

A Mirror to the Heart

Jonah, Pt. 1

Jonah & Hebrews 4:12-13

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I. PRAYER

- i. Would you make us all receptive to the surgical work that your Word does to our hearts...exposing our true desires and motivations...knowing that this work is for your glory and our joy.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. Why do bad things happen in the world if God is sovereign (in control of everything) and also perfectly good?

- i. Just scan the local Herndon news from this past week...
 - Last Wednesday, a mother apparently shot her two sons and then turned the gun on herself in Herndon.
 - Last Thursday, a young boy in Herndon died on a school bus due to some medical incident that hasn't been specified.
 - Just terrible events...
- ii. Or I think of my good friend, Alex.
 - 29 Years old, married, 3-month-old son, joyful, faithful guy who worked hard, loved the Lord, and loved his family...and I attended his funeral a few weeks ago after a long hard fight with brain cancer.

b. If God is good and if God is sovereign, things like these wouldn't happen, right?



- i. This is a question that has caused so many to question if God is really there...or to believe that if he is there, he either doesn't care about what happens here or he really doesn't have control of it.
- ii. How can God be good and sovereign while all of these bad things happen?
 - And the answer to this question is that we live in a fallen and broken world.
 1. God originally created the world to be a place where all of creation lived in joyful harmony together.
 2. Where there is no pain, death, sorrow, or regret.
 - But the first man and first woman, along with all of us after them, decided we didn't want to live in a place where God was in control, we wanted to be in control.
 1. And that sin and rejection of God has meant that all of creation has become separated from God.
 2. The cosmos has fallen. We live in a creation that is broken.
 3. A place where there is disease, anger, hatred, violence, pain, and injustice.
 4. Although God is good and He is sovereign, God has allowed us to live out our sinful desire of being autonomous from Him.
 5. And this broken world is the result.
- iii. **But our question in response to that is why would a sovereign and good God even allow for the possibility of that sort of rebellion and the cosmic consequences of that rebellion?**



- And the answer to that is because God created us as individuals and he loves us.
 1. God is love, he loves his creation, and he desires for us to love him and each other.
 2. And I love how Ravi Zacharias puts it,

"You cannot have love without the freedom of the will. If you are compelled by some machine to a certain decision, you can never love. You can comply but you will never be choosing to love. If the freedom of the will is indispensable to love, and what God wants of us is to love him and love our neighbor, for him to violate our free will is for him to remove our ability to love."
 3. In other words, if God in his goodness and sovereignty violates our freewill to ensure nothing bad ever happens, then we would be something other than humans and we would not be able to love.
- iv. Okay, that's compelling...but even in that, why can't God in all of his power and goodness reverse the fall, redeem the cosmos, and give us another chance?
 - Why does he have to allow the consequences of the fall and our free decision to rebel against him to linger for so long?
 1. One could argue that Adam and Eve didn't know the cosmic and generational collateral damage that would come with their first disobedience against God.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rztXYphVXrQ>



2. If God was really good and really sovereign, he would find a way, right?

c. It's these questions why I want us as a church to spend a good part of this Fall season studying the book of Jonah.

- i. Because as we study the book of Jonah, we are going to see two things:
 - First, we are going to get a clear picture of God's goodness and grace.
 1. We are going to see that God is at work reversing the fall and bringing redemption to the cosmos.
 2. We are going to see God's mercy and his desire to forgive and restore people to Himself.
 3. That God is not at work reversing the Fall through taking our freewill but rather through transforming our hearts.
 4. But that leads to the second thing that we are going to see.
 - We'll see that the book of Jonah is actually a mirror to our hearts.
 1. A mirror that will show us that the fall of creation is not just something that is out there or something being imposed on us, but it is something in all of us and something that we contribute to.
 2. The book of Jonah is one of those mirrors that we don't like to look into because it shows us flaws in our own hearts that we'd prefer to not talk about nor recognize as even there.
 3. It shows us how the darkness, the evil, the sin, the brokenness of this world has reached its roots down to the deep crevices of our heart.



- But this book also shows us that God wants to expose those dark crevices and he wants to insert his grace and his goodness into those deep places of our heart so that we may love him and have joy in this life.
 1. Our good and sovereign God is at work redeeming this world to where everything that is bad no longer exists...and he is doing that work in your heart.
 2. The question is this: are we willing to look into the mirror and see where our own hearts need to be transformed by the goodness and grace of God.

III. INTRODUCTION TO JONAH

a. So, let me tell you about the book of Jonah.

- i. Jonah is a prophet.
 - In the Bible, the later part of your Old Testament is filled with what we call the major and minor prophets.
 1. The major prophets being the long ones like Isaiah and Jeremiah.
 2. The minor prophets are the shorter ones, like, Jonah.
 - The Prophets were people whom God appointed to deliver his Word and call people to repentance, especially during the time of the divided Kingdom of Israel.
 - According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah was an active prophet during the time of King Jeroboam, who was a wicked King over the Northern Kingdom of Israel.



1. Now the prophetic books in the Bible are usually filled with the prophecies and the oracles that God gave the prophets to preach.
 2. And normally, these prophets were called to preach this Word from God to their own people.
 3. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah were Israelites called to prophesy to the nation of Israel.
 4. AND, usually these prophets were godly people.
- Not so much with Jonah.
 1. First of all, the book of Jonah is not primarily filled with the Words that God told Jonah to preach.
 2. It is mostly a story about Jonah and his disobedience to God.
 3. In fact, in the whole book, Jonah only preaches five Hebrew words. That's it!
 4. Also, Jonah was not sent to preach to his own people, but rather to the city of Nineveh, in modern day Iraq.
 5. And lastly, Jonah is not someone that the book holds up as one who is a godly example to us but rather the opposite!
 - So, the book of Jonah is unique...but it is unique for a purpose.
 1. Because it is not the words of Jonah that are prophetic and cause us to examine ourselves.
 2. No, it is the life of Jonah that is prophetic, that is a mirror to our hearts that will cause us to examine ourselves.



b. And I want us to study this book in a bit of a different way.

i. I'm very excited for this study because this will be our first sermon series on an entire book of Scripture.

- And typically, when you preach through a whole book of the Bible, you preach verse by verse.
 1. For example, this week we'll do chapter 1 verses 1-5. Next week, verses 6-10. And so on...

ii. However, this is not how we are going to study the book of Jonah.

- Stories like Jonah are not meant to teach us by focusing on a small chunk week after week until we complete the narrative.
- Rather, the best way to study a book like this is to examine the entire story, the entire narrative from a different angle each week.
 1. Kim got back from Bulgaria this past week and she brought me back as a gift a beautiful painting from some missionaries she met who are also artists.
 2. It's one of those paintings where you have to really look at it for a while and take in the whole thing to understand what it is depicting.
 3. So, it wouldn't make sense if I examined this painting by starting in the top left corner and examined each square inch in succession until I had examined the whole thing.
 4. No, I take a step back and examine it as a whole.



- The book of Jonah is a complete narrative that we need to step back and examine every single week from a different perspective and zooming in on different parts.
 1. So, by the time we're done studying it, we will have studied each verse in depth but not necessarily in verse by verse order.
- iii. **And because we want to examine this story every single week as a whole, we will need to be reminded of the story by retelling it every single week.**
 - So, let me tell you the story of Jonah.

IV. THE STORY OF JONAH

a. God came to Jonah, who was in Israel, and told him to go to Nineveh and preach against it.

- i. Nineveh was known for being an evil city.
 - Think if God came to you and said I want you to go to Pyongyang, North Korea and preach against that nation.
 - That regime will kill you for that.
- ii. **So, obviously, Jonah was not about to go to Nineveh.**
 - And instead of staying put, Jonah actually decides to flee in the other direction by getting on a ship to Tarshish.
 1. So, Jonah is in Israel, on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea.
 2. He's told to go to Nineveh, which is further east in modern Day Iraq.
 3. So, instead he tries to go to Tarshish, which all we know about Tarshish is that



it was somewhere on the west side of the Mediterranean.

iii. **Now naturally, we would think that Jonah did this out of fear.**

- But, we would only think that if we didn't look at the story as a complete painting.
 1. Jonah tells us what his reason was for fleeing in the opposite direction.
 2. See, Jonah would eventually go to Nineveh and he would eventually preach against it.
 3. And the people of Nineveh would repent and humble themselves before God.
 4. And God would show himself to be gracious and merciful towards the people of Nineveh.
- And so Jonah says in 4:1-2 -
 1. **Read Jonah 4:1-2.**
- Jonah doesn't flee out of fear, Jonah flees out of hate.
 1. Yes, Jonah is a prophet. He is in "ministry."
 2. There just are people that Jonah doesn't want to hear the good news of a gracious and good God.
 3. There are people whom Jonah wants to go to hell.

b. So, while Jonah is on the boat on his way to Tarshish, God was angry for the hate in his heart and he sends a massive storm to toss the boat around.

- i. That's right, Jonah was attempting to flee God, who made the earth and the sea.
 - That's the level of the hate in his heart.



ii. **And Jonah knew the futility of what he was trying to do!**

- Because the pagan sailors on the boat cast lots (think rolled dice) to figure out who was responsible for this storm. These sailors were pagan, but they believed in the divine.
 1. And God, in his sovereignty, made it that the lots fell on Jonah.
- So, the sailors come to Jonah and ask him if it was possible that God was sending this storm because of Him and look at Jonah's response:
 1. **Read Jonah 1:9.**
 2. Jonah knew he was running from the Lord of all creation!
 3. He knew this storm was in response to him.
 4. Jonah was trying to send a message to God. He didn't actually believe he could run away from God.

iii. **See, the crazy thing about God, is that he is sovereign, and he is good.**

- In fact, God is so sovereign that he can even use our disobedience for his purposes.
- Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard and the sailors did and the storm immediately stopped.
 1. God loved those sailors and wanted them to be saved.
 2. **Read Jonah 1:15-16.**
- And of course, God's plan for Jonah wasn't thwarted.
 1. Most of us know the story.
 2. God sent a very large fish to swallow him up for three days and three nights and then the fish vomited him onto dry land.



3. If God can speak this world into existence and control the weather, then he can let a man live in the belly of a fish for a few days.
4. And God, again, tells Jonah to go to Nineveh.

- See, God is sovereign, and he is good which means we cannot disobey our way outside of his grace and his will for our lives.

c. So, Jonah heads to Nineveh.

- i. And the city is so large that it takes three whole days just to walk through it.

- So, Jonah walks into city and preaches his five word sermon:
 1. **Jonah 3:4 - "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"**
 2. 7 words in English, 5 words in Hebrew.
- That's it!. That's the sermon!
 1. You can feel the passion. You can feel Jonah's joy in being God's mouthpiece to this city.
 2. You don't sense any reluctant obedience in this short sermon, do you?
- But, see even our bad attitudes can't thwart the sovereign will of God, because...

- ii. **Nineveh repents!**

- **Read Jonah 3:5-10.**

d. And we get to the last chapter of the book and Jonah is furious with God.

- i. God, I knew this is what you were going to do!
 - Nineveh deserves to be destroyed, they do not deserve to be redeemed!



- ii. See, as we get through the bulk of this story, the reader is struck that it was the pagan sailors and the evil Ninevites that were so quick to humble themselves, confess their sin, and repent.
 - But it is the prophet of God, Jonah, who won't humble himself.
 - iii. And God turns the tables on Jonah. He is gracious to the evil Ninevites who repent but confronts Jonah in 4:4 - *"Is it right for you to be angry?"*
- e. And then we get this odd episode to end the story where the anger and bitterness of Jonah is even more exposed.**
- i. How could someone have an actual belief in the sovereignty, goodness, graciousness, and saving power of God, but be angry at him for it?
 - Keep in mind here, Jonah has right belief, right doctrine, right knowledge, but the wrong heart.
 - ii. Here's the episode - Jonah climbs a hill next to the city and sits down to see what would happen to the city.
 - His heart still had hope that God would destroy it.
 - iii. And God makes a plant grow next to Jonah that provides him some nice shade from the sun and the text tells us that Jonah was very pleased with the comfort that plant provided.



- However, that night God appoints a warm to kill that plant and as the sun was rising the next day, he also appointed an east wind that raised the temperature.
 1. Just like here. If we get winds out of the north, it is usually cooler. If we get winds out of the south, it is hotter.
 2. So, it was hot, the plant was dead, and the sun was beating down on Jonah.
 3. And Jonah says in dramatic fashion in 4:8 - *"It's better for me to die than to live."*
 - But we learn that this whole episode with the plant is meant by God to reveal the condition of Jonah's heart.
 1. Because the story ends with these three verses - **Read Jonah 4:9-11.**
- iv. **A clear distinction between the gracious and good heart of God who wants to reverse the fall with the selfish and judgmental heart of man.**
- The book of Jonah isn't a fun story about how Jonah took a ride in the belly of the fish.
 - It's a mirror to our hearts and forces us to confront our selfish ways and let the grace of God bring transformation.

V. HEBREWS 4:12

- a. And starting next week, we are going to begin to take a deeper dive into this story.**
- i. And here is how I want us to prepare for this journey in the book of Jonah together.



- I want us to set proper expectations on the work that the Word of God will do in our hearts.
 1. Because the story of Jonah is meant to expose what's in our hearts.

b. Read Hebrews 4:12

- i. I love to cook, but the knives that I have at home are dull and terrible.
 - You have to press really hard, you get rough cuts, and it takes more work.
 - Now, my folks, they bought the Cutco Knives.
 1. Those things are great.
 2. And when you cut with those...it's like your knife is gliding through the food with precision and ease.
 3. It's great.
- ii. This is the analogy that the writer of Hebrews uses for the Word of God.
 - Like a surgeon's scalpel, it is able with precision to cut into our hearts and discern with accuracy the motivations and desires of our heart.
- iii. The true motivations and desires of our heart is our most precious kept secret, right?
 - No one can judge the true condition of our heart.
 1. We can sometime even be blind to the motivation of our heart.
 2. But all of us would probably be ashamed to have all of it exposed to others.
 - But the Word of God, which is living because it is applied by the Holy Spirit, is able to navigate those waters.



- iv. And that's what the Word of God will do as we study Jonah.
 - The book of Jonah is going to reveal to us the thoughts, inclinations, and motivations of the heart of Jonah but it's meant to be a mirror so that we may see where that exists in our own hearts.
- c. **See, God, in his goodness and in his sovereignty, is in the midst of a work to bring about redemption and restoration to this fallen world and he is doing it through His Word.**
 - i. And the Word of God does two things in the work of redemption.
- d. **First, the Word of God announces the message of salvation (or what we call justification) and the Word of God announces the message of transformation (what we call sanctification).**
 - i. The Word of God announces that salvation has been accomplished in and through the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
 - That although we are dead in our sin, God has made us alive in Christ Jesus!
 - 1. Although we have rebelled against God and have been banished from His Kingdom, God has made a way to adopt us back into his family through Jesus Christ.
 - See, through Jesus, we are able to be legally justified in the sight of God.



1. Legally acquitted of our sin because Jesus came and lived the life we could not live and died the death we deserved to die.
 2. So, Jesus pays the penalty for our sin on the cross and transfers to us his own righteousness, so we stand before God justified, acceptable in his sight, and adopted into his family.
 3. The Word of God brings the message of justification.
 4. That, if we have faith in Jesus, our sins (past, present and future) are not counted against us.
- And after we have faith in the justification provided by Christ, the Word of God begins the work of transformation in our hearts.
- ii. **You have to understand that your justification is not dependent on your transformation...no your transformation gets it start with your justification.**
- This is the work of the Word of God slicing into our hearts, discerning our thoughts and motivations, discovering how our sinful flesh still influences our lives, and graciously and lovingly cuts it out.
 1. And over time, as one who has been justified in the sight of God allows the Word of God to do the work of transformation, one becomes seasoned, sharpened, less influenced by the world, more influenced by the Word...joyful.
 2. And this process is a process of allowing the Word to do the surgical work of discerning the sin still inside of us, confronting it, and removing it.



- It's all God's grace and goodness in our lives, it's all a part of God restoring us from the fall, for His glory and our joy.

e. Application

- i. **And this is the hope of what will happen as we study Jonah together.**
 - Let's allow the Word of God to do the surgical work of transformation in our hearts.
- ii. **So, my encouragement to you as we prepare to do this study is to spend time reading and familiarizing yourself with the story of Jonah.**
 - Read the story. Observe the details. Ask the Holy Spirit to use it to transform your heart into the likeness of Christ.

VI. PRAY

