

## **Jonah Flees From the LORD JONAH 1 (NIV)**

**1** The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

**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.

**4** Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. **5** All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. 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. **6** The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

**7** Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. **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?”

**9** He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

**10** 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.)

**11** 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?”

**12** “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.”

<sup>13</sup> Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup> At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

### **Jonah's Prayer**

<sup>17</sup> Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His Word.

Jonah 1  
Fearless Grace  
June 20th, 2021  
Kailua Christian Church

## INTRO

Good morning, friends! My name is Yumiko Nakagawa, an ordained minister of Evangelical Covenant Church. I have served at an ECC church in Boston for over 10 years and moved to Hawaii last fall. It is so wonderful to worship with you all again.

As some of you know already, I became a Christian when I was studying at a university in Japan, and shortly after I became a Christian, I transferred to a college in America. It was my first time living outside of Japan surrounded by people who do not speak Japanese, I knew almost no one in America, but I was not scared at all, because I knew God was with me. I didn't bring too much stuff other than this huge Japanese study Bible because I couldn't think of anything else that's essential.

I remember my first day at this church on campus. I remember how happy I was when I got to the chapel. I waited outside for a bit because I knew I was early and I didn't want to appear too eager. After a bit of waiting, I got impatient and decided to go in anyway, thinking I would just tell them I came early to help set up. I opened the door filled with excitement and joy, "I finally get to worship with new brothers and sisters in Christ!" Only to find no one was there! Obviously, I got there too early. So early that even the praise team or the set-up team was not there. (Isn't so endearing?)

So, it's quite sad that I ended up leaving the church within the first few months. I was deeply disappointed with Christians and church, so I stopped going to church. Eventually, I started missing my daily devotion and prayer, I opened the Bible less and less. By the time I graduated from college and moved to Hawaii, I didn't even bring the Japanese Bible, my proud and cherished possession I brought to the states, because I no longer need it.

In the following 5 years, I had no desire to seek God, no interest to talk to God. I completely forgotten about God by the time I got to Afghanistan. I was working in Kabul for a short-term assignment at Japanese Embassy then, and one day I attended the opening ceremony of the hospital. It was quite uncommon, but because the hospital was built by an American church, they invited people to pray the Lord's Prayer after quran was read. As usual in these ceremonies, by the point of ceremony, I was so bored as I didn't understand a word of quran, prayers, long and speeches. So, when this young American man said we are going to sing a Christian song and pray to our God, it wasn't what he said that made me happy. I was quite happy that I understood what he said and I could participate. I was quite happy that I also joined the prayer mainly because I was so

happy to be able to participate and be able to understand. But, as soon as we started to pray, unexpectedly, I was overcome with a strong emotion. I remember I felt like God was holding my shoulder right next to me and tears came out from nowhere.

Until then, I had thought my Christian phase was done, all in the past. But, I was wrong. I wasn't done, God wasn't done with me. God pursued me all the way out in a far-away land while I was running away from God all these years. This is my Jonah story of running away from God.

What's your Jonah story?

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT THIS PROBLEM

On the surface, the plot of Jonah is quite simple. Or, at least that's what I thought until a few years ago when my friend Pastor Aaron Engler preached brilliantly on this particular passage. Which inspired me to preach from this passage based on his sermon with his full permission.

The story of Jonah actually goes quite deeper than it first appears. It carries literary and theological sophistication that connects Old and New Testament beautifully. It's also a bit of an enigma. What is this big fish? Can a man survive in a fish's belly? Is the story supposed to be read as a fiction like a parable or a historical record?

One thing I would suggest is for us to try reading Jonah as a "satirical parable." Or, as one seminary professor put it, Jonah was the ancient Hebrew version of a Saturday Night Live sketch.

In Jonah, everything is ridiculously exaggerated. Everything.

It's not just a storm, it's a great storm.

Jonah was not just sleeping, but in a deep sleep, so deep that the life-threatening storm didn't wake him.

It wasn't just a fish, it was a huge fish.

The city of Nineveh wasn't just bad, it was so bad that God couldn't ignore anymore. So bad that it wasn't just the people in the city who needed to repent (Jonah 3:8), but even the animals had to repent! How do animals repent, even??

As ridiculous as the book may sound, it is evident that it was written with a great intentionality and is filled with ironies.

For this morning, I want to point out an obvious irony in the book.

Everyone in the book of Jonah obeys God.

Literally everyone — the godless Ninevites and their king, the sailors, even the cattle on the land and the giant fish in the sea— everyone and everything obeys God, completely and immediately...  
except Jonah.

Jonah the Hebrew.

Jonah the prophet.

Everyone obeys God, except Jonah. It's shockingly unexpected for all these people and ANIMALS to obey God, but one person we would not be surprised at all to see following God, does not obey God.

Jonah the prophet runs away from God, which itself is such an irony. His job was actually to come to God and receive the message. Instead, Jonah runs away from God!

Verse 3 reads: "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." (Jonah 1:3)

Couple things to note about this passage:

1. It doesn't explain why Jonah decided to run away. All we can do at this point is to speculate, so we will wait to learn about Jonah's motives until we get to the later in the book.
2. Jonah headed to Tarshish (Tarshish) which is in the opposite direction to Nineveh, where God told him to go.
3. In our Bibles, it usually says that Jonah "paid the fare" to Tarshish, which gives an impression that he stood in line like everyone else and bought a ticket to get on a regular commercial ship. But, actually the implication here is that he paid the fare of the whole boat. He chartered the ship to Tarshish which would have taken a year at least. Chartering a ship to take him to a year long journey, now that's not cheap.

But, Jonah was willing to pay the high price to run away from God. And the price he was willing to pay was not just financial cost.

You see, for the Israelites at the time, the sea was a place of chaos and dangers. It was the place of unknown, where their enemies come from. The sea, to them, represented the worst of all possible places on earth - it was the one place that God was not. But,

Jonah would go there because he would do just about anything to get away from God. Jonah was afraid of God's calling.

When Jonah received God's call, he was in Jerusalem, which is located on 2400 feet above sea level. (Pali lookout is 1,100).

From there, he runs down from the mountains of Jerusalem, down to the gentile port of Joppa, 15 feet above sea level.

After Jonah descends into the ship, he goes straight down into the below deck and fell into a deep sleep. For the Hebrew speaking reader, the geographical movement of going down into the sea, The idea of leaving the holy city to a pagan port, and to the godless sea, and going into a DEEP sleep in the belly of ship paints a clear image of DEATH. DEATH In a large bold font in black.

And it was not only the readers gets the message. When God sent the storm, the sailors could tell this storm was not an ordinary storm (Jonah 1:4) and they were in despair. They feared for their lives. And meanwhile, Jonah was sleeping, disengaged from what's going on outside, lock himself in his own little world.

Literally, the sailors and Jonah were on the same boat, but there was a stark contrast between their responses.

While the sailors were doing everything they could in the face of great unknown storm, Jonah did NOTHING. The sailors were fighting the storm, praying to their gods, and trying to figure out who's responsible for the storm; Jonah NOTHING.

When asked the question (Jonah 1: 8), Jonah was quite articulate about who he is and who God is.

"I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Which is quite comical knowing Jonah was running away from the very God who made the sea and the land. And even the sailors could see how idiotic Jonah's words are.

"Hold on, so you believe in God and believe that your God made the earth and the sea, that God is so powerful to rule everything. And, you are telling me, you are trying to outrun who? You know you actually can't run away from your God, right?"

Jonah continues on saying the right thing: "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." (Jonah 1:12)

But, one thing he doesn't up to this point and even at this point is to talk to God, to pray to God.

Even the sailors who didn't believe in God in the beginning of this treacherous journey prays to Jonah's God, God of Israel, one true God, the LORD (Jonah 1:14), but Jonah does not say a word to the LORD.

On the other hand, the sailor's response is quite remarkable. Not having much of prior knowledge or experience of God, they knew far less about God than Jonah did. They never heard God's spoke like Jonah did. But, with the little they knew, they responded so faithfully. Based on what they saw in the storm and what Jonah told, they immediately acknowledged Sovereign Creator God. When they experienced the God immediately stopped the storm, it was in reverence that they worshipped God by offering a sacrifice and made vows. We are not accountable for the whole truth, but we are to the truth we know. Jonah knew God is the Creator, God is mighty, and God called him, yet, didn't act upon his knowledge and calling.

Jonah runs away and kept distance from God even though he knew a lot about God and even had the privilege of receiving God's message directly. Sailors, with little knowledge and without an intimate relationship like the one Jonah had, came to God. Isn't it ironic?

And God responds to both of them with Grace in a different way.

To the sailors, who were faithful with little they had, God responds to the prayer and calms the storm. And it wasn't just to the sea God brought peace. God changed the hearts of the sailors (verse 16). God replaced the sailors fear with fear of God, reverence of God.

And God also responded to Job with grace.

In theory, God could:

1. Have not send the storm and have let Jonah run to Tarshish.
2. Have transported Jonah to Nineveh in a supernatural means.

But, instead, God sends the storm, not just any storm, but the storm that is the Spirit of God. In Genesis 1 reads (Genesis 1:1-2):

(Gen 1:1-2) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. The word 'storm' in Jonah 1 is actually the very same word with 'the spirt of God' in Genesis 1:2.

In other words, it was the Spirit of God who saw the primordial chaos and darkness and divided the land from the sea and it was the Spirit of God that hovered over the creation and gave shape to it.

And in the book of Jonah, we see the same Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the deep chaos of fear. God of Grace rules over Jonah's fear. Jonah was thrown into the depth of water, which symbolized as the depth of death. But, not to the death, but into the fish's belly (to the dark and the unknown), Jonah enters. And what happens next? Go on and keep reading the book and I would love to hear how the rest of book brings life to you.

#### CONCLUSION

Jonah runs away, hide, and keeps distance from God. Sailors didn't, came to God. Both Jonah and sailors were driven by fear - the fear turned Jonah away from God, turned sailors to God. And to both of them God was God of Grace. And so is to us whether we run away, hide or keep distance like Jonah, or respond with what's given like the sailors, God is God of grace over our fears.

Where do you need God's grace in your life today? What fear is driving you away or to God? We say faith over fear, which was the case for the sailors. I want us to take a step further and remember that God exemplifies something else: grace over fear.

Even when the pandemic is over, with Pastor Dale back, your church will have challenges. In these days, my prayer is that you will remember God's grace over your fears, and someone else's fear. My prayer is for this community is that God to replace your fear with reverence of God as God did with the sailors, and God to rule over your fear as did to Jonah.

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