

Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah: Man On The Run
Don't Run From God!

They come in your inbox. Email forwards from well meaning friends. One tells you that Microsoft and AOL will send you cash if you forward this email to as many others as possible.

Another warns: Parking lot carjackers are placing flyers on the rear windows of cars, then taking the cars when drivers step out of their vehicles to remove the flyers.

Another says, "James Dobson pleads for action: Atheists are petitioning the FCC to get religious broadcasting banned from American airwaves."

Hopefully you trash this stuff instead of clogging up all your friends inboxes. We call these urban legends.

Ask most people about the story of Jonah in the Bible and they'll say, "That's just a ancient version of an urban legend."

I think that it is safe to say that the book of Jonah is probably one of the most maligned, criticized and scoffed at books in the Bible.

In fact, as far as the prophets go, outside of the book of Daniel (which gives a pre-written history of the world), probably the heaviest attacks have come against the book of Jonah.

Of course, God in His omniscience and foreknowledge was well aware of the unbelief and criticism that would develop in our day and I think that's the reason why Jesus specifically named both Daniel and Jonah.

In Matthew 24 Jesus refers to "*the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.*"

And then in Matthew 12 he says, "*For 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.*"

Jesus Christ not only confirmed the existence of Jonah but the reality of the fish. And what Jesus did was, put his own seal on the book of Jonah as historical fact. If people want to reject this miracle, they have to also reject the words of Christ.

In fact, this Jonah thing was no side issue with Jesus. He mentioned it a number of times because He said Jonah in the fish was actually a prefigure of His death, and his resurrection.

I don't know about you, but I'll stick with the guy who rose from the dead. I figure He should know what He's talking about.

But you know what, I believe actually the fish and the miracles are really side issues that people get wrapped up in because they don't want to face the real point of the book of Jonah.

Here's the thing: The Book of Jonah is really about us.

When the Jews had a temple with a holy place, once a year the High Priest would go in and sprinkle the blood of an animal sacrifice on the mercy seat to make an atonement for the sins of the people.

Of course, there's been no temple for over 1900 years and so the Jewish people have developed a ceremony and liturgy for Yom Kipper - day of atonement.

Today if you would attend a synagogue service on Yom Kipper you would hear the book of Jonah read and then at the close the people would all respond "we are Jonah" "we are Jonah."

Jonah is really a book about us. And the most important lesson that we can learn is how much we are like Jonah because once we really learn how much we're like him, then we will stop making excuses for ourselves.

Jonah was a man who ran from God. Every one of us in this room this morning have run from God at some time in our lives. The story of Jonah is our story.

Turn Jonah pg 816

Today I'd like to just begin to look at the opening verses of this short O. T. book. I'd like us to see who this man Jonah was and just what circumstances he found himself in.

I. Jonah Was A Man With A Mission From God

In Jonah Chapter 1 vs. 1, we read

The Book of Jonah is classified with what is known as the minor prophets.

A prophet was an individual who was actually a mouth piece for God. He was someone who was commissioned to speak God's message.

If you read thru these O. T. prophets you will find there is a distinct similarity to them all. They all have a message of sin, or judgment upon sin, and then blessing in the future.

But there's one thing that makes the book of Jonah stand out from all the other prophets and that's that the book isn't centered around Jonah's prophetic message. The message is there, that God judges sin.

But actually the book is more concerned with the sin of the prophet than the sin of his audience.

And that makes the book very instructive for us. Because we're so much like him.

The book doesn't begin by giving us much information about this man Jonah. All we are told is that his name is Jonah (which means "a dove" in Hebrew) and that he is the son of a man named Amittai.

But if you will hold your place there in Jonah and flip back to the book of II Kings, we can find out some additional information about this man Jonah.

PG 344 II Kings 14:23 -27.

This was somewhere around 760 BC at the time when the nation of Israel was divided into 2 kingdoms. The northern section was known as Israel and the southern part was called Judah.

Jeroboam was the King of Israel during this time and even though he was an evil king, God still used Jonah to prophesy that Israel would be successful in a military campaign to restore some of their lost land.

Jonah was from Gathhepher which was a little town up in the hill country to the north and I'm sure he had a comfortable ministry and as a prophet.

The king always liked it when you prophesied good things about him.

And so Jonah was a prophet of the Lord and a popular man in Israel, well liked by the king.

But now back in the book of Jonah we are told about something that happened to disrupt Jonah's peace and comfort.

I. Jonah Was A Man With A Mission From God

II. Jonah Was Told To Do Something He Didn't Want To Do

The Word of the Lord came to him saying,

Read: Jonah 1:2

God says, "Jonah, I've got a mission for you. Go 500 miles east and preach to the guys in Nineveh.

Now Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and Assyria was the enemy of Israel. God was calling Jonah to preach to his enemies. Today the ruins on Nineveh are outside of the city of Mosul in Iraq.

To say that Nineveh was wicked was a bit of an understatement. The Assyrians were famous for the fierceness and cruelty. When they won a battle, which was most of the time, they would impale people on stakes and put them all around the conquered cities. One of their delights was skinning people alive and tacking their skin upon the city wall for a trophy.

Now put yourself in Jonah's place. God says, "leave your comfortable surroundings of positive preaching where you can say good things and be popular and go hundreds of miles away from home to a bunch of barbarians who are your countries enemies and who would just as soon split you in two as look at you, and tell them how rotten they are."

What an exciting ministry opportunity!

I. Jonah Was A Man With A Mission From God

II. Jonah Was Told To Do Something He Didn't Want To Do

III. Jonah Ran Instead Of Obeying

Look how Jonah handled that command from God, verse 3.

God told Jonah to go 500 miles to the east but instead he decided to go 2500 miles to the west. Tarshish was in Southern Spain.

Now Jonah was a man who loved God. As far as we know, he was a man who was always faithful to God. He certainly was experiencing the blessings of God. But at this point in his life, he made a conscious effort to disobey God. He didn't want anything to do with Nineveh and so he rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Now Jonah wasn't ignorant, he didn't think that God couldn't find him.

But this phrase "the presents of the Lord" actually says in Hebrew "before the face of the Lord" and you will find that used over and over again in the book of Leviticus to describe some one ministering to God. A priest always served "before the Lord".

I think that rather than Jonah trying to get away from the location of God, something which he couldn't do, he was trying to resign from serving God.

God said, "Go to Nineveh and serve as my prophet. Jonah said, "No thanks, I quit. I'm running away from my prophetic duty."

All those action verbs in verse 3 indicate that Jonah's decision was purposeful. He rose up to flee, went down to Joppa, found a ship, paid the fare, and went down into the boat. This was a deliberate determined effort to avoid obeying God.

Now why in the world was Jonah so dead set against going in obedience to God?

Did he doubt that God could provide his needs for the journey? We're not told about his doubt.

Did he figure his skin might be the next up there on the wall? He certainly could have, although, as a prophet of God he must have at least had a head knowledge of the fact that God would protect him.

Actually, Jonah had a very unique reason for not wanting to go preach to the Ninevites.

Read 3:10-4:2

Jonah's reasoning went something like this.

"If I go and preach to the Ninevites the city may be spared. But if I don't go then the Ninevites will continue in their sin, be destroyed by God, and we'll be rid of them forever."

Jonah was very patriotic. He loved Israel. He loved being a prophet in Israel. But he loved Israel more than he loved God.

Any time you love something or someone more than you love God you are in big trouble.

You don't have to bow down before a stone image to be an idolater. Idolatry is loving anyone or anything more than we love God.

James Boice writes, "We can understand the geography involved in Jonah's motives if we can imagine the word of the Lord coming to a Jew who lived in New York City during World War II, telling him to go to Berlin to preach to Nazi Germany. Instead of this he goes to San Francisco and takes a boat to Hong Kong."

Now, we might laugh at Jonah and what he went through. But before we laugh too hard we ought to ask ourselves whether or not we're in the spiritual ancestry of Jonah.

It's true we may have never been sent to Nineveh, and we haven't boarded any ships to Tarshish lately. But the Word of the Lord has come to us. And often our attempts to avoid it are no less determined than Jonah's were.

You say, "wait a minute," I'm not a prophet. I don't have God speak to me in the middle of the night and tell what to do."

No, instead we have what the Bible calls "a more sure word of prophecy." We have the Bible itself, and too many times when it comes to the word of God "we are Jonah!"

See everything was OK between Jonah and the Lord as long as the Lord didn't ask Jonah to do something he didn't want to do.

Verse 1 says "Now the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah"

Verse 2 "Arise, Go to Nineveh,"

Verse 3 "BUT Jonah."

BUT is an awful word when it comes to a response to God's word and God's commands.

Sure, I'll obey God, but I wouldn't even go against my own wishes and desires.

Of course, I'll submit to God's commands, BUT I wouldn't do anything that's inconvenient, anything that involves too many adjustments, anything that means a change of lifestyle.

Isn't it funny how we can even sit here and enjoy a sermon as long as it doesn't touch some area of our life. As long as it hits on someone else's sin. As long as what we're hearing fits in with our lifestyle.

But let that preaching from the Scriptures cross our desires and wishes, let it pin us down in some area where we are bucking the Lord and we stop enjoying and start squirming.

And too often we try to pick and choose which portions of the Bible we want to obey and which we want to ignore.

We say, "God bless my family. take care of me. But in this one area over here, stay out. In that area I'm running and I want you in my rear view mirror."

Or, your in a marriage but now you think you finally met the right person and you want out. God says stay in and you want out. So you run from God.

Or maybe it's, "God I know the girl I'm dating isn't a Christian but she's really cute, and it's a whole lot easier for some one to become a Christian than to become really cute, so stay out of this relationship."

And in the end we say, "God I know you're really big and huge and infinite, and that you created everything, and put the stars in the sky and know each one by name, and you made me with all my complexities, but in this one I know better than you."

God is very specific in the Bible as to what His will is for each of our lives. There are 5 passages in the New Testament that specifically deal with the revealed will of God for us. I'd like us to look at those and do some self-evaluation. (A little self-confrontation.)

II Peter 3:9 pg 1081

Really, the story of Jonah goes way beyond describing how Gods works with His followers to show us how God works with everyone, whether they're a follower of God or not.

God came to Jonah, Jonah rebelled, but then God worked to bring Jonah to himself.

Peter tells us that God's will is that none would perish but that all would come to repentance.

The word repentance literally means “a change of mind” and God wants us to change our minds about 3 things.

a) Sin Sin is no minor issue. Sin put Christ on the cross. Sin is an affront to a holy God. The wages of sin is separation from God for all eternity and sin involves attitudes as well as actions.

b) Ourselves For all have sinned. As much as we hate to admit it we are all sinners. We have all missed the mark of God’s perfection and deserve judgment.

c) God Not some heavenly grandfather in sky benignly overlooking all sin. God isn’t sitting in heaven waiting for us to slip up so He can get us. He’s just and he’s holy, but his love has provided a way of forgiveness. His will isn’t that people perish but that they look to him for salvation.

That’s why he sent his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to die and be raised again. He paid our sin debt for us and now God comes to us thru His Holy Spirit to draw us to faith in Christ.

Maybe your a Jonah at the most crucial point of all. Your trying to earn your own way to heaven thru religion or your good works and God is saying to you “come my way.” *“For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”*

God’s will for you is that you be saved. And without salvation you are going to perish. Maybe you need to come to Christ this morning and trust in his finished work on the cross.

A second place that we find God’s will revealed is in I Peter 2 pg 1077 Read vs 15

Now this is obviously written to people who have accepted the gift of salvation. And what Peter is saying is that if you try to live a God-following life in this world you are going to come into conflict with the system.

The early church was changed with all kinds of unbelievable things. Supposedly they drank blood during communion, and were involved in immorality because they talked about loving one another. Peter knew that the only way that they could ever refute these accusations was to live a life that was so pure and spotless that the critics would be

proven obviously false.

It's amazing how closely people watch you when you claim to be a Christian. Why is that? Because they're watching is to see if you really have something that's made a difference in your life.

The pattern of our life has to match what we profess to believe. It's God's will that Christians stand out as lights in a dark world.

A third place that we find God's will revealed is in Eph. 5 pg 1041

Read 17 & 18.

God's will for you is that you be filled with, or in other words, controlled by, the Holy Spirit. This one's obviously written to believers. And notice it is God's will for every believer. Your life is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

The reason that Paul draws a contrast between wine and the Holy Spirit is because a person who is drunk has submitted themselves to the control of an agent which is in them.

And that is what every Christian is supposed to do. Only the agent which is in you isn't alcohol but the Holy Spirit. As a believer the Holy Spirit lives in you and you are to allow him complete control.

Boy, do we have a lot of Jonah's at this point. See if the Holy Spirit is controlling you, your life is going to be radically changed. And most Christians are afraid. They don't want to give up the reigns of their life to God. Being filled and controlled by the Spirit means not being controlled by self.

God says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice to me. I want to control what you say and what you do, and what you think.

The word of the Lord has come to us. This couldn't be any clearer. It's not optional in the life of any believer. And yet there seems to be this long line down at the ticket counter of people trying to get on boat for Tarshish.

The 4th place where were told about the will of God is in I Thess. 4 pg 1049

Read vs 3-6

We won't spend a lot of time here today, but look at the 4 principles God gives us in these 4 verses.

vs. 3 Stay away from sexual sin - be pure.

vs. 4 Control your body to honor God. I would say that includes the way you dress, the way you move, the activities you participate in.

vs. 5 Don't act like the people who don't know God

vs. 6 Don't use other people to get what you want.

You say, "wow, what's the big stress in the Bible against sexual immorality? Was that a big problem in the 1st century? It sure was! Is it a big problem in our day? Sure Is! Boy could I tell you story after story of Christians who have fallen into immorality. And I'm talking about everybody from the man in the pew to the man in the pulpit.

Our society just reeks of all of this. Everywhere we turn its trying to pull us into immorality.

God says I want you sanctified, Holy, set apart for me. Don't participate in it, Don't dwell on it, Don't be entertained by it.

God wants you sanctified wholly. Are you willing to make that commitment no matter what the cost? Or are you trying to keep God as far back in your rear view mirror as possible?

And the last one: I Thessalonians 5:14 Pg 1050

That's huge, isn't it? It's a sin to be unthankful.

You know, nowhere in the Bible is there a promise that I'll always be healthy, that I'll always have money to buy the things I want, that my family will be protected from heartache and pain.

And yet the Bible doesn't give me grounds for feeling sorry for myself or being bitter and angry at God for my circumstances. I'm supposed to give thanks.

And if I can't give thanks what I'm really saying is that there is an area of my life that I'm unwilling to entrust to God; that I should have everything the way I want it. I'm like Jacob in Genesis Chapter 28 when he said to God, "If you'll be with me and meet all my needs and allow me to do what I want to do, then you'll be my God."

All too often in adversity or heartache, people run from God because they feel he's called them someplace where they just don't want to be. He's touched an area of their life they don't feel he had a right to touch and so they hand in their resignation to God and they take off in the opposite direction that he wants them to go.

That's what Jonah did. Well, built into Jonah's struggle to get away from God are two results that always follow anyone who tires to disobey God.

If you go back to Jonah Chapter 1 with me they're both mentioned in verse 3.

Jonah 1:3

#1 Jonah went down

I don't think it's just a coincidence that God says Jonah went down to Joppa and went down into the ship.

Whenever you disobey God, I don't care what shape or form your disobedience comes in, you always head down.

Later on in this chapter we find that Jonah was down at the bottom of the ship. He was taken and went down into the sea. He sunk to the bottom of the depths and was swallowed down by the great fish and taken down until he couldn't go any lower. That's a lot of going down.

But it's always that way when a person runs from the presence of the Lord. The way may look beautiful when we start. The seas may look peaceful and the ship attractive, but the way is still down.

As cool as you are, as slick as you are, as clever as you think you are, when you run from God you're running from the source of wisdom and truth and eventually it's down hill.

#2 Jonah paid his fare

The way from God is always down. And it's always very costly. *He paid the fare and went down into it.*

Sometimes the way from God looks very easy. The boat was available, Jonah had the money, he bought his ticket. But he never reached his destination. Jonah was thrown overboard, he never got a refund, he paid the full fare but never got to the end of his journey.

Donald Gray Barnhouse said, "Its always that way. When you run from the Lord you never get to where you are going, and you always end up paying the full fare."

Disobeying God always has a high price tag attached to it.

It costs: Joy, peace, protection, power, the promises of God. The most costly thing next to being unsaved is to be disobedient to the word of the Lord when it comes to you.

Sometimes it seems like people are really asking something like this.

"How much can I do in rebellion against God without getting burned? I know what I'm doing is wrong, I know God doesn't want me to do it, but what will it cost me if I do?"

And what they're trying to do is run some kind of profit and loss sheet.

If God just won't punish us too much, if it just won't cost us too much, maybe we can grab a bit of sin to toy around with and just get a minor scar.

Let me say if you have ever contemplated going against the will of God, it doesn't pay. It only costs.

And the cost is so high that it just isn't worth it.

The word of the Lords has come to us this day. It's come to us in the form of this book. Obedience brings joy and peace. Disobedience brings heartache and sorrow.

Are you saved today? Have you received the gift of God which is eternal life thru Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christian are you Spirit controlled? Sanctified, holy, are you thankful in all things? It's God's will for you. Don't settle for any thing less! Don't run from the presence of the Lord.

It might not look that way at first, but your just heading down, down, down and it will cost you more than you could possibly imagine.