

Jonah 1B

- Welcome back to our second week in the story of Jonah, a man who refused to obey God's call
 - And when we last saw our hero, he was sound asleep in the steerage of a Phoenician sailing vessel
 - All the while being tossed in a storm so violent, that the captain and crew were certain they would die without supernatural intervention
 - The storm was a result of God's determination to bring Jonah to Nineveh as He had ordered
 - But Jonah was determined to thwart God's plan, or at the very least not participate in it
 - And as we ended on verse 6, we heard the pagan ship captain rather sarcastically ordering Jonah to pray to his God for relief
 - It became our best picture yet into Jonah's heart
 - A selfish man concerned only with himself, uncaring for the fate of these sailors caught up in his spat with God
 - And moreover, as Jonah flees from God we are reminded that it's hatred for the Ninevites in the first place that led him to disobey God
- As we prepare to return to the text tonight, it's worth mentioning that Jonah probably didn't jump up and begin to pray as the captain requested
 - After all, what would Jonah say to God?
 - Jonah knew why there was a storm and he knew precisely how to stop it
 - What kind of prayer from Jonah would God hear except "forgive me, I'll go to Nineveh"?
 - There is a time for prayer, and then there is a time to get off your knees and do what God has told us to do
 - So as Jonah continues to ignore the crew's plea for help, we see them take matters into their own hands

[Jonah 1:7](#) Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

[Jonah 1:8](#) Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

[Jonah 1:9](#) He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

[Jonah 1:10](#) Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

- The crew decides that the god of the seas must be angry at someone on the boat
 - So they decide to determine who that person must be
 - They throw lots (dice)
 - Throwing lots to learn who was to blame
 - And the belief was that the god the men worshipped would intervene supernaturally to produce a certain result on the dice
 - And by that result, the men could know the answer to a question
 - So before the dice were thrown, the men would arrange the question so that the throw on the dice could make a sensible answer
 - This was a practice common among pagans, but it was also a technique that God permitted with the camp of Israel

[Prov. 16:33](#) The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the LORD.

- God gave the practice to the nation of Israel as part of the Day of Atonement
 - In Leviticus 16 He told the priests to cast lots to determine which goat was set free as the scapegoat and which one was sacrificed on the altar
 - Signifying that God is the one to choose what sacrifice will satisfy Him
- In 1 Samuel, Saul cast lots to determine whose sin was responsible for God's silence before a battle against the Phillistines

- In the case of Lev. and 1 Sam., these men were truly seeking God's revelation through the dice
 - But a pagan culture turned to the dice more as superstition or merely as chance
 - As when the Roman soldiers cast lots over Jesus' clothing
- Here I believe the sense is that these men sought divine revelation, even though they didn't know the true God
 - And the lots fell on Jonah
 - Though the text doesn't say this, I think it's clear that they fell this way as a consequence of God's intervention to ensure the guilty party was correctly identified
 - It's as if God is standing nearby pointing at Jonah
 - As if they couldn't figure that out on their own
 - Jonah's already a trouble-maker
- When the lot falls to Jonah, they begin to interrogate him
 - They ask a series of questions
 - Amidst the storm, the roaring wind, tossed, soaked
 - Before looking at the questions, did you notice something else about these men that distinguish them from Jonah?
 - We already talked about how Jonah – the man who knew the true living God – was unwilling to pray
 - But a bunch of pagan men who didn't know God were willing to pray
 - The one who had received God's compassion and mercy was unwilling to show any himself
 - And now we see the contrast continue
 - After these ungodly men sought divine instruction and received it, they heeded it
 - The lots said Jonah was to blame, and they immediately began to act on what had been revealed

- In contrast to Jonah who, when he received God's revelation, chose to disregard what he was told and fled from God's presence
 - The contrast between what the prophet of God did and what these heathens do will continue to build as we move through the rest of this chapter
- They ask on whose account has this calamity (or evil) struck us?
 - Their first assumption is that Jonah is the recipient of a curse sent against him by some enemy
 - In other words, they ask Jonah who do you know who would do something like this against you?
 - Who did you upset?
 - They follow that question with what do you do? Where are you from? What people are you from?
 - Tell us about you so we can begin to solve this puzzle and correct our circumstances
 - After battling this storm helplessly for so long, these men must be excited over a glimmer of hope presented by the lots
 - Maybe they have an answer here, something they can use to appease the gods or break the spell
- We don't know whether Jonah gave any answer to the earlier questions, but he finally answers the last question
 - I am a Hebrew
 - This part of his answer was probably not very newsworthy to these sailors
 - The picked Jonah up in Joppa, which was a Jewish seaport
 - So Jonah's origins were hardly a surprise
 - But his next statement probably got their attention
 - He said I fear the God that controls the sea and dry land

- The word in the Hebrew that Jonah uses here is *yare*, which is translated fear
 - It is used to mean both afraid and reverence
 - So it's likely that what these men thought Jonah said, was that he was afraid of his God – the one that controlled the sea and land
 - So these men, we're told, became extremely afraid
 - The word there is *yirah*
 - Extreme fear or reverence
 - More irony
 - Here's the prophet of God, who knows God and knows His power, saying calmly that He "fears" the God of the sea, while doing his best to ignore the storm
 - Meanwhile, pagan men who don't know this God personally show great fear of him and concern
 - Who really fears God? Who is truly prepared to show Him due reverence and respect?
- It probably worried these men all the more that this was the God of the land and sea
 - The god the Phoenecian culture worshipped was Baal, a pagan god of the sky
 - So when they hear that Jonah worshipped the god of sea and land, it was a real breakthrough for these men
 - They finally could make sense of their circumstances
 - On the other hand, they now knew the real reason to fear – the god of the sea was angry with one of their passengers
 - So naturally, they ask Jonah the question that we have all been thinking since verse 2
 - Jonah, how could you do this?
- Again, here's irony
 - What Jonah had refused to accept, these men understood immediately

- If you make the God of the sea angry, don't try to escape from him by getting in a boat and heading out to sea
- It's even worse than they imagine, of course, because what they didn't know was that Jonah's God is the God of everything and everywhere
 - Therefore, there was nowhere Jonah could run. Period
- How ironic that the man who knew God far better than these pagan Phoenecians couldn't appreciate the futility of his actions as well as they could

[Jonah 1:11](#) So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?" – for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

[Jonah 1:12](#) 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 on account of me this great storm has come upon you."

[Jonah 1:13](#) However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.

- At the point that these men finally discover the source of the trouble, they realize they have a different problem
 - If the god of the sea is angry at Jonah, what can they do to solve the problem
 - If the problem had simply been that Jonah had failed in some kind of prayer or ritual, then he could have simply performed the act now and placated the angry god
 - Or he could have made a sacrifice or prayer
 - But Jonah's problem was he was running away from a god who was pursuing Jonah
 - So they ask Jonah – what do we do now to appease your angry god and calm the seas?
 - In response to their question, Jonah makes a suggestion that sounds very self-sacrificial, very selfless
 - He says throw me overboard and the seas will calm, because God wants me
 - Jonah explains his answer by admitting that the storm has come upon them because of his disobedience

- While it's nice to see Jonah finally own up to his responsibility for the ship's predicament
 - But don't be fooled
 - Jonah isn't having a change of heart here
 - Jonah didn't say the obvious answer
 - The obvious answer was take me back to Joppa
 - Surely that answer would have calmed the storm
 - God wouldn't have impeded their travel back to Joppa if Jonah was intent on returning so as to obey God
 - That would have certainly brought an end to the storm
 - No, Jonah is still as obstinate as he's been from the beginning
 - He would rather die than see the Ninevites receive God's mercy
 - This confirms what we said last week, that Jonah could sleep in the ship because he wasn't bothered by God's efforts to swamp the ship
 - Death was an acceptable outcome to Jonah
 - Jonah's answer also confirms what we've suspected all along...Jonah has nothing but callous disregard for the welfare of these men
 - He knew what was going on, but up till now he's done nothing to stop it, nothing to help, not even willing to inform the men of what he knows
 - He's shown absolutely no love nor respect for these men
- Can it be that someone who knows the God of love, the God of mercy and grace, could stray so far from mercy, grace and love in his own life?
 - I'm certainly willing to answer that question about Jonah, but please don't make me answer for myself?
 - Can I get an Amen?
 - Isn't the power of God's word that we might look upon a man like Jonah as we see him at his worst

- And perhaps see something of ourselves reflected in his life?
- And as a result, we experience a little conviction?
- Because if Jonah is different from us, it's only a matter of degree
 - We may never have taken such dramatic steps as Jonah to avoid showing mercy and forgiveness to God's enemies
 - But Jonah's selfishness and lack of compassion for unbelievers are probably mirrored in our own lives more than we even realize, at least on some days
 - The story of Jonah should be a reminder to us that before we know it, we can become smug and self-centered in our faith
 - And without patience for those who yet remain outside God's grace
- But if Jonah is self-centered, the crew is a picture of mercy
 - Because look at how they respond to Jonah's suggestion
 - They decide that Jonah's answer is bizarre
 - And they immediately recognize that the obvious solution is to take this loser back to port and leave him to his angry God
 - But the storm won't allow them to proceed
 - Isn't this fascinating?
 - The prophet of God, who knows the love and mercy of God, stands resolved to commit suicide rather than obey
 - While a crew of pagan worshippers are so afraid and respectful of this unknown god that they are trying desperately to obey His wishes
 - The prophet of God caring nothing for the welfare of these sailors nor for the welfare of an entire city
 - While heathens who live according to their sinful hearts would rather embark on a difficult and dangerous trip back to Joppa before taking responsibility for the death of this troublemaker

- Again, irony everywhere you look in this story
- And then in verse 13, a very curious detail
 - As they make every effort to bring Jonah back, the storm gets worse
 - This seems strange doesn't it?
 - Wouldn't we expect that as the men make an effort to return that God would make the storm subside, not increase?
 - Isn't the purpose of the storm to bring Jonah back?
- Consider something I mentioned last week
 - I asked the question why was God so intent on using Jonah to deliver His message rather than just finding someone else
 - And the answer I gave was that the calling of God is irrevocable
 - But that was only half the answer
 - The other half of the answer is that God was at least as interested in changing Jonah as He was in changing the city of Nineveh
- This is God's pattern throughout scripture
 - We read about God at work but overlook that God's primary purpose is often different than we assume
 - In this case, God desires to bring repentance to Nineveh, yes
 - But even more importantly, God wants to bring repentance to Jonah
 - God is working on Jonah's heart every bit as much as He is on the Ninevites' hearts
 - To help explain how God does a work in us through His call on our lives, I've used an analogy of a father working with his son
- So here we see God intent on working in Jonah's life by how He calls Jonah alongside Him to perform a work in Nineveh
 - And if God were to allow these men to return to Joppa with Jonah on board, then no work could have been accomplished in Jonah's heart

- Jonah would have arrived in Joppa
- And maybe Jonah would have been forced to reach Nineveh in some other way
- And perhaps he would have been forced to declare what God wanted declared
 - But Jonah's heart would have remained unchanged through it all
 - And what's more, those like Jonah in the nation of Israel and in the church today would have lacked the opportunity to learn from this stubborn prophet
- So God opposes the sailors' efforts to reach Joppa, leaving everything at an impasse
 - The storm threatening their lives
 - An angry God unwilling to accept the sailors' return as long as Jonah's heart remained disobedient
 - And a stubborn prophet who would rather face death than obey God for the sake of a city of Gentiles
 - And so they did the only thing they could do

Jonah 1:14 Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased."

Jonah 1:15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

Jonah 1:16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

- These men lift their voices to a God they've never worshipped or even heard of before, and they ask Him for mercy and forgiveness
 - Because they recognize they have no option but to give in to Jonah's request
 - And they worry about the reaction of this powerful God to their decision to put innocent blood to death
 - They count Jonah as innocent simply because Jonah hadn't committed any offense for which men are normally condemned to death by other men

- Jonah was guilty of no crime as far as they knew
- Maybe we should ask at this point why Jonah didn't just jump overboard himself?
 - If he knew that was the answer and preferred death to obedience, then why not commit suicide?
 - Probably the easiest answer was he lacked the courage
 - In some ways, it takes more courage to jump overboard yourself than to allow others to do it for you
 - And even in this decision, he shows a lack of compassion for these men
 - These men are so troubled by the prospect of tossing an innocent man to his death, that they say this prayer in advance of the act
 - Which itself reflects a true fear of the living God that they are concerned about His view of their actions
 - But it also illustrates once again how selfish Jonah truly was and how little regard he had for these men
 - [Story of friend in car...]
- So the men pick up Jonah, throw him into the sea and the sea stops raging
 - This scene reminds me so much of the calming of the Galilee by Jesus in the boat with the disciples
 - One word from Jesus and the wind obeys
 - Likewise, the moment Jonah drops in the sea, and the sea stops raging
 - Such a striking display of God's power and sovereignty over His creation
 - One scholar wrote "The book of Jonah contains within its few pages one of the greatest concentrations of the supernatural in the Bible. Yet it is significant that the majority of them are based upon natural phenomena."
 - Though we sit here trying to imagine it, what would it have been like for these men to witness it?

- Well the text gives us a glimpse into what it did
 - The men see the result of throwing Jonah into the sea and they are struck by fear of the Lord again
 - They offer a sacrifice to this God and make vows
- We can't be sure what happened in these men's hearts
 - But it's certainly possible – and given the focus of the narrative I think it's likely – that these pagan men came to a faith in the living God
 - Their vows being vows to put aside other gods in order to follow the God of Jonah
 - That outcome certainly fits the overall theme of the book
- And then one of the most famous and loaded verses in all the Bible

Jonah 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

- Chapter 1 ends with this amazing, incredible, unbelievable and downright weird turn of events
 - Up to this point, if you didn't know where the story was going, you could go along with all that has happened
 - The story has a certain sense to it that fits
 - Man hears from God
 - Man disobeys God
 - God gets angry and strikes man
 - And then just as the story climaxes, Man is swallowed by a large fish only to remain alive for three days and nights
 - I can't help but imagine a Monty Python cartoon skit
 - It seems like the entire story just took a turn from the sublime to the ridiculous
- And all by itself, this verse raises so many questions, and for some, so many doubts

- We'll explore some of those questions briefly tonight, but we're going to save most of our discussion for next week
 - First, what kind of fish can swallow a man?
 - Is this a natural event or a purely supernatural animal created specially for Jonah?
- Well, let's start with the text
 - The words for great fish in Hebrew are *gadol dag*
 - Which means big fish
 - It's used 18 times in the Bible and it always means fish
 - There is no Hebrew word for whale used in the Bible
 - And this is not the same word as used for sea monsters or dragons as used in Job
- So it's probably just being used here in the generic sense of a swimming sea creature
 - So it could be a shark or a whale or even some kind of extinct sea creature
 - There are examples of sharks and whales swallowing men whole
 - Though it's probably not possible for a man to exist alive in the fish for days on end apart from God's supernatural intervention
- So as we said earlier, God is working throughout this book in supernatural ways, yet He's largely employing natural phenomenon to accomplish His work
 - And the fish is the natural instrument to capture and preserve Jonah if the alternative is allowing him to drown in the ocean
 - Plus the belly of a fish is also a great place to keep Jonah if you are trying to make a point about the consequences of disobedience

- So, the fish is an unidentified species of sea creature large enough to swallow a prophet whole, and suitable to God's purpose of applying a little pressure to Jonah
 - Jonah jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire
 - When Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, He made a halibut decision
 - Now he must flounder in the belly of this fish, carping over his circumstances, without a sole nearby to comfort him
 - Without a perch to rest upon in a space tighter than a drum
 - Just guppy to be alive
 - Sorry...I just got carried away there for minnow