



**Idea:** Jonah is the story of a man who is on the run from God, seeking to subvert His will.

**Intro:** One of the worst experiences in the world has to be the feeling of helplessness on the sea. There is a reason the ancient Hebrews viewed the sea as chaotic. A couple weeks ago, my family and I enjoyed a few days at the beach with some friends. One particular morning, the tide was low and the waves were big, which allowed for some really good boogie board action. The dolphins were also out in large numbers. Seeing them surface not far from where we were, I decided to paddle out and get a closer look at Flipper.

I was able to get fairly close to the dolphins. They were swimming all around me. It was like an excursion without the expense. Well, after about ten to fifteen minutes of watching them, I decided it was time to go to the shore. It was obvious that the current was taking me down the beach. As I started paddling, it seemed like no progress was being made. I paddled and paddled. I got off the board and tried to swim. All of this was to no avail; I was not moving. In fact, it seemed like I was moving farther away from the shore. At this point, I decided to try to walk in because the last time I checked I could touch the bottom without the water being over my head. Well, not now. I was out in the deep! At this point, I got a little nervous. Who wants to be the guy on the boogie board that has to be rescued? So, I decided to use the current to my advantage, and I paddled and swam my way to the shore. It took forever, but I made it. I will probably never forget that feeling of helplessness.

Today, we are beginning a new sermon series, working through the experience of a prophet who also found himself adrift at sea. Jonah is a biblical story that has fascinated people for thousands of years. Typically, the first thing a person thinks of when he or she hears the name Jonah is a whale...“Jonah and the whale.” This dramatic tale with its unusual features, however, does more than just capture our attention. It speaks to our hearts. The message of Jonah searches us in a special way because it is so similar to our own experiences. Jonah is the story of a man who is on the run from God, seeking to subvert His will. It traces not only the path of the prophet’s journey, but it also unravels the inner workings of his heart – his fears, motivations, and passing moods. Human behavior has never changed, so believers today still experience these same symptoms. Like Jonah, we too at times work to subvert the will of God. As we walk through these forty-eight verses, we will discover the true character of God, be reminded of the role we play in the lost being saved, and learn the dangers that come with rebelling against the Lord.

As we kick off this series, I believe it is important to get a good feel for what is in the book. Jonah is so much more than the story of the big fish. In fact, it plays a relatively small role in the plot. The message of Jonah is one of subversiveness. God wants us to see Jonah’s rebellion and his deliberate attempts to subvert the will of

God in ourselves. The prophet was called and commanded to preach repentance to his enemies. His response was to literally go in the opposite direction. Let's skim through these four chapters of Jonah.

Read Jonah 1:1-5, 7-11, 15-2:1; 2:10-3:5, 10; 4:1-3, 11.

**Inquiry:** God's sovereignty and our call to evangelize are married in beautiful harmony within this story. Our God is gracious and merciful. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does not delight in bringing disaster upon the sinful. Just as the Lord desired to see the people of Nineveh repent and turn to Him in faith, He desires to see our neighbors and the nations repent and turn to Him today. My prayer is that as we work through Jonah's story, our eyes will be opened to the vast lostness that is all around us. I hope we will begin to see our neighbors as Jesus sees them, people who are spiritually dead, not knowing their right hand from their left. May we be filled with compassion rather than indignation. As many of us stand against the encroachments of liberalism and socialism in our culture, may we not lose sight of the intrinsic value of each and every person, for they are made in the image and likeness of God. It is good and right for us to oppose teachings that are wrong and even evil, but we cannot allow ourselves to choose sides when it comes to people. As Christians, if we only share the gospel with those who are good and moral, who would we evangelize? The gospel is for sinners. It is for the sick, not the healthy. Jonah needed to learn this truth in his own life.

Who is Jonah? The Book of Jonah contains no explicit reference to an author or to a chronological setting. In fact, if it were not for 2 Kings 14, we would know almost nothing about the historical situation or the prophet.

*<sup>23</sup> In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. <sup>24</sup> And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. <sup>25</sup> He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. – 2 Kings 14:23-25*

This passage sets Jonah's ministry in the reign of the eighth-century B.C. king Jeroboam II. He was a nationalistic prophet who forecast the extension of the frontiers of the Northern Kingdom. Israel's border had been weakened during early conflicts with Assyria. Jonah's prophetic word strengthened the nation and kept Israel from being blotted out as a people.

Jonah was told to go to Nineveh and preach. This city was situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, opposite the modern city of Mosul in northern Iraq. It was an old city, dating back to approximately 4500 B.C., and one of the principal cities of ancient Assyria. Genesis 10:11 tells us that the city was built by the "mighty hunter" Nimrod. It especially became a powerful and strategic city during the reign of Sennacherib, the great Assyrian king ((705-681 B.C.)

With that background in mind, there are four actions on display in this story of God's subversive servant.

## **1. God spoke.**

Read Jonah 1:1-2.

The story opens with a time-honored expression for the communication of the divine will to a prophet. The Word came to Jonah. It has an awesome aura about it. The phrase "*the word of the LORD*" is mentioned seven times in this short book. God was speaking. We are not told how Jonah received God's Word, for the Lord chose to speak to prophets in different ways. What is clear is that God spoke. According to Sinclair Ferguson, God's Word came with great clarity. He commanded Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh. It sounded a note of reality. It was a great city. And it gave the prophet a heavy responsibility. He was to declare that God knew their sin.

The first action on display in this story is God's voice. God is portrayed as one who notices, as a God who is active, and as a God who takes sin seriously. Upon hearing God's voice, a second action was taken.

## **2. Jonah rebelled.**

Read Jonah 1:3.

Jonah did rise up, but he fled in the opposite direction of Nineveh. No reason is given here for the disobedience. He is simply painted as a deserter, running away. By fleeing from the Lord's presence, Jonah is emphatically stating his unwillingness to serve God. His action is nothing less than open rebellion against God's sovereignty.

Joppa was the seaport of Jerusalem. Today, it is known as Jaffa, which is part of metro-Tel Aviv. Jonah found there a ship going to Tarshish (Tartessos in southwest Spain). This city from Jonah's point of view was at the other end of the world from Nineveh.

The narrative suggests determination on the part of the prophet. He very well could have hired the whole ship for his escape. Whether or not he chartered the ship, it seems highly likely that he sold his home, left everything behind, and set off at the risk of his life. His mentality was, "Come hell or high water, I am out of here!"

The second action on display is Jonah's rebellion. The prophet was sent to Nineveh in order for the Assyrians to know that God takes sin seriously. His response of rebellion brings about a third action. God will show Jonah that He takes his sin seriously.

## **3. Consequences ensued.**

Read Jonah 1:4.

The remaining verses of chapter 1 reveal God's sovereignty. His actions supersede those of His creation. They are over against the actions of His people.

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. – Gal 6:7*

It should not surprise us to read that Jonah's rebellion was met with stormy consequences. He got into a ship to flee the Lord's presence and command. Therefore, it was in the ship that the Lord's judgement would fall on Jonah, but it was not Jonah only who experienced the consequences. The mariners feared for their lives (1:5). These veteran seamen were scared to death and rightly so. God was set on destroying the ship and everything in it. Eric Redmond makes an interesting point on this. He says, "The Lord will make a storm to wreak havoc and wreck our plans when we readily dismiss obedience to His command."

Many times, the consequential storm is of our own making. It is comprised of the results of our choices. At other times, the consequential storm is specifically tailored by God Himself. In either case, consequences follow the decisions we make, and they affect those around us. This is the third action on display. Thankfully, the story is not over. There is yet a fourth action.

## **4. Grace given.**

Read Jonah 2:10; 3:5.

Jonah was graciously given an opportunity to repent of his sin and be forgiven. Grace is evident throughout this story. God could easily have killed Jonah in the storm. He could have killed him in the sea. Or He could have killed him with the great fish. In each situation, grace was extended. God was merciful, not giving what Jonah deserved. Instead, God was moving the prophet to a place of repentance and faith. He graciously allowed him to participate in the preaching to Nineveh.

At the same time, God graciously brought those rough, pagan mariners to a place of reverence and worship (1:16). He also revealed His love for the Ninevites. Rather than throwing His hands up and declaring that He tried, God went to great lengths to get His prophet back on the road to Nineveh. He did all this in order to extend grace and mercy to violent, idolatrous pagans.

The actions displayed in this story reveal two truths we need to know today.

### Two Truths

1) God's will cannot be subverted.

As we read the account of Jonah's rebellion, we cannot help but think of David's words in Psalm 139.

Read Psalm 139:7-13.

God is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all-present). There is no way to escape His eye or His hand. God does not change and neither does His will. No matter how much we run, rebel, or work to undermine, we cannot subvert God's will.

2) God is gracious and merciful.

Throughout the story these two characteristics are on full display. God chooses to respond to Jonah, the mariners, and the Ninevites not as their sin and rebellion deserve. He offers grace and mercy.

No matter the depth of our sin and depravity, God offers grace. Forgiveness is available. If you will be faithful to confess your sin, He will be faithful to forgive it (1 John 1:9). You are never beyond hope. We just need to respond to His grace and mercy.

### How should we respond to God's call?

1) Immediately (3:2)

The command to Jonah was to arise and go. It was to be obeyed immediately without delay. God's call to us today is no different. When we hear from God our response should be immediate and without delay.

Each Sunday, we offer a response time. It follows the teaching of God's Word because we believe that God speaks through His Word. When He does speak to our hearts, we must respond immediately. There should be no delay.

2) Obediently (3:3)

Jonah obeyed God's command. He got up and traveled to Nineveh. What God told him to do, he was now doing. When God speaks into your life, your response must always be obedience. It must be immediate obedience. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Do what God has impressed upon your mind and heart.

3) Faithfully (3:4)

Jonah preached the message of repentance. As we continue in the story, we see that his heart was never in it. God rebuked him for it. Therefore, we learn that what God calls us to do we should do faithfully. Our hearts ought to be in the work. Our response should be one of faith and energy.

**Conclusion:** A couple weeks ago, when I was adrift in the sea with the dolphins, I was helpless. It felt like I could not make any progress at all. The water was working against me. It was only when I began to work in the same direction as the current that I began to move. Jonah learned this truth too. He learned that running from God and seeking to subvert His will was a fight he was doomed to lose. Christian, how subversive are you? How often do you tell God no? How often do you do the opposite of what you know to be God's will? How should you respond to Him today?

I love that this story is not just for followers of God. There are many "sinners" who come to a saving knowledge of God's grace. Perhaps that is where some of you fit today. You are like the mariners or the Ninevites. You need to turn from your sin and by faith receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You need to believe on the gospel.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ?