



*“I knew that you are a gracious God,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
a God who relents from sending calamity”
Jonah 4:2b*

October 14th - November 11th, 2018

Jonah 1:1-16: The Word of God speaks



I love a good story. If you add danger and humor, even better. Jonah is a great story that has both of these things. Most of us are somewhat familiar with the story and we remember the big fish and maybe the fact God did not use his flamethrower on Nineveh. Yet, there is so much more to this story that will stir our hearts toward God and cause us to look at our own hearts. In fact, the story of Jonah is kind of a mirror to our own stories. There is a little bit of Jonah in all of us. Maybe like Jonah, we have a view of God that is inaccurate and a view of ourselves that is stunted. We have titled this series **Grace Untethered** because most of us have a view of God's grace that, many times, is safe and predictable. The story of Jonah challenges our assumptions on grace and invites us to the dangerous (untethered) nature of God's grace that is radical and transformative. It is a grace that spoke to Jonah of a mission to his dreaded enemies and provided a violent storm on the high seas and a giant fish to keep him from drowning. These are things we don't usually associate with grace...comfortable things like nice coffee mugs with Bible verses or Christian music and Christian conferences and retreats. Jonah jars our understanding of grace as only safe and predictable to a reality of a God bringing transformation to our hearts and our world. A grace that transforms brokenness into a goodness and wholeness. The grace of God begins with a Word from God. How will we respond when we hear God's Word? The question is, will we run like Jonah or will we receive and act upon what God has said?

Discussion questions:

1. As you read the story, what patterns in the story emerge? Who are the main characters and how are they responding to God?
2. Why do you think Jonah ran away from God? How do his actions jive with what he knows about God(v.9)? Why do you think there is such a disconnect between what Jonah believes and how he acts?
3. What do you think is the significance of God sending a violent storm? How does God use storms in our lives? What was Jonah doing during the storm? Why do you think this is significant?

4. What can we learn from the sailors and their response to the storm? The sailor's response to Jonah (v.10) presents a great irony. What did they get that Jonah missed?

5. Was Jonah's desire to be thrown in the sea loving? Why did the sailors not want to do this? How did this illustrate Jonah was still running from God?

6. Do you see a disconnect from what you know about God and your actions in life? Why do you think there is that disconnect? How do you respond when you hear a Word from God?

7. God did not let Jonah get away from Himself. How have you seen God pursue you in your running? What does this say about God?

8. What was the basis of God's relationship with Jonah? How does this help us understand our relationship with God?

9. How do you observe grace in this story? How have you experienced grace in your life as you have run from God?

Jonah 1:17-2:10: God provides



We all have needs. A great portion of our lives is spent making sure we have a place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear. These are all necessary and good things that we need to live. Some of us spend too much time thinking and worrying about these things. Remember, Jesus told us in the gospel not to worry because God knows what we need. In fact, Jesus said we should seek first “God’s Kingdom and righteousness first” before pursuing these needed things because God is good and will provide everything we need.

The irony is that Jonah, as a preacher, should have been seeking God first, but instead he was running away. He did not like God’s grace towards the Ninevites, and he wanted no part in God’s plan of salvation for his enemies. Jonah had a big spiritual need that he thought was no big deal. But God saw Jonah’s condition as very serious, and he needed some provision. So, God provided a violent storm and sailors to throw Jonah in the sea, and He provided a big fish, all to deal with Jonah’s real need. Maybe like Jonah we think we are doing the right thing by going about our business and not God’s business. Maybe you are not in a literal storm, but you have an illness, financial crisis, a family conflict, or career disappointment. Each of these can be real storms in our lives. Sometimes the storms in our lives are God’s provision of Grace because they get our attention and help us see our true condition. It is not until Jonah is in the belly of the fish in the depths of the sea that he starts to see his need and the beauty of who God is. God is good, and His desire is our good. He loves us so much that He will send storms to help us see ourselves and His goodness in the right way. So, we too, can say with Jonah, “Salvation comes from the Lord!”

Discussion questions

1. How does God provide for Jonah? Do you think this is what Jonah expected or would have chosen? What had Jonah chosen?
2. Read Matthew 12:38-42. What is the significance of 3 days and 3 nights in the fish? How does Jesus fulfill this prophesy? How does Jesus use the story of Jonah as a warning to us today?

3. What do you observe in the prayer of Jonah? What is his response to God's provision? How does this prayer highlight the real problem in Jonah's heart? How is God pursuing Jonah and revealing who He is?

4. What is so dramatic about the way Jonah is restored to land? What does this say about Jonah's condition?

5. How have you seen God provide in your life? How is this evidence of grace? How has God's provision been different than you would have chosen or expected? How does this point to God's goodness?

6. What is the warning we can take away from the story of Jonah for our lives? What would be a better way to respond to God's loving pursuit in our lives?

7. How does Jesus story of the lost sons (Luke 15:11-32) highlight some of the same themes as Jonah? What do both these stories tell us about God and about us?

Jonah 3:1-10: The Word of God speaks (again and again)



I remember turning in a paper in college that I had thought I had done a great job on. Only for the professor to sit down with me and explain how I had missed the basic idea of what she was looking for in the research paper. She explained again what she was looking for and invited me to try again. At the time, I was not so happy about having to redo my research paper. Now I see the grace of her taking the time to speak to me again. Jonah missed it the first time, but God patiently speaks to him again, giving him a second chance to share the message of judgment and salvation to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeys and does not run away but follows through with what God had said. How many times has God given us a second or third chance to respond to His Word?

The difficult thing for Jonah is that he is not expecting Nineveh to respond to God's Word the first time. He is fully expecting God to bring out the flame thrower. To his surprise they, unlike Jonah, listen and respond the first time. The irony in this story is that Jonah, who was God's prophet, did not listen to God. But the Ninevites who were ruthless enemies of God's people did listen to Him. This is a reminder that it is not our spiritual heritage that saves us. It is only by grace through faith. In the N.T. book of Romans, we are told "faith comes through hearing". Are you listening to God's Word? Is your heart inclined to obey what God says even if it runs counter your own thoughts and desires?

Discussion questions:

1. What does it say about God that He spoke to Jonah a second time?
2. How does Jonah respond this time to God's call?
3. What can we learn about Nineveh from Jonah's description? Ancient Nineveh is located in modern day Iraq where the United States has fought an ongoing war with ISIS. What are some of the parallels with Jonah's relationship with Nineveh and our relationship with the people who live in this region today?

4. What was Jonah's message to Nineveh (v.4)? What does this message say about God? What does it say about Jonah? Did Jonah leave anything out?

5. What was the Ninevites response? How did God "Overthrow" Nineveh in a way Jonah did not expect?

6. How would you compare Nineveh's response to God's message to Jonah's in chapter 1?

7. How have you seen God give you "second chances"? How does this help us understand grace? How does this point to God's grace in your life?

8. How does it make you feel when you see God's grace given to people who are personal enemies? Why do we like grace for ourselves, but grace for others is hard to swallow?

9. What do God's actions towards Jonah and Nineveh tell us about who God is?

Jonah 4:1-11: God is gracious in his pursuit of lost people



A friend of mine was greeting people as they were coming into church one Sunday. As one visitor was coming into the church he saw my friend and was amazed. This guest had known the greeter for many years and would never have imagined seeing in a church, and even less serving as a greeter in a church. This visitor who became part of the church later told me his initial thought was that this could not be real. Could a person who had been so wild and anti-God actually be changed? He discovered it was real and that God can transform even the wildest person to one of His children. Jesus said I have come not to save the righteous but the sinner. He said he came not for the well, but the sick. The gracious nature of God is to pursue the most unlikely people to be transformed into new people. Soren Kierkegaard famously said, "God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but he does what is still more wonderful: he makes saints out of sinners."

Jonah encountered this gracious pursuit of God of the Ninevites - a gruesome and wicked people, who were only bent on destruction and evil toward others. The surprise for Jonah was that these people encountered the living God and they realized they were lost and needed to be transformed. They repented of their sin and asked for God's forgiveness. This is a wonderful work of God!

Jonah is caught in a bind as his heart is not with God's heart in this pursuit of loss people. The question we have to grapple with like Jonah is, "Where is our heart toward the lost and sinners in our lives?"

Discussion questions:

1. God's incredible grace towards Nineveh causes an angry reaction in Jonah. Does this reaction surprise you? Why or why not?
2. In Jonah's second prayer (v. 2-3) of the story we see Jonah's heart towards God why he was running from God. What is it about God that made Jonah angry and want to die?
3. The key statement in the whole book of Jonah is verse 2 where God is revealed for who He is. How do we see God character and plan of salvation displayed throughout the story?

4. What is it about God's question to Jonah (v.4 and v.9) that exposes the real core issue? How does the story of Job compare to Jonah's struggle and God's question?

5. How does the idea of God's grace, compassion, slowness to anger, and abounding love to those who you think are unworthy affect you? Who are those people in your life?

6. The fact that lost people are broken and messy can make grace and love for them seem wrong. Why is this? Why do we have acceptable sins and unacceptable sins? How does God view sin and repentance regardless of the person and sin?

7. Who are those that God has compassion towards that He is asking you to also be compassionate towards?

Jonah 4:1-11: God's pursuit of His people



The story of Jonah is really a story about God and us. A God big enough and dangerous enough to love and save lost people and to faithfully love and provide for His people even in their running away from Him. It's also a story about us. How will we respond to the God revealed to us in the story of Jonah? In many ways the one most lost was Jonah, and we too, like Jonah, can think we know God, but really be lost in our safe and predictable expectations of Him. The good news is God is gracious and does not leave us in this condition. He chases us down in loving pursuit and invites us into the beauty and risk of a relationship with Him. In the end God's invitation is to Himself. For Jonah to see God as the ultimate treasure and life itself. It is the untethered grace of God that keeps pursuing a running Jonah for him to know this treasure.

Maybe this story is a wakeup call for you. Maybe you have been running away from God actively. Or you have been preoccupied with lesser desires and values so different from God's desires and values for your life. Either way, you have a choice and are at a crossroads when you hear the story of Jonah. Will you turn from your selfish ways and begin to see God for who He is and go down His path of what He wants to do in your life and in our world? Or will you continue down your path away from God? The story of Jonah does not have a nice ending all wrapped up in a nice conclusion like "Jonah and Nineveh lived happily ever after". It ends with an open question for us to grapple with. How will we respond to God? Will we treasure God above all else and be willing to walk with Him in His untethered grace?

Discussion questions

1. As Jonah runs from God again outside the city to wait for God to punish Nineveh, what parallels do you see from the first time he ran from God?
2. How does God's provision (plant, sun, wind, worm) again reveal His love for Jonah?
3. How many times is the word "angry" used to describe Jonah? What is it about anger that reveals our heart's condition towards God and others?

4. What is Jonah's primary concern (desire)? How is this concern (desire) different from God's? How has God been trying to get Jonah's attention about God's desires?

5. How do our desires and values tend to drift away from God's desires and values?

6. How have you seen God pursue you and get attention in your life to expose your anger and misplaced desires?

7. How does Jesus story of the Father's pursuit of the older son (Luke 15:11-32) highlight some of the same themes as Jonah? What do both these stories tell us about God and about us?

8. What is the dangerous (untethered) nature of God's grace in our lives? What does this grace require that we give up for a greater treasure? What is God asking you to give up for Him?

9. What is the greatest treasure God is inviting you to? How does this bring the Father's joy and your good?