

God Says Go, Prophet Says No (Jonah 1-2)

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Preacher: William HC

[0 : 0 0] Father, thank you so much for your kindness to us. Thank you that you work through sinful men and women to declare the excellencies of your kingdom.

Father, we've learned already that the kingdom of heaven is at hand through your son Jesus. And we're to repent, turn, and believe. Help us to do that together as a family.

And help us to do that so that not just we will be encouraged, but our families, our neighbors, our coworkers, East Auckland, and who knows who else will be encouraged and pointed to your son Jesus.

Please equip us for this task ahead, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Newsflash.

Preacher wanders off the stage to catch some Pokemon. Newsflash. A fog machine in megachurch breaks and the Holy Spirit stops working.

[1 : 0 5] Latest news as churches reopen. Members reminded to get out of their pajamas. This one's my favorite. Newsflash. Worship leader caught in this infinite loop between the bridge and the chorus.

True story. These are all obviously not real news articles, right? Babylon Bee. Who reads Babylon Bee? Yeah? Christian website full of articles in a style that's known as satire.

Anyone heard of the word satire before? Yep. Satire. You know what that means? Well, Oxford Dictionary knows what it means. It says, it's a way of communicating that uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or their vices, their sins.

Right? So it's comedy to critique something that's foolish or wrong. Comedy that confronts. That's what satire is. It's a kind of weaponized humor, I guess. It's as old as ancient poets like Aristophanes and Juvenile.

But Homer Simpson is satire too, right? And Flight of the Conchords, they get in on the action as well. Satire can touch on trivial topics, right? Here's one.

[2 : 1 5] Man forced to fire own son from Lego assembly team. Also possibly true story. Here's a more serious one. Disney blunder. This Uyghur concentration camp clearly seen in the background of Mulan.

Hmm. Satire can be especially stinging when it's trying to directly confront a vice or sin, right? 14th of February, the popular Hong Kong TV show, a headliner, a broadcast, a skit where a police officer steps out of a rubbish bin to talk about wearing PPE, right?

It's kind of like, whoa, okay, that's really, really harsh. It was a backhanded insult because local media, at the time they were reporting, no one could find PPE. Okay?

Except the police could. It was comedy that they were writing to confront a perceived sin, okay? So you see that satire gets quite serious. And that didn't last, and the show's no longer running.

It's this use of satire, comedy that confronts sin, that seeps through the book of Jonah. I'll say that again. Jonah is all about comedy that confronts sin, right?

[3 : 28] Because we all love Jonah, don't we, right? Right? Reluctant prophet becomes amazing missionary. Go be like Jonah, said every Sunday school teacher ever. But what if there's more to the story?

What if we actually read what was there? Okay? And in chapter 3, there's humor. Okay? You get cows repenting in sackcloth and ashes. Just imagine that for a minute.

Cows in sackcloth and ashes. There's irony. Deep irony, right? Here's a man of God. He's running from God while his enemies turn to God. What? Wow. Exaggeration.

Okay? In the Hebrew text, the word gadol, great or big, appears like every three verses. It's meant to be like, whoa, this is big. And even ridicule. Okay? When have you seen a movie where the main hero gets vomited out of a fish?

Jonah is comedy to confront. It confronted proud, disobedient Israel when they first heard it. And I think it will confront us too.

[4 : 33] Okay? It won't be an easy ride. How will we respond when a sovereign God shows mercy in ways we don't like? To people we don't like? What will we do?

Today we'll have time to look at the first two chapters. And just like any good series, we're going to come back and see the other two chapters as well. So as I hope as we do this, that we'll get to do three things.

Okay? We'll appreciate the comedy as we skim through Jonah 1 and 2. We'll confront the sin that we all share. And then we'll dive deeper into God's mercy.

So those are three things that we'll look at today. I did put some notes on the Facebook page. Thank you for those people who set that up. So if you want to follow on your note taker type, do jump on there and follow along.

Let's appreciate the comedy. Let's appreciate the comedy. To do that, we want to read the text, don't we? We want to read the text. It might help us to think of Jonah 1 to 2 as three scenes. All right? Firstly, he runs away.

[5 : 32] And he's thrown away. And then he prays away. So have a look at me at the start again. Jonah 1, 1 to 2. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai.

Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me. It says here, son of Amittai.

This means that this is the same Jonah who's mentioned in the book of 2 Kings. 2 Kings 14.25 actually references Jonah, son of Amittai.

And so we're right now, where are we in time? We're in 8th century BC. Okay? 8th century BC. And this is a time when God's people were split between north and south.

And Jonah served King Jeroboam II. That was his name. And he served him during the time when an evil Assyrian superpower was kind of on their doorstep in the northern border. And as represented here by the capital city, Nineveh, the great city of Nineveh.

[6 : 35] History tells us how savage the Assyrians were. Idol worship, sexual immorality, extreme cruelty to their captives, and especially when they captured the Israelites.

Here's a quote inscribed by one Assyrian king. I'll just read it out, but it's a little bit graphic. And it says this, I flayed, it means like skinned live, many right through my land and draped their skins over the walls.

I burned their adolescent boys and girls. A pillar of heads I erected in front of the city. Today we call this war crimes, right?

And we call the Assyrians terrorists like ISIS or North Korea or Nazi Germany. And in verse 2, God calls Jonah to literally get up, arise, and go to preach against their wickedness.

Evil does not go unnoticed by a holy God. Judgment is coming, and Jonah has been chosen as messenger. But then the first twist in the tale comes, doesn't it, right?

[7 : 41] Verse 3, as we heard. Jonah did a, what? A forest gump. Like he ran in like the opposite direction of Nineveh. Nineveh's here. He's running down to the coast, away from Nineveh, right down to the coast.

He gets to Joppa, hops on a boat to get to far away Tashish. Tashish literally means far away as possible. Okay? He's not following the script. And we don't find out why Jonah runs.

Okay? You need to come back next week because he tells us in chapter 4. But yet, maybe, even at this stage, maybe the author wants us to imagine our own gut reaction if God told us to do something similar.

Okay? Imagine that. Ian, go to North Korea and tell them about Jesus. What? Show mercy to those guys? Are you serious?

You know they torture and execute Christians, right? Ian would tell them you back. You know Kim Jong-un is completely nutty, right? Are you kidding me? That's maybe how Jonah felt at this time. You see that?

[8 : 41] We're three verses in, but we see three things. God has a message for the Ninevites. And Jonah's meant to preach to them, but he runs away. He runs away. Our sovereign God sees all this, and he gets to work.

Verse 4, we see kind of like a fast bowler. He hurls a great wind. He churns up a great storm. And now the ship's in big trouble. It's rocking and rolling, filling with water.

Just imagine that as the waves are breaking in. And imagine you're a pagan sailor on this ship, right? You're just trying to get somewhere. And then your ship is about to sink. And so what do you do?

You start crying out. Please, Lord, help us. There are no atheists in a foxhole, okay, they say, right? And in a big storm, you can't just, you know, you want to cry out to someone. So that's what they do.

But what does Jonah do? Verse 5, but Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. He's so asleep that the captain has to go down and wake him up.

[9 : 46] And the author slits him a little bit of déjà vu, right? Because the way he writes it in verse 6, it says, arise, right? Like kind of what Jonah heard. Arise and cry out to your God.

Jonah stumbles up to the deck and he meets panicked sailors, right? The ship is in trouble. And they're casting lots. What irony. Jonah ran away from the wickedness in Nineveh.

And now there's a calamity, the same word, disaster, for the poor sailors. It's your fault, Jonah. And yet when they demand answers from their castaway, in verse 8, how does Jonah respond?

How does Jonah respond? Have a read in your Bibles. He says this. He answered, I am a Hebrew. Hmm. What you say first is often a clue to what's most important to you, right?

I'm a Kiwi. I'm Asian. Under pressure, what does Jonah own up to first? His nationality. And do you notice, too, which question Jonah avoided from the sailors?

[10 : 50] Like a sneaky politician. He admitted his nationality, his religion. He even admitted that this God rules over land and sea. But what did he not say?

He doesn't admit to being a prophet. It's funny, eh? So weird. Imagine an engineer denying that he knows how to build stuff, all right?

Or a school teacher saying, I don't work with kids. A man of God who doesn't want to speak to God or speak for God. It's crazy. It's crazy. Now, the sailors, though, they connect the dots.

They realize who he is. Jonah's running away from his God, and now they're about to drown, okay? Now it's time to panic, verse 10. But they don't panic. But they at least, you know, it terrifies them, but they at least still talk to him calmly.

What have you done? What have you done? And then they ask him, what should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us? It's amazing. That's such poise.

[11 : 50] And Jonah replies this, throw me overboard, verse 12. Throw me overboard. What's going on in his mind as he said that? This verse is actually hotly debated.

Some people say, this is Jonah. He's really sorry now. Okay? All right. He confesses. And yet, I think I side with those who see this as, I think, kind of like the ultimate selfish act.

Okay? Jonah's like, oh, God. I wanted to run away. But now I can't run away. You're stopping me from doing even that. And this is Jonah's final attempt, I think, to escape his job, his commission.

He knows that God's certainly not letting him get away to Tashish, right? So he's going to try and get a permanent exit his way. He'd rather die than follow through and see his enemies repent.

And yet, the irony is that while Jonah keeps running, the pagan sailors show the most remarkable turnaround. I wonder if you noticed this.

[12 : 50] They went from crying to their own gods, verse 4. And then you scroll further down to crying to Yahweh, okay? Lord, alodi and caps for mercy and even acknowledging that he is sovereign, right?

What does he say? They cried to the Lord, oh, Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Don't hold us accountable for killing an innocent man. For you, oh, Lord, have done as you please.

It's ironic, isn't it? Outsiders responding better than God's chosen ones. Isn't that a pattern that the Bible repeats over and over again? The blind man sees Jesus.

The religious leaders don't. And after these sailors throw Jonah into the sea, look what they do. Verse 16. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

Ironic, isn't it? Foreign sailors worship Yahweh. And yet God's number one prophet jumps ship. Seriously. You couldn't make this stuff up. Jonah runs away.

[14 : 01] He's thrown away. And in chapter 2, we see that he prays away. He prays away in the belly of a fish which God appoints to rescue him. Now, perhaps you're not a Christian here, or you're a Christian with questions.

And when we get to this point, the idea of a giant fish is a little bit hard to swallow. This poor fish, I mean, over the ages.

Suddenly one of the most criticized animals in the whole Bible, right? I texted a workmate, and he was like, what? You're really reading that story today? You know, the one who isn't a fish? Either he's in a...

Look, either it's a kind of a weird, made-up plot device. Other complaints. It's scientifically impossible. I had a nine-year-old kid tell me why it couldn't work. Or maybe it's just plain weird, right?

Who could make this stuff up? Look, I can't answer all those questions in two minutes. Yet, I think we need to remember this. We've already seen that God is a sovereign God.

[15 : 02] He can do anything. And while God doesn't always work in a miraculous way all the time, He does often do so when He needs to show that He's the boss.

When He needs to demonstrate His authority to people who need to know it at that time. You think of the plagues in Egypt. He was trying to show Pharaoh who's boss. Think of Mount Carmel, the fire that comes down with Elijah, or Jesus' transfiguration.

Miracles to authenticate who is the true God. And so perhaps this is God doing the same, but to Jonah. Remember Jonah, right?

His pretentious talk, I'm a Hebrew. I worship Yahweh. Except you're running away. As if God is saying, you really believe that I'm the Lord of the land and sea?

Well, get into this fish. Let me show you. Jonah prays.

[16 : 02] He prays. And look on the surface. It's actually a beautiful prayer, right? In my distress I called to the Lord and He answered me.

Verse 2 says. Lots of echoes from Psalm 42 and other places. Look, Jonah knew his Bible. He knew what to say when he needed to say it. You know, I wonder if with what's already gone on, we need to be more suspicious.

I think if we typed up Jonah's prayer, it would be like in Comic Sans, you know? It would be like he was praying it, but he didn't really mean it. Because here's some of the cracks, right?

Let me read for you, okay? He celebrates his survival, right? You listen to my cry, verse 2 says. But he actually never confesses his sin. He never repents in this prayer.

That's weird. In verse 9, but I with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. Sounds so holy, right?

[17 : 06] He thanks God for his mercy, and yet, at the same time, he's still running away from the Assyrians. He doesn't want them to hear of this mercy. While pagan sailors up above are turning away from their idols, and they're crying to the true God.

At the bottom, he's saying, verse 8, those who cling to worthless idols, verse 8, forfeit the grace that could be theirs. Can you see that kind of oddness to it? Jonah's prayer, I think, has an odd feeling about it, a queasy stomach feeling.

It's an odd prayer in an odd place. And look, if the sailors in chapter 1 prayed this prayer, I think we'd be pretty... That's legit. That's great prayer. That's so honest. But because we've already seen Jonah be disobedient, be a little bit two-faced, we're meant, I think, to be skeptical of this prayer.

Okay, so if we kind of turn Jonah to 9, right? Beautiful words. What I vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. If this was Jonah saying this, I think you kind of put like a yeah, right, sure meme next to it.

Okay? That's kind of what we're meant to take away from this, I think. And in a sense, Jonah's prayer, I think, mirrors the heart of Israel. Right? Israel, Israel.

[18 : 20] Knowing their Bible so well. So good at putting God's words on their mouths but struggling to obey him in their hearts. That was their heart issue. Does that sound familiar? And look, what does God actually think of Jonah's prayer?

I think this is the clincher. Verse 10 tells us. This is what God thinks. And the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Just as the land in Leviticus vomits out those who defile it. Leviticus 18. The fish tells us what to think of this OG prophet.

God rules Jonah's spew. Okay? He is vomit. Satire. Comedy that confronts.

It's pretty awkward stuff going on, isn't it? All right? We see from Jonah 1 to 2 that Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh. Why is that?

[19 : 18] I think we need to now confront some of those sins. Those underlying sins, I think, that we see in Jonah's heart and maybe in our hearts too. In our hearts if we looked hard enough. I think Jonah wrestles with three things that we can see from the text.

Firstly, Jonah's wrestling with prejudice. Right? What's prejudice? Prejudice is to be sinfully proud in a particular earthly identity.

We saw that. Jonah's Hebrew identity clouded his judgment, hindered his obedience to go on God's mission. To obey God. And we have all kinds of identities here.

That piece of piece of English, right? Some of you might identify as Kiwi. Asian. Hong Konger. Second gen. First gen. Gamer. Baller. Whatever. Left. Right. Yellow. Blue. Whatever.

Whatever your identity. But whenever a tribe that we belong to become so big that we look down on another group, that's prejudice or sin like Jonah. When I first moved to Sydney with my wife and kids, I found all kinds of ways to avoid saying nice things about Aussies.

[20 : 27] I'd shake my head at how they said things. I'd laugh at the things they ate. I'd gloat in their misfortunes, in rugby especially. And yet the more I lived among our friends and prayed and served alongside them, the more I saw how much kinder and more gracious they actually were than me.

My prejudice, my Kiwi glasses were getting in the way of deep and enjoyable relationships. How about you? Do you cross the road to avoid certain kinds of people?

Be honest. Do you look down on others in class or at work who don't think like you or speak like you? Maybe even in church do you do that?

Jonah confronts our sin of prejudice, doesn't he? Second, I think Jonah wanted to, I think, reveals the sin of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy. Right?

Literally to be two-faced about something. Okay? Specifically to have a sinful pride in what you already know and yet fail to live it out.

[21 : 33] Yet to fail to live it out. Why does Jonah act far worse than the pagan sailors he hung out with? Right? He knew all the facts. He can pray beautifully.

And yet where the sailors were diligent, he's asleep. Where they treat him nice, he prays against them behind their back. How about us? Do we talk well in public, but then we walk poorly in private?

Right? PCBC English, does our life match our words? Right? If we don't believe it, newsflash. Right? Newsflash. Dad completes perfect devotional, loses temper at children.

Maybe a true story. Another one. Local Christian has more Napoleon Dynamite quotes memorized than Bible verses. Ooh. This just in.

Woman scoffs at Muslim co-worker and then yet worships all week. At the long weekend sale. Breaking news. Musician nails worship set.

[22 : 39] Surf's porn all night. Jonah confronts our hypocrisy, doesn't it? Hypocrisy. Third, I think we see in the book of Jonah, we see complacency.

Big words. Basically just means, look, sinfully just assuming that God's grace covers everything I do. Right? It means I can live the life I want. Complacency. Right?

I think one of the most remarkable things about this story so far is how God has gone so far to give Jonah a second chance. Right? Imagine that. If you had this kind of employee, you'd fire them straight away.

Yeah. But God is so gracious. So gracious. So gracious. And yet, Jonah thanks God for saving him here in chapter 2. But to be honest, he still sounds a bit entitled.

And we're going to see next week. He doesn't actually improve that much. It's as if he thinks he deserves the salvation that God's given him. Have you ever thought that? Have you ever thought, didn't God get a good deal when he made me?

[23 : 44] Have you ever thought, oh, Jesus, thank you for being my ATM, spitting out grace. I'll just keep sinning. Thank you. Jonah confronts our prejudice, our hypocrisy.

And yes, he confronts our complacency as well. God loves us. He shows mercy to us. He never wants us to stay where we are. Who would have thought, eh?

God's best prophet ever. Revealing so many things that we wrestle with. If you feel like me right now, a little bit confronted by Jonah, we can't just stop here.

We cannot just stop here. We need to know not just the comedy in the text, not just the sins it confronts. We need to know and dive deeper into God's mercy too. Right? We need to know how Jonah's story actually comforts us.

Because here is a God behind the scenes who showed Jonah amazing grace. This is the same God who shows us amazing grace as we've sung through Jesus Christ, the gospel.

[24 : 45] The good news about Jesus has everything, I think, we need to comfort us, to challenge us. Yes, but to comfort us and cure us from our sins, whether it's prejudice or hypocrisy or complacency.

If you're struggling with insider pride, okay, prejudice, go to the gospel. Go to the gospel. Look at how Jesus, an outsider, crosses over into our world to be the same as us and die in our place.

That's a gospel. Look at the cross. Look what he did. He did this even before we cared about him. Friends, Jesus crossed over to die for you. And when we truly get that, I think that will break down our prejudices.

Make us friends with the enemy. To widen our friendship circles. To give up our prejudices. What about our hypocrisy, right?

Where we say something and do another. Go to the gospel. Go to the gospel. Jesus tells us, he even told it once a satire. Let me read this one to you. You might remember this one. Two men went up to the temple to pray.

[25 : 51] One a Pharisee and one a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and he said, God, I thank you. I'm not like all those other people.

Robbers, evildoers, adulterers. Or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. You can see the halos on his head, can't you? And yet the tax collector stood at a distance.

He would not even look up to heaven. But he beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. And Jesus says, I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

All those who exalt themselves will be humbled. All those who humble themselves will be exalted. Where Jonah would rather die and go to Nineveh, where he would say one thing and do another, Jesus lives the whole life.

And he is glad to die for us. And that should humble us and make us live differently. How could we ever feel smug about our faith? Faith. Right? It cost Jesus his life.

[26 : 53] We are all sinners in need of a Savior. And as for our complacency, right? To make light of God's grace. How could we do that? If we really knew the gospel.

Go to the cross. Stare at and gaze at the love in his eyes. See how much it cost the Father to give us a second chance. It cost him his son. And we don't know why the Assyrians of all people get a second chance.

But we do know this. God is so committed to his justice and his mercy that to give us both it cost us his son. So don't be complacent about that.

Don't just park it and live the life you want. PCBC English. In Jesus. The prophet greater than Jonah. We have grace amazing. Vast and free.

And worth transforming our lives to live for him. So friends, how should you and I respond when God shows mercy to people we don't like? Well, we'll have to keep finding out next week.

[27 : 58] But at the very least, friends, if you've been confronted by the mirror of Jonah, turn to Jesus for the cure, please. Let me encourage you to turn to Jesus for the cure.

He gives us the power and the pattern to repent of our prejudice, our hypocrisy, our complacency, whatever it is that we sin against him with. And his love humbles us, humbles us to bow before the Lord over land and sea.

And it will teach us if we let him to go wherever he calls us, to do whatever he wills us, to trust that salvation belongs to the Lord and not to us. Let's pray.

I want to pray from Psalm 117. And it says this, Praise the Lord, all you nations. Extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord. And yet, Father, we confess our sins. We have not praised you as we should. Well, sometimes we've praised you and then lived differently.

[29 : 06] And then sometimes we've praised you and then laughed at people around us who don't. Forgive us, Lord. In the story and the lens of this wonderful story of Jonah, show us.

Show us how we can change and not be the same. Show us the depths of your mercy. Help us to dive deep into it. And help us to trust Jesus for the cure for everything that we struggle with.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.