

Jonah 1:1-3

Trinity Baptist Church, Mount Pleasant

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AM Services

**An Encouraging Word From Dr. Tim Watson**

Series: The God Of A Second Chance #1

A Study In The Book Of Jonah

“Lord, Here I Am....Send Someone Else”

When a golfer makes a bad shot and wants to redo it without adding an additional stroke to his score, he takes a mulligan and shoots again. **Mulligans**- the redoing of bad shots are the mainstay for many amateur golfers. As a kid when we played neighborhood baseball and football and there was confusion or controversy about a certain play, we would go back and do the play again in what is called a “**do-over**”, a term for doing the play over again.

All of us have experienced times in life where we wished we could experience a “**do-over**”. How many of us have made a major mistake or committed a sin where we thought to ourselves, *“I sure would like to take a mulligan on that one. I would love to re-do that situation.”*

Maybe you have cut some corners in a business deal and that dishonesty came back to haunt you later on. Perhaps you said some unkind and hurtful words to someone, and you wished you had not said those words. Maybe you have experienced the pain of a failed marriage. Or you made some mistakes in how you raised your kids. Perhaps you are a teenager, college student, or a single adult and you have not kept yourself sexually pure. You have often thought, *“I would give anything for a do-over. I would give anything for a second chance.”*

There are some situations in life where people may not give you a second chance. But the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is you have a God who loves you. You have a God who is willing to give you a second chance.....and in many cases, because of his grace, he is willing to give you third, fourth, and fifth chances because the grace of God knows no limits.

We are beginning a series of messages based on the life of the eighth century B.C. minor prophet by the name of Jonah. Jonah is referred to as a “minor” prophet not because he is unimportant; he is referred to as “minor” prophet because of the length of his book compared to other prophets whose writings are much longer. (Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel)

Jonah was a man who was granted a second chance by God to make right some things in which he had been wrong. God was gracious to give Jonah a mulligan, a do-over, a second chance. The good news is the God who gave Jonah a second chance is willing to give you a second chance as well.

Look in your Bible to the Old Testament book of Jonah. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, and Jonah is the 32<sup>nd</sup> book in the Old Testament.

If Steven Spielberg, the gifted writer and movie director, was looking for a movie project in which the film was filled with suspense and drama and lessons for life, he would find all of these elements tucked away in the small book of Jonah. Steven Spielberg would be able to say this movie is based on a true story, because it **is** a true story. It really happened. It is not fiction.

One of the problems with Jonah is that a lot of us **think** we know his story, but maybe we don't. The average person usually associates Jonah with one other character; they think it is the story of Jonah and the whale. They think the whale's name is Monstro, and Jonah is running from Gepetto and wants to be a real boy and.....it gets a little fuzzy at that point. I love what the writer Greg Levoy said about the prophet Jonah: "Jonah is really the Patron Saint of Refused Callings."

Although Jonah is one of the most popular books in the Bible, it is also one of the most controversial. Its historical validity is questioned by skeptics of the Christian faith and even by some so called, "Bible scholars." Skeptics or cynics have a hard time believing God could prepare a large fish (we sometimes say "whale" even though the Bible says it was a "large" fish or "great" fish) to swallow Jonah.

Skeptics will say it is impossible for the Jonah narrative to unfold the way scripture says it unfolded. Cynics say there is no way a large fish or whale can swim from near Spain (where ancient Tarshish was located, the place where Jonah wanted to go) to Ninevah located in modern Iraq and spit Jonah onto the Mesopotamian coastline. The large fish would have to swim at speeds over 200 miles per hour for three straight days to reach the Mesopotamian coastline. They also ask, "How Jonah survive for three days in the belly of a fish?" "How could he not be digested?" Some people have a hard time believing God could bring together all the elements of Jonah being swallowed, survive in the fish, and spit up on the shoreline near modern day Iraq.

Did you know that in our U.S. Naval Fleet we have nuclear submarines, vessels of human ingenuity and engineering, that can keep hundreds of sailors alive for several months under the ocean? If humans can prepare an Iron Fish like that, don't you think the God who created the universe and knows every star by name could perform a miracle as simple as preparing a fish for a runaway preacher named Jonah?

The book of Jonah is not about a fish. In fact, only three verses in the book of Jonah deal with the large fish. The other forty-five verses of this book tell us the real struggle of Jonah's story. It is a story of someone like you and me. It is the story of his struggles, calling, disobedience, and problems. It is the story of his successes and failures and of the second chance he was given by God.

### **I. Historical Context-**

#### **a. The date and the writing of the book of Jonah:**

Most scholars place the writing of the book of Jonah in the eighth century B.C. between 782 B.C. and 745 B.C.

#### **b. Authorship:**

Who wrote the book of Jonah? Although the book of Jonah is about the Jewish prophet named Jonah, it appears the book itself was written by an unnamed author. It is difficult to make the case Jonah wrote the book that bears his name because Jonah is constantly referred to in the third person.

#### **c. The purpose of the book of Jonah:**

Why was the book of Jonah written? What is the theme of the book? The theme of the book of Jonah: **God's love has no limits**. The book of Jonah teaches us about the nature of God and his love for **all** people! Of all of Israel's enemies, the Assyrians had been the cruelest. Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh the Capital City of the Assyrian Empire. The old city of Nineveh is located in modern day Iraq near the city of Mosul Iraq. He was to tell the godless Assyrians to turn from their wicked ways, and if they would do this, the God of Israel would spare their lives. Jonah was Jewish, and if anything, he wanted the pagan people of Nineveh to die the worst possible death because of the Assyrians cruelty to the Jewish people. [Example: Telling an Israeli national to go to Hamas and tell them about God's love]. It's all about understanding the historical context.

When Israel was split into two sections in 920 B.C. there was the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes and the Southern Kingdom of Judah with its two tribes. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was overtaken and captured by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Several thousand Jews were murdered and massacred by the Assyrians. The Assyrians practiced genocide as a state policy.

### 3

The city of Nineveh was hated by the Jews so much that the Old Testament prophet Nahum named it, "The City of Blood." That was its title: "The City of Blood." Nahum writes in Nahum 3:1,3 "*Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims, piles of dead. Bodies without number, people stumbling over corpses.*" (Nahum 3:1,3)

Then in Nahum 3:19 he predicts the fall of Nineveh: "*Your wound is fatal. All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty.*" (Nahum 3:19) The prophet Nahum says when the City of Nineveh falls, people are going to stand up and clap and cheer.

It is in this context Jonah is commanded by God to go to these hated Assyrians and preach to them the God of Israel loves them. The theme of the book of Jonah: **God loves all people. His love has no limits. He even loves your enemies.** That was a tough lesson for Jonah to learn.

#### d. The interpretation of the book of Jonah:

How is the book of Jonah interpreted? You need to understand different Bible scholars through the years have interpreted the book of Jonah in different ways.

##### 1. Allegorical-

An allegory is a story with a hidden meaning. Those who interpret Jonah as an allegory equate each major character in the book to some event of historical significance during the time of the writing.

##### 2. Parable-

There are those who interpret Jonah as a parable. That means Jonah did not exist from a historical standpoint. Some who interpret Jonah as a parable say that Jonah is a well-written short story dating to the post exile/post exilic period of the Jews. Post exile refers to the Jewish people coming out of the Babylonian Captivity. The Babylonian captivity would occur 140 years later in 597 B.C. and there are some Bible scholars who say the book of Jonah is a parable, a story about the nation of Israel when they would eventually come out of slavery to the Babylonians.

##### 3. Literal Historical Approach- (My Interpretation)

This interpretation believes there really was a man named Jonah, who was swallowed by a fish. We do know that Jonah was a real, historical person. 2 Kings 14:25 says, "*He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of Arabah (Dead Sea), in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah, son of Amittai, prophet from Gath Hopher.*" (2 Kings 14:25)

One characteristic of a parable in the Bible is that person's name is rarely mentioned. For instance, there is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We do not know the Prodigal's name,

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Nor the name of his father or his older brother. Therefore, we have strong evidence that the book of Jonah is not a parable or an allegory. He was a real, literal, historical figure.

But the main reason I believe Jonah is a literal, historical figure is because Jesus believed Jonah was a real person. Listen to Matthew 12:39-41, Jesus answered, *"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it; for they (Ninevites) repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."*

If you question the historical nature of Jonah, then you are going to have problems with the integrity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus related Jonah in this passage to his own resurrection; and if Jonah's experience was not historical, such an association by Jesus would not have made sense. You will have problems with the resurrection of Christ.

**(Reading the Text: Jonah 1:1-3)**

- 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."*
- 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. (Jonah 1:1-3)*

**The word of the Lord comes to Jonah: (I like this translation)**

Could you, would you go to preach? Could you, would you go to reach, the people in Assyria? For you fit my criteria?

And Jonah says to the Lord:

I would not go there in a boat,

I would not go there in a float.

I would not go there in a gale.

I would not go there in a whale.

I do not like the people there.

If they all died, I would not care.

I will not go to that great town.

I'd rather choke. I'd rather drown.  
I will not go by land or sea.  
So stop this talk and let me be.

## 5

God calls people to particular places for particular purposes. For instance, in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, God called Isaiah to be a prophet to his people. Specifically, in Isaiah 6:8, the Lord said to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah Responded to the Lord by saying, "Here I am Lord. Send me."

What a contrast, when in Jonah's case we find God calling him to go to Nineveh and preach against the sins of the people. But when God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he replied, "Here I am Lord.....send someone else....I'm on my way to Tarshish."

Jonah was a prophet;he was not a priest. Priests served in the Temple. They offered sacrifices. They led the people of God in worship. A prophet was different. A prophet was a reformer. A prophet was an activist, a troublemaker. Prophets were were there to prick the people's conscience. Israel always had a lot of priests but they could handle only one prophet at a time.

Plus, Jonah was a prophet to Israel. He had nothing to do with other countries. They did not have the scriptures. Assyria did not have a Temple. They did not know about sacrifices. They certainly did not know the God of Israel. And God did not say in verses 2 to Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach **to it**" but "Go to Nineveh and preach **against it**." (v.2) Then, Jonah spoke the Hebrew language (perhaps some Aramaic) and the Assyrians had their own language and dialects which were Akkadian. (Akkadian language). He said, "I'm certainly not going to Nineveh because things may get lost in translation."

Verse 3- "But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed to 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."

Notice two times in verse 3 it says, "Jonah ran away from the Lord" "Jonah was fleeing from the Lord."

Let's look at a couple of maps to illustrate how bad Jonah wanted to get away from God:

- Gath Hopher (hometown of Jonah) to Nineveh: 500 miles
- Gath Hopher to Joppa (Jaffa): 60 miles
- Gath Hopher to Tarshish (near Spain): 2000 miles

Tarshish is significant not just because it is in the opposite direction from Nineveh, but Tarshish is in many ways the opposite kind of city than Nineveh. Nineveh was a military city where the Assyrian army had its home base. Tarshish was not a military power, but it had great wealth. It was a pioneer in the trade business.

## 6

Commerce and trade over the sea was like a new technology as better and stronger ships were built, therefore, bringing goods and services to Tarshish from all over the world. Many people in Tarshish were getting rich. So, the phrase, “I’m taking a ship to Tarshish” became a symbol of wealth and status in the New World. We might say, “I’m going to Beverly Hills, Silicon Valley, Wall Street, Madison Avenue, where the good life is.”

Verse 3 says, “**After paying the fare**, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.” (v.3)

A little detail we might skip over is verse 3 where it says, “**Jonah paid the fare.**” This is a big deal. In Jonah’s day, money or currency, or the use of coins was relatively new. Commerce and trade in the Ancient Near East were based on a barter economy. Coins or paper money as we know it was scarce among the people of Israel. Not many people would be able to do what Jonah did. Jonah had enough money/currency/coins to buy passage for a long voyage out of his pocket. He had mobility. He had options.

Here’s one of the dangerous things about money: Having money makes it easier for us to think we can run away from God, because money provides options.

Jonah thinks he’s running toward safety, but what may look safe from a human perspective may be the most dangerous place on earth. The only safe place is to be in the middle of God’s will for your life.

### **Application:**

It may be you are beginning to identify with Jonah. God has called you to a “Nineveh-like task” and like Jonah you are responding, “Lord, here I am....send someone else. Lord, I don’t want to do what you have called me to do”.

The better question is: “**What is your Nineveh?**” “What is it God is calling you to do and you are resisting and running from the Lord?”

Perhaps God is calling you to restore a relationship that has been broken. And the thing that is hindering the restoration of that relationship is your PRIDE. You’re saying, “God, I

know you want that relationship restored, but I sure don't want to do what I know I need to do." **That is your Nineveh.**

For some of you, God is calling you to repent of sin in an area of your life that no one else knows you're dealing with. You know that area of your life is displeasing to God, but you don't want to totally let go of it and release it into the hands of God or get help. **Nineveh.**

## 7

For some of you, God is calling you to a specific ministry area, there is a place of service to which you have been called, or there is a dream God has called you to fulfill, but like Jonah, you are running in the opposite direction. You're running from that dream, that place of service, that specific ministry area to which God has called you. Like Jonah, you are resisting God and refusing to go to Nineveh. You have your own Nineveh from which you are running.

Some of you are on a boat sailing for Tarshish, while God is saying, "Go to Nineveh". The question is, "Where are you headed?" There are only two roads in the Christian life. One leads to Nineveh, the other leads to Tarshish. One road is the will of God; the other is disobedience to His will.

It is important for you to go down the right road because God has job for you that no one else can do quite the way you can do it. Every person in this room is valuable to God. Each of you has a special part to play in the Body of Christ. You are important to God. And because you are unique, valuable, and important to God, it is critical that you obey God and do the things he has called you to do.

We are going to see in this series how God uniquely called Jonah, not Isaiah, not Jeremiah, not Amos, or any other prophet, to go to Nineveh. God's call was extremely unique and personal for Jonah.

God is still speaking to his servants today and his call on your life is just as personal. And preachers and pastors are not the only people God calls to particular places for particular purposes. Today he is calling you as a teacher, coach, lawyer, businessperson, homemaker, college student, banker, and engineer to specific kingdom tasks. But we must listen. And then, we must be willing to obey God and do whatever it is He has called us to do. We must be willing to go to Nineveh.

