
**“A Journey of (Dis)obedience”
(Jonah 1-4)
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Introduction:

The book of Jonah is an incredible book. There are so many different themes that we could spend months learning about.

- Of course Jonah brings up the question of whether the story is a myth or reality? Jesus himself mentions Jonah a couple of times and seems to believe that the events of Jonah really did happen. And it isn't physically inconceivable that a large fish or whale could in fact swallow a person.
- In Jonah we learn about what it means to be called by God.
- We can learn about what repentance truly is.
- We learn about the nature of humans, how wicked both Christians and non-Christians can be.
- We learn about racism, hypocrisy, disobedience and other sins.
- We learn about the heart of God for the lost, for cities and urban centers, even for his creation.
- We learn about what it means to truly obey.
- And there are other things. That's what makes Jonah such an interesting book.
- But also from a literary standpoint, the book is really amazing. It's use of irony, rhetoric, repetition, prose and poetry and it's open-ended ending, really make it a real fun and interesting book to read.

In today's sermon, I'm approaching this book from Jonah's perspective. So basically, I'm asking the question, "What can I learn from the way Jonah interacted with God?" "What do I learn about myself? What do I learn about this world? What do I learn about people? And of course, most importantly, What do I learn about God?"

Every Christian is not only saved by God, they are also called by God to serve and obey Him in a very specific way. This is, without exception, true for every single Christian. And this happens not just once in a person's life, but repeatedly. It happens daily in the little things. It happens periodically with the big things. Isn't that true? Can't we all attest to that in our own experience? Every day we face dozens of small decisions of obedience. And every once in a while, we face a huge decision.

This was true with Jonah as well.

1: 1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

And many times, when God gives us a command to obey, we face what Henry Blackaby calls in his popular book and workbook *Experiencing God*, a crisis of belief. This is when have to face God head-on and decide whether or not to obey.

And Jonah too, faced his own crisis of belief.

1: 3 But Jonah ran away from the (presence of 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 (presence of the) LORD.

What we do at this critical juncture, this crisis of belief, tells in very large letters, what we truly believe about God. When we look at Jonah's story, what does his behavior say about what he believed about God?

It showed a very flawed view and understanding of God.

- God cares about evil and sin (2)
- God has a heart for the city (Nineveh) (2)
- God has a heart for all nations (from Gen 12, we see his heart for the nations), not just for the Jews.
- God truly does desire for all peoples to come to know him.
- God wants to use us as his instruments of reconciliation.
- He thought you could out run God.
- He thought his will was stronger than God's will.

If Jonah truly believed these things about God, he would have obeyed, but what does he do instead, he hops into a ship and heads to the other side of the world, as far away as possible from the will of God.

The NIV doesn't capture the literal essence of this passage. Jonah was literally fleeing from the presence of YHWH. (NIV just ran away from the Lord) So is it true that to disobey God is to flee from God's presence? Yes. It was true with Adam, after he sinned, he hid from the Lord.

Folks, you and I do that all the time. Perhaps our disobedience is not getting on a plane and running away from God, but not getting on a plane and going where God is calling you. We run away from God and immerse ourselves into career. We run away from God and use the excuse of family to serve him. We run away from God saying, I'm not ready, or God couldn't possibly use me. The human heart is exceedingly wicked. We will allow our own arm to be dislocated and broken, before we 'tap out' and say to God, 'you win!'

But if you are a Christian, you know that you cannot hide from God. You cannot run away from him. All of God is present everywhere. We all know that though we try to ignore Him, he lingers in our hearts and minds, constantly calling us to return and to obey. His incredible patience allows Him to out-wait our mini rebellions.

Friends, what does your action or inaction say about what you believe about God?

And so Jonah departs, hops on board a ship, and runs away from God. He was to go to Nineveh, but turns the other way and heads toward Tarshish.

Nineveh is along the Tigris river in what is known as modern day Iraq.

Tarshish – Maybe in Spain (the other side of the Mediterranean) in any case, it was the end of the world for them. It's like saying, anywhere but there and you get on a plane and go to the remotest part of the world you know of.

A huge storm arises, and his shipmates wonder why this is happening. They cast lots and the lot falls on Jonah and reluctantly, they throw him overboard. The storm subsides and Jonah's swallowed by a great fish.

I think Jonah knew as events on that ship began to unfurl, that what he had done was wrong. When he was confronted by the others, look at what he says.

1:9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

In these words he begins to understand who he is (I am a Hebrew. I am a worshiper of YHWH) and who God is (He is YHWH, he is the creator, even of this storm). **This is the beginning of repentance—to understand who God is and who I am in relation to God is the beginning of repentance.** It's when we misunderstand God and misunderstand our relationship to him, that's when we fall into sin and disobedience. What happens when we do that is we lose our bearings. It's as if we're heading down the wrong course, and we're relating to God wrongly – that's when disobedience happens.

And we know Jonah is serious about his repentance, because of what he says next. "Throw me overboard." Repentance is to courageously take your lumps, take what's coming to you. True repentance faces the music, and accepts the consequences. And of course, we lunge ourselves at the mercy of the cross. Friends, this is absolutely critical that we understand this. Our spiritual lives, our relationship with God, our usefulness in his hands, utterly depends on this. Being truly repentant means we face the consequences. David did that after his sin with Bathsheba. Peter did it after his sins of denial. And the same goes for us.

And the Lord proves himself faithful again and again when we humble ourselves and repent. Look at v.17.

1:17 But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah has his period of suffering, he has his time of self-loathing. And he begins to understand what God is all about. We can read about that in his confession inside the fish in chapter two.

2:1-10

1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

2 He said:

"In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.

From the depths of the grave I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the deep, ?
into the very heart of the seas, ?
and the currents swirled about me; ?
all your waves and breakers ?
swept over me.

4 I said, 'I have been banished ?
from your sight; ?

- yet I will look again ?
toward your holy temple.'
- 5 The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me; ?
seaweed was wrapped around my head.
- 6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; ?
the earth beneath barred me in forever. ?
But you brought my life up from the pit, ?
O LORD my God.
- 7 "When my life was ebbing away, ?
I remembered you, LORD, ?
and my prayer rose to you, ?
to your holy temple.
- 8 "Those who cling to worthless idols ?
forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
- 9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, ?
will sacrifice to you. ?
What I have vowed I will make good. ?
Salvation comes from the LORD."
- 10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Praise God that He gives us second chances, Amen!?

3:1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a **second** time: **2** "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Isn't that amazing?

God, YHWH, the big guy, the creator of heaven and earth, in whose hands the universe is but a drop in a bucket, cares not only for nations and cities, but he also cares deeply for persons, for individuals. He cares for me and he cares for you.

This story is not only about God's huge heart for the lost millions. The story is also about correcting, steering, and re-directing one of his own. Isn't that incredible? God cares that we know him rightly. God cares that we relate to him rightly. God cares to correct our prejudices. He cares enough to use a rebel like Jonah, He cares enough to use a rebel like you.

Before we expect God to use us again, we must repent and rededicate ourselves to him and to obedience.

So Jonah obeys. Chapter 3 continues the story. He enters Nineveh, proclaims the message, the people, the king declare a time of mourning and repentance and God, our gracious God, relents.

3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Mission accomplished, right? Everyone's happy now right? The tens of thousands of people of Nineveh are saved. Jonah obeyed. He was used by God. Everything's great right?

Not quite. I'm so glad the story of Jonah didn't end with chapter three. I'm so glad God allowed chapter four to be put in there. Definitely the mission was accomplished in Nineveh, but the mission had just begun with Jonah. And that's the amazing thing.

God calls us, he sends us, we disobey, we repent, we obey, God uses us, end of story right? No...and thank God that's not the end of the story. God is saying, Jonah, I'm not through with you yet. You still have a lot of growing to do, a lot of unlearning and relearning. **And I am passionately interested in helping you become a person who is more and more like me.** And that is God's passion for each one of us.

Look at Jonah's reaction after Nineveh was spared.

4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

What Jonah says is truly remarkable. What Jonah is saying is nothing less than, "God, I'm a racist, but you're not. And I knew that, and I was really hoping you'd share my racism, but I knew in my heart you wouldn't. Because deep down inside I know what you are. You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. And so God, because you haven't turned out the way I expected you to be, I am so disappointed, I'd rather die.

Wow! If I were God, I'd be like, "Okay, your wish is my command!" and zap! And wipe Jonah off the face of the earth.

What do we see instead? God, in his infinite patience gives Jonah another lesson. Jonah's sitting down on the ground (v5) waiting, hoping that maybe, just maybe, fire would fall from the sky and raze Nineveh. What a character, eh? During his waiting the sun is beating down upon him and God provides some shelter—a vine to give him shade to ease his discomfort.

And the next day God sends a worm to eat the vine. The vine dies and no more shade. And to top it off, God sends a heat wave upon Jonah. And Jonah, enjoying his personal pity party, says again, I wanna die.

We shouldn't be so quick to laugh at him and point the finger at the immaturity of Jonah over Nineveh, over the vine, because when we're living in disobedience and unwilling to accept the teaching of God we become like irrational beasts, trying to do and say and make up anything to justify ourselves and if that doesn't work, we'll resort to pouting like children. We'll say, "I don't care", we'll cross our arms, and say, "God you can't make me do it."

But look at the Lord's response, his final response.

4:10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

And God again shares his heart with Jonah, as he does with each of us when we're thinking and acting wrongly. He shared his heart with Abraham, Moses, with Peter, who was also a racist.

The way the book ends with the question, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" I believe is silently ending with the thought, "**shouldn't you?**" **So it would read like this...**, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" Shouldn't you?

Conclusion:

Folks, God not only wants to use us, he wants to change us. He wants us to know his heart. He wants us to know him and know him deeply. He loves us so much and displays so much patience when we are so slow to learn, so slow to obey, and so slow to change. Every single one of us will go on this journey of obedience time and time again and when you do, remember Jonah, remember God and the purposes he has not only for the world, but for you.



We think of the God of the OT to be a mean warmonger. But the people who knew God did not know God that way.

Who was one of the first to encounter God this way? It was Moses.

[Exodus 34:6](#)

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

[Deuteronomy 4:31](#)

For the LORD your God is a **merciful** God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

The great benediction of the OT, Numbers 6:24-26 speaks of God's grace.

2 Kings 13:23

[Nehemiah 9:17](#)

They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, **gracious** and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them,

[Nehemiah 9:31](#)

Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a **gracious** and merciful God.

The Psalmist knew that God was gracious

[Joel 2:13](#)

and rend your hearts and not your garments."Return to the LORD, your God,for he is gracious and **merciful**,slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;and he relents over disaster.

[Luke 6:36](#)

Be **merciful**, even as your Father is **merciful**.

[James 5:11](#)

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and **merciful**.

But Jonah's response is one of anger. So angry "it is better to die than to live." (4:3, 9)

"cannot tell left from right" – morally ignorant. Ignorant of God.

And many cattle. (God is the creator that cares for his creation)

“Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

Matthew (also Luke 11:29-32) 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."

39 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. 40 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. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one^[e] greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 16: 1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

2 He replied,^[a] "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' 3 and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

So why is Jonah here? So that Jesus could say hundreds of years later. A person that is greater than Jonah is here. Jonah was just a prophet, a messenger, but here is the source of the message, Christ, the Son of God himself is here. And so the sign that Jonah gave to the Ninevites, to repent, is the message that the Son of God is giving. Don't ask for a sign, some miraculous sign, look within your own heart, see your own sin. The focus is in the wrong place. Many people are the like the people in Jesus' day, they want God to reveal himself w/ a sign or some sort of miracle and Jesus says, wrong direction, wrong focus, look within your life, look at your own sin and repent. And God will come to you.