

Remnant Life Church
July 10, 2016
Sunday School Stories Retold:
Jonah – How The Story Began
Jonah 1

- We're going to be concluding our series on the Sunday School stories that you heard if you went to church as a youngster with Jonah
 - Jonah's account is a story in 3 parts
 - This week the beginning of Jonah's story
 - Next week how the story changed
 - The following week how the story ended
 - He starts off poorly; comes around to the right way of thinking after a brief 3 day retreat with God; but then slides back into his old patterns again at the end
 - I would think that cycle should have a familiar ring for every one of us here this morning

Read – Jonah 1

- His story, while a very familiar one, is also very unique
 - In every book of the OT written by the prophets they are a collections of his writings containing instructions, warnings, and often prophetic words
 - The story of Jonah is what happened to him!
 - Since the story is about the man we should know a little bit about him
- Jonah bar (son of) Amittai
 - His full name means Dove of Truth
 - The two names together present a greater depth of meaning than the first alone
 - Dove representing peace
 - + A symbol of the end of God's wrath (peace) to Noah ([Gen 8:10-11](#))
 - + The Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove coming down at Jesus' baptism as a reminder of the Noahic covenant ([Matt 3:16-17](#))
 - + Both of those symbols revolve around water (consequence and cleansing) and in his story Jonah becomes an instrument of God to save the sailors from the storm of the water
 - Truth being a thing not always easy to hear makes that symbol of peace more impactful
 - He is a prophet
 - [2 Kings 14:25-27](#) tells us that he is prophet active in Israel (northern kingdom) during the reign of Jeroboam II approx. 180 years after Solomon and the division of the kingdom into northern and southern kingdoms
 - He is active following the time of Elijah and Elisha and is a contemporary of Hosea and Amos

- Not an easy time or place to be for any of the prophets as every one of the 19 northern kings of Israel from Jeroboam I till the final one Hoshea over a span of 210 years disobeyed and turned their backs on God
- Ninevah
 - The first readers of Jonah would immediately know the name Ninevah
 - The capital of Assyria – today: near Mosul in northern Iraq along the Turkish border along the banks of the Tigris River
 - City itself is called large and important with an area of about sixty miles in diameter (3:3)
 - Detractors of this story as an actual historical account say that the city itself has been excavated and the walls do not encompass that much area
 - Similar to Mechanicsburg – the borough and the surrounding area
 - The name Ninevah was not only for the city itself but also the surrounding area that took 3 days to walk
 - City itself impressive with walls that extended for 8 miles around and a library of 20,000 stone tablets uncovered
 - This city was renowned for their evil on the levels of Sodom and Gomorrah making the prophet Jonah’s response to God a little bit easier to understand
 - Later the entire book of Nahum is written about Ninevah because they reverted back to their sinful ways after the revival through Jonah’s preaching
 - *Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!* (Nah 3:1)
 - Like a Jew of the 1940’s delivering the same message to Hitler in Berlin
 - In less than 50 years the Assyrians would conquer Israel and carry them into captivity where they would remain until the Babylonians then conquered the Assyrians at the time of Daniel and his friends.
 - **NOTE** – Jonah is placed 5 books after Daniel in the OT but that is not due to the chronology of the events historically but through a grouping by size of book (Major(5) – Isaiah-Daniel – larger with broader focus; Minor(12) – Hosea-Malachi – shorter and/or with narrow focus)
- There are 4 ways that the book of Jonah can be read
 1. Historical – the events happened as they were recorded
 - We still must remember that the Bible is not a book of history it is God’s message of love to His creation
 2. Myth – a created story that claims to be historical
 3. Allegory – a story to convey a message where each detail contributes to the whole i.e. – Jesus’ teaching of the wheat and tares – sower, wheat, field, tares, harvest, etc.
 4. Parable – the most common form used by Jesus the difference from allegory is that not every part of the story represents something else but is broader in scope
- None of the 4 can be said to have conclusive irrefutable physical evidence to support it free of any questions; FAITH must be applied!
- For me the single greatest proponent for historical is the use of the story by Jesus in the Gospels

- *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matt 12:40)*
 - “As” not “like” Jonah in the belly – different from when Jesus taught using parables (*The kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field...Matt 13:44*)
 - Jesus spoke of it as an actual event that took place – good enough for me!
- What do we learn, what truths, from how Jonah responded to God’s assignment for him?
 1. At some point every one of us has run or are right now running from God
 - It might not be from somewhere God is telling you to go like Jonah
 - Perhaps an area of your life that you are not submitting to Him
 - God might not like what I do or don’t do with my money, but it’s my money!
That’s running
 - I know that this relationship is bad for me or needs to be changed but that’s too much work or too hard to do
That’s running
 - There is area of your life that needs to change – critical, gossip, unkind, judgmental – but that’s who I am!
That’s running
 - The 3 geographic areas in this story are Joppa the largest port (today Jaffa in Israel); Ninevah (located in northern Iraq) and Tarshish (the coast of Spain)
 - Running from God means you end up many times in as a bad a place if not worse than the place you are running from
 - Jonah wanted to get to Tarshish which at that time was a Phoenician port city
 - They were not a people who worshipped God but were a pagan, military society
 - Jonah didn’t want to go to Ninevah because of the depth of their evil so he ran to the Phoenicians who were...wait for it...just as evil!
 - This takes us to the next truth...
2. Running from God NEVER puts you in a better place!
 - Jonah never even got to Tarshish because his situation got even worse
 - God sent a taxi to pick up Jonah (1:17)
 - The fish is not the central character of this story but it gets the most attention
 - The term whale is used to convey any great or very large fish – similar to the word leviathan in the OT
 - It has been reported and documented that a man was taken into the mouth of a whale shark and survived (it is a fish and not a whale)
 - Not to say that this is the fish but it physically is possible with a mouth as wide as 5 to 6 feet
 - God will use whatever means necessary, even those that are outside of our thinking or comprehension, to accomplish His will!
 - What must of Jonah have thought after being spit out by the fish? “Well, I’m back where I started!”
 - He then needed to start the month-long 400 mile journey to Ninevah
 - The next truth is...

3. You never run alone – others are always drawn in
 - For Jonah it was the sailors of the boat he took to Tarshish (1:5)
 - These men faced 2 consequences for Jonah running
 - + First they had to sacrifice their livelihood by throwing everything overboard
 - + Second they thought they could die
 - + These men were not recreational sailors
 - + They were hardened, seasoned traders who sailed back and forth regularly through these waters
 - If you run from God you may think it is only about you but it never is
 - Disobeying God is sin and sin is never nice and neat in our lives
 - Sin keeps you longer than you wanted to stay; takes you places you did not want to go, and costs you more than you wanted to pay – EVERY TIME!
 - The final truth is...
4. God's power and mercy are greater than any storm
 - Interesting Jonah's response to a storm so fierce that even these seasoned, experienced sailors were terrified
 - He went to sleep!
 - Not the sleep of innocence but the sleep of denial
 - The sailors started out praying to their false gods but ended up praying to the one true God (they were wiser than the prophet!)
 - First they tried in their own power (1:13)
 - Then they prayed to God asking for forgiveness and repenting of a sin that they had not even committed yet (1:14)
 - When the storm calmed they offered sacrifices to God and made vows (gave their lives over) in thanksgiving (1:16)
- Running from God, which in the first few moments will seem like a good decision, is ALWAYS a bad idea that will almost immediately reveal itself to be foolish, costly, and filled with difficult sometimes terrible consequences
- The Greatest Truth...
 - God will be with you when you obey His Word
 - He will equip you – the armor - (Eph 6)
 - He will guide you – the rod and staff of the shepherd - (Ps 23)
 - He will never leave you (Heb 13:5)

God will send a big fish into your life if He needs to but should we not simply surrender our will to His? His ways are always better, always wiser, always the best for us, and always to His glory!