

We are going to take a short break from the Gospel of Luke and we will spend the next 4 weeks studying the Book of Jonah. When most people think of the Book of Jonah they immediately think of the story of Jonah being swallowed Alive by a whale and then later being spit back out on dry land. But in the Book of Jonah the whale is probably the least interesting part about the entire book. In fact, the Bible seems to want to skip over the whale entirely. It mentions this miracle in passing as if it's totally uninterested in it well spending a lot more time with a lot more details about other parts of the story.

Part of what makes this book so fascinating it's not the miracle that takes place in it but all the other elements of the story that we find. The book follows a renegade prophet who at first refuses to do what God commands. Yet somehow this sinful Prophet has greater spiritual success than any prophet before or after him.

The book itself captures the imagination of everyone from children to Scholars. It's filled with irony and humor. It has a great compelling narrative. It's filled with poetry and a beautiful prayer that sounds like the Psalms. And best of all the story ends on a cliffhanger that leaves you wanting more.

This is the story that we're going to look at this morning. Because the book has so much depth and so many elements it can be hard to try to get our arms around it and wrangle it. It's going to give you a what I think is a helpful theme of the book they'll keep us grounded as we try to explore everything that is in this book.

Our theme for the series and what I want you to keep in mind as we study this book is our inescapable God. Oh you'll see as we move through each chapter of this book that you cannot escape our God. You cannot Escape his presence. You cannot outrun his Mercy. You cannot evade his purposes. And no matter how hard you try He won't give up on you. And we need to be reminded of the inescapability of our God because often we are like Jonah and we try to run very far from him.

So let's turn to the Book of Jonah and our Bibles and see what we can learn from this rebellious prophet.

Point 1: **You cannot escape God, no matter how far you run or where you are.**

This is what makes Jonah such a rebellious and Renegade prophet.

Because he tries to get away from God.

Why would he do that?

Well, to understand why he would want to get away from God first we got to ask what God wanted from him.

The answer comes in our first two verses.

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,"

The book begins with some typical prophetic language.

It says **"the word of the Lord came"**

this means that God's prophetic inspired words had come to the prophet and now the prophet who is about to be identified will Proclaim them to it's intended audience.

So after announcing that the word of the Lord has come of the book then identifies the name of the Prophet to whom it has come.

"the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai."

the books of the Bible typically will tell us who someone's father is not just for background information but so that we can identify who this is.

And thanks to the identification of Jonah we know that this is not the only place we have read about him.

Jonah also appears in second Kings chapter 14.

There it mentions that Jonah was a prophet during the rain of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

Jeroboam II only gets about six or seven verses in the chapter and we get two main facts about his reign.

The first fact is that he was an evil King.

He continued in the sins of his ancestors and he added his own sins on top of it.

We also learn that he expanded the territory of Judah and Israel.

they had been conquered by other nations.

Much of their territory had been stolen from them as Divine punishment by God.

Yet this king gets some of the land back.

And he gets it back because Jonah came as a prophet to prophesy that God would restore and expand the land of Israel.

This is our introduction to Jonah.

Jonah is not a prophet who rebukes the Kings of Israel.

Even though we know that the king he served under was wicked and evil. Instead we have stories of Jonah telling the wicked evil king of Israel that Israel is going to be blessed and restored and God does so.

So Jonah is already an unusual prophet and Jonah is a prophet who is proud of Israel's heritage.

He has gotten to serve God and watch God bless Israel once again.

Now God comes to Jonah to give him another word from the Lord.

Jonah might be expecting that God is going to bless Israel even further.

Maybe now they will no longer be split by Civil War into two Nations but God will restore them all again and they can get back to the glory of Solomon and David.

Instead, verse 2

2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

God does not want Jonah to go to Jerusalem he wants him to go to Nineveh.

God doesn't want him to go speak to the people of God he wants them to speak to the enemies of God.

Jonah would have been shocked.

This is unprecedented and has never happened before.

Now the prophets of God would often prophesy words to the other nations.

But they did not arise and go to the other nations.

They stayed in Jerusalem or they stayed in Israel and from there they prophesied to Egypt or Moab or Babylon.

But they didn't go to those Nations.

But now God wants Jonah to go and speak to them.

He wants to go to that great City because their evil has come up before God.

Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Nation.

And the Assyrians were not just one of the many nations that Israel had conflict and worse with.

The Assyrians were by far the most hated most despicable and most evil Nation.

It is no surprise that they're evil has become so great that God can no longer do nothing about it.

The Assyrians build their empire not just through military might but through Terror.

They were much like a terrorist state.

And we know about the atrocities that they committed not because their enemies wrote about it but because they bragged about it.

They wanted everyone to know would being an enemy of Assyria would mean.

Vlad the Impaler would impale thousands of people on wooden stakes in the Medieval ages and his wickedness inspired the tale of Dracula.

But he didn't invent that method of torture he borrowed it from the Assyrians.

The Assyrians also invented crucifixion though the Romans would later perfected.

They would rip out the tongues of those they conquered before they were flayed alive.

Which means they would slowly peel off your skin.

One king loved to play entire populations of cities and then drape their skin over his walls.

They would burn children alive.

They would make you grind down the bones of your ancestors and relatives to dust.

They would cut off limbs arms noses ears and gouge out your eyes.

I'm just scratching the surface of what they did.
And we know about this not because Assyria's enemies told us about it.
We know about it because they bragged about it.
You can go and look at artwork from the Assyrian kings that they made of their torturing of other people's and would hang in their palace.
It is no wonder that their evil has risen up to God.
And it is all of this evil that we need to keep in mind when we read the story.

We might be so removed that we think Jonah was just sent to talk to some people in another country.

Jonah was sent to the most evil nation in the world.

Verse 3, **" But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. 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, away from the presence of the Lord."**

God tells Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh and so Jonah arises and he runs away.

Jonah says no thank you.

Three times in this verse it tells us that Jonah is not going to Nineveh he is going to Tarshish.

Now we don't know exactly where Tarshish was in Jonah's day.

But we do know that it's in the opposite direction.

It is somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea.

It is in a remote place about as far away from Nineveh as you can get.

Not only is Jonah told to go east and he goes west Jonah is told to go up and he goes down.

He goes down to Joppa.

He's told to go walk across the land and he goes on a boat across the sea.

Jonah is trying to get away from the presence of God.

He's trying to run away from God and from God's mission.

But our God is inescapable.

Verse 4, **"But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so much that the ship threatened to break up."**

And so God hurls a great storm at Jonah's boat.

He throws it like a soldier would throw a spear.

The word for great wind here is also used in Jeremiah 23.

There God says that the storm of the Lord and all of its Fierce wind will come upon the false prophets.

The wind will go against those who claim to speak in God's name but don't.

But the Book of Jonah makes it clear that this fears wind will also come against those who are supposed to speak in God's name and don't.

There is nowhere they can run that it won't find them.

And the storm is so serious that it looks like the ship is going to sink at any moment.

It's all about to fall apart in the fall into the depths of the sea.

Verse 5, "Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep."

The sailors are terrified.

They are all praying to all of their gods every god that they can think of.

And they are going down to where the cargo is and throwing everything possible overboard to try desperately to keep their ship from sinking.

And while they are all running around in terror trying to keep themselves alive what does Jonah do?

Jonah continues to go down instead of going up.

He goes into the ship.

He lays down and he falls asleep.

There's certainly some echoes of Jesus calming the storm.

After all the storm is raging and both of them are asleep.

They were asleep for very different reasons.

Jonah is asleep because I think he knew this would happen. He did not really think that he could escape God's presence but he certainly wants to escape God's mission and call. And so Jonah lays down and takes a nap like somebody stuck deep and depression they can't bring themselves to get out of bed. He has totally given up. It seems like Jonah would rather just die than obey God. And it's not just that Jonah fears the Assyrians. So we'll discover throughout this book Jonah hates the Assyrians. He just wants God to kill them. He does not want to preach to them because he doesn't want them to repent of their sins and come to faith in God. And Jonah tries to run away but he finds that he can't escape.

The sailors are set up as literary foils for Jonah. They are like opposites playing off of each other in the story. Jonah shows us that you cannot run from God. The sailors show us that even if you ignore God you still can't escape Him. Verse 6, **"So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."**

The captain gets summoned to go and deal with Jonah. Because the picture is the Jonah is sleeping down where all the cargo is. And while the sailors are taking everything out of that room and throwing it to the sea, They see a dude in the corner hiding behind boxes just fast asleep. So the captain comes to try and wake him up and get him to help. You may also notice how the captain's words mirror God's words. He tells Jonah to arise. It is meant to call back to God's word to arise and go to Nineveh.

The captain even tells Jonah to arise and call out to his God. He tells Jonah to pray and ask God to stop it.

We already see the first glimpse that the Pagan sailors are more righteous than Jonah.

Verse 7, **“And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.”**

No one's prayers are working.

So they are trying to find the answer.

They're trying to figure out which God is angry at them and whose fault it is so that they can fix it so they don't die.

Well they're searching desperate for an answer Jonah knows the answer and isn't telling them anything.

We have a silent prophet in the midst of a desperate dying people.

So in their desperation they decide to cast lots.

They drew straws or they picked some small objects one to represent everybody on the boat shook it up in a box and then pulled one out.

The one they just so happened to pull out is Jonah's.

Because Jonah can't get away from God.

The prophet can be a silent as he wants but God is going to speak even if it's through pagans throwing dice.

Verse 8, **“Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”**

Just to be clear these are not get to know you questions.

This is not the sailors trying to get to know John a little better so they can figure out what happened.

The sailors are trying to identify Jonah's God.

Because it's a polytheistic culture every nation every people even every individual has their own gods.

There are small gods and bigger gods and stronger gods and weaker gods.

And they figured out that Jonah's God is the one that's angry so now they need to know who it is.

And their questions are meant to identify which God Jonah worships.
But notice which question Jonah answers first.

Verse 9, **"And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew"**

The first thing that Jonah says is his race or his ethnos or his people.

Jonah deliberately reverses the order of their question.

And his answer reveals what he thinks the most important thing is.

He knows that they're trying to find out who is God is.

He doesn't begin as a prophet saying thus says the Lord.

He does not identify who the Lord is.

Jonah says I am a Hebrew.

The rest of the verse **"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."**

It's quite the and.

He is a Hebrew and also this is my God.

But in Jonah's defense he does not just identify that it is his God.

He says that Yahweh is the God.

He is the God who created everyone and everything and all things belong to Him.

Verse 10, **"Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done! For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD,"**

They are filled with the fear of the Lord where Jonah is not.

And they who hadn't heard of Yahweh before 5 minutes ago cannot believe that Jonah would run from him.

They are shocked and bewildered.

They can't believe that someone who serves this kind of God would ever disobey them.

Verse 11, **"Then they said to him, what shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us? For the sea grew more and more tempestuous?"**

And as they ask the storm is getting worse.

The waves are getting higher in the sky is getting darker things are getting more and more scary.

And they asked Jonah what do we do.

Here Jonah has every preacher's dream a willing audience.

They say okay this is your God you have angered him you know why you have angered him what do we do to please your God?

When you make your God angry how can you appease his wrath?

When you sin how can you find Salvation?

And so what should Jonah say?

What should his answer to their question be?

Jonah should say when you anger my God there is salvation when you repent of your sins with a pure heart.

So Jonah should have told them I have angered my God because I did not go to Nineveh.

I will go repent and turn the boat around and take me to Nineveh so I can obey my God.

That's what Jonah should say, but what does he say?

Verse 12, **"He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."**

Jonah says throw me in the ocean.

There's some layers to Jonah's response.

On one hand we should see that this is some progress.

Jonah seems to care that the Pagan Sailors may die because of his sin.

And so he is willing to give his life so that they can be safe.

He's almost offering himself up as a sacrifice in their place.

So it's a good thing that his heart is softening towards those who are not Hebrews like him.

He doesn't just want to die and take them with him.

But he still isn't really repentant.
He would still rather die than go to Assyria.
So he wants them to throw him into the sea like a human sacrifice.
So how these pagan men respond?
And they actually respond how Jonah should have

Verse 13, **"Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them."**

This is one of the many reasons I love this book.
Jonah does all the wrong things and all of the unbelievers do all of the right things.
It is almost like they say yeah no Jonah.
We're not going to kill you I think we need to take you back so you can go to Nineveh.
And so they row as hard as they can try to get back to dry land to get this Renegade prophet back on track.
There's a lesson here too.
You can row as hard as you want.
You can work as hard as you want.
But you can't make someone else repent and follow God.
They have to do it on their own.

Verse 14, **"Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."**

The first people in the Book of Jonah to call out to God is not the prophet of God is not Israelites it is pagan sailors.
And they call God by his name.
They call on the name of Yahweh.
And they ask Him to forgive them what they're going to do to Jonah.
Because they recognize that this is wrong.

But as they do it they recognize that Yahweh is the God who made the dry lands and the Seas and He can do what pleases Him.
They show better faith than Jonah.

Verse 15, **"So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging."**

They pick Jonah up and they hurl, there's that word again,
they hurl him into the sea.

And as soon as they toss him into the water to see ceases to rage in the waters are calm.

Verse 16, **"Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."**

After God is delivered them they make sacrifices.

There are lots of people who might pray to God in a foxhole what it looks like they're playing is going to crash.

But after they're safe.

After God has delivered them through the storm.

Their fear of the Lord continues.

And they make proper sacrifices.

Instead of sacrifices to their own gods or all the other gods they prayed to,
They make sacrifices to the gods of Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

And they make vows.

Who doesn't tell us exactly what these vows are we have to guess.

My guess based on the context of the rest of the book that these men become followers of the true God.

I love about this first chapter is that these men were just going about their business.

They weren't searching for a new God to worship.

But God came and found them because you can't escape Him.

Jonah refused to go to unbelievers and to preach the gospel to them.

He ran as far away as he could and yet even as he was mostly silent God brought these unsaved Sailors to faith in him.

Verse 17, **"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."**

We have already read half of what the Bible tells us about this fish.

It's just one verse matter of fact.

We had drama of God hurling the storm like a spear in the back and forth or the sailors and now it's just Jonah goes into a water fish swallows him up Jonah stays alive.

Cuz you can't escape God.

What I want you to know is that wherever you go God can find you.

This isn't meant to be like creepy or terrifying.

Is meant to be comforting.

Part of what we see in the first chapter of Jonah is that you can't escape God.

And you can't escape Him because He loves you.

You can't escape Him because He's not going to let you run away.

He will keep coming and coming and coming after you inviting you to follow him.

Sometimes we are like Jonah and we are children who are trying to run away from home.

And God is the parent who loves us and cares about us.

And because He cares about us He chases after us and He doesn't let us get away no matter how far we try to run.

And God is also a God who comes to find us even when we are looking for him.

Listen to me nobody is going to hell on a technicality.

No one will spend an eternity apart from God because they never heard about him.

God will come and find you.

God will come and knock on your door.

Just like he did for those sailors.

I want you to know that you are never too far from God.

He is right here waiting.

And even if you think that you have run too far away from this you could the moment you turn around He will be right there.

This is the story of the gospel.

Like Jonah all of us have sinned and ran from God.

We rebel against Him and we try to escape His commands and rules.

But God did not let humanity get away.

He sent prophet after prophet to call us home.

He gave us His word so that we could hear His voice.

And when none of that worked, He came Himself.

He left behind all the trappings of heaven and perfection to become a human.

Jesus came to pursue us.

He came not to kill us for our sin.

He came to die in our place.

He gave His life and shed His blood for you.

Because God loves you and does not want you to get away.

We can't escape God.

You cannot escape God, no matter how far you run or where you are.

But you cannot escape His mercy and grace.

There is forgiveness for all of your sins.

If God can show mercy to the Assyrians and to Jonah, then God can show mercy to you.

So stop trying to escape.

Stop running and turn to God.

Let Him save you from every storm.