

## Jonah: The Missionary God, When God Calls, Jonah 1, 2/2/25

We are going to pause in our study through the Life of David in 1 Samuel because February here at Brandywine Valley Church is Missions Month. We focus this month on two things: 1) We challenge you with the mission God has for each of you right here in the Brandywine Valley- where you live, work and play. 2) We put a spotlight on our sending and supporting role in global missions. We have over 30 active missionaries in at least 11 countries around the world that we partner with for the sake of the gospel and their flags are represented in the room today. Each Missions Month we bring in one of our missionaries from the field to spend time with us, share about their ministry, to educate, challenge us, and for us to bless and encourage them. This year we are excited to have **Rodney and Kristen Huffty**, Young Life missionaries to Scotland. Rodney is going to be preaching the message on Sunday the 16th, and the Hufftys will be sharing about their ministry in our Christian Ed ministry on the 23rd.

Also I'm looking forward to our **Missions Dinner on Feb 21 at 6pm**. This is a special time for us each year as a church family, we will get to come together to enjoy a great Scottish inspired meal, and I will host Q&A with Rodney and Kristen where you will get to ask them questions like do people really wear kilts and have you ever seen the Loch Ness monster? But also important questions like where are you seeing the Spirit of God at work among the youth of Scotland?. Get your tickets now as we are limited to a little over 300.

Also, each Missions Month we take up a special collection called **Faith Promise** that will go to support their ministry in Scotland as well as a portion set aside for two missions trips we are planning- one adult trip to Scotland in April and a college-age trip to Peru in May. Our goal is \$25,000. You can give however you'd like, but we encourage you to consider "found money" from overtime, tax refund, inside the couch cushions.

Now, all this talk about global missions and evangelism makes some of us uncomfortable. Because there is a popular notion out there in our post-modern and increasingly post-Christian culture that missions work is religious colonialism, imposing our beliefs and values on people of other cultures. "My truth is my truth and your truth is your truth." Is the motto of the day. Shouldn't we just let everyone believe what they want without trying to change their minds? Well, let's talk about that.

While there may be bad ways to go about missions and evangelism, there are at least two reasons that should never be the perspective for us as Christians. #1 Because the Bible clearly tells us that **all people are spiritually, eternally lost without a saving relationship with Jesus**, which ought to compel us out of love, to share the message of hope with lost people. Thank God my parents shared the gospel of Jesus with me and even when I rejected the message for several years, thank God, my friend Nick on the football team kept inviting me to his church even though I said no many times, and thank God Youth Pastor Bob didn't give up on me when I was skeptical and even mocked Christians, and thank God eventually the gospel hit me like truck and the Spirit of God took a heart of stone and made it into a heart of flesh. If you are a

Christian today your testimony is “I was lost and now I’m found.” And that should compel us to personal evangelism and supporting missions around the world. #2 The reason we go on cross-cultural missions trips and we support missionaries is because **we have a missionary God.** He doesn’t just sit back in heaven and say, “Good luck figuring out all these answers to life’s biggest questions and how to get to heaven on your own!” No, the Bible tells us that God pursues us. He reveals himself through his creation, miracles, through the prophets, through His Scriptures, and ultimately through Jesus Christ. John 3:17 *For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* God is a missionary God who is compelled out of love for humanity to offer the gift of salvation through Jesus. And so, we are caught up in the grand story of God’s saving mission through the gospel of Jesus. And so the church is not a Christian country club. The church is an outpost in God’s missionary adventure to the world!

And that is exactly what we are going to be challenged with in our **Missions Month series in the book of Jonah.** We are going to see God’s heart of mercy and compassion on a mission to reach some of the most undeserving people on the planet. And we are going to encounter a reluctant missionary, Jonah. And let me warn you in advance, this story will challenge us to wrestle with the reality that each of us are Jonah in one way or another. If you’ve ever lacked compassion toward a group of people- this is for you. If you have ever said no to God about sharing your faith with anyone, this is for you. So that covers all of us.

Let’s get into our Bible. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Jonah. If you don’t know where that is in your Bible, it is right between Obadiah and Micah. Which probably doesn’t help much. I heard a pastor say that Jonah is tucked in there with all those books that sound like Star Wars characters: Obadiah, Jonah, Obi Wan, Micah, Nahum, and Chewbacca.<sup>1</sup> No shame in going to your table of contents. If you grew up in the church, when you think of Jonah what from your childhood comes to mind? A storm, a whale, flannel graphs in Sunday School, Veggie-*tales*, It’s almost a fairytale-like story isn’t it?

But this is not a mythical story, I believe this is a real story from history. For a few reasons. Nineveh (where Jonah is sent) is a real place in history, the remains of which you can visit in Northern Iraq. Jonah is a real prophet- he shows up in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, 700s BC. Jesus references the person, places and events in Jonah as real in Matthew 12:39-41. **Jonah 1:1-2 *The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:***

***“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*** Jonah as a prophet is used to the Word of the Lord coming to him, but this time God comes to him with a Word that he did not expect and it challenged him like it would for each of us. It was a command to go to Nineveh. Now why was that a big deal? Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria which were enemies of Israel. They were idol worshippers and we know from history that they were a brutal people. For example, did you know they perfected the art

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to JD Greear for this little joke:)

of skinning people and keeping them alive? I will spare you more gruesome stories, suffice to say they were easy to hate. And God says to Jonah, “You know those horrible, dangerous, idol worshipping enemies of Israel? Go tell them about me, and warn them that I’m watching!” Jonah finds this plan appalling. Now spoiler alert- we will find out from chapter 3 the main reason Jonah did not want to go is because he knew God was compassionate and he didn’t want these awful people to repent and be saved. **3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.**

**He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port.**

**After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.** Tarshish is in modern day Spain. Let me show you a map because it tells the story... **(insert map)**. Jonah not only says no to God, he runs in the exact opposite direction, to the furthest place in that day they knew to go... this was essentially the end of the world. Jonah is running from both the mission of God and God himself. Well, let’s see how that works out for Jonah. **V.4 THEN THE LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.**

**All the sailors were AFRAID and each CRIED OUT to his own god.** If seasoned sailors are terrified and crying, you know that this is not your typical storm...they knew this had divine origins... **And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.**

**But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.**

**The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep?”** Pause for a moment, if you know your Bible, you should be having some deja vu...This sounds familiar to a story about Jesus in the Gospels, where he was in a boat asleep in the middle of a terrifying storm and the sailors wake him up and say how can you be sleeping? That’s right, and it’s not a coincidence, Jesus is going to relate himself to Jonah in Matthew 12. Jesus says he is the greater Jonah. While Jonah said no to God’s mission to reach sinful, undeserving people, Jesus said Yes! While Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish, as good as dead before he was brought back, Jesus spent three days in the belly of the earth, actually dead, before he was brought back to life. Keep this in mind as we are studying Jonah. **V.6 Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”**

**Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.”** At this point Jonah was either in denial that this had anything to do with him or was just trying to avoid it and hoped it went away. **They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.** Casting lots was an ancient form of drawing straws- God intervened to have Jonah draw the shortest...there was no escaping God. **V.8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is RESPONSIBLE for making ALL THIS TROUBLE for us?”**

**What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”**

He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Do you see the irony? God who made the sea...you know the one we are on? They are like a toy boat in a bathtub with God. Running from God is futile when he is master of it all. *This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?"*

*(They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)*

*The sea was getting rougher and rougher.*

*So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"*

*"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm.*

*I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."*

*Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.* Kudos to these sailors; they at least don't want Jonah to die. But now they are in a rowing contest against God... How would you like that? You're rowing... He has His finger on the stern...v.14 *Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life.*

*Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased."*

*Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.*

*At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.* And here we see a motif throughout this story- rough, gentile, pagan outsiders respond rightly to God, they acknowledge God, call upon his name, confess, repent and worship him. We may see them in heaven, and it won't be the last rough, gentile, outsiders to repent in the story. Or in salvation history. I was kind of a rough, gentile, outsider...God seeks and saves the lost. He is on a mission compelled by compassion and mercy.

The chapter ends with the part we remember most about the story. *Now the LORD PROVIDED a huge fish to swallow Jonah,*

*and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* And on that cliffhanger...or or more accurately a fish-hanger...we will stop and pick up next week. Let's talk about you and me for a few moments.

I said in the beginning that we are all Jonah. God's mission calling doesn't just come to a select few, special prophets. Jesus' final words to his disciples call every Christian to join the mission

of the gospel- **Matthew 28:18** *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

**19** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,*

*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

**20** *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* It is because Christians throughout history took the Great Commission seriously that you are here. And now it's our turn. Each of us are caught up in God's mission calling.

There are three possible responses to God's call to mission... **Saying "No" to God- Flat-out disobedience:** like Jonah at first. And we can say no to God out of the same motives. **Fear-** "What will these nasty Nivehites do to me?" **Love of Comfort-** Jonah had a successful ministry to his own people. He didn't want to get stretched out of his comfort zone. **Lack of Compassion-** What if they repent and God forgives them? They don't deserve that!

Are you saying no to God out of fear? What will my friends at school think of me? What if I'm rejected by my family? Or out of comfort? Maybe you've sensed God asking you to go on a short-term missions trip, but you said, No, I don't want to burn my vacation days and spend money to serve on a trip. Besides, I don't sleep well without air conditioning! Or maybe out of lack of compassion you've said, "No God, do you see the stuff they post on social media? I'm not going to show mercy to them." Or "Do you know how my in-laws treat me? They don't deserve my forgiveness!" That's Jonah, and we might have some Jonah in us.

The second possible response is **Saying "Ugh...fine." to God- Box-Checking obedience:** like you'll see Jonah in chapters 3 and 4. This is when we reluctantly, half-heartedly, say fine...I will check the box. And so we serve the homeless, or we hand out a tract, or we invite someone to church, but our heart isn't in it. Maybe out of religious guilt, or pressure because Pastor Nate is telling me to do it, or because you are afraid God might send a storm or a fish your way if you don't. But God is not after box-checking obedience, He's after a whole new kind of obedience.

The third possible response- **Saying, "Yes. Now please help me." to God. Gospel-transformed obedience:** This is how Jesus responded and how he calls us to respond. "You want me to share my faith with my neighbor? I'm in. Just help open the door and give me the courage." "Lord, You are giving me the opportunity on the airplane seat next to me? I'm in. Just give me the words to say." "God, you want me to host refugees in my home for dinner? I'm in." "You want me to go across the ocean on a missions trip? I'm in." "Yes Lord. Now please help me obey." This kind of obedience is God's love language and it's the kind of response He empowers. **2 Chronicles 16:9** *The eyes of the Lord look to and fro throughout the earth to support those whose hearts are fully his.*

Listen, I'm convinced after 25 years of following Jesus and almost 20 years of pastoral ministry, the only way you can develop this kind of response is through a deep experience of God's saving grace in your life. There is a story in Luke 7 where Jesus is having a meal in Simon's house, a religious insider like Jonah was. And a sinful woman comes in weeping, and anoints Jesus' feet with her tears and expensive perfume, wiping them with her hair. Simon is shocked that Jesus allows this, thinking if He were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman she was. She doesn't deserve this. But Jesus tells us this principle- those who have realized how much they are in need of grace and forgiveness, and compassion and receive it, respond with grace and forgiveness and compassion. But those who don't think they need it, do not. This is how the Gospel transforms us, when we realize that we are just like that woman, we are just like those sailors, deeply in need of God's saving grace, lost in the storm...but for the saving grace of Jesus. When that is our experience with grace- it transforms our hearts, our posture toward lost, undeserving people and transforms our no into a yes.

**How are you responding to God's Call to His Mission?** You see, here's the diagnosis: some of you here are responding with no, or a box-checking yes because you've never had this deep experience of saving grace personally, or you've become like Jonah, your Christianity has become cold religion. If you've never had this, pray for it, invite his saving grace in your life today, now! And if you have, repent and go back to the first time...may I see it like the first time standing as a sinner lost.

Let me close by saying this- Responding to God's mission with a "Yes, Now help me." Is a moment-by-moment gospel-transformed obedience that we must surrender to, it's not automatic or robotic. Recently, Shannan and I were having a breakfast date at a little cafe in Wilmington, and let's just say, everything about what this cafe stood for was the opposite of my worldview and value system. From the music, the decor, the posters, and events advertised, the staff was kind of a walking billboard of what they stood for...Now, in my flesh I kind of wanted to leave, and the only reason I didn't was because the coffee and food was really good. Just being honest. My first reaction was offense, and then judgment...I'm never coming here again, and I can't wait to get out of here...except one more bite of this delicious breakfast sandwich. When I got home, I started working on my Jonah sermon...the Lord really convicted me. And I thought, I'm Jonah. Where is my compassion? Nate, don't you know that but for the grace of God you are forgiven and saved and you know the truth? I repented, and prayed, prayed for my heart attitude and prayed for them...

Friends, where is God calling you on mission? And what is your response? No? Ugh...fine? Or Yes, Lord now help me? That's our challenge today, and throughout this month.

Thank God Jesus said Yes in the Garden of Gethsemane...Communion.