

“Have You Got a Little Bit of Jonah in You?”

By General Pastor Peter F. Paine

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I'm glad to be here. Last time I was here, I told you that the next time I come, I'm going to bring Debbie, but I failed to keep that promise—It wasn't possible for Debbie to be here. She is doing well, and she asked me to greet you and tell you hello. Her mother, Hazel Davis, is doing great, the mother of our ministry, the first lady of our church, and she asked me to tell you hello. So I bring you greetings from Sister Davis and Debbie and from the leaders in Norfolk. I am thrilled to be here with you today. I have a message.

Six hundred and seventy years before Christ, there was a book penned about the familiar Bible character, he's the Jewish prophet, Jonah (Jonah 1:1-4:11). Jonah was an interesting man, because Jonah was like a glass of water, you could see all the way through him. Jonah didn't hide much. Jonah didn't have too much to cover up. Jonah was a man that God used, and he was a prophet. There were other prophets of the day, but Jonah was respected as a prophet, and he had spoken the Word of the Lord and people heard from Jonah. But Jonah was flesh and blood like me. And like you.

If you're a child and you hear the story of Jonah you think of this great fish; it's kind of a cartoonish kind of a story. It works, doesn't it? This man, he's running from God, and he gets in a boat, and as he goes overboard, God lets a fish swallow him and gets him to dry land and then he says, “Oh, God I'm sorry.” God has stuff for him to do and he does it and that's the story of Jonah. Good story. Good story. I like that story. It's a good story, isn't it?

Now, if you're a Bible scholar, you hear the story of Jonah and you think, well, he was a prophet and Israel was his land and he understood that God's people were blessed and the Ninevites, they were heathens. They were wicked people; they were bad people, and, it turns out, good news for Jonah and those who felt like Jonah, God's going to destroy the Ninevites! Ha, ha! Can't wait to read the headlines! “GOD DESTROYS THE NINEVITES!” Only, before that paper gets released, before that hits the newsstands, God comes and taps Jonah on the shoulder, and says, “Got a mission for you, Jonah. Go to Nineveh, preach repentance, and I'll save them.”

If you're a young Christian, and you hear the story of Jonah, you think, “God, I'll never be like that. I'll never, never, never, never be like that. What a stiff-necked, self-willed, selfish human being. You bless him, you speak to him, you speak through him, you use him mightily, and then one day he tells you, “No.” Not me! Uh-uh! If I had suspenders, I'd pull them out (gesturing with thumbs pulling imaginary suspenders in a prideful way).

If you've been around a couple of years, like I have, you might just hear the story of Jonah and think, “Is it possible? Is it possible that I could do that to you, God?” Now, Peter, he said to the Lord Jesus Christ (I've stepped out of Jonah for a moment), “Others, they'll deny You, Lord, but, not me. Uh-uh, no way; I know better than that.” So Peter said, “Nuh-uh, not me. Others, Andy, he'll deny You. Malcolm, he might, too. You know, Jesse, I think he, yeah, he's on that list. And, Parrish, probably, I mean, that suit is something, but, Parrish, you know... Not me, huh?” (Matthew 26:33) Not you? yeah, you. Yeah, me. Here's an old guy like me, and I'm thinking, “Lord, how many times have I said no to You? Is it possible You can still use me? Is it possible that You still have something for me to do? Is it possible that I can still be useful in the building of Your Kingdom?” Yeah. Where are you at today in the story of Jonah?

If you're unfamiliar with the story of Jonah, let me give just a little outline today, or a chapter. God calls Jonah, He says, "Go, preach to Nineveh." (Jonah 1:1-2) Jonah didn't like the Ninevites and he didn't want to go. So, he went down to the seaport, where he could get a ship to go to Nineveh. Nineveh was about thirty-five miles from where Jonah was. Thirty-five miles. Where did Jonah go? he went to the seaport and he paid the fare—I think that's a big point; we may come back to it. We'll see—he paid the fare to go to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). That's on the west coast of Spain. It's about as far as you could go in that day. It's like the end of the known world. Nineveh—Tarshish (gesturing with his hands to indicate a great distance). North Chicago—Alaska (using the same gesture to indicate that the distance is about the same). He went as far as he could go. On his way there, the storm was so big (Jonah 1:4), that everybody in the boat was praying to their own god, and the storm didn't change. There was one person in the boat that wasn't praying, and that was the man who was asleep in the boat (Jonah 1:5). That was Jonah. Now I could spend a long time, right there. I could spend a real long time right there. Jonah was in trouble; Jonah had other people in trouble... Jonah was not just messing with his life, he was messing with the lives of those in the boat, and he was messing with the Ninevites. All because he was not listening to God. Now, you would think a guy like this would be wide awake. Hello? Not Jonah; he's taking a nap. He was feeling comfortable with his rebellion. Jonah's comfortable with his arrogance. Jonah hasn't even figured out yet that he was arrogant. So, the captain wakes him up and says, "Who's your God? Is this your mess?" (Jonah 1:6) Jonah says, "Yeah, it's my mess." (Jonah 1:9-10) He doesn't have the decency to jump overboard, he says, "Throw me overboard." (Jonah 1:12) I could spend a little time there, too, but I've got something to tell you. So they say, "You know what? even though you put us in this predicament, we're going to try to get to shore." (Jonah 1:13) It's not in the text, but I'm thinking that they thought, if they could get to shore, they could get rid of him there. They tried to get to shore, but the storm was just too great. And, so, they said, "We're throwing you overboard, Jonah." (Jonah 1:15) And whoop, he's in the drink, and then the waves calm, and Jonah's blowing bubbles, going down. I wonder—anybody else wonder what's Jonah thinking before the fish arrives? Was he thinking, "You know, God, I think I'd rather die like this than preach to the Ninevites," or was he thinking, "Uh-oh." I'll tell you what I think, and I'll tell you why I think this: I think Jonah hadn't come to himself yet. I think Jonah still needs some time. I think—wait a minute, somebody's going through something here today—Jonah hadn't learned anything yet. Hello? Jonah hadn't learned anything yet. Part of that thinking is because Jonah said, "You guys throw me over if you want. I'm not going to do anything." Part of that thinking comes from the idea that he didn't get into the fish's belly and then get spit right out; three days go by. I was talking earlier about the fact that if you're a theologian, you might look at it this way; if you're a child you might look at this way; if you're new Christian you might look at it this way; if you've been a Christian for a long time, you might look at it that way... Three days. Now, those of you that are theologians, you might want to tell me right now that this is a reference to Christ (Matthew 12:40). I am among those that believe that. God prepared this great fish; it swallowed Jonah... I'm going to spend a moment on this point: Some people who study this say that Jonah died, and three days later was brought back to life. Some people say he was alive all three days. I think he died, and I think God brought him back to life. So Jonah revives, sings praises to God, the fish spits Jonah out, and Jonah's ready to go to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9-10). Wouldn't you be? He gets to Nineveh, and he starts crossing the city of Nineveh, and those that study these things say that Nineveh was of three-day journey (Jonah 3:3); it was like sixty miles, if you could do twenty miles a day. Now Jonah is prophesying that God is going to

destroy Nineveh, unless they repent. And they repent (Jonah 3:5). Maybe because he smelled like a fish. Maybe because they thought, “You know what? this must be of God, because Jonah doesn’t like us.” Sometimes you think God going to send you to where you want to go; sometimes God sends you where you don’t want to go, because that’s where you’ll do the most good. Should I say that again? Sometimes God sends you where you don’t want to go, because that’s where you’ll do the most good. Amen? At Jonah’s preaching, the people repent, but Jonah’s not happy about it (Jonah 4:1). God’s not done with Jonah, and Jonah’s not done with God. How about you? Is God done with you yet? Are you perfect, or are you still a work in progress? I wonder how many times—and I know this seems arrogant; don’t hear what I’m not saying—if the story of my life were written—and I’m not saying that I’m somebody that that should be done—I wonder how many times, if the story of my life were written, would it say, “...and he was like Jonah when he did this...” “God said it ought to be this way, and he was telling God, ‘No, it needs to be that way, and here’s why...’” we’re all human beings, and sometimes our humanness gets in the way of our walk with God. Sometimes our humanness is the biggest hurdle we have to overcome for us to hear the perfect Word of God, and to see what God has for us to do. Somebody say, “Amen.”

So, will you admit—and I’m not asking you to do it out loud, right now—but I might, later on—will you admit that you’ve got a little Jonah in you? Will you admit that you’ve got a little Jonah in you? This is very big, because I’m not doing this to put anybody down, but if we can all recognize that we’ve got a little bit of Jonah in us, it can go a long way towards getting a lot of God in us. Amen? If we can all recognize that we have some humanness in us that interferes with God doing His greatest work in us... Hello? Sometimes, the gift that you—wait a minute, somebody’s not listening, and I’m going to try to help you: If you are a parent, you have said to your son or your daughter, at some point in the journey, when they said, “Why?” you said, “Because I said so!” You’re not doing that to hurt the child, are you? You’re doing it because you love your child. So, how about sometimes God just says, “Because I said so.” We don’t get to negotiate with God. Maybe what you need in your life—this isn’t for everybody in the room, so do some checking here—maybe what you need right now is to be told, “Because I said so,” from a God who loves you. God has got the bigger picture; God gets it in a way that you don’t. Maybe you’re wanting something, and God is saying, “Not now.” Maybe God is telling you to do something, and you don’t want to, and He’s saying, “Right now.” You see, I came to bring a message to you today, and say to you, “We’ve all got a little Jonah in us,” and it’s time for us to do what God wants us to do, the way God wants us to do it.

Now this is an interesting part of the story of Jonah: I don’t have any indication in Scripture, and maybe you would like to challenge me after service (I’d prefer you wait until after)—I don’t have any indication in scripture that Jonah doubted that if he preached to Nineveh that they would repent. Quite the contrary, I think because Jonah *knew* that they would repent—I mean, I mean, if Jonah had been convinced that, “Okay, I’ll go, and I’ll tell them to repent, and then you’re going to kill them anyway! Ha! Then I can say, ‘I told you so!’ and I can watch them burn, and it’ll be like the Superbowl! It’s going to be awesome! And Israel wins! And he Ninevites get toasted!” I believe Jonah knew that God was going to do what He said He was going to do. But, when—watch this; I said that so that I could said this—God did what He said He was going to do, how did Jonah react? He wasn’t happy, was he? “How dare you save those people? How dare you save those people? Ninevites! Ninevites!”

Well, now I want to challenge somebody by saying, “You know what? you might be a Ninevite.” I was. I wasn’t of Israel. I wasn’t God’s chosen, and somebody preached to me;

somebody came to me, and said, “Repent, or you’ll perish,” and I said, “I’ll repent.” Hello? Hello? Now, some of you are wondering if I’m going to get into what happened afterwards, about later they were destroyed... Not for the purpose of this message, but that’s an interesting part of the story; I’m not ignoring it, it just isn’t part of the purpose of this message today. Is it okay if I just acknowledge that exists, but that’s not the central theme of the message today. The purpose of this message today is not so much to take a comprehensive look at the book of Jonah, as to look for ways that we might be like Jonah, and then say, “God, how can I be the person that You want me to be? How can I be the person You want me to be? How can I live the life that you want me to live? How can I live so that when You say stand, I stand, when You say sit, I sit, when You say go...” You say, “I’m not a puppy dog!” No, you’re not, and I didn’t call you one. Get that rebellious spirit out of the way and listen to what I’m trying to help you with here. If that hits you, then it as meant to. I’m not trying to hurt you, I’m trying to help you. Are we ready to say, “God, when You speak, I’ll listen?” Hello? I get it; the word ‘slave’ to me is an ugly word, but, you know what? my Bible tells me that I’m either going to be a slave to sin, or a slave to God. I want to be a slave to the One who loves me, and gave His life for me, and shed His blood for me, and paid the price, and has the authority to write my name in the Lamb’s Book of Life. If I wrote the Bible, I would take that idea (the idea of slavery) out of it, I suppose, because I find it offensive, just like Jonah found it offensive to have to go preach to the Ninevites. Here’s what it boils down to, saints, are you letting God be God, or are you still telling God how you want it to be? Are you letting God be God, or are you still telling God, “This is how I want it to work?” It got quiet in here. Are you yielded to God? Now, if you think that being yielded to God means that you’re never going to have what you want, let me help you with that.

Matthew 6:33 ...seek ye first the Kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you.

Amen? Amen? When you put God first... Watch this; I’m going to retell the story of Jonah as I see it would have gone if Jonah had been a yielded, humble vessel: “Jonah, go preach to Nineveh. Tell them, unless they repent, I will destroy them.” “Lord, the Ninevites? Really? You would save them? Here am I, Lord, send me.” It might not have made a good movie or book... You know what? your life will make a good book or movie, because you have overcome your rebellious state, and you’ve finally yielded to God. If, in fact, you’re willing to finally yield to God. Here’s what I want to say to you: Don’t let your journey end in a rebellious state. I told you as humbly and transparently as I know how that I can identify with Jonah’s rebellious spirit. I hate that that’s true, but it is. But I am fully determined not to let my life end in a rebellious state. I am going to finish well, how about you? I’m going to wrap this message up on that point. Are you determined to finish well? Before I go any further in that final point, I’m going to—and someone says, “How can you have another point if you said that was your final point?” I only said that I found the airport; I didn’t say I was landing yet.

Some of you remember David Hart; he was here less than a year ago. David Hart was in the United States Navy, and he came and several of you sat and spent time with him. He came to services and you shared the Gospel with him. When he came to Norfolk, Virginia several people shared with him; Pastor Wilson sat down and had a Bible study with him, and he got baptized in Jesus’ name. I’m thankful for that story. Some of you remember that David Hart said, “I don’t want to give my heart and life to Jesus Christ yet, because I want to do some more...” I think his term was, “clubbing.” I want to do some more riotous living; I want to do some more worldly

things... David Hart was eighteen when he was here, he turned nineteen when he was in Norfolk. David Hart is dead. He was home; he went swimming with some friends, and he drowned. His father called, and he said, "David told me of his giving his life to Christ. He told me about his baptism. I'm so thankful to know that he got ready, because I could not have imagined that he'd never see twenty." I just told you that I want to finish well, how about you? You say, "Oh, preacher, that was something; sort of a dirty trick: You tried to scare me into thinking that I don't have a promise of tomorrow." Well, thank you for noticing. Hallelujah. That's exactly what I want. You know what? your journey, my journey—I look around the room and I see people of all ages. I know, for me, that I'm closer to the end than I am to the beginning. I'm fifty-nine years old; I doubt I'll live to be one hundred and eighteen. It's possible. I'm not sure I want to. I'm just saying. I don't have a death wish, don't get me wrong. Hello?

Are you going to finish well, or are you going to stay in a state of rebellion? You see, that's this message: Are you going to finish well, or are you going to stay in a state of rebellion? My prayer is—I'm going to ask the musicians and singers to come back, and play "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord." Let's sing that song again, as we bring this message to a close. "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart. Show me where I'm like Jonah. Show me where I have a selfish, self-centered, stubborn area of my life that I need to let go of. Show me, in my life, the crevices and the cracks where I haven't fully yielded to You. I know I'm talking softly right now, but I hope you're hearing what I'm saying. I came today to help somebody say, "I'm done rebelling against You, God. I'm going to finish well. I'm done telling You that I don't want to do what You're telling me to do. I'm willing to do what You ask of me. I'm not going to tell You how You should be God anymore, I'm going to let You tell me how I should serve You." Somebody came to this message today to say, "I don't know how much longer I've got, so let me get right with You right now, God. I love You; stay right with me here, so that when this journey ends, I get to hear, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord.'" You see, I didn't come today for you to say, "Oh, that was a nice message." I came today to have you say, "Yes, Lord!" I hope that somebody's saying, "Yes, Lord!" If you're here today, and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then I hope you say, "Yes, Lord!" If you've never been buried with Him in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life, then I hope you say yes today. If you're saved, but you have a rebellious bone in your body, I hope you say yes today, and yield to God. In case you're wondering—in case I haven't made it clear enough: when I was praying about what God would have me to bring to you today, the message came to me as much as it would anybody else. I want to live a yielded life because, yeah, I think I know something; I've spent a few years on this journey, and, every now and then, I think I've got an answer. But then I have to remember,, "God, I don't know what You know. I don't see what You see. Help me. Lord. Open the eyes of my heart, and let me see You; let me see it Your way. Let me live the way You want me to live."