Text: Jonah 1:4-17
Title: “Mid-Course Corrections”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Jonah 1:4. The book of Jonah is one of the most unique books in the Bible. It’s the story of a prophet who is given a commission by God to go to the great city of Nineveh and warn them that if they didn’t repent and turn to God, they would be annihilated. But Jonah disobeys God. He gets on a ship headed in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh. And, as we will see today, God brews up a big storm. Jonah is tossed overboard, and swallowed by a big fish. He survives in the belly of the fish for three days when he is spit up on the shore and finally gets about the mission that God gave him to do.

As I mentioned last week, we believe that this account is a historical account, for several reasons. But there are liberal scholars who don’t believe it actually happened.

ILLUSTRATION – That reminds me of the story of a pastor who noticed a little girl standing outside her SS class waiting for her parents to come and pick her up for "big church." The pastor noticed that she clutched a big storybook under her arm with the title "Jonah and the Whale." He decided to have a little fun, he knelt beside the girl and asked, "What's that you have in your hand?" "This is my storybook about Jonah and the whale," she answered. "Tell me something," he continued, "do you believe that story about Jonah and the whale, that a man can be swallowed up by a big whale, stay inside him all that time, and come out okay?" The girl said, "Why, of course I believe it! We talked about it in Sunday school today." Then the pastor asked, "Can you prove to me this story is true?" She thought for a moment and said, "Well, when I get to heaven, I'll ask Jonah." The pastor responded, "What if Jonah's not in heaven?" The girl put her hands on her hips and sternly declared, "Then YOU can ask him!"

Well there are some powerful truths here in this book about getting “on mission with God.” Like Jonah, we struggle with an “on mission” mindset.

Well we saw last week that God has a quest to reach the nations. He calls Jonah to go to the great and wicked city of Nineveh to preach to them. But Jonah immediately rebells. He goes down to the port, purchases a ticket on ship that is headed in the exact opposite direction. He runs from the Lord. But God doesn’t give up on Nineveh or on Jonah.

In God’s dealings with Jonah I see some powerful parallels for how God deals with us to correct our lives to get on mission with Him. God wants His people on mission with Himself. Sometimes that requires a mid-course correction for us, as it did for Jonah.

1. GOD ORCHESTRATES CIRCUMSTANCES TO GET OUR ATTENTION (v.4).

Now Jonah thinks that he can succeed in running from God, but God is going to alter Jonah’s travel itinerary.
Jonah 1:4 (NIV) - Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

When it says that “the Lord sent a great wind on the sea…” Literally he “hurled” or “threw down” a wind that creates a storm on the sea. God is in control of these circumstances; He wants Jonah’s attention.

You know, sometimes God lets us persist in our disobedience for a while before He intervenes. Not so with Jonah; God acts swiftly. What is happening here is that God is disciplining Jonah.

It’s important that you and I understand that God is not only a quest to reach the nations … He is on a quest to teach His people … to shape us into the people He desires us to be. That’s the purpose of discipline and correction. Hold your place in Jonah and turn with me to Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:5 (NIV) - And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

Hebrews 12:6 (NIV) - because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Hebrews 12:10 (NIV) - Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

Hebrews 12:11 (NIV) - No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Let me just say that not all storms that come into our lives are God’s correcting us for disobedience. It may be that God is simply ready to take us to the next level of relationship with Him, and to do that He must take us through a storm.

Well it is clear that God is disciplining Jonah to correct Him; not for immorality or idolatry, but for insubordination … for refusing to fulfill God’s mission for his life. Do we understand that God is not just about making us “good” people, but a people on mission with Him? Don’t just settle for being good.

Note: You never know how God will orchestrate circumstances to get you back on track … He may use your finances, your job, your relationships, your health. God loves you so much and wants you to be in the center of His will. He will use all kinds of instruments to accomplish that.

2. GOD CONFRONTS OUR COMPLACINGNY (vv.5-6).

Now this is a fierce storm and the sailors are terrified.
Jonah 1:5a (NIV) - All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

The sailors send up SOS prayers … “each cried out to his own god.” But the false gods cannot save them, so they resort to their nautical experience. They must lighten the ship by throwing the cargo overboard. But where is Jonah while all this is going on?

Jonah 1:5b (NIV) - But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

Jonah is below the deck asleep. Amazing. Jonah is so complacent that the raging storm cannot awaken or shake him. Up on the deck are sailors about to perish in a storm, and Jonah is asleep.

What lesson to God’s people then and now to awaken from our complacency as crying people perish all around us.

ILLUSTRATION - When I talk about missional living, I’m talking about the way the first century Christians lived. Historians tell us that when the plague struck their city, Rome, everyone, including the Roman physicians, fled the city, like Jonah fled from the mission God gave him to go to Nineveh. But historians tell us that these first-century passionate followers of Jesus ran to the need, not away from it. They believed something that changed the way they lived … they believed the truth … the truth that plague victims were humans created in the image of God … the truth that Jesus had called them to give a cup of cold water to these kinds of people … that death held no fear for them because Christ had overcome death by His resurrection. They believed something that caused them to do something … on mission with God.

Well, maybe the captain had gone down to fetch some of the cargo to throw overboard when he discovers Jonah asleep.

Jonah 1:6 (NIV) - The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”

Ironically a pagan ship’s captain had to call a man of God to prayer. “Get up and call on your god, man.” The idea was for all the crew and passengers to call on their various gods … you know, tap every resource. This way which ever god was offended would be placated and thus spare the ship.

Well, if the captain only knew how those words must have stabbed Jonah in the heart. Jonah was spiritually so far from God, the last thing he was inclined or wanted to do was to call out to God.

Sadly there is no evidence that Jonah prays here. God’s discipline has to get more severe before Jonah will pray.

By the way, the words “get up and call…” are the very same words in the Hebrew that God used when He gave Jonah his assignment in the first place (1:2). Jonah must have thought he was having a nightmare. Do you think God is trying to get Jonah’s attention?
So God orchestrates circumstances and confronts our complacency. The next thing I want you to see is:

3. THERE ARE DEFINITE CONSEQUENCES TO OUR DISOBEDIENCE (vv.7-13).

Jonah’s disobedience brings severe consequences…
- To himself (we’ll see that in a moment)
- To the sailors he is travelling with (the storm)
- To the people of Nineveh who need to hear the message that Jonah is supposed to deliver

Our disobedience impacts the lives of people around us.

The crew has done everything in their power, but the storm is still raging. They are sure that someone on the ship has angered one of the gods and has become a magnet attracting the wrath of God.

Jonah 1:7 (NIV) - Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Well as soon as the sailors find the culprit they want to know the details. So they bombard Jonah with questions.

Jonah 1:8 (NIV) - So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

All these questions will help them understand what has happened to them.

ILLUSTRATION – I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been on an airplane going on a mission trip, or in another country, and someone asks me, “What are you doing? Why are you here?” And it’s always a great opportunity to say, “I’m from the US, and I’ve come here to tell you about the love of Jesus Christ.”

But Jonah cannot give that answer. He has to confess that he is running from God. But first he makes a rather strange confession:

Jonah 1:9 (NIV) - He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

Doesn’t Jonah see the irony? The Lord is the God of heaven (the ultimate source of power and authority), who made the sea and the land. He says he worships the Lord, but he doesn’t, otherwise he would not be running away from God. The word “worship” literally means “fear.” Jonah doesn’t really worship God in this sense, or he would be disobeying Him.

Jonah 1:10 (NIV) - This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)
Again, these pagan sailors had a greater sense of the sovereignty of God than Jonah did. Their reaction tells us that they understood the gravity of the situation: “What have you done … bringing this peril upon all of us?”

**Jonah 1:11 (NIV)** - The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

They ask, “Okay, this God is your God. What should be done to placate Him?”

**Jonah 1:12 (NIV)** - “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Jonah now admits that it is futile to run from God. He knows full well that he is the cause of all the problems on the ship. He realizes his guilt before God and he is willing to take his punishment.

  Note: Was this a way for Jonah to finally be rid of God’s demand upon his life? If so, he was saying, “I’d rather die than obey God and love the Ninevites.”

As I read these verses it occurred to me that a child of God who isn’t on mission with Him is dead weight!

**Jonah 1:13a (NIV)** - Instead, the men did their best to row back to land.

The sailors don’t want to make a mistake and have the blood of innocent man on their hands. They had more concern for Jonah than Jonah had for them. Ironic … pagans acting more like believers than believers.

**Jonah 1:13b (NIV)** - But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

There’s something else we need to see. God orchestrates the circumstances, confronts our complacency, shows us the consequences of our disobedience. But …

4. **THE ULTIMATE CONCLUSION IS THE GLORY OF GOD (vv.14-17)**

**Jonah 1:14 (NIV)** - Then they cried to the LORD, “O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.”

**Jonah 1:15 (NIV)** - Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

Now Jonah is in the hands of God; and that was God’s design from the beginning when He threw down the wind that caused the storm (1:4). God will deal with His servant Jonah, and nothing can stop it.
Jonah 1:16 (NIV) - At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

This is the purpose of God in all circumstances … to cause people to give glory to Him. Even in the severe discipline of one of His children, God elicits glory from all who watch His severe hand at work.

God’s great power and justice have been on display, and the purpose for all of that is for His name and fame to be exalted. He has everything in His hands … the sea, the sailors and the prophet.

Note: God uses the same storm for different purposes for different people. In this storm God was drawing some pagan sailors to better understand His power and glory. And in the same storm God is correcting the course of His servant Jonah. This is why the Bible tells us to give thanks in all circumstances. God is working through them all in more ways than you or I could ever imagine.

Jonah 1:17 (NIV) - But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

This is God’s grace in action. Jonah’s life is saved only by a gracious act of God. God doesn’t abandon His servant to death. The Lord mounts a special rescue operation … a huge fish which becomes a submarine to pick up Jonah and ultimately to deposit him back on the shore so they he would have another shot at obedience.

Jonah is in the belly of the fish for three days and nights. Why? Perhaps it was to give Jonah time to come to his senses, spiritually speaking. Ultimately that is what happens to Jonah.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – Story of John Hyde going to India