

“A GREAT MISSION” – Main Reading: **Jonah** 1:1-3 [funny college quiz story]

v. 1 — “...*the word of the LORD* came to Jonah...”

The phrase, “*the word of the Lord came*” occurs **109** times in the Bible, but it’s never *really* explained...

Now, you might ask: “*Well, what’s there to explain?*”–The word of the LORD came to Jonah.

I guess you’re right, there’s nothing to explain here on the surface...God gave a message to Jonah.

And it was *incredibly* **clear**: “...*go to Nineveh...*”

It was *particularly* **real**: “...*that great city...*”

And it came with *heavy* **responsibility**: “...*call out against it...*”

There’s nothing more going on here, you might say.

Except the Bible tells us that this was an **intense** experience for *all* the Old Testament prophets.

Habakkuk 1:1 ⇒ “oracle” נִצְּנָמַּ massa – a burden (mentally), something to carry, a doom.

Listen to how God, through Jeremiah, described His Word. **Jeremiah** 23:29

Some historians, who have *really* searched into this phrase,
“*the word of the LORD came*” indicates a **visit** from Jesus Himself.

This would totally line up with John chapter 1–“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*”

So, maybe that’s why this was so intense for all of these prophets...
Because God the Son had paid them a visit to give them an **assignment**.

For Jonah, and other prophets like him, they could not **escape** the reality that God’s voice had sounded in their **ears**, and it would *soon* be shared with others through their **lips**.

So, let’s look at God’s instructions for Jonah, here:

v. 2 — “**Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.**”

Nineveh was indeed a *large* city–the capitol of Assyria. [read facts from study packet]

The 100 foot tall border wall featured 1500 battle towers that were each 200 feet tall.

Not only was this a huge place, it was also a wicked, evil, and **violent** place. **Nahum** 3:1-4

Historians attest to this—the Assyrians would pile up pyramids of their enemies' **heads**, sacrificed **holocausts** of children, and lined their city streets with the **bodies** of their victims to incite fear in other armies. And all of this they did without *even the hint* of remorse.

Not to mention, Assyria was the birthplace of all kinds of idolatry...

To an Israelite, like Jonah, Nineveh would have been the **epitome** of evil...

And yet, this is the *very* place to which God tells Jonah to go.

We live in a day where so many people are *itching* to receive direction from the mouth of God.

How many times have you, or someone you know, had this thought:

*“Oh, if only God would just tell me where to go to college,
or who to marry, or which job to take, my life would be so much easier!”*

Well, you see, it would *all* depend on **what** God told you to do, wouldn't it?

If God told you to quit your job and move to your favorite vacation destination,
that might make your life easier for a while...

But, for Jonah, God told him to live out his *worst* nightmare:
Go to a city he **hated** and preach to people that he *absolutely* could not stand.

And Jonah was **not** up for the task...

**v. 3 — “But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish.”**

His first instinct was to get out of there!

He runs the other direction—no debating or arguing with God...
instead, Jonah bolted toward the door.

He *partially* obeyed God in that he **got up** (arose), but his obedience stopped there.

[He goes to Joppa, a city where Peter later lived prepared to evangelize to Gentiles]

One fun fact is that Jonah's name means "dove." 

Consider the *first* dove in the Bible. **Genesis** 8:8-12

The dove's obedience to Noah puts Jonah's response to God to shame. [More on this next time]

Just as Jonah found his way down to Tarshish, most of us know how to get there as well..

We *each* have ways that we try to escape thinking about God
or acting like the Christian we are called to be.

question : *what's the place your run off to? Where do you go to try and escape responsibility?*

For some people, it's going to **work**.

Others **isolate** themselves,

Some escape in **pornography**—a sense of intimacy without any strings.

For others people, it's **shopping**—buying something new takes your mind off of things.

But the truth is, as Eugene Peterson says: "**Tarshish is a lie.**"

The distraction and satisfaction of **escape** is *only* a temporary fix...

**"...he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish,
away from the presence of the LORD."**

Donald Grey Barnhouse said:

**"If you run away from God, you will pay the total fare, but you will never get where you're
going. On the other hand, if you go where God wants you to go,
He will pay the fare and you will always get where you need to go."**

question : *have you ever tried to get out of a responsibility or run away from something?*

So, where is this place that Jonah was running to, called Tarshish?

It's in modern day **Spain**—this was the *farthest* place that a ship would *ever* sail at this time.

Jonah heard God's *clear* command and decided to go *as far as possible* in the *opposite* direction.

It's not that Jonah misheard—God's word *always* accomplishes what it was sent to do—and
He wasn't caught-up on a *tricky* Bible verse...this command was *crystal* clear, Jonah just **disobeyed**.

That's usually when Christianity becomes *hard*—not when a verse is *difficult* to understand, but when God's commands are *so simple* and *so clear* that they become hard to follow.

But Jonah tried to run away from God...it's been tried before—and it *never* worked. **Genesis** 3:6-8.

Later, Adam and Eve's son, **Cain**, would try to run away from God in Genesis 4, too.

So, there Jonah was, trying to run away from an omnipresent God,
Following in the footsteps of the *very first* sinners.

And this is something that *every single* person in the history of the world has tried to do.

It is part of our sinful nature to run away from God. **Romans** 3:10-11

We ***don't seek*** after God, we are **fugitives** from Him—criminals on the run...

At the same time, the Bible tells us, over and over to seek after God. **Isaiah** 55:6-7, **Matthew** 6:33

Christians, thanks to the work of God in our lives, are made capable of seeking Him.

Think about it: When you first realized that you were a sinner who *only* Jesus could rescue,
you *probably* weren't looking for Him.

Maybe a normal **conversation** with a friend turned into your **conversion**
as they shared the Gospel with you...

Maybe like me, you were listening to preachers on the **internet**
and realized that you hadn't *really* put your trust in Christ yet.

Maybe, like one famous preacher, you went into a hotel
to use a **cigarette** vending machine and saw a Gospel tract on a bulletin board.

Or Lee Strobel, an atheistic journalist who was born again while trying to **disprove** Christianity.

However you got saved, you *probably* didn't wake up that morning and think:
Today, I have *got* to get right with God.

In fact, it is more likely that you, like Jonah, were trying to get *away* from Him
or pretend like God didn't exist...But He is *impossible* to escape. **Psalms** 139:7-10

We may not be able to *fully* escape God's presence...but that doesn't stop us from trying...
And, sometimes, when we are *really* caught-up in sin, we may *feel* like God is *awfully* far away.

Sin can make us feel like a stranger to God,
and while Jonah might've thought this is what He wanted,

He would soon discover that his disobedience would have cost him his life
without the presence of God's mercy in this story.

Thankfully, it is *impossible* to outrun God.

It's also *impossible* for God's plan to be shaken-up...thwarted. **Job** 42:2, **Proverbs** 19:21

God had a mission for Jonah to do, and yet Jonah made a **free will** decision to try and get out of it.

But even so, God has a plan, and *no one* can stop it.

God's plan does not take away Jonah's ability to disobey and make **choices**,
in fact God allows everyone to make *genuine* decisions!

But, in the end, *whatever* decision you make, God has accounted for it in His plan,
and He is ruling over the entire story—not just of Jonah, but in each of our lives.

See, once God has decided that something *will* happen in our lives, it's *really* out of our hands.

Sure, we can kick and scream and **refuse** to do what God wants.

But, eventually, it *will* happen *just* as He planned it.

So, perhaps there is something that God wants *you* to do...

We have a *whole* Book of things that He wants you to do,
and maybe you've been neglecting to do some of it.

Or, maybe God has been so clearly doing something in your life, and you've been pushing it off.

My advice for you would be to make it happen *before* you end up in a Jonah situation.

What we'll see in these coming weeks is a **collision** course between what Jonah wants
and what God wants. And, by the end, you'll see who comes out on top. **[Pray]**