

JONAH & THE BIG WHALE | HOW TO SHARE YOUR FAITH | FLANNEL BOARD

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Pastor Dudley Rutherford, author of the book, *Compelled*, tells a story about God giving him and his church a new found passion to reach the lost in their city. He says

JONAH'S STORY

We won't read the entire text here but I'm just gonna give you the highlights of the story of Jonah.

The Assyrians in Nineveh were an awful people and those that lived there were considered to be brutal, godless, immoral and totally depraved, especially to the Hebrew people. God was about to wipe them out because God does take sin very seriously but He's also patient and kind like we learned last week - giving us many, many chances to repent and give our lives to Him.

Jonah was asked by God to go to Nineveh to preach to them so that they would repent and avoid destruction - find salvation.

Jonah didn't believe they deserved salvation so he was disobedient and instead boarded a ship rebelling against the command of God go in the opposite direction to Tarshish.

God caused a great storm to come across the boat and everyone was afraid for their lives! I don't know if you can imagine being out at sea at night with 10 to 20 foot waves but it would be absolutely terrifying if you ask me. Jonah has this feeling in his gut that this storm was brought upon them by God and that he is the reason. It's interesting to note that you may have heard the story as a child or teenager and thought that everybody on the ship came to the conclusion to throw him overboard but that's not what the Scripture says. It's important to note that he tells them to throw him overboard! **He tells them that it is his rebellion and his sin that is causing this storm - he takes ownership of the problem** saying "I'm the one! Throw me overboard!" Which is interesting because everybody on that ship is also a sinner!

They throw him overboard and scripture says the storm STOPPED! The minute his body hit the water, the raging waves calmed. WOW. Then he is swallowed by a giant whale! Vs 17 says it like this...¹⁷ And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Now I want you to understand that there are parables in the Bible that are simply a made up story to illustrate a kingdom reality but this is not a parable this really happened!

Did you know the Blue Whale is on average 95 feet long! **PICTURE UP**

To help you picture a blue whale, they are the size of three double-decker busses put in front of one another - lined up.

Jonah really did get swallowed by a whale!

Blue whales commonly reach the colossal length of 29m (95ft), that's roughly as long as three London red double-decker buses parked end to end, or the full length of a netball court.

Next Picture The *longest* blue whale on record is a female measured at a South Georgia whaling station in the South Atlantic (1909); she was 110ft! The heaviest blue whale was also a female hunted in the Southern Ocean, Antarctica, on She tipped the scales at 418,878 lb - which is equivalent to about 30 elephants. Their tongue alone weighs as much as an elephant. Their heart is the size of a car! That's a BIG FISH!

Jonah is stuck in this whale for three days!

For three days Jonah is sitting in the pitch black valley of this whale, soaked in the stomach acid wondering how he's even still alive I don't know if you've ever seen the show *I shouldn't be alive* but this would make a great episode!!

So Jonah, we find in chapter 2, repents and calls out to God for help.

Anybody ever been there? You find that going your own way in life only caused you more pain and heart-ache?

Jonah repented of his rebellion towards God and **God causes the way out to spit him out! Vs 10 says... ¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.**

Jonah is covered in whale vomit! Can you imagine that smell!?!? The thousands of fish that whale has eaten - the sea lion carcasses - the smell had to be TERRIBLE!

So God gives Jonah a second chance to obey the command.

Jonah then obeys the Lord and takes a ship to Nineveh to preach. and preaches to them but you need to understand that he is still not in a great mood about preaching to the Assyrians in Nineveh. His sermon is NOT loving - this is no John Piper message or Steve Hill message! He yells at them saying "In 40 days God is going to kill you all!"

But in a surprise reaction to his heart-less sermon, They all repent! They all come to salvation "least to the greatest!"

God choose not to wipe them out because they truly repented - all the way up to the King!

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

Even Jesus speaks of this moment when an entire people repented of their sin and turned to God - this is what we call "revival". Jesus said in ...

Mt 12:41

⁴¹The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

The Bible says that everyone - least to greatest - in the entire city repented! The King even sent out a message...

Jonah 3:8-10 / 4:1-4 **Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."** ¹⁰ **When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.**

Jonah was disappointed that they repented (he'd rather they die and get what they deserve)

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Then the story ends kind of abruptly.

God supplies Jonah shade from the heat miraculously providing a big leaf plant to give him shade. Then it dies and he has a temper and God makes a point to him that he cares more about the plant than the people of Nineveh! God says to Him

¹⁰ ... **"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons**

This is a REAL story, not a fictional tale or allegory. It still speaks to us about our need for grace, 2000 years after Jesus even talks about it.

Because this book of the Bible tells of a giant fish swallowing a man, many have dismissed the book of Jonah as fiction. But 2 Kings 14:25 mentions Jonah as living during the time of Jeroboam II (about 793–753 b.c.), and Jesus referred to Jonah as a historical person (Matt. 12:39–41). Unlike other prophetic books, Jonah focuses on the prophet himself rather than on his message. When God sent Jonah to Nineveh he rebelled, was swallowed by a fish, repented, and fulfilled his mission after all. When Nineveh repented, the reason for Jonah's rebellion became clear: he had feared that God would forgive the Ninevites; and when God did forgive them, Jonah resented it

(4:1–3). The book lists no author, but only Jonah himself could have known all the facts it records.

Why would Jonah be upset that they repented?!

Jonah was upset that they repented because he had a religious spirit that conflicted with his understanding of God's grace. He wanted God to be more just than He was gracious. He didn't realize the depths of God's grace and love.

He was grappling with something we all grapple with today...

Can God be both just and gracious?

Let's find out.

Many times in Scripture God does tell the leader of Israel to wipe out - to kill an entire people. In fact, in our story of Jonah, God had warned that He was going to kill them if they didn't repent. He didn't want their sin and rebellion to spread throughout the world.

So like we learned last week, God does take sin very seriously.

It's also a fun fact to know that

I'm The One (at the airport)

By the way, have you ever felt like you read the Bible too much and you start seeing life through the lens of the Bible? Like your flight gets delayed at the airport - so you get on the intercom and say "I'm the one! It is me who has sinned. Throw me on to the tarmac. I'm the one."

No one's ever done that or thought about doing that? Me either. I was just checking. It's certainly never crossed my mind to make that joke on the intercom - at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

So back to our story and our sermon -

Let's now go into the NT to see how clear it is that **God is incredibly gracious and loving while at the same time, being perfectly just. He wants everyone to repent and receive His grace... EVERYONE!**

- **Scripture: 2 Peter 3:9** [9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.](#)
- **2 Corinthians 5:20-21** ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who

knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jonah can't see what we see now ...

God's perfect justice and perfect love on full display on the cross of Jesus.

Romans 8:32-39

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A few more thoughts as I read Jonah's story again in light of these others scriptures...

- **God doesn't call perfect people into ministry. Jonah is a bit dramatic and double-minded. He's impatient and dealing w/ a religious, prideful heart.**
- **The call of God is "without repentance" meaning it will never leave a person's life. When someone is called to ministry, speak it out and confirm it but give them time to learn what they need to learn.**
- **God is incredibly patient with sinful people - those in Nineveh and Jonah!**
- **God is judge and we are not.**
- **God wants EVERYONE in His family. People are never the enemy, they are the mission.**

Looking at Jonah 4:3 While it was commendable for Jonah to have prayed, this prayer stands in stark contrast with the words of Jonah 2:7, where he cried out to the Lord, "My life was ebbing away." Jonah was a man of irony. As he fled from the Lord in chap. 1 only to regret it, being banished from the Lord in chap. 2, so

in chap. 2 he praised God for saving his life only to pray in chap. 4 for God to take his life. In the second instance he cried out for death, which he did not receive. It is true that God always answers prayer, but not always the way we want it or when we want it. Why? His ways are better than ours.

Believers, however, should always be thankful that God knows the depths of every heart and knows every need better than we know ourselves.

God knows you in all your weakness, all your fears, all your double-minded craziness and He still fervently loves you! He's not giving up on you!

Let's return to our first question....

Can God be both just and gracious?

Yes! you've heard me say this many times before and I'll probably say it as long as I am your pastor that **At the cross of Jesus Christ is where we see the perfect union of truth and love - the colliding of justice and mercy.**

Only at the cross were Jesus Christ the son of God hangs in your place do you see the love of God on full display because you were a wretched center on your way to hell and yet God is dying for you. That is a display of his incredible grace but also as we look upon Jesus hanging in our place we see God's perfect justice on full display for sin had to be paid for with death and not any death but the death of a perfect sacrifice

Hebrews calls Jesus the perfect lamb! Church that's why the old testament we see the priest offering the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb to atone for the sins of the entire nation. It was just to give you a picture that God takes sense seriously and that has to be paid for and that amazing good news, that great news, that incredible news, that you don't have to pay for your sin!

Jesus already paid for your sin!

now that is the gospel and we could close the Bible and go home right now

but we're not so just settle down lol

today that's not the end of the story because in the story we find a picture of the great commission

in the story we find a man being asked by God to preach to a sinful culturally depraved people. Jonah knew that ASyrians were an awful bunch!

This is a sermon that I collaborated with a Pastor Dave on and he found a great quote for this moment **“You know that you have formed God in your own image when he hates the same people that you hate.”**

Can we bring it home right now? If there is a group of people that you absolutely despise and that you wish they would literally die and be separated from God forever then you my friend are like Jonah and you need a “deep sea fishing experience” if you know what I mean!

Talk about “Hesed” in the Bible - re-study the book

J Joyfully

O Obey

N

A

H

Turn the Luke 15 because we’re going to read a parable that Jesus gave that is awful similar to the story of Jonah

The prodigal son

in this very brief story we find the disobedient son who is bells against his father and as you know spends all his money repents then comes back to God and father God opens his arms welcomes him forgives him throw some a party and celebrate his return home.

The next scene of the story is what I believe to be the most important part of the story because it is the reason Jesus even shares the story especially when you contrast it with the two stories Jesus tells right before he tells this one it’s just like communication today, it’s all about context

The lost coin

The lost sheep

The lost son

The entire chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel - Jesus tells three parables and all three are exactly the same except for one thing.

Only in the lost son story do we have somebody clearly not celebrating the repentance and the return of what was lost - we have "the older brother"

The older brother is upset with Father God that the sinful person repented and God just forgave him and gave him the same blessings that he was given. This is the perspective of the religious person who doesn't see their own sin and their own need for God's amazing grace. You can spot them. They go to church but they're usually upset, bitter at someone, judging someone or talking down about any church, christian, minister that comes to mind. "The older brother" is a scary place to be.

You see, Jonah is not only the younger brother and rebels against God but he is also the older brother - the second half of Jonah's story is that he is like the Older Brother. He is the one who is mad at Father God when sinful people repent because **he feels he deserves God's grace more than others.**

That my friend is a very sticky and terrible place to be! That is the perspective of a Pharisee in fact when Jesus tells the story there a Pharisees looking him in the eye and a know what he know! He is talking about them!

So what do I believe God wants to do in our hearts today through reading the story of Jonah and asking him to give us a fresh perspective?

I believe God wants to give us His heart for lost people!

The story of Jonah is the story of us! It's our sin that Jesus takes on.

The story of Jonah is also the story of Jesus!

Jesus himself reference Jonah saying that like Jonah, He would be hidden in the earth for three days and it that would be the sign from God to them that he is who

he says he is.

Jesus took on sin died on the cross was buried in a grave for three days and on the third day the earth spit him out as he rose from the dead a total miracle and then provided freedom and salvation to everyone who heard and believed his message!

Jonah said throw me overboard I am the one I will take the punishment of everyone on the ship all the evil is Syrians even though you have sinned since you were born I will admit that I am the one you need to kill. Jonah was swallowed by a whale and in the belly of the earth for three days and then the third day God caused the whale to spit him out and then he preached a message and everyone who heard and believe the message received freedom and salvation!

do you see the connection between Jonah and Jesus!? This is what is so powerful about the Bible each story has these different fabrics that are weaved together all telling the story of grace, of giving us pictures of not only ourselves, our sin, our salvation, the God's ability to save us!

He has certainly preached more compassionately - some believe he did.

But if we

look at the attitude of Jonah we're actually not surprised by what he said for his sermon because he is having a very bad attitude in this whole thing, remember he doesn't even want them to repent !!!!!

so let me get this straight God uses a minister with a bad attitude I was lacking compassion barely obedient and would rather be anywhere else in the world than standing at the pulpit that day God uses him to shout a warning message that he doesn't even want to say with a little to no empathy and yet God miraculously touches every heart that is listening in the least to the greatest the poor to the rich the servant to the political leaders the business owners of the day - ALL OF THEM REPENTED! Despite Jonah's terrible, prideful attitude!

God will use you to win people to Jesus despite you!! lol

You know I wonder what happened to Jonah to make him cynical?

Here he was a believer yet he had a cynical outlook on life. Usually that happens after someone has experienced great trauma, betrayal or deep hurt. Author Carry Niewhof points out that after we experience deep pain - when we've given love and energy to someone and they betray us, our first temptation is to become cynical. Believing the worst of people - especially those that resemble the people who hurt us.

Jonah, I believe, experienced some pain, some rejection and that rejection caused some cynicism in his heart. Don't let that happen to you!

Fear of Rejection

What if I'm rejected?

When we share our faith, what happens we're rejected?

What if our compassion was greater than our fear - greater than our fear of rejection?

All of the prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and others were rejected by the very people they had come to help (Daniel 9:6) By accepting the call from God, every person realized that rejection was not only likely but expected.

If we're rejected, it doesn't indicate our failure. Our success in our obedience to do the will of God in conjunction with sharing our faith in Jesus.

Even Jesus was rejected. His rejection was even prophesied about. Isaiah 53
 "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised and we held Him in low esteem."

Ps 118:22-23 tells us that Jesus is "the stone the builders rejected"

Jesus even spoke about this concept of rejection often - telling the pharisees that they were rejecting the very doctor that they needed.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

I want to close with the moment Jesus share of the story of the good Samaritan. and the good Samaritan we find that man is beat up and left for dead on the side of the road robbed of all his money and his dignity

Some religious people walk by but are too busy and lacking compassion- unwilling to help him but who is it that stops vines up his wounds takes him to a hotel pays the bill and shows incredible love and compassion? A Samaritan! Someone who is considered to be in moral depraved godless brutal and let's face it these religious people that it didn't even want to look at the hurting man had racism in their heart we find that same racism in the hearts of the disciples when they don't want to go to Samaria but Jesus forces them to to confront their political ideals that conflict with the kingdom of God

For 3 1/2 years Jesus had to continually teach them that absolutely everyone was deserving of God's grace and the disciples consistently had a hard time with that and to be honest maybe you and I do too.

The story of Jonah like the story of the prodigal son like the story is a good Samaritan I'll tell us the same thing

God is willing that none would die but that all would come to repentance and find salvation in him! He wants EVERYONE to experience His compassion and goodness!

Where is your Nineveh?

- **We're going to ask the Prayer Team and Jay & His wife to come up and we're going to pray for God to fill you with His compassion and His love for lost people.**
- **They are emboldened to tell people about Jesus with genuine compassion**

- **God will “speak to your fish” Your broken situation / problem and cause it to work in your favor and for His glory.**
 - **He works all things out for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. If you’re feeling like you’re “stuck in a fish” Maybe there’s an assignment God’s given you that you haven’t yet obeyed? Maybe there’s someone you’re supposed to reach and you haven’t chosen to share your faith in Jesus yet.**