

## **The Reluctant Messenger** [Jonah 1]

Alan Hannah

**Big Idea:** *We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.*

10.5.25

### **// INTRODUCTION**

*How many of you have ever tried to avoid something you knew you were supposed to do?*

- Maybe it was a difficult conversation you needed to have.
- Maybe it was a phone call you needed to make.
- Maybe it was apologizing to someone.

***We've all been there...*** We know what we SHOULD do, but then we get creative with excuses why we WON'T do it.

Today, we're starting a four-week journey through one of the most fascinating and uncomfortable books in the Bible, the book of Jonah. Now, I know what you're thinking... "I already know the story of Jonah. A guy gets swallowed by a fish. It's Sunday School 101." But here's the thing, there's so much more to this story than just a big fish. In fact, the fish is only in three verses of the entire book.

***The book of Jonah is about God's love for all people, but it's also a story about us. About our reluctance to take God's love to the people we'd rather avoid. It's about our prejudices, our comfort zones, and what happens when we run from what God asks us to do.*** Over the next four weeks, we're going to walk through this book chapter by chapter, and I'm going to encourage you to read along each week.

Today, we're starting with the hardest part, ***the part where God calls, and we run.***

*Because here's the truth we need to face right from the start...*

**We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.**

### **// PRAY**

### **// THE CALL WE DON'T WANT TO ANSWER**

Let me set the stage for you. ***The book of Jonah was written around the 8th century BC, during a time when Israel was facing one of its greatest threats, the Assyrian Empire. And the capital of Assyria was... Nineveh.***

Most of us don't have strong feelings about ancient Assyria, but imagine if God asked you to go share the gospel with the people you fear or despise most. ***That's what this was like for Jonah.***

The Assyrians were known for their brutal military tactics... we're talking about a nation that would impale their enemies, burn cities to the ground, and terrorize entire populations. The Bible Project notes that Nineveh was "the most violent, oppressive superpower of the ancient Near East." ***They were Israel's worst nightmare.***

*And in this context, God speaks to Jonah...*

*<sup>1</sup>The LORD gave this message to Jonah, son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>"Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are."  
[Jonah 1:1-2]*

***Pretty straightforward, right?*** God sees the wickedness of Nineveh. God wants to give them a chance to repent. And God chooses Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, to be His messenger.

***But here's what makes this story so brutally real...*** Jonah doesn't argue with God. He doesn't negotiate. He doesn't ask questions. He just runs.

*<sup>3</sup>But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish. [Jonah 1:3]*

Nineveh was about 550 miles northeast of Israel. Tarshish was likely modern-day Spain, about 2500 miles in the exact opposite direction. ***Jonah literally went as far away as he could go.*** It's like God saying, "Go to New York," and you booking a flight to Australia.

## // WHY WE RUN

Now, before we come down too hard on Jonah, let's be honest with ourselves, we can relate, right? ***How many of us have run from God's call in our own lives?***

- Maybe God has been prompting you to share your faith with a coworker, but they're difficult or antagonistic toward Christians, ***so you stay silent.***
- Maybe there's a family member who doesn't know Jesus, but the relationship is complicated, ***so you avoid the conversation.***
- Maybe there's a neighbor, a friend, or a classmate... and every time you think about saying something, ***you find a reason not to.***

***We are Jonah.*** We run in the opposite direction because...

- We're afraid.
  - ***What if they reject me? What if I say the wrong thing?***
- We're comfortable.

- *My life is good right now. I don't want to rock the boat.*
- We're judgmental.
  - *They don't deserve God's grace. They've done too much. They're too far gone.*
- We're too busy.
  - *I'll do it someday. Just not today.*

***But here's what we need to understand...*** when Jonah ran from God's call, he wasn't just running from Nineveh, he was running from God Himself. And the same is true for us. When we avoid sharing our faith, we're not just avoiding uncomfortable conversations; we're avoiding the very purpose God has designed for our lives.

We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.

*Jesus said it this way in Matthew 28:19-20...*

*<sup>19</sup> "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." [Matthew 28:19-20]*

***This isn't a suggestion. This is THE mission.*** And when we ignore it, there are consequences.

**// THE COST OF RUNNING**

*Look what happens when Jonah runs.*

*<sup>4</sup>But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. <sup>5</sup>Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. [Jonah 1:4-5]*

***Notice the irony here?*** The pagan sailors are crying out to their gods while God's prophet is asleep below deck. ***The people who don't know God are more spiritually aware than the guy who does.***

*How often do we see people who don't know Jesus searching desperately for meaning, for hope, for peace... and we, the ones who have the answer, are just going through life on cruise control?*

The captain comes down and says to Jonah...

***<sup>6</sup>"How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives." [Jonah 1:6]***

Think about that. ***Jonah ran from his calling to be a messenger, and now a pagan ship captain is telling him to pray.*** When we refuse to fulfill our purpose, God will find another way. But we miss out on the blessing of being used by Him.

The sailors cast lots to figure out who's responsible for the storm, and of course, the lot falls on Jonah. They ask him who he is, and...

***<sup>9</sup>Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." [Jonah 1:9]***

***Think about this...*** He worships the God who made the sea, while he's trying to hide from that same God in a boat on the sea. ***He knows the truth, but he's not living it.***

***And here's the devastating part...***

***Verses 10-12 show us that Jonah's disobedience puts everyone around him in danger.*** The sailors are terrified. They ask what they should do, and Jonah says, ***"Throw me into the sea, and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault."***

***When we run from God's call, we don't just hurt ourselves; we hurt the people around us.*** Our families suffer. Our communities miss out. And the people who desperately need to hear about Jesus never do.

We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.

***Let me show you something that drives this point home in a way I never could.*** Penn Jillette is one-half of the famous magic duo Penn and Teller. They've been headlining shows in Las Vegas for decades. ***Penn is also one of the most outspoken atheists you'll ever meet.*** He's written books about atheism, he's debated Christians publicly, and he's never been shy about his disbelief in God.

But a few years ago, something happened after one of his shows that stopped him in his tracks. A man came up to him, complimented his performance, looked him in the eye, and gave him a Bible. ***And Penn recorded his response in a video that I want you to watch.***

***// VIDEO: "A Gift of a Bible"*** - <https://youtu.be/6md638smQd8?si=jj1MlvTxmgB6ouWs>

***Did you catch that?*** An atheist, someone who doesn't believe in God at all, said, ***"How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"***

**Even someone who rejects the gospel understands that if we truly believe what we say we believe, our silence is actually cruel.** If you saw someone walking toward a cliff in the dark, you wouldn't stay quiet because you didn't want to offend them. You'd shout. You'd run toward them. You'd do whatever it took to stop them.

**That's what sharing the gospel is.** It's not pushing our beliefs on people. It's not being judgmental. It's love. **It's caring enough about someone to risk an awkward conversation because we believe their eternity is at stake.**

The sailors don't want to throw Jonah overboard; they're more compassionate than he is, but eventually, they have no choice.

***<sup>15</sup>Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! [Jonah 1:15]***

***And then comes the verse we all know...***

***<sup>17</sup>Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. [Jonah 1:17]***

**God doesn't give up on Jonah.** Even in his rebellion, even in his reluctance, even in his running, God pursues him. That's grace. **But let's not miss the point...** Jonah could have avoided all of this if he had just obeyed in the first place.

**// THE LIFE GOD DESIGNED**

***Here's the truth we need to wrestle with...***

We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.

**God has called every single one of us to be His messengers.** Not just pastors. Not just missionaries. Every follower of Jesus.

***<sup>20</sup>So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" [2 Corinthians 5:20]***

***You are an ambassador.***

- Your workplace is your mission field.
- Your neighborhood is your mission field.
- Your family is your mission field.

***And yes, that includes the people who are hard to love.***

- The people who've hurt you.
- The people whose politics you hate.
- The people whose lifestyles you don't understand or agree with.

*Jesus didn't die just for the people who are easy to reach. He died for everyone. And He's asking us to take that message to them.*

***But here's the beautiful part...*** when we say yes to God's call, we don't just change the lives of others, we experience the life God designed for us.

Think about it. Jonah spent three days in the belly of a fish because he said no.

- *But what if he had said yes from the beginning?*
- *What if he had walked into Nineveh with faith instead of fear?*

We'll see later in the story that Nineveh does repent... **120K people turn to God.** Jonah could have been part of that from the start. He could have experienced the joy of seeing God move in miraculous ways.

***When we say yes to evangelism, to sharing our faith, we get to be part of the greatest story ever told.***

- We get to see lives transformed.
- We get to witness the power of the gospel firsthand.
- We get to experience purpose and meaning that goes beyond ourselves.

*<sup>14</sup>But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? <sup>15</sup>And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" [Romans 10:14-15]*

***Your feet can be beautiful.*** Your voice can bring hope. Your life can be the message someone needs to hear.

**// WHAT NOW?**

***So where do we go from here?***

Let me give you three practical steps...

**1. Stop running.**

***If you've been avoiding God's call to share your faith***, today is the day to stop. Confess it. Own it. Tell God you're ready to obey, even if you're scared. He'll meet you there.

## 2. Start praying.

***Ask God to give you one person this week that He wants you to share His love with.*** It doesn't have to be a full gospel presentation.

- Maybe it's an invitation to church.
- Maybe it's offering to pray for someone.
- Maybe it's just being present in someone's pain.

Ask God and then watch for who He brings to mind.

## 3. Read Jonah chapter 1.

Seriously, read it. Wrestle with it. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through it. And get ready for chapter 2 next week.

**// CLOSING** [Everyone stand, invite prayer team]

***Jonah's story doesn't end in the belly of the fish.*** There's hope ahead. There's redemption. There's a second chance. But it starts with a choice, the choice to stop running and start obeying.

We are all messengers, and our silence has consequences.

***God is calling you to be His messenger.*** Not someday. Today. The question is... will you run, or will you go?

**// PRAY/RESPONSE**