

It will be 4 years ago this Summer that I taught my very first sermon series when I was the youth pastor at a church in Perry, Georgia. It was the first series that I wrote completely on my own that went through an entire book of the Bible. What took me 4 lessons in 2016 will now be spread out into 10 devotionals in 2020. The book that I taught out of was a popular Old Testament prophet named Jonah. Most of us know by now the story of Jonah (or have at least seen the VeggieTales version of it) but maybe we aren't sure how we can apply it into our lives. I think one of the reasons that the story of Jonah is included in the Bible is because we have all ran away from God in one form or another in our lives. My goal in this short study is to help you reopen your eyes to the story of Jonah and realize that even though we run from God, God continues to seek us out. And you know what? I'm thankful! I'm thankful that despite all my running, God still wants me and He pursued me, long before I ever pursued Him. Let's dive in (that may be a really bad Jonah pun so I don't really want to take credit for that) together and look at the life of the prophet Jonah

-Pastor Brady

Day 1

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-3

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.”

Devotional

Why did Jonah run? People have been asking that for centuries. All that the Lord tells Jonah to do is to go to Nineveh and call out the sins of the people. I think that the most common answer as to why Jonah wouldn't want to go to Nineveh is because he was afraid that the Ninevites would kill him. Nineveh was a part of the Assyrian empire, a known enemy of the Jews, so Jonah would be perfectly justified in being afraid. Something that I have noticed is that hatred is often a greater motivator than fear. Fear may prevent someone from doing something, but hatred can drive someone to do something at the cost of another person. Jonah fled not because he knew that the people would repent, but because he hoped that if he did not deliver the Lord's message, they wouldn't. Imagine hating someone so much, that you hoped that they would be the recipient of God's wrath? When you realize how great your own sin was and just how much Christ has saved you from, you can't hope that someone remains separated from the Lord. Your desires change, you should long for the Lord to bring His lost children home, regardless of whom those children are.

Questions

1. Do you think that Jonah was in the right to flee from what the Lord called him to do? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Pastor David Platt means by this quote: “every saved person this side of heaven owes the Gospel to every lost person this side of hell”?
3. Do you think that you are more worthy of the chance of forgiveness than someone else?

Day 2

Scripture: Jonah 1:4-6

⁴ But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

Devotional

When I read about this part of the story, my mind immediately goes to another man that fell asleep on a boat in the middle of a great storm. Several centuries later, Jesus fell asleep on a cushion in the middle of the storm. His disciples ran to wake Him up and asked Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? (Mark 4:38) I've always seen a great irony in that question. I can imagine Jesus hearing that question and thinking, "don't you guys get it? The very reason that I am here is so that you do not perish!" Why was Jesus able to sleep through the storm? Because the storm had no power over Him. I think that we could talk about this in a bunch of different ways. We could talk about how because Jesus was able to be at peace in the storm, we can find peace when the storms in our lives come rolling in. However, I don't want us to focus on that. I think that one of the reasons that Jesus was able to find peace in this storm was because He knew that it was nothing compared to the storm that He was about to face on the cross. There the Son of God perished in the storm of God's wrath so that we wouldn't have to. Every day we may find ourselves saying, "God don't you care? I'm so overwhelmed I might die!" But we can look at what Christ did for us and hear Him say, "I do care. I care so much that I died the death that was meant for you. I took on the full force of the storm, so that you can feel the sunny embrace of my Father's love."

Questions

1. How can you find peace when you feel that you are caught in a storm?
2. What was one moment in your life where you felt God's peace in the middle of your "storm"?

Day 3

Scripture: Jonah 1:7-10

⁷ And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" ⁹ And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them."

Devotional

Sometimes I wish this was the response the world had when we told them about the God that we serve. Imagine simply telling a group of unbelievers that you are a follower of Jesus Christ and they fall back in a mixture of awe and terror! We think that this kind of thing doesn't happen anymore but it actually happens more than you might think that it does. The moment that we are convicted of our sins and realize that Jesus is who He says He is, we all fall back in terror. Fortunately, we don't have to stay there long because we know that Christ comes with forgiveness and grace. Now when we hear the name of the Lord, we no longer have to fall back in fear, we can fall forward into forgiveness.

Questions

1. In verse 7, why do you think that Jonah didn't just come out and say that he was the reason that the ship was caught in this storm?
2. If the sailors were not believers in God, what do you think made them so afraid when Jonah said that he was a follower of God?
3. When you hear about Jesus, do you fall back in fear? Or do you fall forward in worship?

Day 4

Scripture: Jonah 1:11-17

¹¹Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹²He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." ¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. ¹⁷And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

Devotional

You know what I think is pretty incredible? How in about 10 verses unbelievers go from calling out to their gods for help to fearing the Lord and offering sacrifices to His name. I don't know if I would go as far to say that they were full fledged believers at that point but I think that it important to recognize their response to all that happened. In order for them to get to this point, Jonah had to suffer. It just goes to show you that you may be pushed to some pretty extreme lengths so that the people around you might see the glory of God. Jonah had to be thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant fish in order for people to see the greatness of the God he served. Serving the Lord is costly.

Questions

1. Would you be willing to suffer so that other people might worship the Lord?
2. Do you think Jonah would have been happy to know that despite the cost to him, these sailors turned to worship the Lord?
3. Do you think that God used the fish to save Jonah or to punish Jonah?

Day 5

Scripture: Jonah 2:1-6

“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. ³For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ ⁵The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”

Devotional

How often do you turn to prayer when it feels like your life is falling apart? I think we have a natural tendency to run away from God when it seems like things are falling apart instead of running towards Him. God is the only truly consistent being in the universe. Who God is, is who God will always be. Even in the midst of his trials, Jonah knows that God is the God who saves. Jonah calls out to the Lord because he knows that is where his help comes from. “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ²My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2). Jonah might not know what the Lord is going to do, but he does know that regardless of his circumstances, he can trust the Lord.

Questions

1. Do you think that Jonah may have been worried that God wouldn't hear or care about his prayer?
2. Are you ever worried that God doesn't hear when you call out to Him?
3. What are some promises that the Lord tells us in the Bible that reminds us that He always hears our prayers?
4. How can you remember to pray when you go through tough times?

Day 6

Scripture: Jonah 2:7-10

“⁷When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. ⁸Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. ⁹But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!” ¹⁰And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.”

Devotional

Even in the belly of the fish, Jonah declares what has been true from the beginning of time and what will be true for the rest of time: Salvation belongs to the Lord! God is the only source of rescue and the only source of salvation. Sometimes it takes extreme circumstances in order for us to remember this. Jonah seems to have an “A-ha!” moment while in the fish. Deep down he always knew that the Lord was the lone source of salvation, but now he sees in the good times and the bad, God remains our beacon of hope. These verses remind us that we cannot save ourselves. God alone can save. Tim Keller explains it like this: “Salvation belongs to God alone, to no one else. If someone is saved, it is wholly God’s doing. It is not a matter of God saving you partly and you saving yourself partly. No. God saves us. We do not and cannot save ourselves.

That’s the Gospel.” (Tim Keller- *The Prodigal Prophet*)

Questions

1. What do you think it was that made Jonah remember that salvation comes from the Lord?
2. Jonah says, “when my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord.” Do you think that God ever uses moments in your life when it feels like you are going to fall apart to remind you of Him?
3. True or false: You CAN save yourself.

Day 7

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.”

Devotional

The Lord gave Jonah such a simple message, and yet it completely transformed the lives of the Ninevites. From what we read, it looks like Jonah only had to say one sentence and this woke up Nineveh to the evil of their sins. Here is what I think we can gather from this moment: the power of the Gospel doesn't come from the messenger or the length of the message. It comes solely through the Word of God. I remember reading in a book by Bob Goff how he once heard a prisoner give a Gospel presentation and how he thought it was the worst Gospel presentation that he had ever heard. What amazed him was how after the message, people still came up wanting to know more about Jesus and some were even saved through the prisoner's message! As a pastor, let me tell you this encourages me greatly. All I have to do is preach the Word of God faithfully and trust Him with the results. The power of the Gospel never comes from the person that is sharing it. It comes solely through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions

1. What do you think made Jonah's message have such a big impact?
2. Why do you think it is hard for some people to trust the saving power of the Gospel?
3. Do you remember the first time that you were blown away by the truth of the Gospel?
What was it that caused you to be so impressed?

Day 8

Scripture: Jonah 3:6-10

⁶The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.”

Devotional

What does it really mean to repent? Repenting doesn't mean just feeling sorry about something. People can feel sorry about something but still not want to change their behavior. It's like the old example of how when a kid gets in trouble, he often doesn't feel sorry because he did something wrong, he feels sorry because he got caught. So, what does it really mean to repent? R.C. Sproul summarizes it best when he says, “In Scripture, repentance means ‘to undergo a change of one's mind.’ This change of mind is not a mere switching of minor opinions, but of the entire direction of one's life. It involves a radical turning *from* sin and *to* Christ.” (R.C. Sproul- *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*) The Ninevites didn't just feel sorry about the things that they had done. They completely changed who they were in response to what they had done. If we are to be followers of Jesus, there should be a substantial difference between who we *were* before Christ and who we *are* in Christ. We won't always do things perfectly. But who we were, can't be who we continue to be.

Questions

1. What does true repentance look like?
2. Can you think of anything that you need to turn away from in order to embrace Jesus?
3. What do you think makes repentance hard for people?

Day 9

Scripture: Jonah 4:1-4

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Devotional

When we read this chapter, we see that Jonah was angry that the Lord would allow the people to repent. But he was more than just angry, he was livid. In fact, the original Hebrew language of verse 1 literally means, "it was evil to Jonah as a great wrong." He thought that the Lord made a mistake. He thought that despite the goodness that the Lord showed the people of Nineveh, God was actually doing something evil! Jonah only seems to understand grace to a certain extent. He seems to understand that God does in fact show amazing grace to the undeserving but he doesn't seem to understand the extent of God's grace. Jonah seems to believe that he is more worthy of God's grace than the Ninevites. Being a Jew, it makes some sense for him to think that, they were God's chosen people after all. However, the only reason they were God's chosen people was because God showed grace to Abraham thousands of years ago. No one is more deserving of God's grace than anyone else. That's one of the beauties of the Gospel. God extends His grace to the least deserving people in the world. That includes me and you.

Questions

1. Do you think that you are more deserving of God's grace than someone else?
2. Do you think that Jonah was right to be angry?
3. How would you describe God's grace to someone who has never heard of it?
4. What are some ways that you can show grace to others?

Day 10

Scripture: Jonah 4:5-11

⁵Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

Devotional

What can we learn from these last few verses of Jonah? I think one of the main ideas is that God is much more compassionate than we will ever be. He creates and He sustains His creation. What encourages me is that God sees us as we are, but He doesn't leave us as we are. He knows what we need better than we do. We can easily forget how when Jesus looked out at the crowds that were following Him, He didn't think, "look at all these sinners!" Instead we read that He looked out at them and had compassion on them. Jesus continues to look at us with eyes of compassion and mercy. I believe that Jonah realized the error in his thinking and he learned to embrace the compassion that the Lord had not only for him, but also for the Ninevites. Why do I think this? Because the only way that the story of Jonah could be told was if Jonah himself told others. I'll end with the words of Tim Keller. "What kind of man would let the world see what a fool he was? Only someone who had become joyfully secure in God's love. Only someone who believed that he was simultaneously sinful but completely accepted. In short, someone who has found in the gospel of grace the very power of God."

Questions

1. You made it through all 10 days! Take this time and reflect on everything that you went through!