

Devotional
“Jonah and God’s Mercy”
Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10

Monday: “Flee” - Jonah 1: 1-3

We aren’t quite told how the call of God came to Jonah. Perhaps it was a gentle whisper, a dream, a vision, an audible voice, or maybe an inner leading. But Jonah knows that it is the unmistakably the voice and call of God because what it was telling him to do was quite unwelcome. Not anything that he would pick for himself.

The call was to go at once to the great city of Nianevah that had been sinning in the face of God and cry out against it. Essentially Jonah was being told to go to a city where he would not be welcomed and preach a message that no one would want to hear.

Jonah didn’t argue with God’s call. He didn’t try to negotiate. In fact, he didn’t verbally respond at all. But his actions spoke loud and clear what he felt. He fled. The complete opposite direction.

Think of a time that you fled from God. What happened?

Prayer: Gracious God, we confess that there are many times in our life when we have fled from you. When we have tried to out run your call and your presence. Forgive us, O Lord. Keep speaking to our hearts and calling us back to you. Amen.

Tuesday: “Great Wind” - Jonah 1: 4-10

Jonah knew that he couldn’t really flee from God. In fact, when the crew of the ship asked him who his God was, Jonah claimed that his God was over the sea and the dry land. Where could Jonah really go? Where can we really go?

Then the crew of the ship do something interesting. They go through questions, and casting lots (which was essentially be like playing a game or spinning a wheel to determine the will of God) and finally determine that Jonah is the cause behind the storm. Jonah’s God is mad at him. They knew that Jonah was fleeing from God because he told them. They just didn’t really grasp what that means.

If we search hard enough we will find people to go along with our disobedience. People that will tell us that its okay to run from unpleasant situations, or back us up when we say that we aren’t quite sure if this is the call of God for us, so we will just wait it out. Or ignore it. It’s not hard to find people who will be complicit with our sin. People who will harbor us from the will of God or help us run the opposite direction. But that doesn’t make it right. And it doesn’t mean that the storms won’t come.

How did the storm play a part in Jonah’s story?

Prayer: Lord, we know that the truth is that we cannot outrun you, even if others try to harbor us. Break our cycles of disobedience we pray. Amen.

Wednesday: “Pick Me Up” - Jonah 1: 11-17

The crew tried everything they could think of before giving in and throwing Jonah overboard, treating him like a piece of cargo that had already been discarded instead of the

prophet of God he was. But then something happens. The storm stops. And the crew falls before Jonah's God making sacrifices and vows. These men who just a few verses before were crying out to their own God came to see the power of the God Jonah worshiped. Even Jonah's disobedience was used to give God glory. This is not to say that we should run from God so that God will be glorified. Rather its pointing out that God will be glorified, and we have the choice to be part of that or not. Do we want our sin to point to God or our trust and obedience?

At the end of the day, I think we understand Jonah because his fear resonates with us. The fear of the call. The fear of the unknown. So we choose to run away, instead of following God into freedom. We flee instead of listening to God.

I don't think I've ever heard a call story where the person being called by God responded willingly the first time. But as the story of Jonah show us, God will not be ignored. God is relentless in pursuing us. And God just won't let us shrink away from the call that was specifically designed for us.

We like to kid ourselves into thinking that if we don't respond to the call of God then someone else will just do it for us. But its your call. No one can do it the same way you can because God made it for you. God wants you. If Jonah didn't go, how would the Ninevites get the message? The only way to deliver it was through another person. And God selected Jonah. But Jonah let fear trump calling.

What is God's call upon your life?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you that you are so gracious and good to us that you can redeem even the worst of situations for your honor and glory. Redeem us and our lives for the sake of your Kingdom we pray. Amen.

Thursday: "Again" - Jonah 3: 1-5

Jonah finds himself spit up on the dry land. Just think of what relief he must have felt! God heard his prayer. God redeemed him. Then comes the call of God to Jonah a second time. Go to Nineveh and preach the message I will give you. Jonah must have been in shock, feeling like he was back at square one with the same choice to make - whether to obey the call or run from God.

Its a hard message to swallow. God doesn't give up on God's mission. And God doesn't give up on us. When we repent, it does not mean that we get to abandon God's original plan or that we have a way out of what we didn't want to do in the first place. Our God is persistent, which Jonah learned, and we will constantly have to choose whether we will be obedient or disobedient. Those are the only two choices.

This time Jonah is obedient. He heads out to the great city, and once he was about a day past its gates, nearing the city center, he cried out "Forty more days and the city will be overthrown." Jonah probably didn't believe that the people who heard the message would care, or could or would repent, so he didn't even include it as part of his message. Prophets almost always invite people to repent, but instead Jonah continued with his vague message - not saying who would overthrow the city or how they would do it. He just kept repeating "Forty more days and the city will be overthrown."

But something strange happened. As nebulas as Jonah's message was, it actually caused the people to repent! To turn from their wicked ways and mourn what they had done. The message was enough to make people focus on God, not on the missing pieces of information. The people believed God. They fasted and lamented.

How has living into your call transformed your life and the lives of others?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you that you do not give up on us as your call comes again and again. Continue to speak to us, O Lord. Continue to use us. Raise us up to be your obedient people. Amen.

Friday: “Relent” - Jonah 3: 6-10

Jonah traveled forth with the message of God and the fruit was greater than he could have ever imagined! An entire city believed in God and changed their ways. Jonah’s message and the people’s reaction which led to God’s mercy is a reminder that no one is beyond hope. No place is beyond God’s grace and mercy.

But Jonah must have been startled by what took place. This is not what he expected. He didn’t even have enough faith and hope to tell the people to repent in the first place. Yet here is the King before him commanding his people to change their ways. People and animals wearing sack cloth and ashes, fasting from food and water. Jonah didn’t believe that his obedience could possibly lead to any fruit. He didn’t trust the God who had just rescued him when his cries of repentance were heard.

Perhaps that is the whole crux of the third chapter of the book of Jonah. We like it when our lives are spared, but not others. We want and expect God to change God’s mind about us and give us a second chance, but not others. We constantly compare ourselves to others thinking that we aren’t as bad or our sins are more forgivable. We ultimately become the judge of others, taking over God’s job, deciding who is even good enough to hear the message of repentance.

What would you think at this point in the story if you were Jonah? Would you be excited for the Ninevites? Disappointed that they actually repented? Most of us would say that we want those that we love to repent and turn to God. And we pray that they come to know the love of Christ. But do we pray the same things for our enemies? Do we hope that God spares them or gives them a second chance? Do we as willingly follow the call of God when it places us in contact with those we dislike or do we run the other direction? Do we willingly follow God, but only on our terms?

What is the fruit that comes from obedience?

Prayer: Lord, let us have hearts filled with your compassion and love, we pray. Let our obedience bear much fruit for you. Amen.