

“Letting Go of Our Pride”

Jonah 1:17-3:1

Today we are in the second week of a brief study on the book of Jonah in the Old Testament. Some have questioned its validity and whether or not it really happened, but I believe wholeheartedly that it did happen. Jesus Himself knew that it happened and even taught it to His followers. The message of the book of Jonah is powerful for all to hear and understand. Most people think they know what the book of Jonah is all about. Some will say that it's about a great fish that swallowed Jonah. But there is much more to it than that. The great fish is only mentioned four times in the entire book. Some would say it's about a great city called Nineveh. But, there is much more to it than that. The great city is mentioned only nine times in the book. Some would say that the book is about a disobedient prophet. But, again there is much more to it than that. Though the book bears the prophet's name, his name is only mentioned eighteen times. To the surprise of most, the truth is that the book of Jonah is all about God. God is mentioned in this short book thirty-eight times. If we eliminated God from the book of Jonah, the book wouldn't make much sense at all. **Charles Spurgeon** said about Jonah, “The life of Jonah cannot be written without God; take God out of the prophet's history, and there is no history to write.” Because God is full of grace and mercy and is patient towards His people, we learn much about God through its pages. All throughout the book we see God working and moving on behalf of mankind, even when we don't realize it. In fact, **Jonah 4:2b** summarizes the truth about God well. Jonah said to God, “You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.” What wonderful truths we discover about God in this verse. He is full of grace, compassion, patience, kindness, and forgiveness. This is Who He is, what He is like, and what He does. Interestingly, however, Jonah knew all these things in his head, but he still didn't respond to God in an appropriate way. Unfortunately, from Jonah's example we learn how not to respond to God's leading in our lives. Jonah clearly heard the commands of God. God said, “Jonah, get up, go to Nineveh, and cry against it because its wickedness has come up before me.” Jonah was brought to a crisis of belief, a moment of decision, where he must choose to obey God or reject God. There was no middle ground. Sadly, Jonah chose to rebel, go his own direction, and disobey God. There are many reasons that this was his choice, but all of it stemmed from one primary thing – Jonah refused to let go. There were things that God wanted to do in him, around him, through him, and for him that were greatly hindered because he simply refused to let go. Last week we saw how Jonah refused to let go of his plans. Today we learn a second fact that hindered him. Jonah was greatly hindered because he refused to let go of his pride.

Read Text

It should not be a surprise to us this morning to learn that pride is a hindrance to us experiencing the grace and blessings of God. However, it may come as a surprise to us to find that even prophets of God can struggle with pride. Jonah was dealing with a great bit of pride. He felt that his plans were best. He made himself out to be a god thinking that he could do what he wanted to do. As we will see later in the book, his pride led him to look down at others with a heart of prejudice. His pride was also seen in the fact that he thought he could sin against God and get away with it. Even

in Jonah chapter 1 as the storm is slamming against the boat and the sailors are convinced they are going to die, Jonah refuses to repent of his sin and seek forgiveness. Why? Because his heart was hardened and full of pride. Friends, God warns us and instructs us repeatedly not to be filled with pride. **Proverbs 16:18-19** says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.” **Proverbs 18:12** warns us, “Before destruction the heart of man was haughty, but humility goes before honor.” God despises the proud so adamantly that in Proverbs 6:16-19 He tells us that there are six specific things that He hates. What is the first one? “A proud look” or “haughty eyes.” Pride is the exact opposite of what we see Jesus model throughout His earthly life. It is the exact opposite of what He modeled, taught, and instructed His followers to do. God wants us to follow Him and not the world around us, which means that among other things we must do away with our pride. **1 John 2:16** explains why, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

I believe that God wants all of us to heed the instruction of **1 Peter 5:5b-6**, “And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.” Do we hear this today? God is opposed to and rejects the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Jonah knew this, but he still struggled with great pride. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we, too, can battle our flesh and struggle in this area. From this passage in Jonah I want us to look at three words of encouragement if you are struggling with pride that is hindering you from trusting God and obeying Him. I believe there is much that God wants us to see.

I. Remember Who is in Control Over Your Life (vs. 1:17-2:1)

When we are dealing with the struggles and temptations of pride we must remember that God is God and we are not. We often try to manage our lives, our schedules, our bubble, and even the lives of others. However, we aren’t really ever in control. Only God has all power and authority. Only He is truly in control of all things. In Jonah’s case, his pride was revealed as he thought he was in control. He thought he could do whatever he wanted without cost or consequence. God had called him to go to Nineveh to tell the people to repent, but Jonah didn’t want to do that. So, he made his plans and did his own thing. He thought he was in control. He was in such control, he even thought he could just relax in the bottom of the boat and catch a good nap. However, he had such little control that his nap was soon interrupted, his direction was quickly changed, and he was about to be reminded that pride always leads to a great fall.

A. God Reveals His Plans

Because Jonah was God’s servant, God clearly revealed His plans to Jonah. Jonah was faithfully serving the Lord and the Lord had more for him to do. It is easy to understand God’s plan in this passage. God planned for the people of Nineveh to deal with their sin. God planned for Jonah to be His messenger to Nineveh. God planned to do a great work in Jonah’s heart and life through this experience. God’s plan was the same then as it is now. He is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance,” 2 Peter 3:9b. It is because God loved the people of Nineveh that he called Jonah to go preach. But it is also

because He loved Jonah that He invited Jonah to be a part of His plan. Jonah didn't see the personal part of this. He only saw Nineveh and his own heart issues blinded him to how this was an act of God's love for him personally. So, though God clearly revealed His plans, Jonah stubbornly refused.

B. God Relentlessly Pursues

What happens when we pridefully reject God's instructions and plans? It is encouraging to me to know that God pursues prodigals. It would have been easy for God to sit back and do nothing. It would have been easy for God to blast Jonah or strike him dead for refusing to obey. However, God didn't do that. Again, how does God act? He acts with grace and compassion. He doesn't give up on Jonah. He doesn't toss him aside. As with Abraham, Moses, David, Thomas, Peter, etc., God still had a plan and a purpose to accomplish in him and through him. As a result, God acts very intentionally and strategically to pursue Jonah and bring him back. In fact, even when Jonah went through this ordeal he clearly recognized that God was the one behind all these things. In **Jonah 1:12b** he explains the storm saying, "I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." Then in **Jonah 1:17a** he says, "And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah." The word that Jonah used for the great fish that was "appointed" suggests that not only was this fish specifically chosen by God, but was likely created for this primary purpose. The point is that it was the Lord Who was behind this. Then in **Jonah 2:3**, Jonah explains, "For You (Lord) had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me." In other words, Jonah knew, even then, that God was still in control. God is always in control. Because of Jonah's disobedience it appeared that God was working against Him, but the reality is that God was actually working for him to draw him back to right relationship and to put him on the right path.

Jonah's circumstance is one that none of us would want to face. None of us would want to be in such a violent storm. None of us would want to be left at sea to die. And certainly, none of us would want to be swallowed by a great fish. Jonah was in a huge circumstance, but in the midst of this storm we need to be aware of God's amazing love for Jonah. In fact, Jonah expected to die out in the middle of the sea, but God was still in control. Jonah awoke in the belly of the whale to find that God had been gracious and spared his life. And there in the belly of the whale we see that Jonah accepted what God did because he knew that God loved him. We see Jonah not blaming God, but calmly recognizing that God was disciplining him. In the midst of Jonah's circumstance, we should see God's control and compassion. That is always the case with God. **Hebrews 12:5-11 explains it powerfully (Show Text)**. There are several key truths here about the discipline of God. **1) God disciplines those He loves**. Many people ask, "If God loves us then how could He allow this circumstance to happen in my life?" But the truth is that many of the circumstances that we find ourselves in, we face because they are consequences of our own actions. If God didn't love us, He'd let us keep wandering our own way like a helpless sheep destined to be devoured by its enemy. But God loves us, so at times He disciplines. **2) God deals with us as His children**. The key words in all these verses are "son" and "children". These

words are used seven times in verses 5-8. What greater evidence could there be of His love than the fact that He treats us as His children? We all know well of the results of a child that grows up without discipline. He typically grows up to be a selfish, arrogant bully. A child that does not learn to submit to authority will never become a useful, mature adult. God deals with us as His children. A father only disciplines his own sons. In the same way, God only disciplines those that are His, and all of us need this discipline. **3) He disciplines us for our good.** When a child is disciplined, he is disciplined so that he may turn from wrong and do what is right. When God disciplines, it is so that we can turn from our sinful ways and turn to God's ways. Sin's ways will lead to death and destruction and heartache. But God's ways will lead to fulfillment, life, and peace. God gives discipline so that it will yield in us "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." In the midst of our discipline, there is no question about God, He is love. He is our Father. He has our good in mind. As a result, we must respond appropriately. **Warren Wiersbe** said it well, "We can despise God's discipline and fight. We can be discouraged and faint; we can resist discipline and invite even stronger discipline, possibly even death; or we can submit to the Father and mature in faith in love." I'm sure Jonah didn't enjoy his circumstance, but even then, he knew it was sent from a loving Father Who had absolute control and had his good at heart. If we are going to let go of our pride, we must first remember Who is truly in control and submit to Him.

II. Realize the Consequences of Your Pride (vs. 2:2b-6)

What happened to Jonah because of his pride? We saw it last week. When Jonah refused to humble himself and follow God, he chose a path that would lead him in a downward spiral. From the moment Jonah disobeyed God we see that "he went down." One step at a time he went lower and lower. He went down to Tarshish. He went down to the ship. He went down below the ship. He was thrown into the depths of the sea where again he went down and then he went down into the belly of the great fish. Friend, it never pays to harden our hearts and run from God. At any point Jonah could have repented and turned from his path and experienced God's grace, but time after time he refused to do so. Notice the misery of Jonah's situation in these verses. He goes from one tense to another very quickly. At times he is relaying what took place, and at others he is explaining what he said directly to the Lord. But, from this we see the consequences of his pride.

He felt completely overwhelmed. He felt that he was in a place where there was absolutely no hope and no help. He said, "The great deep engulfed me." It means that it swallowed him up. This describes a position of terror or hopelessness. Listen to this visual, "Weeds were wrapped around my head." It's like he is bound in this situation. He couldn't get out of it if he wanted to. He was stuck in the worst kind of way. He feels that the chords of the sea are trying to strangle him. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in it so deep that you saw absolutely no way out? You felt so overwhelmed by the consequences and pain of your sin that you felt hopeless? You literally felt that there were chords keeping you bound to your situation. You were completely overwhelmed and felt no hope of freedom. Jonah was there.

He felt complete despair. He said, "Water encompassed me to the point of death." In other words, he felt that he was at death's door. He felt that he could never make it out of this alive. He felt that

his death was imminent. He felt that there was nothing he could do. He further states, “I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me FOREVER.” The imagery is powerful. The roots of the mountains suggests the absolute lowest part of the earth. He can’t get any lower than this and he feels that he will be stuck there forever. He is telling us “I am going down to the pit that will hold me forever. I am hopelessly lost. I am a lost cause. The depths of despair will hold me forever. I can never be rescued.”

He felt alone. Here is perhaps the saddest consequence. He felt that he was all alone and that not even God was with him. Notice what he said in **verse 4**, “I have been expelled from Your sight.” In other words, he sadly feels completely rejected from the very presence of God. What a miserable and horrid place to be. Think of this contrast for a moment. In the previous chapter, he hardened his heart and ran from God and tried his best to flee from the presence of the Lord. He didn’t want the Lord to see him or find him. He defiantly wanted nothing to do with God or His plan. But, now, in his state of despair and death, he wishes that God would look upon him. In Jonah’s mind, he was getting what he deserved. He had tried to run from God’s presence and now he feels that God is nowhere to be found. He had wished to be away from God and now he is coming face to face with what that truly felt like.

I want to remind us in this moment that we must always live by the facts of Who God is and not merely by our own emotions and feelings. Jonah may have felt all of these things, but our emotions can lie to us. Jonah’s sincere feelings did not change the absolute authority, sovereignty, or promises of God. God cared for him. God still had a plan for him. As bad as Jonah’s heart and actions were, they didn’t change what God had called him to do. His actions certainly didn’t change the simple reality that God is still God. Remember what David prayed in **Psalm 139:7-10**, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.” As Jonah has descended to the bottom of the sea and had now been swallowed by the great fish, at the lowest of lows he finally begins to look up. And, it is when we come to the end of ourselves and look up to God that we find the help we need.

III. Rely on the Compassion of God (vs. 7-10)

I love this summary statement in verse 7. Jonah would have indeed been hopelessly lost forever if it wasn’t for a simple but powerful action found in **verse 7**. Literally as Jonah was fainting away, losing all hope and life itself, in this great moment of desperation and despair something amazing occurred. Jonah tells us in first person what happened. He said, “I remembered the Lord.” Let me ask you this morning, are you tired of running from God? Are you ready to look up and remember the Lord? Jonah was a prophet of God. He had a relationship with God. But as we have seen, with a hardened heart and rebellious attitude he had become blind to his own sin and to God Himself. His actions only led him to a downward spiral, but here is the moment of hope. Here is the moment of change. He remembered the Lord. This reminds of Jesus’ instruction to the church at Ephesus in **Revelation 2:4-5a**. Jesus said, “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds that you did at first.”

This is where Jonah was. He had literally run from God and now in this moment of despair he suddenly remembers God. Notice the process.

A. He Changed His Focus (vs. 7)

Verse 7 tells us simply that Jonah remembered the Lord and that his prayer was heard in the Lord's holy temple. But, in the previous section, **verse 4** tells us how this occurred. It tells us Jonah's mindset. He said, "I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple." Think of this for a moment. Remember, Jonah felt completely separated from God. He didn't feel that God was there. But, even in the depths of despair Jonah chose to put his faith and hope in God. Even when he didn't feel anything good he said, "I will look again toward Your holy temple." When Jonah said that, he was now believing and claiming the promise of God. He now had hope in the midst of the deep. His hope was in the faithfulness and the truthfulness of God. In **1 Kings 8:38-39** when Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem he asked God for this special favor. He prayed, "Whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men." Jonah was claiming that promise. When he could sink no lower, the only place he had to look was up. So, by faith he remembered God and looked to Him.

B. He Cried Out to the Lord (vs. 2)

Jonah didn't just remember the Lord and look to Him. Because he truly believed in God and His power to deliver, even from seemingly hopeless and impossible situations, Jonah took another step. He cried out to the Lord. It seems only appropriate that this would be Jonah's response to God's compassion. We might look and say, "Well it's about time." After all, Jonah has gone through all this calamity. And, he has now been in the belly of the whale for three days. But regardless of what it took to get him there, he is finally where he is supposed to be. He calls out in distress. He cries out for help. I'm thankful that the God we serve hears our cries for help. David experienced this and **Psalms 18:6** declares, "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears." He said again in **Psalm 31:22**, "As for me, I said in my alarm, 'I am cut off from before Your eyes'; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried to You." **Psalm 34:15,17**, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry...The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles." Friends, we must turn to God. Don't let your pain or your shame cause you to bow up your neck in pride. We must turn to God and cry out to Him. I wonder what it will take for some of us to get to that point in our lives. Don't harden your heart like Jonah to the point that you have to lose everything before you'll cry out to God.

C. He Committed Himself to the Lord (vs. 9a-b)

As Jonah prayed, he revealed both remorse and repentance. Remember, repentance is a change of mind. It is a turning from sin and a turning to God. In **verse 8** Jonah said, “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.” That is a true statement. Remember, an idol is anything that takes away from God the affection and obedience that rightfully belongs to Him. Of all the people that we read about in the book of Jonah, he is probably the chief sinner of idolatry. He is putting his own will above the will of God. So, Jonah is in a sense admitting that his own idolatry caused him to be unfaithful to the Lord, but listen to the change of his attitude and actions. **Verse 9**, “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay.” Jonah is praying and now surrendering by committing himself to obey the will of God. He vows to sacrifice to the Lord. He vows to give thanks. We don’t know what other promises he made to God, but it would seem likely that he is now vowing to go to Nineveh like God had instructed him to do. God was listening, hearing, and observing all that Jonah is communicating. God didn’t miss a single word.

D. He Confessed His Need for the Lord (vs. 9c)

Notice the final statement of Jonah’s prayer. He declared “Salvation is from the Lord.” In other words, Jonah admitted that he couldn’t save himself. He knows that nobody on the face of the earth can save him. Only the Lord could save him from this darkness. Only the Lord could raise him from the pit. Only the Lord could free him from this prison. If there was only one thing that he knew it was this, salvation is from the Lord alone. Notice he didn’t say, “A lord”. He said, “The Lord.” No doubt Jonah is now convinced of God’s grace and mercy and is repentant of his ways. He confessed his need for God and threw himself on the mercy of God so that he might be saved. It shouldn’t surprise us at all that this was the final statement of his prayer. Once he confessed his need for God, God was quick and ready to move.

Notice how God responded to this convicted prophet. He didn’t beat him up further. No, He delivered him. When Jonah repented and declared that there was no other way for him to be saved the Bible says, “THEN the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto dry land.” Now, I’m sure that Jonah wasn’t thrilled about the vomit, but I imagine he was ecstatic for the grace that God had shown. It was the most unlikely scenario, but God immediately showed mercy and delivered the repentant Jonah. Jonah was now free to obey the Lord and do what God had called him to do. He still had many lessons to learn, but Jonah had been delivered. But far beyond the deliverance from the great fish, there is another powerful evidence of God’s grace. Remember, He is the God of second chances. What was the first thing that Jonah lost when he hardened his heart and ran from God? He lost the voice of God. God could speak, but Jonah was so spiritually deaf that he refused to hear. He spoke through the storm and the captain, but not directly to Jonah. But now that Jonah has repented and turned to the Lord notice what happens in **Jonah 3:1**, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time...” What a great and gracious God!

We must be reminded this morning that God cares for His children. Those who have accepted Christ as Savior have been adopted into the family of God. He loves us even when

we make foolish choices and go our own ways. We see that with His response to Jonah. Yes, God is holy and just. Yet, He is gracious to those who are humble. He forgives those who repent. **James 4:6**, “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Jonah finally came to God with that attitude. He humbled himself, admitting his wrong and the devastation that he experienced as he felt cut off from God. Once he humbled himself and confessed his need for God, God delivered him. I am convinced that God stands ready to do the same in our lives, but we must humble ourselves and cry out to Him. I pray that we will be quick to respond to the opportunity!