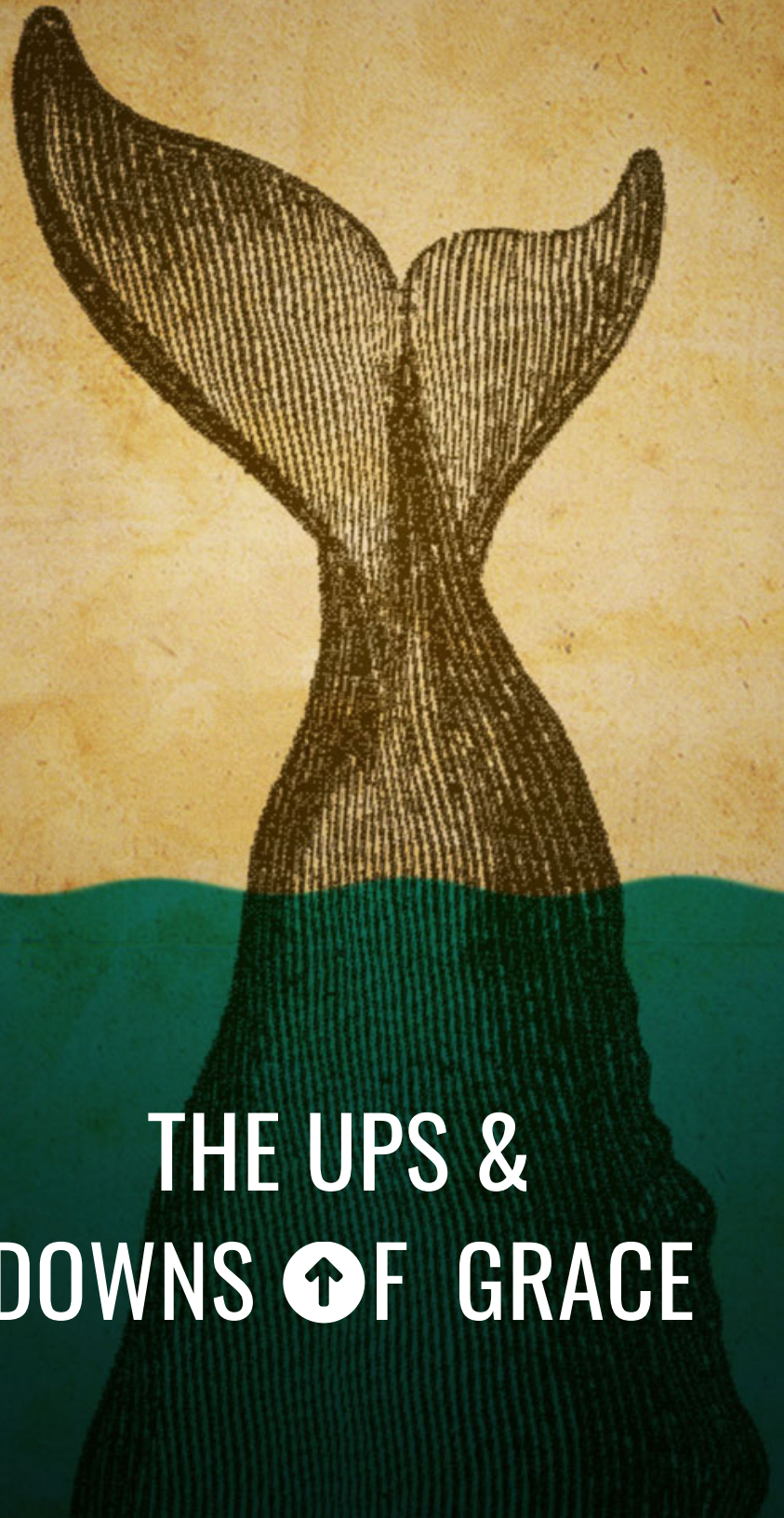




A Study Through Jonah



Jan 3 -
Feb 14

THE UPS & DOWNS OF GRACE



THE UPS & DOWNS OF GRACE

A STUDY

Through the Book of Jonah

January 3 - February 14

© 2020 City Church

Beijing, China

All rights reserved.

Written by TJ Johnson

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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

THE UPS & DOWNS F GRACE

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 (Vegetales) 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

THE UPS &
DOWNS  F GRACE

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?



Prayer & Praise

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

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



Praying through the Darkness

Jonah 2:1-10

January 16

THE UPS &
DOWNS  F GRACE

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?



Prayer & Praise

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

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



Preaching Justice

Jonah 3:1-4

January 23

THE UPS & DOWNS F GRACE

Preaching Justice in an Unjust World

The story of Jonah is the story of a just God calling Jonah to preach justice to unjust Nineveh. Assyria had killed, destroyed, burned, oppressed, enslaved, terrorized, and mistreated entire groups of people who cried out to God for justice. So God sends Jonah. One man with one message...call out against their evil.

God's concern for the injustices of Jonah's day is just as strong as the injustices of our day. God's call to Jonah to preach justice is just as relevant to us today. If you follow history you will soon discover that there has never been a shortage of injustice in this world. Until Christ returns, evil is here to stay. And where evil exists, injustice abounds. While this is bad news, the good news is that as a preacher of injustice, you will NEVER be out of a job! Everywhere we look there are injustices that demand our voice just as Nineveh's injustice demanded Jonah's voice.

William Wilberforce, who fought tirelessly to end the slave trade, once said, "To live our lives and miss that great purpose we were designed to accomplish is truly a sin. It is inconceivable that we could be bored in a world with so much wrong to tackle, so much ignorance to reach and so much misery we could alleviate." May each of us open our eyes to the wrong, ignorance, and misery, that we might, through the preaching of the gospel, bring alleviation to a world in need.

Standing with you against injustice,

Pastor TJ



Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time

Discussion Questions

1. What injustices has God highlighted in the Bible?
2. What injustices do you see in your immediate world?
3. What are some Biblical and unbiblical ways to speak out against those injustices?
4. Share with the group some people you personally know who have been oppressed. How can we pray for and support them?
5. Proverbs 31:8-9 speaks of people using their power to fight injustice. What power do you have that can be used to fight injustice?
6. How has Jesus demonstrated to us the way justice is to be preached in an unjust world?
7. Jesus reminds us to pray for our enemies, including oppressors. What “oppressors” can we begin to pity and pray for?



Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time

Discussion Questions

8. What influence do large cities have on culture in regards to justice and how can we citizens of the city use this to our advantage?
9. Why is the gospel the most powerful way to fight injustice?
10. What is the importance of preaching, “the message that I tell you”? In what ways might we mix our message with God’s message?
11. What are some practical ways we can extend grace to those whom we preach justice to?
12. In what ways has God “overthrown” your heart toward your own evil injustices?
13. What’s one thing your group could do this week to fight an injustice in Beijing?



Prayer & Praise

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

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



Repent and Believe

Jonah 3:5-10

January 30

THE UPS & DOWNS F GRACE

Repent and Believe

Does the fact that God is abounding in steadfast love guarantee forgiveness? Or does His slow to anger nature ensure we will not experience His wrath against our sin? In short, no! While we are saved BY grace alone, it is THROUGH faith alone. If we do not respond to God's steadfast love through faith, then we are still in our sins and away from His presence.

Take Romans 2, for example:

Do you presume on the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Did you catch that? God's kindness doesn't automatically lead to a right relationship with God; it is meant to lead us to faith and REPENTANCE (turning to God and away from sin), which leads to reconciliation with God.

This action is exactly what we find in the book of Jonah. In chapter one, God's kindness is extended to the Mariners, and they respond in faith with repentance.

In chapter two, God's kindness is extended to Jonah, and he responds in faith with repentance. In chapter three, God's kindness is extended to the people of Nineveh, and they too respond in faith with repentance.

For all the wrong that Nineveh is known for, one thing they did correctly was respond to God's warning against their evil. When we read chapter three, we see that they display all the marks of true conversion. Nineveh believes God. Nineveh feels remorse for their sin. Nineveh turns to God and away from their evil. And as a result, Nineveh is forgiven. God's great kindness, extended to each of us, is meant to lead us to the same action. Believe, be broken, turn from sin, and turn to God.

Repenting in faith with you,

Pastor TJ



And the people of Nineveh believed God

Discussion Questions

1. What sign was given to the Ninevites that enabled them to believe God and how does that compare to the sign given to us today?
2. What does it mean to “believe?”
3. Why should we feel sorrow for committing sin?
4. How does Nineveh’s fast signify their sorrow over sin?
5. How can we as Christians show sorrow for sin today?
6. Why is it important that we turn from our sin and not simply verbally or physically show sorrow for sin?
7. How would you define Biblical repentance?
8. How can we as Christians live a lifestyle of repentance?
9. How is God able to forgive us (remove guilt and punishment) if we are guilty?
10. What are some good next steps for those who repent and believe the gospel?



And the people of Nineveh believed God

Going Deeper

11. Discuss the difference between faith and works based salvation.
12. Do you believe Nineveh truly repented? Explain.
13. Discuss God's role and Nineveh's role in the salvation of Nineveh.
14. How do we reconcile God's aseity with His action of relenting in Jonah 3:10?
15. Have you ever experienced an event similar to Jonah 3:5-10?
16. Have you truly repented and believed the gospel? If so, share with the group. If not, what is keeping you from making such a decision?



Prayer & Praise

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

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



An Angry Prophet

Jonah 4:1-4

February 6

THE UPS &
DOWNS  GRACE

Repent and Believe

At a very early age my sons, without being taught, understood that every story follows the same pattern: An introduction of characters, a conflict, a series crisis leading to a climax (problem solved) which in turn leads to a conclusion (they lived happily ever after).

Once understanding this story line, my sons were usually content to watch a movie only until the climax. After the main tension of the movie had been resolved they would typically start talking or move on to some other activity, as if the movie was finished. In their minds, once the climax arrives the problem has been solved and the movie is over! Who cares about the ending part, we all know they lived happily ever after.

But the book of Jonah shows us why conclusions are so important. Life doesn't always have the happily ever after conclusion we so often find in the stories we love today. If you, like so many before you, begin to tune out of the story of Jonah at the end of chapter three then you will miss out on some major truths God is trying to teach us.

One such truth is this: Life doesn't always go the way we envision it. For Jonah, his experience at Nineveh is as shocking as the ending of the book that bears his name. He didn't want to go to Nineveh. He didn't want Nineveh to repent. He didn't want God to forgive Nineveh. But it happened nevertheless. And for Jonah this seems a great evil in his sight. He can't reconcile God's mercy toward a people whose evil demand justice. So, Jonah does what so many of us do when the world doesn't go our way. Jonah becomes angry. As a reader it's easy for us to judge Jonah's anger, but if we step back we will find that we too have acted like Jonah in our anger. As we come to Jonah 4:1-4, God is teaching us how to deal with our anger when the world seems to be against us.

Repenting of anger with you,
Pastor TJ



Do you do well to be angry?

Discussion Questions

1. What are the various disappointments in Jonah's life that leads to anger? In what ways can you empathize with Jonah?
2. What are some common root causes of anger? How does each of these root causes connect to God's right to sovereignly rule the world and our resistance toward that?
3. How does the book of Jonah display God's sovereignty over the world?
4. How does Job 40-42 help us understand God's right to rule the world and our need to submit to his rule even when we don't understand it?
5. What are some ways in which people justify their anger?
6. What are the main differences between God's anger and our anger?
7. Have you ever experienced godly anger and acted on that anger in godly ways?
8. What were the three questions given in the sermon for processing if our anger is godly or ungodly? Can you think of other helpful questions?



Do you do well to be angry?

Discussion Questions

9. Can you give examples when you were slow to anger and when you were quick to anger?
10. In what ways has your anger been hypocritical?
11. How have you seen the destructive nature of anger in your own life and the lives of others?
12. How can we redirect our anger so that it helps sanctify others rather than condemn them?
13. In what ways does Jonah deal/express his anger? What are some worldly/secular ways in which people try to release their anger? Are any of these ways ultimately helpful?
14. What are the four steps of a Psalm of Lament?
15. Which step do you find most difficult?
16. Have you ever prayed through your own Psalm of Lament? If so, share.



Prayer & Praise

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

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

