

5/31/20

Finding Courage to Live the Mission

Jonah 1-4

Sermon Summary

This message looks at the prophet Jonah and his unwillingness to fulfill his God-given mission to take God's message to the people of Nineveh. However, he had made a commitment to be a prophet of God so God takes some actions to encourage Jonah to do what he was called to do. Jonah ends up taking the message of God to the Ninevites but when they repent and God relents in bringing destruction on them, Jonah becomes angry and so depressed he wants to die. God was using this story to illustrate how the nation of Israel had failed in their God-given mission to take His love to the world and to illustrate His own heart of concern and compassion for people who did not know Him. The end of the sermon showcases how followers of Christ are called to live a missional life and several Scriptures are given to help us find the courage to live our mission. The entire book of Jonah is used for this message.

Full Sermon Notes

"You put Your love on the line to bear the weight of sin that was mine" Jesus was willing to do for us what we could not do for ourselves! If you've ever wondered why Jesus' death was so gruesome, it's because our sins are so gruesome and He wanted to take the punishment we deserved. Folks we live in a world that needs the truth and the love of God now more than ever. If there was ever a time when we need to be a praying church on mission for God it's now! Today we're going to look at a story that has so much practical application to our lives it's not funny! I hope after today, you'll never dismiss the story of Jonah and the big fish, or whale, as just for the kiddos! It's for all of us. And it's good to have our children with us this morning. We're going to hear an amazing story today. Let's pray!

The Book of Jonah falls under the category of the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets were not minor in their importance, but the length of their writings were small in comparison with prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah. Jonah is an interesting book because it is less about what Jonah said, and more about what he did. Of course the story starts out with what he didn't do. Before we talk about that I need to give you a little Hebrew history.

Way back in Exodus 19:5-6 we discover that God had called the Hebrew people to live a mission. Listen...

Exo 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

Exo 19:6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

God had chosen them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, not so they "alone" could know God and be saved, but so they could be an example to the world of the love of God for His Creation and especially for people, because people are made in His image! The Hebrew people were not to be the "Frozen Chosen," cold and callous to the fate of the rest of the world! They

were to be God's representatives to the world. They were supposed to be God's evangelist, His spokesmen and women, to proclaim to the world His desire to have a personal relationship with people and that He had a set of principles and guidelines He had designed for the benefit of humankind. However, the Hebrew people had never really fully understood or accepted their calling. This condition became worse after the Assyrian exile, where a majority of the Jews in the Northern Kingdom were dispersed from their homeland and taken captive. The same attitude developed in the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the Babylonian exile, which would come after the Northern Kingdom's fall. The late Dr. Jack Glaze, who was one of my spiritual mentors and who served as the field supervisor for my Doctoral project, wrote the commentary on Jonah in the Broadman Commentary. We'll hear from him several times today. Here's what he said about the situation with Israel...

"There developed in Israel a sense of superiority and exclusiveness which led to a self-centered particularism that tended to exclude all other nations from the circle of God's mercy and care."

Jonah, who had lived in the Northern Kingdom, had been influenced by this attitude. The exile had caused the Jewish people to develop a deep distrust of foreigners and that turned into an extreme nationalism that caused them to lose concern for others. Dr. Glaze goes on to say...

"The book of Jonah exposes the narrow nationalism and shows the universal redemptive design of God for all mankind. Among the true worshipers there were those who understood that the nation had failed to fulfill her mission and that God was giving them another chance to be a true kingdom of priests. They sought to awaken the national conscience."

This is the purpose and reason for the Book of Jonah: To "Awaken the national conscience" to the love of God for the World. The "universal redemptive design of God for all mankind" doesn't mean that every person will be saved, but that God desires that every person be saved! God's love is universal! There's no human being that God doesn't love and that Jesus didn't die for! But God has extended us the freedom to accept or reject. God's Word tells us this in 2nd Peter 3:9...

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So just how far would God go to get the message of His love for the world to His people? Pretty far. In fact He sends His prophet Jonah on a mission to go to the land of Nineveh, about 700 miles away, to share a message with them. Let's see Jonah's reaction to God's call...

The Call to Live The Mission

Jonah 1:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:

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

Now at first you might be wondering how this mission could have anything to do with God loving the people! I mean God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it because of its wickedness! This is where people so many times misunderstand the love of God. God loves us so much that He is willing to confront us with our wickedness and sin because He understands the deception of sin and the damage sin causes in the lives of people as well as the ultimate consequences. Remember, God will not force us to leave our sin and accept His love, but He will set before us the choice. If wicked people aren't shown their sin and their need for God they will just live in darkness, and sin will ultimately destroy them. So God cares enough to be honest with us about our situation! You may not like it but that's true love! Listen to what God says through the prophet Ezekiel...

Ezek 18:21 "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.

Ezek 18:22 None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live.

Ezek 18:23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

Those words had not yet been written when Jonah lived, but, as you will see, Jonah knew this about God and we'll see in a moment, it was a part of why he didn't want to go to Nineveh. So I told you how far God was willing to send one of His chosen prophets to reach a lost people: 700 miles. 700 miles back then might as well have been to the other side of the world! No planes, trains, or cars. But it was not the distance that bothered Jonah. Remember I told you that Jonah had been influenced by the culture of his day and he had developed a hatred for people like the Ninivites. And just how far would Jonah be willing to go in order to not live the mission God had called him to live? Let's look at...

Jonah's Response to the Mission

Jonah 1:3 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.

Okay, Jonah goes about 33 miles south to Joppa, and pays the fare to travel to Tarshish. How far is Tarshish from Jerusalem? By plane it's 2,242 miles. Jonah didn't have the plane option so he booked passage on a boat, and that would have probably been just under 3,000 miles of travel. Boy that was a long way. Over three times as far as Ninivah. Can you imagine the amount of funds he paid for that?

So Jonah was being disobedient to the Lord and he was going way out of his way to be disobedient! Once again, let me say that it's so good to have our children in the service with us this morning. I hope you all got your activity packet! Kids, let me ask you a question. Have you

ever gone out of your way to disobey your parents and realized later it would have been so much easier to just do what they told you to do in the first place? Sometimes the trouble we go through to avoid being obedient is way more trouble than just doing what we were asked to do. Jonah is about to learn that lesson in a big way! And kids, all of us adults can probably remember when we had to learn some hard lessons and sometimes we still do! So let's look at...

God's Response to Jonah's Disobedience

Jonah 1:4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

Now someone here might be tempted to say or you've at least thought this: "Pastor Larry you always talk about God giving people a choice, but it doesn't seem like God is giving Jonah much of a choice on whether or not to go to Nineveh." That is true but you must understand that Jonah was a prophet of God. He had accepted the call of God in his life and had been given the high profile platform to speak on behalf of God even to Kings. Jonah had made that decision and commitment and God had every right to hold him accountable. Being an advisor to the King came with a certain amount of prestige I'm sure. Going hundreds of miles away to a people he didn't know, didn't care for and who didn't know him from Adam, was a different thing altogether. Sometimes we're willing to do the good jobs, the fun jobs, the rewarding jobs, the lucrative jobs, but the difficult assignments, those that are low in recognition, and especially those that might carry personal risk and liabilities, well that's a different story.

But remember, Jonah's story represents Israel's story. Israel had run away from their calling so many times! The Old Testament records how they would make commitments to God and promise to follow Him and would then egregiously break their covenant. God had called the Nation of Israel to be a Kingdom of Priest, and a holy nation, in order to show the world that the One True God of the Universes was not confined to one nation or people, but was God over all creation. Let's read on...

Jonah 1:5 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.

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."

Notice each of the sailors cried out to their own god, the national deity of their homeland. And the captain tells Jonah to call on his God too!

Jonah 1:7 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.

Jonah 1:8 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?"

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

Jonah 1:10 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.)

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?"

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 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.

I am impressed with these people, even after finding out the storm was Jonah's fault, and he told them to throw him into the sea, they tried to row back to land so they wouldn't have to throw him overboard! One thing I feel is often overlooked in this story is how God used everything that happened to reach these sailors. Listen to what it says they did...

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."

Jonah 1:15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

Jonah 1:16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

God's Mercy to Jonah

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

God miraculously provides a way for Jonah to not drown in the raging waters! Not the kind of cruise ship you would want to be in, it was smelly and cramped, it was the belly of a huge fish, probably large enough to be a whale, and it could have been, but big fish or whale, it saved Jonah's life and got him to shore so he could make his journey to Nineveh. One of the interesting things about this story is that it is also a prophetic look into the future of another person who would carry a message from God to the world. And who would that be? Jesus, God's Son, God in the flesh! The one who spent time in the belly of a tomb. It was a bit different for Jesus than Jonah because many of the folks who were responsible for Jesus being nailed to the cross were not remorseful like the folks who threw Jonah overboard. And it was different because Jesus willingly made the long journey from heaven to earth to bring us news of God's love for us and His desire for us to turn from our sins and find life! Now let's look at what Jonah did when he was at one of the lowest points of his life and in the belly of the whale.

Finding Courage to Live the Mission

Jonah 2:1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

Jonah 2:2 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.

Jonah 2:3 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.

Jonah 2:4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

Jonah 2:5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

Jonah 2:6 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.

Jonah 2:7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

Jonah 2:8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

Jonah 2:9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

What do you do when you're at your most desperate place in life? Jonah prayed from inside the fish! In other words he had faith that God was going to deliver him, and what a prayer. In his distress Jonah cries out to God for help and Jonah states in his prayer that he knows God is listening! While he feels so far from God he believes he will once again see God in His Holy Temple. He believes God will lift his life up from the pit he's in! He then makes a powerful theological statement that those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. Jonah decides to let go of his sin of disobedience and promises to sacrifice to God with song and to keep his vows. He then makes this proclamation...

"Salvation comes from the Lord!"

The Scripture then says this...

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

For a second time God gives Jonah his mission and Jonah obeys.

Jonah 3:1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

Jonah 3:2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Jonah 3:3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city--a visit required three days.

Jonah 3:4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

The Mission is Wildly Successful

Jonah 3:5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

Jonah 3:7 Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.

Jonah 3:8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

Jonah 3:9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

The King repented and issued a proclamation for the nation to repent in hopes that God would have compassion on them. God responded...

Jonah 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.

Jonah must have been thrilled! One of the most successful revivals ever recorded! Spiritual awakening happened right before Jonah's eyes! From the belly of the huge fish to great revival! A whole nation turns from their paganism to Yahweh God! But...

Jonah Feels the Mission is a Failure

Jonah 4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

Jonah 4:2 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.

Jonah 4:3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Wow!! What just happened? Jonah just wants to die! Seems to be a theme with some of the prophets of God. Roller Coaster emotions. One day on a mountain top, the next day in the belly of depression! There are several reasons why Jonah was so upset. He was more concerned about his pride as a prophet and his pride of being a part of the exclusive "Chosen Nation" and so he is angry with God for being merciful and gracious and loving. Remember, Jonah was still under the thinking that Yahweh God was only for Israel and the Hebrew people and no one else! He had just preached emphatically that God was going to bring judgement on Nineveh in forty days! His reputation as a prophet was at stake if God didn't follow through with the destruction of the city! He's thinking, "Where's the kaboom? There was supposed to be an earth-shattering kaboom!" But God was trying to teach Jonah, and the rest of the world, the real mission of His heart!

God Teaches His Prophet a Lesson on The Mission

Jonah 4:4 But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah 4:5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

Oh, he's still hoping to see some judgement!

Jonah 4:6 Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

Jonah 4:7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.

Jonah 4:8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

Jonah 4:9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

Jonah 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.

Jonah 4:11 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 just like that, the story ends! What a powerful message. One hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left was a reference to the innocent children who would have perished. God confronts Jonah and through his story, the nation of Israel with their arrogance, their foolish pride, their prejudice, their callousness towards human life! Jonah was more concerned with his shady vine than he was about human life! And Jonah had prayed such a beautiful prayer of faith when in the belly of the fish, but he couldn't seem to let go of his own personal agenda and find the courage to live God's mission! If Jonah could have only realized that he was not chosen by God because he was better than other people, but because God loved him and wanted him to know that love and to share that love! We don't hear anything else from Jonah or about Jonah except for a brief mention by Jesus about the connection between Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus would spend in the grave. So I don't know if Jonah ever fully accepted that the ultimate mission of God was to love the world and to save the world. But Jonah's story sure has implications and lessons for anyone who considers themselves to be a follower of Jesus Christ! As a Christ follower you should be all about...

Finding Courage to Live Your Mission

You heard me right, I did say “your mission.” You don’t have to be a missionary, a preacher, or a prophet, to be called of God to be on mission! If you have ever accepted the love, the forgiveness, and the grace of God through Jesus then you have a mission. The mission hasn’t changed from the days of Jonah! It is still to show God’s love to the whole world, not just the chosen few! There may only be a few who accept the message, but God wants us to offer it to everyone! How do I know? Jesus made it perfectly clear on numerous occasions! He said this in

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

And then another time Jesus was passing through Jericho where there lived a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jewish tax collectors were in league with the Roman occupiers and so they were despised by their fellow citizens. Zacchaeus was short and wanted to see Jesus so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him. Watch what happens...

Luke 19:5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Luke 19:6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Luke 19:7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

Luke 19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Luke 19:9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Unlike Jonah, Jesus was excited when the sinner repented and turned to God and proclaimed that, contrary to popular opinion, Zacchaeus was also a son of Abraham and that salvation had come to his house the day Jesus visited him. Because of Zacchaeus’ acceptance of Jesus he was reinstated as a Son of Abraham. Adopted back into the family! And for those of us who are not Jewish by birth, we too are Sons and daughters of Abraham because of Jesus and what He did for us on the Cross! So it’s not by our bloodline, but by the shed blood of Jesus that we are adopted into the family of God! And as a result of this we now have the same calling and mission as the Nation of Israel! We are to show the world through our lives and our testimonies that God loves the world and will save all who will call upon the name of the Lord! Where do I find Scriptural support for this?

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Pet 2:10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light! This should help you find the courage to live the mission. God may not send you to speak to kings, or nations, or large crowds, but there are people within your sphere of influence that God has called you to love, to care for, and to build a relationship with so you can show them God's love in your actions and when the opportunity arises to share with them God's love in word! Jesus made our mission clear when He was asked by a Jewish lawyer which commandment was the most important...

Mark 12:29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

So whether it's an international neighbor in another country, a neighbor across the street, a neighbor in the next office cubicle, or your closest neighbor, your spouse, child, sibling or parent, ask God to give you the courage to live the mission to love them and share God's love for them!

Let's pray!