

Sunday July 12, 2026
Jonah 1:4-17
Jonah: For the City Series
@ FGBC
30 Minutes

Who Doesn't Deserve God's Mercy?

- What is something that you really don't like...maybe even something that you hate?
 - o It could be something, like my hatred for alive birds.
 - o It could be an injustice or a disease...cancer, addiction, trafficking.
- Who do you hate most? or Who doesn't deserve mercy in your eyes?
 - o Some of you are taken aback by the fact that I would even ask such a question in church...I mean Jesus calls us to love our neighbors right?
 - o We aren't supposed to hate anyone...maybe a slight dislike, but that's it.
- Last week we started working our way through the book of Jonah, and began the discovery of Jonah the prophet who really wasn't an awesome prophet...he was very hesitant to share the message of God and was much more concerned with himself, his comforts, and his heritage then he was with really following God with all his life.
 - o Jonah acted the way that he did because of a fear that God was going to be gracious and merciful to people that were different from Jonah...people who had a different background and heritage than Jonah.
 - "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people." (Jonah 4:2, NLT)
 - Jonah didn't want other people who were different from him to experience God's mercy...it sounds like he wanted destruction for them.
 - Jonah had pride for his nation and background that was troublesome, and the Ninevites (the people Jonah was running from) were different...they weren't Jonah's people.
 - Jonah was happy living in his own little bubble and kind of hated other people, figuring that they didn't deserve God's mercy.
 - If you were a Hebrew, you were good in Jonah's books.
 - If you were not a Hebrew, Jonah didn't like you.

READ Jonah 1:4-17

- Jonah runs away from all that is good and all that God calls him to all because he doesn't want other people to experience abundant life in the God of Israel.
 - o Runs away from Ninevah.
 - o Runs away from the storm by climbing into the hold of the ship.
 - o Runs away from his God by putting his heritage before his faith.
 - o Runs away from his life by asking the sailors to kill him.
- Jonah didn't want to be around the pagans.

- The pagans were the people of Ninevah, whom Jonah ran from.
 - The pagans were also these sailors headed to Tarshish, whom Jonah avoided as much as he was able.
- Have you ever avoided someone that you didn't like?
 - Have you ever run from God?
- As Jonah runs and avoids, he is doing so with some racial undertones...Jonah doesn't want certain people (Ninevites, sailors) to experience abundant life simply because of who they are...their race, background, ethnicity.
 - But the argument of God throughout scripture is that people matter, period... regardless of ethnicity, background, job, gender.
 - God cares for all people, and we are called to follow suit.
- Who are these sailors?
 - It is likely that they are the Phoenician people.
 - Hebrews and Phoenicians had a good relationship
 - Hebrews were agrarians who lived inland, while the Phoenicians lived on the water, in the cities of Tyre and Sidon.
 - They traded together and there was some intermarriage that happened (which wasn't necessarily a great thing, but it happened).
 - They differed in their understanding of the divine.
 - Hebrews had a monotheistic understanding of God...Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "The Lord Is our God, the Lord alone. You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength."
 - Phoenicians had a polytheistic view of the divine...there were many gods who were worshipped and each of those different gods had different specialities.
 - These sailors knew a god(s) and would have had a familiarity with the Hebrew God.
- As we continue to look at Jonah, we see some examples of what fear looks like in the lives of the sailors.
 - 1) Fear of circumstances
 - The pagan sailors feared for their lives when the storm set in (1:5)
 - These were experienced sailors...the water was their livelihood.
 - Experienced sailors are not just fair-weather sailors...they had likely experienced their fair share of storms throughout their work.
 - These sailors though realized that there was something different about this particular storm...there was a divine aspect to this storm...this storm was otherworldly, hence their terrified response when they found out that Jonah was a Hebrew who worshipped "the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" and was running.

- Their fear was further exacerbated by the realization that the storm wasn't just a low pressure system going by, it was a God-pressure system hovering over the waters.
 - In that moment, those sailors knew something about God, even if they couldn't place their finger on it exactly, so they feared their circumstances.
- 2) Fear from action.
 - Jonah and the sailors then experience a fear that comes out of their actions.
 - First Jonah wants to escape life...he asks to be thrown into the sea...he sees death as being an easier option than to face the consequences of God.
 - He comes across as sincere, "Throw me overboard...this is all my fault...if you throw me overboard everything will be okay."
 - Jonah is saying this so that he can escape, not so the sailors can escape.
 - I don't think that Jonah actually knows that his suicide mission would actually stop the storm...he just wants to get away from these sailors.
 - But the sailors don't want blood on their hands...they don't want death to be the result of their actions.
 - Even though Jonah gave the okay, Jonah's death would still be their fault...I can imagine that in throwing Jonah overboard, that reality that they killed a man would have stuck with them.
 - So the sailors row and row and row so that they won't be faced with death.
 - Their efforts are fruitless...this divine storm is too much for the sailors.
 - Finally it comes to the point where they have no other choice but to throw Jonah overboard...their hand has been forced...and at this point, as far as the sailors knew, Jonah was dead.
 - The sailors had no clue that Jonah was eaten by a fish and that he was alive still.
 - The sailors experience fear rooted in their actions.
- 3) Then there is the fear of the Lord.
 - Once the sailors realized that their efforts of rowing harder weren't going to be enough, they cried out to the Lord...they didn't cry out to their gods,

but they cried out to Yahweh, the God of Jonah, while the storm is still raging.

- I can't imagine what it would be like to be in that position...to cry out to a different god than what you know when you are in a state of emergency.
 - But when God shows up, God is going to draw people to himself regardless of the actions of those who are around.
- And then that fear of the Lord continues to be exhibited after the storm calms...after Jonah has been thrown overboard...“The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power.” (Jonah 1:16a)
 - The divine storm becomes a divine revelation of the power of God and these sailors take note.
 - In the storm calming, the wrath of God is satisfied.
 - After the storm has cleared, these pagans commit their lives to Yahweh... “They offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.”
 - Usually vows like this are made when in the midst of duress, not once the duress has ended...
 - Once the crisis that we find ourselves in has ended, it becomes easier for us to go back to the way things were instead of committing to the vow that we made.
 - Usually when things turn out okay again, that commitment to God that was so important in the midst of the storm wanes.
- Jonah's fear of other people and his fear of God bringing people to abundant life caused him to, in the words of Daniel Timmer, become an anti-missionary.
 - Timmer says, “Jonah's anti-missionary activity has ironically resulted in the conversion of non-Israelites.” (Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation, and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah*), pg 75)
 - This is the exact thing that Jonah was trying to avoid, but God has a way of accomplishing his purposes even with disobedient people.
- The story of Jonah is upside down story where the opposite of everything that you expect to happen, happens.
 - Jonah sleeps in a storm, which you typically wouldn't do when you are on a boat...it's usually all hands on deck.
 - Jonah is identified as the culprit and cause of the storm, but the sailors don't accuse him and stone him as is often the case in scripture, but they try to save him.
 - Jonah's anti-missionary activity leads to people coming to faith.
 - Pagan sailors repent.
 - A suicide mission ends up with Jonah right back where he started...at a crossroads needing to figure out what he was going to do next...Ninevah? Or run again?
- This upside down experience is similar to the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims...

- Blessed are the poor, the sad, the humble, those who hunger for justice, those who are merciful and pure of heart, those who work for peace, those who are persecuted.
- Sit at the foot of the table, not at the most important seat...the first shall be last and the last shall be first.
- Love those who are outcasts and poor and in need, serving and feeding and visiting and caring for them
- If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
- If someone hurts you, turn your cheek.
 - Jesus doesn't preach a kingdom of power but of humility and surrender and service.
 - Almost everything that Jesus teaches is the opposite of what the world tells us is important.
 - If someone hurts you, fight back.
 - If your hand causes you to sin, it probably isn't a big deal...indulge your desires.
 - If someone is in need, they probably deserve to be in need...they should just work harder.
 - Fight for what you want...fit in and rub shoulders with the powerful so you can succeed.
 - Hide your sorrows and humility...be strong in everything.
- Abundant life can come from the most unexpected places as we see with the pagan sailors who turn their backs on their pagan gods.
 - And we see a glimmer of abundant life in Jonah too...the God that Jonah doesn't seem to trust actually saves him, and Jonah is given another chance... (Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah*)
 - Don't we all need another chance and another and another because we so often squander the chances before us?
- In many ways, the story of Jonah is about evangelism and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.
 - Jonah ran and didn't want to work for the good of the pagans, but those pagans came to faith...
 - Jonah later doesn't run, but walks very slowly and hesitantly into Ninevah to proclaim the 5 word message that God gives him, and people come to faith...
 - We see in Jonah God calling us to be faithful to the message of God to the world around us, even to people that we hate and see as being very different than us...people who we think can't deserve the abundant life that God gives.
 - Everyone is deserving of abundant life, not just the people you choose to be deserving...everyone is deserving not because they have or can earn anything, but because God is the giver of abundant life.
 - Everyone is deserving of hope in the midst of the storm.
 - Everyone is deserving of love in the midst of brokenness.

- Abundant life, hope, and love are gifts of God to you and gifts that you can give to others.
- As followers of Jesus, we may not be called to Ninevah, but we are most definitely called to proclaim Christ to the world around us.
 - When it comes to being faithful to what God calls us into, Penn Jillette, magician and atheist has something to say to that.
 - “I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize...[don’t evangelize]. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward...how much do you have to hate somebody to *not* proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?
“I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is *more* important than that.” (Penn Jillette)
- Jonah lived in the reality where he didn’t believe the other (the sailor, the pagan, the Phoenician) deserved life...hope...love...the message of salvation.
 - Often we can act the same way.
 - We are scared to give a reason for the hope that we have.
 - We are scared of what other people might think.
 - We say, “Someone else is better gifted at me when it comes to speaking, sharing, evangelism, so I will leave it in their hands.”
 - I am not saying that we should be the person on the street corner telling people they are going to hell, but I am saying that we must be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, and be willing to go when God calls us to go with love for our neighbors, friends, and enemies alike, instead of running in the opposite direction, with hearts filled with hatred to those around us.
 - We are called to speak and act in love for God and those around us...we are called to serve and listen and speak the life of Jesus when the opportunity arises.
 - Last week Dan asked the question, “Will you let God’s love wake you up?”
 - Will you let the love of God pursued the sailors, wake you up?
 - Will you let the love of God pursued a disobedient Jonah, wake you up?
 - Will you let the love of God pursues you, day after day, wake you up?