

Jonah, about so much more than a fish

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Lessons in the book

- We all know about the fish swallowing Jonah, but there are larger lessons in the book including the answers to these questions:
- *What about people who haven't heard the gospel if Jesus is the only way to God?*
- *What are the consequence of sin in the life of a believer?*
- *What do we do about bad people, or when people treat us badly? What does God expect from us as His people?*
- *For answers to these questions and other scattered applications, let's look at Jonah.*

Background of Jonah

- Prosperous time in Israel
- 2 Kings 4: 23 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 Dead Sea 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.
- ²⁶ The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering and here was no one to help them. ²⁷ And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

Assyria the major power—brutal and cruel

Jonah's situation

- Had been a very successful prophet of military victory in Israel under Jeroboam II
- Didn't want to see mercy on Israel's enemies—Knew of the cruelty of Assyria
- He wanted to decide how to serve God
- Did not want to follow God to do a difficult job
- To preach salvation and mercy to threatening enemies
- So he ran in the opposite direction

We know what happened

- Huge storm, they know it's from God
- After questioning, Jonah admits his sin
- Crew throws him overboard & the sea calms
- Application/lesson: our sins affect others

- Swallowed by a great fish

Lesson: sin robs us of the love, kindness, blessings

- *Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. Jonah 2:8*
- Grace, Hebrew: *cheched*, often translated "kindness"
- *Other OT stories in which it is used:*
- *Of Abraham's servant when sent to find a wife*
- *Of how God blessed Jacob who left his family poor and alone and returned a rich man with a large family of his own*
- *Of the favor shown to Joseph when he was in prison*
- *Deut 7:12 it part of the covenant, a summary of God's response*
 - If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, (*cheched*) as he swore to your ancestors.
- When we disobey God it is often because we think something else is better
- But it never is
- We often worry about being punished, but often the punishment is a lack of the blessings God wants to give us

How does it really apply

- Situation—a difficult time, situation in life
- How do we respond?
- Bible tells us "in everything give thanks" "whatever is good ..."
- Cast all our prayers on him
- But sometimes we choose to cling to the worthless idols of bitterness, questioning, comparing ourselves with others and this leads to a spiral of self-pity and sadness
- But how different if we "let them go"
- Circumstances may or may not change, but joy and peace can flood our lives in the midst of challenges
- Don't be too hard on yourselves—it is a learning experience because our culture celebrates victimhood—and wants God to do what we define as good
- Hopefully none of us will have to be swallowed by a fish to learn that love, mercy, grace and an obedient walk with God are what we were made for

For those who doubt this happened

- Jesus' comment about "great fish" swallowing Jonah:
- *He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given*

it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 12:39-40)

- Not only verified the story, but used it to illustrate his death and resurrection

The rest of the story

- After God's mercy in rescuing him from the fish Jonah carries on His job
- A second chance for great ministry
- He goes, preaches a simple message
- God causes repentance in Nineveh
- Application: *God gives second chances for obedience to EVERYONE*
- Reluctant prophets and evil people
- No one beyond his salvation
- And when people ask what about those who haven't heard?

• We can answer—how do you know?

• God is doing so much more than we can imagine

Jonah's response to the great revival

- When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 3:10. . . .
- Jonah 4: *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.* ² He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."
- ...God's response:¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"
- *Consider how we all desire mercy from God, but often are unhappy when God grants it to others*
- *That does not please our Lord—didn't then, doesn't now*

Lessons from Jonah

- When Old Testament God of vengeance mentioned—
- Tell them about Jonah and the Nineveh

- God loves and is more merciful than we can imagine
 - Anyone can repent
 - God gives second chances
- But sin will be judged—Nahum
- God's will *will* be done
 - Our attitude determines our joy & blessing or not

Application from Jonah

- When God judges enemies, it is HIS job
- When He gives mercy, HIS choice
- *What is important is our reaction*
- *Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from them. Prov. 24:17, 18*
- *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. Prov. 25:21*

Lesson repeated in New Testament

- *Romans 12: 17-21* *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:*
- *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*
- *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*
- Revenge is God's job—reference Psalms
- If we attempt to take revenge we are saying we know better than God, we are putting ourselves in HIS place
- *Then we will experience discipline*

One more application

- Incredibly important
- *What if Jonah had stayed to teach, to follow up, to help them learn about God?*
- They obviously returned to their wicked ways (though probably not all—some believers to welcome exiles)
- But we don't know because Jonah bailed out
- Instead of a great nation following God—judgment comes about 150 years later—recorded in Nahum

Application—however we can obey

(because different callings and responsibility)

- When people turn to God, they need follow up

- It isn't enough to condemn people or to get them to make an emotional response
- They need to learn the basics of the Christian life
- They need to read God's word and learn to apply it
- We must get serious about "Fully fulfilling the Great Commission"
- Jesus said to "teach them everything I've commanded you."
- Grow yourself and encourage other believers to grow also.
- Pray all of us will take it seriously and be obedient to do whatever we can to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

Challenge to us all

- We all have a Nineveh—those we resent, hate, are angry with
- We all are Jonah—we want to run away, we don't want to finish the tasks he called us to
- But to be His witness, we must pray for the ability to respond as Jesus did. . . .
- Jesus reacted in many ways, prayed, challenged, interacted, walked away, and finally died for those who hated him.
- He trained those he called for 3 years; he finished the job God called him to do
- It takes divine power –Jesus in you—to be kind to mean people, to trust God in difficult situations, to be obedient in all situations and to the end
- But fortunately we have all we need because no matter how we try to run away in our hearts or with our feet Jesus promises never to leave us.