

## Tempered by Trials

### Sermon # 8

#### Jonah: Learning You Can't Out Run God!

Through the various characters of our "Tempered by Trials" series we have specifically looked at the way the problems and trials they faced in life shaped them to the men and women they became. The trials and the problems, the troubles they faced made them into the people they became. Trials may not be pleasant but they are necessary tools that God uses to forge our characters.

Abraham – Learning to Trust When No Solution Seems Possible

Jacob – Learning Dependence the Hard Way

Joseph – Learning that God Is Always Near

Moses – Learning to Wait On God's Timing

Elijah – Learning that God Will Provide

Daniel – Learning to Lean On God In A Crisis

And tonight we look at the life of "Jonah – Learning You Can't Out Run God." If you are familiar with the story of Jonah at all you know that God called Jonah to take a message of judgment to Nineveh. Look with me at Jonah 1:1 which says, *"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, (2) 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wicked-ness has come up before Me.'"*

Nineveh was an up-and-coming world power in Jonah's day, the most important city in Assyria. This is the last place on earth that Jonah thought God would send him; why would God send Jonah to preach to his enemies?

Verse three begins with two of the saddest words in the whole book, "but Jonah." Instead of being thankful and setting out to serve God, Jonah decided to run. We are like Jonah in that we defy God when He guides us in directions that we don't want to go.

The person that attempts to "flee the presence of the Lord" is one that is refusing to serve God in the task that he or she knows that God has called them to do.

We need to understand that Jonah made a conscious decision not to heed the call of God. Nineveh is to the East. Tarshish is to the West. Jonah set sail for a destination in the opposite direction from God's command.

Surely as a Prophet he knew what the words of Psalm 139:7-10, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (8) If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. (9) If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, (10) Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.”

But I really don't think that Jonah really thought he could get away from God. I think Bruce Wilkerson may have hit upon what Jonah thoughts were when he wrote, *“If I deliberately disobey Him and oppose His will, it will surely disqualify me for the job. God will have to forget about me and let me go my own way.”* [Bruce Wilkerson & Larry Libby. Talk Thru Bible Personalities. (Atlanta: Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, 1983) p. 133]

That makes perfect sense to me because at one time I think it also described by on feelings as I fought the call to the ministry.

Verse three goes on to say, (v. 3b) “... He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

The Bible says that he went down to Joppa. He found a ship and he bought a ticket. This was a calculated decision. Jonah knew where God had called him and decided he was going his own way. This may surprise you but, anytime we fall away from the Lord it is always calculated. We make plans to do wrong and then we follow through on our plans.

Although some may try to argue the point, the truth is that any path that leads you away from God is downhill. Once we step on the pathway of disobedience, the road keeps spiraling downward. Note Jonah's ongoing downward digression. It is characterized in the New King James Version by the words, *down, down, down*. He went down to Joppa (v. 3a). He went down into the ship (v. 3b). He went down in sleep (v. 5).

*First, Jonah learned God Loves Us Too Much to Let Us Go (v. 4)*

“But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.”

Jonah had chosen the path of disobedience and God would have been within his rights to have said, *“Jonah, you have disobeyed me, and as such you have forfeited the right to be called my child. I am letting go!”* But he did not do so. God loved him too much not to intervene.

I want us to notice the contrast between the first two words of verse three, (“But Jonah”) and the first three words of verse four, (“Then the Lord”). Jonah expressed his puny rebellion but God loved him too much to let him go. The Bible says that God sent the storm. This was not just an ordinary storm but a storm so “great” the even veteran sailors were afraid.

We know that the LORD can calm the troubled waters of our lives, but have we ever stopped to think that He is the same LORD who can stir them up into a great frenzy. It all depends on whether he is in the boat with you or not. If he is in the boat then we can call out like the disciples when they found themselves in a storm, "Master save us." But if he is not in the boat and you are running away from Him in disobedience, then what?

I want you to consider that, God took the call upon Jonah's life so seriously that He would actually sink the ship on which the disobedient prophet was sailing, if necessary rather than let him continue on the path of disobedience. God is too merciful and too loving to allow His children to drift into open rebellion without disciplining them.

In verse four it says that *"the Lord sent a great wind on the sea..."* and in verse seventeen it says, *"the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.."* The storm was God's doing. When the sailors drew lots to determine who was the guilty party(v.7), God caused the lot to fall on Jonah. God sent the great fish to swallow Jonah. It was no fluke, it was no coincidence, it was God's hand. Yet it was not God's hand of punishment it was God's hand of deliverance.

*God Loves Us Too Much To Let Us Go and ...*

Second, Jonah Found out God Loves Us Enough To Give Second Chances (3: 1)

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time saying, (2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

Jonah found out that God gives second chances. Our failures can leave us feeling that God could never use us again, that God could never bless us again, and that we are useless in God 's work and to God's plan.

We serve an awesome God! He has plans for each of us and we can't fail enough to ever change those plans. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future with hope."

Jonah had failed when he was first called to go to Nineveh, but his failure was only temporary. It has been said that failure is not fatal and does not have to be final. There is a huge difference between "failing" at something and being a failure. And Jonah isn't the only person in the Bible who "failed" God at some point. I want to use just one Old Testament example and one New Testament example to make my point.

In the Old Testament Abraham was called by God and told that from him he would rise up a mighty nation. There is just one small problem, how do you make a nation out of a man with no children. But God promised Abraham that his wife, Sarah, would give him a son. But the years come and go and the biological clock is ticking. Sarah is pass the child bearing years. So what does Abraham do? He decides to help God out and has a child by his wife's servant. He

“failed” to believe God but God didn’t give up on him. It was a mistake, it had serious ramifications that the world is still feeling. Yet God gave him a second chance, God kept his promise and He made Abraham the “father of many nations”.

In the New Testament perhaps there is no better example than the Apostle Peter. Poor old Peter. Peter, the one who swore that he would never deny Jesus, then denies Him not once, not twice, but three times, publicly! Peter “failed” Jesus. Yet Peter repented and God forgave him and He gave Peter a second chance. Peter of course goes on to become one of the greatest leaders of the early church.

These people I’ve just mentioned, along with many others have “failed” God at some point in their lives. But God DID NOT give up on them. God didn’t give up on them and He won’t give up on you or me. What a comfort to realize that the best of God’s servants have made foolish mistakes, but were used again.

When the word of the Lord came to Jonah “*the second time*” it came with the same commission he had received the first time. It was God plan for Jonah to go to Nineveh (1:2) it is still God’s plan for Jonah to go to Ninevah. God’s plan for Jonah had not changed, but Jonah did.

The first time the word of the Lord came to Jonah telling him to go to Nineveh, Jonah ran away. This time, having learned his lesson the hard way on the consequences of disobedience; this time he obeyed.

God Loves Us Enough To Give Second Chances and...

Third, Jonah Learned That God Loves Us Enough to always be Merciful.

#### Chapter 4

Surely one of the greatest tragedies of life is to having gone through some heartache or trial, problems and illness and all sorts of anguish, and yet having not learned from what you have been through.

It is sad to see men and women who have gone through so much in this life, yet they never seem to learn. They go through terrible times, but their character is never changed for the good even in the slightest. The reason for all of that can be; that our problem is the same as Jonah’s problem. A failure to understand God’s will in our lives. How do we see the circumstances that come into our lives? Do we see them as intrusions? Do we see them as enemies or do we see them as the hand of God.

In verse one of chapter four we read, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” Jonah is angry. He had obeyed God (finally).he was doing what God wanted done but God had not done what Jonah wanted. Jonah has just preached the most successful revival in

history as a result the whole city of Nineveh from the King on down have repented. But because they have repented God will spare the entire city and this is not what Jonah wants to hear. He felt betrayed.

The word translated “angry” means to burn. Jonah was literally fuming. Resentment robs us of our peace and happiness. Every thing in life is seen through the lenses of our anger and resentment. In verse two Jonah’s attitude and anger is revealed even further when he says, “... Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

How many times have you heard someone say, *“I knew this would happen! I just knew it!”* That is what Jonah is saying verse two, *“I knew this is what would happen. This is why I didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the first place.”*

Notice Jonah tried to justify his attitude of resentment. The fact is that we all do what Jonah did. When it gets tough to do the right thing, we seek to justify our disobedience. We even go to the word of God seeking grounds to justify doing what we want to do. But when we find ourselves reading the Bible in order to find verses and passages that justify our behavior we are not only wrong we are in danger.

*“The same thing happens when we become angry. We begin by being angry at big things, but quickly we become angry at petty things. First, we are angry with God. Next we express our anger at circumstances, then minor circumstances. Finally, our shoelace breaks one morning, and we find ourselves swearing. God was showing this to Jonah saying in effect, ‘Look where your anger has taken you, Jonah. Is this right? Is the way you want to live? Do you want to spend your life swearing at petty annoyances?’ [James Montgomery Boice. The Minor Prophets: Vol 1 Hosea- Jonah, Chapter 34. “God More Merciful Than His Prophet.” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) p. 249]*

The Lord responded to Jonah with a simple question in verse four, “Then the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

In other words God says, *“Jonah do you think you have a right to be angry with me?”* The question is a challenge to Jonah to really stop and think whether an angry prophet or the sovereign God of the Universe is right.

Jonah was angry with God and how does God respond to him? Instead of sending a burden into his life God sent a blessing. God responded to his anger by allowing a plant to grow over him to provide for his comfort.

In verse six we are told, “And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery.”

Although Jonah was in a place he had no business being and was filled with anger he could not justify, God still cared about him.

Jonah was his child, and he was hot and tired and hurting, so God provided what he needed.

Did Jonah ever back on the right track? I think he did. On what do I base that conclusion? On the fact that it is Jonah that records this whole story and he kept nothing back not even his own disgraceful behavior.