

- How does it make you feel when someone pursues you?
  - When they think you are valuable enough to want to be with you? When someone wants to hang out with you? When someone seeks you out?
  - It is wonderful.
  - Most of you also know what it is like to not be pursued. To be ignored. AND, many of you have been the ones who ignored or did not pursue the other person.
  - We saw last week as we began our journey into the book of Jonah that it is a story of a pursuing God. This story can encourage us. It is for this reason.
  - **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE [YOU] BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.**
  - First, he pursues you. He never stops pursuing you. When you turn him down, he doesn't give up. He never stops inviting and calling you to follow him because he likes you.
  - Second, it is his desire to know you and it is not anything you do that inspires him to pursue you to get your attention. It is his grace. That means we can never chase him away.
- Last week we went through the story of Jonah. We did it a high level, trying to get a sense of the story.
  - This week we are going to begin going through it with a little more precision and detail.
  - As we said last week, Jonah is considered one of the minor prophets in the OT, not because of its importance, but its length.
  - The book of Jonah is a purposeful story that was written to show God's work and heart for the world and the Jewish nation's place in it.
  - We get some insight into the time when Jonah lived from a statement in 2 Kings 4:25. *"He [Jeroboam] was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher."*
  - Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel who prophesied in Israel to wicked kings during the reign of Jehoash and Jeroboam II, roughly 790 BCE.
  - During Jonah's time, the Assyrian empire had risen to world power and prominence. Assyria was exerting its military might and was conquering and threatening the nations around it.
  - This is significant because 50-60 years earlier Assyria had attacked Israel and made them vassals of their kingdom. (See 2 Kings 15:17-20)
  - This was intolerable to the Jews. They were God's chosen people and they believed it gave them some type of immunity. God would always judge the evil nations around them more than themselves. They hated having to give tribute to Assyria. It seemed to fly in the face of what God had promised.
  - As a result, between 30-50 years after Jonah, Israel allied themselves with Egypt and stopped sending tribute to Assyria. The king of Assyria found out he was a traitor and marched down and after a 3 year siege, siezed the capital, killed many, deported most of the rest, settled his own people and Israel ceased to exist. Only the southern kingdom of Judah remained.
  - So it is in between these two events, neither of which Jonah saw or was part of, that Jonah heard from God.

*Jonah 1:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*

- There are three distinct parts to this first chapter.
- V1-2 records God's call to Jonah.
- V3 records Jonah's response to that call.
- V4-17 shows the consequences of Jonah's decision
- Yet in each one, **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.**

## I. God's call.

- He wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh, the second greatest city of that part of the world, behind only Babylon.
- The distance was about 500 miles, so if Jonah journeyed the typical 15-20 miles per day, it would take him a month or more to get there.
- When it talks about the wickedness of the city, it is referred to the relentless and persistent sin of those people. They were known throughout the far east as a brutal people.
- If you read the histories written by some of the Assyrian kings themselves, they boast of making pyramids from the heads of their enemies. They bragged and wrote about skinning people. We read how one king captured a leader and pierced his face with a chain and made him live in a kennel. There is much more and a lot of it is horrible. Not only that, but gross idolatry was practiced with many temples and gods and goddesses worshiped.
- It was to this people that God called Jonah. I might be reluctant as well.
- Principle: God's call is always based on his sovereign grace.
- God was calling Jonah to follow him so that he could call the Ninevites to follow him.
- We are told the wickedness of Nineveh had come up before God and he wanted Jonah to preach judgment on them. Even this is based on grace. If God did not want them to have a chance to repent, why would he even bother with sending a prophet?
- I have said this over and over during my years here. God is always speaking. God is a God who speaks. He is calling and inviting us. When he does, it is always based on his grace. On his love for people.
- The entire story, even as we see in chapter 1, is God relentlessly pursuing Jonah in order to pursue the Ninevites.
- Principle: There is no such thing as a neutral response to God's call.
- The call of God was never in question. Jonah clearly heard God's instructions. This is never presented as an issue of whether or not Jonah heard God. God was clear.
- When God speaks and reveals His will to us how will we respond?
- Will we believe it, receive it and obey it!
- Or we disbelieve it, reject it and disobey it!
- **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.**
- How did Jonah respond?

## II. Jonah's response.

- The problem with Jonah's call from God was not with understanding what God wanted him to do. It had totally to do with wanting to listen and obey.
- 3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.*
- God called him to go to Nineveh to preach to the hated Assyrians. He so much rebelled against this that he got on a ship and headed as far away as possible.
  - I wonder how many times we act the same way?
  - *"I don't like to face problems head on. I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. In fact, this is a distinct philosophy of mine. No problem is so big or so complicated that it can't be run away from!"* (Linus, to Charlie Brown)
  - Doing the wrong thing USUALLY SEEMS EASIER. It looks easier to go to Tarshish than Nineveh. Satan loves to make sure that we see that it is harder to obey than to do things our way.
  - I wonder why Jonah ran. I wonder if these apply to us?

- There might have been some fear. Jonah was perhaps a bit fearful of preaching condemnation to this group of people.
- Maybe it simply seemed like too much work. Jonah had to travel to a foreign culture, take a long time, go through a lot of effort . . . for what?
- Maybe he just preferred what he knew. What he desired. To stay in Israel. To be a conventional prophet. With people he knew.
- These might all be true, but at heart, what Jonah couldn't accept was the possibility, no matter how slim, that the Ninevites would hear the message, accept it and repent. And if that happened, Jonah knew that the Lord would have mercy on them and relent from sending destruction. That was one outcome that the prophet wouldn't see come to pass.
- Just like with Jonah, when God calls, we choose our response.
- *"You cannot continue life as usual or stay where you are, and go with God at the same time."* (Chuck Swindoll)
- As we are going to see, Jonah decides in favor of himself, and his does not go well.
- Principle: Disobedience is never a pathway to peace.
- It might be easier in the moment, but it never gives long lasting peace.
- There is no peace in disobedience.
- **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.**
- That is why despite Jonah's response to run, God continued to pursue him.

### III. The results of Jonah's response.

*4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

- Your answer to God's call with affect you and others.
- Principle: We are free to choose our choices but not their consequences.
- Remember that the focus of this story is God, not Jonah.
- God had purposes that he wanted to accomplish and he miraculously intervened to alter the direction of his servant's itinerary.
- When Jonah ran away, God wanted to give him another chance.
- The sailors were terrified. If seasoned sailors were terrified, it must have been bad.
- They started praying each to their own gods.
- They were doing everything in their power (cargo) and not in their power (the gods) to save their lives and their ship.

*But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."*

- There is some irony in that a pagan captain had to find Jonah and tell him to pray.
- 7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.*

- You think maybe God had something to do with this result?

*8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"*

- They barraged him with questions.

*9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

- It is interesting that he claims to worship God, whom he was currently disobeying, yet isn't that what we consistently do?

10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) 11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

- They seem to be more aware of the consequences of his decision than he was.
- Their question is mostly rhetorical in nature.
- Their next question reflects that they perhaps felt helpless to appease Jonah's God. Their question affirmed that they believed that Jonah's actions were responsible for their predicament.
- Perhaps they even felt that they might be culpable accomplices.

12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." 13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased."

- The sailors desire to not have an innocent man suffer is in **direct contrast** to Jonah's disdain over the death of the Ninevites.
- Jonah likely didn't realize it at the time, but God used these men to reveal the heart He desired in Jonah. They did not know him, and were not obligated to Jonah in any way, and yet they were willing to put their lives in danger in order to save him from the raging sea.
- Maybe this was Jonah being compassionate? Maybe this was the ultimate running away?
- God had other plans for him.
- Their words to God reveal that the sailors recognized God's sovereignty and providence.

15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

- They recognized the power and reality of God.
- Their response is again a **direct contrast** to Jonah's.
- Where he disobeyed, they worshiped. They offered sacrifices and made vows.
- Note the picture of Christ. The salvation of the sailors was for someone to sacrifice themselves for them.

17 Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

- It does not need to be 3x24 hour days. In their vernacular, it meant one 24 hours day and the part of two others.
- Principle: God is sovereign in his pursuit of us.
- God has purposes that he wants to accomplish and he is in control regardless of our response.
- God acts sovereignly over the storm.
- God acts sovereignly over the dice.
- God acts sovereignly over the storm again.
- God acts sovereignly over the fish.
- **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.** Every sovereign act that shows he is in control of all things is to bring Jonah to a place to respond to his call.
- There is something tremendously comforting knowing that God will always pursue us and that it is by his grace and not our actions that he does so.

- BUT . . . what is sobering is that his pursuit and call requires a response.
- I have heard people ask this question, "What is God's will for my life?"
- People struggle with whether or not they have heard God's call.
- What does God want me to do? Take this job? Quit this job? Move here? Marry this person?

- That can be difficult. God does not always make it really clear like he did with Jonah because he wants us to pursue him in relationship.
- However, our response to him usually falls apart on the call we already know.
- Examples:
  - Be holy.
  - Treat your mother and father with honor.
  - Confess to someone you have wronged.
  - Forgive those who have wronged you.
  - Give generously of your stuff.
  - Don't worry .
  - Live without gossip, complaining or murmuring.
  - Put other's interests before your own.
  - Live sexually pure within the bounds of marriage.
  - Serve others actively.
  - Tell others about Jesus.
  - Make disciples
  - Honor one another.
- We know these things. They are not "up in the air". We are not trying to understand them.
- All of those things we wonder about are secondary in nature to these.
  
- I could end our time with an inspiring story of someone who listened to God's call and changed the world. Who fed children, went to be a missionary in a difficult place, gave up everything and made this huge difference.
- Rather though, I just want to tell you. I have lived half a century and I have yet to be sorry that I listened to God's call and followed him. ALL of my regrets are connected to when I did not.
- **GOD PURSUES PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE.**
- He is pursuing you. He wants you. He loves you. He has stuff he wants you to partner with him in doing.
- His call to you is always based on his grace.
- For the Christ-follower, is not about how we hear the call of God, it that when we hear it, will we receive it and obey.
- The pathway to peace is not in disobedience.
- It is in responding to God's lovingly, sovereign, gracious pursuit of you.
- For Jonah, he went the opposite direction and he ended in the belly of a great fish. That's where we will pick it up next week.