

Introduction: Pg. _____

Children's Bibles! The familiarity of the Story...

****Read first page of *Jesus Storybook Bible***

Outline:

God says Go.

Jonah says No.

God says, I'm the boss.

Jonah says, I'm sorry.

God gives Jonah a second chance. Jonah goes, preaches.

The people of Ninevah turn from their evil ways.

God is happy. Jonah is mad, and God teaches Jonah another lesson. The end.

"The plot is simple enough to be grasped by children, and yet the story unfolds with such literary and theological sophistication that it continues to enthrall seasoned scholars and theologians." (YB?)

Jonah was a minor prophet with a major message. Minor because of length, not importance.

- His task is to speak against the Assyrians...
- Ninevah (modern day - close to Mosul, Iraq)
- The Assyrians were a ruthless, wicked people. They hung the heads of conquered kings in their royal gardens (doesn't make the children's Bibles!). They were not nice. People you did not want to deal with, even if you were God's prophet.

The story of Jonah, as we will begin to see in the first chapter, is really a . . .

"A Tale of Two Hearts" **Jonah 1:1-17**

Any time we come to the Old Testament (before Jesus), we should remember the New Testament (after Jesus), which says: **"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."** (Romans 15:4)

Read vv. 1-3

I want to walk us through this chapter by asking three pivotal questions.

I. Will you reflect God's heart by pursuing all people?

Verse 1-3:

The book begins with these words: "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah"

- Quick and abrupt. Other books would give some kind of orienting material. This is the only one of the prophetic books that begins like this.
- The focus is the assignment. It sets the tone for everything that follows.
- What is the assignment? (v2)
 - "Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and call out against it."
 - You can sense the urgency. First two words are imperatives: "Arise! Go!"

- Not only does God want Jonah to make this happen, the impression is he wants immediate action.
- “Cry out against it” indicates God’s displeasure and his warning to them that judgment will come if they continue in their evil ways.
- This was unheard of. Though we will find many prophecies addressing foreign nations in the prophets, it was unheard of for God to send one of his prophets to bring that message face to face.
- And God did so because he loved the city of Ninevah. That’s why we’re calling this series: “God’s City.” As chapter 4 will tell us, there were over 120,000 people who lived there.
- God loves the cities over our world and he call us to love cities, because cities are filled with people who need him.
- As we track through Jonah I hope you will be compelled to love our city like God loves us.
- Sadly, we discover that Jonah was not compelled.
 - Jonah got up, but surprisingly, he did *not* go. Rather than traveling east to Ninevah, he went west to Mediterranean seaport of Joppa, got out his money and paid fare to board a boat to journey to...
 - Verse3: Tarshish, away for the presence of the LORD.”
 - **Location: MAP.** Israel. Ninevah. Tarshish. (Almost off the map...)
- He runs the opposite direction. This is bold rebellion, spit in your face rebellion. Complete and utter disobedience.
- He wanted to get away from the presence of the Lord. Now, if anyone knew God was omniscient (knows everything) and omnipresent (is present everywhere) it is Jonah.
 - What this phrase tells us is that wanted to put himself in exile away from where God spoke to him, away from where God’s power was made known, and away from where God’s name dwelled.
 - *[[This is one reason people stop picking up their Bible. “The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.” - D.L. Moody.*
 - *This is one reason people skip church. Experienced God in these moments.]]*
 - I don’t want to go back to the place that is going to remind me of God’s plan for me because I want to do my own thing!
- Are there ways you have run from God this week? When we run from God, we always run into negative consequences.
- How closely do we share God’s heart for all people? What about the city where he’s placed us? Our neighbors? Or Coworkers? Do we have God’s heart?
- If there was one prayer that we could just start praying together personally, together, with one another, for one another... it would be this: God, give me your heart. **God, give us your heart.** God, give them your heart.
- That one prayer not only sums up today’s sermon, it not only sums up this entire four week series, it should be the sum of our life: God, give us your heart.

T: Will you reflect God’s heart by pursuing all people? #2.

II. Will you reflect God's heart by fulfilling his plans?

Read 4-10

God says: I have a plan for you. We, like Jonah, often respond by saying: That's nice, but I have a plan for me.

We are even so foolish to think that we can outmaneuver God, but God says, "You have no idea how committed I am to fulfilling my plans. *You* may not want to fulfill my plans, but *I will* fulfill my plans, and I might still use you to do it!

This is what drives God's response in verses 4-5.

- "But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. . . " Jonah, thought he was running away, but we can never outrun God. God chased Jonah with a storm.
- This storm was so fierce that verse four could literally read: "As for the ship, it threatened to burst apart." Desperate times call for desperate measures, so the sailors started throwing cargo overboard, because if this ship goes down, they are going down with it.
- The closest picture I can get in my mind is the *Andrea Gail* in the movie filmed here on the north shore called *The Perfect Storm*.
- If the ship goes down, they go down. That's why every sailor was crying out prayers to their various gods, hoping one of them might come and save them.
- Now while compete chaos is breaking out on the sea and in the boat, where was Jonah?
- Asleep! . . . until the captain chides him in verse 6 and wakes him with some haunting words: "Arise, call out" Sound familiar? God has a way of reminding us of who He IS and what HE WANTS, even when we run (Because he loves us).
- As the storm rages on, the sailors decide to cast lots to see who is responsible for this situation and the lot falls on Jonah, which leads them to unload on four questions on Jonah in rapid succession!
- They then bombarded him with four questions in rapid succession:
 - What is your occupation?
 - Where do you come from?
 - What is your country?
 - Of what People?
- All of these questions drive at the chief concern to identify the offended deity. (YB, 78)
 - You see, in the worldview of the sailors, a person served a variety of deities which would have been associated with a different aspect of a person's life.
 - We saw this in India with the multitude of Hindu gods over creation, knowledge, time, fertility, wealth, and the weather.
 - But the Bible tells us there is one, true God, who is God over everything! I'll take that kind of God!
- This is exactly what Jonah communicates. His response in verse 9 is succinct & powerful. "I am a Hebrew (the typical designation of Jewish people by foreigners at that time), and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."
 - You want to know who's responsible for this? Yahweh (I am)
 - Who is Yahweh? The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

- And don't miss the irony of Jonah's words and the admission in Jonah's words. Jonah knew he could not flee from the presence of God.
- [[He was familiar with truths like Psalm 139:7-8, where King David wrote **"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!"**]]

In all of this we learn: When we run away from God, he runs after us!

- I used to think, when I moved away from God, he moved away from me.
- And then my view of God improved to understand that God was not moving (Hebrews 13:5), I was just moving, but it doesn't stop there.
- Not only does God not run from us when we run from him. Not only does God not move when we move away from him, God actually runs after us, when we run away from him.

What would be the solution? *Read vv. 11-16 [running commentary]*

- The storm was growing worse. They could not wait any longer.
- Jonah volunteered himself to be thrown into the sea, because he was convinced God would cause the storm to cease once he was thrown overboard.
- This was no small step for Jonah. He expected to die under divine judgment.
- The sailors tried to row even harder to dry land, but the wind gusted stronger and the waves grew taller to the point where they were left with no choice but to throw Jonah overboard. We can see their growing respect for God in *verse 14* as they prayed.
 - God you have the authority to spare our lives.
 - God you have the authority to do whatever you please.
- And once they hurled Jonah into the sea, the sea ceased from its raging." P
- What's the moral of the story? Some of you are thinking: don't play chess with God. He's got you in checkmate before your first move. He can use your means of escape as a means of his salvation.
- But there's a bigger story here. God wants us to pursue all people. He wants us to follow his plan, and he wants us to reflect his holiness.

T: Which brings us to our third question

III. Will you reflect God's heart by living a holy life?

God's plan for Ninevah was holiness.

- Look back at *verse 2*.
- The reason evil offends God is because God is holy. He is morally perfect, completely pure. There is no fault or flaw in God.

God's plan for Jonah was holiness.

- He expected him to follow his instruction, obey his will and deliver his message even when it might be costly, and even when our heart might not be fully engaged.
- And God says, "Be holy because I am holy."
- God made us to reflect him!

Part of the irony in this story is how the author juxtaposes Jonah's disobedience and lack of faith with the sailors, who did not know God, but throughout the story grow in their knowledge and fear of him to the point where it says in verse 16: "The men feared with great fear YHWH, and they sacrificed sacrifices to YHWH and they vowed vows." (Youngblood trans) [progression of fear]

Why does God do all of this? Why does God send a storm? Because God loves Jonah. Why does God have him thrown overboard? Believe it or not, because God loves Jonah? God wants to teach him through these difficult circumstances about his heart to pursue all people and his plan for us to live holy lives according to his design.

As Jonah is sinking in the sea, God makes one more move. Look at verse 17.

- But that was not his final move... God "appointed" - Completely sovereign over the situation.
- [[Four instances of "appointed" in Jonah. In every case they relate to how God uses his creation to teach Jonah a lesson about himself, the Creator!]]
- And by the way: Jesus accepted this story as true, and if the God portrayed in this chapter exists, it would not be hard for him to cause a great fish to swallow Jonah, even if that were a miraculous occurrence.
- So why did God send the storm, why did God save Jonah out of a watery grave only to have him be swallowed by a whale? Because he loves him. Listen to the words of Hebrews 13:6-10.

"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, . . . we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness." (Hebrews 13:6, 9-10)

Conclusion:

The book of Jonah has a lot to teach us about this man named Jonah. Consequently it has a lot to teach us about us, but it has even more to teach us about God and about his Son, Jesus.

Jesus told us that all of the Bible points us to him, and this story does in numerous ways.

Scandalous Mercy.

- 2 Kings 14:23-27 provides critical background for our study through Jonah.
- It describes both Ninevah AND Israel as "evil." (v24)
- It also tells us about Jonah who told the people that God would extend the borders of Israel in spite of their wickedness and the wickedness of their king.
- God's mercy to a wicked Israel, should have prepared Jonah for his mercy to a wicked Ninevah, but Jonah could not wrap his heart around God being *that* merciful. That would be scandalous mercy.
- And there is another irony here: God commissioned Jonah to cross the very borders he prophesied about.
- God is the God who crosses borders. (Can I get a witness from some of my people who know something about that?) Like Jonah, like we often choose to play it safe within the confines of comfortable love.
- But not with Jesus.
 - Jesus crossed the borders of eternity to enter time and space.
 - Jesus crossed the borders of perfect deity by taking on humanity with all of our frailty and weaknesses.

- And Jesus crossed the borders of suffering for us to distribute God's scandalous mercy, so that we might become the sons and daughters of God.

Jesus... is the true and greater Jonah

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God, give us your heart! Jesus, give us your heart! Let us cross borders in such a way that people view my mercy as a scandalous mercy!

The Point: Make the aim of your heart to reflect the heart of God.

If you have been running from God this week (or perhaps for your entire life), this is no better day than today than to return to him.

Prayer:

- God, would you lead us past the confines of our own comfort.
- Move us out with scandalous mercy to love people like you love, to follow your plans, and to live a holy life just like our Savior, Jesus Christ.
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