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JONAH 1:1-2:10

Today we begin a short study in the Old Testament book of **Jonah**. This book contains one of the most **familiar**, one of the most **interesting**, and one of the most **controversial** stories in the entire word of God.

We all learned this story as children in Sunday School. And we've all heard it preached and taught as adults.

It seems as children all we get from this story is the fact that a man was swallowed by a big fish and lived to tell about it.

I believe most of the time as adults, we tend to focus on the fact that Jonah was rebellious...and that's all we see. But, I hope in the next several weeks, we'll see some deeper messages in this book.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee gives **six purposes** for God is that book...

- The book of Jonah sets forth the **resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- The book of Jonah teaches that **salvation isn't by works.**
- The book of Jonah teaches that **God's grace cannot be frustrated.**
- The book of Jonah teaches that **God will not cast us aside for faithlessness.**
- This book teaches that **God is good and gracious.**
- Finally, this book teaches that **God is not only the God of the Jews, but He is also the God of the Gentiles.**

I hope we can expound on these purposes as we go along...

This book was written by its main character...the prophet Jonah. I believe it's interesting to note that there isn't any prophecy in this book. See, the job of a prophet was not only to tell **what would happen in the future**, but **more importantly and more frequently** the job of a prophet was simply **to tell forth the message God had told him to share with the people.**

The book of **Jonah** is a personal account of major, life-changing events in the life of a man named Jonah. It is thought to have been written around 775 B.C.

One more thing that is so important for us to keep in mind as we begin our study of the book of **Jonah...**

And that is that God had called Israel to be a light to the nations around them. He had placed them strategically where three continents meet. God had placed them at the center of world trade...close to two vital waterways...the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.

And He had charged them not to be like the heathen nations around them. He had wanted them to make being a child of Jehovah so appealing that those heathen nations around them would also want to worship Him.

But, they hadn't done this...and I believe the book of **Jonah** is a picture for us of why they didn't...and we'll see that in just a few minutes.

I also want to point out that we need to view the book of **Jonah** as a picture of what we would later see in the Great Commission. In the other books of prophecy in the Old Testament, we don't see the prophets being called on to go and prophesy to Gentile nations. But, God called

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Jonah to do this...just as Jesus called His Jewish disciples to go and evangelize **all** the world...**Jew and Gentile**.

Jonah 1:1-3...

Jonah was Jewish.

Jonah lived in Israel.

Jonah was the son of Amittai, Jonah is mentioned in the book of **2 Kings** as having delivered the message of God to King Jeroboam of Israel.

And outside of these facts, very little is known about Jonah's background.

We also know that the Lord Jesus Christ referred to Jonah in the books of **Matthew** and **Luke**...and we'll expound on that in the weeks ahead as well.

We know a little bit more about the Ninevites. Nineveh was the capital city in Assyria. Do you know who built Nineveh? We have to go all the way back to **Genesis 10** (which we don't have the time to do) to see that Nimrod built it...and it was referred to as a "great city" back then.

And we have to understand that the Assyrians and the Israelites were bitter enemies. The Assyrians were violent, blood-thirsty, war-loving people. I looked up some information on Assyria and all I saw was one war after another after another.

And if you want a good description of the violence and wickedness of Nineveh, read the book of **Nahum**. Nahum describes very vividly the extent of Nineveh's depravity and wickedness.

So, here we see Jonah on the horns of a dilemma. Jonah is told by Almighty God to go to this wicked city and preach against it. Think about this! It would be like Bro. Bob being called to go to the city of Baghdad in the height of Saddam Hussein's reign of terror and openly preach Christianity.

Really, it would be more like a Jewish man being called to go and preach judgment to the city of Berlin at the height of WWII.

And Jonah said, "Well, I'm not going!" And he found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and got on board that ship. Twice in **verse 3** Jonah is said to be fleeing from the presence of the Lord. But **did** he? **Could** he?

Jonah is soon going to learn as the David had learned that there is nowhere a person can go to flee the presence of the Lord.

Let's stop a moment and think about what made Jonah run away? Dr. James Montgomery Boice offered some interesting thoughts on this subject...

What was the real reason he didn't want to go to Nineveh?

Well, it could have been because he thought of the **difficulty** of the mission.

I mean, God told Jonah that Nineveh was a **great** city and Jonah may have wondered **what difference could one man make in a great city like Nineveh. Who would listen? Wouldn't the men of Nineveh mock this lone Jewish prophet?**

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And wouldn't we feel the same way? If this were the reason Jonah ran away, we could identify with that, couldn't we? I mean, haven't you and I been guilty of saying, "What difference could I possibly make in my **office**? Or in my **club**? Or in my **neighborhood**? Or in my circle of **friends**? Or even in my **family**?"

But, the Jonah doesn't tell us that this was his problem...And remember Jonah is the one writing this...

Maybe it was the **danger** of the mission. God told Jonah not only that Nineveh was a **great city** but that it was a **wicked city**. Jonah must have thought, "What can one lone Jewish preacher do against such evil? Won't people like this take great pleasure in killing me?"

And wouldn't we feel the same way? If this were the reason Jonah ran away, we could identify with that, couldn't we? Haven't you and I been guilty of not speaking up, and for fear of far less retaliation than this? I know I have been guilty of just thinking I would offend someone and they wouldn't speak to me again, much less being frightened that I would be thrown in prison or my life taken!

Jonah doesn't tell us that the **difficulty** of the mission was his problem, nor does he tell us that the **danger** of the mission was his problem.

We won't find out the real reason until we get to **chapter 4**. But, just in case you're absent that week (or I'm absent that week)...let me tell you what his real reason was. In **chapter 4** Jonah tells us that the reason was **discrimination**.

To put it simply, Jonah didn't want the blessings of Jehovah to come to the Ninevites. He knew that God was not sending him to Nineveh only to announce a coming judgment. He was sending him so Nineveh might repent, and this was something Jonah didn't want to happen.

It was fine for God to bless the Jews, but Jonah didn't want God to bless the Gentiles, especially the wicked Ninevites!

We said awhile ago that God had called the Jews to bless the other nations, but the Jews had become self-absorbed, and they were very proud of their relationship to Jehovah...and they didn't want anyone else to have that same relationship!

So, we see the result of Jonah's **discrimination** was his **disobedience!**

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse made a very profound observation. He said that Jonah "paid his own fare." And he went on to explain that what he meant was that since Jonah was thrown overboard, **he never arrived at where he was going and that he obviously didn't get a refund on his ticket. So, he paid the full fare and didn't get to the end of his journey.**

The point Dr. Barnhouse was making was that it is always that way.

Dr. Barnhouse said, "When you run away from the Lord
you never get to where you are going, and you always pay
your own fare."

"On the other hand," Dr. Barnhouse said, "when you go the
Lord's way you always get to where you are going, and **He**

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pays the fare.”

Can you relate to that? Have you ever gone your own way and wound up paying your own fare and never really arriving at the destination you had dreamed would be so wonderful...

I agree with Dr. Barnhouse...when we go God's way, we always reach the desired destination and He pays the fare!!!

Verses 4-9...

Don't miss the mercy of God in all this. Don't miss the love of God in all this. God had called Jonah to a task. Jonah had refused to obey God. God could have absolutely washed His hands of Jonah and gone on to the next prophet and called **him** to go to Nineveh...

But, God didn't do that! Did any of this take God by surprise? Was God surprised at what Jonah did? Of course not! God knew exactly what **Jonah** was going to do...and God knew exactly what **He** was going to do!

He sent a great wind and a great storm...and He did this out of love and mercy for the prophet Jonah. God was saying, "I love you too much Jonah to let you go. There's no place you can hide from me, dear child of Mine."

And I want to tell you this...many times when **we** choose **our** own way, God will allow us to do our own thing...**for awhile!** But, sooner or later, if we are truly God's children, He will send a great wind and a great storm into our lives.

Think about it...was there ever a time in your life when **you stopped having your quiet time?** When **you stopped reading your Bible?** When **you stopped praying?** When **you stopped even coming to church?** **At first, God let you get away with it, didn't He?**

I mean, He didn't send an angel to you and say, "**Thou shalt have your quiet time and pray and read your Bible under penalty of death!**"

No! He gently brought conviction to your spirit. Then, if that didn't work, He sent firmer conviction. And if that didn't work, He brought a tempest into your life!

And I know we've touched on this many times before...but **our sins are never committed in a vacuum.** When we are disobedient, we always hurt other people! **Here is Jonah, running from the Lord, and what happened? He put the lives of everyone on board in peril.**

And we have to understand that these men were seasoned sailors. But, this was a fierce storm and **they were afraid** and they did everything they knew to do...they cried out to their gods and they threw cargo overboard.

Well, this did no good and they concluded that the trouble must be someone on board the ship, so they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah! Dr. Barnhouse said, "**Man throws the dice; but it is God who makes the spots come up.**"

So, they woke up old Jonah and asked him *who he was and what he did for a living and where he came from and what nationality he was...*and Jonah told them, "**I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.**"

Isn't it interesting that even in his disobedience and rebellion against God, he couldn't lie to these men? I believe old Jonah knew God had caught him. Jonah knew he hadn't really fled the

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presence of the Lord. But, sadly, this didn't end his rebellion! And we'll see that in the weeks to come.

Let's see how the **men** responded, and let's see how **Jonah** responded.

Verses 10-14...

First of all, **verse 10** says these men were **extremely frightened!** **Verse 5** already told us they were **afraid!** Now, they are **extremely frightened!**

WHY? Because they had heard of Jonah's God! They had traveled all over the Mediterranean Sea. They had heard many stories of other people and their gods.

- But, they had never heard of any of the pagan gods who had**
- **brought down plagues on Egypt**
- **or parted the waters of the Red Sea**
- **or led His children through the wilderness and guided them with a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day**
- **or leveled the walls of a great city like Jericho**
- **or made the sun stand still so His children could have victory over the Amorites...**

They had heard of this great and mighty God, but they may never have come face to face with a real prophet of this mighty God!

And what a sad witness this prophet was! He was a follower of this mighty God, yet he had already told them that he wasn't following Him...he was running from Him!

I believe if the situation had been more stable and the storm had subsided, these same men would have asked some more questions to Jonah...like

- **"what did your God do to let you down?"**
- **or "what made you so disappointed in your God to run away?"**
- **or "have you found another god who is better for you?"**

See, when unbelievers see believers running from their God, they can't help but have questions, can they? And it's so sad when believers make unbelievers question the goodness and graciousness of our God by the way we conduct our lives. God has called His children to live their lives in such a way as to **show forth** His goodness and His graciousness not **question** it!

It has been rightly said, **"Non-Christians never look better than when they are compared with some Christians."**

We read **verse 12**, and we say, "How commendable of Jonah! How brave of Jonah to say, 'just pick me and throw me from the ship...all your troubles are because of me!'"

But, what if he had had a different response? What if he had bowed his head in repentance? What if he had said, "You know, fellows, God has brought this storm because of my disobedience. God called me to go to Nineveh, and I didn't go. But, my heart is broken before God. I repent before Him. Please turn this ship around and head back to port and let me go to Nineveh."

What if Jonah had said that? I believe God would have calmed the storm and given them safe passage back to Joppa.

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But, what Jonah was saying when he said, "Throw me overboard..." was "I'd rather die than do God's will."

Dr. Boice presented this question. Can a Christian do that? Can a Christian become so hardened to the will of God and the voice of God that he prefers death to hearing God's voice and doing God's will? YES! **Because this is the course of sin. What begins with just a step in the wrong direction can become a downward slide that leads to self-destruction!**

And did you notice...to the sailors' credit, they didn't throw Jonah overboard right away...at first, they made every effort to bring the ship to shore, but the storm only became worse!

Verses 15-16...

I believe we see in these verses the mercy of God in a very real way! I want to tell you this. God never ordains for you and me to sin. God never ordains for you and me to disobey Him.

But, He is a sovereign God and He is a merciful God, and He can use even bad situations and bad circumstances to accomplish His will.

Verse 16 tells us these pagan sailors feared God greatly and these pagan sailors offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. Was this what is commonly called a "foxhole conversion?" You know, when folks get really scared and cry out to the Lord and promise Him anything if He will just get them out of their predicament?

No! Notice that these sailors feared God greatly and offered a sacrifice and made vows to God **after** God calmed the sea!

Verse 17...

Now, this verse has brought much **disagreement**...much **disbelief**...and much **controversy**. People get so caught up with the fish that they miss what is going on inside the fish! But, I don't want us to do that today.

We'll talk more about this fish next week, but this morning I want us to look at what was going on inside the fish...**really what was going on inside Jonah!**

Verses 1-9...

When **Jonah** abandoned **God**, he didn't really think much about that. But, when Jonah felt **he** was being abandoned by **God**, he got busy praying, didn't he?

Dr. Ellenberg asked the question just this past Wednesday night... "Do you ever feel abandoned by God?" **Of course we do.** Human nature is that occasionally our circumstances are so bad that we look around and we don't see God anywhere!

But, He's still there! And Jonah found that out!

He said he called out and God answered him. He cried for help and God heard him.

And I want us in the time we have left to concentrate on four characteristics of Jonah's prayer...because they are characteristics that should be true of any prayer that comes from a disobedient child of God!

1) This was an prayer of honesty...

He acknowledged his misery. And he also acknowledged it was God who had caused it!

Jonah didn't blame the storm.

Jonah didn't blame the sailors.

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Jonah didn't even **blame** God!

Jonah knew he deserved everything that had happened to him.

Jonah simply in all honesty stated the facts. "I'm distressed. I called to God. He heard and answered me. And I am here because He put me here."

Not only was Jonah's prayer of prayer of honesty...

2) This was a prayer of repentance...

Verse 4 tells us that Jonah said he would look again toward God's holy temple. What is repentance? Repentance means you're traveling down the road of life one way and you make a 180 degree turn in the opposite direction!

Jonah was running **from** God, and now Jonah says he is running **to** God!

3) This was a prayer of thanksgiving...

Now, I haven't been there, but I believe it would be hard to be thankful in the belly of a fish.

But, the lesson we can draw from Jonah here is that we should offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God even in the worst of situations.

What did Jonah have to be thankful for?

Well, he could be thankful even in the belly of the great fish for the fact that **he cried out to God and God had not turned His back on him the way Jonah had turned his back on God.**

He could be thankful for the fact that even in the belly of the great fish **he had a relationship with God.**

He could be thankful for the fact that **even if God did not deliver him from this terrible situation, he would see God face to face one day and live with Him forever.**

And these same things are true of you and me. You and I can be thankful in the worst set of circumstances that

God never turns His back on us...

And that no matter what we have done, we are still His children and He is still our Father...

And that even if He doesn't deliver us physically, one day we will be delivered spiritually!

One last thing...

4) This was a prayer of sacrifices and vows...

What did we see in the previous chapter? We saw heathen sailors make sacrifices and vows to God! And here in **verse 9** we see this chosen Jew doing exactly the same thing!

We can't come to God claiming special privileges. We must all come to God the very same way. Jonah sees that in **chapter 2**, but he's going to forget it in **chapter 3**.

I believe what makes the book of Jonah so special to me is that I have done my share of running from God! Now, I've never been called to go to a foreign land and preach judgment! But, I have been called by God to do things that I have rebelled against.

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But, I'm so glad that God doesn't give up on His children. God is so determined to perfect His good work in us that He will continue to do so with whatever it takes!

Do our lives follow His will? Then, **He will bless our lives and encourage us...**
Do we run away from His will as Jonah did? Then **He will send us into the midst of storms until we're driven back to Him!**

All the storms of life aren't necessarily **orchestrated** by God...but all the storms of our lives are definitely **allowed** by God. And **Romans 8:28** tells us God is able to work all things for our good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Jonah was called to go to Nineveh...and we'll see next week that **to Nineveh he went**. We can do things **our** way or **God's** way. I believe we see from today's Scripture that doing things God's way is so much better!