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**Series: Jonah & the Mercy of God****Title: You Can't Outrun God's Mercy****Text: Jonah 1:1-16**

More than just a children's Bible story, more than a story about a defiant prophet, and more than a whale tale, the book of Jonah illustrates God's abundant, indiscriminate mercy that chases after you when you run, meets you in the middle of a storm, finds you in the depths of the sea, and encounters you in your anger. It's a story about the mercy of God displayed to everyone, the people who know the mercy of God, the people who have never heard of the mercy of God, and even those we think don't deserve it. The story of Jonah is a story about the character of God. Jonah is not the main character. The Lord is the main character, and the Lord's character will consistently be displayed through the story.

Introduction to Jonah

- The book of Jonah is categorized as a minor prophet, one of the twelve minor prophets at the end of the Old Testament. They are not minor because their message is unimportant, but because they are shorter in length.
- Jonah was a real historical prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, during the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. King Jeroboam II did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Jonah was a prophet during this time, and prophesied that the land would return to Israel. The Lord's mercy gave the land back to Israel, despite King Jeroboam's unfaithfulness (2 Kings 14:23-29).
- Most prophetic books are collections of sermons and messages from the Lord to the people. However, the book of Jonah is primarily a narrative, a story.
- The book of Jonah includes literary features such as satire, exposing hypocrisy and spiritual blindness through irony and reversal. The book feels excessive because it seeks to expose the absurdity of human rebellion and to magnify the mercy of God. The book also includes hyperbole, intentional exaggeration for emphasis. Everything in Jonah is "great:" a great city, a great storm, a great fish, great fear, and great anger.

The Mercy of God

- Psalm 103:7-17 reveals the character of God as compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. Verse 10, *He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.*
- Mercy is God not treating us as our sins deserve, but instead responding with compassion, patience, and rescue. The book of Jonah reveals that God's mercy is not limited to good, religious, or deserving people. God is always compassionately pursuing, without judgment, and moving toward undeserving people with patience, rescue, and love, bringing them salvation.

The Word of the Lord (Jonah 1:1-3)

- The story begins with God's initiative when God speaks to Jonah and desires to show mercy to the people of Nineveh. God could have left the Ninevites in their violence and wickedness. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was brutal and oppressive, known for cruelty, conquest, and bloodshed.
- God was telling Jonah to go preach repentance to a violent enemy nation responsible for terror and destruction. Jonah doesn't just dislike Nineveh politically; he despises them personally and nationally.
- Verse 3 is shocking: *"But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord."* In open rebellion, Jonah attempts to outrun God. Notice the downward language: Jonah went down to Joppa, and he went down into the boat. Running from God always takes a person downward spiritually.
- Jonah didn't need a boat to get to Nineveh, yet he refused to listen to God, to hear and obey the word of the Lord. Jonah boarded a ship to Tarshish (modern-day Spain), which represents the farthest known western destination in Jonah's world. Nineveh is east. Jonah goes west. God says go there, Jonah goes the opposite direction.
- Jonah isn't just fleeing a location. He's fleeing the presence of the Lord, but Psalm 139:7-9 says, *"I can never escape from your Spirit!...if I dwell by the farthest oceans..."* You can't outrun God's presence, which is everywhere. Mercy pursues Jonah and does not give them the punishment his rebellion deserves.

The Mercy of a Storm (Jonah 1:4-9)

- *"But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea..."* The storm is not accidental, but it is mercy. God appoints the storm. We usually think of mercy as comfort, relief, blessing, or rescue, but sometimes mercy disrupts and changes our direction.
- Jonah is sleeping in the storm while the sailors are terrified. The captain wakes Jonah and pleads with him to call out to his God. It's ironic that an unbeliever has to tell a prophet to pray.
- The sailors cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah as the cause of the storm.
- In verse 9, Jonah has excellent theology: "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." However, his life contradicts his confession. It's possible to know correct things about God while living completely disconnected from him.

The Sailor's Experience Mercy (Jonah 1:10-16)

- Jonah tells the sailors to throw him into the sea, but they row harder. Eventually, the sailors, realizing there is no other option, cry out, not to their false gods, but to the Lord in verse 14: *"Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life."* They are beginning to recognize the Lord personally.
- After they threw Jonah into the sea, the raging sea immediately grew calm. The sailors were in awe, worshiped the Lord, and made vows. The pagan sailors became worshipers. These unsuspecting people experience the mercy of God
- The irony of chapter 1 is that the prophet of God is running from the mercy of God while pagan sailors receive it.

Maybe you see yourself in the story. Maybe you're running, resisting, spiritually sleeping in a storm. Jonah 1 reminds us that you can run from God's voice, but you can't outrun God's mercy because his mercy is deeper than see and stronger than your rebellion.

Further Study of Jonah:

- Watch the BibleProjects video: <https://bibleproject.com/videos/jonah/>
- Read the book of Jonah at least once this week, or once a day this week.