

## ***Why Jonah?***

**Intro:** We tend to go to the same old books and mine the same old stories. When we actually read the Bible all the way through we can be surprised at how great the variety of kinds of books we have. (Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, books of strange dreams and visions)  
And then we arrive at Jonah. Why is this book in the Bible?

### **I. Why Jonah?**

- A.** It is unfortunate that we think of the big fish when we think of Jonah. While certainly dramatic, I don't think that's the point of the book.
- B.** So what's the point? It isn't the sermon – that's dispensed with in one sentence. It isn't the prophet – he's reluctant, disobedient, surly, and bigoted.

### **II. The Book in Brief**

- A.** Jonah doesn't say "Here am I, send me." He heard the call of God to go to Nineveh and ran away from the Lord instead. (a human response: we tend to run away, ignore it, or claim that we have been inadequately equipped to respond)
- B.** An interesting question: why was God sending Jonah to Nineveh? Nineveh was Israel's enemy. A lot of the problems, war, and persecution Israel and Judah had faced and would face in coming years was due to the aggression of the Ninevites.
- C.** Didn't Israel and Judah deserve the prophets? The chance at repentance? Why is God going to people completely outside of the covenant?
- D.** Jonah might have pondered these questions as he boarded a ship going the opposite direction. A storm comes up.
  - 1.** the pagans are the sympathetic characters in the book.
  - 2.** they refuse to throw him overboard at first. They are also the first to worship God in the book.
  - 3.** Jonah is swallowed by a sea creature.
- E.** Jonah is finally thrown up by the creature. (God spoke to the fish and, unlike Jonah, it responded) Jonah's face and

body would have been burned and disfigured. His joints would have suffered tremendous damage and the story of this strange man and his survival would have beaten him to Nineveh.

1. He arrives at Nineveh – whose city symbol was a fish.
2. Jonah preaches an eight word sermon and the whole city, over 160,000 people, repent.
3. This book isn't about the sermon. It isn't about the fish. It's about God's love even for those we don't love.

### **III. The Love of God**

- A.** God doesn't stomp through the universe. He heard the cries of Nineveh and responded to them, sending them a chance to escape destruction. In 3:10 the word means "relent, to revert back to his nature." Kindness and grace have always been God's preferred way of dealing with us.
- B.** Jeremiah 31:31-34 and John 10:16. God's love goes beyond us and to the very people we can't stand.
- C.** When God forgives the Ninevites and calls off the destruction, Jonah is angry. After all he suffered and will continue to suffer, the Ninevites will be fine and the fireworks have been called off. (4:1-3) Now, stranded outside of his own country, he sits and waits under a vine the Lord provided (out of mercy and love – even though Jonah never indicates he understands that).
- D.** God sends a worm and the vine dies. A hot desert wind comes on Jonah and he is miserable. When he complains to God, God reveals His heart. (4:10-11).

A century and a half later, Nineveh would be destroyed by the hand of God (see Nahum 2-3). Like Nebuchadnezzar and others who were touched by God, some conversions are temporary. But this book shows us the kindness of a God who, rather than leave us under a death sentence for our evil, sent us His Son.

And that son sat with his followers and echoed the promise of Jeremiah 31 when he raised up the cup and said, "This is the new covenant."