

The Problem of Grace: Are You Involved in God's Mission? – Jonah 1:1-16

I have to admit, I've only ever seen one of the Mission Impossible movies. The first one with Tom Cruise in it came out in 1996, when I was 15. He was just in his 8th and last movie for the franchise last year. Some of you have seen the movies, and some of you, who have been around a little longer will remember the TV series which aired from 1966-1973. If you aren't familiar with either, it's about a secret agent and nearly every episode or movie begins with the agent receiving a secret message on a tape recorder that starts this way. "Your mission, should you choose to accept it" and then the message would outline the mission and then self-destruct so no one else could hear it.

It's hard not to think of that phrase when you open the book of Jonah and read the first few verses. Jonah had a very real and dangerous mission in front of him, and he received that mission directly from the God of the universe.

In some ways Jonah's mission is unique. None of the other OT prophets were sent to a foreign nation like this. But in other ways, it's not unique at all. God's mission has always been the same since mankind fell into sin. God desires to redeem people from their sin and bring them into a relationship with Him. Israel was the center of God's mission in the OT, but there are indications all through the OT that God's goal is to redeem people from every tribe, tongue, and nation for Himself. Listen to His words in Genesis 12:1-3 to Abraham. In you and your family will all the families of the earth be blessed.

Jonah 1 directly addresses God's mission in the world, and it forces us to ask this question: Am I involved in God's Mission today? If you have been saved by the death and resurrection of Christ, you are called to participate in God's mission in the world. Jonah's story confronts my involvement and yours. And it confronts us through 3 characters in chapter 1. Here's what we will see in this chapter today: **3 Characters to Know to Participate in God's Mission in the World.**

1. Resistant People

Clearly, Jonah falls into this category. Look with me at verse 1. We don't know a lot about Jonah, but he was a prophet according to 1 Kings 14:23-25. A prophet was

called to receive God's Word and convey it to the people, so the first few verses of Jonah 1 would have been a shock. Look at verse 2. 3 commands from God for Jonah. Go to Ninevah, a great city in the Assyrian Empire, and proclaim judgment against it. Why? Verse 2 again. All sin deserves judgment, but there are groups and individuals at times that demand swift and direct judgment from God because of their deep seated wickedness and the Ninevites were one of those groups.

They were ruthless, violent, and power hungry. There are accounts of their atrocities and they include tearing off the lips and hands of their victims, skinning people alive and piling up the skulls of the defeated among other things. Yet, God directs Jonah to make the 500 mile journey over land to warn them of coming judgment. Jonah has other ideas. Look at verse 3.

Twice it says he tried to get away from the presence of the Lord. He got up, as God commanded, and then went the opposite direction. Tarshish is west of Israel and Ninevah was east. He wasn't interested in participating in God's mission. Why?

The book doesn't tell us yet and we are meant to read the book with this question unanswered until the book itself gives us the answer in chapter 4. But we can take this ambiguity and think about our own lives and engagement in God's mission.

Hardly any of us are as opposed to God's purposes in the world as Jonah. We aren't running the opposite direction necessarily. And yet, we often avoid God's mission in subtler ways. Before I mention some of these ways, let's talk about what your participation in God's mission as a church member looks like. You aren't a prophet, but you are called to be involved. After the coming of Christ, God's mission for His church is to make disciples and grow them to maturity in relationship with Him. For you to be involved in that mission means that you actively participate in the life of the church in seeing others grow and mature and that you pursue those outside of Christ with the gospel. Participate and Pursue.

And both are key components of God's mission. We can't neglect either. The second we stop being concerned about those outside of the church we have begun avoiding God's mission. The second we stop pursuing knowledge of God's Word and growth in character to look like Christ, we are avoiding God's mission.

Don't find yourself resistant like Jonah. Take the next step forward in engagement with God's purposes, whatever that might be for you. Now let's meet the second character.

2. Relentless God

I use this word relentless because I think it's an accurate portrayal of God's activity in the world to see that His purposes are fulfilled, even when His people are resistant at times. Think about how God is portrayed in this chapter. First, he commands Jonah to go to the Ninevites. Long journey. Dangerous people. God directly commands Jonah to go. He pursues those outside of His people.

But he also pursues His own people when they stray. What happens when Jonah gets on a ship going the opposite direction? Look at verse 4. God hurled. This word is used to describe a warrior throwing a spear at a target. This storm is so violent that the ship seems to be breaking apart. And the storm gets even more intense later in the story. Look at verse 11 and verse 13.

God doesn't just use the storm. He uses the unbelieving and pagan sailors to go after and confront Jonah as well. Look back to verses 5-6. The captains command "arise" is the same command God gave to Jonah in verse 2. It's incredibly ironic that this pagan captain has to tell Jonah to cry out to God. And then God forces Jonah to have to answer some questions and deal with the reason for the storm. Look at verses 7-10.

But even at this moment Jonah still won't turn to God in repentance. Instead, he continues to resist. Look at verses 11-12. The men aren't quite ready to toss him overboard just yet. They make one final push, but God won't let off the gas. Look at verses 13-15.

So, God pursues Ninevah and God relentlessly goes after His wayward prophet. But God also pursues these pagan sailors. Ultimately they are brought to some sort of faith in God through their encounter with Jonah. And they are actually our third character. Reachable Pagans that are pursued by a relentless God.

3. Reachable Pagans

Think about the irony here. There's some indication in the story that Jonah is very proud of His Jewish heritage and looks down on anyone outside of God's chosen people. This would have been typical of Israelites at this time. When the sailors ask Jonah several questions what's the first thing he says about Himself? Look at verse 9. "I am a Hebrew." Jonah's identity was wrapped up with his nationality and ethnicity. God commands Him to go to Israel's enemy and He refuses, but what does God do in the meantime? He reaches a bunch of pagan sailors through Jonah instead.

They are just doing their thing and God intervenes. Notice how their perspective changes over the course of their interaction with Jonah and with the storm. Look at verse 5. They are afraid of the storm. Notice verse 10 after Jonah identifies God as the God of both heaven and earth. He's not some local deity, whose power is confined to one nation. This is the sovereign God over all. And then, notice that they aren't praying to their own local gods anymore by verse 14. God's covenant name of Yahweh is used twice in this verse and they recognize His power. Finally, look at verse 16 and their reaction when the storm ceases after Jonah is tossed overboard. They wouldn't have been able to offer this sacrifice on the boat. Chances are almost zero that they would have had an animal with them to sacrifice. This took place after their journey and when they got to land.

God uses His resistant prophet to draw these men to Himself. But notice what exactly brought about their rescue and the turn to fear God and offer sacrifices to Him. It was the substitutionary sacrifice of one man for them. It was the "death" of one man for their salvation. Look at verse 15 and in particular that last phrase, "the sea ceased from its raging." God's wrath in the storm was diverted from these sailors because of the sacrifice of Jonah instead of them. They would have died, but now they receive life and begin worshiping God. What does that sound like?

There are many differences between Jonah and Jesus, obviously, but this is exactly what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Our sin deserved God's wrath and judgment and yet, Jesus was sacrificed for us and God's wrath ceased.

Now, if you think, oh come on, we aren't supposed to read that in this passage! This is the OT and this story has nothing to do with Jesus's death on the cross. Don't argue with me. Argue with Jesus. Turn with me to Matthew 12 and we will start in verse 38. They want proof and what proof of His deity does Jesus say He will give them? What sign? Look at verse 39. What is the sign of Jonah? It's exactly this. The sacrificial death of Jesus for sinful people followed by His resurrection. Look at verse 40. Now look at verse 41. Something greater than Jonah is here.

Same pattern, but greater sacrifice and greater results. Jonah was a sinful prophet in rebellion against God and yet God used him to rescue these sailors. Jesus was the innocent son of God and His sacrifice is sufficient to save all who believe. And not just save from temporary death but from eternal death. Jonah didn't die but Jesus felt the full impact of God's wrath over sin and took it for us. Someone greater than Jonah is here.

This sacrifice is the heartbeat of God's mission. It's what the entire OT prepared for and it's what we believe and proclaim now. This is the good news of the gospel that we have the privilege to announce to the world around us. And the world around us is filled with reachable people. Yes they are outside of Christ. They don't know him and don't seem to care, but the sailors were in the same position. But God intervened through Jonah and you may be the means of God's intervention in someone's life this week.

Are you involved in this mission? It's a delight and joy. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 8/2/26

- How would you explain God's mission in the world to a new believer in Christ? What is necessary to include and what is optional?
- Does God's mission change from the OT to the NT? Explain your answer.
- Does chapter 1 tell us why Jonah didn't want to go to Ninevah?
- It's clear that Jonah was avoiding participating in God's mission. What are some common ways we avoid God's mission today? What are some common reasons why we avoid it?
- What would your next step of involvement in God's mission look like?
- How is God relentless in this chapter?
- How does God save the sailors from this storm?
- Do you agree with the interpretation that Jonah's sacrifice points to Christ's sacrifice? Why or why not?
- What are the similarities between Jonah's sacrifice and Christ's? What are the differences?

