

## **Jonah and the God Who Pursues**

### **Jonah 1:1-17**

Jonah is best known for the whale. But the fish hardly gets a mention. The real hero is the God of grace. Today we will just set the scene for the book.

Jonah's name means 'dove'. But he was a hawk, a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. At the same time as other prophets called Israel to repentance, Jonah preached a message of military expansion, to secure Israel's borders (2 Kings 14:23-26). To a faithful Jew, he would have been viewed as somewhat suspect, a nationalistic hawk.

#### **Running From God**

Nineveh was the capital of an evil empire. When God calls Jonah to go there, he refuses. Instead he tries to go to Tarshish – as far away as he can get. He had been a prophet – but past obedience or fruitfulness is no substitute for present day obedience.

Jonah knows that God is everywhere, so why does he run? He is trying to flee from God's 'felt presence.' He wants to flee from his relationship with God. When things are tough in our lives, the temptation is there to shut down our relationship with God. But thankfully, whilst we may turn our back on God, God does not turn His back on us. Instead He pursues us as He pursued Jonah.

But why does Jonah run in the first place?

#### **Running from Grace**

As chapter 4 will tell us, Jonah is not afraid of failure – but of success. If the Ninevites do repent, what will that do for his reputation back home? What others think of him means more to him than God. And Jonah wants his enemy to be judged and destroyed, not shown grace. His identity was tied up with his nationalism. These were the idols in his life.

Jonah's idols may not be yours. But is there anything in your life, that if taken away, or threatened, will cause your relationship with God to be undermined, that would result in your heart growing cold towards God, or you turning your back on God?

So Jonah runs because he wants judgment, not grace. What he discovers is that same grace pursues him.

#### **One Greater than Jonah**

When Jesus was in dispute with the religious leaders of His day, He said, 'something greater than Jonah is here' (Matt 12:41).

Jonah refused the call to go to his enemies, but Jesus came willingly. Jonah wanted nothing to do with a message of grace, but Jesus is the very embodiment of grace. He didn't just preach grace – he lived and died it that we might receive it. Jonah couldn't face the thought of losing his reputation. Jesus made himself of no reputation, dying the death we deserve on the cross.

So, as Jonah heads out of here, thank God for Jesus – the one greater than Jonah – and his pursuing grace.