

JONAH GO!

TEACHING NOTES #1

HERE AM ; ...

SEND HIM!

Have you ever heard the story of “Wrong Way Roy”?

His name was Roy Riegels. Sports fans listen up! You’ll appreciate this. He was playing in the Rose Bowl of 1929. Roy was an All-American center from the University of California, Berkeley. His team, the “Golden Bears,” were facing the Georgia Tech “Yellow Jackets.” Roy was playing both offense and defense. It was toward the end of the first half when a Tech player fumbled the ball. Roy picked up the loose ball and started running toward the goal some 65 yards away. There was only one problem: it was the *wrong* goal!

The opposing team’s coach, Georgia Tech head coach Bill Alexander, watching this said, “He’s running the wrong way. Let’s see how far he can go.”

Fortunately, one of Roy’s teammates, Benny Lom, took off in hot pursuit of Wrong Way Roy and tackled him just before he crossed over the wrong goal line!

Half-time came and you can imagine the shame and embarrassment of Roy. He left the field, no doubt with head hanging low to the locker room. He probably thought he was finished in that game and in football in general. Everybody in the stadium was wondering what Nibs Price, the Cal coach, would do with Roy Riegels.

As the team sat in the locker room, the coach remained quiet. The only sound was that of Roy, sitting in the corner and crying like a baby. Finally, the coach stood and announced to the team, “Men, the same team that started the first half will start the second half.”

Roy Riegels lifted his head, his eyes red and his cheeks wet with tears, “Coach, I can’t do it. I’ve ruined you. I’ve ruined the University of Southern California. I’ve ruined myself. I couldn’t face that crowd in the stadium to save my life.” Coach Price reached out his hand and said, “Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over.”

Wrong Way Roy Riegels got up and went out to play one of the most inspiring individual efforts in Rose Bowl history.

Perhaps you feel like Wrong Way Roy right now. Perhaps you knew what it was to walk with the Lord, but you turned your back on Him. Or God called you to do a certain thing and you went in the opposite direction. Satan said, “He’s running the wrong way. Let’s see how far he can go.” While the Lord, like Roy’s coach, is in effect saying, “Get up and go on back!”

HERE BEFORE US IS THE STORY OF WRONG WAY JONAH

He was given a job to do and he got on a boat and went in the opposite direction.

You might say Jonah was the original “Chicken of the Sea.” He found out it is impossible to run from God. He also found out that God gives second chances! And the Lord accomplished this through a storm, and a whale, and a worm.

I have always loved animals of all kinds. In fact, I had two aspirations as a young boy: to be a professional cartoonist and to own a pet shop!

Over the years, I have gone through every phase of animal. Reptiles, including turtles, lizards in all shapes and sizes, and snakes galore. Rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, rats, and hamsters. Birds, including finches, parakeets, cockatiels, lovebirds, and parrots. Dogs, including poodles, collies, a springer spaniel, German shepherds, and mutts. Fish, including angelfish, Oscar fish, plecostomus, silver dollars, etc. *No cats!*

Animals are amazing! One of the things I am looking forward to in the Millennium is how they will be tame! Because I have been bitten by parrots, rabbits, hamsters, snakes, and even a monkey!

Isaiah 11:6 says, “The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them” (MSG). The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God—a living knowledge of God, ocean-deep and ocean-wide.

God is in control of the animal kingdom. He cares about animals! He was angry when Balaam beat his donkey. He cares about every sparrow that falls to the ground. And, when necessary, He uses animals to accomplish His purposes.

A pre-selected donkey carried Christ into Jerusalem. Another donkey spoke and rebuked the prophet Balaam. Ravens hand-delivered food to the prophet Elijah. Bears came out and attacked teens who were mocking the baldness of Elisha.

I read two stories about dogs (*not cats*) that saved people’s lives. One was a beagle that dialed 911 when its owner fell ill. Apparently, the owner taught his dog, Belle, to bite his cell phone if he had a diabetic seizure. And a man whose SUV plunged 40 feet when backing out too far from his driveway. He told the dog, Honey, to “go get help.” She ran half a mile to a friend’s house and brought them back.

Maybe this is why dogs are getting their own TV network now. It’s called “Dog TV” and it is a channel you can leave on for your dog while you are gone. I’ve always known TV was going to the dogs but this confirms it. I’m not sure what the content will be: fire hydrants, tight shots of toilets, and cats running. There will not be a network for cats. They wouldn’t watch it anyway.

I remember reading about a school of porpoises that saved a man’s life. He fell off a boat and they helped him to a buoy which they circled until help came. I guess you could say they drove Him to the buoy. He ended up writing a book about it, “The Porpoise Driven Life.”

Here now, is the story of how God used a whale or great fish to swallow a prophet. It was like sushi eating in reverse: fish eats man. When you hear Jonah's story, you immediately think of the whale. But only three verses deal with the fish. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Men have been looking so long at the great fish they have failed to see the great God!" Perhaps no other book in the Bible is as ridiculed as the Book of Jonah.

Now, when you bring up the story of Jonah and the whale, critics balk. I personally have no problem with the miracles of the Bible. If you can believe Genesis 1:1, the rest will be a snap. The most important proof is that Jesus Himself validated this story!

In Matthew 12:39-40, in response to the Pharisees' demand for a miracle sign, Jesus said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (NKJV).

So not only did Jesus validate the story of Jonah in the whale as a miracle, He also used it to illustrate His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead!

THE PROPHET JONAH

What a prophet he was. The place from which he prophesied was the bottom of the sea. The pulpit from which he preached was the stomach of a fish!

This is the story of a man with a mission; he was given a job to do and he refused. It's also a story of God's long-suffering and patience and willingness to forgive those who stop running from His will and plan for their life but instead would embrace it!

The title of the message today is "Here : / . . . Send Him!"

There were other sermon titles that people submitted to me: "The Hard to Swallow Truth about Obedience," "When Bad Decisions Eat Up Your Profits (Prophets)," "All's Whale that Ends Whale," and "Reverse Sushi . . . Revenge of the Tuna."

But the book of Jonah could be summed up as follows: God said "Go," Jonah said "No," and God said "Oh?"

Jonah reluctantly obeyed and a great revival broke out in Nineveh. It took God longer to prepare His servant and get him to obey His call than it did for the entire godless city of Nineveh to repent. Things haven't changed much, have they? It still takes longer to get Christians motivated to share the gospel than for sinners to repent. When we go into a community for a crusade, we spend far more time "rallying the troops." For starters, it's reminding and sometimes convincing Christians of the Great Commission.

The church is awash in concerts, conferences, and worship, but is negligent in evangelism. Jesus did not command us to have concerts or conferences, but He did command us to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel!"

LET'S READ ABOUT HOW GOD'S CALL CAME TO JONAH

Jonah 1:1-3 (NKJV)

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah arose 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 from the presence of the LORD."

Have you ever tried to run from God and His will for your life? Like Wrong Way Roy, you were going the wrong direction. Thinking you had a better plan than God did. Perhaps it was certain truths taught in Scripture you didn't want to follow. It may have been the calling of God on your life to do something. It might have even been a calling to serve Him, but you said, "No."

And much to the chagrin of Jonah, God loved the people of Nineveh! They were a *huge* city. Its streets were 20 miles long and its walls 100 feet high. The walls around Nineveh were so wide that 3 chariots could be driven abreast. Nineveh was not only great in size but also in wickedness.

V2. *For their wickedness has come up before Me.*

Literally, "Their wickedness has reached a high degree or the highest pitch." Nineveh was like an overflowing septic tank that "stunk to high heaven"! This verse shows us that God is acutely aware of the wickedness of man.

What kind of people lived in Nineveh? Answer: really, really wicked ones. Nineveh, a city of the Assyrians, was legendary for its cruelty. In Nahum 3:3-4, we read about the dead lying in the streets—dead bodies, heaps of bodies, everywhere. People would stumble over them, scramble to their feet, and fall again. "All this because Nineveh, the beautiful and faithless city, mistress of deadly charms, enticed the nations with her beauty" (Nahum 3:4 NLT). She taught them all to worship her false gods, enchanting people everywhere.

Graphic accounts of their cruel treatment of captives had been found in Assyrian records. The Ninevites were well known for their savagery in plundering cities where they burned boys and girls alive and tortured adults, tearing the skin from their bodies and leaving them to die in the scorching sun! The Ninevites made the Nazis look like lightweights in comparison.

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Archeology has uncovered monuments they built to their own cruelty that say, "Many within the border of my own land I flayed, and spread their skins upon the walls," and "I cut the limbs off the officers, the royal officers who rebelled." Another monument stated, "Three thousand captives I burned with fire!" Even another cruel Ninevite wrote, "I cut off their hands and their fingers and from others I cut off their noses, their ears and their fingers and of many I put out their eyes." Add to this the fact that the Ninevites were the avowed enemies of Israel.

So, you can understand Jonah's reluctance when God says in verse two, "Arise, go to Nineveh." Or literally, "get up and go!" He "got up and went" alright—in the wrong direction! Instead of going 500 miles northeast to Nineveh, Jonah attempts to go 2000 miles west to Tarshish. Pretty much as far from Nineveh as you could get. A lot of us are on boats going to Tarshish while God is saying "Go to Nineveh!"

Listen, there are really only two roads in the Christian life: one leads to Nineveh, and the other to Tarshish. One road is the will of God, the other is disobedience to His will.

WHAT ROAD ARE YOU ON TODAY: THE ROAD OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD OR DISOBEDIENCE?

So, what was the real reason Jonah did not want to preach to Nineveh?

1. Perhaps Jonah went to Tarshish because he was afraid he would be unpopular. He could not bear the idea of being laughed at or rejected. Maybe, but I don't think that's the real reason.
2. Maybe Jonah went to Tarshish because he was unconcerned. He just did not care about these people. Their plight did not move him in the slightest. Perhaps, but again, I don't think that was it.
3. Then again, maybe Jonah did not go because he thought it would be difficult. He did not want to inconvenience himself, and this would be very hard to do. Again, I don't think that was it. I suggest a fourth possibility, which I believe is the real reason Jonah did not go.
4. He did not go because he was certain it would succeed! This is shown by what he says to the Lord in chapter 4, after God pardoned Nineveh, "So he complained to the LORD about it: 'Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people'" (Jonah 4:2 NLT).

So much for the idea of the Old Testament versus the New Testament God. Where the "New Testament God" is loving and compassionate and the "Old Testament God" is angry and hostile. A Person who says this has not read the whole Bible. Here we see the God of both testaments who is "gracious and compassionate" and "filled with unfailing love" (see Jonah 4:2).

The fact is, judgment for Nineveh suited Jonah just fine. After all, they were the enemies of Israel and they certainly deserved it! He actually enjoyed the fact that his enemies were about to be destroyed. There may even be some of us who might take some perverse pleasure in knowing that certain people who really bother us are going to hell. Where do we get off with an attitude like that?

WE ALL DESERVE GOD'S JUDGMENT!

Jesus did not say, "Hate your enemies, and hope judgment comes to them soon." He said "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies! Bless those who curse you!" (Matthew 5:43-44 NKJV).

In many ways, Jonah was a racist. He did not want “those people” to come to God. Is there a particular person you feel a hatred for or don’t want to come to Christ? For some it could be a Muslim, “They believe in a different god and there are those Muslim terrorists!” There of course is truth to that, but here is the question: Does God love them and want to save them? God does, and He is saving many from Islam. For another it could be homosexuals. They might say, “That’s wicked and sinful and wrong!” Yes, homosexuality is a sin, but like all sin it’s forgivable.

But for many of us, it’s not that we hate people; we honestly just don’t care! Otherwise we’d do something. We’re safe and secure in our eternal destiny. We say, “Let them take care of themselves.” But the verbs in verse two are imperatives. They are commands. “Go” and “preach.” This was not to be done tomorrow but today. Now, where have we heard this kind of verbiage before?

Answer: from Jesus Himself in the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19–20 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (NKJV). There are two important things to note here about the Great Commission.

1. They are a command. It was never a mere suggestion of Jesus that we, His followers, carry the gospel unto “all the nations.” It was, and is, a command! The commission of the church is not to wait for the world to show up. The commission of the church is to go to the world. Jesus did not tell the whole world to go to church.
2. These words are directed to every follower of Jesus! These words were not directed merely to the original twelve disciples, nor are they meant today for only those we might call “the professionals”—pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, etc. They are for every follower and disciple of Jesus Christ.

If I am His disciple, I am commanded to go and make disciples of others. If I am not making disciples of others, I’m not really being the disciple He wants me to be! So, here is my question to you today: Are you doing your part to fulfill the Great Commission? Are you going into all of your world?

These words are from Jesus Christ to you! He saved them for the end of His earthly ministry. These were His final words before He ascended to heaven. They are a *big deal* to Him and should also be to us! Jesus orders every one of us to “go into all the world and preach the gospel.”

Let me say something that may surprise you. If you are *not* seeking to fulfill the Great Commission, that can be a sin! But how? It is a sin of omission. James 4:17 says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin” (NKJV).

Chuck Swindoll tells a true story about an incredible case that came before the courts:

There was a man walking on a boat dock. He tripped over a rope and fell into the cold deep waters of the harbor. He came up sputtering and yelling for help, and he sank again. He obviously was in serious trouble. His friends were too far away to help; some did not even hear him. But only a few yards away was a young man on his dock sunbathing. The man yelled, “Help, I can’t swim! Help, I’m drowning!” The young man, an excellent swimmer, only turned his head to watch.

The drowning man floundered in the water, sank, and came up sputtering in total panic. He finally disappeared beneath the water, never to come to the surface again. The family of the drowned man was so outraged by this callous indifference. So they sued the sunbather who sat by idly. The court ruled that the man on the dock had no legal responsibility whatever to try and save the other man's life. They agreed with Cain's words, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Chuck Swindoll writes, "Indifference may not be illegal, but it is immoral."

In the Gospel of Mark we have a variation on the Great Commission, "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mark 16:15 NKJV). Jesus did not say, "Go into all the world and live as good examples." Needless to say, He wants us to do that, to indeed practice what we preach. But in the Great Commission we are specifically to preach the gospel.

HOW DO PEOPLE PRIMARILY COME TO FAITH? ANSWER: THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Corinthians 1:21 says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those . . ." (NKJV). Not through "foolish preaching" but the foolishness of preaching. In other words, God has chosen verbal communication.

Romans 10:14 says, "But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?" (NLT).

After hearing this message to "get up and go," what did Jonah do?

V3. *But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

YOU SIMPLY CANNOT ESCAPE FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD!

Adam and Eve, like Jonah, listened to the Word of God. In clear detail they were told how they should obey and follow the Lord. They refused to obey God, and after they sinned, what is the first thing they did? "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD" (Genesis 3:8 NKJV). This is like playing peek-a-boo with a small child. God even plays along in Eden saying, "Oh Adam, where are you?"

What fools we are when we think we can hide from God.

Jeremiah 23:24 says, "Can anyone hide himself in secret places so I shall not see him? . . . Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (NKJV). The Psalms had already been written at this point, so perhaps Jonah knew this one that David prayed:

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." (Psalm 139:7-10 NIV)

That verse offers comfort to the believer, reminding us that we are never alone. But in Jonah's case it offers truth—God will never let His children out of His sight. Thankfully, we simply cannot escape the presence of the Lord. But Jonah was going to try anyway.

V3. *Jonah found a ship.*

Fact is, Jonah was looking for it. Satan opened all the doors for Jonah's disobedience. It is amazing how skilled Satan is in manipulating situations. Circumstances, sometimes directed by the enemy, can lead us the wrong direction!

There will always be that nonbeliever ready to get romantically involved. There will always be that "caring guy" ready to hear about your husband problems. There will always be that way to make easy money, even if it seems illegal. There will always be a ship waiting to take you in the wrong direction.

Sometimes when we are engaged in such activity we might even delude ourselves to think that God Himself is opening the doors. Scripture must always be our guide in these things. Donald Barnhouse has said, you may "find your ship" and it may sail right on time, but if you are en route to Tarshish when God has called you to Nineveh, a storm is brewing. And sooner or later you are going overboard!

V3. *So he paid the fare, and went down into it.*

Know this, it's very expensive to sin.

If you ever run away from God, you're always going to pay your own fare; and you're never going to get where you thought you were going to get when you put your foot in the boat.

EVERY STEP AWAY FROM GOD IS ALWAYS A STEP DOWN

- ↓ First Jonah went *down* to Joppa, and then he went *down* into the ship.
- ↓ Then he went *down* into the sea, and he went *down* into the fishes' belly.
- ↓ Then he went *down* into the deep.

It's the life of running from God—down, down, down! The same thing happened to King David. David started going down when he looked lustfully at Bathsheba bathing. He went down further when he called for her to come to his palace. He went down further when he committed the sin of adultery. He went down even more when he murdered Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. He went down even further when he tried to cover his sin. He kept going down, down, down, until he repented!

GOD WILL ALWAYS HAVE THE LAST WORD!

Read Jonah 1:4-5, "But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep" (NKJV).

V4. *But the Lord sent out a great wind.*

The Lord sends a mighty storm to the prodigal prophet. We will all have our storms in life. I believe there are three kinds of storms we will face in our lives as Christians: protecting storms, perfecting storms, and correcting storms.

- 1. Protecting storms.** This happened right after Jesus performed the miracle of fish and loaves. The people wanted “to make Him king by force.” So Jesus got His boys out of town as fast as possible. He was protecting them from the adulation of the people. They were safer in that storm with Jesus than on the shore without Him. There out on Galilee a storm came, but Jesus said, “Let’s go to the other side.”
- 2. Then there are perfecting storms.** Look at all of the trials and tribulations that young Joseph went through. Sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of rape, and wrongly imprisoned. These were perfecting storms. Joseph had done nothing to bring those things on himself. The very opposite was the case, but the Lord allowed calamity to come into his life to mold and make him into the man that he needed to be. He ultimately became the second most powerful man in the world of his day.
- 3. Correcting storms.** That was certainly what Jonah was experiencing. He brought this on himself for sure. Now because Jonah is His child, God chastens him. Hebrews 12:6 says, “Whom the LORD loves, he chastens” (NKJV). First He tried the staff, now the rod—not to destroy but to teach a lesson! Thank God for storms like this. They are a reminder that God loves us! Listen, God did not have to send this storm. The Lord could have let Jonah go on in his rebellion. He could have just cut him off. This was a *loving storm* if you will. The storm was a sign that God wasn’t finished with Jonah yet.

So maybe you are in a correcting storm. You have taken a trip behind God’s woodshed. God is simply saying, “You are my child and I will do what it takes to get you right.” David said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Psalm 119:67 KJV). Jonah knew better, but these men did not.

V5. *Every man cried out to his god.*

Man is invariably a religious creature. There was an emergency religion. When things were going well they did not care about their gods. But when the storm hits and things were beyond their control, they cried out to their gods! The men effectively draw straws and find out that this has all come on them from Jonah!

“Then they said to him, ‘Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?’” Jonah admits, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:8-9 NKJV).

They were blown away. They had heard of the Lord God of Israel. The God who parted seas and drowned armies. They wondered, “Why would you run from a God this powerful?” But that’s exactly what Jonah was doing—running from God.

Nothing is more pathetic than a Christian who has lost his or her testimony. It’s even worse than the person who never had one.

Jesus said, "If salt has lost its saltiness, it's no longer good for anything." Sometimes nonbelievers have more faith than believers! After Jesus was crucified, His followers were devastated! They had lost all hope, they were disappointed, disoriented, and disorganized. Yet the nonbelievers remembered what Jesus said would happen after He died. In Matthew 27:63 they said, "We remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day" (NIV). They remembered His words of rising, when the disciples apparently forgot them!

Sometimes nonbelievers have a better idea of what we believe than some Christians do. Have you ever had a nonbeliever call you out on your bad witness?

I read a true story about a bar that was being built in Texas. The local Baptist church started a campaign with petitions and prayers to stop it. Work progressed up to a week before opening and lightning struck and it burned down! The bar owner sued the church saying they were responsible because of their prayers. The church denied any responsibility and any connection to their prayers and the fire. The judge read through the plaintiff's complaint and the defendant's reply and said, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but it appears from the paperwork that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that now does not!"

THE ONLY THING WORSE THAN BEING CALLED A HYPOCRITE IS ACTUALLY BEING ONE.

Jonah was totally being called out for his hypocrisy. Jonah admits he is a Hebrew prophet on the run and they need to throw him overboard. Apparently, they did not need much convincing, as overboard Jonah goes. But the Lord was ready with his custom-designed watercraft. We read in Jonah 1:17, "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (NKJV).

Prepared means "ordained, called," and we will talk about this more next time and how stubborn Jonah was. We will also look at the message Jonah preached that produced a revival. Not just any revival, but the largest in human history. We will talk about how God could use us to bring something like this to America. But let me close by asking you this:

ARE YOU RUNNING FROM GOD?

Maybe God has told you to do a certain thing and you have refused. Maybe you were raised in a Christian home but you have run in the other direction. These sailors called out to their gods, but there is only one true God who can save us. Call out to him right now.

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