

“I am Jonah” // Castaway, #1 //

Jonah 1:1–16

Introduction

Happy 2012 everybody. Just wanted to commend this church again for its generosity. In the month of December this church gave just under \$1.5 million dollars to Kingdom work.

- Some of that went to our ministries here; some of it was given to our Believe project (which goes to expand our facilities to reach more people); a huge chunk of it (about half a million thus far) was given away to our Christmas Missions Offering: money we give away for church planting and to bless our community.
- Let me say that again: You gave nearly a million and a half, *½ million of that was money we just gave away!* Thank you. (At all of our campuses, can we celebrate what God has done, again?—*Applause*)
- Our goal for that offering is \$625K. But we always get a bunch more in during January so let’s finish this.

If you have your Bibles, open them to the book of Jonah.

- If you don’t know where that is in your Bible, it is right between Obadiah and Micah. I’m sure that helps.
- No, Jonah is tucked in there with all those books that sound like Star Wars characters: Obadiah, Jonah, Obi Wan, Micah, Nahum, and Chewbacca
- Table of contents; no shame in that

For the next several weeks we are going to be in this book. And this is one of those times where we bring the whole church together to all study the same thing. Our small groups; our kids ministries; our student ministries; everybody—is going to be studying this book together and discovering what it means for you, personally, to be engaged in the mission of God. What does it mean

for you engaged in the mission of God (**not all of you are called like me**) and, are you? Is your family engaged in the mission of God? And what does that even mean—the mission of God? Is this the creepy “how to be an evangelist” sermon series?

- When I was in college I had a guy explain in a series about evangelism... “tract bombs.” No, that’s not what this is about.

But I do want to see you equipped to engage your world for the gospel.

- That’s the vision of this church: not a bunch of you, like sheep, who come in here and gather around while I do the work of God in your life; our vision is seeing you empowered to live in fullness of your spiritual gifts. The vision is not a big audience for me; it’s a more greatly empowered and released you. The way we say it is, “We don’t want an audience; we want an army.”

So, I want you to avail yourself of this whole experience.

- Not in a small group? Great time to get into one.
- Pick up a study guide
- Prayer guide for your family

OK, let’s dive in to Jonah. No pun intended. I’m reading from the ESV.

[1:1] Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, and said [2] “Arise, go to Nineveh ...

Now, stop right there. If people know anything about Jonah, they know it’s got something to do with Jonah telling God “no” about going to Nineveh and then being swallowed up by a big fish. And a lot of people get hung up right there and say, “This can’t be true. How is that even possible? Staying alive in a fish for 3 days? It’s got to be a myth.”

Well, I would remind you that this is not a story about a big, magical fish; it’s a story about God.

- Honestly, I would not even put this in my “top 10 hardest things to believe in the Bible” list.
 - Genesis 1:1? God spoke the worlds into existence with a word... Luke 2, God born as a baby who heals the sick, raises the dead, is crucified and rises again?”
 - Why would you pick this out and say, “This is impossible?” If God created all the galaxies with a word, he can pull off stuff like this.
 - Somehow in our family devotion time this week we got off on the resurrection from the dead... I explained... Kharis: “A Jesus that we’ve never seen is going to come back to earth and raises people’s bodies from the dead? This all seems kind of ‘mystical’ to me, Dad.”
 - Yes, if you believe in a God who spoke everything into existence by the word of His mouth, you believe some things that are mystical, and there’s no way to escape that unless you want to get rid altogether of the idea of God who works on earth.
 - That’s the question. Is there a God who works in the world or not, and was He present in Jesus Christ? If so, then this stuff shouldn’t be a big problem.
- People say, “Well, maybe it’s supposed to be read as a parable.”
 - The problem is that it’s just not written that way. The names; the dates; the details; it’s written in the genre of history. It says, “Jonah, the son of Ammitai?” not “once upon a time there was a guy named Jonah...” Plus, the book of 2 Kings tells you about some of the other stuff Jonah, the son of Ammitai, did.¹
 - The other thing is that Jesus thought of this story as actual history; he referred to the historical events as a very important prophetic sign for his own ministry. See Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:30.
 - And I feel like he would know.

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

- 2 things about Nineveh: it was a very great, and very wicked, city.
- It was huge. Jonah says it took 3 days to walk from one side of the metroplex to the other. Historians tells us that the walls of Nineveh big enough to ride 3 chariots across. Huge with big architecture; best singers and culture were there.
- Second, it was also extremely wicked. Which is a lot of times true about great cities.
 - The Ninevites were known as some of the cruelest people in the ancient world. Nineveh boasted in their own histories about how cruel they were... I was looking at this book of pictures (hieroglyphic looking stuff) from Nineveh; the most graphic pictures of cruelty.
 - When they would conquer another city, they would skin alive a lot of the men women and children, and spread out their skins over the city walls. Then they would bury these skinned people while they were still alive up to their heads in the sand, and pull their tongues out and drive a stake through their tongue into the ground, so they would just languish in pain and dying of thirst. And then at night they would make them listen to Paris Hilton CD’s over and over. I made that last part up, but they were unspeakably brutal.
 - They would rape the women and kill them; they even boasted about raping and killing little girls. One account describes how they would the soldiers and impale some of them alive outside of the city gates. They would behead all these people and make a mountain of heads outside the city so they could say, “This is what

¹ 2 Kings 14:25

happens to those who dare oppose the Assyrians.”²

- These were the people that Jonah was asked to go and preach to (and, btw, if you read the OT, you’ll see that one of Nineveh’s primary targets was it’s neighbor to the South, Israel, which means Jonah and people he knew were victims of Ninevite cruelty)... and so naturally Jonah doesn’t want to do it...
- In chapter 3, Jonah says the reason he didn’t want to go preach is because he was afraid they’d repent and God would forgive them.
- Can you blame him? Let’s not be so judgmental on poor old Jonah.
- Jonah has a great deal of *personal* bitterness against these people.

[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.

- Here begins Jonah’s rebellion against God. God clearly told him to go, and he ran the other way. And not a little ways... Tarshish was 1500 miles from Nineveh.
- A couple of things to notice:
- *First, Jonah was upstanding in every other way.*
 - The book of 2 Kings (14:25) tells us that Jonah was one of Israel’s premier prophets. He had a very successful ministry during one of Israel’s finest hours. He was like the Billy Graham of Israel!
 - Write this down: *Rebellion is simply saying “no” to God.*
 - We tend to evaluate our walk with God by comparing how godly we are to others: “I go to church more; I give more; I’m more moral.” But Lordship is one of those things that if it’s not absolute and total, it’s not real.

² Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the OT*, 599; *Surprised by Grace*, 93. See also Craig Groeschel sermon on this passage.

- **You’re never farther from God than when you’re close to Him and say “no.”**
- There are a lot of godly people who look like they are walking with God in every other way... but there’s some area they are saying “no” to Him in.
 - Maybe, for you, it’s a **relationship** that you know is not pleasing to God but you won’t quit it...
 - Maybe there is a sacrifice God has put on your heart to make (**money**—God has placed a need on your heart but you don’t want to give up the money... or He’s convicted you about your lifestyle... your poverty of spirit is enough to let you know you shouldn’t be indulging yourself the way you are, but you persist on);
 - A sin you need to confess
 - Maybe a **sacrifice of your time** He’s leading you to make;
 - Maybe it is to go, like Jonah, to leave family and friend and go somewhere
- **You’re never farther from God than when you’re close to Him and say “no.”**
- Second thing I notice in this verse: he “found a ship ready.”
- You ever notice that people assume the “readiness of the ship” is like God’s ok on a plan of action?
 - I can’t tell you how many conversations I’ve had where people are doing something clearly against the will of God and they’re like, “But look, all this just worked out and...”
 - I’ve talked to people in the midst of adultery, and they say, “Well, I was miserable in my marriage...” and then I met this person... I felt like that was God wanting me to be happy in the marriage. But what if that was your enemy laying a trap for you?
- Let me tell you something: *If you want to run from God, there will always be a ship ready to Tarshish.*
- You have an enemy whose whole role is to “ready the ship” for your disobedience!

- If you always allow your eyes to wander, there will almost always be a girl who will return your flirtations. If you want out of your marriage, there will always be a “too good to be true” relationship that presents itself. If you tolerate greed in your life, there will always be a great deal on something to buy, or way to cheat or steal to get ahead!
- Or how about this say, “Well, I had a peace in my heart about it,” like peace in your heart is God’s OK on a situation that overrides His word in your life.
 - One of Satan’s primary roles is to give you peace about doing the wrong thing! In Gen 3, at the first temptation, he assured the woman, “It’s ok. The forbidden tree is good for food; it’s make you wise; oh, you won’t die.” **He gave her peace about disobeying God.**
 - That peace in your heart may not be God’s affirmation of what you’re doing; it may be Satan numbing your conscience as he leads you down a path toward death.
 - Don’t look to peace in your heart as a guide for your life; look to God’s word. Peace in your heart can change based on what you ate or what kind of mood you’re in. God’s word never changes.

[4] But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, (the problem with running from God is that God is already where you’re going) **so that the ship threatened to break up. [5] Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.**

- So, here’s the situation: all these pagan sailors, scared out of their minds, are like “everybody pray to their god, and hopefully one of them will pick up and be in a good mood and then we’ll all be ok.”
- So they pull out the crystals and amulets and hankies blessed by the television evangelists...

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.

- How ironic is this? They are up there having a theological discussion and the prophet of God who has been given a message from God is downstairs asleep.
- There’s a play on words happening here you should see: See that word “down”? Jonah is full of stuff like this. That word “down” is being repeated.
- That word “sleep” in Hebrew is a word used for deep sleep... not “dozing;” like the sleep Adam took.
 - Jonah goes “down” to Joppa; “down” to the inner part of the ship and “down” into sleep.
 - It’s a sleep of death; it’s total spiritual disaster
- You’re getting a picture of the downward progression of sin. It starts with small disobedience; it ends in total spiritual disaster.
 - It’s like when you’re swimming in the ocean and you start out in front of one building, and before you know it, you’re 14 hotels down the beach.
 - Adulterous relationships at 40 begin as addictions to porn at 20.
 - Eating disorders in college begin with jealousies not dealt with in high school
 - An impenetrable, rebellious heart at 50 begins with resisting your God given authority in high school
 - Beware of the drift!

[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.” [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 (surprise) **Jonah. (They spin the roulette wheel and every time God stops the ball on Jonah! Again. Again.) **[8] Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your****

(job, by the way) **occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"**

[9] And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." [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, because he had told them.

- Write down a couple of more things:
- **Our disobedience affects others**
 - We never sin in private. For some of you, your family and friends are suffering because of your disobedience. You're sin has made you a bad father; an unfaithful friend; a disappointing husband.
 - In *The Great Divorce* CS Lewis talks about those who are running from God, and He describes them as being see-through. They have less and less substance. But those who run toward God become more solid. They take on bright colors. Those running from God become less human. When we run toward God we become more like what God intended us to be: more alive; more human.
 - The greatest gift I can give to everyone who knows me: my wife, my kids, my co-workers, my neighbors, for you, is being close to God.
 - Yes, I do it for God's sake, and for my own, but also for theirs. The greatest gift you can give anybody is your own holiness.
 - I think of it like this: You know they say on flights... oxygen masks. It is strange we have to put ours on first! But I have to be breathing to help my child (King of Queens episode). Same way spiritually.
 - If you're passed out spiritually, you'll kill those around you.

- For many of you, people around you are dying... because you are not walking with God. God wanted to you use you in their lives, but you're not breathing! Your failure to walk with God has eternally devastating consequences for those around you!
- Your kids are growing up to be materialists because you are one. You can't be generous.
- God is not a priority for your kids because He's not one for you.
- Your kids are not going to believe in God because He's not really *real* in your life.

- **God sends storms to break His people from self-reliance**
 - God sends storms into your life to get your attention.
 - 1 of 2 things will humble us: our **theology** or **affliction**.
***Our theology should humble us, but most of us are hard-headed. We're like Jonah.
 - We're slaves to money, so God attacks it; we're addicted to people's approval so God frustrates us in that; we are proud and don't want to listen to anybody so God makes us fail; we're self-centered so God allows our marriages to blow up.
 - Some of you are there right now!
 - (Now, I'm not talking about all affliction; some times we suffer and it has nothing to do with disobedience; but there are times when you knowingly disobey God and He loves you enough that He sends a storm.)
 - You say, "How do I know—maybe I've done something I don't know about and God is ticked at me?" No. When God sends this kind of storm, He makes sure you know. If I'm trying to get my kids attention, I don't hide it. I don't spank them and say, "now, you figure out what you did wrong." So, if you're in something you suspect

might be a storm from Him, ask Him. He'll make it clear. He is a speaking, communicating God.

- Is that happening to you right now? If so, I'm telling you to submit to it. Listen, the only way you're going to survive this storm is by submitting to God in it.
 - *If Jonah had continued to fight the storm, it would have killed him and all aboard. But when he submitted to the storm, and said, "throw me into it," it led to his salvation.* If you fight it, it will destroy you; if you submit to it, it will save you!
 - I want to tell some of you: it doesn't have to be so hard. **Jonah ends up in the belly of a fish that smelled like an outhouse at the state fair.** It doesn't have to get to that point!

[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. [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." [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.

- Kudos to the pagan sailors; they at least don't want Jonah to die.
- **But now they are in a rowing contest against God...** How would you like that? You're rowing... He has His finger on the stern...

[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." And then they [15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

- I get a funny word picture here. Because in the next couple of verses it says that the fish gulped him up. But that was after the sea ceased from its raging. Jonah hits the water; the sea turns into stagnant pond. Jonah is like, "Well, that worked. I guess I can get back in." Just then, vs. 17. Fish

gulps him (which is where we'll pick up with the story next week)

But first, **let me give you a few brief, concluding thoughts that set the tone for the whole book of Jonah, and show you where we go from here:**

1. The book of Jonah shows you what a real sinner is

- Like I told you earlier, Jonah is upstanding in every other way, he's just not willing to do this.
- Jonah was in a dilemma. One of two things would happen through this preaching. Nineveh wouldn't repent, and Jonah would probably be killed. Nineveh would repent, and then they wouldn't be destroyed, which would be bad for Israel!
- If Jonah obeyed God here, he'd either lose his life, or he'd lose what was most important to him... his position of status in a prospering nation. He'd lose his sense of identity.
- Jonah would obey God until it required him obeying God in those areas that mattered the most to him; those areas that defined him; those idols he held onto most dearly.
- So, that's the question for you. Most of you are religious, doing God's will in most things: Are you willing to obey God if it costs you everything? Even if it takes you away from that thing which is most precious to you; if it takes from you that thing that most *defines your sense of identity*?
- Vs. 3 gives you a very important insight. It says, "Jonah ran away from 'the presence of the LORD.'" "Presence" is Hebrew "panim," which means "face." Jonah knew he couldn't get away from God. The most basic theological lesson is that God is everywhere. He wanted to be away from the "panim," the face of God. Ideally he wanted to obey God and have His presence; but when what he loved most went one way and the face of God went the other, he chose to stay with what he loved most.

- Listen: *Real obedience to God is when you so value the face of God, it is so precious to you, that you would give up everything for it!*
 - **In Dan 3**, three Hebrew boys found themselves in a dilemma: if they obeyed God, they would be cast into the fiery furnace; if they denied God, they would live. Here was the question: would you rather be in the flames with God, or in safety without Him? That is the question you have to ask. Would you rather have the joy of the face of God, even if it means obeying God in a very difficult situation, or have the benefits of disobedience without God?
 - Talked to someone who is thinking about leaving their marriage...
 - God has called you overseas, somewhere difficult... do you value God enough?
 - Is the face of Jesus so valuable to you that you'd give up everything to possess Him?
- I say this a lot, but some of you, your Christianity is not at all about God. Like Jonah, it's a family thing; a culture thing; a "get out of hell free" card... and the place you see that are the places, like Jonah, that you won't obey.
- Jonah shows you what a real sinner is. Jews gather each year on Yom Kippur in the synagogue and Jonah is read. They all respond in unison the conclusion: "We are Jonah." Jonah is the religious person who is daily confronted with the question of whether they'll leave everything to follow God.

2. The book of Jonah shows you who the real Savior is

- There's a contrast being set up between how Jonah feels about the Ninevites, and how God feels about them. Jonah wants to see them destroyed; God wants to see them forgiven.
- Jonah is actually giving you a picture of the real Savior who would come for the Ninevites:
 - Matthew 12 says Jesus says that He was a prophet like Jonah. He said that His death and resurrection were a fulfillment of the sign given through Jonah.

Jonah was cast out into the sea, and the sea became calm; he was swallowed by a fish and taken down to the depths of the ocean, then 3 days later he was brought back to the land of the living.

- Jesus was cast out into the ocean of God's wrath (at the cross) and the great tempest of God against our sin became calm. He was in the heart of the earth for 3 days, like Jonah, and then resurrected.
- The difference, of course, was that Jonah went through all of that involuntarily because of his disobedience; Jesus went through it all because of our disobedience.
- Jesus did everything right that Jonah did wrong.
 - Jonah ran from his enemies; Jesus ran toward them.
 - Jonah was on a mission of revenge because he hated the Ninevites; Jesus came on a mission of rescue because he loved them.
 - Jonah was all about His own self-protection; Jesus poured Himself out in self-sacrifice

When Jonah saw that, he resented it.

- I hear people refer to the God of the Bible as judgmental, and "how could He dare punish people for sin..." But the moment we get a taste of evil against us, we cry out for vengeance.
- What we usually fail to understand is that all of our sin is to God what Nineveh's sin was to Jonah. Our sin is what crucified Jesus. It is infinitely more hideous to God than what the worst sin against us is to us.
- Nineveh's sin against God was great; our sin against God was even greater.
- **I told you, "I am Jonah." Also say, "I am Nineveh." When you see that, it changes you.**

What God wants is for His people to have a heart like His; a heart that overflows with goodness and compassion. What you're going to see in Jonah is that there are 3 possible responses to the word of God...

- *Flat-out disobedience*: like Jonah at first.
- *Dutiful obedience*: like you'll see Jonah in chapters 3 and 4. This is where many of you are.
- *Gospel-transformed obedience*: Where you act like God acts because you love like God loves. Where you have a heart like His..

It's like I often tell you; God is not just after obedience, He's after a whole new kind of obedience...

- The only way you can develop this is through a deep experience of God's grace in your life.
- You see, here's the diagnosis: some of you are not mission; not generous; you are not deeply passionate about God, because you've never had this deep experience of grace.
- That's what we'll learn more about in the days to come.
- Are you excited? I am. Let's pray toward this.

Conclusion:

But, before we get to that, let's take first things first. Some of you are in the same place of Jonah. There's a place you are saying "no" to God in.

And some of you are in a storm because of that. Why not turn this place into the deck of a ship and have you just repent, right now?

That storm in your life—it's not there to pay you back for your sin, but to bring you back from your sin. Jesus was paid back for your sin. Jesus went into the storm of God's wrath for you and took it all! That means God's wrath is no longer in the storm, only His love.

The storm is not designed for retribution; it's designed for restoration.

Instead of continuing to fight, why not get down on your knees, right now, and surrender to God? You know what it's about.

Why do you keep running? God only wants to bless your life and to use you more greatly than you ever dreamed... why are you resisting Him?