

Open in prayer

Introduction

Jonah bought a ticket. A prophet of God, who had heard His voice, walked down to the harbour, counted out the fare, and paid good money. To get away from God.

Did it work? You might laugh if you weren't so much like him. You may never have booked passage to Tarshish, but you know where Jonah is headed. The prayer you stopped praying. The command you keep postponing. Small steps in the wrong direction.

Jonah 1 tells us this: The Lord who made the sea cannot be outrun, even by his own prophet.

We start at a crossroads. The Lord speaks. And the prophet must choose. Which way will Jonah go? Open with me to **Jonah 1:1-3**.

1) Which way will Jonah go? (**Jonah 1:1-3**)

Verse 1, The word of the Lord came to **Jonah** son of Amittai.

The Lord spoke to His prophet. We find out a little about Jonah in **2 Kings**. There he is described as the prophet from Gath-hepher, who spoke the word of the Lord during the evil king Jeroboam II's reign. And what Jonah said came true. He has seen God's word fulfilled. God speaks to His prophet.

And what does the Lord say? **Verse 2**, Get up! Go to the great city of **Nineveh** and preach against it because **their** evil has come up before **me**.

Nineveh lies to the north-east of Israel. In Genesis we read that Nimrod, a man of violence and power, went to Assyria and built Nineveh. **Nahum** indicts Nineveh as the city of blood, totally deceitful, full of plunder, never without prey. God isn't sending Jonah to Israel's misguided neighbours. The Lord is sending His prophet to a city under judgement.

Jonah stands at a crossroads. Which path will God's prophet take?

Verse 3, **Jonah** got up to flee to **Tarshish** from **the Lord's presence**.

Jonah gets up. But not to go to Nineveh. Jonah gets up to run as fast as he can away from God. To get as far away from God as he possibly can. Tarshish lies far across the sea, to the west. Nineveh is north-east. Tarshish is in the

opposite direction. Jonah is not a bad geography student. He knows which way he is facing. He plans to flee the Lord's presence. The Lord's presence is not a place on a map. Jonah wants to get away from the Lord himself. Jonah is trying to get out from under God's gaze.

Jonah should know better. He is a prophet after all. Jonah should know his Old Testament. David's words in **Psalms 139**, Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. You can't hide from God.

Think of playing peekaboo with a toddler. They cover their eyes and for a moment believe they cannot be seen. Jonah is a grown man who should know better. You can't cover your eyes and hide away from God.

Now track his steps. He **went down** to **Joppa** and found **a ship** going to **Tarshish**. He paid the fare and **went down** into it to go with them to **Tarshish** from **the Lord's presence**. Down to the harbour. Down into the ship. Down. Down. Down. Jonah's on a downhill spiral away from the Lord.

The scene is set. This prophet who has known God's word is running as hard as he can away from the Lord. This isn't going to end well. We can feel that before the dark clouds gather.

Which way will Jonah go? Down. Jonah's on the ship. Trying to put the sea between himself and God. But whose sea is it? What happens when a man runs onto the Lord's own water? God's about to send a whole lot of bad weather Jonah's way. And the question will be asked, who can fix the storm?

2) Who can fix the storm? (Jonah 1:4-14)

So, Jonah is on the ship. He has put the sea between himself and God. Now watch what the Lord does.

Verse 4, But **the Lord** **threw** **a great wind** onto **the sea**, and such **a great storm** arose on **the sea** that **the ship** threatened to break apart.

The storm was not bad luck. It was not bad weather. The storm belongs to the Lord. He threw it in Jonah's path.

Verse 5, **The sailors** were **afraid**, and each cried out to **his** god. **They** **threw** the ship's cargo into **the sea** to lighten the load.

These men are sailors. Rugged, ragged sailors. If you were a sailor on that boat you had one job. Get cargo from one port to the next. If you get cargo

from one port to the next you make bank. If you don't get your cargo from one port to the next you lose. For these men to throw their cargo overboard to lighten the load means they were scared. Scared enough to come up with a practical solution for the problem they were facing. But nothing changes. The storm continues to rage. What comes after practical solutions? Religion. Every man to his own god. On your knees begging and bartering with the divine. But still nothing changes.

We do the same. We keep a practical spare wheel in the boot of our car. Untouched for years. Until we have a flat tyre. And out comes the spare. But if the flat tyre happens on the N1. At night. In the rain. Then we're not just changing the tyre, we're praying too. Because we've run out of options. These sailors throw their cargo overboard, and pray like their lives depended on it.

And where is the prophet? Verse 5, Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down to the lowest part of the vessel and had stretched out and fallen into a deep sleep.

Down again. The one man on board who knows the living God is the one man not praying to Him.

Verse 6, The captain approached him and said, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up! Call to your god. Maybe this god will consider us, and we won't perish."

Get up. We've heard that before. Verse 2. The Lord told Jonah to get up. Now a pagan captain tells Jonah to get up. But the prophet is still not ready to move.

Verse 7, "Come on!" the sailors said to each other. "Let's cast lots. Then we'll know who is to blame for this trouble we're in." So they cast lots, and the lot singled out Jonah.

Even the die answer to the Lord. And so the questions start pouring out.

Verse 8, Then they said to him, "Tell us who is to blame for this trouble we're in. What is your business, and where are you from? What is your country, and what people are you from?"

Every eye is on Jonah. And he answers.

Verse 9, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land."

Listen carefully. Every word is true. Jonah's got sound theology. True words spoken by a man standing on a ship, fleeing the God who made the very sea beneath his feet. How often do we know the right answer yet do the wrong thing?

Verse 10, Then the men were seized by a great fear and said to him, “What have you done?” The men knew he was fleeing from the Lord's presence because he had told them.

Great fear. And Jonah? Nothing. No prayer. No sorrow. The sailors, with wrong theology, are afraid. The prophet, with right theology, is silent.

It gets worse. **Verse 11**, So they said to him, “What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down for us?” For the sea was getting worse and worse.

The sea was getting stormier. Every answer has failed. The ship is breaking apart. These men are desperate.

Jonah gives his verdict. **Verse 12**, He answered them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you, for I know that I'm to blame for this great storm that is against you.”

At last, Jonah names himself as the cause. But notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, take me back. He doesn't say, I'll go to Nineveh. Just, throw me overboard. Jonah would rather die than do God's will.

Verse 13, Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they couldn't because the sea was raging against them more and more.

These pagan sailors will not just throw a man overboard. But every plan is spent. The cargo is overboard. The prayers have been prayed. The oars have been strained. There is nothing left. And so they turn to the Lord. Not to their gods. To Yahweh, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the seas and all in them.

Verse 14, So they called out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, don't let us perish because of this man's life, and don't charge us with innocent blood! For you, Lord, have done just as you pleased.”

The Lord does as He pleases. The storm was his. The lot was his. The sea is his.

The Lord caused the sea to rage. And once Jonah is exposed as the cause, the sailors plead with the Lord to save them. The Lord who made the sea cannot be outrun, even by his own prophet.

Who can fix the storm? No one on that ship. Not the sailors. Not the prophet. The cargo is gone. The prayers are spent. The oars have failed. The sailors have their hands on the prophet. Who threw Jonah in?

3) Who threw Jonah in? (Jonah 1:15a)

Verse 15, So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea.

They lift him up. And throw him out. He is gone.

Where's Jonah been heading this whole story? Down to Joppa. Down to the ship. Down to the hold. And now, down to the sea. In Jonah 2, Jonah will say, You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas. I sank to the foundations of the mountains, the earth's gates shut behind me. Down. Down. Down. Down to the Pit.

Did you catch that? In Jonah 1, the sailors threw Jonah into the sea. In Jonah 2:3, Jonah says, you threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas. Jonah sees the Lord's hand inside the sailors' hands. And he is right.

Think back. The Lord commanded Jonah to go. The Lord threw the wind. The Lord stirred the storm. The Lord singled out Jonah by the lot. And the sailors themselves confess it. You, Lord, have done just as you pleased. Not luck. Not chance. Not the sailors. The Lord is in control. Of every wave. Of every die. Of every hand.

Don't stumble here. The sailors' hands were real. They chose. They felt responsible. They cried out about innocent blood. Yet the Lord's hand was in theirs. Think of a farmer. He ploughs. He plants. His work is real. But he cannot make it rain. Or think of a letter. The pen moves across the page, yet the author wrote it.

Here's the point. The sailors threw Jonah into the sea, and the Lord threw him in with them. Not as a judge casting off a runaway. As a Lord who has not let go. Chapter 1 is not the prophet's doom. It is the Lord's pursuit. The Lord who made the sea cannot be outrun, even by his own prophet. Not on the ship. Not in the hold. Not even in the deep.

The sailors' hands are now empty. But the sea is still raging. And Jonah is sinking. So who will calm the sea?

4) Who will calm the sea? (Jonah 1:15b)

The sailors' hands are empty. The sea is still raging. Jonah is sinking.

Then, verse 15, and the sea stopped its raging.

Just like that. Calm. Not slowly. Not a storm wearing itself out. The waves that threatened to break the ship apart go still the moment Jonah hits the water.

Who did this? Not the sailors. Not the prophet. Not one of the gods they had

begged. The Lord did it.

Look at what he has done in this chapter. The Lord commands. The Lord throws the wind. The Lord singles out Jonah by the lot. And now the Lord stills the sea. He sent the storm, and he ends it. At his time. On his terms.

Jonah ran onto the sea to hide from God. But the sea was never Jonah's hiding place. It was always the Lord's.

Here's the point. The Lord who made the sea calms the sea. Suddenly. Miraculously. The storm was never stronger than he was.

The sea is still. The ship is whole. Every sailor is alive. But the sailors are not at peace. What will they do now? And where can their fear go?

5) Where can fear find rest? (Jonah 1:16)

The sea is still. The ship is whole. Every sailor is alive. So where does their fear go?

Verse 16, The men were seized by great fear of the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

Look at how their fear has moved. In verse 5, they feared the storm. In verse 10, a great fear seized them when they heard who Jonah's God was. Now the fear has found its true object. Not the wind. Not the waves. The Lord.

Think of a highveld storm rolling in. The sky turns black. The first crack of lightning splits the afternoon. We shut the doors. We pull the dogs inside. We fear the storm, and we run from it. That was the sailors' first fear.

Now think of a man standing at the edge of Victoria Falls. The roar. The spray. The drop. He does not run. He stands. Small. Silent. Struck by something far bigger than himself. That is fear which worships.

The sailors are on their knees before the God who made the sea. They offer a sacrifice. They make vows. No sermon from Jonah called them to it. The Lord did. Pagan sailors, who had never heard his name, now bow to the Lord of heaven and earth.

And where is Jonah? The text does not say. The foreigners worship, and the reader is left wondering what has become of the prophet. The one who was sent is silent. The ones who were never sent are on their knees.

Here is the point. The men feared the Lord. And so the chapter closes where it began. The Lord who made the sea cannot be outrun, even by his own

prophet. He sent the storm, he stilled the sea, and he turned pagan hearts to himself. Nothing Jonah did could stop it. Nothing could.

But a question remains. The sailors have a fear that bows, but where can that fear find rest? A sacrifice has been offered on the deck, but is it enough? A prophet has gone down into the deep, but is he the one who can bring fear to peace? Is there another Sent One, greater than Jonah, who did not run?

Connect to the gospel

The Lord who made the sea cannot be outrun, even by his own prophet. Not on the ship. Not in the hold. Not in the deep.

But hear how that sounds to a runaway. A holy God who cannot be escaped. The thought that a holy God is after you may sound scary. Where is the hope? Without the cross, there is none. This text only comforts because of Jesus.

Jesus himself points us back to Jonah as a sign. Something greater than Jonah is here. Jonah was sent, and he fled. Jesus says, I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. Jonah went down to flee. Jesus came down to obey.

He did not run. Not from the manger. Not from the wilderness. Not from the garden, where his soul was crushed with sorrow. He set his face toward Jerusalem. And at the cross, the storm broke. Jonah was thrown into the sea for his own rebellion. Jesus was thrown into judgment for ours. The wrath we had earned fell on the Son who never ran.

The tomb was sealed. It was over. But God raised him on the third day. He is not here. He is risen. The sign of Jonah is fulfilled, and death could not hold the Sent One.

The Lord who cannot be outrun is not a judge hunting us down to punish us. He is a Father who sent his Son after runaways. And the Son went down further than Jonah ever went, so that God's pursuit of his people ends in welcome, not wrath. The One we could not escape came down to find us.

So here is the way forward. Don't run from the Lord. Run to his Son.

Where have you been running? And what will you do with the Son who did not run?

Application for Christians

Where are you headed? Small steps in the wrong direction. Downward.

Awayward.

Maybe it is the prayer you stopped praying. The command you keep postponing. The sin you keep calling a weakness. The marriage you will not lead. The children you will not teach. The person you will not forgive.

I have been that man. I knew the right answer, and did the wrong thing.

Hear this, Christian. The Sent One did not run. Jesus came down to obey, and he obeyed all the way to the cross. He did it for runaways. He did it for me. He did it for you. So the Lord who pursues you is not a judge hunting for a reason to punish. He is a Father holding to his good purpose for you.

So what has he told you to do that you have not yet done? Your small step downwards?

Do not run from the Lord. Run to his Son. Name your sin before him. Plainly. Not in general. This is what you told me to do, and this is what I have not done. Then covenant in your heart to obey. Not tomorrow. Not when the storm hits. Do not delay to obey him today.

Application for non-Christians

Where are you running? Perhaps not from God at all. You are busy. Working. Providing. Trying to be a good man, a good husband, a good father. And when the storm comes, you do what the sailors did. Throw the cargo overboard. Pull harder on the oars. Pray to whatever might listen.

It will not work. The sea keeps raging. Nothing those men did fixed their real problem. Nothing you do will fix yours. Not your effort. Not your goodness. Not your religion. You cannot fix this.

Fear the Lord. Not the storm. Not your circumstances. The Lord created the heavens and earth. He is holy. And he is not to be played with.

But do not stay in your fear. Jonah went down to flee. Jesus came down to obey. He took the storm that was ours, and he rose again. As he says, Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Look to the Son. Trust him. Not as one option among many. As your only hope.

Do not wait for a better day. Today, the door stands open. It will not stand open forever. Don't run from the Lord. Run to his Son. Stop trusting yourself. Look to him now.

Conclusion

Jonah bought a ticket. Where did it take him? Down. Down to Joppa. Down to the ship. Down to the lowest part of the vessel. Down to sea. And the Lord pursued him every step of the way.

We've seen that in Jonah 1:1-16. Which way did Jonah go? Down. Who could fix the storm? The Lord. Who threw Jonah in? The Lord. Who calmed the sea? The Lord. And where can fear find rest? In the Sent One who did not run.

Christian, is there something He has told you to do that you have not yet done? Your small step downwards? Do not delay to obey Him today.

Unbeliever, you cannot fix this. Fear the Lord, and look to the Son.

Don't run from the Lord, run to his Son.

Amen.

Close in prayer