

READ THIS FIRST

The Book of Jonah

Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The reality is that sometimes God sends us to places and people that we’d rather avoid. If we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that we find some people distasteful, offensive, wicked, ugly, and combative. It would be far more comfortable to stay near those we like, cozy inside the friendly confines of our shared opinions and values. But this “holy huddle” mentality, which is so common among the evangelical church today, is absolutely opposite of the nature of God himself and contradictory to the church’s purpose on earth.

God has always been a God of mission. The Bible as a whole is the story of God’s missionary activity to those who don’t deserve it. God’s missionary zeal finds its pinnacle in the person of Jesus who left the comfort of Heaven to inhabit a human culture and sacrifice himself for the sake of those he was sent to. As Jesus’ followers, the church is now to carry on the work of mission so that people from every tongue, tribe, and nation may come to know and love the One True God.

Jonah is a relatively short story designed to: 1) demonstrate the foolishness of disobeying God, 2) proclaim the reality that God is aggressively seeking those who are far from him, and 3) convict God’s people who are often indifferent and unaffected by the plight of lost people.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to help you to see that obedience is always the best thing, to remember that God is eager to use you in his mission, and to feel love and compassion for those who are far from God.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons
Lead Pastor

The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Jonah. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to info@secondmilechurch.com.

Week 2

GOD'S PURSUIT IN OUR REBELLION

Jonah 1:4-17

.....
So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."
.....

(Jonah 1:6, ESV)

Introduction

A community group leader in our church recently had dinner with one of his non-Christian friends. As the discussion turned to spiritual realities, the leader told his friend, "I'm going to pray that God makes your life miserable until you realize that your real need is for Jesus." This bold statement was initially received with understandable confusion, and the friend subsequently grew angry at the thought of a Christian wishing for his misfortune.

"Let me explain," the leader continued. "What I really want is your ultimate joy and satisfaction, which I know you'll only find through knowing Jesus. Because I love you I want you to see the hopelessness of pursuing things that won't satisfy."

Would a loving God really do that? Would he really allow (or even cause) someone to experience difficulty or pain in order to draw them to himself? This passage has a bold answer: Absolutely!

God loves us the way we are—but he loves us too much to let us stay that way. God made Jonah's life miserable because he didn't want Jonah's disobedience to continue and, in love, he was willing to do whatever it took to bring him back.

Investigation

Read Jonah 1:4-17

1. What things did God use to try to get Jonah's attention regarding his disobedience?
2. Verse 5 says that Jonah was asleep while the tempest roared around the boat. How is this an ironic, accurate illustration of the bigger picture of this story?
3. How would you compare the attitude and behavior of Jonah with the attitudes and behaviors of the sailors?
4. What was the end result for the sailors? What about for Jonah? Why are these significant?

Implication

1. Scottish writer Hugh Martin wrote a commentary on Jonah and titled the chapter related to this text, "The World Rebuking the Church." He makes the point that Jonah did not leverage his relationship with God for the common good of the sailors. In what ways has the Christian church been asleep while the world around us perishes?
2. Though the sailor's were initially unaware of Jonah's disobedience, they were still caught up in the storm with him. In what ways do the sins of individuals still have consequences on other people? If possible, give some examples from personal experience.
3. Though Jonah said that he feared the Lord (1:9), his actions said otherwise. What similar inconsistencies do you see in your own life? How can the gospel help you align your words and actions?
4. Though Jonah might never have expected it, God used this situation to make himself known to the sailors (1:16). Who are some people that you would like to see God reveal himself to?

Other Issues

Could Jonah really have been swallowed by a great fish, survive for three days inside that creature and live to tell about it? Is this a myth, a parable, an allegory or real history?

The Bible, of course, does not speak of Jonah being swallowed by a "whale"; it specifically mentions a "great fish" (Jon 1:17). Some English versions of Matthew 12:40 use the word "whale," but the Greek original is *kētōs*, a general word meaning a huge sea-monster. Taken as such, there are several sea-monsters that would be able to swallow a full-grown man easily enough, but the true whale, which has its home in the Arctic seas and is not found in the Mediterranean Sea, has a narrow throat that would generally prevent such a swallowing. There is another species of the same order in the Mediterranean Sea, however, which could swallow a man.

Ambrose John Wilson in the *Princeton Theological Review* for 1927 mentions a case of a sailor on a whaling ship near the Falkland Islands who was swallowed by a large sperm whale. The whale was later harpooned, and when it was opened up on deck the surprised crew found their lost shipmate unconscious inside its belly. Though bleached from the whale's gastric juices, he recovered, even though he never lost the deadly whiteness left on his face, neck and hands.

The problem with claiming that this text is a parable, allegory or myth is that each "solution" presents its own problems of literary genre. For example, parables are simple; they treat one subject. But the book of Jonah has at least two distinct parts: his flight and his preaching. Neither does Jonah fit the category of allegory, for there is no agreement on what the values are for each of the characters and events. The very diversity of answers is enough to state that allegory is not the solution. The same judgment would hold for suggesting that Jonah is a myth.

The book of Jonah, up until modern times, was everywhere treated as an historical record of the repentance of the city of Nineveh under the preaching of a man named Jonah. The apocryphal book Tobit has Tobit commanding his son Tobias to go to Media, for Tobit believes the word of God spoken about Nineveh. The Greek Septuagint text says that the preacher who predicted judgment on Nineveh was Jonah. In New Testament times, Jesus and the early believers took Jonah to be a real character. Thus, the objections to the book come down to this: it has too many miracles! But that is hardly an adequate basis on which to reject the internal claims of the book itself. Jonah is a believable account of a harrowing sea experience and of an unprecedented Gentile response to an ever-so-brief exposure to preaching about the need for repentance. But it happened!³

³Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997, c1996). 332.