

Pillar Passages – Jonah 1
Jed Brown
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Welcome to another edition of Pillar Passages. Today we are looking at Jonah chapter 1.

Of course, when most people think of the book of Jonah, they think of the fish and Jonah being swallowed up by the fish—which we will get to in time. But just in sheer ink being spilled, we ought to be thinking about what is the burden of the writer? What is the burden of the book of Jonah? We will look at the sheer number of verses like that the fish account takes like 3 verses. The rest of the book is written really about the God of the fish. So as we look at Jonah chapter 1 today, I invite you to think about, ‘Who is this God of the fish?’

The word of the Lord comes to Jonah. The word is, ‘Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, because they are evil. Jonah know the God that he serves. He knows that this God means for—the end result to be—repentance.

The calling out against it is not just to bring judgement, but to bring about repentance, and forgiveness, and peace before God. This is what God is after. Yes, the God of the Old Testament was just as much after this among the nations—not just among Israel, but among the nations—even as much at the God of the New Testament. It is the *same* God.

Jonah knows this. Jonah knows that this is God’s endgame. But Jonah hates the Ninevites. They are Assyrians. Jonah knows that the Assyrians are going to be a really pain in the neck for Israel in the decades to come.

To put a fine point on it, Jonah hates the Ninevites. He hates the Assyrians. So he doesn’t want to do it. He hates that more than he loves obeying God. So, he procrastinates and puts it off. He flees.

There is a repeated and very weighty phrase here—one that we should pay attention to.

Verse 3. It says, that Jonah **‘fled from the presence of the Lord.’**

He goes to Joppa and finds a ship. Thinks he can hide from God on a ship. He goes and jumps on the ship with a bunch of sailors away **‘from the presence of the Lord.’**

But God finds him. God finds him easily. God is sovereign over all things; over every square inch of existence—even the sea. So He whips up a tempest of a storm. The ship threatens to break up. The mariners are afraid, and ‘each cried out to his god.’

In those days, people thought of gods as being more localized gods, and each person has his own god. Each cried out to his own god. They started hurling the cargo over.

But Jonah is down in the inside of the ship, and he's asleep. So the captain comes and finds him, and brings him up, and asks him to pray, because, perhaps your god will give a thought to us.' But of course, Jonah is hiding from his God. Why would Jonah be praying when all the pagans are praying? That tells you how upside-down is the situation are for Jonah.

The soldiers, finally—nothing works, nothing helps—so they finally cast lots to find out whose god got ticked off. 'Which one of you ticked off your god?'

And the lot falls on Jonah.

The funny thing here that seems to our modern ears so superstitious, but in fact, the was actually quite accurate. The whole process landed on the heart and the problem of the situation.

They turn to Jonah and they tell him, 'On what account has this evil come upon us? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What's your country? Just what is going on?'

Jonah tells them (v.9) 'I'm a Hebrew. I fear the Lord.' Then he adds this. 'The God of heaven and the God who made the sea.'

Ot-oh. Yep, it was your God, Jonah. What did you do?

They were exceedingly afraid, and they told him, 'What is this you have done? Putting us in all this danger, because they knew he was **'from the presence of the Lord.'** There it is again.

They say, 'What shall we do with you that the sea may quiet down for us. We don't want to throw you over, but the sea is getting more tempestuous.

He said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea, because I know that I'm the problem.

Nevertheless, (v. 13) the men graciously continue to row, but they could not. The sea grew worse and worse, by God's design. And so, (v. 14) they call out to be held harmless in the Lord's court. 'Let us not perish for this man's life, and don't charge this against us, because You, O Lord,--They are getting a lesson in the one true God, and they acknowledge that this one true God just as it pleases Him.

So they pick up Jonah, and they hurl him into the sea. The sea cease from its raging. And they feared the Lord exceedingly. Ironically, the very thing God sent Jonah to do, happens. They turn to the Lord, and they fear the Lord exceedingly, and offer a sacrifice to Him and make vows. They become God-followers through the whole scenario.

And then the big fish swallows up Jonah—which we will come back to in a later video.

There are three things that I'd like us to think about from this video.

The first is: Just who is this God?

This is a God who is sovereign—sovereign over boats, and oceans, and men, and over every square inch of existence, and even over whales. He is a God who is sovereign, and in His sovereignty wants to spread His amazing grace over the world for its praise. As Paul puts it in Eph 1, God is doing all of His work of salvation to the praise of His glorious grace. His grace is glorious—no matter what. It is, in and of itself, glorious. But God in His generosity wants more people—people all over the world, in all the nations—to see it, to experience it, and in glorious joy give it praise. Because our praise of it would only result from our receiving of it which would be for our newness of life and our eternal life.

God is a generous God, who exercise His sovereignty to bring about the praise of His glorious grace throughout the world.

Okay, one more thing about this God: Because He is goodness itself; because He is glory itself; because out of Himself emanates infinite generosity; infinite grace for forgiveness, mercy, love, peace, joy, kindness; because He is this good God, it is *in His presence* where life is found—newness of life, life forever more *in His presence*. No matter the circumstance in life, the safest, best, highest, strongest place in all of the universe is *in His presence*.

Okay, so now a question: What is procrastination? How would you define it?

I would define it as; withholding from doing some good thing that God has called you or me to do.

That is exactly what Jonah does here. But it could be evangelism. It could be paying a bill. It could be picking up the phone and contacting that person that you haven't talked to. It may be saying I'm sorry, please forgive me to your spouse. It could be finishing that homework assignment. It could be finishing the report at work. All kinds of things could be involved in procrastination. But they are all things God has called us to do.

How do I know that? Because I know that God is sovereign—God is sovereign over all things. And God is generous. Because He is sovereign and because He is generous, every good thing that is pushed into the world comes by God wearing a person as His mask. God means for the Ninevites to experience His glorious grace and to praise Him for it. But He will use Jonah to bring that about. He will wear Jonah as His mask to do that.

But that, again, could be anything. That could be baking bread. It could be helping a friend. It could be, again, doing that report at work, paying that bill, all kinds of things.

When we put them off, we are standing a thwart God's purposes to push more good into the world. Which means that procrastination is a much bigger problem for us than maybe we realize. It's a much bigger sin than we might realize. It's not a neutral act. And it's not a little sin. It doesn't fall into the category like a cousin of a guilty pleasure. It can be a big problem—especially in the area of evangelism.

Note the connection points and the similarities here in Jonah 1 and the Great Commission at the end of Matthew.

In Matthew 28, we see, beginning in verse 18, first the sovereignty of God. Jesus says, that 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. That is the basis of the Great Commission. So then, our calling is to believe that. To believe that God is sovereign over every square inch of existence, over every person, over every whale, over *ev-er-y* thing. He is king by the power of His resurrection.

So then, we are commanded—just like Jonah was—to go therefore and make disciples of all nations, even nations that we may normally hate, and baptism them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am *with you always*. You will be '**in My presence**' to the end of the age.

We are to bank on that; both in the positive and the negative. Both in the positive, that no matter what we go through, we will be in His presence and He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will *keep us* until the end.

But there's another sense here in which we will always be in His presence. We *cannot* flee. We cannot flee from His presence.

So I wish for all of us to think about this; to think about where we stand on the Great Commission. Where do we stand on this? I wonder sometimes if part of God's discipline today, in the chaos of our age, I wonder if part of the purpose of the chaos is God's discipline on The Church, because we have procrastinated and put off His call to share the gospel with the nations. We have become fruitless. We've made church about us. We've made church basically a place where we receive psychological therapy. Where we create rule and we become good moralists, and we think about God in the abstract, but we do not think of God as risen from the dead, King over all creation, with a message we are to proclaim, joyfully, sacrificially, to the ends of the earth. I wonder if our chaos is God telling us—God causing us to be swallowed up in the belly of the fish, God causing us to be tossed in the tempest of culture, because we have run away from His calling in our life.

The chaos speaks to us, as Christians, to repent to turn back to His calling for us. His calling to bring about the praise of His glorious grace, where there is currently now praise. To bring about the newness of life—the new life that is only found in the proclaimed gospel.

May He grant us repentance. May He grant us newness of life within ourselves. And may He grant that newness of life to be contagious through us to the nations afresh in you and in me.