

You Can Run, But You Can't Hide: Thank God!

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[0 : 00] All right, well, we are, by God's wonderful grace, going to begin the book of Jonah together.

A little caveat, a word of caution. Amen. We need to be extra careful with stories that we're somewhat familiar with, that we don't allow our childhood stuff and our biases to feed into what we think we know about this story.

I'll say more about that in just a minute, I think. I'll try anyway. So if you know about the book of Jonah, you probably know about the whale. That's the big reveal, isn't it, for all the childhood stuff, yeah.

The book of Jonah is one of the minor prophets. We don't call him a minor prophet because he's lesser than the other prophets. It's just that the book is shorter, and so we have a number of these. Shorter prophecies relating to the life of Israel as they relate to their God. The story of Jonah and the whale seems preposterous, I think, on the face of it.

[1 : 32] So that no rational adult would allow themselves to believe that something like a man being thrown overboard in a great, great storm could be preserved for three days and three nights in the digestive system of some great sea beast.

We say a whale. We don't know what it was. We say a whale because that's the biggest thing we can think of in the sea. But we're not going to get to the whale much today, all right?

That's how it'll end. We'll deal more with the whale or whatever it was next time. But I think from a secular point of view and even many Christians, even Christian commentators, theologians, and historians, depending on who you read, some would tell you that this is just an allegory.

That didn't really happen. It's just a cute story that serves to make a point, to teach a lesson, an object lesson. Well, there is an object lesson here, but I happen to be one of those people who believe that this is historical narrative.

And I'll say more about that in just a moment as well. Most often, this is told as a children's story, isn't it? And if you were raised around church or in a Christian home, you probably heard this story at some point as a child.

[3 : 04] It's the moral being, don't disobey God. Or maybe like Jonah, God might do something unpleasant to you. You might get swallowed by a big catfish or something.

I was raised in the deep south, so there you go. Sometimes the story is even put to music. Like this song from, how many of you have heard of the Newsboys?

All right, now I'm going to try to do this. We'll see if I can get through it. I know, I just, you never know. You never know. So I'm going to put the words up here.

By the way, the title of my message appropriately, you can run, but you can't hide. Thank God. Thank God, right? We all can relate to that.

All right. So this song is an example of the kind of thing that we're exposed to as we're growing up or whatever with the story of Jonah.

[4 : 12] It goes something like, And yet I'm singing in relief.

basically, we're about to beat on this song. That's a really large mouth. I'm sleeping with fishes here in the belly of the whale.

I'm highly nutritious here in the belly of the whale. Bad food, lousy atmosphere. I don't want a bellyache. How long is this going to take?

Wait, I'm not done. Next verse. This is for Maddie. Woke up this morning kind of blue Thinking through that age-old question How to exit a whale's digestion It might behoove me to be heaved Head out like a human comet Hmm, I wonder what rhymes with comet I'm sleeping with fishes here In the belly of the whale I'm highly nutritious here In the belly of the whale I'm ready to reappear I

don't want a bellyache Lord, how long's this going to take?

In times they come rolling around Inzymes they come breaking us down to the core The good Lord grants that we all get a second chance Let me back up Let me back up And then listen to the final one I'm one of the dishes here In the belly of the whale They say I'm delicious here In the belly of the whale Lord, please make him chuck it all It's a gut call in the belly of the whale I'm in the belly of the whale In the belly of the whale It's very catchy Suzanne played this for me Like at the beginning of the week Just to tease me And I said, ooh That's catchy, you know So there you go You endured You just never, ever, ever know What's going to happen up here So the reason I share this with you Is that's typical of what we experience

[6 : 42] When we talk about Jonah and the whale Here's the big problem That song's so fun and so catchy The book of Jonah has nothing to do with fun It's a sobering, almost terrifying, chilling story Of just how hard our hearts can be In contrast to just how compassionate God's heart is That is the story of Jonah Let's look at chapter 1 together The word of the Lord came to Jonah The son of Amittai Saying, arise, go to Nineveh, the great city And cry against it For their wickedness has come up before me But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish From the presence of the Lord So he went down to Joppa Jonah found a ship Which was going to Tarshish

Paid the fare And went down into it To go with them to Tarshish From the presence of the Lord So twice in those first few verses We're told that Jonah is fleeing From the presence of the Lord The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea And there was a great storm on the sea So that the ship was about to break up Then the sailors became afraid And every man cried to his God And they threw the cargo Which was in the ship Into the sea To lighten it for them But Jonah had gone below Into the hold of the ship Laying down And fallen sound asleep So the captain approached him And said How is it that you're sleeping?

Get up Call on your God Perhaps your God Will be concerned about us So that we will not perish Each man said to his mate Come, come Let us cast lots So we may learn On whose account This calamity has struck us So they cast lots And the lot fell on Jonah Then they said to him Tell us now On whose account Has this calamity struck us?

What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you? In other words They're asking him What business have you on this ship? Why are you here? And what are you doing? He said to them I am a Hebrew And I fear the Lord God of heaven Who made the sea and the dry land Then the men became extremely frightened And they said to him How could you do this?

[9 : 15] For the men knew that he was fleeing From the presence of the Lord Because he told them So they said to him Well what should we do to you That the sea may become calm for us?

For the sea was becoming increasingly stormy He said to them Pick me up And throw me into the sea Then the sea will become calm for you For I know that on account of me This great storm has come upon you However the men rode desperately To return to land But they could not For the sea was becoming even stormier Against them Then they called on the Lord And said We earnestly pray O Lord Do not let us perish On account of this man's life And do not put innocent blood on us For you You O Lord Have done as you have pleased So they picked up Jonah Threw him into the sea And the sea stopped its raging Then the men feared the Lord greatly And they offered a sacrifice to the Lord And they made vows So as we look into chapter 1 together We're going to take Jonah As historical narrative I don't believe this is allegory

I don't believe that this is a fanciful story Just to make a few points About God or about people Or about evangelism I believe this is all literal This is historical fact This stuff happened But we are dealing with a narrative We're dealing with a story So this is somewhat different From the way that we would approach Interpreting and understanding A book like 1 Peter Which we just finished together Which was line upon line Of principle and truth That we could unpack Doctrine upon doctrinal truth This is a story And it conveys a flow So we're dealing with characters And plots and themes It's kind of like the way That we would approach a study And understand the gospels Which are also historical narrative Reflecting on the life of Jesus So we're telling a story But I want you to notice this as well Above all

Above all Jonah is a book about The great compassion of the Lord God And how he responds graciously To even small steps of obedience Which is so encouraging to me So we're going to follow The flow Or what we might call The movement Of the story With an emphasis On what all this has to do With God And God's workings In the lives of people Made in his image So think of it this

way Friends This will go all the way Through chapter 4 to the end Throughout the narrative God acts And people Respond To whatever it is God is doing Whether God is speaking Or saying Or giving direction Or whether God is affecting Something going on Around the people Or with the people God acts

People respond And we're going to look At that pattern As it plays out In chapter 1 So the way that we'll begin Is by looking at God's gracious Priority In the first couple of verses What is God doing And how can we understand God's movement As the story begins I'll go ahead and let you know That the main character In this book Is not Jonah It certainly isn't The great sea beast That swallowed Jonah The main character And focus Of the book of Jonah Is on God And God's acts Of compassion And grace So once again In the first couple of verses The word of the Lord Came to Jonah The son of Amittai Saying Now in the Hebrew text Verse 1 begins Came Came The word of the Lord

[13:30] The first word In the Hebrew text Is came So starting the sentence With that word Emphasizes God Acting God Is doing something God is moving God is initiating His will For both Jonah And What we will see later The Ninevites Imagine If you would For just a moment God speaking Directly to you Now We understand And believe Here at Grace Church That God does Speak to us today But he does not Speak to us On an individual level With new revelation God speaks to us And guides us today Through scripture His already written Revelation We can know For absolute certain That this book The Bible The 66 books Of scripture Are God's will For us As his people It tells us Everything we need

To know For life And godliness And nothing's Been left out So we believe In the sufficiency Of scripture That's how God Communities So when I pray I don't pray And then listen For some still Small voice That could be Anything In my head Or my heart I don't trust My heart What I turn To as I look For guidance And answers To my prayers Is what God Has already Spoken to me In his word And I trust That through His word God will give me Principles Or truths And direction And guidance To help fill in What I need to know About being faithful In that circumstance Does that Are you following What I'm saying?

So I'm not Listening for some Voice In other words I'm not going To have God Speak to me And tell me What college To go to There's Something's not Going to come out Into my Conscious being And say Go to UVA Go to Whatever What God's Going to do Is lead me Through his word And through the Counsel Through the wise Counsel that he Tells and commands Me to seek Of other people He's going to Lead me Through those Means By grace Through faith Into What is His will So I do The best Homework I can I rely on Those principles From scripture To help guide me In making wise Decisions I seek the Counsel of wise People to speak Into my life I make my Decision I give my Heart to the Lord in it I go out And I step Out in confidence And I do What I need To do That's how We move Forward in the Will of the Lord So I'm Saying all Of that again To say When you Imagine God

Speaking to You We have to Imagine that Happening now Through scripture Scripture was being Written at the time Of these people So what we have Here is the Bible telling us That God Came To actually Commune with Jonah And speak Verbally to him And give him Direction Now one of the Reasons I'm Pointing that out To you Is because of The big Difference That there Is between This prophet Who was Used of God To write Scripture I believe Jonah wrote This And us Today the Way we Receive that Truth And live By that Truth And then for Us to Understand There was No Misunderstanding On Jonah's Part God said It to him Directly He knew Exactly What God Wanted Of him And why And what Did he Do He didn't Listen Did he He didn't Listen Well the Word of The Lord The word Of the Lord Coming to Jonah Coming to You Coming to Me Is authoritative And binding It's also Though Listen to This It's also A sign Of God's Favor God giving Us his Truth Is a sign Of God's Favor Because God Offers Then Direction Guidance And Think of This God is Involving Jonah In God's Plan He's Telling His Prophet This is Your next Mission This is Your next Assignment As I Use you To enact My will Among these People Well we See the Text tell us That that Word came To Jonah And Jonah The name Actually Means Dove He lived And served In the First half Of the Eighth Century B.C.

[18:07] Now that May not Mean Anything To you Let me Give you A couple Of references These Events Actually Took place The best That we Can figure Around 760 B.C.

When Jeroboam II Was king Over the Northern Tribes Of Israel You remember That Israel Had had A civil War They had Split Into Two Nations The Northern Kingdom Of Tribes Was called Israel The

Southern Kingdom Of Tribes Was called Judah That's What's Going On Right Now Jonah Was Galilean He was From a Village Northeast Of Galilee Gath Heifer You can Find That Reference In Second Kings 14 25 We're Also Told In The Text He Was The Son Now This Is All I'm Not Going To Give You A History Lesson Here I Resisted The Temptation To Do That We're Not In Seminary This Is A Sermon And I'm Trying To Unpack Some Of The Text For You And Give You A Little Background That Will Help Fill This In Because Chapter One Sets The Tone For All Of The Meat Of What's About To Happen In The Next Three Chapters So

Again We're Told That He Was The Son Of Amittai We Really Don't Know Anything About This Man He Is Mentioned A Couple Of Times In Scripture Amittai Means My Truth My Truth We See In Verse Two Arise Go To Arise Go To That's How My Translation Reads Those Are Two Different Hebrew Words And Those Two Words Comprise The Two Commands The Two Imperatives That Give Us Our Outline For Us The Instruction That God's Given The Prophet So Following This Is The Way That He Can Demonstrate Or Act In Obedience To The Word Of God He Knows Exactly What God Wants Him To Do And Why He Wants Him To Do It And This Is How He Supposed To Accomplish That We Might Say That Arise Go To This Way We Might Say Get To Your Feet Get After It

Get To It Come On Man They Like To God Absolutely Is God is communicating to Jonah, this is important to the Lord.

This is where this man, Jonah's heartbeat needs to be. This is why he needs to take his next breath in life, is to fulfill this mission for God.

[21 : 00] And God is making it very clear, this is urgent. Get up and get after it. There's no time to waste kind of thing. And Jonah, my goodness, he didn't listen.

Nineveh is the next thing we see mentioned. We got to deal with some of this just to set the tone. Arise, go to Nineveh. Now for Jonah, that was a huge deal. Obviously, as we read through chapter 1, you can see that Jonah wasn't liking that at all.

Nineveh was the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire. They were the dreaded enemies of the Hebrews. And again, just to spare you the history lesson, I can tell you a few things.

They were the Nazis of the north. These were some wicked, wicked, vicious people, infamous for their brutality. It's not just biblical history that tells this.

Secular history has borne this out as well. The Hebrews hated and feared the Assyrians. Now the Hebrews had many enemies. Over the course of time in ancient Israel, they had a number.

[22 : 09] They had the Hittites. They had all kinds of people. They had the Philistines that they hated, but they didn't hate anybody more than they hated the Assyrians, the Assyrian Empire, even the Babylonians, the Persians.

Well, it was this terrible, terrible wickedness of the Assyrians that the Lord was now about to judge through his prophet, Jonah. So folks, you need to think in terms of Jonah at first as God sets the stage.

This is about sending a prophet to preach doom and gloom. This is the quintessential doomsday prophet. He's the guy with the placards hanging around his neck saying the world is going to end. We'll get to that. But that's exactly what God meant when he said, go to Nineveh and cry out against it. Tell him, I'm coming, and I'm going to kill everything.

I'm going to destroy. Raise it to the ground. Jonah hears all of that and understands exactly what God's wanting to do. Nineveh was known around the ancient world as it says in the text, a great city.

[23 : 22] That's just the way ancient peoples, throughout all the research that you could do on this, that's the way ancient peoples would refer to Nineveh. They wouldn't just say Nineveh. They'd say the great city, Nineveh.

It was impressive for the ancient world, probably second in population, acreage, and grandeur only to Babylon itself.

To cry against it, as the text tells us, go, Jonah, and cry against it, just simply meant to announce its destruction. Now that's the first couple of verses and what God is doing with Jonah as he sets the priority for the prophet, for his prophet.

Here's the priority I want you to live by. Here's what I want you to do. Now we see Jonah's great pride, the way that he responds to what his God has told him to do.

But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to

Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

[24 : 35] You notice, twice we're told that. It doesn't say he fled from Nineveh. It doesn't say he fled from his mission.

It says he fled from the presence of the Lord. This is very, very personal. Jonah, look, the mission, the mission is only important in so much as I'm the one that told you to do it.

This is how you relate to me, walk with me, love me, show obedience and faith to me. Jonah, this is how you worship me, is by following through in what I've told you to do.

That sounds a lot like us, doesn't it? This is how we worship God, walk with God. It's through obedience. And that's not what Jonah does.

But that's what God is telling him. So twice we are told that Jonah is deliberately defying the Lord.

[25 : 36] In direct disobedience to God and his commands for Jonah to rise up and go to Nineveh, Jonah did rise up and fled to Tarshish.

Most likely, we don't know for sure where Tarshish was, most likely it was in Spain. Folks, Spain is 2,000 miles in the opposite direction.

It's kind of the end of the known world for these people. What are we saying? That song, Get Out of Dodge, he's getting as far out of Dodge and going as far away as his mind knows to go.

That's just amazing to me. Right now, we can only speculate about why Jonah is running away.

Now, the text is going to tell us much later in the book, in the story.

But right now, we're not being told anything about why he's running away. You might want to think, oh, well, you just told us that Israel was scared to death of the Assyrians and they hated them with a purple passion.

[26 : 39] Well, okay. Now the prophet's being told, go tell them I'm going to wipe them out. Yes! I can't wait to get on the donkey and get there. No.

He didn't go. And so you might think, oh, he didn't go because he's scared. He's afraid. This is a courage issue. Well, if you've already read the book, you know the answer. That's not it.

It's worse than that. We'll get to that. But right now, we're not being told. What we know from the text so far, Jonah is trying to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Don't make that more complicated than it is. Most likely, this means he's trying to put as much distance as he can between what God wants and what Jonah wants.

Now, we can relate to that. You say, well, I don't flee from the presence of the Lord. Really? Really? Anytime you and I sin or act in disobedience to God, what are we doing?

[27 : 42] Are we moving close to or far away? We're distancing ourselves in terms of our disobedience, aren't we? It's like we're disfellowshipping ourselves in the Lord.

Now, thank God we can't lose our salvation, but we can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can quench the Holy Spirit. So Jonah is acting in a rebellious, pridefully rebellious, disobedient way, trying to put as much distance between him and God as he possibly can in terms of what God has given him to do. Did Jonah know better than to try to flee from God? I think he did. I think he knew better because he most likely knew as a prophet of God raised in the scriptures, he probably knew Psalm 139, 7 through 10.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there.

If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even the sea, that's common. Even there, your hand will lead me. That's what the fish is about.

[29 : 02] And your right hand will lay hold of me. Isn't that great? There's nowhere I can go to flee from the presence of God. I cannot escape my God.

I cannot escape my God. I cannot escape my God. Yay. Thank God. I can run, but I can't hide. He sees me everywhere. Now, about 100 years later, the prophet Jeremiah will write this.

Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him, declares the Lord? Do I not fill the heavens and the earth, declares the Lord? It's great.

The text also mentions that he flees the presence of the Lord to go to Joppa to find a ship. Joppa is on the eastern shore of Israel.

It's about 40 miles from Jerusalem heading a little bit northwest. Nineveh, on the other hand, is about 500 or 550 miles going northeast.

[30 : 07] And as we've said, Tarshish is about 2,000 miles. Dead west. So if I look on a map and I see Israel right here and this coming down, this is Galilee.

Here's the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. Over here's the coast for the Mediterranean Sea. Joppa's over here. Nineveh's over here. Going the wrong.

So the song got it a little wrong that I sang, you know, headed north when you told me to go south. That rhymes with mouth. So that's why they did that. Jonah's heading west when he should be heading east.

He's trying to get as far away as he can is the point the text is telling us. So in Jonah's present state, his prideful, prideful disobedience knows no bounds.

Now that's scary. That's one of the ways we can relate to Jonah. Boy, Lord, if you took your hand off of me, my sin would know no bounds.

[31 : 15] If you've never proven that to yourself, just take it on faith that the word of God says that about you and teaches that. You don't even know your own heart. Think about this with Jonah at his own expense.

I mean, how much is it costing this guy to do this? At his own expense and with tremendous effort. Have you ever thought about that? If criminals who put out so much effort to do wrong would just turn that around and try to do right, there's no telling what they could invent and do and come up with to help society instead of trying to cheat all of us and steal and rob and everything else.

This is Jonah. He's expending great effort. He is running as fast as he can to the furthest place in the world from Nineveh. He can't do it fast enough.

Well, what's God going to do about all of this beginning in verse 4? God's gracious control. Can you run from the Lord? The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.

I want you to take notice. I don't know how your translation would do it, but the word great is used a number of different times throughout the book. Here, it's a great storm, a great wind is coming up and this is God.

[32 : 43] Once again, God is acting, God is initiating. Now, when we read this in verse 4, I wonder, well, what's Jonah? See, I get into this.

I've already given you a little bit of insight into how I spend some of my research, you know, watching Veggie Tales and singing ridiculous songs, but it does get serious too.

I'm thinking, Jonah, what are you thinking? What are you thinking? But you know, it's just, this is something that we do not try to do like when we counsel people because you hear folks say this, I try to get into their head.

I'm not trying to get into Jonah's head. And I don't try to get into my counselee's heads. I just, you know why? Because the scripture says that's God's territory.

I can't know your heart. You can't know my heart. Now, you can reveal it to me. As soon as you get angry with me or you, you're revealing something about your heart to me or me to you.

[33 : 47] If you show me compassion and grace and kindness and the benefit of the doubt, you're showing me something of your heart. So you can show it to me, but I can't get in there.

That's God's domain. But I am thinking, Jonah, what are you thinking, man? Well, that's just it. When we're in sinful rebellion, nothing makes sense.

Sin is insanity, isn't it? Jonah is pridefully determined to make God's will for him impossible to fulfill. Now, how insane is that?

He knows who he's dealing with. I'm going to make it as hard for God to do this with me as possible. My wife's grinning at me and I think it's because I know what she's probably thinking.

She's probably thinking, I know a guy who did that years ago. Yeah, absolutely. Here he is on the ship.

[34 : 48] Now they've made sails, so they're somewhere out in the ocean. The text doesn't tell us how far out in the ocean they are. And maybe Jonah's thinking, good, I've made it.

I'm finally out of reach and out of God's domain. You know, I see this like a movie reel as I read narrative. So I can see Jonah standing there, his beard in the wind, his hair, you know, with his stuff.

And he's leaning over the side of the ship with all that hitting him and the wind bracing him and he's thinking, you know, he's, yeah, I'm getting out of Dodge. I'm away. I've made it. I got to the ship.

You know, just that, that syrupy, sickening self-confidence that we have that we can do things apart from God and actually get away with it.

Ah! What creatures we are. You would think that we needed God's grace, compassion, guidance. Yeah, that's what we all need.

[35 : 48] That's what he needs. When he's thinking that he's fleeing from the presence of the Lord, several comment, I can't take credit for this, several commentators pointed out that it seems like Jonah was probably thinking getting out of Israel is getting out of God's domain where the temple is, where God has made his presence known among his people.

So if I can get out of Israel and get as far away from there as I can, I can be away from God. But again, we saw in the scriptures that's not true and he knew it.

And he knew it. Well, here he is on the ship feeling real confident in himself. The camera pans down to the water and you start to see the water boil.

Cue a vicious storm breaking on the boat. Say, Jeff, does the text give us any hint of how that storm might have happened?

I mean, are we seeing like this breeze start to pick up and Jonah kind of looks around and goes, oh, it's getting kind of breezy out? No. This is instantaneous. The text makes it clear this is an instant sea boiling, wind all over the place, the waves breaking on and over the ship.

[37 : 06] This is a miracle. This is God. Look, look at the text. Hurl. That's right. Greg got it. Hurl.

That's not gradual. I promise you right now, if I pick something up and hurl it at you right here, it'll get there quick. That's exactly what the storm did.

It got there very fast. And it scared everybody to death. The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea.

Do you see all these? That great wind, great. We're being shown this is a powerful, all of a sudden kind of thing. Hurl has a violent meaning.

It can also mean to throw down violently. The sea was calm and then suddenly it wasn't. And it was because God is acting to send a great wind that produced the great storm.

[38 : 10] But now look, there's one guy on the boat who knows what this storm is all about. But he's saying nothing.

He's not going to let it out of the bag. But think of this. He's saying nothing while his sin makes these sailors miserable and threatens not only their livelihood but their very lives as well.

Jonah is no hero. He is acting as a wicked, wicked man. Boy, that rocks your theology.

He's a prophet of God but he's not acting like it. In a miracle, God sovereignly controls the elements to stop Jonah in his tracks.

God uses the weather, the boat, the sailors, the sea to correct Jonah's course of sinful disobedience. We just need to see that in one word, grace.

[39 : 26] Now, I'm sure that Jonah in those moments wasn't thinking at all in terms of God is acting in grace. We know that by what happens next. The sailors weren't thinking that, but how often do you think it?

How often do you and I think in the middle of our rebellion against the Lord when God sends trials to discipline us in our life, how many of us would stop to think this is an act of God's love and grace on my life?

What do we pray for? Oh, stop it. We got to get out of this. So many times all of our resources are pooled to try to get us out of this circumstance where we, have we even stopped to ask?

I know that all things happen to me for good and all things happen to me under God's hand, so I need to stop and ask God, what's this about? What's this about?

What is this, what is this supposed to do in my life? God's gracious control of all these circumstances to stop Jonah in his tracks and offer grace to him, but Jonah's not seeing it that way.

[40 : 37] If you look with me at verse 5, Jonah's guilty conscience, then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his God. They threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea.

That's no small thing to lighten it. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, laying down, and fallen, sound asleep. My goodness.

So here these weathered sailors are terrified. It gives testimony to how fierce and violent God's storm was in the face of horrific certain death.

These mariners, these seasoned sailors used to storms on the sea, used to all this kind of thing, they're calling out on what they believed could save them.

These grizzled guys are unhinged. They're freaking out on the boat. This is how bad this thing is. So what was once so precious to them, what they had looked to to help them with their livelihood,

their prized cargo, now they see that as something dragging them down so they throw it overboard. [41 : 48] That's perspective, isn't it? Right? Things that we held so dear and thought was so precious, we get into these trials and we realize God is showing me what really is valuable in life.

He's refining me and helping me to see there's a whole bunch of things I can live without. But there are some things that God's given me to bless my life that I need in my life and God says I need them.

God says that. So overboard it goes. Their raw fear, the raw fear of these sailors is contrasted with Jonah's sound sleep.

Ah! Now, why isn't Jonah terrified and helping the sailors? Why isn't he pitching in? He knows why the storm's coming.

And he is so calloused and so indifferent that he goes down into the hold of the ship and goes to sleep. Now, how are we to understand this? In a word, here it is. This is the sleep of carnal indifference.

[42 : 53] That's what this is. He's a troubled man. But this is carnal indifference. This is all about Jonah. I'll give you a reference.

I won't turn to it. Ephesians 5.14. I'll let you look that up. Just think of it this way. When you're living against your conscience in some sin or some wrong in your life that you know the Lord is displeased about, it can keep you up at night, can't it?

That's typically what it does to us. It stresses us out. It can nag at you during the day. It bothers you. You might look for ways to keep your mind occupied so you don't have to think about that kind of thing.

But Jonah's behavior betrays, here, a hardening heart and a conscience being desensitized by prideful disregard and disrespect towards God, truth, and other people.

This is very, very dangerous. Now, does Jonah know he's wrong? I've already said, yes, he does. That's why Jonah's running from God and from himself, from his calling.

[44 : 09] If God leaves him like this, Jonah's pride, contempt, and hardening will destroy him. Do you see the graciousness of God? God could just take his hands off of this prophet right now and he could just destroy the boat and take everybody down with it and God would be justified in doing everything that I just said.

But that's not what God does. He's not sending the storm. Hear me carefully, folks. He's not sending the storm to destroy these men. How do we know that from the Bible?

How do we know that? He didn't destroy them. We know that's God's will. There it is. It's written in black and white. He didn't destroy them.

Not a single man lost their life, lost his life. Not even Jonah. I'm getting there. I'm getting ahead of myself. Jonah knew that he was wrong.

That's why he's running. I thought of when I thought of this, I thought of David and Bathsheba. And I thought maybe I'll use that as an illustration.

[45 : 20] David, you know, committing sin with Bathsheba. He knew he was wrong from from Jump Street doing what he did in his lust. But and then he he didn't tell anybody.

You know, how long before he had relations with Bathsheba until Bathsheba came to him and said, hey, guess what? I'm pregnant. That takes a little while for a woman to realize that she couldn't go down to the place and get a pregnancy test.

Right? No, she's going to have to wait so that she can see what her body tells her, what nature tells her. So I don't know how long.

Nobody knows how long, but it was a while that David sat on that and calloused his heart until God sent Nathan the prophet and Nathan the prophet confronted David in his sin, didn't he?

I remember this is what I think Suzanne might have been thinking about. I don't know. Just real quickly in my life, a few of you have heard this before.

[46 : 29] I've shared this with a few of the men. when I was called into full-time Christian service, I went to school. It took me five years to get through my undergraduate program.

I changed degrees several times trying to figure out what God wanted to do with me. I just knew whatever it was I wanted to serve the church. But I didn't ever think of pastoring as in preaching. I just wanted to be one of the guys in the trenches, just helping people. That's what I thought I would do. So how I got to the pulpit ministry is another story.

So I graduated and it came time for me to step up to the plate and begin to think through, all right, next steps for actually getting into the church to serve. And it absolutely scared me to death. It terrified me. And the coward that I am, I said, in a word, nope, we're not going to do that plan. Changed my mind.

[47 : 31] I know what God wants me to do and I ain't doing it. So I'm getting on a boat in Joppa and I'm going to Tarshish. So I joined the army.

And my plan, and I said this to my wife, my plan, I want to become an army ranger and I want to kill people and I want to show God that I am not ministry material.

Now I'm going to tell you the back story of why I did that. I'm a coward. It's because I knew that if I went into the ministry and did what the Bible said I needed to do as a pastor, I would not be able to live for Jeff.

And I said, no way. I got things I want to do. I got places I want to go. I'm a man of ambition and I don't want to lay that at the altar of God's grace.

I want to do what I want to do. So I did. And I got in the army and now for all of you military guys, I have to always beg your forgiveness because I didn't go into the military to serve my country.

[48 : 43] I got in the military to serve myself and I made a complete mess of it. God was not blessing me. I did super well in basic training. Right toward the end of basic training about three weeks before we were supposed to graduate.

I was on the bayonet course and I was going through and you know how they hype you up. OK, you guys have been in the military. I got drill sergeants all along the way and they delight in this screaming and yelling and hollering, you know, all these terrible things at you.

I was scared out of my mind. But you're also on a bayonet course and you're supposed to be learning how to kill people and all this kind of thing. So I'm hyped up, man. I am amped up.

Well, I got to this one part about midway through and it came up on me super fast as I got up off the ground to go to the next station. There was about a six and a half foot drop into a pit with these dummies and you were supposed to do certain things.

One of them was stab in and then you were supposed to move to the side and come around and hit them with the stock of the gun. So when I hit, when I jumped off of that thing, I didn't expect it.

[49 : 53] I went flat footed and I felt a sharp, sharp pain go from my middle of my foot up through into my hip. But I barely, I hit that thing and I hit it so hard I broke the composite stock on that M16 right here where my hand was and it split my hand all the way up.

And so that's hanging there and I'm running and I've got, you better hurry up, you better get all my side out of my side and I'll kill you. You know. I asked for it.

Right? I got on the boat in Joppa and went to Tarshish and this is what I got. This was the storm. Fast forward, long story short, I ended up at my AIT.

Somehow I managed to get through all that. I ended up at my AIT. I'm in training. Suzanne got super sick. She was with me at the training post. That was actually a mistake. They weren't supposed to send her but they did.

We didn't know that. She just went. That's what my order said. We have a brand new baby. She's about 18 months old. She got super sick with her kidney disease. We were still in the early stages of it trying to be diagnosed.

[51 : 02] We didn't understand what was going on. We just knew she was having a really bad time, etc. She's in the hospital and now we've got this little kid. We don't know anybody. We're brand new and I show up at O Dark 30 for roll call with my 18 month old in my arms.

Guys in the military, how do you think that went over? About 30 seconds later I'm in the first sergeant's office and he is ripping me a new one. And this, I'll never forget this.

You're married to the army now. Make friends fast. That was their salute. It's the army. They're not there to babysit me. One thing led to another and I never in my whole life I have faced so many hard things in our life as God has taken us through.

I broke. I broke. I had no idea what to do. But God got my attention. I fell on my face before the Lord and this was my prayer.

God, if you will still use me and still have me, let this big green whale called the army vomit me out and when I hit the beach I will run to wherever you want me.

[52 : 18] That's what I said to the Lord. I got an honorable discharge out of the army on a medical hardship because of Suzanne's situation. There was nothing we could do. That's just the way it

was.

I spent a year working at Sam's Wholesale Club saving money for one reason. We saved every little penny we could save. Lived like hermits. And when that year was up and we had the money we moved to Fort Worth, Texas and I started seminary.

And we never looked back, did we? It was hard but we never looked back. God will get your attention. By God's grace all those things that were so embarrassing to me in the army so humiliating so degrading God used every single bit of that along the way to course correct me or I never would have stood here.

And that's the truth of how God has used the whales in my life to help us at different intervals.

So I'm a thankful man and I don't want to be one of those guys who has to have that happen all the time. You know, I want to learn to listen and be sensitive to the Lord. We'll look at God's gracious confrontation in verses 6 and 8.

[53 : 41] So the captain approached him and said, How is it that you're sleeping? Get up, call on your God. Perhaps your God will be concerned about us. Each man said to his mate, Let us cast lots. We want to figure out who's responsible for this.

Verse 8, Tell us now. We know it's you. Why has all this happened? They want to know what's going on. What in the world have you done this for? Why have you brought this to us? The sailors know that they're going to die.

They know they're headed to death. The first thing they did to save the ship was jettison all the precious cargo, the whole reason they were on the ship. Now the captain tells them all, including Jonah, Call on whatever God you believe in to save us.

Well, things don't improve. They grow even more desperate. The sailors realize the storm is raging because someone on the ship is being punished, so they make a third attempt to save themselves. They cast lots to see who it is. We don't know how they did that. We just know that in the ancient world that was a common way of discerning these kinds of things. The lot falls on Jonah.

[54 : 47] So now they want an explanation. They pepper Jonah with all these questions. They try to figure out what to do next. Jonah, why? Why did you bring this on us? And this, this is what the narrative of the chapter has been building up to.

Now we get to the point. Right here in the middle of the narrative is the main focus and main point of what God wants us to see and understand about his gracious confrontation of this wayward, pridefully rebellious prophet.

So we'll look in verse 9, Jonah's glib confession. Don't be fooled by this confession. He said to them, Jonah, in response, I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.

So the author, whom we believe to be Jonah himself, wants us to see that what Jonah says in reply to the sailors is the focus of this entire incident of Jonah's prideful flight from God.

And that focus is put forward in a Hebrew chiasm that runs from verse 4 all the way to verse 16 and it looks like this.

[56 : 02] Many of you will be familiar with chiasm because of me introducing it to you back in Ecclesiastes. It's a literary device that a number of different cultures use, not just the Hebrews, but they used it and implanted it in their literature sometimes to help their readers focus on and easily come to the point that the author was trying to make.

Here's what the chiasm looks like in this section. So you want to match A with A. and as you do that it begins to narrow and shrink.

A with A, B with B, C with C until finally you get to the middle and the middle is where the point is and that's Jonah's confession in verse 9.

Do you see how that works? Jeff, would the original readers have caught this? Yes. That's why they did it.

So this confession is just what Jonah needs to remember and believe regarding himself, regarding his relationship with God.

[57 : 16] It's something like this. I'm not my own man. I'm God's man and I live to worship Him and do His will for my life. I can't run from my God. I can't hide from my God.

More pointedly, why would I want to? See, that was what I dealt with when I got out of the army and started obeying God's will. I was so humiliated and I had to learn to get over myself in those kinds of things.

Jeff, you're a sinner. You're no better than anybody else. Given the opportunity, you wouldn't follow God. You'd follow your own heart. It's only by God's grace that any of us can do what we do for the Lord.

Amen? Never let yourself think that it's about you and your ability to do what you can do. It's not. It's about your inability and your gracious God's ability to work in you.

That's beautiful, caring, loving. So far from deflating our egos, that builds us up in Christ.

[58 : 22] It helps put us in perspective. And then we learn to follow the Lord and trust God. And as a pastor, I needed to learn those lessons and learn them quickly and early.

Don't get into ministry, Jeff, and make it about you and think you can gut it out, tough it out, clever it out. That's not what ministry is. So this is one of the many terrible, terrible realities about our sin. It negatively impacts everyone in our orbit of life. Jonah concealed his sin. He thought it was private, hidden, personal.

He had a secret when he got on that boat. But it wasn't private. It wasn't just personal. It wasn't really hidden because it wasn't hidden from God.

Instead of being a blessing to these sailors, Jonah was a blight. He was a curse. His disobedience brought the wrath of God down on the people around him.

[59 : 26] That's just how I felt when all these things struck my life in my disobedient rebellion against God. It affected my wife and my little baby. It affected the soldiers around me.

The mission I was called to was terribly selfish. Sin, hear me carefully, my friends. Don't miss this. Sin turns us in.

Then, inside out. And then it turns on those around us as they experience the fallout of what sin does to our hearts and our minds.

God's gracious provision, even in the light of this confession, which is very interesting to me, that he would say I'm a Hebrew to these Phoenician sailors who believed in all these false gods.

I fear the Lord God of heaven. It doesn't look like it, does it? It doesn't look like he has reverence for God in his life. Verses 10 through 17 captures something of how God then begins to provide even through this terrible storm for all that Jonah is trying to undo.

[60 : 50] Upon confessing, they asked Jonah, how could you do this? Jonah, you've told us now, you've shared with us, how could you do it? And then they ask him this. They ask him what they should do to him to appease his God.

Now, this is Jonah's opportunity to say any kind of crazy thing he wants. I want all of you to line up, go over to this side of the ship and run around the inside of the ship six times and then cry out to God and say, save us!

He could have said that. He could have said anything. What does your God want so that he'll stop this storm? And while they're having this discussion, the storm's growing even worse.

Now Jonah tells them just what they need to do. A sacrifice has to be made. And it has to be Jonah. Now again, he's no hero. Don't think Jonah's a great guy.

Oh, this is... I read a couple commentators and I went, are you kidding me? This is a man that... We don't want to emulate this. Stay with me.

[61 : 53] Everyone understands, everyone on the boat understands Jonah is saying that he has to die to appease God. Throw me overboard. Jonah knows he deserves death.

And here's the thing. This is why you can't make Jonah a hero at this point. Jonah would rather die than obey God by going to Nineveh. That's...

Death is an out. Death. Now they all know what's what. Now they all know what they have to do.

Verse 13. However, the men rode desperately to return to land, but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.

The men in compassion don't want to kill him. They show their compassion to Jonah when Jonah, the Hebrew prophet of the Creator God, was callously willing for them to die along with him for his sinful rebellion.

[62 : 59] Yeah, I'll go down to the hold of the ship and go to sleep and when all of the water comes in and overwhelms the ship, I'll just drown and die and we'll all be...

Yeah, that's what Jonah was willing to happen to all those men, innocent men. But here are a bunch of guys, they're not willing to kill Jonah. So they row harder trying to escape this thing.

But they can't overcome the storm. Now here's my question at this point. When I first started studying this, I got, and I'm really trying to think through all of this and thinking how wicked Jonah is being, boy, it just made me so mad at him.

Of course, I'm thinking the whole time, well, you did the same thing, Jeff, you know. I'm not trying to be haughty about it. I hope it's a righteous anger. I was like, you spoil brat. My question, my question at this time is this, well, Jonah, if you know that's what you need to do, why don't you do the right thing and just jump overboard?

Why you got to have somebody throw you? Be a man. Get up on the side of the ship and jump. Does he do that? Nope. I just, I can't even imagine what that scene must have looked like.

[64 : 12] Ellie, you guys, if you want the storm to stop, you're going to have to pick me up and chunk me overboard. And then he, what, did he just stand there? No. This is so bizarre.

Well, something drastic happens in verse 14. Then they called on the Lord. What? They were calling on all these false gods before. Now look, they're calling on the Lord and they said, we earnestly pray, oh Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us.

Lord, we don't want to do this. And then they say this, this is what we know. Lord, you've done as you pleased. You brought all this about. You've brought us to this moment. We're only doing what we know will please you.

Wow. The sailors appeal to the God Jonah has told them about. And so the sailors ask God not to punish them for Jonah's offenses.

They ask God not to hold their deeds towards Jonah against them. And then recognizing that God and not them was in control of all this. They picked up Jonah.

[65 : 22] They put him over the side into the boiling sea. And the text says, and the sea stopped its raging. Once again, friends, that's a miracle. Instant storm, instant stop.

That would be unnerving. You're going one minute with these waves slapping over the ship and the ships going down and now perfect calm in a microsecond.

God provided the sailors with grace in the form of stopping the storm that was about to kill them.

And as I said before, friends, God preserved every single life on that ship.

not one of those men was harmed. Verse 16, then the men feared the Lord greatly and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and they made vows.

They made vows. This is another amazing contrast that we've seen throughout chapter 1. It's between the sailors and Jonah.

[66 : 36] Given Jonah's confession in verse 9, it's quite a contrast. Here's a prophet of God offering the Lord only prideful disobedience and now here are pagan sailors offering God their prayers and praise.

It reminded me of Psalms saying even the rocks will cry out. God can make anything and anybody praise Him. Now He deserves every bit of it.

Free will. He deserves it from us. But notice now, notice, the sailors collective steps of obedience in calling out to God and in following through with putting the offender overboard, doing these obedient things brought about God's gracious compassion on them as He calmed the storm.

Please don't miss that. It is important. The sailors responded in obedience. They don't understand all of this, but they understand enough to attribute what they're doing to God and they pray and they praise God and they act in obedience and God in their acting in obedience sees those small steps and moves in compassion on them and saves every one of them.

Now, you might ask, is this genuine conversion? Now, I'm going to have to tell you I wrestled and wrestled and wrestled with this. I don't tell you how many drafts I made writing this out and studying it.

[68 : 09] The truth is this, I don't know. I don't know if these men were genuinely saved. I lean toward not. I think that the men are doing what they know, but I'm not sure that they in faith embraced, as in conversion, the Hebrew God.

Now, as I get further into the story, I can come back and tell you why I lean that way. But if somebody were to come to me and say, Jeff, I think the text bears out this was a genuine conversion.

Well, that sounds great and nice, and we want that to be the case, but I'm just telling you in earnestness, I don't know for sure, because I don't think the Ninevites repented in conversion faith.

I'll just go ahead and let you know. And so I wonder if this is a parallel to that same thing. They did what they knew. But the point is in all of this, the sailors went from great fear of the storm to great fear of the God of the storm.

To what level and degree I'll have to let that just rest. All of this, of course, no thanks to Jonah. Jonah could have evangelized these guys.

[69 : 24] He could have made a big difference. Even in his repentance, if he could just turn away and say, you know, guys, I blew it. No. He had to be thrown overboard, remember.

Well, what of Jonah? Well, I think Jonah, at this point, he thinks this is the end. Now death, now death can finally take him. He can be done with God's will for him to go to Nineveh. And then we have this, folks, but God. God. But God wasn't done with this rebellious, prideful, wicked man.

But God, who made the sea and all that's in it, provides a great fish of some kind to keep Jonah alive.

that's for next time. We want to talk more about what in the world is that all about. Let's pray together.

[70 : 35] Dear Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to you for the great compassion that you show to people like me who can be selfish and ego-centered and really not care about other people.

We're so grateful, God, that you patiently and mercifully show your wonderful compassion on us. We are so undeserving.

we never want to lose the awe that we feel over you being kind to us, given the sinful life and heart that we have before you, before you intervened, before you brought the storm of life onto us and used those very things to bring us into your presence and demonstrate to us how merciful and compassionate you truly are.

We're so grateful that the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest example that we have of your compassion, that you were willing to sacrifice your own son at his expense for our wonderful benefit.

God, we're so thankful, Father, that you grant us the provision of your love in so many ways every day of our lives. We have so many reasons to be thankful.

[72 : 20] So God, please let the story of Jonah, as we've looked at chapter one, please let it sober and encourage our hearts that we are serving a God who will use anything and everything that you've made in your design to bring us to yourself.

And while we might run, we cannot hide. And we are grateful to you that you found us and delivered us and gave us life in Jesus.

Help us now forever more to live as grateful, loving, and gracious people toward others, knowing that we were once undeserving as well.

We thank you for this message. We pray you'll help us to attain to it in our hearts. And we thank you for the blessing that you have made us a family in Jesus. It's in his name that we pray and for his glory.

Amen.