

Jonah

Is that you I see staring back at me?

Jonah 1:3
October 15, 2016

Today

I've decided to make a series from the stories of God's people in Scripture.

- Last week we talked about Samson – self-reliant and proud.
- This week we are going to talk about Jonah – reluctant and rebellious.
- Next week we are going to talk about Elijah – afraid and depressed

Hopefully we will come to see that people rarely look good, let alone righteous, but God is just what He claims to be:

- **Exodus 34:5-6** - Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,
- **Psalms 103:8** - The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
- **Nehemiah 9:16-17** - But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. 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.

Okay let's get started:

In the Old Testament, the names of people and places were much more important than they are today. When we read names in the Bible, it tells us something about how that particular person is likely to behave in the rest of the story.

Jonah means "dove" – timid, fearful, senseless. We quickly discover that his name fits.

History:

Jonah was a real person. He lived in the Northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (800-750 BC)

- **2 Kings 14:23-25** - In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴ He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. ²⁵ He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.

During that time Assyria was the major power of the region and opposed and harassed both Israel and Judah eventually destroying Israel in 722 BC.

In Assyria, during the reign of Semiramis (queen regent) and her son Adad-nirari III (810-782 BC) there was major religious reform that exhibited characteristics of monotheism.

So, given the reality regarding the wickedness of Nineveh, why go to the trouble of saving them?

On the surface Jonah is about a man but in reality, the book is about God and how great His heart is toward people. God is concerned about the people in the city of Nineveh. God always wants to save people. He is in the saving business. That is why God sends Jonah to Nineveh.

It is a powerful story about the heart of God.

- **Jonah 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."

I don't think that Jonah woke up that morning expecting to hear God's voice telling him to head to Nineveh. Instead, he was probably minding his own business - going about his day. Then it happened - he heard God's voice: "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Jonah knew the reputation of Nineveh. He knew what the people were like. Living in Israel he would have seen firsthand the cruelty of Assyria.

- He hated them for their bloodthirsty cruelty.
- He hated them for their idolatry.
- He hated them for their arrogance.

Given the above you would think that Jonah would jump at the chance to go to his enemy's camp and tell them their cup was full and they were going to be destroyed.

- **Jonah 1:1** - But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So, he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

God says, "Jonah - go east." Jonah responds by saying, "I'm going west."

Jonah had no desire to go to Nineveh, Why? Why did the world's worst missionary run from God? He knew what could happen. He knew that if he brought God's message to Nineveh and if they repented –

- God would forgive them.
- God would pardon them.
- God would let them off the hook.
- God would extend them Grace.

And that is not what Jonah wanted – he wanted them to be punished – he wanted them to pay!

Grace teaches us that God does for others what we would never do for them. We may extend ourselves to save the "not-so-bad". But we would never save the "really bad" - but God does.

God is more gracious than Jonah was.

God is more gracious than I am or you are.

God saves people we would never save.

What is important to note is that Jonah was not so concerned about where he was going to but WHOM he was running from. He wanted to get away from God.

So, he purchased his ticket, finds his cabin and..... takes a nap.

How easy it is to deceive ourselves into thinking that God can't see what we're doing or that He doesn't know when we step out of His will. Jonah might have actually thought he had gotten away with it, so, what does God do:

- **Jonah 1:4-5** The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.

It must have been a really bad storm because these men - who were professional sailors - were afraid. They had never seen anything quite like this storm, it was worse than anything they had encountered before.

Notice that they did two things to try to save their lives.

- A. They prayed.
- B. They threw the cargo overboard.

Where was Jonah? He was in the hold of the ship fast asleep.

Before I move on let me point out a fact:

Others Suffer Because of Our SIN

We think that when we sin - we are only hurting ourselves. Everyone on board the ship is endangered by Jonah's sin.

We never sin alone. We may be alone when we sin, but we never sin alone. Our sin, our compromise injures those around us.

How could Jonah sleep during a terrible storm like this? The answer is simple - Jonah thought he had outrun God. He thought he had gotten away with it.

The captain found Jonah yells at him: "How can you sleep at a time like this? Get up!"

At this point this pagan captain had more spiritual insight than Jonah did. The captain wants Jonah to wake up and start praying. Everyone else is praying - but it's doing no good. The problem was Jonah and only Jonah could fix the situation.

Does Jonah pray? The Bible doesn't tell us that he prayed. He probably didn't - he was still running from God. So, the sailors took matters into their own hands - They cast lots and the lots fell on Jonah. He didn't come clean until he had no choice.

Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

- **Jonah 1:8-12** - Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"--for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.

Jonah knew it was all his fault, but he still didn't want to go to Nineveh. He still didn't want to obey God. Maybe he's hoping that throwing him overboard will result in his death and death, for Jonah would be a good result.

But when Jonah said, "Throw me overboard," the sailors would not do it. Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

In order to save the ship - Jonah must be sacrificed. Finally, they decided to throw Jonah into the sea.

ASISDE: Look at what verse fourteen and fifteen say;

Jonah 1:14-15 Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased." So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

Suddenly that boat is filled with enthusiastic worshipers of the One True God. They are not praying to their own gods - they are worshiping the One True God.

Their spiritual condition had changed.

This boat heading for Tarshish – now has a boat load of missionaries. Can you imagine the story that they will have to tell? A story about a man who is running from God - but God won't let him go. A story about a God Who is so powerful that even the wind and sea obey Him. A story about a God who loves people - and wants to see them saved.

While the sailors are praising God Jonah is bobbing in the ocean hoping to die.

BUT

- Jonah 1:17a - The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.

God still has a heart toward Nineveh and an assignment for Jonah.

God has saved Jonah. Oh, the injustice!!!

Jonah remains rebellious. Three days in a fish didn't really change him. It took him three days to pray and he never repented in his prayer – he just acknowledges who God is - apparently that is enough.

On the third day the fish spit Jonah out.

Maybe he gets a shower, has a meal and HOPES that God has forgotten this horrible idea and more importantly has chosen someone else.

BUT

- **Jonah 3:2** - Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

Horror of horrors! Jonah's Disobedience Hasn't Canceled God's Call. Nineveh still needs a messenger. The word of God still needs to be preached there. So, Jonah is offered a second chance - what does he do?

- **Jonah 3:3a** - So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD."

At this point there is no debate. There is no argument. This time Jonah obeys.

Do you think Jonah is obedient now because his attitude has changed? Does he now agree with God's desire to save Nineveh? I don't think so and this will prove true at the end of the story. Jonah is just simply remembering his disastrous first attempt to flee. What Jonah has realized is that he cannot, in fact, run from God. So, he goes, grudgingly and with a bad attitude, but he goes.

This leads to an important point. You don't have to always like what you are called to do - but you need to do it anyway.

So, Jonah sets out for Nineveh, which is roughly 400 miles away.

Jonah doesn't have to prepare a sermon. He just has to tell the Ninevites what God has told him to tell them.

- **Jonah 3:4** - Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown

It took Jonah 3 days to preach the world's shortest sermon. Going from neighborhood to neighborhood until all had heard the message. When he was finished, Horror of horrors.....

- **Jonah 3:5-8** 7 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

The king of Nineveh gets it. He knows they are guilty. He knows they should be punished. But he hopes that the mercy of God will spare them. He says:

- **Jonah 3:9** Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish

The Ninevites do what Jonah was hoping they wouldn't do – REPENT. The whole city repents!

Billy Graham never had that kind of success.

The greatest revival in history happened because of a one-sentence sermon preached by the worst missionary in history who didn't even want to be there.

So, Jonah's mission is over. He has preached the sermon God asked him to preach. He has been more successful than he had hoped. He went outside the city and sat down to see what happens. Hoping for destruction, dreading salvation.

- **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.
- **Isaiah 55:6-7** - Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

OOOOO!!!!!!

- **Jonah 4:1-2** - But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

How dare God forgive "THOSE" people!! How dare God give them a second chance!!!!!!

Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew the character of God. He had personal experience:

- He knew that God was gracious.
- He knew that God was compassionate.

- He knew that God was slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness.
- He knew that God would forgive them.

God did just what Jonah knew he would do – which is why Jonah ran in the first place!!!!

And now Jonah begins to pout.....

- **Jonah 4:3** - Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

Does Jonah deserve death at this point? Yes, but God continues to show mercy to Jonah, mercy that Jonah does not believe the Ninevites deserve.

- **Jonah 4:4** - Do you have good reason to be angry?"

"I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

God now tells Jonah the reason for his mercy – the Ninevites don't know what they are doing. They are lost, but they don't know it. Jonah's story ends with a question: "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh? Should I not be concerned about that great city? Should I not love the people there?"

Once again we are faced with the reality that Jonah doesn't look very good in this story. He misrepresents God at every turn. He is rebellious. He lacks mercy. He does not love the people God loves.

What happens to Jonah? We don't know. Is Jonah converted? We don't know

What we do know is that God will go to great lengths to convert people and that what He says about himself is true. God loves people. He loves to show compassion. He loves to extend mercy. He is slow to anger. He is longsuffering. He desires to forgive.

The hero of Jonah is God.

The conversion of Nineveh does not last. The city is destroyed in 612BC and the nation no longer exists. God knew that would happen, but He went out of his way ANYWAY to save as many as possible.

Take Away

1. God Loves PEOPLE and desires to save them.
2. God's Plan for Saving People Involves HIS PEOPLE.

Is God calling you to do something?

Are you reluctant to accept the call?

Are you running away hoping He won't notice?

God wants to use us to save the world.

Let us learn to love the people God loves.

Let us come to embrace His call.