

# The Power of God's Mercy

## Jonah 1:4-16

### Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. As I was traveling last week for my dad's wedding, I was sad to miss the kickoff of our Fall sermon series in the book of Jonah, which we've titled, "The Pursuit of Those Far From God". It wasn't just the kickoff of a new series, but a new season, a three-month focus on one of our five Antioch identities, that of eyewitness.

Along with that, this past Tuesday we started our five-week Men's Eyewitness Training, and we had a roomful of guys learning and practicing and encouraging one another in sharing the gospel in a very simple way. If you missed the first night, come to the rest and one of the guys will catch you up. If you made it to the first night, keep coming!

As a visual reminder of the beauty of this season, today we are kicking off a new interactive art project. A pastor friend makes mosaics from reclaimed lath wood, so we asked him to do a custom mosaic just for us--but here's the catch--we as a church glue on the pieces. Over the next three months, each time you share the gospel with someone--that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again--we want you to come and glue a piece of the mosaic onto the base. There are about 140 pieces that make up the mosaic. If everyone in our church were to share the gospel with just one person in the next three months, we would easily complete the mosaic. My prayer is that we not only complete it, but that some of those people will become followers of Jesus.

Today we're picking up where Trey left off last Sunday in Jonah 1:4-16 with a message titled, "The Power of God's Mercy". In many ways, this is a part two to Trey's sermon. His main idea last week was this: "Like Jonah, we can never flee far enough from the presence of God".<sup>1</sup> Today's main idea basically tag-teams that (young disciples, here's one of the questions you're looking for on your sermon guide): Like Jonah, you can never flee far enough from the *power* of God. In this passage I think God shows off his power primarily through his mercy, and does so in three ways: God's mercy is more powerful than our apathy - vv. 4-6, God's mercy is more powerful than our secrets - vv. 7-10, and God's mercy is more powerful than our stubbornness - vv. 11-16.

---

<sup>1</sup> Trey Moss, "Fleeing From God, Jonah 1:1-3"

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Jonah 1:4-16. That's page 774 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The text will also be on the screen. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

*4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."*

*7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.*

*11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." 13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. Jonah 1:4-16*

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God's people said, *Amen*. You may be seated.

## Exposition

When Sheldon and Jean met each other and fell in love, they described themselves as pagans who worshiped love. They decided that they would make their relationship so sacred that, if there was a God, even *he* would be amazed by it. Their marriage was first and everything to them. Then they moved to Oxford and became friends with a Christian named C.S. Lewis. Lewis confronted them with the grace of God, and he told them *Christ* must be first and everything. Eventually they became Christians and began to see how their marriage could no longer be the most important thing in their lives. Jean gave in to Christ more and more, but Sheldon resisted. Not long afterward, Jean contracted a virus that destroyed her liver and over time led to her death. As you can imagine, Sheldon was devastated. Over the next several years he corresponded with C.S. Lewis as he wrestled with God. In time, Lewis penned these words, which would become the title of a classic written by Sheldon, “You have been treated with a *severe mercy*.”

That’s a strange phrase, isn’t it? A severe mercy. What Lewis meant was that God is so merciful that he is willing to be severe with us in order to reclaim our whole hearts and his whole world.<sup>2</sup>

This is similar to what we’ve been observing in the book of Jonah. There, we see a man familiar with the mercy of God who is running from the mercy of God; a man who has been brought near to God acting like a man who is far from God. And here’s the relevance: we all do this. We all run from God at times. Not just from his calling to be an eyewitness. We run from his commands and his people and his word and his correction and even his blessings at times. I mean, sometimes we run and we don’t even know why we’re running.

In all these things, we are ultimately running from God himself. So we oughtta be really interested in how God responds to Jonah, how he responds to someone on the run. We begin to see this in verse 4:

*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Jonah 1:4*

---

<sup>2</sup> Russ Ramsey, “Revisiting ‘A Severe Mercy’--40 Years Later,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/severe-mercy-40th-anniversary/>; Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy: A Story of Faith, Tragedy, and Triumph*

## I. God's mercy is more powerful than our apathy - vv. 4-6

Make no mistake about it, the storm was not a coincidence. The author is clear from the beginning--it's *the Lord* who is in control of this scene.<sup>3</sup> Jonah might have been exercising his power to *disobey and run*, but God was exercising his power *over all creation*. Not much of a comparison there! God hurls the kind of storm that gives sailors nightmares. But the severity of this storm wasn't driven by his wrath, but his mercy, the same mercy that led him to call Jonah to preach to the wicked people of Nineveh. It was the same mercy that for Jonah, in the words of King David, surely followed him all the days of his life.<sup>4</sup>

This brings us to our first stopping point today: God's mercy is more powerful than our apathy. Look with me at verse 5:

*Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. Jonah 1:5*

So the comparison between the Lord and Jonah continues here. Jonah, on the one hand, exercises his power of apathy, of just not caring; not caring that he could die or the sailors could die or the people of Nineveh could die. And I get it, I find that when *I'm* on the run from God in some way, the easiest way to quiet my conscience and to quiet the voice of God's Spirit is to just ignore him; and sleep is probably the easiest way to do that. And we have that power, right? We have the power to just not care if we set our minds to it.

But God, on the other hand, shows off his power, the power of his mercy. He sets things up around Jonah in such a way that Jonah *can't* quiet his conscience. He's about to shake Jonah awake to see *pagans* acting like *Jonah* should be acting.

First of all, the sailors were terrified and ran to the only gods they knew. They were dependent instead of independent. Even though they didn't know God, at least they were devoted, which was more than could be said of Jonah, the only one who *did* know God!<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Jonah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 113

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 23:6

<sup>5</sup> Eric Redmond, Bill Curtis, and Ken Fentress, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*, Loc 373-380

Second, as God hurled the storm, the sailors hurled the ship's cargo. Now, this could have been in order to lighten the ship, or it could have been a sacrifice to appease their gods.<sup>6</sup> Either way, even though their lives were meaningless apart from God, they wanted to live, and so they did something about it. But that was the opposite of Jonah, the one who actually had something great to live for!

And third, the sailors tried to find mercy in the eyes of the god who caused the storm. We see this in verse 6:

*So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." Jonah 1:6*

How ironic is it that a pagan sailor is telling a prophet of God that he should be praying? <sup>7</sup> About the moment Jonah finally forgot about being on the run, of all the words that could have been yelled at him, he is jolted awake and hears this: "Arise, call out to your god!"<sup>8</sup> The verbs "arise" and "call" are the same verbs used in God's opening command to Jonah, "*Arise*, go to Nineveh, that great city, and *call* out against it, for their evil has come up before me."<sup>9</sup>

The captain continues, "Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." It's a hope for mercy.<sup>10</sup> So every word from the captain reminds Jonah that he's on the run, and that he can't escape the reach of God's powerful mercy.<sup>11</sup>

Where in your life are *you* on the run from God today? You've tried hard to ignore it, to not care. But friend, in this very moment God is so merciful that he's not letting you forget. He wants all of you. And his power to bring you home outlasts your power to resist.

## **II. God's mercy is more powerful than our secrets - vv. 7-10**

Another way in which we try to run from God is by hiding. This brings us to our second stopping point for today: God's mercy is more powerful than our secrets. Look with me at verse 7:

---

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, 114

<sup>7</sup> John H. Walton, *Jonah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Loc 1891-1892

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, 114

<sup>9</sup> Jonah 1:2

<sup>10</sup> Walton, Loc 1894-1897

<sup>11</sup> Walton, Loc 1893-1894; Alexander, 114

*And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Jonah 1:7*

Casting lots is similar to our way of drawing straws, except it was believed to give divine direction. The sailors did this in order to find out who was responsible for making their god so stinkin' mad. There was an easier way to go about this, you know--Jonah could've just told them! But instead, he tried to keep it secret. The problem with that we just learned about in the wise book of Ecclesiastes:

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14*

When it comes to a God who has the power of knowing everything, there are no secrets! There is no hiding!<sup>12</sup> The lot falls right on Jonah and he faces a firing squad of questions (in verse 8):

*8 Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Jonah 1:8-9*

Jonah's been caught. And it's one thing to be running from God and to proactively repent by confessing it to God and others. God always "delights in truth in the...secret heart," and "a broken and contrite heart...[he] will not despise."<sup>13</sup> But it's another thing to be running from God and hiding it--and *then* get caught. That's much harder to truly repent and be restored from.

This is why each month in our pastors meeting we ask the question, "What sin do you need to confess or temptation to bring into light in order to receive forgiveness and healing?" It's why we encourage you to meet with a few friends to hold each other accountable. That's not just to help *avoid* running from God, but to help one another get out of "the sin that so easily entangles".<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, 115

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 51:6, 17

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 12:1

There's a deep fear among many Christians that if they confess their secret sins, they'll be shamed in front of everyone. And that is the exact lie that keeps us hiding. You know what would do more good during this focus on being Eyewitnesses than our promotion or our trainings? Running to God and to others with our secrets to find forgiveness and healing. Confessing the sin of avoiding that person God has been urging us to share with. *Then* God will "restore to us the joy of our salvation," and we "will teach transgressors [his] ways, and sinners will return to [him]." <sup>15</sup>

Let's not get caught like Jonah, who sounds pitiful as he confesses, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Really Jonah--you fear the Lord? Doesn't seem like it. Look at how he contrasts with the pagan sailors in verse 10:

*Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Jonah 1:10*

The sailors immediately realize the severity of the situation. 'Wait a minute, you mean to tell us that you're running from the God of heaven and earth, the God who made the sea?! What have you done?! We're dead!' And just as Trey mentioned last week how our disobedience is costly, look at what it's about to cost not just Jonah, but these sailors!

But once again, God's mercy steals the show--the fear of the Lord that should be flowing from Jonah instead begins to pour out from the pagans. How do we know that? Because otherwise they would've immediately punched Jonah into the ocean. Instead, in order to not offend God any further, the sailors are afraid to even touch his prophet. <sup>16</sup> Their hearts are softening. Meanwhile, Jonah's only seems to be getting harder.

### **III. God's mercy is more powerful than our stubbornness - vv. 11-16**

This brings us to our third stopping point for today, God's mercy is more powerful than our stubbornness. In verse 11,

*11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl*

---

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 51:12-13

<sup>16</sup> Walton, Loc 1922-1926

*me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” Jonah 1:11-12*

Here’s what running from God leads to--Jonah is just getting even more stubborn and hard-hearted. We can see it first of all because Jonah doesn’t offer to hurl himself into the sea. No, no, ‘You pick me up and hurl me into the sea,’ he says to the sailors. But this is just an outward expression of stubbornness. It’s coming out from the deeper problem: a stubborn heart.

In this moment Jonah could have repented and come running back to God. He could have confessed, “Lord, I have disobeyed Your command to go to Nineveh. Forgive me, and please spare the lives of these men!”<sup>17</sup> And he knew that God would’ve answered him because later he says these exact words, “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”<sup>18</sup> What kind of scoundrel do you have to be to choose drowning instead of mercy?! Really, the enduring words from what we know of Jonah’s life are basically, ‘I would rather die than see God’s mercy.’<sup>19</sup>

Hashtag, don’t be like Jonah.

But here’s the thing--we *are* like Jonah. We are all one prolonged act of disobedience away from being hardened more and more by our sin until we’re doing things we never thought possible. This is why the author of Hebrews warns us,

*12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12-13*

And to me one of the most costly things about running away from God is that you begin to see his mission flow around you instead of through you. God’s mercy is more powerful than our stubbornness--we can dig our heels in and cross our arms and shout “No!” like a toddler, but the river of God’s mercy will just rush past us to someone else who’s ready to receive it. And here’s an example (verse 14):

---

<sup>17</sup> Redmond, Loc 542-552

<sup>18</sup> Jonah 4:2

<sup>19</sup> Jonah 4:3, 8-9

*14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Jonah 1:14-15*

The sailors are so moved by their growing fear of the one true God that they submit to what seems to be his will—even though it seems crazy—even though it’s basically human sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> And as they do it, they appeal to his mercy. What a contrast between them and Jonah! How tragic that mercy flows to pagans while God’s own prophet sinks to the bottom of the ocean from the weight of his stone-cold heart. The sea ceased from its raging and

*Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. Jonah 1:16*

This is no longer just a pee-your-pants kind of fear, but now it’s worship, it’s awe and wonder at this great God. And as outward expressions of their softened hearts, they offer a sacrifice and make vows to honor him.<sup>21</sup> Even in spite of Jonah and his mess, the sailors “acknowledge his God as their own.”<sup>22</sup> Once again we see “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, [has relented] from disaster.”<sup>23</sup> His severe mercy has won.

## **Conclusion**

So what is our takeaway? Don’t be like Jonah, right? Well, if that’s all you take away from today, I would call that a fail.

The power of God’s mercy isn’t just a matter of bringing us running back to God. The power of God’s mercy is on full display when we realize that it *brings God running back to us*. The severest mercy of God was not a storm of great wind that devoured a runaway prophet. It was a storm of great wrath that devoured God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is nothing if not a picture of both severity *and* mercy. It’s a picture of God running to you to extend his mercy despite your apathy and your secrets and your stubbornness.

---

<sup>20</sup> Walton, Loc 1940-1944

<sup>21</sup> Walton, Loc 1947-1953

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, 117

<sup>23</sup> Jonah 4:2

Don't let the mercy of God bypass you today on its way to someone else.

And here is that mercy on display. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **We are announcing that Jesus Christ hurls God's mercy at runaways like you and me.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember what Jesus has done for you. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, let us know so we can help prepare you for baptism and communion. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back and people to pray with you on the sides. Let's pray.

## **Bibliography**

Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy: A Story of Faith, Tragedy, and Triumph*

Russ Ramsey, "Revisiting 'A Severe Mercy'—40 Years Later,"

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/severe-mercy-40th-anniversary/>

Trey Moss, "Fleeing From God," Jonah 1:1-3

John H. Walton, *Jonah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary

Eric Redmond, Bill Curtis, and Ken Fentress, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*

T. Desmond Alexander, *Jonah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries