

JONAH GO!

TEACHING NOTES #2

THE HARD TO SWALLOW TRUTH ABOUT OBEDIENCE

Jonah and the whale: there probably is not any other story in all of the Bible more ridiculed than this.

However, the focus of the biblical story of Jonah is not about the whale or great fish. Fact is, there are only three verses that refer to it. The story of Jonah is that he was called to do something he did not want to do. And because God loved him, He would not let him off the hook. God got his attention and Jonah finally obeyed and a massive revival took place.

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."

THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH IS: GOD GIVES SECOND CHANCES!

Let's pick up where we last left off. God came to the prophet Jonah and told him to go and preach to Nineveh. God said "Go," Jonah said "No," and God said "Oh?" Jonah flat out refused and found a ship going in the opposite direction.

The reason for this was that Jonah hated the Ninevites. They were a very wicked people, known for murder and horrific atrocities. They were so wicked they "stunk to high heaven." As God said, "Their wickedness has come up before me." They also were the enemies of Israel, so Jonah wanted nothing to do with them. In many ways, he was a racist, having no concern for their souls.

The reason he would not go, is Jonah knew the merciful and loving nature of God. He did not want the Ninevites to hear a message of hope and then be spared. He was told to "go and preach," and he flat-out refused. So, he found a ship, he paid the fare, and he went down to Tarshish.

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.

So the last time we saw Jonah, he was going down. Sin will always take you down. Remember this: sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to spend! But know this, God will always have the last word!

Jonah 1:4-5

Jonah 1:4 “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, 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 the case here with Jonah. He brought this on himself for sure. Now because Jonah is His child, God chastens him. This was a reminder to Jonah that he was indeed a true child of God.

HOW DO WE KNOW GOD LOVES US?

Because he lets us go wherever we want to go and do whatever we want to do? Not have any standards or rules but just live as we choose? No, that is not a sign of love but neglect.

That’s pretty much the story of my childhood. Sadly, it’s also the story of many children in America today too. No rules, no curfews, no expectation of good grades. I might add, no discipline, no bedtime story, no home-cooked meals, and no parenting.

My friends thought I had it made in the shade. You know where I spent my time? At friend’s houses with parents. Sitting at dinner with their families, because that’s what I wanted. Because Jonah was God’s loved child he was disciplined. Because God *only* disciplines His children.

You don't discipline someone else's children. You discipline your own children because you love them! Hebrews 12:6 says, "Whom the LORD loves, he chastens" (NKJV). As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as His own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?

If God doesn't discipline you as He does all of His children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His child after all. When you disobey the Lord and do not get away with it—rejoice! It's when you do it again, and again, without pangs of conscience you should worry.

This storm was God's discipline of His wayward son Jonah. 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 WAS NOT FINISHED WITH JONAH YET.

So maybe you are in a correcting storm. 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 nonbelieving men did not.

So, a storm is brewing and Jonah is praying? No, he is sleeping!

If that is not a picture of the church today, I don't know what is. The world is afraid and the church is asleep. The world asks questions; the church has no answers. People are dying in their sin, and the church is asleep.

Jesus told the parable of the wise and unwise virgins or bridesmaids. It was a picture of how people will react when He comes again. Five of the virgins did not have oil in their lamp. Five did have oil and they were prepared. At midnight, the call went out, "The bridegroom is coming!" The five wise virgins, though they had their oil, were sound asleep. Seems like they should have been telling the others. But when they all awoke, the foolish virgins asked for oil, and the wise ones said, "No, get it for yourselves, we don't have enough, lest there should not be enough for us!" (see Matthew 25:1-9).

I fear many of us in the church today are asleep at the wheel. You might say, "I resent that!" Let me ask you this question: When is the last time you engaged someone in conversation about Jesus?

That is, in effect, what God was telling Jonah to do, to "Go and preach to Nineveh!" We as the church need to wake up to the critical time in our history as a nation. Romans 13:11-12 says, "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (NKJV)

WAKE UP AND SUIT UP!

The problem with being asleep is you usually do not know it! Have you ever sat down on a couch in front of the TV and thought, “I’m going to rest a bit.” Then you wake up and realize you fell asleep for an hour? You ask someone, “Was I asleep?” You did not know. Or, even if we do know, when someone wakes us up, we deny it! Someone calls at 3:00 A.M. and says, “Did I wake you?” You say, “No, I was up!”

The sailors had to wake up the sleeping prophet. Jonah 1:6 says, “So the captain came to him, and said to him, ‘What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish’” (NKJV).

What will it take to wake up the sleeping church? This is my great passion, the gospel! God wants to reach our culture with it. It is our essential message. It is not optional; it is something we are commanded to proclaim. Yet for many of us, the Great Commission has become the great omission!

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! Isn’t this what people always do when crisis hits?

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. The same could be asked of us!

ARE YOU RUNNING FROM GOD TODAY?

Has God told you to do a certain thing and you’ve gone the opposite way? Has He put it on your heart to share your faith and you have refused? 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.” It’s like a decaf soy latte or a tofu burger. These nonbelieving sailors think Jonah is nuts to run from a God like this.

Sometimes nonbelievers have more faith than believers! Remember, 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!’” (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. A local 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!"

Sometimes nonbelievers have a better idea of what a Christian is than a Christian. Jonah was totally being called out for his hypocrisy. The only thing worse than being called a hypocrite is actually being one.

Jonah admits he is a Hebrew prophet on the run from the Lord God. This completely freaked them out. Jonah 1:10 "Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, 'Why have you done this?' For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them" (NKJV).

First, they were afraid of the storm, which indicated that it was a bad one, as they were seasoned sailors. But now they were exceedingly afraid because they knew God was doing it. A God they had not previously known and who clearly was very powerful.

Sometimes we are so concerned with *relating* and *being relevant* that we forget it is not a bad thing for people to have a fear of God. I fear in the church today we have traded *reverence* for *relevance*.

WE'VE TRADED BEING GENUINELY GODLY FOR TRYING TO BE COOL.

Listen, nothing is more "uncool" than trying to be cool! We need to live as authentic, godly followers of Jesus, with a respect for the Almighty. If someone can come to this church, while living in sin, hear me preach and feel good, I am doing something wrong. My job is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." If you tell me you were uncomfortable by what I said, I'd say "Good! That is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit working on you."

Jonah told them what they needed to do to make the storm stop. Jonah 1:12-13: "And he said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.' Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them" (NKJV).

They wanted to find a solution in their own strength, not God's. So they rowed. This is a picture of people trying to obtain salvation. They want to do it on their own, starting with their own gods that they call on. They had already tried throwing excess cargo into the sea.

People think, "If I cuss a bit less, go to church a bit more, give some money to God, then I'll be saved." But what God wants is a sacrifice. And Jonah was that man. He says, "Throw me into the water and the storm will stop!"

JONAH BECOMES A PICTURE OF WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS.

Jesus Himself said Jonah was a foreshadowing of His death and resurrection. In Matthew 12:39–40, Jesus said, “No sign will be given . . . 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).

And Jonah lived after this, a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ. They threw Jonah in, the storm stopped and the men believed! Jonah 1:16 says, “Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows” (NKJV). It shows that God can still work through flawed people. In fact, that is a dominant theme in this book.

My wife, Cathe, fell away from her faith shortly after her commitment. She even went back to smoking pot and was mocking Christians. She was with a friend of hers who was not a believer and she saw someone with a Bible. Cathe was reminded of the faith that once filled her heart and she told her friend about it. The friend was so moved by Cathe’s testimony (albeit flawed), she wanted to accept Christ! Cathe led her in prayer and recommitted herself to Christ as well!

GOD CAN USE US EVEN WHEN WE ARE NOT EXACTLY WHERE WE NEED TO BE.

But God still needed to move Jonah from point A to point B. And he was ready with his custom-designed watercraft. Jonah 1:17 says, “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* or *called*. There is some speculation that it may have been a 50-foot sperm whale. Most of the items recovered from sperm whale stomachs are not chewed, but swallowed whole. An intact 40-foot-long giant squid weighing 440 pounds was recovered from a sperm whale.

So, to swallow a Hebrew prophet? No problemo. A mere appetizer. As I said last time, this is like sushi eating in reverse.

Fact is, in Matthew 12:40, the word for “great fish” is “sea-monster.” It may have been a whale, it may not have been. Frankly, it doesn’t matter whether there is a fish now in existence large enough to hold a man for three days. We only need to know there was one.

To show you how stubborn Jonah could be, look how long it took before he prayed.

V17. *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

But Jonah was a child of God.

AND A CHILD OF GOD, THOUGH OFF COURSE AT TIMES, ALWAYS RETURNS HOME.

In fact, that is how you can really tell if you are a prodigal or a pig. A prodigal always comes home, a pig does not. The first chance that a pig gets, he is going to make a beeline back to the slop. Why? Because that's where he wants to be.

In contrast, a prodigal will always return home, because a prodigal is a child of God that has gone astray. Speaking of a person not really being a prodigal but a pig, we read in 2 Peter 2:20-22, "If they've escaped from the slum of sin by experiencing our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ, and then slid back into that same old life again, they're worse than if they had never left. Better not to have started out on the straight road to God than to start out and then turn back, repudiating the experience and the holy command. They prove the point of the proverbs, 'A dog goes back to its own vomit' and 'A scrubbed-up pig heads for the mud'" (MSG).

The question we must all ask ourselves is: Are we pigs or are we prodigals?

The Bible says in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (MSG). We all know people who have supposedly *fallen away* spiritually. Sometimes people make changes in their lives, go to church, get all excited about the Bible and then they suddenly bail out, never to return.

Usually we say, "Oh, isn't that sad; they are backsliding." But I suggest to you many of these people never were true believers to begin with. The true test is where they wind up. A true believer will always come home eventually. A person who is not a true believer won't. My mother spent most of her life as a prodigal, but in the end, she came home.

So, Jonah, the prodigal prophet, prayed from the fish's belly. Remember, you can call out to God wherever you are! You can pray in any position, at any time, and anywhere. You can pray publically, privately, verbally, and silently. You can be kneeling, standing, sitting, lying down, or even driving. You can pray with your eyes both open and closed!

Sometimes we think that perhaps the Lord will hear our prayers more readily if they are prayed in a church building. But that is not necessarily true. Daniel prayed in a lion's den. David prayed in a field. Peter prayed on and under the water. And here is Jonah's prayer, in the belly of a whale!

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE YOU ARE, JUST PRAY!

And that's exactly what Jonah did, he prayed! Ephesians 6:18 says, "Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere." Let's look at that prayer of Jonah.

Jonah 2:1-9 (NLT)

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish. He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me! You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves. Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. How will I ever again see your holy temple?'

"I sank beneath the waves, and death was very near. The waters closed in around me, and seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was locked out of life and imprisoned in the land of the dead. But you, O LORD my God, have snatched me from the yawning jaws of death! "When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone.

Jonah effectively prayed the Word of God. Eight times in these verses he quotes from book of Psalms. I love to quote Scripture when I pray; not to remind God but to remind me of what it says. I pray, "Lord, you have promised to 'Provide all of our needs according to your riches,' so, provide now for my needs." And "Lord, you have told us 'If there is any sick among us we should call' so I pray now for this sick person." Or "Father, your Word says, 'If any man lacks wisdom let him ask,' so I ask now."

So, Jonah quoted the Word of God from the belly of a fish. This was not an easy place to pray either.

V5. *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

But Jonah was a child of God.

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. *I sank beneath the waves, and death was very near. The waters closed in around me, and seaweed wrapped itself around my head.*

Jonah was even beginning to lose hope.

V7. *When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.*

Jonah did not ask to be delivered; He just started giving praise to God.

V9. *But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone.*

You might say, "I can't give thanks right now; I don't feel good!" Do you think Jonah, wrapped in seaweed, in a stinking fish's stomach *felt* good? The Bible does not say give thanks unto the Lord when you feel good. It says, "Give thanks unto the Lord because He is good!"

NOW, HERE WE SEE THAT GOD GIVES SECOND CHANCES.

Jonah 2:10-3:2

“So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you’ (NKJV).

Jonah probably wondered if God would ever use him again. God was certainly under no obligation to do so. But remember, this all happened to Jonah because he was loved by God. The Bible is filled with second chances God gave to His people:

1. God gave a second chance to Adam and Eve. They were strictly warned to not eat of the forbidden fruit. But ate they did and sin entered the world. The Lord could have thrown up His hands and said, “That’s it!” Instead we read, “Toward evening they heard the Lord God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The Lord God called to Adam, “Where are you?” (see Genesis 3:8-9). There is the Father, longing for fellowship with His wayward children.
2. King David was given a second chance after his adultery and murder. He was confronted by the prophet Nathan and David repented. He went on to live the most effective years of his life.
3. Samson who had so much going for him, with his long hair and amazing strength. He was like a superhero from a comic book, but he was real. Yet, the mighty Samson fell into sin. He was the *he-man* with the *she-weakness*. First he married a nonbeliever, then he was with a prostitute, and finally with Delilah. The devil had him *hooker, line, and sinker*. The Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes and shaved his head. But God gave him a second chance. Judges 16:22 says, “The hair of his head began to grow again” (NKJV).
4. Simon Peter failed miserably. He denied the Lord when Jesus needed him most. Yet, when Christ was risen, the message was to go tell the disciples *and Peter* (see Mark 16:7). And on the shore of Galilee, Simon Peter was re-commissioned.

So, here’s Jonah, repentant and regurgitated. Believing and barfed. Righteous and ralphed. Bleached and beached. What a sight he must have been on the shore of Nineveh. And to the point, where did God send him? Back to Nineveh. It was Nineveh or bust.

And where do we need to go to get right with God? We need to get back to where we were.

As Jesus says to the believers in the church of Ephesus, “Remember from where you have fallen. Repent and do the works you did at first” (Revelation 2:5 NASB).

REMEMBER, REPENT, REPEAT

Maybe you are in a storm today. Perhaps it has come because of your disobedience to God. Don’t panic; it’s a *loving storm* from a loving Father calling you back home. Here’s the good news:

Jesus already paid the price for your sin. You don’t need to throw cargo overboard, you need to believe. He died on the cross and rose again from the dead for you.

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