

## Jonah 1:1-6 – A Prophet on the Run – Lesson Summary

I've always loved the beginning words of the book of Jonah. We are immediately introduced to a personal God who reaches down to His people. The simple fact that God speaks to Jonah directly should humble us. The following call to take part in God's story should excite us. And, a command to rise and go should direct us to do likewise. But notice, God's words "should" do all of these things, yet so often, we don't allow them to. Jonah appears to struggle in the same way because we are about to see Jonah flee in self-righteousness, rebellion, and redirection. Jonah responds as a prophet on the run.

In the first six verses of Jonah we see a clear call on Jonah's life, his counteraction, and the consequences as a result. However, if we are not careful, we will fail to see the clear connection to our lives today as well. Jonah's heart will be exposed throughout the entire book but ours should be too. The call on Jonah's life is clear. He is to go to Nineveh and speak out against their sin. Instead, Jonah makes the decision to arise and flee in the complete opposite direction. Tim Keller says it like this. "Instead of going east, Jonah goes west. Instead of going by land, he goes by sea. And, instead of going to a great city, Jonah goes to the ends of the earth." Interestingly enough, every step of his flight from God takes him downward in elevation. He goes down to Joppa, goes down into the boat, and lays down to sleep. Even his finances diminish as he pays the fare to board the boat! Isn't this what sin does? It takes us downward, away from the presence of the Lord. But as hard as he's tried to flee from God, the Lord continues to pursue him.

At first sight, God's hurling a storm at Jonah in verse 4 could lead us to believe that God is responding in anger and rage. After all, if Jonah refuses to enter the violence of Nineveh with the grace of God, then God will direct the violence of nature upon Jonah in judgment. This seems perfectly logically in our "you get what you deserve" culture. However, consider the nature of God, abounding in mercy and steadfast love. Is it possible that the storm is an act of both judgment and mercy? After all, the ship never does break up. Jonah doesn't die. And we'll actually see God speak to him again. That's not to say that Jonah's sin didn't have consequences. His actions put others at risk. His disobedience led to his indifference toward others, his own life, and his relationship with God. But in the midst of the storm, God uses a pagan sailor to begin to expose the wickedness of Jonah's heart. Jonah is again called to rise and cry out to God. However, this command does not come from God, but instead, a pagan sailor. God begins to use the very type of person Jonah is fleeing from in order to bring him back.

After just 6 verses it would be easy to summarize our study with the simple words, "Don't be like Jonah!" Sadly, this would be grossly missing the point. While we should not behave as Jonah does, we have the power to do so only because Jesus pursued us like God pursued Jonah. The battle cry throughout our study should instead be, "Be like Christ!" Despite our sin and rebellion, our propensity to run, and our desire to flee from the presence of the Lord, God in His abundant grace pursues us to death on a cross that we might be able to respond to His call to "arise and go" on His behalf.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) What was Jonah's response to God's call to "arise and go" to Nineveh? What does this response reveal about Jonah's heart?
- 2) Jonah's response reveals that he is not ok with God's call on his life at that time. Have there ever been times in your life in which you are not satisfied with the situation or circumstance that God has you in? How have you responded?
- 3) When Christ called Jonah to go to Nineveh he was providing an opportunity for Jonah to participate in displaying the grace and mercy of God. Jonah refuses to show this grace and mercy. How have you struggled to show mercy to those who are hard to love? How is God calling you to grow in mercy for others?