

## Week 2 – God Shows Up; Sailors Get Saved – Jonah 1:3-16

### Scripture Reading: Mark 4:35-41

#### Introduction

Every so often we run up against people or circumstances that go against what we know should be the common order of things

Like the big, tough looking biker with the heart of gold or the puny disc jockey with the tremendous bass voice

Baseball legend, Yogi Berra, was the master of making contradictory statements like, “No one goes there anymore; it’s too crowded”

And last week we saw that Jonah provides one of these unexpected contradictions when he receives the command from God to go to Nineveh and preach a message of coming judgment and instead of obeying, like we see all the other prophets of God do, Jonah chooses instead to run away

We spent part of our time together last week looking at what motivated Jonah to act as he did and we saw that there is a little bit of Jonah in each of us – how we all have the inclination to go our own way

If you missed last week’s message we have CDs back by the sound booth and it’s available as an audio file and, now that I’ve learned how to make them available, as a text file on our church website – [www.brickchurch.net](http://www.brickchurch.net)

I encourage you to listen to or read that sermon as it serves as a kind of introduction to the sermon series

This morning’s passage is an action-packed, tension-filled account that shows us several things about those who were involved and it is a passage filled with details that go against what we would reasonably expect

In Jonah we have the God-fearing yet spiritually numbed prophet who shows no compassion to the people of Nineveh as he stubbornly runs away from the very God he claims to fear and serve rather than carry a message of coming judgment to them

In the sailors we have a group of polytheistic, false god worshipping pagans who are very sensitive to spiritual matters as they demonstrate compassion toward Jonah and a desire to do well before the one true God once he reveals himself

And in God we see great mercy and commitment shown to Jonah and great power as God controls nature and orchestrates events as he pursues his reluctant prophet and we see that God is the God who saves in spite of human failings

We are also going to learn a lesson about what the follower of Jesus Christ should and should not use to guide his or her steps

Our passage this morning is **Jonah 1:3-16** and as you open your Bibles to join me there you will notice that we are overlapping a bit with the repeat of verse 3 which we will get into in a bit more depth this morning and we are omitting verse 17 which really ties in better with our message next week – now that you have joined me follow along as I read verses 1-16 so that we get the full context (**Jonah 1:1-16**)

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. 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, away from the presence of the Lord.*

*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”*

*And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.*

*Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.*

If you are taking notes our main headings this morning are:

I. Jonah's Running

II. God's Response and the

III. Sailors' Reaction

Let's turn our attention now to **verse 3** and Jonah's Running

And how Jonah, having heard the word of the Lord to go to Nineveh, instead headed to Joppa on the coast about 70 miles south of his hometown of Gath-hepher and booked passage to Tarshish

## I. Jonah's Running

Jonah recognized that God had spoken and he wasn't unclear about what God wanted him to do

But as we saw last week, Jonah was a true-blue patriot and he hated the Assyrians so much that he wanted no part of giving them even the slightest opportunity to turn to God

Jonah wanted Nineveh to be destroyed so he immediately took steps to get as far away from God as he could

He didn't argue with God or raise any kind of protest but when God said, "*Arise, go to Nineveh*" our text says "*Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish*"

While we have seen that Jonah should have known better than to think he could flee from God's presence – after all, he confesses in **verse 9** that God "*made the sea and the dry land*" he might well have been the victim of incomplete or incorrect theology

Back in Jonah's day the common belief was that gods only had power where they were worshiped because they needed to be fed by their worshipper's sacrifices – so gods were tied to the specific places where they were worshipped

Therefore, Jonah may well have thought that if he got away from Jerusalem he could get away from God's influence

So Jonah headed to the nearest port city to get on a ship that would carry him to the place that was at the furthest extent of the known world in his day

**And this is something I want you to pay particular attention to because it's highly relevant for us today –**

**If Jonah was paying attention only to his circumstances he likely thought he was on the right track**

**First**, God took no steps to stop Jonah from heading to Joppa – he allowed Jonah to run

**Second**, there was a very conveniently a ship heading to Tarshish that had room for him

**Third**, Jonah had the money to pay the fare to Tarshish at his disposal

And we see in **verse 5** that Jonah was far from troubled by what he was doing

In fact he was so deeply at peace with his actions that he was able to find a place way down in the hold of the ship somewhere where he could get comfortable and fall sound asleep

**But I want you to notice a motif that is easy to overlook**

Jonah was unknowingly on a downward path

Look at how often the word "down" is mentioned in these verses:

Jonah went "down" to Joppa, he went "down" into the ship, and he went "down" into the inner part of the ship and lay "down" to sleep

And Jonah doesn't stop his downward trend there – after he is thrown overboard we see in **2:6** that he continues "down" into the sea

Every step Jonah took after he disobeyed the word of the Lord was downward but he didn't notice because he was guided only by his circumstances and nothing seemed amiss

And the same can be true of us

**We must be careful because we can convince ourselves that all is well even when we know we are disobeying God**

Especially if we only pay attention to how things are going or how we feel

Feelings are fickle and easily rationalized and the enemy delights in making our path away from God smooth and easy

**So our primary means of direction must come from the Word of God**

As you know, I have often shared that I tend to operate on the assumption that God will redirect or stop a believer when they go in a wrong direction – that true faith requires action oftentimes without fully knowing the end of a matter

**But that methodology is predicated on the premise that the believer is sincerely seeking to do God's will and prayerfully seeking to know God's will through the study of God's Word**

One of my favorite passages to illustrate that truth is found in **Acts 16:6-10** where Paul and his entourage attempt to take the gospel south to Asia and were blocked by the Holy Spirit so they headed north toward Bithynia and were again stopped by God leaving west the only direction to go – and only when they ran out of land to the west God revealed they were to get on a ship and head to Macedonia

The key is that Paul knew God wanted him to spread the gospel to new areas and he was working to do just that as God progressively revealed his will through rejecting Paul's choices of direction

We aren't told why God acted in this way and why he didn't just tell Paul to go to Macedonia straight away but perhaps it was to teach Paul to keep working while responding to God's direction and not to stick to his own priorities

But that clearly wasn't the case with Jonah – God had plainly told Jonah where to go and Jonah *knew* he was being disobedient and God permitted him to do so for a time

And that can also be true for us when we go our own way either in open disobedience to what God has told us or because of a failure to seek and follow God's will relying instead on our own wisdom or strength

But we can have confidence that God's Word contains all we need to keep our lives on track and to ensure that we never need stray from his will

The psalmist has a great deal to say about this in Psalm 119

**Verse 1** says - *Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!*

**Verse 9** says – *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.*

And **verse 105** - *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

And there are many other testimonies to the value and sufficiency of God's Word in that one psalm and spread throughout both the Old and New Testaments

Like in **2Timothy 3:16-17** which says:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

God gave us his written Word so that we might know for certain just what his will is

But Jonah cast God's word to him aside and tried to flee from the presence of the Lord according to his own wisdom and he put himself on a downward path

**And God allowed him to have an easy time of it as he ran – at least for a while**

I won't go into specifics but I can still remember times when my parents warned me of taking a particular course but allowing me to do as I thought best - and I can still remember having to face the consequences of those decisions

Sometimes a person has to suffer a hurt before he is ready to listen and as painful as it is for a parent to watch it unfold, it has to be allowed to happen because it seems to be the only way the child will learn

**The truth is, there are times when God will decide to let us go our own way and allow us to continue in our sin so that we have no option except to face the consequences of our wrong choices**

**God could have stopped Jonah at any point**

- He could have stopped Jonah on his trip to Joppa
- He could have made it so there was no ship that had room for Jonah
- He could have caused the price of transport to be too high for Jonah to afford

But God chose to let Jonah persist in his sin

God was patient in letting Jonah have his way

But God wasn't finished with Jonah just yet and we'll now look at God's response

And we are going to see that when God showed up, he showed up in a big way

## II. God's Response

Look at how **verse 4** begins – “But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea...”

To hurl means to throw with great force or violence and God sent a storm so powerful it threatened to destroy the ship and the mariners – experienced men of the sea – were afraid

I think it might have looked something like this –

I have to imagine the storm was just that sudden and forceful as it slammed into Jonah's ship out of a clear, blue sky

**Jonah was running and God let Jonah run to a place from which there was no escape before he acted**

And in God's sending of the storm we see that God is all-knowing or **omniscient** in the fact that God knew precisely where Jonah was as he directed the storm straight at Jonah's ship

We see that God is everywhere or **omnipresent** in the fact that he isn't tied to Jerusalem in spite of the common belief of the day and there is no place where one can go to get away from God

And we see that God is all-powerful or **omnipotent** as he controls nature itself and directs the force of the storm

But in his state of spiritual insensitivity, Jonah was fast asleep in the hold of the ship oblivious to the danger he was in

After all, if he was convinced by the way everything had aligned to make his journey to Tarshish possible he was most likely sleeping the sleep of contentment thinking he had gotten away from God and his demands

**Sin makes you stupid and unaware and unless you are brought to your senses you can blissfully slumber as you perish**

So as the sailors are hurling their cargo into the sea and praying to their gods, Jonah slept on until the captain noticed his absence and upon finding him, awakened him and implored him to join them in seeking salvation from the storm

**But notice that it's not recorded that Jonah ever prayed**

Jonah knew that he was in open defiance of the Lord and may well have doubted whether his prayers would do any good at that point

And that's another mistake we commonly make as we think we have to straighten up or fix ourselves or our situation before we can approach God when the only way we can get back on the right path is by talking with God

When we find that we've strayed from God's path, the first thing we need to do is to rush to God and open his Word to hear from him so that he can show us where we went astray and how we can get back on track

The thing is, Jonah knew exactly where he had gone wrong but he remained silent until **the sailors took steps to find out what was going on**

Still showing more spiritual sensitivity than Jonah the sailors **cast lots** to find who was responsible for their dire situation

Casting lots was a common way of determining the will of the gods – and it still is in some cultures

We see lots regularly used by the Jews in the Old Testament as they sought to know the will of God

You may remember that the division of the land was determined by lots when the children of Israel took possession of it

And we see believers in the New Testament resort to lots prior to Pentecost as in the selection of Matthias as the apostle who replaced Judas Iscariot

We don't know what method the sailors used but typically small stones or sticks with markings were shaken and tossed much like we would toss dice and the results interpreted

You may remember the account of Achan in **Joshua 7** which is similar to Jonah's account

Achan had stolen part of the plunder of Ai rather than devoting it to destruction as God commanded causing God to command the leaders to cast lots in order to reveal the guilty party

Like Jonah, Achan remained silent as the lot first determined the tribe of the offender, then the clan, and then the family until Achan was finally revealed to be the one who had sinned

I can't imagine what Achan and Jonah were thinking as the lots were cast because as much as the lot might look like random chance, **Proverbs 16:33** tells us that God causes the outcome when lots are cast

So we know that it was God who controlled the outcome and God who revealed the guilty party in each case and there was no chance they wouldn't be found out

Jonah had willfully rejected the word of the Lord and gone his own way and then he relied on faulty information to give him a false sense of assurance

And God permitted it until the time was right to make his presence and power known in an effort to get Jonah's attention and arrest his rebellion

And we need to look at the example of Jonah as a warning because, like Jonah, we can rely on the wrong things to give us assurance that all is well

Everything had gone smoothly and Jonah was able to sleep thinking he had gotten away cleanly with his disobedience and so can we because the consequences of sin don't always show up immediately

For a time all can seem well and we may think we are okay but God will eventually discipline his child

And if we're honest we have to admit that our disobedience isn't typically because we didn't know God's will but because we didn't want to submit to God's will

Isn't that true?

When was the last time you would say that you blundered innocently into disobedience?

What do you think the ratio of innocent and willful wrongdoing would look like in your life?

Like Jonah, we have all tried to go our own way hoping to get away with it at one time or another and may well be trying it even today

**And, like Jonah, we can be stubborn even in the face of God's efforts to turn us back to him as we will see next as we look at the sailors' reaction**

### III. Sailors' Reaction

As we have already seen, the sailors seem to have a good deal more spiritual sensitivity than Jonah

When the storm overtook them they immediately began to pray to their gods while Jonah appears to have not prayed at all even when he was begged to do so by the ship's captain

And in trying to do everything they could to rectify their situation the sailors sought to have the cause of the storm revealed through the casting of lots – which was an act of spiritual inquiry

And after the lot fell to Jonah the sailors began to pepper him with questions

Only then do we see Jonah confess and tell the sailors that he was a follower of the God who created the world but that he was running from God – he probably also told them he was a prophet since they asked about his occupation

Again, the sailors had the good sense to be afraid of such a powerful deity and they sought to know how they might appease Jonah's God so they asked Jonah what they might do to entice God to quiet the storm

At this point Jonah does what appears to be a noble and selfless thing as **he offers to sacrifice himself** for the sake of the others and he tells them to pick him up and hurl him into the sea

**But we need to notice that Jonah remains stiff-necked and he doesn't surrender to God - because**

**It isn't enough to recognize your sin, to recite it or even to have remorse for it; you must also renounce it**

And it appears that Jonah would rather die than repent and turn back to do what God had commanded

But the sailors were afraid of what God might do to someone who harmed his prophet so they did their best to avoid it

And **verse 13** tells us they rowed with all their might to get back to dry land only to have God increase the intensity of the storm and thwart their efforts

Somewhat reminiscent of Pilate in **Matthew 27:24** who saw no way to spare Jesus and also avoid a riot by the Jews and decided to wash his hands of the matter and give in to them, the sailors knew the ship would be lost if they didn't do something so they prayed to Jonah's God for forgiveness and threw Jonah overboard as he had suggested

And in **verse 15** we see that *"the sea ceased from its raging"*

I believe that the storm ended with the same suddenness with which it came and that it was just like the storm that ceased immediately with Jesus' command to *"be still"* in **Mark 4**

Try to envision yourself on the deck of that ship – can you even imagine the awe that would overcome you as you experienced the wind and waves immediately becoming calm the instant Jonah's body hit the water?

It's no wonder the sailors *"feared the Lord exceedingly"*

While it appears they had been willing to accept Jonah's God and perhaps add him to their array of gods now they saw with clarity just who God is and the realization caused them to truly revere God

I number myself with those who believe that the sailors believed and became followers of the one true God at this time

Look with me at what **verse 16** says –

*Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered sacrifice to the Lord and made vows*

This was no bargaining ploy to get out of a jam because they offered sacrifice and made vows *after* they had been delivered – I believe their actions were born of true faith based on what they had witnessed and experienced

Jonah ran because he didn't want to preach to pagans and now in an ironic twist a shipload of pagans came to saving knowledge of the Lord as a result of his running

The pages of Scripture are peppered with people who God used to achieve his ends – some as a result of their righteous example and some as a result of their unrighteous and that should give us pause

**We all want to hear the words, "Well done" but we need to know that God will accomplish his ends even by our bad example if necessary**

## Conclusion

Sometimes things don't go the way we expect and the account of Jonah is full of unexpected twists

Jonah was a follower and prophet of the one true God but he lacked discernment and compassion for those he was directed to warn so he ran from God

The sailors were pagans who worshipped a variety of false gods yet demonstrated unexpected spiritual sensitivity and compassion toward Jonah

And things also don't always go according to the script we imagine in our own lives

Like Jonah we may well be fooled into thinking that if everything is going smoothly we must be okay with God only to discover to our amazement that it's often the smoothest sailing when we're going downhill

Jonah found out the hard way that every step he took away from God was a step down and that God was letting him have his way and permitting him to put himself to sleep spiritually

I figure that Jonah may well have thought to himself as he settled in for sleep "Everything is going so well; this must be God's will after all. After all, the people of Tarshish need to hear about God the same as the Ninevites."

**We can, and often do, rationalize the same way because we forget that God never goes against what he has said in his Word and no set of favorable circumstances or positive feelings can ever supersede what God has plainly said**

However, when the consequences of our disobedience aren't immediately doled out we can be lulled into a believing otherwise

Truthfully, if sin were immediately punished we wouldn't be nearly as enticed by it

But since it's not we forget the truth that is variously attributed to many speakers and authors "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

We need to recognize that God is patient and he will often let us have our way just as he did with Jonah until we discover the seriousness of our sin and willingly turn back to him

It's tough love for sure but stubborn creatures that we are sometimes it's the only way we'll learn

We also need to understand that God isn't dependent on us and remember that God will always prevail with or without our cooperation

God wants us to play a positive role in partnership with him but his success isn't dependent it

Because God has the ability to orchestrate people and events to accomplish his will even in the face of stubborn disobedience by his children

**And if you want to be used as a positive force in God's work you have to be living an obedient, God-honoring life**

We leave with Jonah having learned that things aren't quite as he thought they were as he sinks to the bottom of the sea and with a ship full of sailors who have a new lease on life as followers of God

Next week we will consider God's rescue of Jonah from certain death through the appointment of a great fish

Let's pray