

THE PRODIGAL PROPHET

Jonah 1:1-3

This new resource is intended to help deepen our study of God's Word together. Individuals or groups of people may enjoy working through this content while having fellowship in a home, while away on summer vacation, or even in a Connect Group. We'll provide updated content from week-to-week across this summer in advance of each Sunday gathering.

Jonah 1:1-3

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.”³ 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.

SUMMARY

The Book of Jonah tells the story of one of God's messengers who refused to obey God. It's an interesting book. Most of the books in the Bible focus on God's message to a group of people. This is the only book that explicitly focuses on God's messenger.

The book of Jonah shows us an angry believer in God who would rather die than see God's grace extended to the undeserving. We never do hear the end of Jonah's story. The reason is simple: What counts today is not what Jonah decided to do, but what you will do with the Father's grace. Will the grace of God melt your icy heart once again, or will you harden yourself under the assertion that you don't need it?

This is a book for all of us. We all have been commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). So, Jonah isn't just for preachers or missionaries. The book will lead us to consider how each of us responds in our own relationship with God. Do we obey the word of the Lord and seek his presence? Or, do we disobey the Lord and run from his presence? God's Word functions like a mirror that we must look into. The wise person will see what God intends and choose a life of obedience (James 1:19-22).

GOSPEL & MISSION

The gospel is the good news of forgiveness. It is also the announcement of a gift – the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our frantic hearts are constantly inventing new ways for us to be taken care of and for it to appear that all is well. Only the perfect record of Jesus Christ will satisfy. The only way to receive it is to open and empty our hands. We let go of our efforts to prove ourselves worthy of God's love. We reach out to God with the empty

hands of faith and ask him to save us and to fill us with his Holy Spirit.

God does not have a mission for his church; God has a church for his mission. We need the book of Jonah because we, too, are participants in the mission of God. God's mission is to cover the earth with the knowledge of his glory, like the water covers the bottom of the sea. To accomplish this mission, we need people who know and love God to inhabit every sphere of society and every sector of life. Mission success requires image bearers of God knowing and loving God in the arts, sciences, arts, and law.

There are no insignificant people and no insignificant places. Yet, the book of Jonah reveals a peculiar love that God seems to have for people living in cities. This will be an important theme for us to listen to because we are one of the few city-center churches in Nashville. As we embark on this journey together, let's be mindful not to behave like Jonah who would rather die than see God's grace reach the inhabitants of Nineveh. Let's also be sensitive to the needs of our neighbors in Nashville - our own great city in need of our great Savior.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What do we know about Jonah? How does Jonah represent more than himself?
2. Why did Jonah refuse God's call to go to Nineveh and preach? Give practical and theological reasons.
3. Have you ever felt that God was calling you to do something that doesn't make sense? How did you respond? Have you ever refused God's call?
4. What was Jonah's real problem? What was his real conclusion?
5. Have you ever had difficulty trusting God in your life? What happened? What impact did it have on your life after that?
6. How does Jonah run from God? How does the mystery of mercy become the problem facing Jonah?
7. How can we become better at examining our hearts and noticing the different ways we run from God, both big and small?
8. How can one be certain of the historicity of Jonah? What points of connection exist between Jonah and our cultural literacy that might allow one to use Jonah to enter into discussions with the world about Christ?
9. What is the significance of the phrase, "from the Lord's presence"? In contrast to your hesitancy to tell others about Christ, what is your attitude in prayer and your Christian practice when you want a sense of "the Lord's presence" to comfort or heal you?
10. How do the opening three verses of Jonah serve as an introduction to the whole book?