

Go West, Young Prophet!

(Jonah 1:1-16)

(preached 9/17/14; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Huntland, TN is a small town of 800 residents on the TN-AL state line.

On April 28 of this year, a tornado barely missed the town, but claimed two lives in a neighboring county.

However in 2012, Huntland suffered a direct hit from a very strong tornado.

And according to the mayor, Huntland was also hit in 1996.

With a history of severe weather, most people are surprised to find out that Huntland doesn't have a tornado warning system.

So, in June of this year, the mayor and his wife used around a \$1000 of their own money to purchase a siren system...

That will be used to alert the town if severe weather approaches the small community in the future.

The mayor said that his goal is to save lives, especially the lives of those at the town's school which serves over 500 students in the county.

The sirens have been installed in two places on each end of town and will be a great blessing if another tornado heads their way.

I would say that many of us would probably do the same thing given the same situation.

A thousand dollars seems to a small sacrifice to prevent the loss of lives.

But what would we think if it was discovered that the mayor has passed on that opportunity....

Because he really didn't like the people of the town.

What if he said, "Well, I have the money to buy a warning system for the city, but I really don't want to save the folks who live here.

There would be outrage.

You have the resources to help and you refuse because you don't like the people who live there?

He would be called a selfish person.

And elitist.

People would not consider him to be a believer for sure.

How could he be a Christian?

He obviously doesn't love others if he wouldn't feel convicted to provide a warning system for them.

Well, over the next few weeks, we are going to look at one of God's prophets who did this exact thing.

He was called by God to deliver a message to a group of people...

But he refused to do it because he didn't like the people who were going to be warned.

How could a man of God have no love for his fellow man?

But that is exactly what happened in the book of Jonah.

And that is where we will be for the next few weeks on Wednesday nights.

The book of Jonah is a very interesting book for a number of reasons.

First, it is a story that every child hears if they have ever stepped foot in a church.

Jonah and the whale is what most people know it as, but the Bible never calls it a whale...

Instead, it was simply a great fish.

Second, the point of the book is usually remembered as the miracle of a man surviving in a fish's belly.

However, the focus of the book should be seen as the great compassion of God.

Third, Jonah is the only prophet to ever refuse a mission from God.

All of this combines to make a very interesting book of the Scriptures.

So, for the next few weeks we will go through Jonah verse by verse.

And I think it will be a good time to examine our hearts in this way....

Am I as merciful and loving as God?

The truth is that we should be, but I suppose that there is a little of Jonah in all of us.

And we need to crucify those attitudes we when see them.

So, let's begin to look at this book, but before we get there....

I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to 2 Kings 14:23....

And this is where the Bible first introduces us to Jonah.

Now, in 2 Kings 14, we see a divided kingdom.

And here is what I mean by that...

Since the nation of Israel began when God called Abraham, the nation was a united nation.

Well in 931 BC, Israel split into 2 parts...

A northern kingdom which retained the name Israel.

And a southern kingdom called Judah.

Well, two kingdoms meant two kings.

And for the most part, the kings were evil and led to the people away from the Lord.

And when we get to 2 Kings 14:23, we meet one of these kings, Jereboam.

Now, prophets also existed in this day as spokesmen for the Lord.

And when we get to 2 Kings 14 beginning in verse 23, we see that Jonah was a prophet during Jereboam's reign.

So, let's read 2 Kings 14:23-27...

²³ *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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. ²⁷ But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.*

In verse 25, we meet Jonah who told Jeroboam that he would enlarge the kingdom.

Even though Jeroboam was an evil king, the Lord still accomplished much through him.

And Jonah was part of this success in that he was used by the Lord to tell the king of his success.

Now, this would have happened early in Jonah's ministry before the events in the book of Jonah.

But what you need to see here is in verse 25.

The northern border of the kingdom extended all the way to Hamath, which was extraordinary.

For years, Assyria to the north had been an enemy of Israel and prevented the nation from growing their borders to the north...

But now, as Jonah has predicted, the kingdom is now growing into Assyrian territory.

And that had not happened since the days of David as king.

Politically speaking, it was impressive.

But unfortunately, such conquest had been a distraction for the people, who were quickly becoming idol worshippers under Jereboam.

Anyway, the fact that Jonah was first used by the Lord to expand the borders into Assyria is very important.

I actually have a map that I want to project up here, so you can get an idea of what I am saying.

Now with all that in mind, let's flip to the Jonah chapter 1....

And I will begin tying all this together in the first few verses of this short book, but I want us to read the first 16 verses of this book to start....

Jonah 1:1...

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." ³ 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.

⁴ 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 ^[a]break up. ⁵ Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the ^[b]cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it ^[c]for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep. ⁶ So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

⁷ Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may ^[d]learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ 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?" ⁹ He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

¹⁰ Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "^[e]How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. ¹¹ So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm ^[f]for

us?”—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. ¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm ^[a]for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.” ¹³ However, the men ^[b]rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

My plan is to spend the next four Wednesdays in the book of Jonah working our way through it verse by verse.

Tonight, we will see the pouting prophet....

Next week, we will see the praying prophet...

Week 3 will be the preaching prophet...

And then in week 4, we will again see the pouting prophet....

It is interesting to note that Jonah’s attitude at the end of this book is the same as it was in the beginning.

Which leads me to say to you that the focus of this book is not on the person of Jonah.

What you need to see in this book over the next few weeks is the mercy of God.

In the first, two chapters, we will see God's mercy extended to a Grumbling People...

Then in chapters 3 and 4, we will see God's mercy extended to a Gentile Population.

God is the at the center of the book of Jonah, not a prophet and certainly not a big fish.

So, let's look at these first 16 verses tonight that I divided into 4 section....

First, Jonah goes on the Run

Second, Jonah goes to Sleep.

Third, Jonah goes on Trial.

Fourth, Jonah goes into the Sea.

Let's begin in verses 1-4 as.....

I. Jonah Goes on the Run (v. 1-3)

In verses 1 and 2, Jonah is given clear instruction from the Lord.

Now, remember this is not the first time that God had spoken to Jonah...

In 2 Kings, we know that the word of the Lord came to Jonah predicting bigger borders for Israel.

And Jonah faithfully delivered that message.

But now, another word comes to Jonah and it tells him to go to Nineveh.

Well, if you look over my shoulder on the map, you will see that Nineveh in the upper right hand corner.

And here is where it all ties together.

Nineveh was a major city in Assyria, which was an enemy of God.

The first time Jonah received the word of the Lord, he rejoiced because it was a message of victory.

Israel is growing into enemy territory.

But now, the word comes to Jonah and directs him to go and preach a message warning the Assyrians of coming judgment.

And you may say, what is wrong with that?

That would also be good news, right?

The enemy is going to be destroyed.

No, this is horrible news for this simple reason....

Jonah knew exactly who God was...

I don't want to spoil the ending but it is important that you see this...

Flip over to the last verse of chapter 3 with me...

Jonah 3:10....

Jonah eventually delivers God's message to Nineveh, the city repents and God spares them...

¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would ^[e]bring upon them. And He did not do it.

***4** But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this ^[f]what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore ^[g]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.*

Why did Jonah refuse to obey God?

He knew that God would spare the lives of the enemy.

That was the worst possible outcome for Jonah.

He hated Assyrians.

In fact, he hated them so much that he would rather die than to see them saved.

And he knew that God would save them.

And I think that is a stinging rebuke when we examine our own hearts...

How many times do you enjoy when other people find trouble?

When I stayed with my grandmother in the summers, she also kept another boy named Chad.

I would tell on him, just so he would get a switching.

One of the reasons we teach children to be a tattler is that the sinful attitude behind it of seeing other people get punished.

My grandmother said, "If it's a matter of safety, tell me. If it's a matter of wanting someone to get a spanking, keep it to yourself."

And if a prophet of God can have this attitude, how much more are we susceptible to this.

When I was first saved, I was heavily involved in politics.

And I remember the day when Billy Graham went to meet with Bill Clinton.

And I was so mad.

My thinking was, “I don’t want this man to hear the gospel. The Lord may save him.”

And I wasn’t alone, Graham was criticized by other Christians for the meeting as well.

And what had I become?

A man who was more concerned about my party than another man’s soul.

The person on the other side of the political aisle had become an enemy rather than the mission field.

And my view of politics was forever changed.

The challenge is the same today.

Do you pray for the souls of Islamic militants who are killing Christians?

If you were called to go and share the gospel with them, would you refuse?

Do you value your life more than their lostness?

In the days of the Cold War, were you praying for Russians to be saved?

Or were you hoping they would be slaughtered?

Do you pray for the souls of people who cross our border?

Are you more concerned that they are illegal or unsaved?

At times, we can all this attitude.

Jonah was called to preach a message of salvation to not only a Gentile nation, but to a people who were Israel's enemy.

And how did he respond?

He caught the next boat out of town.

Instead of heading north and east to Nineveh, he went south to Joppa and boarded a ship headed west.

If you look at the map, Tarshish is not even on it.

The exact location is unknown, but the best evidence places it in Spain, which at that time would have been the most western city of the world.

Notice something about verse 3.

Jonah paid his own way.

Which led someone to remark in my study,...

“There are no free rides in the devil’s fairgrounds.”

Another commentator on this verse said...

“Running from God is always a costly business. Unfortunately, the fare was only a small part of what it cost Jonah”

And verse 3 ends with Jonah going down into the ship.

This is no doubt another effort to hide himself from the Lord.

We often think we can escape the Lord’s notice at times, but His eyes are everywhere.

And even when Jonah runs from God, the Lord is right there.

Verse 4-6....

First, Jonah goes on the Run....

Now,...

II. Jonah Goes to Sleep (v 4-6)

⁴ 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 ^[a]break up. ⁵ Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the ^[b]cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it ^[c]for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep. ⁶ So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

Interestingly, Jews were not too fond of the sea.

They saw it as a source of evil, but disobedience will take you places that you never thought you would go.

However, the consequences for disobedience soon follow because a great storm arises.

Even the tough sailors began calling to their false gods.

Jonah, on the other hand is asleep.

He is asleep to his calling, asleep to the Lord's command, and asleep to the storm outside.

Then in verse 6...

A pagan captain asks a man of God to pray.

How backward is that?

An unbeliever urging a prophet to call upon the Lord.

And the interesting thing to see is that there is no indication that Jonah actually prays.

How could he?

A man walking in disobedience has no desire to fall to his knees.

The last person he wants to talk to is God.

So the sailors take matters into their own hand...

Jonah may have gone on the run....

And he may have gone to sleep...

But last,....

III. Jonah Goes into the Sea (v. 7-16)

In verse 7, the sailors cast lots to see who was responsible, which was a common practice in the Middle East.

And the lot fell on Jonah.

When that happened, you would expect verse 8 to read “They threw Jonah overboard.”

But interestingly enough, they start asking questions instead of tossing him overboard.

Who are you?

Where are you from?

What do you do?

And Jonah answers their questions accurately in verse 9..

He tells that he is a Hebrew who serves the God of the seas and dry land.

In verse 10, this only adds to their fear.

So they ask out of respect to God, what should they do to Jonah in verse 11.

And in verse 12, Jonah responds, ...

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea.”

And before we celebrate such a noble thing...

It is easy to say that Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life to save the sailors....

But I think the truth is that Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh.

If Jonah was truly repentant, he would have said, turn around the ship and take me back to Joppa.

If the ship had turned, the storm would have ended.

But instead, he asks to die rather than go back.

However, the sailors are not willing that Jonah should die...

So, they try to row to shore in verse 13.

Isn't it amazing that pagan and ungodly sailors care more about Jonah than Jonah does for the lives of the Ninevites?

The ungodly are trying to save the godly man, but the godly man has no interest in saving the lives of the ungodly Assyrians.

Jonah is not showing any fear of God, but the unbelieving sailors are showing much fear of God.

Have you lost your love of unbelieving souls?

Would you rather die than see some people turn to God?

Do unbelievers care more about people than you do at times?

I think that is all too often the case of those who call themselves Christians.

Do you desire the China turn to the Lord?

Do you care about people on the African continent who have never heard the gospel?

Do is break your heart to see Hispanics die without the Lord?

Are you begging God to save Muslim extremists?

Or are we just like Jonah and think that God is concerned about our country and no other?

After their efforts to save Jonah are not successful, the sailors call upon the true God in verse 14...

And they pray an outstanding prayer....

¹⁴ 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.

They did two commendable things in their prayer.

First, they asked for mercy in sparing their life...

And second, they acknowledged God's sovereignty.

Here again, we see a great irony.

The man of God is silent while the pagans are praying.

And then two amazing things happen in verses 15 and 16.

After they toss Jonah overboard, the seas calm.

Now, you have to understand this.

These are seasoned sailors.

They have witnessed the worst seas in their career.

This is not the first time that they have been tossed around on the waves.

But I would say that it is one of the worst times.

In verse 5, we saw that it scared the sailors enough that they prayed.

But then in verse 10, we see that it gets even scarier when they realize that Jonah had disobeyed God.

But the kicker and the most fear happened in verse 16....

When the sea becomes instantly calm, which is something that these men had never witnessed in their entire lives....

Verse 16 says that they feared the Lord greatly.

It is one thing to see stormy seas and pray.

It is another thing to know that Jonah was disobeying God.

But the greatest fear comes when they witness God's power to calm the seas.

When seas go from rough to calm in an instant, sailors go from lost to saved in an instant.

And here is where I want to end tonight.

Conclusion

God is a saving God.

His aim is in the salvation of souls.

He had called Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh so that people would be saved....

But Jonah was not in the saving business.

Then we see God save sailors souls here.

Even Jonah's disobedience led to these men on the boat turning to God.

Two lessons we see here.

One, God saves who he pleases.

Whether that be Jews in Isreal, Gentiles in Nineveh, or pagans on a ship.

Two, God calls us to be his agents in salvation.

He doesn't need us.

The sailors were saved without a word from Jonah.

But God chooses to use us to share his truth with the world.

Not always with people who are just like us.

And this is not a call to go abroad to share the gospel.

It may be that for you.

But these verses are certainly a call for us all to examine our hearts about other people.

People who live on the other side of the tracks.

People who don't share our skin color.

People who don't share our political views.

People who are sworn enemies of our country.

People who don't share our wealth, our intelligence or our neighborhood.

People who may live half a world away.

Even people who seek to do us harm.

God is a saving God.

He saved you in spite of everything that he did to prevent it.

And he saves others.

And we should rejoice in that salvation.

Rather than moan, complain and pout like Jonah did.

God is a saving God, who rejoices when anyone turns in faith to Him...

The only question is our we rejoicing with Him?

Let us pray.