

JONAH: REJECTING GOD'S CALL

SERIES: As Ambassadors for Christ: Should we Not be Concerned?

by Doug Goins

As we begin studying the book of Jonah together, I want us to keep in mind some of the principles we have been hearing in Ron Ritchie's recent series in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. We will discover that these principles are keys to help us unlock the significance of the story of Jonah.

Firstly, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul speaks powerfully about the practical, daily implications of the resurrection. In verse 15 it says of Jesus that "...he died for all, that those who live [i.e., are alive spiritually through the resurrection] might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." For those of us who are indwelt by Christ and who have surrendered our lives to him, this passage means that we don't live selfishly anymore. We aren't controlled by ego, fear, or self-protectiveness, and we don't live need-centered lives as we did before Christ came in. Rather, we are controlled by the love of Jesus Christ. We are concerned about others and their needs, and how we can express the love of Christ to them.

Secondly, as Paul states in verse 16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view...." That is, we don't look at people from the perspective of prejudice or hostility; we don't evaluate them based on our own sensitivities or cultural biases, whether racial, religious, or political. We view people the way God does, from his heart of love.

Finally, Paul says in verse 18 that we gladly accept what he calls a ministry of reconciliation. That is also an important implication of the resurrection of Christ. If we believe the message of the resurrection, then we're compelled to tell the world and the people we interact with; we can't keep quiet. Because God is committed to reconciling the world to himself, as his representatives we're committed to the same reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ (verse 20).

Amy Marchetti, our deaconess to missionaries, told me Easter week of her own adventure as a minister of reconciliation. She was invited by her first-grader Laura's teacher to come into the classroom and tell the children about the Christian symbols of Easter in a comparison of religious practices. Amy told me that even though she had shared the Lord with many people in many different settings, for some reason she was especially apprehensive about this opportunity. She wasn't sure of the teacher's motives, and when she arrived and began to talk to these thirty-five children, her heart was pounding. She didn't feel like a very confident ambassador for Christ.

Amy told the children the whole story from Palm Sunday through Easter, explaining the meanings of the palm branches, the cross, and the empty tomb. As it turned out, the children were absolutely still, their eyes very wide. When she opened it up for questions, one little boy asked, "Did they really nail Jesus to a cross, or is that a story somebody made up?" Amy responded, "History records that that event really happened." The little boy said, "Well, then, how did he come back to life? That's impossible." Amy had only a one-word answer for him: "God." Then a little girl sitting in the front row turned around to the boy and explained knowingly, "He's very powerful!"

It's fun to talk about the openness and innocence of children. Think about the incredible possibility of each one of those little hearts opening up to Christ, responding to his loving sacrifice, and letting him change them from the inside out. The apostle Paul says that each one of those children can be reconciled to God; they can become the righteousness of God. What a beautiful idea this is--they are put in right relationship with their Creator and Savior,

then in right relationship with themselves in terms of their own identity and worth and value, and finally all their other relationships in life are put in place as well.

But the question I want to confront you with this morning is, how do you respond when you're asked to be a minister of reconciliation and an ambassador for Christ to individuals or groups whom you fear or find difficult to love--those who don't have the innocence of children, or perhaps those with whom you have radical disagreement?

Think specifically of individuals, types of people, or groups of people of whom you're the most critical and judgmental. (They may very well deserve your judgment and evaluation.) Think about the people whom you tend to dismiss, those you hope to have very little contact with, and those for whom you want no responsibility. They may be as close as a spouse or a child who has deeply disappointed or hurt you. Or they may be as distant as the television image of a terrorist who massacres innocent victims.

These are people who have become our enemies because of what they believe, say, or do. If these individuals or groups have declared themselves to be God's enemies then we feel all the more justified in passing judgment on them, writing them off, and distancing ourselves from them. That is exactly what happened to the Old Testament prophet Jonah.

Jonah was called by God to be an ambassador and to extend a ministry of reconciliation to the city of Nineveh, which was one of the capital cities of the Assyrian empire. We're going to spend four weeks examining Jonah's personal account of his struggle with God to respond in obedience to this calling. He disagrees with God from the very beginning. Even though God says he loves Nineveh, Jonah wants nothing to do with this city. He disobeys God's direct command, and we're going to see in this story a growing self-centeredness, an egotism, in him as he tries harder and harder to resist what God wants for his life, even while he clearly understands that God is open-hearted and merciful and loving to the despised residents of Nineveh.

Let's turn to the book of Jonah and look at God's heart for this great city. In chapter 4 verse 11, the very last verse of the book, God makes a final explanation of his plan by asking a rhetorical question of Jonah: "And should I not pity [or show merciful concern for] Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left...?" They are just flailing around in the dark, and God is saying, "Don't I have a right to show mercy to this city?" The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself..." From the beginning God has always had a love relationship with his creation, the human race. He has tried in every way possible to communicate that love.

This story is power-packed with theological truth and with practical implications for us today as we try to live out our identity as ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors of Christ. As we follow this story we're going to find that an examination of Jonah's life is like a look in the mirror, and we may not like what we see. There are aspects of this very reluctant prophet in each of us, and in our contemporary church as a whole.

Before we begin looking at the text, let me refer you to 2 Kings 14, which you may want to read on your own to get the historical context for Jonah's life and work. In 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah is identified as the son of Amittai, as he is in the book of Jonah as well. This is important information because it puts him in a human lineage. If he had a real father, then he was a real person who lived on earth and ministered.

Jonah is introduced to us as a prophet of God who served the Lord faithfully during the reign of Jeroboam II in the middle of the eighth century BC. He ministered to Israel in the north in the time of the divided kingdoms, before any of the invasions and deportations that would affect both kingdoms. King Jeroboam was an idolatrous and immoral king who brought nothing but evil to the land. And yet God in mercy and grace had Jonah prophesy to the nation that the territorial boundaries were going to be expanded. God was going to give back to Israel territory that had been taken several generations earlier by the Syrians. God hoped that the nation would respond to his mercy in repentance. And Jonah's ministry was fulfilled; he preached expansion and it happened. He had great public success in the economic and military glory days of the northern kingdom.

Now let's turn back to the book of Jonah and look at his call in the first three verses. God invites Jonah to participate with him in a mission to Nineveh. The first two verses define God's agenda, and the third verse defines Jonah's agenda. Verses 1-2:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me."

What God wants from Jonah is obedient response to this assignment for ministry. These opening words of the book of Jonah (which is an autobiographical narrative) are very similar to the opening words of other books of minor prophets. God's word comes to Jonah as it has before, and it stirs in him, at least initially, awe and wonder because it is much more than just words. It is a profound experience of God's presence and power. Jonah's call to be a prophet is being reaffirmed and validated. His faithfulness to God and his loyalty to the nation are being confirmed.

When we get to verse 2, however, before Jonah can revel in his new encounter with God, shock waves begin exploding in his mind, and his heart sinks when he hears the statement, "Go to Nineveh." From the very beginning his strong will starts to stiffen and resist as he says to himself, "He can't mean Nineveh," the capital city of Israel's avowed enemy!

Assyria at this time is one of the most feared nations of the ancient Near East, known for its cruelty and violence. It is a world-class city both in size and political importance. But Jonah has no desire to leave Israel, because he sees himself as a prophet of Israel (up to that time the prophets of God didn't itinerate). As we read on we will find a clear sense that in Jonah's heart he is saying, "I am a prophet of Israel, a prophet of territorial expansion and good news for my nation. I don't do windows and I don't go overland to Assyria." Part of it is because Jonah thinks that Israel is the favored nation of God anyway; why would God care about Assyria? He will agree with God that they are quite wicked. The fact that God wants him to have anything to do with them leaves him cold.

There is a deeper reason, though, that Jonah balks at God's call. At the end of the book he is very candid with God about what was going on in his mind at the moment that he received the call. In chapter 4, verse 2, he admits this to God:

"I pray thee, LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil [calamity]."

This verse shows two things Jonah knows. He knows his Bible, the Pentateuch, very well, because this statement that he makes is a word-for-word quotation from Exodus 34, where God is talking to Moses about his own character and his concern for the people. And he knows God's character. He is afraid that if he goes to Nineveh and preaches judgment and there is genuine repentance of sin, then God will forgive them. The bottom line is that he hates the Assyrians with a passion. The last thing he wants to do is become an agent of salvation for his avowed enemies. That is really the deepest source of his resistance. Look at his response in chapter 1, verse 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 on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

God tells Jonah to go five hundred miles east, a three-month journey by caravan, to preach judgment to Nineveh. Jonah turns and goes the opposite direction down to the seaport city of Joppa on the Mediterranean, and probably rushes up to the ticket window saying, "Give me a ticket to whatever ship I can get on that is going the farthest distance away from here!" Tarshish is a little fishing village on the Atlantic coast of Spain, and just to get there by ship will be a year-and-a-half journey through the straits of Gibraltar. But he has all the time in the world anyway. A sea voyage will probably do him good; it will put God's desires out of his mind. That is what he means when he says twice in this verse that he wants to get away from the presence of the Lord. What Jonah is doing is

abandoning his obligation of ministry to Nineveh, and it is an act of sinful rebellion. Jonah is a strong-willed man, and for four chapters he is going to be involved in a massive power struggle with God. If you think about his prior history recorded in 2 Kings 14, Jonah was a faithful prophet as long as God wanted what Jonah wanted. But when God's command goes contrary to what Jonah wants, Jonah is going to do what he very well pleases.

In Lesley Allen's commentary on Jonah he calls us to empathy for the prophet before we get too carried away with harshness toward him. He writes, "A Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whimpering his insidious message of smug prejudice, empty traditionalism and exclusive solidarity." One of the things I pray for our weeks together in this book is that we will face our own struggles with God: the command that we find most difficult to hear, the instruction from God that sends us into a panic, the thing that prompts us to say, "Anything but that, Lord!" Remember, I asked you earlier to think specifically of some individuals, groups, or types of people of whom you're most critical. What assignment would cause you to not only dig your heels in but even run the other direction?

A few weeks ago, just before Charlie Tucker and I left for Germany, Ron Ritchie and I had lunch with a dear Christian from West Germany who is a doctor. He confessed to us his difficulty in accepting a recently converted East German businessman as a brother in Christ. Since the wall had come down and the nation had been reunified, they were members of the same country. The problem in accepting this man was that he had served in the East German army and as a Communist party official; and further, he was suspected of being a member of the *Stazi*, the DDR secret police, before the reunification of Germany. Our friend confessed his embarrassment at how difficult it was to set aside all that history and prejudice.

When I got to East Germany and met with this dear man who is now strong in the Lord, he said that in fact that there are even deeper issues than just the immediate history and political differences. The mistrust goes back centuries to the Middle Ages, and it is based in tribal animosity. This businessman is Pomeranian, born in the Baltic northeast of the country, and the doctor is Bavarian, from the Black Forest. Those tribal animosities after all these generations still run very deep. He talked about how embarrassingly difficult it is to initiate friendship and accept unity in Christ across those lines.

That is the kind of struggle that Jonah is having and what gets him on the ship to Tarshish. When he steps on that ship, he thinks he is finished with God. But God isn't finished with him, no matter how hard he tries to defect. This rebellious missionary bets his life on the false idea that he can run away from God's presence and that God will let him get away with it; and he loses, because God loves him too much. As this book unfolds we're going to see an incredible struggle that speaks to the strength of God's commitment to us and his love for us. Look at verses 4-5a, another "but" statement:

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid [terrified], and each cried to his god; and they threw the wares [cargo] that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them.

There is going to be a lot of hurling in this story---they hurl cargo, God hurls the wind, and they are going to hurl Jonah overboard.

It is amusing that in verse 4, to make the story more graphic it says the ship itself is saying that it is afraid it is going to be broken up; it has never been in a storm this violent. This is the only place in the Bible that an inanimate object speaks.

The terror of these seasoned veterans of the ocean, who have been all around the Mediterranean and know storms and winds, shows that they realize immediately that this storm is supernatural in origin. They have never been in anything like this in their lives. They cry out to all their different gods---it is probably a multinational crew, all the members of which have their own pantheons. The irony is that the one person on board the ship who could have

cried out to the real God isn't anywhere in sight. Look at verses 5b-10:

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 upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish." And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us, on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And whence do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 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 [even more] 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.

Through the whole story the storm intensifies, and Jonah's recalcitrance and self-absorption are going to intensify.

The word that is used to describe Jonah's sleep could mean drugged or deep sleep. It is the sleep of exhaustion and depression. He is going to sleep off this calling that he has rejected. He is emotionally exhausted. Think about how when you are depressed, you welcome sleep and escape from all that is swirling around you. In that same way Jonah is escaping into sleep.

The sailors eject all the cargo, but it doesn't help. They pray to every god they can think of, and that doesn't help either. Then the captain remembers that there is one more passenger who got on at Joppa. He goes down into the hold and looks for him, finds him sound asleep, and says, "How can you sleep in a storm like this? Get up quickly! You must have a god--pray to him, none of ours have worked!"

It's interesting, in verse 6, that when the captain says, "Arise, call upon your god!" it is an identical construction to God's calling to Jonah in verse 2: "Arise...and cry against [Nineveh]...." The words that wake him from his sleep must mock him a bit as they echo what he is trying to get away from.

So Jonah comes up on the deck, but as verse 7 shows, he doesn't say a word. In spite of the captain's impassioned plea, Jonah doesn't pray. All you hear in verse 7 is the desperate voices of the sailors. One thing that struck me is that at least up to this point Jonah is very consistent---he is willing to let both Nineveh and these pagan sailors die in ignorance of the God of the universe. He stands by in silence and watches things breaking up all around him. He is dragging innocent people into his own sinful rebellion.

That is an important spiritual principle. To the degree that we allow rebellion and disobedience in our lives, we will establish a downward spiral like a whirlpool or funnel that seizes us and others and pulls us down, harder and harder. That picture of being pulled downward because of sin is very clear in this text. On the other hand, God says in verse 2, "Arise, go to Nineveh...and cry against it...." As the story unfolds there is a sense of an upward direction in following God. (Paul even talks in Philippians about the upward call of God that we have in Jesus Christ.) But the language Jonah uses as he tells the story in verse 3 is, "He went down to Joppa." And in verse 5, "...Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship...."

(He has a lot farther down to go, by the way. In chapter 2 verse 6 Jonah says in effect that he went down to the bowels of the earth, literally "the belly of hell." He must go to the belly of the ocean.) And he pulls innocent people down with him. We don't sin alone. The wages of sin is death, the Scriptures say clearly, and we drag other people into our death by resisting God, rebelling against him, or running from him. It's a scary warning for us as we examine our own hearts.

In verse 7 the sailors are casting lots, doing divination to try to figure out who the guilty person is. Obviously, from their superstitious perspective, some god or gods are angry with somebody, and they are all suffering because of what this person has done. The lot falls to Jonah, and he is finally forced to go public. Yet in verse 8, even though the divination points to Jonah as the culprit, the sailors still question him. It's almost as if they are

really concerned to give him the benefit of the doubt; maybe the lots aren't accurate. They say, "Tell us who you are, where you come from, what's going on in your life, why you are here. Is there anything that could possibly have caused this?" They care more about Jonah and being fair to him in this interrogation than he cares about them. They are concerned about doing the right thing. But they have to drag out of him who he is and what he stands for.

In Jonah's response in verse 9, he answers only one of the questions they ask. He doesn't respond at all to the questions about his vocation, his town, or his country. And he is not about to talk about his being a prophet of God. You can put yourself in his shoes; in his mind he has disqualified himself from the occupation of a prophet. Jonah simply tells the crew that he is a Hebrew. They can't make too big a deal out of that; it is a common designation of the Jewish people among all the Gentile nations. And even his statement that he fears or worships God is really not much more than a suggestion of religious affiliation. It's like somebody's saying in our day that they are a Christian and meaning only that they are not a Moslem, Hindu, or Buddhist.

But Jonah does draw on his spiritual heritage when he describes God at the end of verse 9: "...the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land..." There's a note of pathos in the words that he chooses to describe God. It's almost as if, as he speaks of the attributes of his God, he feels that he really can't claim them for himself in this crisis because of his disobedience. This declaration of God's absolute sovereignty as Creator over all the sea and dry land contradicts his own assumption that somehow he can escape from God's attention and concern.

When the sailors hear what they have dragged out of Jonah in verse 10, they immediately respond with more fear. It terrorizes them. They latch on to his declaration about his God, and although it isn't recorded here, they must be begging him, "If your God is in charge of all this and he is the one who made the storm, then pray to him! Get him off our backs, get him to calm things down!" But Jonah doesn't ever pray in this first chapter. Then we see the comment they make in verse 10 to Jonah: "What is this that you have done!" You could paraphrase it, "Jonah, if this is the God you believe in, how in the world could you act like this? What kind of an idiot are you to presume on this kind of a God?"

Don't you hate it when nonbelievers ask you a question like that? I've had the question asked of me. My wife Candy helped me remember this week some of the times that I've been asked similar questions. In all candor, some of the experiences are too painful to share. But I remember the one that may be the least embarrassing. I was in my first year in food service management in Idaho, a newlywed and a Christian. My district manager was a nonbeliever, but he cared about me and invested himself in me. One day he took me into his office and shut the door. My face flushed and my heart started pounding when he confronted me with the fact that he noticed that profanity was increasingly creeping into my language as I interacted with people. I remember his words to me: "You leave that kind of language to us pagans. You shouldn't talk that way." It felt like a knife as this nonbeliever said in effect, "How could you act that way?"

I also remember a few years ago, when I was a pastor here at PBC, the pain of a phone call from the president of a company here in the valley. He told me that a young man who was very much involved in the ministry of our church was guilty of embezzlement from their company. The president asked me the same kind of question: "As a Christian, why would he do that?"

Now as the storm increases in intensity, Jonah's stubbornness gets harder and harder. Let's follow the story as it continues in verse 11:

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Take me up and throw 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." Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried to the LORD, "We beseech thee, O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood; for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee." So they took up

Jonah and threw him into the sea....

What an incredible evangelism opportunity Jonah missed! As I was studying this week I speculated about what might have happened if Jonah had, on the spot, repented of his rebellion against God and his defection from his calling and had called on God to save him and the crew. As the story unfolds we know that that is really what God wanted; he wanted a prophet who was right with him and who would go preach the message. I think God would have responded to that prayer to calm the storm, and everyone on the ship would have embraced the God of Israel. The grateful sailors would have put Jonah ashore somewhere, and he would have turned around and headed east toward Nineveh. But that is exactly what Jonah did not want to do. He knew that for him to call on God for help would surely mean that God would reissue the call he had vehemently turned down days before.

It is tragic for each one of us when we refuse to obey God's clear command, because the result is that it puts us out of commission spiritually. It takes away our credibility and it robs us of opportunity. And when Christians fail and violate the call to be ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors of Christ, it is amazing how often the secular world responds with sadness. In the newspaper a few weeks ago there was a quote from a non-Christian man in southern California who was responding to the media's exposing sinful immorality in the life of a Christian radio preacher. This man said, "I was starting to listen to what that guy said. It's really disappointing to see that he couldn't live it out in his own life."

As we look at verse 12 where Jonah finally gives directions to the sailors about what to do with him, we are probably tempted to interpret it rather heroically: "I will save the day! Throw me overboard, then the storm will be calmed!" I read some interpretations that try to make this out to be tragic heroism on the part of Jonah. But what he does here in verse 12 is not a spiritually courageous act. His disobedience to God disqualifies him from that. If Jonah knows that the storm is God's judgment on him, why doesn't he either set things right with God or take responsibility for getting himself off the ship? Instead what he does is make the sailors responsible for his actions. Look at all the first-person-singular pronouns: "Take *me* up and throw *me* into the sea...for *I* know it is because of *me* that this great tempest has come upon you." What we will see in this story is that as he becomes more self-absorbed, he also becomes more narcissistic. He is at the center of everything. When we spend our lives thinking about ourselves and how we can't get what we want, it's common to manipulate people to fulfill our sinful desires. Jonah would rather die than preach in Nineveh, so he has the sailors help him die in disobedience of God. All he needs to do is ask God to forgive him, and he can live. But his stubbornness is greater than his fear of death.

Again, the concern of the sailors is clear in verse 13. They don't throw him overboard right away; they row hard. They don't want to kill him. He is indifferent to life and death, and the sailors have more concern for him than he has for himself or for them or anybody else. They demonstrate an amazing compassion for human life.

Then in verse 14 we see the first prayer, and again it comes from pagans, not from Jonah. The sailors pray to the one true God to whom Jonah has introduced them. And it is an amazing prayer of contrition before the Lord. They are struggling with a tragic moral dilemma. They finally throw themselves on God's mercy and say, "We are going to do this, and we will trust that it is from you." Then in verse 15 after this prayer of faith, they throw Jonah overboard. Verses 15a-16:

...and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

Instantly the sound and fury of the storm, and the yelling and crying and praying and screaming cease. The sea is quiet. And these sailors believe with all their heart that God is indeed the Creator and Sovereign over land and sea as Jonah has told them. They shudder with awe and wonder, and they make thank offerings to the Lord. They promise to live lives of gratitude for his saving grace. It's a very strange twist, if you think about it. Jonah wouldn't go to Nineveh to prophesy to the Gentiles there, but through his own choices, when he tries to escape, he is put into a situation where Gentile sailors believe in the one true God because of his weak, brief, and halfhearted witness given under duress.

We are going to see that God is totally committed to turning this prophet around and using him. There is going to be no escape for Jonah. We are going to stop here this morning as Jonah is spiraling downward into the depths of the sea, where he is going to survive three days and three nights before we can get back to him. It is a powerful symbol of his slide into selfish rebellion against God.

There is a tragic contrast between Jonah and our sister Amy Marchetti. To this point he is not experiencing any of the adventure that Amy enjoyed Easter week in sharing with those children. He certainly doesn't understand God as the apostle Paul knew him, a God who is reconciling the world to himself (as we saw in 2 Corinthians 5). Jonah is still controlled by his own selfish ego and by fear. He is not controlled by the love of God. He doesn't understand it, he doesn't like it, and he doesn't agree with it. He is not willing to offer his life unconditionally for other people. He doesn't understand that God pities even his enemies and has merciful compassion for them. He is incredibly culture-bound--prejudiced and hostile toward people whom God loves and wants to save more than anything else. Jonah is unwilling to be an ambassador of God's saving grace or a minister of reconciliation to Gentiles.

Let me ask you to do two things in preparation for the remainder of this series. Read Jonah through several times and ask God to help you find yourself in the mirror of this book. It has been powerfully convicting for me to do that in recent weeks. And then ask God specifically for two things: Firstly, ask him to remind you of who the Ninevites are in your life--the individuals, family members, racial groups, political action groups, groups whose behavior you find deviant and depraved, groups with whom you disagree Biblically. Who are the people you are afraid of and want nothing to do with? It may take awhile, but God will do it if you ask him to. Secondly, ask him to help you examine any patterns of escape in your life. What is the Tarshish that you are running away to? What are you doing to evade God's clear command in your life? Finally, perhaps the place to start is really to pray that God would make us willing to allow him to exercise the same tough love in our lives that he did in Jonah's. Storms are frightening and life-threatening, but God loved Jonah enough that he was willing to threaten his life. Are we willing to let him threaten ours?

Paul concludes his challenge to an Easter lifestyle--his call to be ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ with this concluding invitation. It calls us to respond this morning,

"...we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.... Behold now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

Catalog No. 4342
Jonah 1:1-16
First Message
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April 18, 1993

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