storm threatened to break the ship apart, the men did what they knew how to do. **Jonah 1:5a, "All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship."**



The sailors each had a favorite god, but none of their gods had any power to calm the storm. Throwing the cargo overboard was a practical measure to lighten the ship, but it can almost be seen as an offering to their gods as well. But the sea continued to rage. The many little gods of the nations had no power, because they are not real.

Finally, the sailors cast lots and the lot fell to Jonah. **Jonah 1:8-9, "So they asked him, 'Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?' He answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.'" The sailors were terrified by Jonah's answer. I think that in this moment they must have realized that the Creator God is the One who is worthy of worship and whose anger men must fear. They must have realized that their little gods could not help them, only the God of heaven, the Lord who made the land and the sea could save them.**

Jonah 1:11, "The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, 'What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?'" The sailors did not know what they should do. Now they turn to Jonah, the prophet of the Lord, and ask his advice. They are, I think, really asking the Lord to speak through Jonah. But Jonah's reply dismayed them; Jonah asked them to throw him into the sea.



Rather than accept this, the sailors decided to try again with all of their strength to save themselves: **Jonah 1:13, "Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before."** The sailors had already given up on their small gods, their idols that were no more than superstition. Now they find that the strength of man's arm is also not enough to bring salvation.

It is very common for men and women to try everything else before calling on the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth. We try to save ourselves with our own strength and wisdom. But it does not work. We try calling on the pantheon of little gods that have sprung from man's imagination over the centuries. But they are not real. They cannot hear. They do not see. They cannot save.

Finally, the sailors fearfully resolved to obey the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet Jonah. Before taking action though, they pray. And, for the first time, they pray to the Lord. **Jonah 1:14, "Then they cried to the LORD, 'O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.'" It is interesting that they consider Jonah an innocent man, even though Jonah had confessed his sin. I think it is a sign of repentant hearts that these hardened sailors considered Jonah more righteous than themselves.**

Jonah 1:15-16, "Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him." In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, there are many unusual things and some of them are hard to understand. If you have read the rest of the story, then you know that Jonah will be spared by God's miraculous intervention. But, even so, it is hard to understand why God would leave the men on the ship with the impression that they had saved themselves by killing Jonah. What is God doing here? I think we will see that the



Lord, who is the Author of History, is directing a play that foreshadows other events in the future - more about that in a minute.

When they saw how the sea was calmed, the sailors offered sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him. In short, they worship the Lord, God Almighty. Now we see that God has used Jonah's disobedience to bring salvation to men who did not know Him. Jonah should have obeyed God, but even Jonah's disobedience is used for God's glory and to bring God's love to more people. Jonah has not yet preached in Nineveh, but already Jonah is a preacher to the gentiles, revealing the mercy and power of the One True God to those who had worshipped only idols.

For me, this brings **Romans 8:28** to mind. **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** The things that have happened turn out for good for Jonah, although that is not yet obvious. But even more, Jonah's disobedience brings new people into relationship with the Lord - people who had not yet known a love for God, but who are now beginning to see His grace and mercy.

Let's turn our attention to Jonah. **Jonah 1:5b** is fascinating. **"But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep."** The sailors were all terrified of the storm, but Jonah, the landlubber from Galilee, was sound asleep. Does this remind you of anyone else?



Do you remember the story in **Mark 4:37-39**, **"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm."** Several of the disciples were fishermen; they were very used to the sea, but in this storm they were terrified. Jesus, the carpenter from Galilee, was sound asleep. They woke Him up and rebuked Him. And, even so, they were saved from the storm.

The story of Jonah is history; I believe that it happened just as the Bible records it. At the same time, the Lord, the Author of History, is weaving some deeply interesting parallels into the story of Jonah and the story of Jesus. Only a few prophetic words of Jonah are recorded, but many of the events of the Book of Jonah are a prophetic model pointing to the coming of Jesus.

The disciples woke Jesus up and rebuked Him. Now the captain of the ship wakes Jonah up and rebukes him. **Jonah 1:6**, **"The captain went to him and said, 'How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.'"** Next, the sailors cast lots and Jonah is selected. They question him and he declares that he is a servant of the Lord.

A couple of verses later, Jonah offered his life as a ransom for theirs. **Jonah 1:12**, **"'Pick me up and throw me into the sea,' he replied, 'and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.'"** Jonah did not commit suicide. But he offered himself as a sacrifice to save the lives of others. When the storm suddenly ceased, the sailors turned to the Lord in worship and were saved, not only from the storm, but also unto eternal life. **Romans 10:13**, **"for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"**

The sailors with Jonah saw that the Lord has power over the storm. The disciples saw that same power of the Lord in Jesus when He calmed the storm. **Mark 4: 41**, **"They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'"** Who is this? It is Jesus, Lord and God, the same One who calmed the storm when Jonah was thrown into the waves.

The Lord provided salvation for the sailors. And, the Lord showed His grace to Jonah as well. **Jonah 1:17**, **"But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights."** Some translations say "whale" but "great fish" is a better translation. And, although we do not know what kind of fish it was, the most likely kind of fish to



swallow a man whole would probably be some species of great shark.

Great White sharks large enough to swallow a man whole have been caught, even in recent years, and we know from fossils that some ancient sharks were far larger. Of course, even if a fish can easily swallow Jonah whole, to keep him alive in a fish’s stomach for three days, or, as some say, to resurrect him after he died inside the fish certainly requires a miracle of God.



Do you remember when Jesus pointed to the story of Jonah? **Matthew 12:38**, “Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.’” This is interesting, because Jesus had already done many miracles. But instead of pointing to His miracles, Jesus answered with **Matthew 12:39-40**. “He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

Jesus encourages us to see the story of Jonah as a foreshadowing of His own ministry. Specifically, Jesus points to how Jonah’s three days and three nights in the belly of the fish speaks of His own death, burial, and resurrection. But we can also see other interesting parallels:

Jonah	Jesus	Notes
From Galilee	From Galilee	2 Kings 14:25, Mark 1:9
Sent first to Israel, then to Gentiles	Sent first to Israel, then to Gentiles	2 Kings 14:25, Book of Jonah, Gospels
Slept on a ship in a storm	Slept on a ship in a storm	Jonah 1:5, Mark 4:38
Rebuked by sailors for sleeping	Rebuked by fishermen for sleeping	Jonah 1:6, Mark 4:38
Identified himself when questioned	Identified himself when questioned	Jonah 1:8-9, Luke 23:3, Luke 22:70
Offered self as a sacrifice	Offered self as a sacrifice	Jonah 1:12, Ephesians 5:2
Declared innocent by “killers”	Declared innocent by killers	Jonah 1:14, Matthew 27:4 (Judas), John 18:38 (Pilot), Luke 23:47 (Centurion)
His sacrifice saved the sailors	His sacrifice saves all who believe	Jonah 1:15, John 1:29, Acts 16:31
Was in the fish for 3 days and 3 nights	Was in the earth for 3 days and nights	Jonah 1:17, Matthew 12:40
Came out of the fish alive	Came out of the grave alive	Jonah 2:10, Matthew 28:6

Of course, there are also big differences between Jonah and Jesus. Jonah was just a prophet, and a disobedient one at that. But Jesus is the Son of God and God the Son, perfect and without sin, obedient even to death on the cross. Still, the similarities justify recognizing Jonah as a prophetic type of Christ.

IV. Conclusion

I would like to close today’s message with a word of challenge and a word of encouragement. First, the challenge, in 2014, let’s ask ourselves daily, “*Who am I?*” When Jonah was asked about his identity, he freely confessed his faith in the Lord and identified himself as one of the Lord’s people. We can do the same. In Christ, we are God’s adopted children, saved by His grace, on the way to being like Him. In **Romans 8:29**, Paul declares, “**For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**” As we walk with Jesus, we are conformed to His likeness. Our challenge is to live in such a way that the people around us see Jesus in our lives, just as we have seen Jesus in the life of Jonah today. May we be like Jesus and show His love in word and deed.

Second, a word of encouragement, **Romans 8:35**, “**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**” In answer to his own question, Paul emphatically declared that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus. And as we have seen today, the Lord continued to love and pursue Jonah with relentless grace even when Jonah was disobedient. As long as we, like Jonah, continue to confess that we belong to the Lord, He will never give up on pursuing us with His love and grace. Whatever troubles we face, we can be sure of His love for us.

V. Prayer