

Jonah: Hide and Seek from God



Jonah:1:1-3

Open to the Old Testament book of Jonah. This is probably going to sound strange, but we're going to use the book of Jonah and the next four Sundays to prepare our hearts for Resurrection Sunday. I don't know if you've ever used an Old Testament book before to get ready to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but that's what we're going to do, publicly and corporately here at Hardin Baptist Church over the next several weeks. I'm sure you already know this, but if you don't, please mark your calendar. Resurrection Sunday is March 31st. How many of you knew that? Now, when Bro Ricky checks the calendar each year for Resurrection Sunday, also known as Easter, I get really excited or I get really sad. I get really excited when Easter is really early or really late because when it's like it is this year, kind of early, but not early enough, guess what's going to happen that weekend. You're already nodding your head...Spring Break. Do you know what that means? It means that many of you, without realizing it, plan to go somewhere with your children because it's Spring Break. You're going to leave Friday afternoon or Saturday, and after you made your reservation, put down your deposit, and you're going, oh no; we're going to miss Resurrection at Hardin. It's always wonderful to visit a guest church in a guest town, but even when you do that...I've done it once; yeah, I missed Easter here as a pastor. While it was awesome, it just wasn't the same. Does everybody agree? So here's what we're going to try to do this year, if you don't mind. For all of those people in Hardin and the

surrounding counties who are going to leave to go on Spring Break and miss Easter at Hardin Baptist Church or in Western Kentucky, here's what we're going to do. On the Thursday night before Resurrection Sunday, traditionally known as Passover night, we're going to celebrate His resurrection. If you can move your Sunday morning service to night and that work out ok, why can't you have it on Thursday night too? Does that make sense? So would you help us do this? Would you just spread the word? When you hear somebody saying they're going out of town for Spring Break, remind them if they still want to celebrate Easter, we're going to have a full-blown resurrection service on Thursday night. Or, if you want to come on Thursday night just to see if it's going to be worth coming to on Resurrection Sunday, you can do that as well. See, every year we miss all of our college students. None of our college students ever gets to stay for our resurrection service. This year, they are not only going to get to worship at their home church, but they're also going to get to worship with us here at Hardin Baptist Church. Would you pray for God's anointing on this as we step out of faith and celebrate Easter on the Thursday before Resurrection Sunday. Please, there are a lot of folks in the community who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Would you invite them to come with you on that special Thursday night service? Now, we've just got five weeks to get ourselves ready to truly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ in that once a year fashion. Do you know what I'm talking about? We celebrate it every day, but there's just something special about that Resurrection Sunday. What we're going to do is use the book of Jonah as our motivation to truly be ready.

We're going to call this series, Hide and Seek from God. I've told you a couple of times, but on my mother's side, there were a lot of children, therefore, there were a lot of grandchildren. My granny's house was different than my house. When my grand boys come over to my house, there are probably more toys at Papaw and Memish's house than there are at their house. I don't know if it's just because times have changed, but honestly, Mom, I don't remember there being toys at Granny Bogard's. Dad, I don't remember there being toys at Mamaw's. That didn't mean we didn't have fun, or that we didn't play. When the cousins got together, you had to play, but you had to be inventive. You had to be creative. You had

to use trees and creeks. You know what I'm talking about, right. There's a real old-fashioned game that we loved to play called hide and seek. Everybody has played that game, right. You were either the hider or the seeker. Now, if you were the hider, here's what I learned was essential in playing hide and seek. If you were going to hide and be the hider, while you were thinking of a place you were going to hide, you had to make sure the place you were going to hide is not a place that the person seeking would ever think of, correct? Knowing my cousins and because of original sin, and because of them being born little sinners, you couldn't trust them. Even though some of them had already put their faith in Jesus, been down into the baptismal waters of Ledbetter Baptist Church, they still weren't completely redeemed yet. So whoever was the seeker, you had to make sure, while you were going to your hiding place, he or she wasn't looking. I mean, before you ever took off, you made sure they were looking in another direction and had their eyes closed. They had to promise you their eyes were closed because you didn't even want them to know the direction you were going in. When we open to Jonah this morning, I'm amazed at how sometimes we adults still play that childish game. Can you imagine Jonah trying to hide from God? Can you imagine Jonah thinking in his mind, *I wonder if God isn't looking?* Can you imagine trying to say to God, ok God, and make sure Your eyes are closed because I'm getting ready to hide from You? I'm going to go as far away as I can go from Your presence. Man, you would have thought Jonah would have known. Do you remember Adam tried that? Adam got caught doing what God told him not to do, and what was Adam's response when God came? Adam hid in the bushes. Can you imagine knowing who God is, and you believing a bush could keep God from knowing where you're at? A bush could keep your nakedness from being exposed to God. We have chosen the book of Jonah because I believe in all of my heart that many of us in here have a little bit of Jonah in us and we play an adult version of hide and seek with God. I warn you not to be offended when you try to hide. God is a seeking God, and just like with Jonah, He will find you. He will find you because He knows where you're going before you ever made the decision to go where you're going. So can we just be honest? Isn't the game of hide and seek one of those games that we need to put away and realize there was a time

when that had its rightful place in our life, as a kid? As an adult, you're never going to win the game of hide and seek when you play it with God.

Stand with me as we open to the book of Jonah, the first three chapters. It's not a problem in Western Kentucky, but you do know that there are places, even in Western Kentucky, where great doubt has been cast upon this book. While you and I might not find anyone right here in Hardin who would doubt this book, I promise you that you wouldn't have to go very far into Calloway County until we find a whole university where there will be folks who do not believe the authenticity of this story. We're going to use the book of Jonah to prepare our hearts because we believe Jonah was a prophet. He was a real man. You're not going to have to ask me at any point if I really believe a big fish swallowed Jonah. I absolutely believe a big fish swallowed Jonah, but that's not what really amazes me in the story. When you believe the God I believe, those things just don't shake you, amen. What catches my attention in this story is not the greatness of the fish, not the greatness of the city of Nineveh, but the greatness of God and how a man who knew God, was His spokesman, could actually get all worked up over a plant, and pout when the plant died, and could care less that a whole city of people were perishing. Some of us are more worried over things, the dent on our new truck, and so many other things, when literally, people are perishing, and we seem to care less. This past year, America spent fifty-three billion dollars on food for our pets! In our present economy where everybody has been cutting back and tightening their belt, the one budget item we raised was care for our pets by 7%. How many of you know you've been cutting back on investing in God's Kingdom? We can afford to feed our dog, but we can't afford to...you've got to be kidding me! see, this is going to hurt because most of us know down deep that there are pockets of people that we really don't care about, and we don't care if God saves them or not. What would your reaction be if God called you as He did Jonah to go to...see, that's when it would be revealed. We are going to read Jonah 1:1-3, and then next Sunday we will look end of chapter 1, the following Sunday, it will be chapter 2, and the following Sunday, chapter 3, and then on Palm Sunday, we're going to use chapter 4.

Scripture

" Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." 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. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord."

(Prayer)

Father, please add Your blessings to the reading of this Your Word. In Your Son's name we pray, amen.

Jonah, according to 2 Kings 14:25, (please make note of that) was an 8th Century prophet. He prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel. Remember, there was a civil war in Israel in 922 BC. The kingdom of Israel was split into the southern kingdom and the northern kingdom, two tribes in the south, and then in the north. From 793-753 BC, Jereboam the II sat on the throne of the northern kingdom. During this time, he did evil in the sight of the Lord. But in spite of his evil, God raised up a prophet by the name of Jonah, son of Amittai. The name Jonah means dove, and Amittai means truth. Jonah actually prophesies that even though Israel is living in disobedience to God that their borders would be expanded to certain places. Sure enough, God blessed. In spite of their sinning against God, they still enlarge their borders. Jonah is a prophet. When you turn to the book of Jonah, it will be different than most of the other prophetic books because most of the other prophetic books deal with the message the prophet spoke. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are called the Major Prophets because when you read their messages, they were long. Then you get to those guys called the Minor Prophets. The reason they're called Minor Prophets was not because they were less in nature of prophet, but their messages were shorter. Jonah is a minor prophet. As a matter of fact, if we were ranking them by their message, he was the minor of the minors. His message is just a one sentence message, but there are four chapters in

Jonah. Why? Because the book of Jonah is really not the book of Jonah, it's the book about Jonah.

God is going to give us a glimpse, not just into the message of the man Jonah, an 8th Century prophet, but the Bible is going to give us a glimpse into the messenger himself. I hope you know this, I believe most of us do. Yes, God is concerned about the integrity of the message, for most, but He's also concerned about the integrity of the messenger, amen. It's amazing what He will do to get His people to do what He's called them to do. Even when they do it, God has a way of knowing if we're doing it for the right reason. What we're ultimately going to discover about Jonah was that Jonah finally did what God said for him to do, but when he did it, he wasn't tickled. If I can say this...his heart really wasn't right. I'm just wondering this morning how many of us could, first of all, not be doing what we're supposed to be doing and need to be doing. But secondly, how many of us who are doing what we're doing, really may not have our heart and our attitude right. Please don't think Jonah is in the Bible because he was an 8th Century prophet. Jonah is in the Bible because God knew there would always be the possibility of a little bit of Jonah being in each one of us this morning.

Are you ready? I love the way the prophets open up, "Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah." Every time you see this statement in Scripture, just know that the God we serve is a God of revelation. He is not a God who has left anything to our imagination. He is a God who has clearly revealed Himself and clearly reveals His will and His ways. The way God reveals Himself, the way God reveals His purpose and His plans is through His Word. The writer of Hebrews is going to make it clear that in the past God spoke to many people many different ways, many methods. But in these last days, God has spoken to us through His Son. Now we believe there was a time when God, through the leadership of His Holy Spirit, actually moved men to write the very words of God, and then ultimately, God sent the very Word of God, Jesus, so that we would ultimately know who He is, God. By seeing Jesus, you see God. By knowing Jesus, you know God. Then God, at the same time He was inspiring men to speak, was inspiring men to write. We hold in our hand what we call the written Word of God.

This church believes that just as God had a word for Jonah that would reveal His will to him, God still speaks to His people today, and He does it through the written Word. My first question to you is this. Are you and I having encounters with the Word of God? See, in the Old Testament times, a prophet didn't speak until he had a clear word from God. You and I have the Word of God; it's been bound. How many of you can honestly say the word of the Lord came to me? There have been times when you've been in the Word and the Word has clearly revealed to you God's plan, God's purpose, and His will for your life. Do you understand that you have a word from God that's just as sure as God's spoken word to Jonah? Do you understand that? Do you believe that? God still speaks to His people. Has He spoken to you? The word of the Lord came to Jonah, and just basically said this. Jonah, arise, go, and cry out, call out to the Ninevites. Cry out against it, that great city of Nineveh, for their evil, their wickedness is before me. I want you to see what's prompting God to reveal Himself to Jonah. The wickedness of the great city of Nineveh is before Him. He wants someone to go cry out, call out, proclaim, preach to, witness to, and tell them how God feels about what they're doing, and that person is Jonah. Arise and go.

One of my favorite New Testament stories is in Acts 8 where Phillip is having that revival in Samaria. Everything is going good, there is great joy in the city, and then all of a sudden, the Spirit of the Lord says arise and go to the desert country. The Bible says "...and Phillip rose and went." I love that. God said arise and go, the Bible says Phillip arose and went. That's the plan. That's maturity. God speaks; you respond. How many of you know the phrase 'lag time?' Do you know what I mean when I say lag time? Have you ever thought about spiritual lag time? I think it's a sign of maturity. That distance between when you have a clear word from God in His Word and the time you decide you're going to be obedient to what God is leading you to do through His Word. That's spiritual lag time. Phillip, so in tune with God, is in the big city, preaching revival, souls are being saved, and all of a sudden, God says arise and go out to the desert. If I were Phillip, I would rather stay in a city where there are a lot of people. There aren't many people out in the desert. This doesn't make sense. What did Phillip do? He rose and went. Wow, that's maturity.

That's not what happened with Jonah. When God said arise, go, and preach, the Bible doesn't say and Jonah arose and went. You've got that big word, but. But Jonah arose. How many of you know it's not going to be good now? Most of us know the story before we read the story. Jonah arises, but instead of going to Nineveh, he heads to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Let's pause here for a moment. Jonah is a prophet; is there any way possible to run from the presence of the Lord? No, there is nowhere you can go where God is not going to be. Does everybody agree? A few hundred years earlier, David had already penned Psalm 139 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As David feels God and circumstances just coming in around him, there's a part of him that wants to bolt and run, but he knows it would do no good for him to bolt and run because he can't go anywhere where God is not. He says if I go to Heaven, You're there. If I go to Sheol, You're there. If I go to uttermost parts of the sea, You're there. He basically says there's nowhere you can go where God is not, and we believe that.

That's not what this is talking about. I don't think Jonah ever had the thought that he could hide from the presence of the Lord. But hold it; the Bible says he fled the presence of the Lord. I know that's what it says, but what you've got to remember that fleeing from the presence of the Lord in Jonah's day was not trying to go to a place where God is not. It's trying to be in a place where God is, but the place you are is not where God wants you to be. God didn't call Jonah to go to Tarshish and cry out against Tarshish, even though God was in Tarshish. Where did God want Jonah to go? Nineveh. So God's will for Jonah was to be in Nineveh, so that was his place of service. That was his place of commissioning, and he didn't want to be there. So he runs from where God wants him to be, and that's what this is referring to in the presence of the Lord. Now, that's east, roughly six hundred miles from where he is. When he starts to run, he runs the opposite direction. He runs west. Have any of you ever looked up on a map how far it would have been from Joppa to Tarshish? It was over two thousand miles. If you caught a boat from Joppa to Tarshish, and it stopped in all of the ports it stopped in, it would take you a little over a year to get from Joppa to Tarshish? Do you hear this? Here's a man called to go a great city and cry out against it, and that's where he's supposed to

be, but he goes to Tarshish. Tarshish is on the peninsula of Spain, which at that time would have been the end of the world to those folks, twenty-six hundred miles from where he's supposed to be. Get this picture. If I'm supposed to be here, but a year later I'm there, over here there is no way God can use me to do what He's called me to do. That's what Jonah is running from! When we say hide and seek from God, we're not talking about any of us believing we can go to a place where God isn't. We're all smarter than that, but isn't it amazing how some of us are trying to get as far away from our Nineveh as we can? Isn't it amazing how you don't even hang around close enough? We go as far as we can go in the opposite direction because down deep in many of our hearts, there are some things God has called us to do that we just don't really want to do. There isn't one of us here who have not played this game at one point in our lives. I get so tickled at people who run from God and then things line up and they actually get where they're wanting to go, and they believe they're still being blessed by God. I mean, how could all of this just...well, listen to this. Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord to go to Tarshish, so he goes down to Joppa. Can I just say this? Anytime you're not doing what God wants you to do, where He wants you to do it, you're going down, no matter how you masquerade it. Any direction you travel, other than the direction God wants you to travel, you are going down. As a matter of fact, he goes down, down, down, down. He goes down to Joppa, buys a ticket, and guess what. There just happened to be a boat to Tarshish! Don't think because there are others going where you are going, it's ok for you to go where they're going. There are some people who God wills for their life is to minister to Tarshish, but if Nineveh is yours, God don't want you doing it in Tarshish. He wants you to do it in Nineveh.

Nineveh was a great city. Historians differ on this, but the most conservative estimate I can get about Nineveh was in its inner city, what we call the downtown area, there was a wall that measured eight miles in circumference. That's pretty big. The walls were fifty feet wide, double-walled. They had chariot races on top of the walls just as we have NASCAR races in Daytona. Everybody knows you saw last night how dangerous it is. Yesterday afternoon when four cars came around that final turn, all were wanting to cross the finish line. Can you imagine? Here's what history says.

On the final turns around those walls, it was wide enough for three chariots to be racing side-by-side. Those walls were one hundred feet tall, had over one hundred and fifty towers around that eight-mile circumference. That's just downtown. The suburbs were even larger. Nineveh was the capital of the empire called Assyria. It would be like when we say Moscow; that used to mean Russia. The Assyrians were probably the cruelest people that ever lived on the face of the planet. When they would go into cities, one of the first things they would do was tie up the husbands and torture their children in their presence, and then do things to their wives that no man would want done in front of their eyes. Before they killed the wives and children, they would take the husbands outside the city, and in front of their children, they would skin them and then bury them in the sand alive with their head out. Historians say they would then pull their tongue out, take a stake, and drive it into the sand. Before the man would die, most men would go insane. Once those men were dead, they would behead them and do one of two things. They would take those heads and pile them outside of that city they had just made theirs as a symbol of their strength in battle. Other times, they would take the heads and put them around their neck, displayed by the men on the front line of battle as they marched on the next city, saying to the people in the city what would happen to them. History says the Assyrians were so cruel that many cities, in the wake of their advancement, would commit suicide before they got there. And Jonah has been called to go preach to these people.

Let's just be honest. How many of us right now wouldn't want to go? Can we be totally honest here? What do you think Jonah really wanted to happen to those people? He wanted them to get what they deserved! He wanted God to wipe them out. How many Americans do you know during the Cold War really didn't care a bit about the salvation of the souls of the people in Russia? How many Christian Americans do you think cried out for the salvation of Adolf Hitler during WW2? How many of you have wished Saddam Hussein would rot in Hell forever? There is a little bit of Jonah in all of us, isn't there? Can we bring it on in a little closer? Hadn't you kind of wished that on some neighbors before? Hadn't there really been some people you've worked with before that you, by actions, said go to hell; I

don't care, you deserve it? Wow! And God was merciful to you, and He was merciful to me. We believe He put our sins on a cross and let His Son die for our sin; what do you think He did about those other people's sins? Were they not on the same cross, on the same Son with your sins? See, the reason Jonah is running and not wanting to do what God is calling him to do is he really doesn't want God to spare Nineveh. He had a direct revelation from God; he couldn't get out of this. God said go! Yet many of us sit here and we don't even know where God wants us to go and we wonder why because God is going to speak to you the same way He spoke to Jonah, and that's through His Word. You've got to be in the Word to know if you're supposed to be in Nineveh or Tarshish. Let me just ask you this question. Where is your Nineveh? Where does God want you to be? Now, where do you want to be? That's Tarshish. Why don't you go home this week and measure how far away you really are from being where you're supposed to be. Why don't we discover what we're supposed to be doing where we are? I don't want history to say about me, he went down, down, down, down. Wouldn't it be awesome if it said he went up, up, up, up?