

## Introduction

The book of Jonah is meant to be a mirror for God's people. This has always been its intent, since, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the author began to write out this story that is equal parts ridiculous, hilarious, and mind-boggling. Scholars classify this story as *didactic*, meaning that is intended teach the reader some key lessons. It is *not* just meant to be a story about a guy and a fish that we read and move on from. It was meant to be a prophetic message when it was written, and God still intends for it to have a prophetic message now.

Why have we taken this story of Jonah and turned it into a story about a guy and a fish, that can easily be recreated as a cartoon or with animated vegetables? The way we refer to this story is often "Jonah and the Whale," when the fish is in many ways one of the least significant things about this story. **I propose that we compromise the story of Jonah because if we actually look in the mirror that Jonah provides, we don't like what we see.** As we see this story unfolding, we understand that if we are going to take this seriously, as God's word to us, we must begin to rework our understanding of Jonah as a cute little story about a guy and a fish, and instead as a prophetic narrative that is speaking to us, today, in this time, trying to teach us something about ourselves that we do not want to hear. And what is that? **When God begins moving, we are often the first to run the opposite direction. And sometimes, the wicked world around us puts us to shame as God moves in spite of our rebellion.**

### Jonah 1:11-17

**11** Then 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. **12** He 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." **13** Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. **14** Therefore 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." **15** So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. **16** Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

**17** And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Have you ever seen a movie or TV show that drops you right into the action? A lot of crazy stuff is going on that you don't understand, characters are running around everywhere, things are exploding, and all of a sudden there's a freeze frame and a character will say in a narration "I bet you're wondering how I got here."

I can almost imagine that happening as Jonah is thrown over the side of this boat. As he hurtles down into the raging sea, let's freeze-frame Jonah a second and consider, how did he get there?

**Let's look at this chart that Trey showed us in our first week, and see where we are.** It does a great job of showing how the author of Jonah organized the book in a way that mirrors itself.

### **I. Jonah is called by God**

- A. Jonah is a prophet, loves Israel, prophesied that Israel would expand their borders (2 Kings 14:25) under Jeroboam II
- B. Called to Nineveh, an Assyrian city
- C. Doesn't want to go
  - 1. NOT scared (Jonah 4:2)
    - a) **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.
  - 2. Doesn't like the Assyrians
  - 3. Doesn't want others to become God's people
- D. Overwhelming narrative at the time: Israel is God's chosen people, they can do no wrong, God isn't going to judge them or welcome anyone else into his family
  - 1. Other prophets challenged this (Amos) and were persecuted by the monarchy and religious leaders

### **II. Jonah runs from God**

- A. Why? How?
- B. Basically is going to the other side of the known world
- C. "Went down" to Joppa, into the boat, will later talk about going down into the belly of the fish
  - 1. Implication of death, disaster, running from God's presence

### **III. God "catches up" to Jonah**

- A. Obviously you can't outrun God
- B. God sends a great storm to get Jonah's attention

- C. Jonah is in the bottom of the ship - seemingly not troubled
- D. They find out it is Jonah that is causing the storm, and Jonah explains why

**This brings us to the beginning of our section today.** Jonah has told the men what God he serves, and that he is running from this God, and they are terrified because they now realize that a God that they do not know is set against them because of Jonah. And whoever this god is, he is powerful enough to control the elements of nature.

**Again, the book of Jonah is meant to be a mirror.** Through the different episodes in the story Jonah is given the opportunity to reflect on how the pagans are responding to God, and consider how *he* is responding. This is the same for us today. As we move through these verses, we are going to contrast the actions of the sailors with Jonah's actions, and see how God uses them to reveal to Jonah and to us what righteousness should look like.

### **I. Mirror 1: Sailors try to save Jonah**

- A. Pretty clear that the men didn't want to sacrifice Jonah
  - 1. The sailors knew that Jonah was the problem
- B. Very self-focused passage all about man's action
  - 1. "What shall *we* do"
  - 2. "Quiet down for *us*"
  - 3. "Quiet down for *you*"
  - 4. "Because of *me*"
  - 5. God is absent in their conversation
- C. Jonah has the opportunity to correct the sailors but he doesn't
  - 1. Doesn't point them to the Lord
  - 2. "Because of me" - no admittance of wrong
  - 3. Why did Jonah not jump overboard?
    - a) Jonah chose to make the sailors do it
  - 4. Did Jonah have to get thrown overboard? Could he have repented?
    - a) Yes - Jonah chose not to repent

Timmer: God goes so far as to send a prophet to a non-Israelite city (something quite rare in the OT), yet Jonah not only disobeys that commission but when in the company of other Gentiles remains completely withdrawn from them.

**In this "mirror" we see that the sailors who do not know God are revealed as being more righteous than Jonah.** Jonah in contrast takes no responsibility, does nothing to try to help the

sailors, and does not point the sailors to God at all. The sailors even try to save his life but God was set against their efforts. So...

## II. Mirror 2: Sailors call out to God

- A. The sailors called upon the Lord
  - 1. The sailors specifically called on JONAH'S God
  - 2. The sailors again were revealed as more righteous than Jonah
    - a) Jonah did not appear to care about the sailors or their wellbeing
    - b) Surrender - in contrast to Jonah
    - c) NLT - you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons
- B. The sailors truly believed that they were killing Jonah - they may have thought this for the rest of their lives

**This second mirror reveals how the sailors call out and surrender to God in their time of distress.** In contrast, Jonah does not call out to God at all, on his behalf or the sailors. Jonah does not seem concerned by the storm - the contrast in their attitudes is quite different. Jonah knows God can save them, knows God can save *him*, he has just shifted to apathetic rebellion. He doesn't care, and apparently would rather die than do what God has asked him to do.

## III. Mirror 3: Sailors repent to God

- A. The sailors' fear has been shifted from the storm to Yahweh
  - 1. Timmer: To fear/revere God: consistently describes those who have and maintain a healthy relationship with Yahweh
  - 2. In contrast with Jonah, who said he feared God in verse 9 but does not appear to by his actions
  - 3. The sailors ACTUALLY fear God, while Jonah just says that he does
- B. Intertextual links
  - 1. The language in this section relates to other passages, specifically in the Psalms
    - a) Psalm 50
    - b) Psalm 107
    - c) Psalm 135
    - d) Psalm 115
  - 2. Many of them speak of the possibility of Gentiles (non-Jews) having a relationship with God
    - a) This is significant for many reasons, but specifically because it is the very thing that Jonah does not like!

### **Psalm 115:9-13**

9 O Israel, trust in the Lord!

He is their help and their shield.

10 O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord!

He is their help and their shield.

11 You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!

He is their help and their shield.

12 The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us;

he will bless the house of Israel;

he will bless the house of Aaron;

13 he will bless those who fear the Lord,

both the small and the great.

Those that fear the Lord will be blessed by him, regardless of their nation or ethnicity. This is what Jonah did not want to believe, but what the author of Jonah clearly wants us as readers to see.

Keller: All of this is ironic. Jonah was fleeing God because he did not want to go and show God's truth to wicked pagans, but that is exactly what he ends up doing.

**This third mirror shows us what surrender to God looks like.** The sailors did not know God, but still repent and call on his name. Jonah did not preach to them, he did not care about them, but in spite of his failure God still calls these sailors to himself. The contrast is clear: Jonah claimed to fear the Lord, but there was no action to support that claim. The sailors did not fear God, but once faced with the reality of who God was, they called on his name.

Timmer: In short, they revere Yahweh for who he is, not for what he can give them.

**This contrasts with who Jonah has shown himself to be. A stubborn, bigoted prophet that does not want to surrender to what God commands, and only wants God to bless him and his people - no one else.**

### **Application**

**I mentioned at the very beginning that the story of Jonah is not just meant to be a story - it is meant to teach us something.** The teaching is directed at God's people, who at first were the Hebrews, and are now anyone who believes in the name of Jesus. So, as those that believe in the name of Jesus, what does this teach us?

To answer this, let's take a summary look at Jonah the man first.

### **Jonah claimed to fear God**

1. Knew God intimately
2. Knew God's ability
3. Knew he was wrong, knew he was disobeying God
4. Did not repent
5. Did not care about others
6. Would rather die than obey God

### **How is this possible???**

It is easy for us to look at the story of Jonah and say "what is wrong with that guy??" I am sure that God's people have all asked that question throughout the years. It seems stupid. Just obey God, Jonah! Why wouldn't Jonah just go and do what God asked? Why would he not want people to come to know the Lord?

But remember, the story of Jonah is a mirror. God's people are supposed to look into this story and see what it says about them. We are God's people, so let's look into this part of the story and see what it says about us.

#### **I. Hardness of heart towards God**

- A. Jonah was close with God but wasn't okay with certain things that God asked him to do
- B. It is possible to be in church every Sunday, spend time with God, and still be hardened against what he asks
- C. Do you *fear* God? Live in reverent obedience, healthy relationship?

#### **II. Hardness of heart towards others**

- A. This is often how a hardness of heart towards God is displayed
- B. You cannot claim to have a soft heart towards God and have a hardness of heart towards others.
- C. Jonah was limited in who he cared about - God wasn't

### **III. Hardness of heart towards repentance**

- A. The final thing we see in this “mirror” is how when our hearts are hardened toward God and others, it is SO hard to recognize our need for repentance, just like Jonah
- B. I am not trying to be shocking or make you mad, but we all need to get shaken up because if we don’t realize our need for repentance - how can we repent?
- C. This is how it can look for us to have a hardness of heart toward repentance
  - 1. We will send some money and school supplies to kids overseas but God forbid they ever come here!
  - 2. Believing we should care for the sojourner, the widow and orphan, but looking the other way as children get locked in cages
  - 3. We ignore issues that make us uncomfortable and instead focus on the ones that we like and align with our politics
  - 4. We demonize opposition with nonsensical conspiracy theories and baseless accusations
  - 5. Instead of acknowledging our nation’s wickedness, we insist that our nation was “founded on Christian principles”
  - 6. Seeing a black person being murdered and wondering “I wonder what they did to deserve that?”
  - 7. Posting things on Facebook that make LBGTQ+ people think you hate them
  - 8. Saying we should care for the poor but then condemning every attempt to do so
  - 9. The list goes on and on

Our attitudes display to a hurting world that we don’t care about them - and even more, we don’t care about what God cares about.

Our hearts are hardened. We need to repent.

**Here’s the good news:** the gospel frees us to be able to care about what God cares about, without our own agenda! Our bigotry, privilege, opinions, and emotions harden our hearts toward God. But through repentance we can turn back to him and be freed to be able to proclaim the gospel to a hurting world.

**This is our job!**

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

**17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

**20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Since we are a new creation, what does that look like?**

### **Ephesians 2:10**

**10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

There are those that say in regard to social issues, “just preach the gospel, and don’t talk address any of those things.” They are dead wrong, and not preaching the whole gospel. You cannot have the gospel without repentance, and a changed heart. And what does a changed heart look like? Doing good works. *You are not saved by doing good works*, but if you say that you are saved and that claim is not accompanied by any good works, you must ask yourself whether you truly have become a new creation.

What happens when a whole nation of Christians act like Jonah? We are seeing it right now! On so many issues we see our culture outpacing us on things that we should care about! Their “righteousness” is a mirror that when we look in it, should put us to shame. We can’t simply say, like the ancient Hebrews, that we are God’s people so everyone but us is wrong. Yes, our culture is sinful. Yes, so much of what they care about is sinful. Yes, we should care about what God cares about because God does, not simply because our culture thinks it’s important. But God can use them as a mirror to show us where we need to repent.

Let’s look at these passages:

### **1 Peter 2:11-12**

**11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Jesus himself says:

**Matthew 5:14-16**

**14** “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

**Conclusion**

Do you think the chaos in our world catches God by surprise? Of course not! We are being given an opportunity to respond. What are we going to do? Are we going to be led by the Lord or our hearts going to be hardened to God and others? When we look around and see our culture outpacing us on caring about what God cares about, how do we respond? Do we fold our arms and pout like Jonah? Do we spend all our time criticizing and no time helping? Or do we cry out God, glorify him, and get busy doing his work?

One practical thought: what/who do you fear?

Another way to ask yourself this question: who/what is discipling you? The media? Our government? Facebook? Twitter? This will condition how you respond. From the mirror we see in Jonah, it is obvious how Jonah was being disciplined. He was disciplined into believing that his nation was the only one God cared about, and that he was right to shun and exclude the rest of the nations. He was disciplined into believing that he and his nation could do no wrong. He was intoxicated with power and prestige, and a nation that he loved more than anything - including God.

**Matthew 16:26**

**26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

What would be included in that “whole world?” What are you giving in return for your soul?

What is it worth to a man if he gains political power but loses his soul?

What is it worth to a man if he gains the all the social media popularity but loses his soul?

What is it worth to a man if he gains secure borders but loses his soul?

What is it worth to a man if he gains perfect health but loses his soul?

What is it worth to a man if he gains the greatest nation in the world but loses his soul?

**When we look into the mirror Jonah provides, we see ourselves in all of our sinfulness. But we also see God revealed in all of his goodness and sovereignty.** We can't miss this part of the Jonah story. GOD MOVED IN SPITE OF JONAH AND HE WILL MOVE IN SPITE OF US. God is not waiting around on us to give him permission to do what he wants. It is obvious that he is moving now, and the question is, will we join him? Will we joyfully surrender and go where he is leading, or will we have to be dragged kicking and screaming like Jonah?

As we close, contemplate the gospel and how we see it revealed in the story of Jonah, and what that means for us.