

## The Story of a Man's Pilgrimage & God's Providence (Series - Jonah: A Life on the Run)

### INTRODUCTION

Please turn in your Bibles to **Jonah 1:1-3**. Is there a better story in the Bible than the story of Jonah? Generations of Sunday School children have listened with wide-eyed amazement at the story of the fish that caught a man. We love this story, yet for all our telling and re-telling, we barely understand what it means. Most people are so familiar with the story of Jonah that nothing in it surprises them anymore.

For most, the book centers about the story of a man being swallowed by a great fish. **Yet, it's much more than this!** The fish gets all the attention, but this book contains a message about the character of God. **G. Campbell Morgan** rightly **states**: "*Men have been looking so long at the great fish they have failed to see the great God!*"

Additionally, God demonstrates in His dealings with Jonah how great is His grace and patience toward us, and how His sovereignty is over all things. In fact, we can be so obsessed with what was going on inside that fish that we can miss seeing the drama inside **Jonah**. In these few pages we find a story that reveals to us the power and compassion of God...and along the way, like **Jonah**, we learn that obedience isn't optional.

**What is the book of Jonah about? Well, let's see:**

- the fish is only mentioned 4 times
- the phrase 'great city' & Nineveh is mentioned 9 times
- the disobedient prophet is mentioned 18 times
- God (Yahweh) is mentioned 26 times

**Think about it...26 times in 4 chapters.** This book is about God! In fact, if you eliminated Him from the book, the story wouldn't make sense. Listen. The book of Jonah is about the will of God and how we respond to it. It's also about the love of God and how we share it with others. **Jonah is not the hero of the story. God is!** This book is about God and how great His heart is toward prodigal sons and daughters who run away from Him. God never gives up on **Jonah**, not when he runs away and not when he sits under a vine and pouts.

*Here are three quick notes about the book of Jonah:*

1. It's a \_\_\_\_\_ story.

Jonah is mentioned by name in 2 Kings 14:25 and is the only minor prophet mentioned by Jesus as recorded in the gospels.

2. It's a \_\_\_\_\_ story.

3. It is a \_\_\_\_\_ story.

Here are some sobering words: "*We are Jonah.*" We're so much like Jonah that it's scary. There's a little **Jonah** in all of us and a whole lot of **Jonah** in most of us. **This book serves like a mirror and as such we may not like what we see.** We are **Jonah** in our disobedience, in our insensitivity to others, in our dissatisfaction at how God works, in our selfishness. What makes the story bearable is that we also see how God is patient and quick to forgive.

Our study of Jonah will reveal the **story of a man's pilgrimage & God's providence**. I want to give you some key words that will help us better understand the story and hopefully aid in our understanding of the text.

*Let's begin with...*

**I. The story of a man's \_\_\_\_\_**

*The first key word is:*

**A. \_\_\_\_\_**

In **chapter 1** God called **Jonah** to go to Nineveh and be the agent of a spiritual awakening. But **Jonah** went in the opposite direction, choosing to reject the will of God for his life.

*The second key word is...*

**B.** \_\_\_\_\_

It's here in the belly of the fish that **Jonah** began to reflect. He prayed and praised God. After three days and three nights the fish regurgitated him up on shore.

*The third key word is...*

**C.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Warren Wiersbe** rightly observes that *'it took God longer to prepare his servant and get him to obey His call than it did for the entire godless city of Nineveh to repent.'*

*The fourth key word is...*

**D.** \_\_\_\_\_

One would think that **Jonah's** heart would have leaped for joy when revival came to Nineveh. There he was in the will of God, used by God in a mighty way. But no! He was angry that God sent revival.

The message of the book is far more than the story of a man and a fish. It is the story of a man's pilgrimage, but it's more than that.

*It's also...*

## **II. The story of God's** \_\_\_\_\_

Please note the following key words that describe the story from God's perspective.

*The first key word is...*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_

You and I cannot read the **first chapter** without seeing the sovereignty of God. God chose **Jonah**; God called **Jonah**. God is in control at all times! Whether we believe it or not or whether we like it or not, God elects His own people, assigns their duties, appoints their places. He calls particular people to particular places for particular purposes.

*The second key word is...*

### **B. Protection**

God cares for His own. Even in our rebellion He protects us from ourselves until we come to our senses.

*The third key word is...*

**C.** \_\_\_\_\_

God is more interested in spiritual awakening than we are. He is about having His will realized through His people. He admonishes us to *"not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will."* (Rom 12:2 NIV)

*The fourth key word is...*

D. \_\_\_\_\_

**Jonah** was ecstatic about the vine that God had sent. Yet, **Jonah** was not happy when God sent the little worm that ate up the vine. Sometimes we get your eyes fixed on lesser things when the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. **Jonah** zeroed in on God's provision and not God's presence.

### **CONCLUSION**

What can we take with us this morning? **Jonah** got into trouble because he had wrong **attitudes**.

- **Jonah** had the wrong attitude about the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- **Jonah** also had a wrong attitude about the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- **Jonah** also had a wrong attitude toward \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Jonah** had a wrong attitude toward \_\_\_\_\_.

If there is anything that **Jonah** teaches us, it is this: You not only can't hide from God, you really cannot run from God. *I read a story of a little boy who kept riding his bicycle around the block, and a police officer was sitting by the side of the road and he watched this little boy ride around the block about ten times. Finally, he got out of his squad car and stopped him and said, "Son, you keep riding around this same block over and over. What are you doing?" The little boy said, "I'm running away from home." The officer said, "Running away from home? How can you be running away and keep going around the same block?" The little boy said, "Because my Mommy told me I couldn't cross the street!"*

In a real sense, we are all like that little boy.

You may think you can run from God, but you really cannot.

**The Bible is clear: your sin will find you out.** Satan can work through circumstances just like God can.

Satan has his ships, and he always has room on his ships. **His ships always go where we want to go when we're running from God.** He can make disobedience look good by means of favorable circumstances. This is how life really works. Sin looks good for a while. **Jonah** experienced the "*pleasures of sin for a season.*" If sin always brought immediate misery, it would be a lot less attractive to us. The bitterness comes later. The sadness comes later. Sin is fun for a while. Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

By rejecting God (actively or passively) your life will become just one catastrophe looking for a place to happen. God offers you yet another chance to make things right with Him.