

**Jonah 3:1-10**  
**January 21, '18**

**“SWALLOWED BY GRACE”**

**THERE IS PROBABLY NO NAME THAT IS MORE ASSOCIATED WITH A SINGLE WORD THAN THE NAME “JONAH” – AND THAT WORD IS “FISH” – OR MAYBE “WHALE” – OR, IF YOU GET *TWO* WORDS – “LARGE FISH.”**

**THIS MORNING, I WANT TO READ FOR YOU THE ENTIRE ACCOUNT OF THE FISH, THE WHALE, THE LARGE FISH IN THE BOOK OF JONAH.**

**HERE GOES – “*BUT THE LORD PROVIDED A LARGE FISH TO SWALLOW UP JONAH, AND JONAH WAS IN THE BELLY OF THE FISH THREE DAYS & THREE NIGHTS.*”**

***THEN JONAH PRAYED TO THE LORD HIS GOD FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH.***

***THEN THE LORD SPOKE TO THE FISH, AND IT  
SPEWED JONAH OUT ON DRY LAND.”***

**OKAY. WE’RE FINISHED.**

**THAT’S THE FULL EXTENT OF THE APPEARANCE  
OF THE FISH - THE WHALE - THE *LARGE* FISH IN THE  
BOOK OF JONAH.**

**THREE VERSES.**

**THAT’S IT.**

**BUT, LET’S FACE IT – THAT’S A PRETTY  
INCREDIBLE THING JONAH EXPERIENCED.**

**IT WAS PHILIPS BROOKS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY,  
THOUGH, WHO COULDN’T HELP BUT HAVE A BIT OF  
FUN WITH THE STORY BY SAYING THAT WE REALLY  
SHOULDN’T BE SO SURPRISED THAT A WHALE COULD  
SWALLOW AN ENTIRE MAN SINCE JONAH WAS, AFTER  
ALL, JUST ONE OF THE “MINOR” PROPHETS.**

**I TRUST YOU KNOW THAT THE BOOK OF JONAH IS ABOUT SOMETHING MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLY A MAN BEING SWALLOWED BY A FISH.**

**IT'S A BOOK, THOUGH, THAT'S QUITE UNLIKE MOST OTHER BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.**

**FOR ONE THING, IT ISN'T EASY TO SIMPLY READ A FEW VERSES & UNDERSTAND THEM ASIDE FROM THE CONTEXT OF THE ENTIRE STORY.**

**SINCE OUR READING FOR THIS MORNING COMES IN THE THIRD CHAPTER, LET ME GIVE YOU A QUICK REFRESHER ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT LEAD UP TO THOSE VERSES.**

**THE BOOK BEGINS WITH JONAH BEING CALLED BY GOD TO PREACH TO THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH.**

**NINEVEH WAS A CITY TO THE WEST & INSTEAD OF  
HEADING THAT DIRECTION, JONAH BOARDS A SHIP  
AND HEADS TOWARD TARSHISH WHICH IS DUE EAST.**

**A GREAT STORM COMES UP & IT'S DETERMINED  
THAT JONAH IS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE  
STORM BECAUSE OF HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO OBEY  
THE COMMAND FROM GOD TO PREACH TO THE  
NINEVITES.**

**THE SAILORS ON THE SHIP THROW JONAH  
OVERBOARD & THAT'S WHERE WE HAVE THOSE  
THREE FISH – WHALE - *LARGE* FISH VERSES.**

**AND THAT QUICKLY BRINGS US TO OUR  
LECTIONARY READING FOR TODAY – ONE OF ONLY  
TWO APPEARANCES OF THE BOOK OF JONAH IN THE  
REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY.**

**WE'RE READING THE FIRST 10 VERSES OF THE  
THIRD CHAPTER OF JONAH – JONAH 3:1-10.**

**YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE FLIPPING  
THROUGH TELEVISION CHANNELS & COME TO A  
MOVIE THAT YOU KNOW YOU SIMPLY CAN'T TURN  
OFF IF YOU STOP FOR EVEN A SECOND TO WATCH IT.**

**THAT HAPPENED TO ME THIS PAST WEEK.**

**ACTUALLY, IT WASN'T ME – IT WAS EMMA SUE,  
AND IT WASN'T A MOVIE THAT *SHE* COULDN'T FLIP  
PAST, BUT ONE THAT SHE KNEW *I* WOULDN'T BE ABLE  
TO RESIST ONCE I SAW IT.**

**IT WAS ON DISNEY JUNIOR – MY ALL-TIME  
FAVORITE MOVIE – PINOCCHIO.**

**TO MAKE IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO RESIST, IT  
WAS AT THE CLIMACTIC MOMENT WHEN PINOCCHIO,  
GEPETTO, FIGARO THE CAT & CLEO THE GOLDFISH**

**FIND THEMSELVES IN THE BELLY OF MONSTRO, THE WHALE.**

**OF COURSE, A WHALE ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT PINOCCHIO & JONAH HAVE IN COMMON.**

**THEY ARE BOTH THRILLING STORIES THAT CONTAIN DEEP MESSAGES FOR LIFE.**

**I WOULD SUGGEST THAT JONAH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.**

**IT CONTAINS & CONVEYS A MESSAGE THAT WE FIND RUNNING ALL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT & THE NEW TESTAMENT AS WELL.**

**SOMEONE READING THE STORY THE FIRST TIME WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT MESSAGE UNTIL THE END AND, LIKE ANY GOOD STORY, THEY'D HAVE TO GO BACK & LOOK AGAIN TO SEE WHY THINGS PLAYED OUT AS THEY DID.**

**FOR THAT REASON, I THINK JONAH IS A  
BEAUTIFUL BOOK IF ONE READS IT FROM EITHER ONE  
OF TWO PERSPECTIVES.**

**IT CAN BE READ AS AN ACTUAL HISTORICAL  
BOOK, WITH A REAL PROPHET NAMED JONAH WHO  
ACTUALLY EXPERIENCED THE THINGS THE WRITER  
SHARES.**

**OR, IT CAN BE READ AS A PARABLE & THE  
MESSAGE IS EQUALLY PROFOUND & BEAUTIFUL –  
PERHAPS EVEN MORE SO.**

**THINK OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS.**

**DOES THE FACT THAT THE PARABLE OF “THE  
GOOD SAMARITAN” IS A STORY MADE UP BY JESUS  
MAKE IT ANY LESS MEANINGFUL TO YOU?**

**OR WHAT ABOUT “THE PRODIGAL SON?”**

**SCENES FROM BOTH OF THOSE PARABLES ARE  
DEPICTED IN PAINTINGS THAT HANG IN “THE  
GALLERY” HERE.**

**JESUS TOLD BOTH OF THOSE STORIES TO  
PROCLAIM A PROFOUND MESSAGE.**

**THE WRITER OF JONAH – WHETHER HE’S  
WRITING OF ACTUAL HISTORICAL EVENTS OR  
SHARING A BEAUTIFUL PARABLE – IS PROCLAIMING A  
PROFOUND MESSAGE IN THIS STORY.**

**THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WERE A CLASSIC  
EXAMPLE OF WHAT SOCIOLOGISTS CALL  
“ETHNOCENTRISM.”**

**THE WAY THEY DID THINGS WAS THE RIGHT WAY  
TO DO THEM.**



**THEY WERE THE FAVORED PEOPLE & OTHERS  
WERE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS – ESPECIALLY IN  
RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.**

**AND YET, ALL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT,  
WE FIND EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY.**

**THE JEWISH LEADERS & THE JEWISH PROPHETS  
WERE CONSTANTLY RECEIVING DIVINE MESSAGES  
THAT PROCLAIMED A DIFFERENT MESSAGE.**

**IT IS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH THAT WE FIND THAT  
MESSAGE THUNDERING THROUGH THE AGES.**

**JONAH DIDN'T WANT TO PREACH TO THE  
NINEVITES – NOT BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID OF THEM,  
THOUGH HE CLEARLY HAD GOOD REASON TO BE!**

**NO – THE REASON JONAH DIDN'T WANT TO  
PREACH TO THE NINEVITES IS BECAUSE HE WAS  
AFRAID THEY MIGHT ACTUALLY LISTEN TO HIM!**

**HE WAS AFRAID THAT GOD MIGHT SPARE THEM.**

**HE WAS AFRAID – HEAVEN FORBID – THAT GOD  
MIGHT ACTUALLY LIKE THE NINEVITES!**

**JONAH SAYS SOMETHING TO GOD THAT WE FIND  
ALL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

**HE TELLS GOD WHY HE RAN AWAY & WAS  
UNWILLING TO PREACH TO THE NINEVITES.**

**HE SAYS, “*FOR I KNEW THAT YOU ARE A GRACIOUS  
GOD AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER, AND ABOUNDING  
IN STEADFAST LOVE & READY TO RELENT FROM  
PUNISHING.*”**

**HOW FASCINATING IS THAT!?**

**AND HOW BRUTALLY HONEST OF JONAH.**

**HE’S ANGRY AT GOD FOR THE VERY ATTRIBUTES  
THAT ISRAEL HAS ALWAYS DEPENDED ON FOR ITS  
OWN SALVATION!**

**TO GET AN IDEA OF WHY JONAH WAS SO ANGRY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF NINEVEH RECEIVING GOD’S GRACE, LISTEN TO WHAT THE PROPHET NAHUM SAYS ABOUT IT:**

***“AH! CITY OF BLOODSHED, UTTERLY DECEITFUL, FULL OF BOOTY – NO END TO THE PLUNDER! THE CRACK OF WHIP & RUMBLE OF WHEEL, GALLOPING HORSE & BOUNDING CHARIOT! HORSEMEN CHARGING, FLASHING SWORD AND GLITTERING SPEAR, PILES OF DEAD, HEAPS OF CORPSES, DEAD BODIES WITHOUT END – THEY STUMBLE OVER THE BODIES!”***

**YOU SEE – THERE WAS NO MORE HATED CITY THAN NINEVEH.**

**NINEVEH REPRESENTED EVERY VILE & DESPICABLE CHARACTERISTIC IMAGINABLE TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL BECAUSE THEY HAD TROUNCED**

**ON ISRAEL AND DESTROYED EVERYTHING IN THEIR  
LAND & THEIR CULTURE.**

**WHO COULD BLAME JONAH FOR NOT WANTING  
TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF  
GOD’S GRACE BEING BESTOWED UPON NINEVEH!**

**BUT – WHETHER JONAH LIKE IT OR NOT – THAT’S  
WHO GOD IS!**

**AND WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, THAT’S WHO  
GOD IS.**

**GOD IS “*A GRACIOUS GOD AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO  
ANGER, AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE & READY  
TO RELENT FROM PUNISHING.*”**

**AND – LET’S FACE IT – WE *SHOULD* LIKE IT  
BECAUSE IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF THAT INFINITE  
GRACE OF GOD THAT YOU & I ARE SAVED.**

**LET'S FACE IT – WE'RE NOT ANY BETTER THAN  
THE NINEVEHS OF OUR OWN TIME & WE ALL HAVE  
OUR OWN NINEVEHS, DON'T WE?**

**WE ALL HAVE THOSE GROUPS OF PEOPLE WE  
WOULD MUCH RATHER *NOT* RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE.**

**WE WANT GOD TO FEEL ABOUT THEM AS WE DO.**

**BUT – THANK GOD (LITERALLY, “THANK GOD”) –  
THAT'S NOT WHO GOD IS.**

**ONCE AGAIN, IF GOD WERE MORE LIKE US, WE,  
TOO, WOULD BE OUTSIDE OF GOD'S GRACE!**

**YES, THE MESSAGE OF JONAH IS ONE OF THE  
MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE &  
IT'S A MESSAGE THAT IS AS VITAL FOR US TODAY AS  
IT HAS EVER BEEN – PERHAPS MORE SO.**

**IN READING THE BOOK OF JONAH THIS PAST WEEK, I HAD WHAT I LIKE TO CALL “A FRANK STAGG MOMENT.”**

**YOU’VE HEARD ME TELL THE STORY THAT EMMA SUE TOLD ME MANY YEARS AGO – SOMETHING THAT SHE ACTUALLY EXPERIENCED.**

**DR. FRANK STAGG, A LONG-TIME PROFESSOR AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST SEMINARY & ONE OF THE LEADING NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS IN THE WORLD, CAME BOUNDING INTO CLASS ONE DAY, DROPPED HIS NOTES & HIS BIBLE ON THE LECTERN & ENTHUSIASTICALLY GRABBED HIS STUDENTS’ ATTENTION BY SAYING, “*LET’S GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY BECAUSE LAST NIGHT IN READING OVER THE PASSAGE FOR TODAY, I NOTICED SOMETHING I’D NEVER NOTICED BEFORE.*”**

**AFTER MORE THAN 40 YEARS OF SEMINARY  
TEACHING, ONE OF THE GREATEST BIBLICAL  
SCHOLARS IN THE WORLD SAID, “*I NOTICED  
SOMETHING I’D NEVER NOTICED BEFORE.*”**

**I THOUGHT OF DR. STAGG WHEN I WAS READING  
JONAH BECAUSE I SAW SOMETHING I’D NEVER SEEN  
BEFORE.**

**I NOTICED SOMETHING I’D NEVER NOTICED IN  
ALL MY PREVIOUS READINGS OF JONAH.**

**WHEN JONAH IS ON THE SHIP HEADED TO  
TARSHISH & THE GREAT STORM ARISES, JONAH SAYS  
TO THE SAILORS, “...*TAKE ME UP & THROW ME INTO  
THE SEA; THEN THE SEA WILL QUIET DOWN FOR YOU...*”**

**THE SAILORS ON THAT SHIP WEREN’T  
ISRAELITES.**

**THEY WERE FOREIGNERS.**

**THEY WERE GENTILES.**

**THEY WERE PAGANS.**

**AND YET JONAH WAS WILLING TO SACRIFICE HIS  
OWN LIFE IN AN EFFORT TO SAVE THEIRS.**

**AND YET, HE WAS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE  
SAVING OF NINEVEH.**

**WHY THE CONTRADICTION?**

**WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THOSE PAGAN  
SAILORS & THE PAGAN CITY OF NINEVEH?**

**HERE'S THE THING – JONAH HAD BEEN ON THE  
BOAT WITH THOSE SAILORS.**

**HE'D TALKED TO THEM.**

**HE'D SHARED MEALS WITH THEM.**

**HE'D WORKED WITH THEM.**

**HE'D GOTTEN TO KNOW THEM.**



**ON THE OTHER HAND, NINEVEH WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A NAMELESS, FACELESS COLLECTION – AN ENTIRE GROUP THAT JONAH COULD DEPERSONALIZE & CATEGORIZE & STEREOTYPE.**

**BUT THOSE SAILORS WERE REAL PEOPLE WITH REAL EMOTIONS AND REAL FAMILIES AND REAL PROBLEMS AND REAL BELIEFS & VALUES.**

**JONAH SAW THEM – NOT AS A MASS GROUP, BUT AS SEPARATE INDIVIDUALS – EACH OF THEM DESERVING OF GRACE & HE WAS WILLING TO GIVE HIS OWN LIFE TO SAVE THEIRS.**

**IT’S INTERESTING THAT WE’RE NEVER TOLD WHAT HAPPENED TO JONAH.**

**AT THE END OF CHAPTER 4, WE’RE LEFT WITH A QUESTION – A QUESTION THAT GOD ASKS OF JONAH –**  
***“SHOULD I NOT PITY NINEVEH...?”***

**THE WRITER DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AS CONCERNED ABOUT JONAH AS HE IS ABOUT US – THE READERS OF HIS BOOK.**

**THE WRITER SEEMS TO BE ASKING A QUESTION OF US – *“WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN FEARS? YOUR OWN HATREDS? YOUR OWN PREJUDICES? WHAT ABOUT THE NINEVEHS IN YOUR OWN LIFE?”***

**YOU SEE, IF WE WOULD MAKE A POINT OF SEEING PEOPLE AS JONAH SAW THE SAILORS ON THAT SHIP HEADED TO TARSHISH, I THINK IT MIGHT TRANSFORM OUR ATTITUDES & OUR ACTIONS.**

**IF WE WOULD LOOK BEYOND ENTIRE CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE & SEE, INSTEAD, THE INDIVIDUAL, WE WOULD PROBABLY BE MUCH MORE INCLINED TO BE SENSITIVE, UNDERSTANDING, SYMPATHETIC & COMPASSIONATE.**

**IN HIS COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JONAH  
SHORTLY AFTER THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD  
WAR, THE GREAT PRESBYTERIAN TEACHER &  
PREACHER, JAMES SMART TELLS ABOUT A CHURCH  
IN SWEDEN.**

**ON THE HANDLE OF THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH IS  
A GREAT BRONZE RING, ENCLOSING A CRUCIFIX.**

**BUT THE RING ITSELF IS HELD BY A LARGE HAND  
PROTRUDING FROM THE DOOR.**

**IT'S MEANT TO BE THE HAND OF GOD.**

**A FINGER EXTENDS FROM THAT HAND, POINTING  
DIRECTLY AT ANYONE WHO WOULD OPEN THE DOOR.**

**IT'S AS IF GOD IS SAYING, *"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN  
TO YOU, THIS CROSS, THIS SACRIFICE? AND WHAT ARE  
YOU DOING ABOUT IT?"***

**JAMES SMART –REMEMBER, WRITING AT THE CLOSE OF WORLD WAR II - SAYS, “*THE NEO-ISOLATIONIST, THE RACIST, THE DETRACTOR OF FOREIGN PEOPLE, THE RESISTER OF HUMAN BROTHERHOOD – ARE THEY NOT WITH US STILL, BLOCKING CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION, FACING TOWARD THE PAST AND HOPING FOR THE RETURN OF THE SOCIETY THEY ONCE KNEW AND KNEW HOW TO MANIPULATE TO THEIR OWN ADVANTAGE?*”**

***THEY HAVE NOT LEARNED, AS JONAH DID NOT LEARN, AS WE ALL ARE SLOW TO LEARN, THAT WE NOW FACE RUIN UNLESS WE CHANGE OUR WAYS ; THAT WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE IF WE WOULD SAVE OURSELVES, WE MUST ALSO SAVE OTHERS, AND IF WE WILL NOT SAVE OTHERS, OURSELVES WE CANNOT SAVE?”***

**HE MAY HAVE BEEN WRITING IN THE MIDDLE OF  
THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, BUT HE JUST AS WELL COULD  
HAVE BEEN WRITING IN THE 4<sup>TH</sup>, 5<sup>TH</sup> OR 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
B.C. WHENEVER THE BOOK OF JONAH WAS WRITTEN.**

**OR HE COULD HAVE BEEN WRITING LAST YEAR  
OR LAST MONTH.**

**THE MESSAGE OF JONAH IS A MESSAGE FOR  
EVERY TIME & EVERY PLACE.**

**IT'S A MESSAGE FOR US.**

**ARE WE WILLING TO ALLOW GOD'S INFINITE,  
UNENDING GRACE TO BE POURED OUT UPON OTHERS  
IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BE SWALLOWED BY  
GRACE OURSELVES? AMEN.**

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