

The One That Almost Got Away

Part 1 – Man Overboard

Intro

The One That Got Away stories – we all have them. For some, it's fish and game stories. For others, it's guy and girl stories.

Jonah's Story

We don't fully know who wrote the book of Jonah; however, all indications point to the source of the writing to be Jonan recounting and retelling his own story once he returned from Nineveh.

We all have stories we tell. Some are the stories of *the one that got away*. Others are ones that *almost got away*. Most of us can look back over the course of our lives and see the ones that got away from us – moments and seasons when we look back with a sense of missed opportunity or even regret. We wish we could go back and have a do-over or mulligan – one more shot at something we let slip away from us. And then there are those moments that almost slipped right through our hands, but somehow [often at the last minute or in ways we cannot fully understand] we held on or made the right decision – that oftentimes changed or shaped someone's future, possibly our own.

Jonah's story is the latter – the one that *almost* got away. The one that didn't just almost get away, but the one he actually tried to run away from.

Jonah 1:1-2

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

Jonah receives a call directly *from God*. The Lord wants him to go to a place that is [according to 3:3] *an exceedingly great city*. God had great plans for the people there. At first glance this is a great moment for Jonah. God is sending him to the largest city in the world to share the gospel. However, it's also a very scary moment. This city has, historically, been one of the most corrupt cities in the world. Filled with physical and structural beauty – the South West Palace was known as *a palace without a rival*. But for all of its earthly splendor, the city and her people were equally wicked and repulsive.

1:3

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah wanted nothing to do with what God was asking of him. He had no desire [whatsoever] to go where God was leading him to go. The Ninevites were so *evil* [mentioned 9 times] that God's wrath and judgement was coming to meet their wickedness. Basically, they had it coming. And Jonah wanted no part, clearly evidenced by the fact that 3 separate times this verse mentions that Jonah fled *to Tarshish* [literally the opposite direction of Nineveh] and 2 times it references that Jonah didn't just run the other direction but that he was running *from the presence of the Lord*.

And he *almost* got away [with it].

1:4-5 [paraphrase]

Then God hurled a great wind into the sea, so powerful that it was threatening to break the ship in half. Everyone on board were afraid and began praying to their own gods. They tossed all of the cargo they didn't need overboard, attempting to save the ship from sinking under the weight of water filling the deck. Nothing seemed to work.

1:5b-6

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 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."

Who sleeps during the wildest storm of your life? Someone who is running from the call of God on their life. We all do it. We know what God desires for us and we go about our own business in our own direction [typically away from God and the people of God] and act like everything is fine. Deep down we know, we just don't want to admit it – so we pretend that life is perfect, even in the midst of a storm. Everyone around us can see the danger and chaos, but we rarely admit it to ourselves.

Instead we convince ourselves that we are busy doing *good* things. Surely God would understand.

Jonah – the Prophet

Jonah was a prophet, which meant he was a follower of God and a speaker on behalf of God. He was doing *good* things already for God. But somewhere along the way he was so focused with the good things he was doing that He didn't have time for the things God was speaking to Him.

Honestly, that's where a lot of us find ourselves. We know the things we should be about, and we really do try to be about doing good things. But somehow [like Jonah] we feel like we know the playbook, the deal, and we start writing out our own stories instead of listening to God for what He wants to write – where He wants us to go, what He wants us to be about.

And this is the most difficult thing for us to do – differentiate between what is *good* and what is *from God*. Because a lot time those things are not mutually exclusive. But just because everything *from God* is *good*, it doesn't mean that everything that seems *good* is directly *from God*.

In Jonah's mind, he didn't want to go to the people of Nineveh. They didn't deserve it. He could find better use of his time. Going to Nineveh was not a *good* use of his time – even though it was *from God* for him to go. *But God, I have better things to do. I am too busy doing these things over here to listen to you.*

Jonah could not see how going to those people could be *from God*, so he decided to keep doing his own thing. He was too busy doing other *good* things.

Biggest Marriage Regret

Visit to infertility doctor. We were young, and I was stupid. We had been married for about 4 or 5 years and were ready to start working on a family together. Several of our friends were having kids and we felt like it was time for us to begin as well. Unfortunately, things did not go as well as we had hoped. Over the course of several months we went through disappointment and heartache. We were trying everything we believed was morally and ethically available to help, but nothing seemed to be working.

We met with a fertility doctor and began a process he recommended to help our chances of getting pregnant. The chance was extremely, the plan was daunting, and my wife was scared and vulnerable. On the biggest day, I simply wasn't there. I had an opportunity to be there for my wife, and I wasn't. I was busy doing other things. In this moment, you're thinking – *how dare you, how could you send your wife to the doctor and leave her all alone on a day like this?!?*

Before all of the ladies mob me and beat me up, let me explain. During this time, I was currently full-time into getting my master's degree in theology during the day and working at UPS during the middle of the night – to provide insurance and income. My plate could not have been more full. I was living off of 4-5 hours of sleep each night but was busy doing the right things – learning to preach and providing for my family. I was busy doing *good* things.

That one got away from me. Over the past 20 years I have wished several times I could have gone and made a different decision – I wish I would have followed God instead of being busy writing my own story, doing things I thought were good things.

I have a feeling that a lot of us are working our way toward our biggest regret – focused on *doing good things* for our family and in the world, but too busy to *hear from God* for the things and people He is leading us to.

I don't want you to wake up 20 years from now with the feeling of *that's the one that got away*.

1:7-8 [paraphrase]

The men were frantically trying to discern exactly why this storm had come upon them, when they finally decided it had to be on account of Jonah. They questioned him about where he had come from, his country, his occupation, his people.

1:9-10

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." 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.

Did you catch what just happened? These unbelieving sailors, who did not follow God, have now for a second time believed [practically] in the power of God more than Jonah, who claimed to be a believer and follower.

So the men asked what they should do to make the chaos stop.

1:12

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.”

Jonah’s situation brings new meaning to the expression *man overboard* – which is yelled when a person or crew member goes from the boat to the water. In Jonah’s case, he [although not by his first choice] allowed the men to toss him overboard. He realized that his selfishness [his desire to write his own story] and unwillingness to listen to God was not only leading to destruction in his life, but in the lives of those around him as well.

He was so desperately attempting to hold onto and hang onto the *good things* he wanted to do, that it took something as drastic as becoming the *man overboard* for him actually hear *from God*.

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.”

Mark 8:34-35

God will do [and use] whatever it takes to align our hearts with His. Even if it means *Man Overboard!*

Self-Denial = Giving up one’s self-centered, self-determined [planned] way of life.

Cross-Carrying = Taking hold of whatever, wherever, and whomever God is calling you to.

Re-focus & Re-center

We can get so busy writing and telling our own stories [business, school, family] that we forgot to listen for and tell the story that God is writing in us.

For a lot of us, we need a re-centering moment. And I’m not eluding to an odd, mystical session of meditation and mindfulness. We need a moment to allow God to search our hearts, remind us of our true purpose [no matter what our circumstance or career path], and refocus our eyes on God’s call and plan for our life.