

2nd May 2021 Jonah's Adventures! Jonah 1:4-16

We have a new series wow wow. Yes it's the 48 verse long book of Jonah and the good news is you can binge read it in 5 mins.

In that section of the Bible we call the minor prophets. 12 books. Minor not because they are any less important, but because of their size. The ones with the funny sounding names Habakkuk, Zephaniah and a favourite of the gospel writers as they quote from them time after time to show Jesus as the one the prophets spoke about.

Sadly they are the ones we know least of all.

Marion and I used to visit a lady. Her illness meant she was getting weaker. She told us she was reading her way through the minor prophets. She said that if she met Habakkuk eg. She wouldn't be embarrassed if he asked, '**What did you think of my wee book?**'

Much more than a children's story. Saw last week Jonah was a real person who lived in history. 2Kings 14:25 a prophet from Gath Hepher near Nazareth. In fact another prophet Jesus reminded his listeners that 'one greater than Jonah is here.' And even applied Jonah's stay in the fish for 3 days and 3 nights to what was going to happen to him., so you see there is more to this story than meets the eye.

It's a book full of questions-14 in all. 8 of those in our section alone and the book even ends with one.

If the book of Jonah were a boxer it would be battered and bruised as down through the years many have taken a swing at it but here it is still standing.

Some great twists and turns to this story. The greatest revival in the history of the world is here and yet it did not satisfy Jonah. Strangely he was more in love with a plant than with the people of Nineveh.

Why was that? The Assyrians. A major threat to Israel's peace and prosperity. At that time (912-609 B.C.) the most cruel regime on earth. Think of the Empire in Star Wars. They are the all devouring machine. Jonah is a zealot...committed to Jews and Jews only and yet God says go to Nineveh 550 miles to the east.

Jonah (dove) flies like a dove and heads as far west as he can go. The more miles between him and Nineveh the better. 'God can get someone else to do it but I'm out of town.'

He knew what he was doing. This was a deliberate self-centered act of disobedience.

Do you know the book Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst?

This is just what we are looking at this morning v4-16

Notice that Jonah's disobedience started off really well. This literally was the calm before the storm. He found a ship going where he wanted to go, they had a berth, bought a ticket (was it one way?) and off they sailed. Conscience bothering him? No problem.

Ray C. Stedman, 'Sometimes it seems when you are trying to run away from God, you can always find a ship that will take you - but don't expect smooth sailing.'

Look how the writer tells us that when we disobey God, **the only way is down**.

v.3 He went down to Joppa

v.5 down below deck to an innermost part of the ship

v.15 down into the sea and v.17 down into the fish

The author skillfully weaves this thread into chapter 1.

v. 4 The end of the calm. literally says 'the Lord **hurled** a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. (same word '**hurled**' often used for throwing a weapon such as a spear 1 Sam 18 King Saul trying to get David)

Wait a minute-second time in as many weeks we have had a life-threatening storm. John speaking on Acts 27 Paul trying to get to Rome through a storm and a shipwreck. 'Strawberry jam sandwiches.'

They hurled away their wage-earning cargo in that account the same as we have here in v.4 but what a contrast between the 2 main characters.

God's man Paul had taken command of the situation.

Our man Jonah is asleep (supposed to be God's man) but he's not even aware of the danger. The truth is when you are disobedient you can have a false sense of security, you can imagine everything is going well that even includes a good sound sleep.

The apostle Paul was in prayer throughout the storm, but not with Jonah. It's the pagan captain who has to wake him up for a prayer meeting. V.6 He wants to cover every base, as all the sailors were terrified and calling out to their own gods. Whoever your God is pray to him or we are a gonner!

Notice it doesn't say here that Jonah prayed. In fact, he doesn't pray until later on when he has reached rock bottom inside the fish in chapter 2. In this he is like the prodigal son who only took stock of his situation when things couldn't get any worse. This is why Tim Keller calls his book **The Prodigal Prophet**. Another downside of disobedience. You are not on speaking terms with the only one who can help. He is running from God after all and Jonah is not going to give up easily.

V7-12 The sailors investigate

Remember these sailors are pros. Most likely Phoenicians, masters of the sea and they have been in storms before-but not like this one.

More pragmatic than the captain who was taking a top down approach of appeasing all the deities he could think of-they want to find the guilty person.

They cast lots -an ancient way of finding the will of the gods or of God e.g. Lots were used in Joshua 14 how to divide the promised land. In Judges 20 who was to lead the attack in battle and in seeing who was the chosen king in 1 Sam 10. Here we have another miracle. Whichever method they use to determine whodunnit God works in the process of these pagan sailors and the spotlight shines on Jonah. He is the guilty one.

Here in v.8 are some of those questions I was mentioning and it's a real barrage. 5 in all and finally Jonah breaks his silence.

He speaks the sailor's language as he identifies himself and his God to them.

v.9 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.'

Does this ring true to you?

It sounds like a quote from Psalm 95:5 'The sea is his and he made it and his hands formed the dry land.'

Then why did Jonah try to run away from him if he is that big? If he really feared the Lord, he would never have got on that boat!

Here is a case of a man who has got the right words in his mind, who can recite the right creed but doesn't live by it.

This is something we need to be mindful of and one that Jonny reminds us of -not just to churn out the words. Even in the Lord's prayer.

No this is a half-hearted confession and the sailors see through it.

v.10 Their reaction

This terrified them-literally 'the men feared a great fear.'

More questions What have you done? Look at the part in brackets. The author tells us, **'They knew that he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them.'**

Running away from the Lord...as we heard from Jonny last week Psalm 139 -you can't run from an omnipresent God. Only to him.

v.18 of that psalm, **'When I awake, I am still with you.'**

No -this all rang hollow but as the sailors were men of action they sought a solution to the problem.

Surely Jonah would know how to appease this God whom he had angered-why they asked in v.11

‘What should we do to make the sea calm down for us?’

In v.12 the prophet accepts the blame and he is just maybe starting to think of others. Look at the harm to the sailors and their property his disobedience has caused.

But look at his solution. **Pick me up and throw me into the sea.** Would he rather die, than obey God and go to Nineveh? I think he would. Why did Jonah not call out to God, ‘Alright I’ll go to Nineveh! You win!

Recognise anyone here? I know I do and I don’t mean somebody else. I mean me!

v.13-14 The sailor’s compassion

Surely something less drastic would work. Let’s try the oars to row back to land but that didn’t work either. In fact it seemed to make things worse. As they grapple with the situation and with what Jonah is saying, they even begin to pray like they are believers. They did more for Jonah than Jonah was willing to do for them.

‘Sometimes unsaved people put believers to shame by their honesty, sympathy, and sacrifice.’ Wiersbe Ouch.

But they are trying here by their man-made efforts to stop this sacrifice and then they realise that there is no other way to be saved. The one, the substitute, the scapegoat for the many. We catch a glimpse here of some of the types Jesus referred to.

v.14 O Lord they pleaded, don’t make us die for this man’s sin. And don’t hold us responsible for his death. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.

v.15 Finally after all else has failed, the sailors sacrifice Jonah to the storm and to the sea.

Man Overboard...love to say Man of God overboard but this is one pouting prophet. He is one tough guy. Jonah is not going to do what God asked of him and he is going to go to his death rather than anywhere near those Ninevites.

Look what happened, v15b ‘The raging sea grew calm.’

Do you remember when a greater than Jonah got up from his sleep and calmed the storm. His disciples were amazed and asked, ‘Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?’ Matt 8:24-27

Let’s go back on board that ship for a minute. Back to those sailors again! Back to the old ways -the storm is over after all, just like Pharaoh of old, once the plague had gone no need to change anything!

Sadly, this is so often the case. Once the danger has passed, we say 'I'll see you God the next time there's an emergency.' This is not what happens here.

v.16 At this the men greatly feared the Lord and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

The storm sent by God has done its work, but not on Jonah, on these pagan sailors. They met God in that storm and are now determined to worship him. They made vows. Vows for the future, promises for the rest of their life. They had been face to face with God.

The irony of course is not lost on us. The disobedient prophet didn't want to take God's message to outsiders, to pagans and yet God brings it about that a whole boat load of them have a new relationship with the one true God.

It was not the end of Jonah. God had not finished with him, but you'll have to come back next week and find out what happens.

Love C. Swindoll when he's at this point in a talk. **I'm through but I'm not finished!**

What lessons can we learn from this?

1. God's compassion extends even to those we find objectionable. If we just keep praying God bless me and my wife, my son and his wife, us four no more then we haven't grasped the meaning of grace. As the old hymn states, 'We have a gospel to proclaim.'

2. Any attempt to escape from the Lord is an act of futility. Wherever you go God is there. Read Psalm 139 later this afternoon and see for yourself. Anyone running from God today? You will save yourself a lot of time and anguish if you heed the message of Jonah and stop. God will have his way. I know I've tried it and it never works.

Call to mind the words of Psalm 95. We call it the Venite and many of us know it by heart. 'Today if you hear his voice harden not your heart.'

3. It's easy to let things slip and for our words to sound hollow. We used to call this backsliding, losing our first love is how Jesus puts it in Rev. 2. People who are calling Jesus Lord but are not doing what he wants them to do. The solution? It's a word you hear a lot in this church. Repent. Turn around. Quit messing about and turn to God.

May God help us before we drop into bed tonight to answer his call on our lives. Amen