

imPERFECT Examples: Jonah
A God of Second Chances
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Good morning, for those of you that don't know me. My name is Jeremy Gross and I am the Family Discipleship Director here at Palm Harbor UMC. I have been on staff here for 2 years, but this is actually the church that I have attended since I was a child. After graduating High School, I was the summer youth intern here while in college. I then moved away from the area to go to seminary and work for about a decade and feel so blessed to be a part of the church where I grew up, where my faith had been shaped and to be able to be a part of the faith journey for others here at PHUMC.

So...for the past several weeks we have been talking about imPERFECT Examples from the Bible. When I was told the sermon series I would be speaking during, I realized there were a lot of examples to choose from. It is essentially everyone in the entire Bible except for Jesus. So this morning we are going to be talking about the life of Jonah.

Now when I say we are going to talk about the book of Jonah. What is the first thing that comes to your mind? Maybe you think: whale or a great fish, or Veggie Tales, or Sunday school, or flanograph. You may be thinking that was a fairy tale story you heard as a child that you can't ask me to believe that actually occurred.

I do want to give you some facts about the historical elements we do know about Jonah the person, the people he was sent to, and the place that Jonah was sent to. First off, this isn't Narnia, but is Nineveh. This is an actual place. Joppa and Nineveh were real cities; and Tarshish was a real place. Nineveh was located in Assyria, modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq. It was the largest city in the world for some fifty years until the year 612 BC. Also, there is no reason to doubt that Jonah the son of Amittai was a real prophet. He predicted the territorial expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II as recorded in **II Kings 14:25**. Jonah was referenced in the Bible other than this book (2 Kings 14:25, Matthew 12:39-41, 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). Jonah was an actual person and Nineveh was an actual place.

But for those who don't see this book as historical...don't miss out because you can't **swallow this whale of a tale**. See what I did there. I want to give you an out. It's okay, if you believe this book is a myth...meaning the writer never actually intended anyone to think the events actually happened. Think about the book of Jonah as a "Myth with a Message." Ask yourself this: Can I make the main question not what happened or could have happened, but how the writer intended his book to be understood?

A quick overview of what brought us to the point of the book we heard for our Scripture reading.

Jonah 1:1-3 “1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.” 3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

So at the beginning of the book, the Word of the Lord comes to Jonah, and instead of doing what God has asked, he goes the opposite way. Jonah’s response wasn’t based on God’s Word, but about his feelings for Nineveh. The people of Israel were not fond of the Ninevites. Why? Because they were some pretty bad people. Take a look at how bad they were.

VeggieTales: Jonah: 1:01 Minutes

<https://youtu.be/emnU7uOpYtk>

Map Slide

So Joppa is modern day Tel Aviv (about 50-minute drive from Jerusalem). And Nineveh was located about 500 miles Northeast in northern Iraq. However, Jonah chose to get on a boat and go 2500 miles in the opposite direction toward modern-day Spain. This is essentially the ends of the earth during that time...there was not travel beyond this point. But why did he go so far away? To flee from God. This was as far as he could go to get away from where God had asked him to go.

Here is the good news...You can run from God but you cannot outrun God!

While on the ship, God sends a great storm that has these professional sailors in fear for their lives. So much so, they threw their cargo overboard. There is no point sailing without cargo because you don’t get paid. What was Jonah doing during the storm? He was asleep.

The captain woke him up and told him to call on his god. Jonah told them he was fleeing from God and that the way to calm the storm was to throw him in the sea.

What does the crew do?

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. 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.”

It seems that the pagan sailors are acting more righteous than the prophet of God. He was definitely an imPERFECT Example of how to follow the Lord.

Jonah 1:15-17; 15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

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.

The entire 2nd chapter of Jonah is a prayer of Jonah crying out to God. God hears Jonah's prayer and commands the fish to spew Jonah on dry land. If we turn from our disobedience, God will relent and give us a second chance. Here is Jonah's second chance.

Jonah 3:1-3a; 1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

So Jonah obeys the Lord and preaches the shortest sermon ever recorded.

Jonah 3:4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

This is a short, odd sermon...only 5 words in Hebrew. No mention of Nineveh's sin, no mention of how to respond, no mention of God. Compared to Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, definitely an imPERFECT Example.

Nineveh hears the word from the Lord and responds to it.

Jonah 3: 5-6; 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

The king issued a proclamation for the people to do the same.

10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Nineveh repented concerning their evil ways:

- 1) They believed in God
- 2) Fasted
- 3) Put on sackcloth

There is something that Nineveh hears in Jonah's message that they respond to and know is genuine. If they did not feel this way, they would have rejected the message and most likely killed the messenger.

So as we move into the 4th and final chapter of Jonah, we begin to see some of Jonah's motives as to why he ran from God in the first place. It turns out that Jonah did not think that the people of Nineveh deserved a second chance from God. Remember: Jonah's response wasn't based on God's Word, but about his feelings for Nineveh. The Assyrians were a horrible people who committed countless atrocities against the people of Israel. It would be like asking a family member of a Holocaust survivor to go and bring God's message of deliverance to Germany while the Nazis were still in power. He did not want to do it.

So after God relents...

Jonah 4:1-4 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." 4 The Lord said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

Jonah knew what God was going to do. v. 2 "Therefore in order to **FORESTALL** this I fled to Tarshish." Forestall...what does that mean?

fore-stall - verb

1. Prevent or obstruct (an anticipated event or action) by taking action ahead of time
2. Act in advance of (someone) in order to prevent them from doing something

Jonah did this because he did not think that the people of Nineveh deserved God's grace.

Eric Mason is Lead Pastor of Epiphany Fellowship in Philadelphia and has a small group Bible Study on the Book of Jonah on RightNow Media. He put it this way:

"And so Jonah has made a grave error in his judgement for his lack of compassion for broken and lost people. Where do we see that in our church? Where do we see that in our day? Many times we have configured in our minds who God should save and who God shouldn't save based on how comfortable I am with engaging them. And if God responded to us like we respond to other people, none of us would have been saved."

So the entire book ends with Jonah climbing a hill...waiting to see if God is going to destroy the city. And when he doesn't do it, Jonah gets angry. From there a vine grows up overnight and shades Jonah from the heat. But then when the plant dies, Jonah becomes angry again.

Jonah 4:9-11; 9 Then God said to Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “I have good reason to be angry, even to death.” 10 Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 ***Should I not have compassion on Nineveh***, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

God points out how Jonah is more concerned with the death of a plant (which he had nothing to do with cultivating) than the destruction of a city. God ends with the question: “**Jonah 4:11** Should I not have compassion on Nineveh...?” And then the book ends...with God asking this question. How does Jonah answer? The Bible doesn’t tell us.

Why? Maybe because Jonah’s response doesn’t matter. That this is a question for us as the reader to answer for ourselves. Are you okay with God loving your enemies?

Matthew 5:43-44; 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

So who is it in your life that you don’t think deserves God’s grace? Doesn’t deserve the opportunity to hear that the path they are on is heading to destruction. To hear that God is a “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity”

Maybe it is your ex-spouse, ex-business partner, the co-worker that makes it difficult to go to work because of, the family member who has hurt everyone in the family and continues to do so, the person who voted for Trump or the person who voted for Hillary, the person with different views on guns, politics, or gay rights.

Are you okay with God loving those people? Something happens when we extend grace to those who we don’t feel deserve it. Can I tell you something? We do not deserve it either. The bible says, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. We deserve death, but we get forgiveness. We deserve eternal separation from God, but we get eternal life. Christians should be the first to extend grace to those we disagree with. But Jeremy you don’t know what they did to me...you’re right.

I don’t know what they did to you, but it doesn’t matter. I want to share with you one final video about God working forgiveness in the life of a mother. A mother who is completely justified in wanting God’s judgement instead of grace.

Video of The Power to Forgive: 3:25 minutes

As we close here this morning, remember how I told you that Nineveh was located in Mosul, Iraq? I want to share with you about an article written back in April of this year about Palm Sunday.

For the first time since 2014, Christians in Northern Iraq were able to celebrate Easter without a significant fear that they would be killed. Four years ago, ISIS took control of the region around Mosul and the Nineveh plains. The militant group targeted Christianity destroying churches and the homes of Christians.

About 55,000 Christians fled the area and about 25,000 have returned.

Thousands of Iraqi Christians walked through the streets on Palm Sunday, waving palm and olive branches; praying, singing and remembering the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ. Their chorus: "King of kings and Lord of Lords. Glory! Hallelujah!"

"Today, the world can see and hear the powerful truth—Christians have returned to the Nineveh Plain."

Possibly down the same streets that Jonah walked over 2,500 years ago, Christians have returned to Nineveh. We never know the eternal impact of our obedience to what God has called us to. Even if it is obedience to bring the word of deliverance to our enemies.

Let us pray.