

DEEP PREP GUIDE

Child | November 9 | BIG GOD STORY

BOTTOM LINE:

We are children of God

STORY TEXT:

Jonah 1 and 3-4

If we talked to Jonah today, I bet that he would feel like the lead singer from one of those bands that got famous for a song they didn't even like. Most of the time when we think about Jonah, we think about fish and whales. Not to say that the possibility of God putting a guy in the belly of a whale for a few days isn't interesting, but it falls far short of the message of the book. This is a story about the heart of God towards his children, and our inability to claim God's heart for us or for others--not about the anatomy or personal occupancy of fish.

From the beginning, the story of humanity has been a story of "going." In the garden, God told Adam and Eve to "go and work the land." When God gave Abraham and his wife a child, God told them to "go and be a blessing, creating a nation." When God rescued Israel from Egypt, God told them to "go to a land flowing with milk and honey where they would realize their purpose." In the New Testament, Jesus tells the disciples to "go and make disciples... from Judea, samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Finally, Paul tells his followers to go spread the gospel throughout the world.

We are called to be a going people, but as has been the case since creation, we have resisted, fled, repurposed, or only half-gone to the places and people God has called us to; instead preferring the people and places within our borders. That is certainly Jonah's story.

Jonah, a faithful Jew living at the height of Israel's power, was called by God to go to the city of Nineveh to preach a message of repentance. Jonah didn't much care for that idea and so he decided to run from his call. While snoozing in the hold of his getaway boat, God decided to shortcut Jonah's plans by sending a storm to overtake the boat. The captain and crew of the boat, realizing that they were in trouble with the power that commands the waves, worked quickly to find a solution to whatever was upsetting this power. The answer to their problem was to throw Jonah overboard. and so they did.

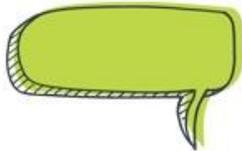
Not letting Jonah off the hook that easy, God sent a large fish to swallow him up so that he had time to reconsider his disobedience. After some time to think in the belly of the fish, Jonah comes to his senses and then is unceremoniously spat out in the direction of Nineveh.

Much to Jonah's contempt, what he finds in Nineveh is a people primed to receive forgiveness and put on repentance. Even the king throws ashes on his head and wears sackcloth to demonstrate his turn towards God. Yet, rather than be happy or excited, Jonah's reaction is similar to a hunter missing a deer: he is angry that God spared Nineveh.

The story closes with an interesting back and forth between Jonah and God where we find that there are things at play in Jonah's heart that caused him to see the Ninevites far differently than God. While not specifically listed in the text, we can surmise that there were tinges of xenophobia, religious snobbery, nationalistic contempt, and

pride. For these reasons and others, Jonah didn't want to leave the borders of his heart, let alone the borders of Israel, to go to Nineveh to be a blessing.

We, too, have been called to be a "going people" and yet we have a lot of things that cause us to see those people and places as something far less than, or worthy than, or beautiful than what God does. The result is that we don't go and the overflowing love of God that stirs inside of us remains a secret to the people who need it most. They don't get to experience what being a "child of God" is all about.



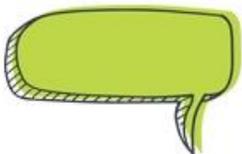
TENSION

Our Bottom Line for this week is that **We are all children of God.**

The tension is that we have things in our hearts--biases, and prejudices--that cause us to see people not as God's children, but as a whole host of other things not worth loving. Think of it like this: Let's say that you have your own child, or someone that you know and love very much. You see what is right about them, you know their heart. But, there are other people that don't see what you see and as a result they discount, discourage, and devalue that person you care for. This is what Jonah did to the Ninevites and it broke God's heart. To God, all of use are worthy of love and compassion. The trouble, the tension is that we, God's church, are selective as to who we want to "adopt" or "invite" into that love.

The opportunity cost is that the life-transforming love of God remains a rumor. That can't happen! So what can we do?

The truth is that we live in a culture that is built to put labels on people. It is designed to determine who matters and who doesn't. As a result, our "vision" gets "blurry." In other words, we don't see each other clearly anymore. Just like someone with near-sightedness, we need a corrective lens. Jesus can be that lens. If we take the time to look at how Jesus interacted and cared for people in the Gospels, we can begin to apply that way of dealing with people in our own lives.

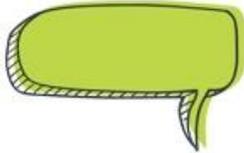


TEXT [CONTEXT]

Jonah's story comes during a period which Israel was quite prosperous as a nation among nations. That is in stark contrast to other periods when they were fighting for their very survival. The interesting thing that happened during these periods of relative comfort for Israel was that they forfeited their call to be a "blessing people" in order to be powerful. In order to become a more powerful nation, they would often conquer nearby tribes, worry about religious purity, and generally isolate themselves from outside influence.

These tendencies were often the occasion for God to send messengers or prophets to recalibrate Israel. You can imagine just how bad the situation really was when one of those prophets, Jonah, was unwilling to be a carrier of blessing.

It helps to imagine this story being read aloud around a campfire by faithful Israelites. When you do that, it is easy to imagine this story as a rebuke to the inward and exclusive focus of Jonah. In other words, the effect the text is supposed to have for the reader is this: Don't be like Jonah.



TRUTH

The truth of this story is that our God is a God of compassion; willing to welcome home prodigal sons (or daughters) no matter how far they are gone. To God, all of us are the same image bearing, breath-filled children, that are worthy of being a part of God's family. The trouble is that we don't often act that way towards others, or even ourselves. That's where Jesus can help us out as a "corrective lens."

The gospels say that Jesus came as a "sign of Jonah" to a generation. He was there to call the Pharisees and religious leaders to turn back to God with their whole heart—to become the blessing people they were created to be when God called Abraham and Sarah so many years before. As Jesus goes about doing this work, he teaches us through his interactions—and words—about how God sees people. In a nutshell, we are all just like the prodigal son that runs away with the inheritance, only to be welcomed back and embraced by the father. Why? Because we are God's children, and God loves us.