

July 2, 2023

God's Good News Story

Jonah: A Story About Second Chances

Today we look into an Old Testament story that most all of us are familiar with. At least parts of it. Most people think on one thing when you mention this name... SO tell me, what one thing do you think of when I say the name....JONAH... that's right either a whale or a big fish. Well, that is a BIG part of the story of Jonah, but not really the main point. **Jonah is NOT a BIG FISH Story...IT IS A BIG GOD STORY.**

Jonah, which is Hebrew means 'Dove', was the son of a man called Amittai, Jonah was born in the area known as Gath-Hepher in Israel around 800BC, about 200 years after the time of King David and obviously about 800 years before Jesus. He lived to around 60 years of age and died around 740BC.

So, let's see what the story of Jonah can teach us today.

I think we would all agree that God is a great and awesome God. Who loves us, and has the best plan for our lives...right? Also, I think we could all agree that He has the best understanding of the past, the present and the future...AGREED? I would gather that you also, at least in theory, would agree then that He has the right to ask us to do whatever He wants, and we should immediately, completely, and joyfully do what He asks...RIGHT? I can feel a little uneasiness and uncertainty from some of your faces... You are probably thinking, OK Pastor

Moak, where are you going with this and do I want to go along...LOL.

Well, this is just the situation that Jonah found himself in. He was a faithful follower of Yahweh/God and I am sure wanted to do His will. Mostly?

Try to put yourself back in time in the mind of Jonah, he is aware of the power and majesty and capability of God and when this great God speaks to him, clearly and specifically, he has this brilliant idea to do something about it....something that may actually have crossed your mind a time or two when you have been led to do something that you may not be to happy about... what did this great prophet of God do.... Well...HE RAN!

That's right, he tried to run from God, actually he tries to sail away from God, on a ship in the opposite direction. You see, God have given him a task, a calling.

Jonah 1:1-3... The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it, because their wickedness has come up before Me." ³ But Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship that was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and boarded it to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah wanted to be "Somewhere Else". I guess Jonah, must have skipped the day in Seminary class in Theology 101, where we are taught that God is everywhere?

OOPS... By the way if you are tempted to run from God, I have just one word... **DON'T.**

As I mentioned before, many people think the story of Jonah is about a whale or a big fish. Others might think it's a story about running away from God. It is true those are the circumstances found in the story, but I want to propose that the real message of this story, one that actually aligns with our "**Scarlet Thread of Redemption**" theme...is that Jonah reveals to us that Yahweh, the great and awesome God can do anything He wants, and He chooses to give Jonah, and us by the way, **a second chance.**

You see, God spoke to Jonah and told him to go to the evil city of Nineveh, which by the way is described as an '**exceeding great city of three days journey with 120,000 citizens.**' Archaeologists say the length of its walls stretched over 7 miles, an area of about 1,640 acres. Now Nineveh was the arch enemy of the Israelites. They hated them. Sadly, Jonah was caught up in the hatred and did not want to even step foot on their ground. He hated them enough to not listen to God.

Jonah had his reasons or excuses for not doing what God asked him to, but you see, God has a way of getting our attention. Ken Davis, a pastor, speaker and comedian tells a story about a true incident that happened to him and his daughter. He was riding with his daughter on a family outing when they stopped at a gas station. While Ken went inside to pay, his daughter filled up the tank. On the way back out Ken saw a young mother having

trouble with her van, which was full of young children. He asked her what the problem was, and she said she was on her way from Michigan to Florida and her transmission fluid was leaking and she had to stop every 100 miles or so to refill it. Ken went inside and bought a funnel and some transmission fluid. He proceeded to fill the receptacle and then wished her good luck. When he got back in the car his daughter was already sitting there and said to him, Dad, God has laid it on my heart to give that woman a \$100 bill. But I am afraid she will be embarrassed or refuse it. She struggled a bit but decided to just drive on. Well, they only made it a few feet when Ken looked in the side view mirror and saw that she had forgotten to take the gas nozzle from the car. As it stretched like a rubber band then popped out and flung around like a jumping snake the daughter dropped her head and said, "I think I will go and give that \$100 now". Ken then slyly said, Yes, I think God is giving you a **SECOND CHANCE** to listen and obey!

1st Key Point: When God tells you something... LISTEN & OBEY. Don't run, it never works out well.

Something to note is that often our response to God's call is based upon our perception of Who He really is. It may be the case that many Christians don't have the proper view and understanding that God always has our best in mind. Especially, when it seems to run counter to what we *think* should happen. You and I must be completely convinced that when God, speaks to us and gives us His plan, it is not for our destruction or harm it is for you

good. Do you remember the verse from the book of Jeremiah?

Jeremiah 29:11... *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

A foundation theological 'piling' (like the wood poles or concrete poles that are driven deep in the ground to provide a solid and sure foundation to build on) must be that we are confident that God is good, loving and that His will and plan is always best for us. Let me ask you, is that 'piling' part of your faith foundation?

God is not some cosmic 'killjoy' that is looking down from heaven to see if you are having fun and then try to stamp it out! No, God is the truest source of joy and happiness. In actuality, we will never find real joy, peace, satisfaction or success outside of God's will for us.

Is it scary... YES.

Is it illogical at times...YES.

Is it always convenient and popular...NO

Is it always best... YES, YES, a thousand times YES!

God doesn't call away from joy and fulfillment, He calls us TO joy and fulfillment! You gotta' believe this!

IF only Jonah had realized this, he could have saved himself a lot of grief. You see when Jonah heard God's call, he did not listen and obey he RAN. Ran to a ship by the sea and hoped to get as far from God as possible. Again, he missed the point about God being EVERYWHERE.

Listen to this scripture....

Psalms 139:7-10... ⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* ⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.* ⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,* ¹⁰ *even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

Jonah got on a boat and headed to Tarshish



Now scholars debate over the exact location of Tarshish, but the most popular believe is that it was all the way over on the coast of Spain near the Rock of Gibraltar. In other words, Jonah not only did not listen to God, he ran about as far away as humanly possible in his day.

Well, as you might imagine, and probably experienced in your life. When you run from God, it NEVER works out good. A storm rose up so fierce that they started throwing everything overboard, then they all started praying to their various gods. Finally, Jonah told them that he was the problem. He was running away from Yahweh Elohim, the LORD GOD of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. They cried out '*what must we do*'?

Then Jonah gave them a very startling solution... You must throw me overboard and the storm will stop. Well, even the sailors didn't want to do that. But, finally they realized they had no other choice. They cried out to God in prayer to forgive them for the blood of this man Jonah and then they hurled him into the sea and immediately it became calm. Then they had a worship service... they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him.

Then the part of the story most of us know takes place. A BIG FISH swallowed Jonah and he stayed three days in the belly of this fish. Some people say this is a pre-figure of what Jesus did. Jonah was three days in the fish like Jesus was three days in the grave. While in the belly of the fish Jonah did what any reasonable person would do.... HE PRAYED... EARNESTLY. God listened to Jonah's prayer and the fish vomited him back up alive on the sea shore.

2nd Key Point: When times of trouble or uncertainty come... Call out to God in prayer. HE WILL HEAR. But the next step is vital. You must listen to His response and accept His answer to your situation. Remember, GOD KNOWS BEST! This time when God called, **Jonah listened!**

Here's where the 2nd chance comes in to play...

Jonah 3:1-3... *¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the SECOND TIME, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.” ³So Jonah*

got up and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.

God in His mercy and grace gave Jonah a 2nd chance to be obedient. Jonah obeyed and began to go through this large city of Nineveh and cried out God's judgment...

(picture of reconstructed Nineveh)

“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (vs4).

Surprisingly, this pagan city did what Jonah at first did not. THEY LISTENED.. They repented and asked for forgiveness. Mercifully, God heard their prayers and turned back His wrath from them and spared them. Happy ending for all, right! You would think so, Jonah had just led an entire city of 120,000 people to turn to God in faith, was he happy... NO!. He was angry, WHAT! Yep, this prophet of God was angry because he still hated the people of Nineveh and was mad that God was 'letting them off the hook' so to speak. He wanted them destroyed, and he even confessed his sorry attitude. Listen to Jonah's words in **Jonah 4:1,2**... *¹But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. ²Then he prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was this not what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore in anticipation of this I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster.*

3rd Key Point: It is possible, but not advisable to partially obey God and still have God do a great work. But it will leave you unhappy and unfulfilled. Actually God will then turn His attention to you, to correct your lack of Immediate, Complete and Joyful Obedience.

Jonah left the city pouting and angry. He even got to the point where he wanted to die. When we get outside of God's will, we can never be truly happy or at peace.

The story closes with God teaching Jonah that God is a God of compassion and forgiveness that wants people to turn from their sin and live, no matter how bad they may have lived their life.

Final Key Point: God is compassionate and loving and desires all people to come to know Him and believe in Him. We should do all we can to help spread the Good News about God's Redemption and love.

Are you doing your part to share God's Good News Story to Everyone? If not, God is giving you a 2nd Chance...to Listen, Obey and see the Work of God in the lives of people around you.

Don't run, don't disobey, listen to God, Follow His will Immediately, Completely and Joyfully.