

Sunday Sermon Series – Ever Chasing God: Jonah
Pittsford Community Church
August 2016
Week Two - Jonah 1:17-2:10
Major Theme: Grace rescues a fugitive from God

Introduction: Phelps Testimony

Review:

Grace chases a fugitive from God

Like Phelps, as we run from God, as we make stupid choices. We have all acted and some of us are still acting in stupid ways that is requiring for grace to come to your rescue. We are just like Jonah we are just a fugitive from God. We are going to see that Jonah's actions have landed him in a very unfortunate position because he was running from God.

You know the story of Jonah, we started it last week...

This week's story is going to start in the last verse of chapter one and we are going to see that God is going to teach Jonah 5 lessons about his grace.

This week's theme: **Grace rescues a fugitive from God**

Lesson #1: Grace finds me in the depths of my distress

v.17 – “the Lord appointed a great fish”

- the fish was not there by accident – an intentional, sovereign act of God to send this particular fish – cf. Matt. 17:27

- three days and three nights – why three days and three nights? Because that's how long it took for Jonah to learn these five lessons about grace.

- What was Jonah doing for three days? Fighting with God.

- Truth: God is committed to our good. He knows what's good for us and what is rooted in evil and therefore harmful to us.

- Heb. 12:5-13: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” ...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? **10** 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.

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- The Lord disciplines the one he loves.

- Last week: Why did Jonah run? – I won't tell you in full yet, but I think we can begin to make out some of the reason here. As humans, because of sin, we have the tendency to place ourselves in the center of our lives. We are the most important thing. We look out for number one. And we tend to believe that we control our lives. Even as professing Christians we do this.
- Christian = surrender to the authority and will of Christ – yet we quickly and constantly find ourselves taking him off the throne of our lives and putting ourselves back on. What causes us to do this? Everything – it happens every time we take our eyes off of God. (i.e. success, ability, fear, selfishness)
 - We must remember that doing that is idolatry at its core. We play God. We make ourselves king. We make ourselves great...but there is only One who is great.

- We talked a considerable amount about fearing God last week – Jonah's little fear contrasted with sailor's great fear – somewhere along the line (success, revered, comfortable life) Jonah reduced God to something in his world, rather than recognizing that he was a part of God's world. How are we doing with that this morning church? Is that hard truth? It's good truth.

- Make no mistake – when Jonah was in the water he was still king of his own kingdom. He was playing God. In his spirit he was still at the point where obedience to God was optional based on how he felt. God still wouldn't let him rule his own kingdom. (God hurled a storm to keep him from running, God appointed a fish to keep him from dying). And it took Jonah three days of anger, resentment, and fighting with God in his spirit before God was able to break through to Jonah and Jonah was able to recognize God's authority over his life and his incredible goodness to him.

v.1 – “Then Jonah prayed...” – such a realization finally led Jonah to approach God, something he hadn't done at all in chapter 1.

- Illustration: Penny – sometimes she gets feisty and she'll growl, and snarl and bite as Becky and I get near and when we pick her tiny 6lb body up she'll be struggling and fighting us the whole way. And we will wrap our arms around her and hold her close and after a little complaining she'll begin to settle down...and she'll let out a sigh, and she'll stop and be at peace because she remembers in that moment that in the arms of her owner is where she longed to be. What a great picture of us and God.

- Reaching the end of ourselves, God is faithful to hold us through the storm. Grace finds us in the depth of our distress. Till we remember that that is where we long to be, in the arms of our Creator.

- Hosea: 6:1-3 - “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. **2** After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. **3** Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”

v.2 – “I called...he answered; I cried...he heard my voice”

- Jonah is learning about grace. Because of his actions, his choices, God has moved him to the worst point of distress I can think of. And yet he called, he made a choice to call out to God. But look at this: Don't miss the wonder perhaps even

surprise of this verse: The shock is not that he called, the shock is what happens next. "he answered me." After everything I did, "I called and he actually answered!"

- If I were God, I wouldn't want to answer the prayer of a man who was running away from me. Just the opposite. It's a picture of God's grace.

v.3 - "you cast me into the deep"

- really? the sailors were the ones that actually hurled Jonah into the water, Jonah recognizes that it was actually the hand of God which was responsible for putting him there. God put him in the depths, God knows exactly where he is.

"your waves and your billows passed over me"

- God is the one who sent the storm after Jonah. This is a statement of admission. God is the owner of the land and the sea and he has the power and authority to use them for his will and purposes.

v.4 - "I am driven away from your sight"

- Was it God who was driving Jonah away, or was it Jonah who was running away from God?

- Sometimes in the middle of our distress we are unsure how we got there. But let me tell you a mistake you do not want to make, you do not want to blame God for your situation. So many times we want to blame God when it was our act of disobedience that got us into the storm we are in. And so often we want to ball up our fist in the face of God and blame him instead of call out to him for grace and acknowledge it's my responsibility that I'm in the situation that I'm in (the anxiety, pressure, pain, relational difficulty).

"yet I shall look again upon your holy temple"

- why is he talking about a temple, he's in a fish! We'll come back to that.

v.5 - "the waters closed in...the deep surrounded...weeds wrapped around my head...the roots (base) of the mountains"

- Jonah is in over his head. Some of you are here this morning, I don't know what you brought in, but you feel as though you are in over your head. You feel as though there is no way out for you. Hopeless, helpless, and your life feels as if it is going down, down, down.

v.6 - "I went down (descended)"

- cf. down to joppa, down into the ship, down into the cargo hold to fall asleep...now we see him going down to the bottom of the sea, his lowest point. Every step away from God is a step down.

"yet you brought up my life from the pit, Yahweh, my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you into your holy temple."

- Could God have appointed a fish to catch Jonah before he ever hit the water? Probably. But God doesn't do that. God waits for him to fall into the water. Waits for him to come to the end of his strength, running out of hope, exhaust all of his resources, then he starts to sink, starts to drown and that's when God catches him. What was God doing? God was teaching him a lesson about grace.

- You can't get out of your storm by yourself it is not until you admit that you are in over your head that you will ever know anything about grace.

- Grace comes when your self-sufficiency is gone, when your strength is gone, when you can't do it. Do you feel like you are in over your head this morning? Then you are a great candidate for God's grace.
- Jonah was coming to the end of himself and God wanted to meet him there. The same is true for you this morning, God wants to meet you are. Grace wants to find you in your distress. Will you stop running and call out to him.

That's the first lesson we are going to learn this morning. Here's the second:

Lesson #2: Grace frees me from the vanity of idols

v.8 - "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love."

- lit. "Devotees of useless idols forsake mercy."
- Surrounded by pagan idol worshippers who turned their attention to the living God. Jonah was beginning to realize that maybe he had some idols too.
- Ironically enough do you know that a life preserver is a great picture of an idol - The job of an idol is to keep you afloat. It gives you just enough hope to convince you that you won't drown. **Listen: Idols will keep you afloat but they won't get you back into the boat they won't get you back onto dry land** - They try to convince us that they will actually save us. They keep you from coming to the end of yourself. They fill your life with just enough that they give the illusion of safety and fulfillment while never putting us back in the boat. God wants to put you back into the boat. He want to put your feet back on dry land.
- but in light of the true experience of grace rescuing us, those idols are exposed for what they are: false gods that hurt not help.

Lesson #3: God's grace surprises me with the hope of steadfast love.

- Same verse
- newsflash: God loves you - even in the midst of the waves. God wants to come to your rescue.
- Conj. "yet" - two thoughts that go together, even as improbable as they might seem. (v.4, v.6)
- Grace definition: Favor given to an ill-deserving person, by an unobligated giver.
- Grace is not an employer paying you for working, as if it is something you earn. Grace is not you paying taxes to the IRS as if it is an obligation. Grace is the gift under the tree on Christmas morning. Favor given to an - ill-deserving person, by an unobligated giver. That is what God wants to give you.
- That's the lesson Jonah was learning. God had a lesson of grace for Nineveh. Jonah hadn't learned it yet. God had to teach him.

Lesson #4: Grace gives me a voice of thanksgiving.

v.9 - "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you, what I have vowed I will pay."

- what is Jonah thankful for? For the lesson in grace.
Jonah thankful for the fish

- The fish wasn't sent to bring Jonah down, the fish was sent to bring Jonah back up
- The fish is God's grace. Sometimes God sends a fish to stop you and take you in an opposite direction. Sometimes God sends a fish to protect you from you.
- He says, "I'll do what you tell me because you are greater than I am."
- It is not happy people who have a voice of thanksgiving; it's people who have a voice of thanksgiving that are happy.
 - If you say, "If God would give me some more stuff I'd be thankful"...you don't get it. God's already been so good to you. Don't you see it?
 - URIMON – 100 ways I've been blessed by God – wall of thanksgiving – 3000 reasons to be a thankful people.
 - Our first step away from God is a failure to thank him. – what is a first step back to him? Thanking him – for the fish, for getting my attention, for the seaweed wrapped around my head – to get me off of myself and onto you

Lesson #5: Grace reminds me, salvation belongs to the Lord.

- Salvation is completely and entirely a gracious work of the Lord.
- The temple is mentioned twice in this passage. In Jonah's mind, Jonah is thinking about the temple because he is thinking about what happens in the temple. The sacrificial slaughtering of an animal by the priest whose blood then pours onto the mercy seat as a symbol of the blood atoning for the sins of the people, thus reconciling them to God.
- We no longer live with the need for the temple because it was God's spotless lamb Jesus Christ who shed his blood as a payment for our sin. All of it. And he offers his grace to us as the free gift under the Christmas tree – favor to an ill-deserving people by an unobligated giver. Would you accept God's gift of grace to you this morning by calling out to him and believing that it is he alone that can save you.
- Grace rescues a fugitive from God
- When you do this, that is when your feet will once again stand on dry land.