

The God of Jonah

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's call and the grace He offers for repentance and new beginnings, as illustrated by Jonah's journey.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 55:7, Jonah 1:1, Jonah 1:17 - 2:1, Jonah 2:10 - 3:1, Romans 2:4, James 4:7, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance And Obedience", "Gods Sovereign Love"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the story of Jonah, highlighting the consequences of running away from God's will and the importance of true repentance and obedience. He emphasizes that God pursues His disobedient servants out of love, giving them opportunities to turn back and fulfill their calling. The sermon underscores the need to acknowledge and follow God's specific instructions, even if it requires humbling oneself and making difficult changes.

Transcript

Read: Jonah 1:1-3:3

There are times when life gets rough for the believer and he lifts up his voice and cries to God, "Why are you letting all this happen to me?" And the cry is honest. He is really baffled.

But there are times when the believer cries to God, "Why are you letting all these things happen to me?" But the cry is dishonest, for he knows very well what's going on.

If Jonah, in the belly of the fish had cried, "Why are you letting this happen to me?", it would have been a lie. Jonah knew why God was hemming him in with all this trouble.

Before the Word of the Lord came to Jonah saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh", Jonah was a free man. And if Jonah had flat-out rejected the Lord, he would have been free to do as he pleased for the time being. But Jonah acknowledged the God of Israel as his Lord.

"Of course you're my God, and I love you, Lord. I want to be your servant. I want to be part of your Kingdom But I'm not going to Nineveh."

"Yes, Jesus, I love you and I do want to follow you. I'm your servant. But I'm not going to get a job. I'm not going to ask that man for forgiveness. I'm not going to associate with white people, black people, gringos, Chicanos, Jews, Gentiles."

"Now, Lord, you know I just don't have a burden for that part of town."

So, we rise to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. We pack our Bible, of course - we're still going to get into the Word every day. And prayer - we're going to show God that we really are Christians.

At first we think we pulled it off. We stand on the deck of the ship and inhale the air of freedom as the sun smiles down upon the blue ocean.

"God understands. Maybe some other time. I'm not ready for Nineveh."

But the third day out the sky turns black and the waves rise a mile high and the wind blows the door right off our cabin.

"O God! Why are you letting all this happen to me?"

But we know - and God knows we know.

The man or woman who's running away from the call of God is not only bad news to himself, he's bad news to everything he touches - his children, his friends, the people he works with. Every sailor on that ship was in danger because of Jonah.

Don't get the idea that God was hemming Jonah in for spite - peeved that Jonah left Him holding the bag.

God is never left holding the bag.

God could have raised up ten prophets to replace Jonah in Nineveh and get the job done ten times faster.

In fact, God is doing that very thing across the earth at this hour. He's raising up a new crop of prophets because the prophets who were originally called to do the job copped out.

But before God raises up a replacement for some disobedient servant He gives that disobedient servant a more-than-fair shake.

God wasn't being nasty to Jonah when He sent that storm to buffet the ship.

God wasn't being vindictive when He sent the giant fish to swallow Jonah.

God was being gracious.

God was giving Jonah an opportunity to wake up.

If Jonah had insisted on going his own way, God would indeed have let him go his own way. Jonah would have come at last to the place where he would never ever hear the voice of God again.

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

He loves Jonah. He loves Nineveh. He even cares about the cattle in Nineveh.

But don't play games with that love!

There are people reading this today who are being hemmed in, not by persecution, not by trial, but by the very hand of the God from whose will they have been fleeing.

God sent you to Nineveh and you want to serve Him in Tarshish.

God commanded from you a specific act of obedience and you're trying to substitute something more to your liking.

You look as innocent and proper as any other tourist as you walk up the gangplank of that ship to Tarshish. But from the day the Word of the Lord came to you and you turned away from it, you have not been the same and you know it!

A study of the Book of Jonah will give you some clues to what's happening. For God deals with all His run-aways pretty much the way He dealt with Jonah.

The first sign that God is on your trail is the storm.

"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."

Jonah knew very well that this was not just another storm. This was God pursuing him. But Jonah wasn't going to pay any attention.

"Don't talk to me about Nineveh, 'cause I'm not going."

So he climbs down into the heart of the ship, pulls up the blankets, and goes to sleep.

When we're running away from God's will and our circumstances begin to boil and heave,

- we ignore it,
- close our minds,
- hole ourselves up in a corner and pretend we don't even care.

We hide in the crowd and keep telling ourselves, "God isn't getting at me personally. We're all in this together".

Then comes the next stage: the fish.

Now we get singled out. The finger of God is put on us. The storm abates for the others but gets worse for us. Now it's a private storm - a storm in the belly of the fish - hemmed in on every side. It's like being dead - like being in a grave.

You can experience this even if you have five hundred friends, thirty-five cousins, the most wonderful wife or husband and loving children. Suddenly you're walled in - trapped inside an invisible shell.

"The waters closed in over me, the deep was round about me. Weeds were wrapped around my head, at the roots of the mountains. I went down into a world whose bars closed upon me forever."

The prodigal son experienced this when he was feeding the swine in a foreign land. Peter went through this when he denied his Lord. Nebuchadnezzar went through this when his reason was taken from him for

seven years.

- It can happen to you in a crowd.
- It can happen to you in a prison cell.
- It can happen anywhere at any time.

Suddenly you're in the belly of the fish surrounded by darkness.

Then comes the awakening: now you remember what God called you to do.

When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came to thee.... What I have vowed I will pay.

Now you see that your own style of Christianity is an abomination and that your special kind of compromise is as filthy in God's sight as any other kind of compromise.

You've been doing your own thing and calling it "discipleship."

You've been going your own way and calling it "obedience."

You can't serve God in Tarshish when He has sent you to Nineveh. All the Bible reading and prayers in the world are useless to you when you are refusing to do the thing God told you to do.

"O God, I repent. I give up running. What I have vowed I will pay."

And with that prayer, prayed from the belly of the fish, comes God's deliverance.

The Lord spoke to the fish and the fish vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Then the Word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you".

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.

What a beautiful thing: God went to all that trouble to give Jonah a second chance. God gave Jonah the opportunity to put his stupid rebellion under the blood and go and do what he was told.

If that isn't love I don't know what is! He raises Jonah from the death of the fish's belly and says, "Alright, Jonah, now go to Nineveh". And, praise God, Jonah didn't push his luck. He went.

If some time in the past you heard the call of Jesus and you know you heard it, and you were told to go in a certain direction - make a certain change but you never did it - the fact that you are reading this, listening to this word is a sign from God that it's not too late.

Don't let the evil one tell you,

- "it's too late now, you have your ticket for Tarshish,"
- "it's too late now, the ship is going to sink,"
- "it's too late now, you've been swallowed by the fish."

Wherever you are. Whatever your circumstances. Call on the name of your Lord. Jesus is Lord even over the fish's belly, for He spent three days there Himself, in order that you could come forth into life.

You may think that you're hopelessly locked in those circumstances - but it's a lie.

There's not a person reading this who can't be set free.

There's not a person who can't make a new start.

"Lord, what I have vowed, I will pay."

"If you want me to go out and get that job, I'll do it if I have to walk the streets eight hours a day for six months."

"If you want me to go and ask forgiveness I'll do it. I'll eat that humble pie."

"If you want me to be one with Ninevites, I'll do it even though we never have been able to get along."

"If you want me to make peace with my husband, wife, brother, parents, I'll do it."

God grant that every Jonah reading this today may cry out to the Lord from the belly of the fish, for that cry will be heard.

There will be deliverance - a new start - if you're willing.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/the-god-of-jonah/>

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