

## **Seeing Jesus in Jonah Jonah & Matthew 12:40-41**

Throughout this series we have been contemplating the different kind of life that God often calls us to live. The book of Jonah ends with the prophet still angry with God over the Lord's compassion toward Nineveh. It is certainly very unChristlike. Before we end the series next week, I want to ensure we see Jesus in this book.

When most people think of Jonah in the Bible, they think of the reluctant prophet who ran from God's missionary call and was then swallowed up by a fish. While it's true that Jonah is in every chapter of the book that bears his name, Jesus is still the character to whom the book points and redemption is still its main theme.

I think we are all familiar with this statement Jesus made -

*Matthew 12:40-41 - For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.*

Unlike the people of Jesus's generation, we don't want to miss Jesus. We can do this by comparing and contrasting Jonah with Jesus.

### **First: Let's Review the Book**

- a) God orders Jonah to preach to Nineveh but Jonah refuses and tries to escape God by sea (1:3).
- b) God orchestrates a storm so that Jonah is cast into the sea to save the lives of pagan sailors (1:12-16).
- c) God then appoints a fish to swallow up Jonah, who remains in the fish for three days (1:17).
- d) On the third day, Jonah acknowledges his sin and God raises him up out of the fish (2:10).
- e) Jonah then proclaims God's judgement on Nineveh, Nineveh repents, and God graciously relents of his prophesied judgement (3:4, 8-10).
- f) Jonah expresses anger toward God for his compassion toward Nineveh but God questions Jonah's heart (4:4).
- g) The book ends with Jonah as displeased with God as when the book began (4:4 & 9).

### **Second: Let's Focus on What it Means**

A common interpretation when preaching on Jonah is to focus was why we should not be like Jonah. The argument is that Jonah's life would have been better if he had just obeyed. If Jonah had only listened, the sailors would not have been put in danger, and he would not have been swallowed up by a fish, and so on. But the primary purpose of the Bible is not to teach morality but to reveal God.

Morally speaking, if God calls us to go somewhere, unlike Jonah, we should obey and go. Common sense alone leads us to that conclusion. But the primary point is not about Jonah's disobedience; it's about how God shows himself to be a great God: the sailor's God, the storm's God, Nineveh's God, the plant's God, the worm's God, the wind's God.....and even Jonah's God.

Our focus anytime we read the Bible should be on God, who is he and what he is doing. The Bible was written to reveal God so that we might know, love, obey and enjoy Him.

When we stop focusing on what Jonah should have done and rather see what God did, we see that the central, recurring theme throughout the whole story of Jonah is God's redeeming sovereignty over everything. Consider the follow verses:

*"And the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea..." (1:4)*

*"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah." (1:17)*

*"And He spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land." (2:10)*

*"And the LORD appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah..." (4:6)*

*"God appointed a worm that attacked the plant..." (4:7)*

*"God appointed a scorching east wind..." (4:8)*

You get the point. Clearly, the story of Jonah is not about Jonah, but about what God does through Jonah.

It's no coincidence that the story begins with Jonah running away from God's plan, and ends Jonah angry with God but God fulfilling his plan anyway, despite Jonah's reluctance.

### **Third: Let's See Jesus.** Matt 12:41 & Mark 4:35-41

One of the first things we learn about Jonah is that he is no hero. He's an anti-hero. We all now this.

And we also know that there is only one hero in the Bible; Jesus. In the strangest of ways, Jonah's failures point us, make us long for the true Hero of the Bible; someone who is unlike Jonah.

Matthew 12:41 – *Something greater than Jonah is here.*

Mark 4:35-41 – *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" <sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" <sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

Mark has deliberately laid out this account using language that is parallel, almost identical, to the language of the famous Old Testament account of Jonah.

- Both Jesus and Jonah were in a boat
- The descriptions of the storm are almost identical.
- Both Jesus and Jonah were asleep.
- In both stories the sailors woke up the sleeper and said, "We're going to die."
- In both cases there was a miraculous divine intervention and the sea was calmed.
- In both stories the sailors then become even more terrified than they were before the storm was calmed.

Two almost identical stories—with just one difference.

In the midst of the storm, Jonah said to the sailors, in effect: *"There's only one thing to do. If I perish, you survive."* (Jonah 1:12). And they threw him into the sea.

That doesn't happen in Mark's story. Or does it?

If you step back and look further into Jesus' life, you see that the stories aren't actually different

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "*One greater than Jonah is here,*" and he's referring to himself: *I'm the true Jonah*. He meant this:

*"Someday I'm going to throw myself into the storm of God's wrath and calm all storms, still all waves but not by my life, (Jonah lived) but by my death."*

There is only one death that can make us right with God, that can save us from God's wrath.

Fundamentally, in relation to God, the entire world is Nineveh, everyone is a Ninevite and Jesus willingly and joyfully (Hb 12:2) came to save us. Like the sailors and the Ninevites, we need to be saved from God's judgment against our sin. Sin is not a storm we can sail away from and death is not a storm we can ignore (Jonah). Nor is God's wrath something we can escape by a make-over (Nineveh).

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has provided a way of salvation. Jesus (though He did not deserve it like Jonah did) hurled himself into the storm of God's wrath so that you and I might be saved. When Jesus sunk to the depths of death on our behalf, he made it possible for us to arrive safely on the shore of eternity. That is the good news of the Gospel.

#### **Fourth: Ten Ways that Jesus is the Greater Jonah**

1. Jonah was a prophet preaching God's wrath and repentance (Jonah 1:2, 3:1-4) and so was Jesus (Acts 3:22; Mark 1:14-15).

Matthew 4:17 - "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*"

2. Jonah ran from God's call to a different kind of life ([Jonah 1:3](#)). Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father's will and went to the cross (John 6:38).

3. Jonah slept on a ship during a storm caused by his own disobedience and offered up his life to save those on the ship (1:4-12). Jesus slept on a ship during a storm, calmed the storm, and would later offer up His life to save those who were disobedient (Mark 4:35-41).

4. Jonah claimed to fear the Creator God who had authority on earth (Jonah 1:9). Jesus *is* the Creator God with the supreme authority over all the earth (John 1:3; Matthew 28:18).

5. Jonah spent three days inside the belly of a great fish because of his own sin (Jonah 1:17). Jesus spent three days inside the belly of the earth because of our sin (1 John 2:2).

6. Jonah learned that "*Salvation belongs to the Lord*" (Jonah 2:9). Jesus' name means "Yahweh saves" and He is the Lord of salvation (Hebrews 5:9; Acts 4:12).

7. Jonah despised God for showing grace toward repentant sinners (Jonah 4:2). Jesus modeled God's grace toward repentant sinners (Luke 19:10).

8. Jonah lacked concern for the salvation of people from other nations (specifically the Ninevites (Jonah 4:2). Jesus gave his life to ransom people to God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

9. Jonah was angry enough to die because of God's grace toward sinners (Jonah 4:3). Jesus was compassionate enough to die because of His love for sinners (1 John 3:16).

10. Jonah cared more about his own comfort than people (4:10-11). Jesus denied himself comfort to reconcile us to God (Philippians 2:6-8 Corinthians 5:18).

In every way, Jesus is the greater Jonah.

#### **Conclusion:**

Christian: There will always be a ship of some kind in a harbor near you that is ready to take you away from what God's call to a different kind of life. But you will drown in remorse.

NonChristian: There will always be a ship of some kind in a harbor near you that is ready to take you away from God's saving voice. But you will drown in regret.

### **Community Groups:**

1. Have someone read Jonah 1 aloud. (Ask people beforehand if they will read).
2. What is happening in and around Israel during this time frame? (Israel's disobedience and the Assyrian threat)
3. Describe who Jonah was, where he lived, when he lived, where he sailed from, where he ended up.
4. Jonah tried to run away from God. Is this possible? Read Psalm 139:7-12. Describe a time you tried to run away from God.
5. What were the results of Jonah's disobedience?
6. Read Jonah 2 aloud. Why is it important that the account about Jonah and the fish be true? Read Matt 12:40.
7. Read Jonah 1:4, 17 and 2:10. Discuss the implications of this verse for God's sovereignty over all things. What are some other examples of God's sovereignty over animals, weather, people, etc.?
8. Read the last sentence in Jonah 2:9. Why might this be the most important statement in the entire book?
9. Read Jonah 3 out loud. Describe Jonah's sermon. Was the repentance real? Why? Why not?
10. Read Jonah 4 out loud. Why was Jonah so upset? Why didn't he want Nineveh to be forgiven? What outsiders might you have difficulty reaching for Christ?
11. How does the book of Jonah reveal God's heart for everything he has created?
12. How does the book of Jonah reveal God's heart for the nations?
13. Remembering all that you have read this morning, list some ways that Jesus is the greater Jonah.
14. Take some time this morning to pray for our foreign missionaries: the Hitchcocks, the Gibsons, the Martinezes and the Soritaus.