

Lent 2020 – A Whale of a Fish Story  
Our relationship to God’s Word - Jonah 1:1-4

Introduction: Jonah’s story sets itself apart. Unlike any other prophet God demands Jonah’s presence in another country. Other prophets speak God’s Word to other nationalities, but none are expected to travel to take a mission trip. The story parallels both the parable of the prodigal son and our own lives on many different levels.

Too often, the story is reduced to a simple fable begging the argument, “Did Jonah really get swallowed by a whale?” Miracles are implausible by definition, so we begin from this starting line knowing that there are bigger fish to fry in the story!

Insights reveals God’s relationship beyond our communities and beyond our limited theology. God bridges nationalities through mercy and grace. Jonah will have none of that creating his own counterfeit God who seems not to play by the rules of Jonah. See Matthew 12:41 for a further exposition by Jesus. We will parallel the insight of Luke 15 *The Prodigal Son*.

Twice Jonah is commanded, first he fails and runs, the second time he succeeds and laments. Timothy Keller divides the scenes as follows:

<i>Scene 1</i>	<i>Scene 2</i>
<i>Jonah, the pagans, and the sea</i>	<i>Jonah, the pagans, and the city</i>
<i>Prodigal Son part I - Running</i>	<i>Prodigal Son part II – Returning.</i>

**Jonah and God’s Word**

1:1 God’s word comes to Jonah	3:1 God’s word comes to Jonah
1:2 The message to be conveyed	3:2 The message to be conveyed
1:3 The response of Jonah	3:3 The response of Jonah

**Jonah and God’s World**

1:4 The word of warning	3:4 The word of warning
1:5 The response of the pagans	3:5 The response of the pagans
1:6 The response of the pagan leader	3:6 The response of the pagan leader
1:7ff How the pagans’ response was ultimately better than Jonah’s	3:7ff How the pagans’ response was ultimately better than Jonah’s

**Jonah and God’s Grace**

2:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the fish	4:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the plant
---	--

<b>1</b> Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying,	This is a very typical approach for calling a prophet. 2 Kings 14:25, <i>He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gathhepher (Galilee.)</i>
---	---

<p><sup>2</sup>“Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.”</p> <p><sup>3</sup>But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.</p> <p><sup>4</sup>But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up.</p>	<p>This is the only reference to Jonah’s heritage supporting a nationalistic view.</p> <p>Nineveh is the capital of Assyria. Stories abound from many sources about the cruelty of the Assyrians. One example: soldiers would cut off legs and one arm of their enemy so they could shake their hand mockingly as he lay dying.</p> <p>In 722 BC after years of siege, Israel finally succumbed. Samaria would never regain its identity again. The lips of Jonah lamented how God could possibly offer any mercy to these wretched people. This would be construed as betrayal to his country’s interests.</p> <p>Deliberately Jonah arose and departed in the opposite direction. Tarshish is west, Nineveh east. He believed the great city would likely discount him and his message if not killing him altogether.</p> <p>Nahum prophesied destruction of Nineveh. Wasn’t that more in line with God’s work eliminating evil? Jonah doubted the goodness and wisdom, and certainly the justice of God.</p> <p>Hurled – a term associated with spears, war. If Jonah will not go to the Great city, he will experience the Great (same Hebrew word) storm. Jonah can run, but he cannot hide. Sin has a storm attached (not all storms result from sin.) We were not created to suffer tragedies (Genesis), but through the difficulties we can be transformed by God’s mercy.</p>
--	--

Final Thoughts:

We often line up with Jonah, we believe we know what good and evil entails and how justice should swiftly deal with it. God often leaves us in the dark about God’s rationale and God’s reasoning. Never did Adam and Eve discover why NOT to eat the fruit.

Romans 1-3 is worth a look explaining how we can reject God overtly performing evil deeds. The other manner is to rely on the law holding it over the heads of others and looking to God for approval concerning how good I am. Read Luke 15 and ponder the parable of the prodigal son and the dutiful son. Neither son trusts their father’s love.