

Remnant Life Church  
April 14, 2024  
**Jonah: Arguing With God**  
Jonah 3:10 - Jonah 4:1-11

The Bible is filled with events that are difficult, if not impossible, to explain.

- And they should, I believe, be broken down into categories
  - Category 1 are the miracles and the life of Jesus
    - When talking about the greatest of the unfathomable miracles, the creation and the resurrection of Jesus stand alone in scope and importance.
  - But a second category might include those things that happened with people involved
    - The parting of the Red Sea comes to mind
    - The walls of Jericho coming down
    - Noah building a craft that had never been seen or needed before
    - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace
  - But perhaps one that could be placed at the top of this list is one that every one of us is familiar with
    - You don't even need to attend church to know this one
    - It is a story with all of the intrigue, twists, and turns that would make a Hollywood movie maker giddy
    - Yet, the true meaning of the story can get lost in the fantastic nature of what happened

Jonah was not just any anonymous man minding his own business when God suddenly appeared in his life

- He was a prophet who spoke for God to the people
- He was one of only 5 Old Testament prophets who focused their prophecy on the northern kingdom of Israel
- And he was likely the only OT prophet who enjoyed some degree of popularity
  - Prophets spoke for God at all times as a warning to turn from their sin or to tell them that judgment was on the way
  - The exception is Jonah and we read in **2 Kings 14:25** - *He (meaning the king of Israel who was evil) was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet...*
  - Jonah prophesied good news for the people even though they were not following God
- His time of prophecy was unique
  - For most of the other prophetic voices they were used during great times of trial or trouble
  - During Jonah's time, Israel was prospering but more in a political than spiritual sense
    - We know that every king of Israel following the division of the kingdom was wicked

- It was through ungodly alliances that Jeroboam II expanded their borders to the greatest extent since the days of Solomon

But even through that time, Jonah's moment had still not come

- And when it does, when the light comes on Jonah from heaven, when God says, "Alright, Jonah – here is what I have for you."
  - Out of every prophet of the day, God chooses Jonah for a very important mission
  - And Jonah argues with God
  - He argues about his willingness to go
  - He argues about God's mercy toward the Ninevites
  - And he argues regarding his seat to watch the spectacle of God's wrath

Within this reaction of a prophet whose story is unfinished, we see 3 distinct aspects of who he was revealed -

1. Selfishness and Fear (chapter 1)
  - a. Jonah did not want the Ninevites to be saved
  - b. And he did not trust God to protect him
    - i. The Ninevites were some of the most feared people of the day
2. Repentance and a renewed faith (chapters 2 and 3)
  - a. Jonah realized what he had done, and his heart changed
  - b. He prayed in faith even though he had no guarantee that he would survive to carry out his assignment
3. But then, the ongoing battle with self that we all face comes around again (chapter 4)
  - a. Jonah turned things around and obeyed God's direction for him
  - b. But his heart returned to what got him in trouble in the first place

**READ – Jonah 3:10 - Jonah 4:1-11**

- Jonah's selfishness comes roaring back again
  - **Jonah 4:2** - *He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*
  - To me, this is one of the funniest verses in all of the Bible
    - Jonah gets on God for being too loving and compassionate
    - I didn't have to go through all of this!!!
    - Selfishness never makes sense
- Jonah presents us this morning with what can be called a question of identity
  - From the very beginning, Jonah was not sure of his identity, and as a result, his entire focus was in the wrong place
    - Instead of focusing on what God wanted him to do as a prophet of Almighty God
    - He was focused on himself

- And it took 3 days of a little quiet time in the belly of a fish for him to be reminded of not only who he was but, and this is the very definition of selfish, to realize it was not all about him
- Many today struggle with their identity
  - Children of mixed marriages often grow up having difficulty identifying their culture
  - Going through your teenage years focuses on establishing identity
  - Identity is so important that whole religions and philosophies have been built around finding, knowing, loving, and protecting self
  - And of course, we now have those who claim they cannot identify what gender they are – even though that has always seemed to be a rather simple thing to accomplish until somewhat recently
- Seeking your identity apart from God always breeds confusion and confusion is not of God
  - **Jer 29:11** - *For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*
  - How can I avoid the confusion of knowing who I am and who He has called me to be?
    - Ask Him!
    - Every one of His disciples struggled at one time or another with who and what they were - but Jesus never wavered –
  - In answering the Pharisees who were challenging what Jesus did He said this...
    - **John 5:19** - *...Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*
- Jonah ends up very confused regarding his identity
  - He was a prophet of God by he forgot that God is God and he is not!
  - Is that not an issue for most people today, at least in some measure? Even for Christians?
    - Do you really trust God fully with your life, your plans, your future?
    - Can you honestly let God be God in all circumstances?
    - The tell-tale statement is one simple, short sentence – “I trust God, BUT...”
    - The question is, will I trust Him when things are not happening in the way I think they should?
- This is not easy and can many times be difficult to understand
- **James 1:2-4** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*
  - Perseverance is about acting or responding in a consistently right way
  - But to have joy in those times?
- You see, God is much more concerned about your character than your comfort
  - Jonah was not comfortable in the fish, but his character was being changed

What is the book of Jonah about?

- It is not about the fish
- It is not about Ninevah
- It is not even about Jonah
- The book of Jonah is about the compassion of God
  
- God then addresses Jonah's selfishness which has now manifested itself in anger
  - **Jonah 4:4** - "*Is it right for you to be angry?*"(note that Jonah does not answer)
  - Jonah has just completed the greatest city-wide revival in all of history – greater than anything Billy Graham ever experienced - and Jonah was the key-note speaker
  - EVERYONE got saved! Even the King!
- But his response is dictated, not by gratitude to God for the power of the Holy Spirit that has just saved lives, but by his selfishness!
  - He missed the fact that now Israel would no longer be tormented by the Assyrians
  - That perhaps now they would have a powerful ally in this city with a very powerful army
  - Selfishness not only often makes no sense, but it also prevents clear thinking
- The story of Jonah begins to wind down with a somewhat strange scenario
  - Three things happen in quick succession
  - First, God makes a vine to grow in one night to provide shade
  - A worm then comes and eats enough of the plant to kill it
  - And a scorching wind comes down and blows a blast furnace on Jonah
  - It is a miraculous object lesson straight from the hand of God
- God wanted Jonah to see how twisted his priorities were
  - Jonah was so upset by the heat of the wind and losing the vine that he wanted to die
  - He cared more about the temperature than he did about 120,000 confused and ignorant people who were all destined for eternal judgment
  - Jonah, to the very end, could not seem to grasp the heart of God for the people of Ninevah

But God is compassionate, and no amount of arguing or selfishness from Jonah was going to change that

- God loves His creation, His people
  - Ninevah was not just a city; it was a lost people who needed to know God
  - Your co-workers, your lost family, the person in line at the store, and the guys you play ball with might be your Ninevah
- And because God loves people, His plan for them involves people
  - That's you, and that's me
  - Do you have the compassion for others that enables you to be kind and loving even when they are not?
- Finally, God will do whatever it takes to save His people
  - What does that mean? How far will He go?
  - How far did He go to reach you?

- Ninevah's salvation was so important God would not let Jonah go and in the process taught Jonah a lesson about true identity

Who are your Ninevites?

- Will you obey God and be the messenger who could very well be the catalyst that brings salvation to their hearts, their families, or even an entire nation?

But the cautionary tale this morning is that selfishness will twist the priorities of your life, and that will always put you in a place where only God should be

- But He loves you so much that He will do whatever it takes to get your attention and reveal your heart
  - For Jonah it was the belly of fish
  - Will take a fish belly experience for you to recognize who you are in Him or are you ready to surrender your life totally to Him and stop arguing?