



RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

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JONAH, FRIEND OF GOD? Part 1

The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: ²"Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh! Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are." (Jonah 1:1-2 NLT) The book of Jonah begins by getting straight to the point. God calls Jonah to go and preach judgment against the wicked people of Nineveh. It is a simple, direct command. It is God's call on Jonah's life at this time.

As we read through the book of Jonah, we are going to look at how it parallels with our lives. Just like Jonah, God has a call on our lives. There are things he wants us to do. First and foremost, he wants us to believe him. *Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* (John 6:29 KJV) Then, there is the call to obey the things the Holy Spirit shows us to do, the good works that he has prepared beforehand for us to do. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10 KJV). Obviously these good works include sharing the gospel through our lives and words.

But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction in order to get away from the LORD. He went down to the seacoast, to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping that by going away to the west he could escape from the LORD. (Jonah 1:3 NLT) What did Jonah do when God gave him this command? He ran away! He went in the opposite direction. We do that sometimes. We say in our hearts, "Lord it's too uncomfortable to believe what you're asking me to believe." "Lord it would be too uncomfortable for me to do this thing you are asking me to do."

It is interesting that Jonah was trying to escape from the Lord. He must have known that there is nowhere on earth that is outside of God's presence. Probably he was trying to immerse himself in a trip to another land to block out the Lord's voice. He was deluding himself, trying to fill his mind and life with other things to block out the Lord's call. At times we do the same. We delude ourselves, trying to immerse ourselves in other things to block out the Lord's voice. But God loves us too much to let us succeed for too long.

But as the ship was sailing along, suddenly the LORD flung a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to send them to the bottom. ⁵Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. And all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. ⁶So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will have mercy on us and spare our lives." (Jonah 1:4-6 NLT)

When we try to block out God's voice often things go fine for a while, just like they did for Jonah – the ship was sailing happily along for a while, and he was asleep, at perfect rest in the boat. But then God sends a storm, and things in our life begin to get tough, maybe affecting others around us. God wants something. He loves Jonah and he loves the people of Nineveh, so he is not going to let Jonah get away with ignoring him. He sends the storm.

God brings us through the belly of a whale, back to the very same place that we ran from.

Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, Jonah lost the toss. ⁸"What have you done to bring this awful storm down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?" ⁹And Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." ¹⁰Then he told them that he was running away from the LORD. The sailors were terrified when they heard this. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned. ¹¹And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?" ¹²"Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. For I know that this terrible storm is all my fault." ¹³Instead, the sailors tried even harder to row the boat ashore. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it. ¹⁴Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah's God. "O LORD," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death, because it isn't our fault. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons." ¹⁵Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! ¹⁶The sailors were awestruck by the LORD's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. (Jonah 1:7-16 NLT)

God causes us to face the very same decisions that we ran from originally.

So now Jonah is no longer peacefully asleep. Instead he is in the middle of the sea. When we refuse to believe or obey God, he sends consequences. He does this to discipline us, because he is seeking to bring us into the fullness of his will for our good and the good of those around us.

Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17 NLT) God is still very much in control of events in Jonah's life. This is God's discipline. Jonah could have drowned in the sea but God sends a large fish (probably a sperm whale) to swallow him alive. Can you imagine what it would be like to be in the stomach of a whale. Dark. Wet. Smelly. Nothing to eat or drink. Constantly swaying as the fish swims through the water. Not a pleasant place to be.

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish. ²He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the world of the dead, and LORD, you heard me! ³You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves. ⁴Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. How will I ever again see your holy Temple?' ⁵"I sank beneath the waves, and death was very near. The waters closed in around me, and seaweed wrapped itself around my head. ⁶I 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! ⁷"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. ⁸Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. ⁹But 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." ¹⁰Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit up Jonah on the beach, and it did. (Jonah 2:1-10 NLT)

Jonah reaches a point of brokenness and repentance. It is no fun to be in the stomach of a whale for three days and three nights. Jonah was surrounded by darkness and the prospect of death. When we refuse to believe or obey, sometimes God sends storms into our lives and we end up in the belly of a whale where we feel spiritual death surrounding us. Jonah called out to God. He promises now to obey God ("I will fulfill all my vows). Many of us have experienced this- after running from God we call out to him in the midst of his discipline. We recognize that we have been wrong and we repent. When Jonah reached this point of brokenness, the Lord commanded the fish to spit him up on dry land- alive.

Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: ²"Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message of judgment I have given you." This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. (Jonah 3:1-3 NLT) Once again God gets right to the point. There is still something he wants Jonah to do. God repeats his command to Jonah. God loves us that much that he will not let us get away with refusing to believe him and ignoring his plans for our lives. He brings us through the belly of the whale and back to the very same place that we ran from, he causes us to face the very same decisions that we ran from originally. This time Jonah obeys. Obviously it would have been much better for him to have obeyed the first time. But at least he obeys the second time

Historical accounts like the story of Jonah are written as examples to us, to admonish and counsel and advise us. (1 Corinthians 10:11) There are things that we can learn from Jonah's life. We see that God called him to do something and we see how he responded to that and what the consequences were.

So now you have to ask yourself the question, What is God calling you to do?

He is calling all of us primarily to believe and trust Him and to believe and trust His word. To believe what He says about Himself and about us. To believe what He did on the cross was sufficient. To believe the love he has for us- even when circumstances speak otherwise.

He is calling all of us to love him and love each other.

And he is calling all of us to good works which he prepared in advance for us to do. He will show you these good works in your own heart as you walk with him and he will show you them through the combined wisdom which we find here in the body of Christ.

Don't be a Jonah. Believe and obey, don't run away. And if you do run away and find yourself in the belly of a whale, experiencing the discipline of the Lord, call out to him in repentance and once the whale spits you up on dry land you will hear God's voice once more calling you to believe and obey. Then believe and obey. And see what God does as a result of your obedience. See what God does when you choose to believe Him and believe his word. See what God does when you love him and love your brothers and sisters in Christ. See what God does when you obey the voice of his Holy Spirit and do the simple good works he has prepared for you. In the next part of this message we will see what God did when Jonah did finally obey.

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walk with Christ. Contact us with
any questions you may have.**

"IF ANYONE THIRST, LET THEM COME
TO ME AND DRINK" - JESUS (JOHN 7:37)