

“Confronting our Protests” Series: “Living the Jesus-Way in this Mosaic” Texts: Jonah 1:1-17; Matthew 12:38-39; Ephesians 2:13
Pastor Dave Sattler Missions Month, January 13, 2019

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: James Bruckner, Peter Williams, & Kevin Youngblood. Books: “The Comfortable Pew” by Pierre Berton (c.1965), “Pinocchio” by Walt Disney (c.1940), “From Every Tribe And Nation” by Mark Noll (c.2014), & “Redeeming the Enlightenment” by Bruce Ward. Online: cmaacan.org & joshuaoproject.net. Wikipedia: Mosul, Iraq. Song: “Swallowed Up (In the Belly of the Whale)” by Bruce Springsteen, c.2012.

I. Introduction:

- **<Slide>** Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC, today launching our Preaching Series for Missions Month 2019.
- We live in a city becoming increasingly rich and diverse in ... language, culture, socio-economics, religious ideologies ... and I could go on. The world is right here in North & West Vancouver!
- So, how does the Christian Story mesh with this time in our city? Our world?
- In his book on Christianity and liberal virtues, Bruce Ward says, Q: The Christian tradition “possesses the resources, in [its] teachings and practices, that can form people ... who live as though ‘we are all responsible for all.’”
 – WARD, p.154.
- As Christ-followers, how do we live the Jesus-Way, in this mosaic, with all sorts of people all around us?
- **<Slide>** For the next three weeks, we will journey through the Book of Jonah, a true masterpiece. Historical narrative, with a little bit of satire mixed in, Jonah is literature with a timeless impact.
- So good, Disney borrowed parts of the story for its classic, *Pinocchio* (c.1940).
- Phrases, now common in the English language, such as, ‘you can run but you can’t hide’ and ‘washed up’ find their origins in Jonah; it’s even the topic of a Bruce Springsteen song, “Swallowed Up (In the Belly of the Whale)” (c.2012)!
- But, for all its great drama, this is primarily a story in which hearts are on display — peoples’ hearts ... and God’s heart — for all to see.
- Jonah confronts the dark prejudices often resident deep in the hearts of Christians — even prophets and pastors. [Hard to believe, I know].
- These wrong attitudes fodder our protests when it comes to obedience to the call to join God in His mission to lost people. And, keep us on the sidelines.
- Or, send us running the opposite direction!
- From conversion of Gentile sailors, to the repentance of Israel’s archenemy, to care for His creation — a huge fish, a vine, a worm, and some cattle, to His robust dialogues with His reluctant missionary, **Jonah chiefly spotlights the Christian God’s amazing love for, and relationship with, all.**
- **<Slide>** Please turn now to Jonah 1, or look it up on p.753-4 in the blue Bibles in the seat-rack in front of you, or fire it up on your electronic device.

- Can't preach Jonah without examining its plausibility: is there a fish, on earth, with a throat large enough to swallow a human? Maybe.
- Was Jonah a real person even? From historical records and other biblical references, including the endorsement of Jesus Himself, there's good reason to believe so. Hailing from Galilee, near where Jesus grew up, we know Jonah lived in the 8th Century BC.
- Differing from other prophetic books, Jonah focuses not so much on the prophecies but the story of the prophet. Whose behaviour is not exactly prophet-like. Which leads us to perhaps the greatest argument for its authenticity: Hebrew writers never wrote this way about their leaders.
- The Book of Jonah stands out so uniquely it would surely not have been included in the Bible if it weren't, in fact, true. As one scholar says, Q: Jonah "reads like the honest down-to-earth confession of a man." – WILLIAMS, p.6.
- Which makes the man, and the story, so relatable.
- Through study of Jonah, and by the Spirit, we trust God will further grow our mission-hearts as, together, we continue to express the love and hope of Jesus. To family, friends, & neighbours. In this mosaic.

Text: Jonah 1:1-17 <Read>

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.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." 7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) 11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" 12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." 15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

- <PRAY> ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. Open our hearts more to the Jesus-Way. We’re hungry to hear from You.’

II. Narrative Outline:

1. <Slide> God Speaks (1:1-2)

- God sets the narrative in motion with His Word, Q: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it,” the Lord says (2a). This call to “go” and “preach” to a foreign nation was new territory for the people of God.
- Nineveh was 900km northeast of Jerusalem near the modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq. Later, it would become the capital of Assyria, the rising power of the 8th Century. And archenemy of Israel.
- The prophet Nahum records the people of Nineveh’s ... evil plots against God (1:9), their cruelty in war (2:2), their exploitation of the helpless (2:12), and their practices of idolatry, prostitution, & witchcraft (3:4).
- God saw their wickedness.
- The Ninevites’ reputation was well-known throughout the ancient world. So this is a tough call, for sure. A difficult assignment given by God to one of His most experienced and reliable servants, Jonah.

2. <Slide> Jonah Runs (1:3)

- The job of a prophet’s was to sit in God’s presence, to hear the Lord’s voice, decipher it, and then deliver God’s messages to the people.
- This time, could God have asked Jonah to do anything harder?!
- His objection is a silent one. Jonah simply runs! To Tarshish, the most remote place he knows; and, presumably, where Jonah thinks no word from God will ever bother him again. He wants out!
- And, his downward spiral is reckless — often the case for God’s falling leaders.
- The text indicates, in his haste, the bolting prophet, may even have had to acquire the entire ship, its crew, & cargo for his escape! Blew it all in an effort “to flee from the Lord” (3)! See, sometimes God allows our disobedience to play itself out awhile, so He’s able to teach us even deeper lessons.
- <Slide> APP — Let’s camp here a bit ... why does Jonah run?
 - o Does he fear the Ninevites? Afraid they’ll kill him? Maybe.
 - o I suggest Jonah’s inner dialogue may have sounded something like this, Q: ‘Oh I know what You’ll do, God! If I go and preach, You’ll let them repent. And then, You’re gonna go easy on them! It’s not fair! Those bad people don’t deserve Your mercy! And, I don’t want to be in heaven with them!’
 - o I think that’s why Jonah runs. From God and His mission-call.

- **<Slide>** APP — Mustn't miss this either: are you running right now?
 - Perhaps God has asked you to do something, and you're ignoring it.
 - Hoping the call, or He, will go away. Perhaps you're running because you don't agree, or you don't like what He's asking of you.
 - Sure, you're in church, but, in your heart, you're somewhere else.
 - On the run. 'Off to Tarshish' — far away from God as you can get.
 - I know, staying close to God, living in His presence, is hard at times.
 - Constantly remind us of our dependence on Him.
 - Makes me feel like running sometimes too!
 - When truth is: we can never flee God's presence. He is always right there. And, God's presence is actually what we really need. Always.
 - Running from God is exhausting. So, it's best we stop.

3. **<Slide> God Pursues (1:4-8)**

- V.4, Q: "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea ..."
- No matter where we go or what we've done, God never gives up on us. Always pursues us. I know, good, in one way ... not so good, in another.
- God uses the "violent" sea, the "threatened" ship (4), even a group of tough sailors to get through to Jonah.
- Who's gone down, way down, "below deck" (6). And I'm sure it's not exactly a cheery elfin response the captain receives when he rustles Jonah awake, Q: "Get up and call on your god [like the rest of us have already been doing]!" (6)
- Soon "the lot [falls] on Jonah" (8) and he's exposed as the one "responsible for the whole calamity" (7). And, he's subject to a barrage from the sailors, including that party-question, dreaded by every pastor, "What kind of work do you do?" (8)

4. **<Slide> Jonah Witnesses then is Plunged (1:9-15)**

- In V.9 the prophet dusts himself off and pulls himself together, Q: "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."
- And you gotta love the irony! Through the less-than-perfect testimony of His broken, on-the-run, disobedient servant, God, surprisingly, begins to reach the hearts of these lost sailors.
- ILL/APP — O how I long for the Lord to use ... my great strengths ...
 - My winsome personality, my oratory gifts, my leadership skills, my notable successes ... to impact others. Sure, God does use those.
 - But, the notion that only our 'greatness' is useful, that we need to 'have it all together' before God could ever use us ... is, I believe, an enemy tactic to keep us on the 'sidelines' of God's mission.
 - More often, at least for me it seems ...
 - God uses my weaknesses, my disappointments, my mistakes, even my failure and sin, as a 'bridge' to reach others. If I'm open to it.

- o No, I don't always enjoy the process. Makes me vulnerable. But, I'm learning to roll with it. To allow God to use my weakness too!
- Soon after, Jonah gives himself up.
- <Slide> Not wishing to anymore endanger the lives of others [our sin often does that; we don't sin in a vacuum], Jonah asserts, Q: 'It's my fault. Toss me overboard and the storm will calm.' (12).
- APP — And we witness here a small 'turning' of Jonah's heart.
 - o At the key moment, Jonah doesn't cave. He mans up.
 - o Sure, like all of us, he will soon turn away again.
 - o But, there is a display of humble surrender here.
 - o To simply stop running is an important step, but it's not enough.
 - o God also wants us to turn from our sin and disobedience and turn to Him. Confession is good, but obedience should follow.
 - o This is the nature of true repentance God desires.
- And, when the sailors chuck Jonah over the gunwales and he plunges into the water, sure enough, "the sea [grows] calm" (15).

5. <Slide> The Sailors Repent (1:16)

- In the ancient world, ocean depths symbolized death; and, tempestuous seas were seen as chaos inflicted by the gods, as an act of divine wrath.
- Now, I'm told, extended time at sea fosters a healthy fear of the Creator.
- Seasoned mariners are known for their belief in deities.
- But, in the aftermath of the quieting of these ancient symbols of divine wrath, chaos, & death, the Gentile sailors in our story are confronted with the identity of the One True God. And their profession of faith is remarkable.
- Hearts changed, they make "vows" and offer "sacrifices" to the Lord (16).
- Their faith-expression is no mere religious sentiment, it's grateful worship.

6. <Slide> God Provides (1:17)

- The Lord's provision comes in the form of an infamous "huge fish [that swallows] Jonah" (17).
- Masterfully, God employs one of His nonhuman creatures to accomplish His greater purpose. The fish relocates Jonah, transports him back, to where God wants him to be. And, its "belly" offers a contemplative space for Jonah to do some serious soul-searching in the presence the Lord.
- Cool how God provides for us; sometimes, rather miraculously.

III. Application:

- Let's land the plane now with a few application points.

A. <Slide> On ... **Mercy for Others.**

- If we're honest, there's a wrong attitude still prevalent in us church people ...

- o When it comes to the ‘other’:
- o Like that addict who regularly hits us up for cash.
- o Or that co-worker who keeps ripping off the company.
- o Or that gay classmate who constantly mocks our faith.
- o Or our feelings toward immigrants from other nations. Two years ago when we announced we were sponsoring refugees, you’d be surprised how many well-meaning congregants protested to me in the foyer: ‘What’s the church doing bringing in a muslim family from Iraq?!’
- **<Slide>** Jonah confronts our dark prejudice toward the ‘other.’
- As one commentator puts it, Q: “Christianity places before [us] ... a whole host of others who are ... despised in the eyes of the world: the hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and captive, a whole ocean of human ... painfulness. It does not merely will that [we] see them. It wills that [we] should recognize in them [our] neighbours and [ourselves]. – BARTH in Ward, p.221.
- ILL — Truthfully I too have a difficult time with God’s mercy.
 - o On one hand, I remember as a young adult thinking, ‘Maybe I should take up a career as a drug-dealer or a gangster, to really test God’s mercy. And, beef up my testimony!’
 - o **<Slide>** While, on the other hand, I’ve long wrestled with a subtle ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude. I mean, c’mon, look at me! I’ve always been ‘good.’ Used to be a bit of a Mama’s boy. [Still am]. Grown up in church. Never smoked a cigarette. Never been drunk. Never been arrested [only two speeding tickets my whole life!] I’m as ‘squeaky-clean’ as they come! Compared to the rest of you, at least!
 - o And it’s taking me decades to un-learn what I thought was the proper, smug, Christian attitude of ‘looking down my nose at other people.’ And their sin!
 - o **<Slide>** APP — But now ... I am beginning to fathom, and to embrace, the incredibly wide stretch of God’s relentless mercy.
 - o The older I get, and the closer I come to Jesus, the more I see my great flaws. And the more I see God’s great mercy. For me. And, for other people. People of NSAC, may we open our hearts more and more to His mercy. For ourselves. And for others.
 - o Beautiful, God’s mercy transforms us.

B. <Slide> On ... God’s Call to Go.

- Suppose God came calling to you, like Jonah. How would you respond?
- ILL - Reminds me of a story I’ve shared before about my childhood pastor.
 - o Of how, in his 20s, he’d received a call from God to be a pastor.

- o But, like Jonah, he ran the other way!
 - o Years later, still on the run, he suffered a bad car accident and was seriously injured — even lost one of his eyes.
 - o Through that incident, he felt God stop him right there and change his heart. And I remember Pastor Fred reminding us all the time, Q: ‘Always listen to God.’
- And I wonder, how open are you to listening to God?
 - Daunting, God’s mission-call can drag us far outside our comfort zones.
 - Begs the question, AQ: Where is your ‘Nineveh?’
 - The place that causes you to think about running the other direction?
 - Reality is: the Jesus-Way calls us to go, to ‘other’ people, different from us — some we may not even like, or ever choose to befriend. But, when we open our hearts and go, God is able to love and reach all sorts of people through us.
 - Difficult, I know, but I want to be quick to listen to God.
 - Often, God simply wants us to ‘get our feet moving.’
 - Be willing to take that first step. Off the couch. Across the hallway. Over the driveway. Into the coffee shop. Knock on the door. Initiate the conversation.
 - Or, take a bigger leap. Join a missions team. Enrol in theological education. Make a career change. Study a new language. Move overseas.
- **<Slide>** These days, our denomination, the Christian & Missionary Alliance in Canada, is sending most new missionaries to people groups deemed ‘least-reached.’ Places in our world where the gospel is yet to be translated, or less than 5% of the population is Christian.
 - According to the Joshua Project, today there are still over 7,000 unreached people groups representing more than 40% of the world’s current population. With India being the most least reached.” — *joshuaproject.net*.
 - For some time now, NSAC Leadership has been praying for God to call ... new individuals, couples, families ... from our church, to go to one of these “least-reached people groups.” One cannot go into these countries as a traditional ‘missionary.’ Requiring new methods of preparation, this ‘undercover’ mission work is extremely difficult. Results are slow.
- **<Slide>** ILL — But, when His people willingly obey and go ...
 - o God tends to move powerfully through them. Against the odds.
 - o Like in Iran, as Pastor Dariush shared last week, in the face of Islam, the underground Christian Church today is growing.
 - o We’ve seen it ... God using the Harada family to plant a church amongst the I-wak, an unreached people group in the mountains of the Northern Philippines.
 - o And Gaileen, part of the incredible mission of God reaching the island of Cuba amidst an oppressive government regime.

- o God is on the move! Always. Are we willing to go and join Him?

C. <Slide> On ... **God's Work of Salvation in Christ.**

- For such a short book, Jonah is quoted often in other parts of the Bible.
- Our Lord, Himself, coins a phrase, “the sign of Jonah” that sheds some light on God’s mission to save all people. It also puts Him in trouble with the religious leaders of His day. And, even His friends and family.
- To set it up, Jesus is in Nazareth, His hometown, teaching and healing people.
- To mixed reviews — mostly negative. ‘Could this be Joseph’s son?’ locals ask.
- Q: “Then,” Cf. Matthew 12:38-39 says, “Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.’ [In other words, ‘Perform a miracle for us now!'] 39 [Jesus] answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’”
- Wow, He’s fired up! So what, on earth, does Jesus mean by the “Sign of Jonah?” Scholars have debated for centuries.
- <Slide> The Sign of Jonah reminds us nothing is impossible with God.
- No matter how bad things go. A reluctant prophet running in the opposite direction. A baby sent to Roman-occupied Palestine in the 1st Century. Jesus sentenced to death by crucifixion. No matter how hard life gets. Despite all the pain and suffering in this world. God’s mission can never be thwarted.
- God is in the business of ‘snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.’
- So, as you receive communion today, take heart, as you face your impossible situations — your broken relationships, your desperate need for healing, your feelings of hopelessness. No matter what, God, not evil, always has the last word. Remember, with God, nothing is impossible.
- <Slide> The Sign of Jonah also reminds us God breaks down all barriers.
- With the same passion that drove His employment of a giant fish to passionately ‘reel in’ His disobedient prophet to get His message out to the lost people of Nineveh, God comes to us. All of us.
- Jesus left behind all the glories of heaven. To live on earth as one of us. To die for us. All our sins are forgiven because Jesus paid the punishment for them on the cross. Three days later, Jesus rose again, conquering sin, death, & darkness. And now, salvation is freely offered to all — all ages, all skin colours, everyone with a past, everyone with a story.
- I love how Cf. Ephesians 2:13 says it, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”
- Because Jesus first came to us, all now are welcome. All who put their faith in Jesus have been “brought near” by His cross. Amen. I invite the Worship Team and Servers to please come. <Prayer, then Instruction>