

“The Runaway Prophet”
Jonah 1:1-3
Mercy Hill Church | March 20, 2022

¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³But 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.

Background of Jonah (and Minor Prophets)

- Jonah is part of a collection of 12 books in the OT called the “Minor Prophets”
 - “Minor” only because of the size and length of the books – not because they are less important or significant
 - “Major Prophets” (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Jeremiah) are significantly longer
- Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jereboam II (~786 – 746 BC) – also around the time of Amos & Hosea (cf. 2 Kings 14:23-27)
- Unique features of Jonah
 - 1. Book of Jonah is mostly narrative (story) vs. prophecies (declarations)
 - 2. Jonah is called by God to speak to a foreign nation vs. majority of the prophets were called by God to speak to Israel (or Judah), God’s people.

1. God’s Word to Jonah (vv.1-2)

- **God’s Command to Jonah**
 - 2 commands (imperatives): “arise” and “go”
 - God reveals His will through His word(s)
- **God’s Commission of Jonah**
 - Israel to Nineveh would be a journey eastward of around 500 miles (comparable distance of San Jose to San Diego)
 - Nineveh, capitol of the Assyrian Empire, a “great city” – in power and development
 - God commissions Jonah to “call out” or “preach” to Nineveh on account of their “evil” (or sin)
 - Behind every command of God, we catch a glimpse of heart and character of God – so what does God’s command and commission of Jonah reveal about God?
- **God’s Compassion (Mercy) Towards Nineveh (Assyria)**
 - God’s commission of Jonah reveals God’s mercy
 - cf. Jeremiah 18:7-8

2. Jonah’s Response to God’s Word (v.3)

- **Jonah’s Disobedience**
 - Jonah tries to run away from the “presence of God”
 - Instead of travelling eastward towards Nineveh, Jonah runs away in the opposite direction (westward) – as far as he can away from God
 - Cf. 2 Chronicles 9:21 – journey to Tarshish could take over a year!
- **Jonah’s Fear of Nineveh (Assyria)**
 - Assyrians were well known for their violence and cruelty (cf. Nahum 3:1)
- **Jonah’s Lack of Compassion (Mercy) Towards Nineveh (Assyria)**

- Jonah didn't want Nineveh to receive God's mercy (cf. Jonah 4:2) much like Israel had (cf. 2 Kings 14:23-27)
- Jonah neglected the mission of God to bless all nations through Israel (cf. Genesis 12:1-3) for His glory
- Unlike Jonah, Jesus perfectly obeyed God in His mission to come to this world – to you and to me – to not only show us our sin(s) but more importantly to show us His mercy and grace. Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God's mercy and mission!
- The spread of the gospel in the early church and throughout the world is due to those who understood that they were commissioned by God to be messengers of the mercy of God

Reflection & Application Questions

- Are you – or have you been – running away from God? Why?
- Who are the (types of) people that would be most difficult for you to share or engage in a discussion about the Gospel? Why?
- How do you often react when God prompts you to do something challenging, difficult or inconvenient? Why?
- How do these opening verses in Jonah shape, change or remind you about God's command to make disciples and His love and mercy for the world?
- Do you find yourself operating out of fear or apathy (lack of compassion) for others when it comes to participating in God's mission and sharing God's mercy with others? Why?
- In what ways do you need to be reminded of the Gospel message in stirring your heart towards compassion for others and in living by faith – and not fear?
- Give thanks for Jesus who perfectly obeyed God in His mission to come to this world – to you and me – to not only show us our sin(s) but more importantly to show us His mercy and grace!