

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz Production
Week 48
Jonah & Micah

Some in and out of the church have a hard time swallowing this story. Some say it's an allegory, or it was a dream that Jonah had. When in fact we have proof that this was an actual event. Jonah was a real prophet, who was really swallowed up by a whale and then vomited onto dry land after 3 days by that whale or large fish. We know this is true because the greatest source of truth tells us it's a true story. That source is Jesus Christ. During His ministry he refers to this account two times. First in Matthew 12 and then again in Matthew 16. He was prophesying of what was to come for Him;

“**40** For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be **three** days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40)

Like you, I sometimes am very skeptical of fishy stories, but when Jesus says it's true, I tend to believe Him over any other source.

The Book of Jonah starts like this: Jonah 1:1

“**1** Now the word of the Lord came unto **Jonah**, saying,
2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and **cry** against it; for their **wickedness** is come up before me.”

This is not an unusual request. Since the beginning of time God has sent His servants to wicked people to cry repentance. But, this time was different. It was different because in most cases the servants of the Lord respond as Nephi did in (Helaman 10:11-12)

“**11** And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto **destruction**.

12 And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.”

This is the normal response we see when we read of the ancient prophets and God’s mighty servants. This is why I am so grateful for Jonah and God’s mercy to give us this incredible story. Because, I sometimes do not respond to God’s call like Nephi but instead like Jonah.

After God’s Voice came to Jonah (Jonah 1:3)

“Jonah rose up to **flee** unto Tarshish from the **presence** of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

The great question is...Why? Why did Jonah run? I think if we were in Jonah's shoes at that time we would have ran too, or at least considered it. Jonah's ministry was approximately 750 B.C. Assyria's power was on the rise. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian empire. It was situated along the east bank of the Tigris river. The ruins of Nineveh are still there today, just on the outskirts of Mosul Iraq. Ancient Niniva is what we know as Iraq today. And they were a blood thirsty, brutal, savage people. They would do some of the most cruel things in history to those cities that they conquered. I won't go into details, but they did horrendous things. Including the children of Israel. For a Israelite to walk into the heart of Assyria and begin preaching in Jonah's mind was a death sentence after brutal torture. And on top of that, I am most certain that some of Jonah's family and friends were mutilated at the hand of the Ninevites. We don't know anything about Jonah's wife or children other than they were not mentioned. But what if, just what if they were murdered by the Ninevites. That changes the narrative of this story and would explain a lot about why Jonah didn't have compassion for these people as God did. That would change this story to be as deep and as painful as the story of Abraham.

This story is full of God's mercy, it's everywhere.

After Jonah was thrown overboard to perish in the sea, listen to what God did for him.

“17 ¶ Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish **three** days and three nights.” Jonah 1:17

God didn't let him die. In His mercy God “prepared”, this word in Hebrew could also be translated as “appointed” a great fish to swallow him up so that he would survive the sea. Do you think that God has this event in mind when He created the fish in the beginning? I wouldn't be surprised. There are very few great fish that are able to swallow a human whole and be able to sustain life while living in the belly. But this lesson God is teaching Jonah is not going well. He is definitely being stubborn and prideful. Yet God continues to help him.

After three days in the belly of the great fish, look at Chapter 2 verse one:

“1 Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,”

Then... meaning after three days he finally prays. If I was just saved from drowning by being swallowed by a fish I might not have waited three days to pray. But, finally he prays, and God again delivers him and the whale vomits him onto the shore.

Chapter 3:

“1 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and **preach** unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Eight words, that was the extent of his preaching to the people of Nineveh."Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"

And then the most miraculous part of the story. Not that Jonah got swallowed by a whale or that he survived, not the parting of the red sea or the overthrowing of Jericho. This most wonderful miracle in all of the old testament. The entire city believed God, repented and turned to God. An entire city full of bloodthirsty savages, turn away from their evil ways, repent, fast and give their lives to God. "from the greatest of them even to the least of them" it says. And God did as He said He would.

"10 ¶ And God **saw** their works (or their efforts), that they **turned** from their **evil** way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it not*."

What mercy...what compassion from Him who knows all things. Just like that, He forgave them. These people, according to God, were worth saving. God extends His mercy to all of His children no matter what they have done or will do. This is one of God's greatest attributes; to extend mercy to the worst of the worst.

Psalms 145:8-9 says:

"8 The Lord *is* **gracious**, and full of **compassion**; slow to anger, and of great mercy.
9 The Lord *is* good to all: and his tender mercies *are* over all his works."

The truth of the matter is that all of us are in equal need of God's mercy... all of us. A great example of this is Paul who was also astonished at the mercy of God. He says of himself in 1 timothy 1:14-15:

"And the **grace** of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**; of whom I am chief."

Paul understood that comparing ourselves to other people didn't work. That we all need to look at God and compare ourselves to Him. And if we do we too will realize that we are as Paul says, the worst of all sinners. Compared to God we all need His grace and mercy. Which is abundant and given freely to those that turn unto Him. Paul says in the next verse, verse 16:

"16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained **mercy**, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all **longsuffering**, for a **pattern** to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

None of us deserve His mercy. Paul certainly didn't deserve it. The Ninavites didn't deserve it. You and I certainly don't deserve it. But He still gives it freely. Instantly forgiving ALL our sins once we turn to Him. How easy it is to love someone who so singularly loved us first.

Unfortunately Jonah didn't see this. He didn't think the Ninavites were worth saving. In fact he was angry about it, he goes to a hill and wishes God to take his life, he even gets angry when his shade God provided withers away. But God still won't give up on him. Chapter 4:10-11

“**10** Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:
11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.”

Most bible scholars believe that God is referring to children here in this verse. God says to Jonah in a very soft, easy to understand way; There are one hundred and twenty thousand children in Nineveh, They don't know the difference between their right and and their left. Should I not spare the children? Jonah, I know you don't like the people of Nineveh, I know you're upset that I saved them. But Jonah, do you at least have compassion on the innocent children?

That's a start. This is why my wife and I started the Live water “Elo Viz” foundation. We know that it's hard to have compassion for adults that have chosen an evil path. But that the sins of the parents may not come upon the children. We chose to forgive and to give them another chance. To help them see the hope and mercy in the eyes of their children. To give them a reason to want to change and turn towards God who stands there with open, loving arms. If the whole city of Nineveh could change in less than 40 days then anyone living on this earth today can do the same thing.

So perhaps anyone listening today could choose to be more like Nephi and Paul and less like Jonah. May we hear the voice of the Lord and turn quickly to those in need acting as He would; with mercy and compassion. I pray we will.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.