

# You Are Called Where?

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### Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-5

We are called by God. Do we pay attention to this call or put Him on hold?

In the last weeks, we learned from **Peter, Abraham, and Isaiah**. Each one of them had his challenges. We can definitely learn from biblical characters. We can learn how God worked in their lives. We can learn from their weaknesses and strengths.

Today I move on to another biblical character who received a call: **Jonah** the prophet, who escaped from his call and ran away from the mission field.

**Who was Jonah?** Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the Northern kingdom was called **Israel** and the Southern kingdom was called **Judah**. Jonah was a prophet in the Northern kingdom of Israel. Each kingdom had good kings and bad kings. **Jeroboam II** the son of Joash was one of those wicked kings of Israel. We read in 2 Kings:

**And he (King Jeroboam II) did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. (2 Kings 14:24-25 ESV)**

**Jonah was a prophet.** God was using him in the Northern kingdom. Jonah was a man of God. He received a call from God. What was it? **“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.” (Jonah 1:1-2 ESV)**

Jonah did not like this mission. Why? Nineveh was a major city of Assyria and over 1000 miles away from Israel. It was a foreign land, and Jonah did not have an

interest towards the people living there. In fact, he wanted God to punish this wicked city. He knew that God was merciful towards people who repented. Jonah did not want God's mercy to reach these people.

Instead of going East, Jonah goes **West**. He goes to **Joppa**, finds a ship and sails in the Mediterranean Sea to **Tarshish**. The storm hits the sailing boat and the sailors eventually throw Jonah out of the ship. A whale swallows him and after three days the whale vomits him out on the land. It is a miracle. I do not have a scientific explanation of how this happens. I believe in the story; I believe God is able to do miracles and the story has a message that we will study this morning. Jonah is on the ground and God calls him AGAIN:

**Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." (Jonah 3:1-2 ESV)**

Jonah eventually did go. The city inhabitants did hear his call to repent and turned to God. They repented and turned to God. **"And the people of Nineveh believed God."** (Jonah 3:5 ESV)

And when the king and everyone repented, fasted and turned to God, we read:

**When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.** (Jonah 3:10 ESV)

Here the turning point of the story that is often overlooked: God had mercy towards the people but Jonah did not. In fact, he was angry.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry, And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a **gracious channuwn** God and **mercifull rachuwmm**, slow to anger and abounding in **steadfast love checed**, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:1-2 ESV)

## **1. Refusal of God's Mercy**

God and Jonah agreed on three points:

- a. They both agreed that Nineveh was an evil city
- b. They both knew that God could change people and miracles could happen
- c. Therefore, both knew that God was merciful, even towards wicked people.

Where was the problem?

**Jonah was a selective in his mission (discrimination).** He did not care about the Assyrians. In fact, he did not want anything to do with them. He did not want them to repent. He wanted the destruction of this people.

-I feel like that towards ISIS. It is evil and needs to be stopped. But I wonder if they wanted to repent, would I want to see their repentance or their destruction? (You can ask the same question in your heart for the people you do not like.)

-I know two Armenian missionaries whom God called to go to Turkey. They could not refuse God's call.

In the New Testament, there is a similar example. **The prodigal son** returns home and **the senior brother** cannot accept his return. "How come my junior brother was 'elevated' to the same level as me, the good and obedient son?" Their father gave the junior **a ring and robe**, and a **banquet**. The older son's refusal to enter to the banquet was a statement to his father that he could not accept his brother's repentance.

Do you find yourself in the same situation? Can you accept the repentance of your enemies?

Prophet Micah simplifies the mission statement of people who want to follow and obey God:

**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (*Hessed*), and to walk humbly with your God?** (Micah 6:8 ESV)

## **2. God Does Not Give Up From Jonah**

Jonah is depressed.

**But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.** (Jonah 4:1 ESV)

He even goes on saying:

**“O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”** (Jonah 4:3 ESV)

**“It is better for me to die than to live.”** (Jonah 4:8 ESV)

God loves His creation. It means He teaches us something new each day. Even Jonah, the chosen prophet of God, learned some lessons. After delivering the message of God, Jonah sat under a plant that God provided for him so he would not faint from the heat. Jonah was full of anger. God sent a worm to wither the plant. Jonah said again: **“It is better for me to die than to live.”**

God’s response?

**But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”** (Jonah 4:9-11 ESV)

Jonah, get out of your misery. Look around. If you pity the plant, I have mercy and love toward my creation. ***Learn to have mercy.*** Jesus said: **“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”** (Luke 6:36 ESV). **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”** (Matthew 5)

God is merciful; God is teaching this man to be merciful to all nations and people.

### **3. The Main Lesson of this CALL: Mercy to ALL**

What is the main lesson of this book?

Both Jonah and the people of Nineveh learned that God is merciful. God treated both Jonah and people of Nineveh with mercy.

The message is loud and clear, God's mercy extended to all who repent and turn from their sins. We are called to take the message to the nations, neighborhoods, cities, families, jails, the homeless, the refugees, to have compassion and mercy.

Let me repeat again this idea. **We all have jobs or used to have jobs.** We are thankful for our jobs. Our jobs will change or end. But more importantly we all have **a CALLING, a vocation.** That calling is from God. Today's message: Calling for mercy towards people who do not deserve mercy. That is a difficult task.

While I was working on my sermon, my missionary friend Maggie Aslanian came to my mind. She was my friend from Aleppo. We grew up together in the same city attending the same Christian camps in Kessab and learning about God in the Aleppo churches. Now she is missionary in Erbil in Northern Iraq or Kurdistan. I emailed her and asked her, "Why did you go to Kurdistan? "

Her answer:

"I always felt grateful to those who were obedient to Jesus and brought the good news of the gospel to Armenians. As a young believer I also dreamt of being a missionary. When I lost my husband due to mental breakdown, I was free so I consecrated myself to God saying: 'Please send me to a country where no one wants to go and all are escaping from it.' The next morning, I received an email from a Christian organization I had not heard about. They said, 'Would you like to go to Iraq to train Bible teachers?' Hence my journey began. I found out that the northern region of Iraq was called Kurdistan. This is my 6th year that I have moved to live there. I have been to over 30 churches and schools all catholic and orthodox. Sometimes I talk in big gatherings... 700 people mainly displaced because of the latest events (ISIS). I go to several villages to hold monthly

meetings for women. Even children attend and listen... On many occasions when I am invited to address school parents in nuns' schools Kurdish parents attend too because their children are there... and they hear about how to raise their children in faith..."

**God used Jonah, a selfish prophet, to save Nineveh.** God can use me as well. God can teach me to go "where"? I don't know. One thing I know I will obey His call. In my previous church, they wondered why I used to go back to the Middle East. God had put on my heart the passion to help and support the people of Syria and Lebanon. I have been in those lands and I have heard God's call in those lands. I hope you will also help me to reach out to our brothers and sisters around the world. That should not stop each of us from asking ourselves, "What is my calling in Fresno?"

I cannot answer this for you. Each of us need to repent first, we are called to life Holy life. Then...

Ask yourself, "Where is the place I do not like to go where God can use me?"

In the end, I would like to end with prayer:

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin! (Psalm 51:1)