

“The Missionary God in Action” – Jonah 1:1-16

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.sobc.net.]

Let's get back into our study of Jonah 1. There is so much truth packed into these verses that there is absolutely no way we could get to all of it in a brief series of sermons. God's Word is like that. We never exhaust it. We come back again and again and find more depth to it, more ways that it penetrates our hearts and drags us to Jesus.

God is very gracious to have preserved His Word for us. And for some of you, it has been preserved so that you might hear the truth about Jesus and experience an absolute turning point in your life, where God saves you for Himself this very day. I've been praying for that. In fact, when I was writing out my introduction yesterday afternoon, I stopped at this point, walked over to the sanctuary, and prayed over each of these pews for this moment. This moment when some of you would sense that you need Jesus. This moment where some of you would already have a sense that God was drawing you to Himself... This moment. I prayed for you. That you would have the courage of faith and respond in the direction of Jesus today.

But if that is going to happen then the Spirit needs to do His work on us this morning and that doesn't happen apart from God's Word. So let's turn our attention to what God would say to us through the Scriptures today. Follow along with me in Jonah. Let's start at the beginning of chapter 1.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. ⁴ But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.” ⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” ⁹ And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. ¹¹ Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” ¹³ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴ Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.”

¹⁵ *So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.* ¹⁶ *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*
(Jonah 1:1-16)

What we just read was the Word of God...

So far we have covered a lot of the front matter. The background. The historical setting. The characters. The initial calling. The likely reasons behind Jonah's reluctance to obey. The folly of his response. Today, we want to narrow our focus to the scene on the boat.

Here's the sermon in a sentence: **The Lord is a missionary God regardless of how committed His servants are to that mission.**

In order to see this idea emerge from the text, we'll start by taking some time to unpack the details of the story itself. Then I want to show you something of the beauty of how this was originally written, which will help us zero in on what is the focal point of the story. Once we see that, we'll spend the rest of our time, this week and next, teasing out the implications.

Verses 1 to 3 we have covered at length. God tells the prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against the city. Jonah rebels. He gets up and he begins fleeing to Tarshish, the end of the known world in the opposite direction of where he was told to go. To get there, he first goes to Joppa and pays for a group of pagan sailors to shuttle him to Tarshish in their boat.

That brings us to verse 4, "*But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.*" The language is very vivid. Some of your English translations say God "*sent a great wind,*" but the ESV (i.e., the English Standard Version) is closer to the Hebrew here. "*The LORD hurled a great wind...*" I mention that because it sets up some important parallelism later, but we will get to that in a moment. For now, notice that God is simply not going to sit by idly while Jonah runs away from the calling on his life. What God wants done in Nineveh is not going to be thwarted by a spiritual tantrum of a stubborn prophet. God doesn't need Jonah, but for whatever reason He wants Jonah to be the messenger and as the story progresses we are going to see that God always gets what He wants in the end.

So here we see God reminding Jonah that his rebellion is a waste of time. God hurls a wind and the effect of that wind threatens the structural integrity of the ship. Now, for someone like myself, it doesn't take much wind upon a boat (or a plane for that matter) to get me uncomfortable, but that wouldn't have been the case with experienced sailors. This wind was worse than any these veteran sailors had experienced. Verse 5 says, "*Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them...*" Their actions are a sign of desperation.

Meanwhile, where is Jonah? The text says, "*But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.*" Isn't that crazy? How could he be sleeping through all of this? Even the captain can't make sense out of it, so he says, "*What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish*" (1:6). In other words, "Stop acting like an idiot and start calling out to whatever god you worship because we aren't having any success with our gods. So get with the program and help!"

Ironically, that is exactly what Jonah should be doing! In the New Testament there was a couple of boat scenes that contrast with this one. In Acts 27 we find another boat with a man of God aboard heading west in the Mediterranean. A storm strikes the ship. The sailors panic and start throwing their cargo overboard.

But then Paul, who is a prisoner on board heading for Rome, steps up amid the crew and steps into the leadership vacuum and says,

“Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.” (Acts 27:21b-26)

What a contrast. In the case of Jonah, the storm comes because God’s prophet failed to heed God’s instruction, God’s Word. In the case of Acts, the storm comes because the other passengers failed to listen to God’s Word spoken to them by God’s prophet, Paul. Jonah seems quite indifferent to the plight of the sailors and quite at peace with his rebellious decisions. Paul labors on behalf of the crew and ultimately helps save every life on board. Quite a difference, wouldn’t you say?

But the thing that is so striking to me is the fact that Jonah is so indifferent. He’s asleep. He doesn’t care. He’s at peace. When I read this, I can’t help but think of another boat scene in the Bible found in each of the first three books of the New Testament. That scene involved Jesus and his disciples. Let me read you Mark’s account.

“On that day, when evening had come, he [i.e., Jesus] said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” (Mark 4:36-41; cf. Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25).

Again, notice the parallels between that account and Jonah 1. In both there is a storm. In both the storm threatens the boat. In both the man of God is sleeping peacefully in the bowels of the boat. In both cases, the panicked passengers wake up the man of God and beg for his help. In both the storm eventually ceases and the men are left more afraid than when the storm raged. Why? Because they had just experienced the power of God that they never had before. But the contrast between Jonah and Jesus couldn’t be more potent. Jonah comes off indifferent and passive. Jesus comes off powerful and in control.

Both of them have this confusing peace about them, but for entirely different reasons. Jonah was at peace in spite of the fact that He was rebelling against God and failing to trust the sovereignty of God. Jesus was at peace because He had absolute trust in His Father. Two totally different heart conditions both manifesting in peace. What does that tell us? Peace in the heart can be misleading. Feeling at peace doesn’t prove anything about our spiritual condition.

For a period of about a year or so, my wife and I entertained probably about 8 Mormons in our home, two at a time, for about an hour a week. Every time a new one came in he would challenge me to read a section of the Book of Mormon on my own time and then pray when I was done. He told me that I would begin to feel a peace in my heart that would serve to validate the truth of their scriptures. That’s nonsense. My response to them was, “you claim to believe the Bible, but you have just asked me to do something that contradicts it.” Then I would quote Jeremiah 17:9—*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and*

desperately sick. Who can understand it?" Do you see the point? Jeremiah just said that the fallen heart is the most deceitful thing known to man and they were telling me to trust my heart! So if we believe God's Word, then the advice these Mormons were giving me was that's pretty dumb.

But, listen, I've seen those same tendencies in the church. I worry sometimes the way we talk about the Spirit's leading. Let me give you an example. How many of you have ever wondered, "What is God's will for my life in this situation?" All of us. And every Christian has at some point felt that pressure figuring out God's will so we can make the right decision. We've bitten our nails. We've been troubled by the thought of making the wrong decision that would mess up our entire life. Ahhhh!

One writer likened this to our experience with "Choose Your Own Adventure" books growing up. Do you remember those? At the bottom of each page, you have to make a choice. If you chose one way, you turn to this page. If you choose the other way you turn to a different page. How the story progresses is determined by which page you choose. What's it going to be? I mean, there was a lot on the line at the bottom of those pages. You figured out pretty quickly that all of the decisions have consequences. It may seem arbitrary in the book, but the choice of who you sit by on the plane may result in your marriage to a beautiful princess who you'll live out your days with on a Caribbean island or, if you choose differently, you find yourself enduring a slow and painful death, torn to pieces by flesh-eating bacteria, in a South American prison cell. So what's it going to be? No pressure.

In truth, those books have really influenced the way we obsess about decision-making: "What if I choose the wrong option? What if I go to college A...but God planned for me to meet my wife at college B? Does that mean I'll be single for the rest of my life? And what if I make the right choice but she makes the wrong one? Can she mess it up for me too?"ⁱ

Been there? So let me show you a couple common ways I see the problems of our decision-making playing out. Here is the first one: someone doesn't take a certain path because they "just didn't have a peace about it" or they ventured on in one direction because, they claim, "God gave me a peace in my heart."

Now I wouldn't deny that God's Spirit can and does grant us peace or create in us an angst so that we can see something that He wants us to see. But is the "peace in your heart" approach really an error-proof method for decision-making? I don't think so. And if you gave it some thought, you wouldn't either. How many times have you made what turned out to be a horrible decision that you felt pretty good about at the time you made the decision? That has happened to all of us. On the other hand, I can tell you that some of the best decisions I have made in life were made with fear and trembling. If you read the Bible, you will discover that there is an adversary out there who would like nothing more than for you to feel pretty good and peaceful about making absolutely wretched decisions. Before Eve made the worst decision of her life, I bet you that serpent gave her a "peace" about it. That was the goal of his deception. If you look at the temptation narrative of Christ, what is Satan doing? He's to reassure Jesus, even with God's Word, that it's okay to give in. The temptations involve attempts to put Jesus' mind at ease, to give Him a peace about the matter.

Here's what I'm getting at, we are not told in Scripture to let the degree of peace we experience in a particular moment be the deciding factor of all of our decisions. That's just not the counsel of God's Word, even if it's the go-to methodology you use to discern God's will. And someone will say, "Well preacher, the Bible does talk about a 'peace that passes all understanding' in Philippians 4:6-7." Indeed, it does. But as J. D. Greear points out in his latest book called, *Jesus, Continued...*:

“If you read the context of those verses, you’ll see that ‘peace’ come from reflecting on God’s fatherly promises to provide for us, not as a warm fuzzy from the Spirit when he’s happy about a particular choice. This peace is the result of a trust, not a litmus test for confirming which choice is right.”

Do you see then? Peace in the heart, at least what is registered as “peace” in the heart, can be experience by hardened sinners and obedient servants. That’s what the contrast between Jesus in the storm and Jonah in the storm makes crystal clear for us. Peace alone, in other words, proves nothing. What to make of it must be determined by God’s Word, because the Spirit of God guides us primarily through His Word. Jesus had peace because He knew and trusted the plan of His Father. Jonah had peace even though He was running from the Word of God. But ultimately, in both cases, the Word of God is what the Spirit used to indicate the will of God. Not the subjective feeling of the human heart. But the objective counsel of the Word of God. “We aren’t told to seek the Spirit *apart* from the Word of God,” writes Greear, “we are to seek him *in* the Word.”ⁱⁱ

Here is another problem I’ve seen related to the decision-making of some Christians. They really want to know God’s will in a situation. They want the Spirit of God to lead them and so there is this hypersensitivity to circumstances and “coincidences” that get confused with the Holy Spirit. So one pastor tells the story of the young man who believed God had told him that he has found the right girl to marry through a series of bizarre circumstances. The same scenario plays out in different ways with different young men, but here is an example:

“You won’t believe this! I was praying about whether to ask Sarah out, and driving on the interstate, I saw a billboard and the first letter on the billboard was the first letter of her last name and the last two digits of the phone number were the same as her age, and right at that moment, my favorite Christian song came on the radio...and so I just KNEW God was telling me to ask her out! Jehovah Jireh!!! God is good, all the time!”

Girls, if a guy has every used a line like that to ask you out, let me just apologize on behalf of all guys everywhere. And guys, come on! Restraining orders begin with similar claims. So if that’s you, man up and stop hiding behind God.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here’s what I’m getting at—This is not a biblically prescribed way to seek out God’s will. There are all kinds of problems with that scenario. We can’t just independently, apart from God’s Word, look at the peculiarities of our lives like tea leaves to be interpreted. That’s what pagans do! How is that different than looking through the entrails of a dead animal for counsel? Imagine if Jonah did that? What he if arrived in Joppa and thought, “Wow, imagine that, I get to this city and there just *happens* to be a boat and crew there that’s willing to take me with them. I just *happened* to arrive at the right time! [isn’t that the language of verse 3?] Maybe it’s a sign. Surely God wouldn’t have opened this door otherwise. Maybe I misheard God back in Israel or maybe He’s letting me off the hook. How else would you explain all of these coincidence? Everything is falling into place.”

Now, of course, Jonah doesn’t say that. He knows better. But he could have. And people today say things like that all the time. He has an open door, but He’s running from God. So, evidently, an “open door” is not a sign of God sanctioning our actions. No, Jonah, had a Word from God and that’s what should have driven his actions. And, again I say, the Spirit of God guides us primarily through His Word. So if you are searching for God’s plan on your life, don’t read the tea leaves of your life, don’t trust the feelings of your heart, don’t confuse the open doors of your circumstances. Trust the Word of God. Search the Word of God. That’s what the Spirit will use to direct your steps. One author put it this way, “you won’t know the

Spirit any more than you know the Word of God. So if you want to walk with the Spirit of God, get on your knees and open your Bible.”^{iv}

That’s something that Jonah would not do. He has no intention of walking with the Spirit of God, that’s why he’s disobeying the word of God and running from the presence of God according to this text. But then the plot thickens. Look again at Jonah 1. In verse 7, the sailors, in their panic, are still trying to figure out what to do, their crying out to their pagan gods, nothing is working. So they reason they have to figure out who is responsible for the arrival of the storm. So, we read, *“they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.”* Casting lots was the equivalent of rolling dice. The thought was that the offended god would superintend the landing of the lots to reveal who the culprit was. In this case, that is exactly what God does. He makes sure the lot falls on Jonah. Then the interrogation begins.

Verse 8 relays their questions: *“Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”* They’re trying to get as much information as possible so they can figure out which god he has offended and what they can do to appease him. Jonah doesn’t answer most of their curiosities, but he does respond...finally. Look at verse 9, *“he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’”*

This is more than likely the first time these sailors have heard of God. They don’t know the true god. This is their first exposure. So look at how they respond in verse 10, *“Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, ‘What is this that you have done!’ For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.”* Technically, it doesn’t say when Jonah told them that he was running from his God. Maybe it was right in this moment. Or maybe it was prior to his boarding the ship, in which case it didn’t trouble them because they understand the gods to have local jurisdictions. Jonah was obviously in a land not his own and heading for a people not his own, so surely his god would be no threat to them. But when Jonah says that his God is the one who made the sea and the dry land, they realize for the first time that the reach of Jonah’s God is global and not local. That’s a terrifying thought for these sailors. They are at their wits end.

So look at the exchange that begins in verse 11. *“Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’ For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.’”* That seems reasonable enough. Jonah is to blame for this storm. If he is lost at sea perhaps the wind from the Lord will die down. Yet these pagan sailors demonstrate far more compassion on Jonah than he has had on them. Their plight is owing to his disregard of their wellbeing. Yet they don’t want to harm Jonah.

Instead of following his advice they row harder to get back to the shore. But the harder they rowed the more they realized there is no way they could get themselves out of this mess. And when they realize they cannot fix their problem, for the first time, they cry out the one true God and throw themselves on His grace. The text reads.

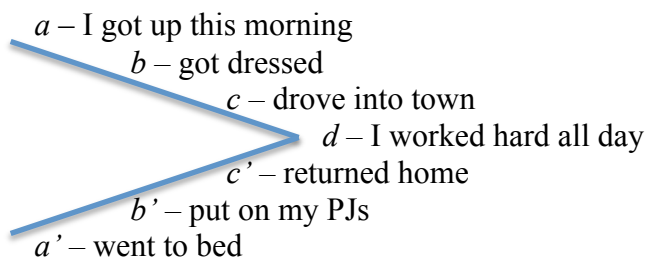
“...they called out to the LORD, ‘O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.’” So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.” (Jonah 1:14-16).

This is how the scene on the boat ends. With worship.

Now there is a lot we can learn from this scene of the story, but if we want to see the main idea we need to take our clues from the author. The truth is, this story is written in a way to draw our attention to main lesson. There is a kind of parallelism used frequently in Hebrew literature that's referred to as a "chiasm." It's referred to as "chiasm" because the structure resembles the shape of a Greek letter called "chi" (χ), which looks something like an English "X." If you cut that letter in half, you have the shape of the parallelism. One of my former professors explained it this way, "In a chiasm a list of items, ideas, or events is structured in such a manner that the first item parallels the last item, the second item parallels the next to last item, and so forth."^v Here is a simple example he offers:

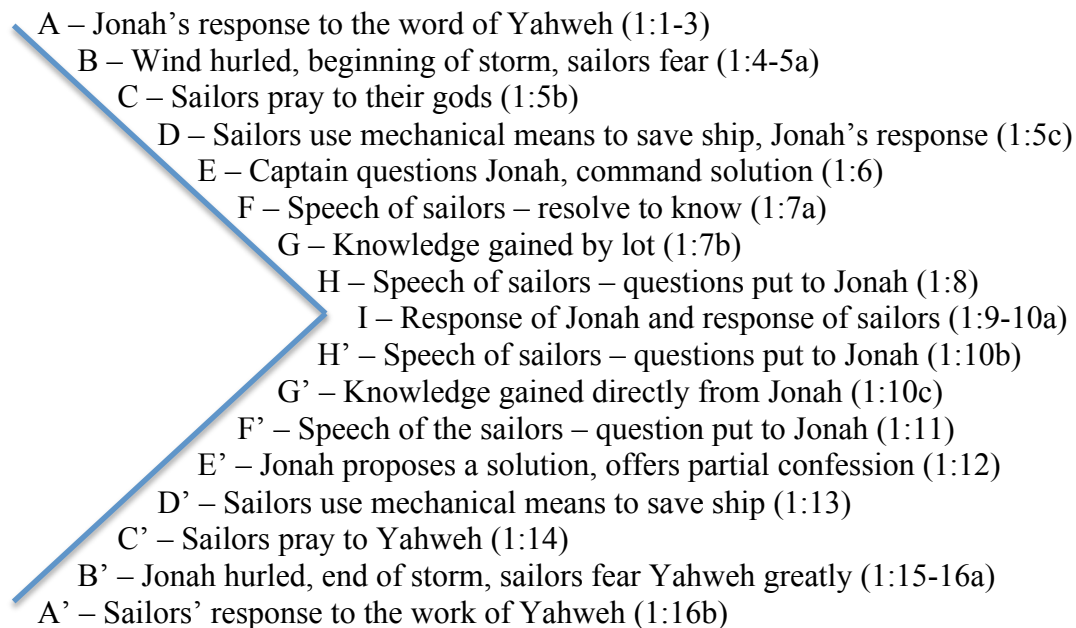
"I got up this morning, got dressed, and drove into town. I worked hard all day, returned home, put on my PJs, and went to bed."

If we were to isolate the structure of those sentences, it would look like this:



It's a cute literary trick, right? But very often, the point of the structure was to draw attention to the statements at the middle of the chiasm. So, in the case of this trivial example, the author was probably highlighting the fact that the subject "worked hard all day." Does that make sense?

As it turns out, a convincing argument can be made that chapter 1 of this book is laid out as one big chiasm. I picked up from the work Dr. Dennis Magary, who is a Hebrew scholar who teaches at Trinity International University, where I'm doing my doctoral work. He also happens to be one of the scholars consulted for the Old Testament translations we are reading in the English Standard Version. Here is how he summarizes the structure^{vi}:



I know that is a lot to take in, but I wanted you to see the thoughtfulness of the structure. For the sake of simplicity, let me condense the structure a bit.

A – Jonah’s response to the Word of God (1:1-3)

B – God hurls the wind (1:4-5)

C – Jonah fears the LORD and the sailors fear the situation (1:9-10)

B’ – Sailors hurl the prophet (1:15-16)

A’ – Sailors’ response to the work of God (16)

So at the heart of the structure—expanded or condensed—is what Jonah says about fearing the Lord and the fear of the sailors when they hear the truth about who God is and what He’s done. We will talk about both of these more next time. For now, let me just mention that when Jonah says he “fears” the Lord, it is sometimes translated that he “worships” the Lord (cf. HCSB, NIV), because the word can convey both nuances. One who fears the Lord in this sense is one who worships the Lord. Either translation has merits. Translations have to make decisions and in this case they have to decide if they are going to communicate the sense of the word in this context or try to preserve the parallelism of the narrative. English won’t let us do both, hence the variations in your translations.

But Jonah’s words ring hollow, don’t they? He claims to be a worshiper of the Lord, but they’re in this predicament precisely because he’s running from the Lord. Yet, taken at face value (as the sailors must have taken it), what he says about God is accurate. And this is the first time the sailors have encountered the truth and power of the Lord. That’s what is happening at the center of the story. These Gentile sailors learn of the one true God.

Therefore, I think it is entirely appropriate to think of this as a *mission* text (i.e., a text dealing with missions). Now that could be misunderstood. I have heard some push this book as a portrayal of a missionary prophet. But Jonah is no missionary prophet, at least not willingly. He’s doing everything in his power to not be an evangelist, but he just can’t help himself. But I don’t know how you could read the story and come out on the other end with Jonah as the paradigm for mission. As John Walton observes,

- Jonah does not want to go—so intensely that he flees in the opposite direction.
- The only message Jonah preaches in the book is coming destruction—no call of repentance, no hope for deliverance, no instruction about God. In fact, God is not even mentioned in Jonah’s proclamation.
- Jonah is disappointed and angry when the people of Nineveh respond favorably.

“In short, Jonah does not have a missionary’s attitude, a missionary’s message, or a missionary’s objective.”^{vii} I think Walton is right as far as he goes. However, I would push further and say this *is*, nevertheless, a missions text, but the One who is out on mission is none other than God himself. This is a text that puts before our eyes our missionary God and the mission of God to reach the nations. The Gentile sailors are just another example of those nations (as is Nineveh). What we are seeing is God’s absolute commitment to His mission. Therefore, this *is* a “missions text” when understood in that vein. The Great Commission, where God calls us to make disciples of all nations, by going, baptizing, and teaching, is not a command that’s given in a vacuum. It’s the extension of the mission of God that we see throughout Scripture. So this text actually has the potential to help us understand the Great Commission better because it draws attention to the missionary God who stands behind that commission and the some patterns that are observed throughout its fulfillment.

So if this is a mission text, what can we learn about missions from it? I'm glad you asked...insert cliffhanger. You need to come back next week to find out. I want to show you some lessons we can learn from the storm, the prophet, and the sailors. There is some real good stuff we can glean here. So make sure you come back next week.

But let me give you a small sample as we close. There is a huge temptation for us to reduce this story to a picture of an angry God punishing a foolish prophet. But that's not what we actually have here. Discipline? Yes. But God's discipline is always an extension of His love. The Bible says this over and over again in several different ways. Jonah is indeed a rebellious sinner, but the storm that God sends is not condemnation. It's mercy! It's God's gracious intervention in the life of a prophet who has no idea what he's doing. It's God's merciful intervention in the life of one of His people. And more than that, it proves to be a merciful intervention in the lives of some lost sailors who would not have known Him apart from the storm. Do you see then? This is a story of God's mercy and affection to go as far as necessary to get our attention.

One of the lessons from the storm is that God pursues His people when they run away. God doesn't need Jonah to accomplish His mission. He could accomplish it in countless other ways, through countless other people. He could have just let Jonah run off into oblivion and get what the prophet thought he wanted. But, in the end, that would not have been best for Jonah. So what does the Lord do? Because of his gracious affection for Jonah, He intervenes in a way that will lead to a second chance. Someone has said, "Interventions are for those who are in great trouble and don't realize it—for those who are self-destructing yet living in denial."^{viii} The storm is, therefore, an act of mercy from God, a means toward restoration for Jonah. C. S. Lewis writes, in his autobiography, called *Surprised by Joy*, "The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation."^{ix} The best thing that could happen to Jonah was the intervention of the storm, because it was a means towards his liberation. Jonah thought running from God would make him free. But, in fact, running from God leads us back into the worst kind of slavery, a bondage to sin.

Tullian Tchividjian captures the lesson well,

"We can experience true life and freedom only when we come to realize that God is God and we are not—something that Jonah was profoundly resisting. Submitting self to God is the only real freedom—because the deepest slavery is self-dependence, self-reliance. When you live your life believing that everything (family, finances, relationships, career) depends primarily on *you*, you're enslaved to your strengths and weaknesses. You're trying to be your own savior. Freedom comes when we start trusting in God's abilities and wisdom instead of our own. Real life begins when we transfer our trust from our own efforts to the efforts of Christ."^x

That's good...but it gets better. If the storm is an expression of God's mercy being sent to intervene in Jonah's life, then the storm, in some sense, should remind us of Jesus.

"*God's mercy is massive.* This storm tells us that God spares no expense in going after those who run away...The supreme example of this massive mercy is Jesus. The incarnation of Christ tells us most emphatically how God spares nothing in going after those who run away. God's becoming man is anything but a quiet and subtle response from God to our running from him. It's a huge loud statement. It shouts to us that God confronts human flight in the most outspoken, powerful way...Jesus is really God's [ultimate] 'great wind,' his 'mighty tempest' in response to human running and rebellion. *Jesus is the storm.* Jesus is God's gracious intervention for those who are enslaved to themselves. He comes...with an aggressive affection to pursue fugitives like you and me."^{xi}

And here's the thing—God hasn't changed. God still may send storms in our lives to intervene, not as punishment, but as merciful intrusions designed to wake us up, to break our chains, and to remove the scales from our eyes so that we can see God's ultimate intervention in our lives, which has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Many of you are bitter about the afflictions of life. But could it be that God's mercy may be at work in them...driving you to put your trust in Jesus and stop trusting in your own self-sufficiency.

There is no salvation apart from the work of Christ—His death for our sins and His resurrection for our right standing with God. That salvation comes as an undeserved, free gift of God's grace through our faith, our turning from sin and trusting Christ alone to save us. Anything in our lives that awakens us recognize our need for Christ or gets us back on the path of following Christ is ultimately a great mercy from the Lord.

The Lord is a missionary God regardless of how committed His servants are to that mission. Thanks God, church, that He has pursued rebels like us! We are Jonahs. But God is still God.

To be continued...

Let's pray...

ⁱ The Choose Your Own Adventure illustration and this questioning scenario come from a J. D. Greear book called, *Jesus, Continued...: Why the Spirit inside You Is Better than Jesus Beside You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 111-112.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., 36, 45.

^{iv} Ibid., 46.

^v J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (3 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 100.

^{vi} I have adapted it a bit, mainly by condensing "I" and "I'" into one point and clarifying the verse references. I have not seen this in print, but know of it through the lecture notes of former students. One example can be found in a sermon called, "Chicken of the Sea," preached by Josh Black on September 13, 2009, as part of a series of sermons through the book of Jonah. That sermon has an appendix, where the same chiasm is related in an appendix. The abbreviated form of the chiasm was also used in the course of his sermon.

^{vii} John Walton, "Jonah" in *Daniel-Malachi* (Rev. Ed.; The Expositor's Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 458.

^{viii} Tullian Tchividjian, *Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), 52.

^{ix} C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 220-221.

^x Tchividjian, 53.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 51-52.