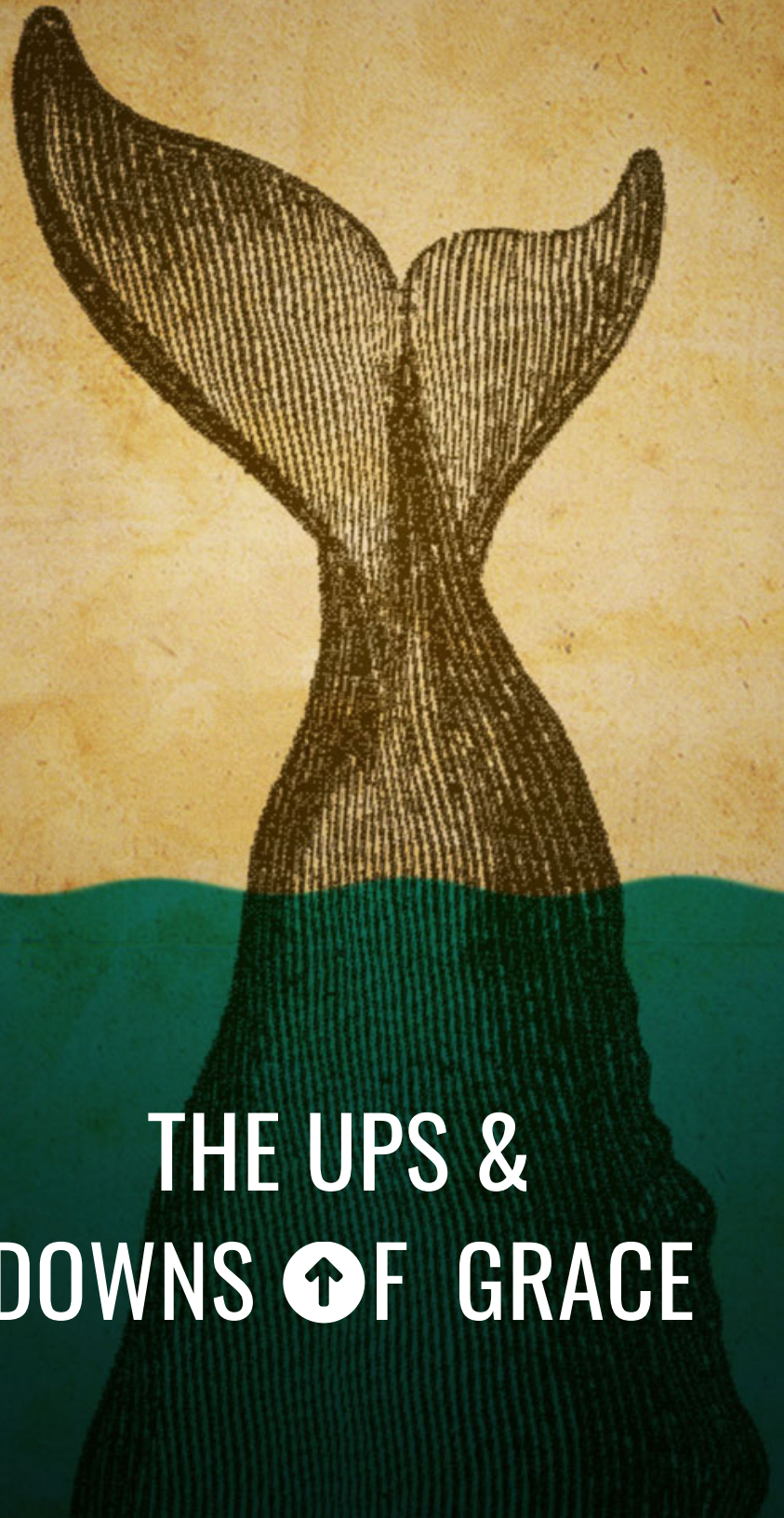




A Study Through Jonah



Jan 3 -
Feb 14

THE UPS &
DOWNS  F GRACE



THE UPS & DOWNS OF GRACE

A STUDY

Through the Book of Jonah

January 3 - February 14

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Beijing, China

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Written by TJ Johnson

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The Ups and Downs of Grace

A careful reader will note the movement in the book of Jonah. God calls Jonah to Arise and go to Nineveh, but instead Jonah fled in the opposite direction. From here we see a downward spiral as the prophet tries to outrun the grace of God.

ARISE is juxtaposed with, Jonah going DOWN to Joppa, DOWN in the boat, and sleeping DOWN in the inner part of the ship when the storm arises. But God's grace out- weathers the storm; the story doesn't end with the storm destroying Jonah. The captain goes DOWN and repeat's God's original call to Jonah, "ARISE and call out..." Jonah RISES and returns to God, "I fear the LORD..."

And yet, Jonah's story, like our story, doesn't end here, on a high note. As God hurled a storm, the mariners hurled Jonah overboard and once again Jonah is seen going DOWN to the bottom of the sea. Yet again, God's grace lifts Jonah out of his plight and has the fish vomit Jonah on dry land.

The downward trajectory of Jonah is once again reversed as God, once AGAIN, says, "ARISE." So Jonah RISES and preaches to Nineveh. They repent and God relents.

END OF STORY....And they lived happily ever after.

Not quite. Jonah, a prophet of God, is disappointed in the effectiveness of his preaching. So he leaves the city and sits UNDER a booth he made for himself. But God, ever gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness, causes a plant to grow UP OVER Jonah. Though Jonah is moving downward again, "it is better for me to die," God is still passionately pursuing this rogue prophet.

The book ends, a bit ambiguously. God gets the final word, but we do not see Jonah repent. We do not see Jonah in the upward movement of restoration. Nothing more is known about Jonah. But as the reader has noticed all the movement of God, he can't help but think...the God who pitied Nineveh and did not leave them alone, certainly continued to lift this dejected prophet out of pity and placed him in God's ever upward Grace. As we read through Jonah, may we discover the God of all grace who is constantly lifting us UP toward Himself.



The God of all Grace

Jonah 1:1-6

January 3

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The God of All Grace

The story of Jonah often gets relegated to a simple children's tale, "Jonah and the Whale," which makes for a great cartoon (Vegetables) or Sunday school lesson but offers very little to rational adults.

But Jonah is not a story about a great whale (or fish or beast of the sea). The purpose of this fish, which only gets a few verses in the entire book, is to magnify the main character. And no, the main character is not the man found inside the fish.

To be sure, the book bears Jonah's name and shares his story, but he, like the fish, is meant to shine a light on the main character. Nor is the main character the city to whom Jonah was sent to preach repentance. Like the fish, like Jonah, they too magnify the main character of the book. So, who IS the book about?

The book begins with God:

Now the word of the Lord came...

The book ends with God:

Should I (the LORD) not pity...

This story is God's story and reveals something spectacular about Him to us. In each interaction, with Jonah, with the mariners, with the Ninevehites, we find that God is "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

It is a story of grace extended TO us. It is a story of grace extended THROUGH us. And so we begin 2021 here, a year of receiving and extending grace. May 2021 be a year of imperfect, reluctant prophets carrying the gospel, at great risk to our own lives, to people who do not deserve grace any more than we deserve grace, but to people whom God delights to show that grace.

This year, my prayer is that our vision of God is expanded by experiencing His presence as we intentionally ARISE AND GO!

Proclaiming with you,

Pastor TJ



Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it...

Discussion Questions

1. What are some typical reasons believers do not share the gospel with the lost regularly?
2. What is the primary reason that believers should share the gospel zealously?
3. Why do you think the Lord's command to proclaim the gospel is easier to ignore than other commands in Scripture?
4. Prior to the call to go to Nineveh, what experience had Jonah had with the Lord that should have given him the will and confidence to go to Nineveh immediately on the Lord's command? What experiences have you had in life in which the Lord has shown you His power? How might these experiences fuel greater courage to share the gospel?
5. What is the significance of the phrase, "from the LORD'S presence"? How does this relate to evangelism?
6. What is the significance for the sailors of Jonah's sleeping – Jonah's indifference – during the storm? What might be the significance of a casual attitude toward telling a non-Christian relative, neighbor, co-worker, etc, about the love of God in Christ?



Discussion Questions

7. What is one immediate decision you can make that will help you be better prepared to share the gospel?
8. Who can you share the gospel with this week and how will you go about doing so?

Going Deeper

9. How can one be certain of the historicity of Jonah?
10. What is the cultural & historical background from which Jonah receives His call to go?
11. Read through the first chapter and note the direction being used (up and down). What is the narrator trying to tell us about God's command and Jonah's response?
12. Why do you suppose Jonah decided to go to Tarshish?
13. Read through the first chapter and note the word, "hurl." Discuss the sovereign pursuit of God and the free will of man who fights against God's pursuit.
14. God tells Jonah to "call out against it (the evil done in Nineveh)". What do you think **MUST** be present in the message of the gospel?

Action Point

Consider starting an Alpha, volunteering for an Alpha, or praying for the Alpha groups that will be forming soon.



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



Calming the Storm

Jonah 1:7-17

January 9

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Calming the Storm

Remember the pattern of Jonah:

- Go
- Preach
- Pray
- Pity

The first obstacle to sharing our faith is God breaking through our rebellious, disobedient hearts to give us a passion for sharing His glory. This past week we heard God's heart for the nations. In hearing God call Jonah to, "Arise and go," we have heard Him call each of us to go as well. This is His attempt to break us for His glory, that His call might echo daily in our hearts and that His message might burn within us so that we become weary of holding it.

The second obstacle to sharing our faith is our own ignorance as to what it means to go and preach the gospel. This is why the book of Jonah is so helpful for us. He has broken the first barrier to evangelism (go), now he will break the second barrier (preach). As we look at Jonah preaching (reluctantly) the gospel we will discover the basics of evangelism in hopes that EACH of us is equipped AS we go. May each of us have a passion to go, fully equipped for the task ahead.

Proclaiming with you,

Pastor TJ



"Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you"

Review

Discuss with the group ways in which you shared the gospel this past week.

If you have still found it difficult to share the gospel try the following:

A. Make a list of all of the unbelievers you regularly interact with, but with whom you have never had any gospel conversation.

B. Make a list of all of the unbelievers with whom you have had some level of gospel conversation.

C. Make a list of all of the unbelievers with whom you have had extensive gospel conversation.

Be intentional about moving people from list A to list B and from list B to list C. Pray and ask God for opportunities this week, then be bold and seize those opportunities.



Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways people try to work their way toward God and why is each ineffective?
2. What are some other gods that your friends worship? As a group, discuss what you know about that religion and effective ways to share the gospel with that religious group?
3. What are some other patterns of substitution in the Bible? How is Jesus the greater fulfillment of these patterns?
4. How does the eminent threat of danger move the sailors toward God? What dangers do we face today that are meant to move us toward God?
5. What is the “fear of the Lord,” how does that help lead to salvation, and how do we help others come to have this fear?
6. What are some ways we can help people understand that sin must be punished?



Discussion Questions

7. Look at the sailors' prayer and compare it to other Biblical prayers for forgiveness. How does this help inform us on how to preach repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus?
8. What are the evidences of the sailors' salvation? What are the evidences of a person's salvation today?
9. Take time to practice gospel bridging and giving a simple presentation of the gospel.

Going Deeper

10. How do we see the sovereignty of God at work in this section and how does this encourage us in evangelism?
11. Discuss the consequences of sin and its impact on those around you.
12. Compare Jonah 1:17 to Matthew 12:39-41 and Luke 11:29-32. What exactly is the sign of Jonah and what implications does it have for us today?
13. What repeated words or phrases do you see in this section? What does the author repeat these words or phrases?



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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



Praying through the Darkness

Jonah 2:1-10

January 16

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Praying Through the Darkness

Among the book of the twelve (Minor Prophets), Jonah stands out as the prophet's prayer book. The secular sailors pray to Yahweh. The prodigal prophet prays to Yahweh. The nefarious Ninevites pray to Yahweh. What is even more astounding than their prayer is that each group's prayer is heard and ANSWERED by God.

None of them deserve it. Nevertheless, God gives it joyfully. It seems to me that Chapter two is not so much a word-for-word recording of Jonah's prayer in the great fish, but rather a later poetical reflection on a God who delights to show mercy to anyone who calls upon His name. In so doing, it invites us to join the nations in prayer to the God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

It also serves as a rebuke to Israel. While the nations pray, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) neglects prayer. While the nations forsake their idols, Israel has forsaken steadfast love and obstinately clung to their idols.

SPOILER ALERT

The book ends rather strangely, with Jonah's refusal to pray! Jonah is a microcosm of Israel, a people chosen by God who has neglected the great gift of prayer. It serves as a warning to the church today. Jesus once called the Temple a "house of prayer." But how often have we, like Israel, neglected the importance of prayer in our lives, in our services?

The book of Jonah is God's plea to us: be a praying church!

Praying with you,

Pastor TJ



*"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;*

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example of when you turned to prayer as a last resort. Why do we so often neglect to pray immediately?
2. What does your daily prayer life look like?
3. How does God's character (Jonah 4:2) encourage us to pray?
4. Specifically, what character of God has most informed your prayer life and why?
5. Share with the group a time God miraculously and sovereignly answered your prayer.
6. What scripture has most shaped your prayer life?
7. In what ways does prayer change us and in what ways does prayer change our circumstances?
8. Has God's mercy in answered prayer toward you ever given you greater mercy toward others?
9. How was Jonah's prayer answered in stages? Share a time when one of your prayers was answered immediately and also when one was answered in stages.



Going Deeper

10. God appointed a fish for Jonah BEFORE Jonah prayed for deliverance. How do we reconcile God's sovereignty and human responsibility to pray?
11. Discuss the time shifts/non-chronological order of Jonah's prayer. What does it teach us about persistence in prayer?
12. Read Jonah 2:3. Why do you suppose Jonah's prayer speaks of God's waves and billows and of God casting Jonah into the sea?
13. How many Psalms are referenced in Jonah's prayer? Why do you think his prayer is filled with scripture?
14. Do our prayers today reflect the common prayer themes in the Bible?
15. Jonah's prayer lacks official repentance language. Do you think Jonah truly repented? Explain.
16. How does Jonah 4 warn us against assuming our present prayer life will be our future prayer life?



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