

Do We Have To? The Book of Jonah

Most of us when we think of Jonah, we think of the guy who got swallowed by a big fish! But do we remember why? It wasn't by chance!

Jonah was a prophet (2 Kings 14:23-28) who tried to run away from God! Why? Because he didn't want to obey what God commanded him to do!

God called him to proclaim a message against Nineveh (the great city of Assyria)!
Jonah 1:2 - "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

Why would Jonah not want to jump at the opportunity to deliver such a message? Assyria was Israel's enemy! He could be God's voice of judgment!

The reason Jonah ran away, was because he knew that God's messages of judgment are always accompanied by opportunities for repentance!

God is a merciful God, Jonah knew this, so if God wanted him to go to Nineveh, it was b/c He also wanted to give them an opportunity to receive His mercy!

But Jonah didn't want the people of Nineveh to get off the hook!
He wanted only the judgment and wrath of God to fall upon his enemies!

Do we ever fall into this same mindset, of being grateful for freely receiving God's mercy & forgiveness ourselves, but not wanting the same for others?

Jonah wanted nothing to do with such a plan for Nineveh, so he tried to run away - **Jonah 1:3.** Jonah could run from God, but he couldn't hide!

He soon realized the truth of what the Psalmist declared in **Psalm 139:7-12**

Jonah ran, but...

- God sent a storm that made seasoned sailors afraid for their lives! **1:4-5a**
- God caused the casting of lots by the sailors to fall upon Jonah! **1:7**
- God brought about the throwing of Jonah overboard! **1:14-15a**

It is never wise to reject God's Word or run from Him! It never ends well!
God had a purpose for Jonah, His prophet, & nothing was going to hinder that!

Even Godly men/women, leaders, pastors, & prophets have to learn hard lessons! Jonah's realization of this came while being in the belly of a great fish!

This fish however was not Jonah's punishment for running away from God –

it was actually the evidence of God's restorative grace upon Jonah's life!

It was also a foreshadowing of an even greater work of God's grace that would come through Jesus Christ – bringing life out of the depths of the grave!

Jonah wasn't ready for that message yet, but God was paving the way for a salvation - not based upon race or performance, but solely upon His grace!

Jonah does go to Nineveh, having learned a valuable lesson, and he delivers God's message to the people of that great city! And guess what happens?

The greatest revival recorded in all the prophets happens! **"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."** **Jonah 3:5**

Even the king repented - **Jonah 3:6-10.** What was Jonah's response? **Jonah 4:1-3**
"No prophet was more successful in his ministry, nor more offended by his success than Jonah." – Larry Crabb

I guess Jonah hadn't yet learned this lesson about the merciful nature of God!

Jonah should have been celebrating the redemptive power of God at work, even if it was the "enemies of God's people" who were receiving it!

It's easy to shake our heads at Jonah, but would we respond any different? How often do our prayers sound a lot like Jonah's interactions with God?
"God... Why do good people suffer when evil people seem to prosper?"
"God... How is it that you let... get away with such sin w/out consequences?"
"God... Do I really have to forgive... show kindness to... pray for...?"

Jonah would rather die than see his enemies receive mercy from God! 3x's

- When on the boat, rather than tell the sailors to turn around and take him back, Jonah says, *"throw me overboard!"* **Jonah 1:11-12**
- When Nineveh repents, he asks God to take his life! **Jonah 4:1-3**
- When outside the city awaiting the people's fate, Jonah asks God to let him die again because he cared more about a shade plant than about the lives of the 120,000 Ninevites living in that city! **Jonah 4:5-11**

Jonah didn't want to be where he was, with who he was with, nor speak a message that could bring about the rescue & restoration of his enemies!

What about us? God has entrusted us as well with a message that is to be shared with even our enemies (the gospel)! Let us not respond like Jonah!

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