

## **JONAH #1 – A CALL OF GOD ON A LIFE:**

Welcome to the first of four Sundays, where we will study the Book of Jonah together. Interestingly Jonah does not carry prophetic Oracles or sayings as we find in other prophetic books. It's a narrative that brings the word of God to bear on a human life. To proclaim the will of God in a particular set of circumstances.

It has to do with summoning, announcing and calling. Most of the time prophets were the bearers of warning and judgement. In Jonah we see God, one on one dealing with a human being and through Jonah we get insight into God's dealings with us. We also gain a glimpse of the heart of God for all people.

One more bit of introduction before we jump into the first section. There is lots of debate over whether Jonah should be considered a historical account, of an actual human being in the events of his life. The reason it's been such a matter of debate is because of an incident with a relatively large fish. We are going to treat all the book of Jonah as history. Even the story of the whale. Everything about Jonah was written as history. We will deal with this in more detail next week.

**<sup>1</sup>“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 1:1.** Here we have the call of God on Jonah's life. “Go” in the Hebrew language is used here and means, God said get up right now and get going! Right this moment.

Firstly, every single person is called to be a saint. When it comes to the word saint, you probably have an image of Mother Theresa flash across your TV screen. She was called to poverty and endured all kinds of hardships. Working in unspeakable conditions. The word itself means those who are “set apart”.

The second functional calling on every Christian life is that of soldier. I think this is almost stranger to think of our lives in this way. We wear jeans and t-shirts, not fatigues and boots. We drive SUVs' and people movers, not tanks. We smell smoke from our BBQ's, not from artillery fire. We fly on Air NZ, not the New Zealand air force.

In the book of Ephesians, we read about spiritual warfare. Putting on the full armour of God. There is a battle taking place over good and evil in the heavenly realms. This is a real conflict. It's the great spiritual forces at war against God in heaven. I love how Eugene Petersen paraphrases it in the message. **This is no afternoon athletic contest. That we will walk away from and forget in a couple of hours. This is for keeps.**

The third foundational calling on every person is to be an ambassador. When we come to God, he appoints us as his ambassadors', his representatives - his spokespersons about his message. We are to talk to others about what God has done in our lives and his reconciling message. The Holy Spirit enables and gives you courage to share your story. The story of God in your life, you are God's representative to New Zealand.

So, with that in mind look again at the first two verses of Jonah. “The word of the Lord came to Jonah- Go”. The word of the Lord came to Jonah as a soldier, ambassador and

a saint. Then came the specific direction. Go as the person you are, the person I've called you to be. Now, God says, I want you to specifically go to Nineveh. It was quite a calling.

Nineveh wasn't called a great city in the bible for nothing. It was the capital of Syria; its population was well over 100,000 people. Translated into our times, it was a modern-day New York or Los Angeles. God said to preach against its wickedness. Jonah knew exactly what that meant. The inhabitants were known for their cruelty during wars and battles. There was widespread sexual immorality and involvement with the occult. The government was corrupt. The Market place was known for its exploitation. So, God picked this country boy to go to this intimidating city and do his work.

In verse three we have Jonah's response. **<sup>3</sup> 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. Jonah 1:3.** The call came and no doubt it was a call from God and Jonah, not only refused it, but ran away from it. If you got out a map and plotted Nineveh and Tarshish. They are in directly the opposite direction. He wanted to get away as far as he could. He had been given a divinely appointed task. He did everything he could to get away from it. Have you ever done that?

Sometimes Christians have a reason for abandoning the call of God on our lives and Jonah has his. We will talk about this and unpack it over the next few weeks. I think it's important to jump ahead in the story to get the gist of it right now because it represents one of the most significant issues of the book. Let's turn to the fourth chapter of Jonah and the second verse.

Jonah is explaining to God why he didn't want to follow God's call. **<sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Jonah 4: 2.**

This is why he was so quick to flee to Tarshish. He knew that God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. You can understand Jonah running from fear. The mission field in Nineveh would intimate anybody. Jonah fled because he didn't want the mercy of God to break out. He didn't want the grace of God to be extended. He did not want the heart of God to go out to the people of Nineveh.

Now let that soak in a minute. It's almost unthinkable – Isn't it? Someone who claims to have anything at all to do with God would not want someone else to come to God, much less, do what it takes to have God reach out to them. I think that the spirit and attitude of Jonah is alive and well today. It goes under a different guise; it travels under a different name and comes out in different ways. The spirit of Jonah was nothing more and nothing less than a callous indifference to the lost. It fleshed itself out in Jonah not wanting to sacrifice anything to reach these people.

Sometimes, Christians are glad somebody, somewhere at some time sacrificed so that they could find God. After a few years we ourselves begin to think about the sacrifice that we will have to make for the next person. We get annoyed when we are asked to do it. We want to be ministered to rather than serving others.

I want to tell you this morning that knowing or not, intentional or not, it's the spirit of Jonah. Every person who had the Gospel come to them was from someone who made a sacrifice to bring it to them. So, Jonah ran away from God. Is that something you can really do? Run away from God? <sup>4</sup>**"And the Lord sent a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. Jonah 1:4.**

There are three things to focus on in this verse. Firstly, you can't ever run away from God. <sup>7</sup>**Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?** <sup>8</sup>**If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there** <sup>9</sup>**If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,** <sup>10</sup>**even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139:7-10.**

Secondly, never abandon the call of God on your life, even if it scares you or intimidates you. Even if we think it's a big mistake to stay involved, it's never best. <sup>19</sup>**It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Amos 5:19.** I must admit this verse has haunted me whenever I think of the call of God.

It says that the day of the lord will be like running from the lion just to meet the bear. Abandoning the call of God is a recipe for catastrophe. It takes us away from God and moves us toward our agendas. Jonah found that running away from God was running into the storm. He thought he was fleeing the storm. He was heading right for it. It's interesting here that in the Hebrew, it says, God hurled the storm at him. Hurling it at him. Not to be vindictive, but to get through to Jonah. Disobedience can shipwreck the lives of those around us.

The third thing to notice about this verse, God is sovereign. There is nothing we can do to thwart his purposes. Having said that, does it mean that Jonah had no choice but to go along with God? We don't know. God in his sovereignty has allowed us the ability to choose and to exercise free will. At the very least we know that God is doing this to get Jonah to strongly reconsider.

In the end I think Jonah could have said no and God's purposes for Nineveh would have been worked out in a different way. So, the opening section ends with a quick view of what happened in the boat.

<sup>5</sup>**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.** <sup>6</sup>**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.'** <sup>7</sup>**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. <sup>8</sup>**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?'

<sup>9</sup> He answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'<sup>10</sup> 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.) <sup>11</sup> 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?'

<sup>12</sup> '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 1: 5-16.

Catch what was being revealed in that little story. The irony of it all, it's a good note to end on. When the sailors came face to face with the actions of God. What did they do? They prayed. Jonah fled. The captain was doing all he could to save his fellow shipmates. Jonah slept unconcerned. The sailors did all they could to find out what they had done to displease God.

Jonah couldn't even begin to see the truth about himself. The sailors were pagans and worshiped false Gods. Yet in the story they are trying to seek God. Jonah confessed who the God was that he worshipped. He said all the right things about God. Yet he was running away as fast as he could. Jonah wanted to commit suicide. The sailors thought that was unthinkable.

They had more concern for Jonah's life than Jonah had for the lost Ninevites. The sailors ended up worshiping God, making vows to commit their lives to God. Jonah was hoping to end his relationship with God. It all hinges on the answer to this question: Do you have God's heart for the lost?