

**Gone Fishing**  
**Week 1**  
**Jonah - Chapter 1**  
**“An Unprecedented Journey”**

**Introduction**

**Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is one God Who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.** **Romans 3:29-31**

Just recently, Sandi and I took an extended vacation/hunting trip to Canada. We planned and saved for the trip for nearly three years. We were anticipating a restful getaway to relieve the stresses of our hectic schedules and respective work loads. Everyone needs a break now and again, and we were certainly looking forward to ours. As the day of our departure grew close, I began to feel what I can only describe as a sense of dread. I actually considered cancelling the whole trip, even though we would forfeit our deposit, as well as the monies already prepaid for travel.

Something about the whole thing just felt “off” to me. Not sure how else to explain it. But I chalked it up as nerves, and we went on our way. The trip was to consist of a three day drive to New Brunswick Canada, followed by a six hour ride on the ferry to Newfoundland, and then another four to five hour drive to the place where we would be flown in by float plane to the hunting camp. Sounds like quite the adventure does it not? Well, in reality it turned into quite the disaster.

The first hiccup (if you will) came when our ferry passage was delayed for three days due to high winds and weather, forcing us to pay for three extra nights in our hotel in North Sydney, Nova Scotia. And by the way, nothing is cheap in that part of the world. Then, on the drive to the hunting camp, the GPS got us lost, and when we finally arrived at the hunting camp, we were informed that bad weather conditions had made the hunting nearly impossible. So, in the end, we were gone for three weeks, and really had nothing to show for our endeavors except for a serious case of frustration and exhaustion. Other than that, it was a great trip! Wish I would have listened to the warnings that were in my head.

I say all that not to have you commiserate with me, but rather, as a segue into our sermon series from the book of Jonah. He too took a disastrous trip that could have easily been avoided had he simply obeyed The LORD’S command. Many in this world, and even in the church, often feel that there are no real consequences for sin. They seek to do whatever suits them, either not believing in God at all, or in the case of “Believers”, not having a genuine fear of The LORD. I blame the televangelists of this world for the latter. They have preached for so long now that God simply wants to follow us around and make us happy, rather than teaching the Biblical truth that Christ has called us to take up our cross and follow Him!

Just listen to what God had to say about our rebellious ways, when Saul decided to do what he thought was best, as opposed to obeying the commands of God:

**Then Samuel said: Does The LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying The LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of Rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft) and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry...** **1 Samuel 15:22-23a**  
(clarification added)

Far too many these days have replaced the reverent fear of The LORD with the false assumption that God loves us too much to ever raise His hand against us. And that, my friends, is not only a false assumption, but a dangerous one. We are commanded to obey, and God will most certainly punish those who are His for our disobedience. Let us ever be mindful of this fact:

**As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.** **Rev. 3:19**

God's people cannot assume that He will do nothing when we disobey. This is a lesson for us all. A lesson that a certain prophet from Israel named Jonah would learn the hard way. The Scriptures tell us that **"The fear of The LORD is the beginning of wisdom... (Proverbs 9:10a)"**. And today we will learn a lesson from one who forgot how to fear. In Jonah Chapter One, we see *The Command Disobeyed*, followed by *The Calm Delusion* and finally, *The Collateral Damage*. Please allow me to explain.

### **The Command Disobeyed (vs. 1-3)**

**The word of The LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before Me." Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from The LORD'S presence. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from The LORD'S presence.** **Jonah 1:1-3**

First things first. The story of Jonah is not an allegory invented about some made up person. Jonah was real, and the events that are described in this book really happened. How do I know this? Because the books of *Kings* and *Chronicles* were written as official historical records of ancient Israel, and the book of *2nd Kings* speaks of the prophet Jonah.

**In the fifteenth year of Judah's king Amaziah son of Joash, Jeroboam son of Jehoash became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. He did what was evil in The LORD'S sight. He did not turn away from all the sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had caused Israel to commit. He restored Israel's border from Lebohamath as far as the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of The LORD, The God of Israel, had spoken through His servant, the prophet Jonah son of Amittai from Gathhepher.** **2 Kings 14:23-25**

So, here we see a historical account of the prophet Jonah, which proves he was indeed a real person.

The second thing that liberal critics of Scripture will argue is that Jonah was never really swallowed up by a fish, and the story is in fact made up. But if that is the case then Christ Himself was unaware of it. For He said that Jonah was a foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection.

**"...For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Ninevah, so also The Son of Man will be to this generation."** **Luke 11:30**

And

**Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher we want to see a sign from You." He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so The Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.** **Matthew 12:38-40**

So let's be clear here, not only was Jonah named in the historical records of Israel, but also Jesus knew that he was indeed swallowed up by a great fish for his disobedience. So let's put the whole "allegorical argument" for the book of *Jonah* to rest here and now. Shall we?

The next thing we need to discuss is the unprecedented nature of God's command to Jonah. First of all, God had never once asked one of His prophets to carry a message of repentance to a foreign land. Israel was placed in the middle of the ancient world, and all the surrounding nations were fully aware of her allegiance to the One True God. Any proselytizing to be done would be from outsiders, who would be drawn to Israel to seek Israel's God. So when God asked Jonah to take His message to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital city, nothing like that had ever been done before. So, more than likely, to Jonah's mind, this seemed to be an unreasonable request.

God has the sovereign right to ask His people to do the unprecedented! And although Jonah may not have liked the command, he had no excuse for his disobedience. I think a lot of Christians today, truly think that God has no right to inconvenience them. I have no idea where this twisted theology comes

from, but rest assured, Christ has commanded us to take up our cross and not the rocking chair. And most of the time, what God asks of us is neither easy, nor comfortable. That is why it requires faith to obey!

Another reason that Jonah refused to go to the Ninevites is because of the Assyrian's brutal treatment of Israel. Assyria was the dominate world power in Jonah's day, and they were well known for their cruelty to all who were subject to them. Their raiding parties often made forays into Israel, slaughtering the men and children and carrying off their women to be abused by the troops. It is quite possible, therefore, that Jonah had even lost family members to Assyrian invaders. Whatever the reason, he despised them and had no desire to see them spared by a loving God. But **God so loves "the world"**, and His desire is for sinners to come to repentance (**2 Peter 3:9**). Jonah's own personal prejudice blinded him to the fact that only God has the sovereign right to save whomever He choses. We are to leave the matters of wrath and vengeance to Him (**Romans 12:19**). For who knows, my enemy today, may well be my brother or sister in Christ tomorrow! Therefore, we are called to love our enemies, rather than despise them.

So, because of his hatred and prejudice toward the people of Nineveh, Jonah decided not just to refuse to go, but he actually went in the opposite direction. Rather than traveling *east* toward Nineveh (located in modern day Mosul Iraq), he ran the other way. He got on a ship to go *west* to Tarshish, which was located on the coast of modern day Spain! You have to give him credit for one thing, when he decided to disobey, he didn't do it halfway! No, Jonah went all in. And for a time, I suppose, he thought he had gotten away with it. But as the saying goes, "man plans, and God laughs."

### **The Calm Delusion (vs. 4-5)**

**But The LORD threw a great wind onto the sea, and such a great storm arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break apart. The Sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his god. They threw the ship's cargo into the sea to lighten the load. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down to the lowest part of the vessel and had stretched out and fallen into a deep sleep. Jonah 1:4-5**

There are myriads upon myriads of misconceptions throughout Christendom. One of the more prevalent being the thought that if everything goes smoothly, then it is because God opened all the doors for us. You know what I'm talking about. How many times have you heard someone say something to the effect, "You know, everything just fell into place in this venture. God just worked it all out smoothly. He opened all the doors. That's how we just *knew* this was His will."

Can someone please explain to me how if everything going smoothly is the ultimate proof that it is God's will, then how is it that Joseph and Mary couldn't get a room in Bethlehem and Jonah had no problems whatsoever getting a last minute ticket on a ship to Tarshish! Let me just be honest here, in my own personal experience, everything that God ever commanded me to do was usually met with resistance and no small degree of personal sacrifice.

I'm sure that Jonah must have thought it was all working out for him. I can imagine him standing in line at the ticket counter and hearing the ticket agent tell him, "You're in luck today my friend, not only do we have one spot left on the ship, but it's for an interior room below deck where you can get a peaceful night's sleep away from all the noise of the wind and waves. The weather in Tarshish is perfect this time of year and you're in for a real pleasurable vacation! Bon voyage!"

Jonah boarded the ship effortlessly and went down into the bowels of the vessel to get some rest. How content he must have been to be headed in the opposite direction of those ruthless pagans of Nineveh. He probably even offered up a few shallow prayers for God's forgiveness along with a request that those pagan Ninevites get exactly what they deserved! And then he drifted off to sleep, unaware of the coming danger.

God sent a storm so powerful that the boat was rocked to its core, and yet Jonah slept the sleep of the delusional, who believe that God will just forget about their disobedience. After all, He's so busy with so many things, surely I can get away with this one little act of defiance? As Jonah slept, the pagan sailors on deck were praying to every god they could think of, but unfortunately for them, there is only one God Who both hears and answers prayer. And they knew nothing of Him.

The sailors, in a desperate attempt to save this ship and their lives, began to throw valuable cargo into the sea. Isn't it amazing how we do everything that we can to amass fortunes for ourselves, but when weighed against the value of life, they are to be cast aside as worthless? I've never one time visited someone on their death bed who was concerned about collecting more treasure. This is why it is so important for us to have our eternity settled and the temporal recognized for what it is. Material possessions are fleeting at best. It is in the eternal that we are wise to invest.

***Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21***

While the delusional Jonah was sleeping soundly, the men on deck were in the process of re-evaluating their priorities!

### **The Collateral Damage (vs. 6-17)**

***The captain approached him and said, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up! Call to your God. Maybe this God will consider us, and we won't perish."***

***"Come on!" the sailors said to each other. "Let's cast lots. Then we'll know who is to blame for this trouble we're in." So they cast lots, and the lot singled out Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us who is to blame for this trouble we're in. What is your business, and where are you from? What is your country, and what people are you from?"***

***He answered them, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of the heavens, Who made the sea and the dry land."***

***Then the men were seized by a great fear and said to him, "What have you done?" The men knew he was fleeing from the Lord's presence because he had told them. So they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down for us?" For the sea was getting worse and worse.***

***He answered them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you, for I know that I'm to blame for this great storm that is against you." Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they couldn't because the sea was raging against them more and more.***

***So they called out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, don't let us perish because of this man's life, and don't charge us with innocent blood! For you, Lord, have done just as you pleased." Then they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. The men were seized by great fear of the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.***

***The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1:6-17***

Yet another misconception in Christendom is in regards to sin. We mistakenly believe that *our* sins, only have an impact upon *us*. Sadly, this is never the case. Our sins have a profound impact upon those around us as well. No man is an island, and when we bring consequences down upon our own heads, rest assured that others are impacted by them as well. Jonah's rebellion placed his entire ship in danger. His sin, most definitely had brought catastrophic reverberations upon the passengers and crew of the ship bound for Tarshish. They unwittingly became the collateral damage of his actions.

The captain of the ship must have been astonished to find Jonah asleep in his bunk as the ship rolled upon the waves. These sailors knew the sea, which means they were fully aware that this was no ordinary storm. Years of experience had taught them to read the signs in the sky, so they would not have set sail if the conditions were not favorable. No, this was something different entirely. This felt like wrath.

Someone was being punished for something. And the crew was determined to find out who. As a man I once knew used to say, "I don't mind *you* getting what's coming to you, but I certainly don't want *me* to get what's coming to *you!*" (Not exactly a Christian sentiment, but you get the point).

The sailors began to question the passengers, but no one was exactly forthcoming, so they began to cast lots, a form of discerning direction in those days by tossing marked pebbles on the ground in order to obtain a "yes or no" answer. When the affirmative lot fell upon Jonah, he had some explaining to do! He confessed that He was a Hebrew, who worshipped (the actual word he used was *yare*, in Hebrew meaning *fear*). The word is used repeatedly in this passage, and a careful scrutiny will reveal that the sailors feared The LORD far more than Jonah did. For if he had truly feared God, he wouldn't have been on that ship in the first place!

I am terrified these days that within the church proper, there is nowhere near the level of fear of God that there needs to be. We have become so enamored with the messages of God's love, mercy, and grace that we have forgotten to revere Him as we should. He isn't "The Man upstairs", He's not our "buddy in the sky". He is Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Most Holy God. And He is The *One* we ought to fear enough to obey. Period. If you do not fear what He can do to you, my friends, then take a look around you and start to consider just how your actions could become trouble for those you care about.

When Ol' Jonah finally came clean, the response from the Sailors was, "What have you done?" How convicting this must have been for the prophet, for in that moment he had lost all credibility! When a child of God commits some grievous sin, the pagans of this world will say, "Why did you do that? I thought you were a Christian!" And in that moment, we have lost our testimony. What a sad thing it is to lose our effectiveness for God in this world, because we value our own selfish desires above our allegiance to the God Who saved us.

I have searched and searched the recesses of my mind to try and comprehend what Jonah did next. He beseeched the sailors to throw him overboard. Now, I am convinced that Jonah would have rather died himself than to preach to the lost souls of Nineveh. However, why did he care what happened to this ship full of pagans? What caused him to be concerned for their safety? If he had not have cared about their lives, then he would have allowed them all to perish with him, but he chose to give his own life for their salvation.

A couple of things are in view here. First, this is yet another sign of the Messiah that would come and give up His own life for the rescue of others. And second, I believe that Jonah did this because he had the opportunity to spend some time with these men. To look them in the eye, as it were. Do you want to know how to overcome you own personal prejudices? Spend some time with those whom you have decided **not** to love!

I once had a friend ask me if I was for capital punishment. Being my conservative self, I answered in the affirmative. And he told me that he was as well, that is until he sat on the jury in a death penalty case. He went on to speak to the difficulty of looking that convicted murderer in the eye and condemning him to death. He said, "I just couldn't do it." For you see, it is far easier for us to condemn someone from a distance, than to do it face to face. Jonah didn't have the heart to see these pagan sailors die. So he offered his life to save them. It is the only Christ-like thing that he has done so far in this story.

As soon as the old prophet was thrown into the sea, the storm ceased. And the power of God caused a revival meeting upon that battered old ship! Pagan men began praying and making vows to the One True God. For you see, God can save whomever He chooses, by whatever means He chooses. That storm was a disaster for Jonah, but it became mighty, saving grace for some pagan sinners lost at sea.

*The Bible* tells us that "God prepared" or "appointed", depending upon the translation, a great fish to come and swallow His prophet. And He was given three days in the belly of the fish to reorder his priorities! Oh the prayers he must have prayed in that dark and slimy place. The same God Who raised Christ from the grave, commanded that old fish to spit out a living Jonah onto dry ground. And that rebellious prophet came out cold, wet, and transformed... ready to preach! As a famous pastor once said, "God said *go*. Jonah said *no!* And God said *Oh?*"

Truth!!!