

Victory of the Lamb – August 18, 2019 – Jonah 1

Wanted: No Way – Pastor Bill Limmer

Last weekend Simone Biles, an American gymnast completed a triple double during her floor exercise routine at the US Gymnastic Championships. What that means for you and me who are more comfortable on a couch than an exercise floor is that she twisted in the air three times and did a double flip all at the same time and landed on her feet. This is the first time a woman has ever completed that move. The reaction was one of amazement. It was a “no way” moment.

“No way” can also refer to horrific times. A couple of weeks ago not far from my son’s house in Rochester, MN. There was a two-car accident that killed all 6 people who were involved. Three of the people who were killed were from one family in Waukesha. It was devastating “no way” tragic news.

Sometimes the phrase “no way” is used when we are asked to do something we don’t want to. From the young person asked to clean her room to the employee being asked to do a job they feel is beneath them. Or if they are asked to do something they can’t do. Of if you ask Pastor Ben to eat Jell-O, he will tell you “no way.”

Today we are beginning a new study based on a book in the Old Testament called Jonah. We are calling this series **Wanted**. (Sermon Graphic on screen) So let’s dive in!

Jonah 1:1 **The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:** In ancient times more so than today, names often had meanings. For example: Jonah’s name means “dove.” And usually when we think of a dove we think of peace. Jonah’s father’s name Amittai means truth. So, Jonah would bring peace by proclaiming the truth. And in fact, God tells Jonah to go the Nineveh.

Jonah 1:2 **“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”** Nineveh is basically present-day Mosul, Iraq. It was a large city with a long history. Just as most people throughout the world today know of Las Vegas so most people Jonah’s day knew of Nineveh. Nineveh was the sin city capital of the ancient world. A phrase describing the city is this: the city of blood and lies where people stumble over bodies – either killed bodies or drunk bodies. The city was a post truth city. They would consider themselves to be enlightened people not wanting to really offend anyone so that people could do whatever they deemed fit. As long as people didn’t tell them the truth something was wrong. Sound familiar? The Bible says of this city that it is wicked. Looking from the outside sin people could say, **No way Nineveh can be saved.** They were far away from God in their heart and lives, but they were dear to God’s heart. And we know because God is sending Jonah to preach proclaim the truth so that they could have peace.

Here is Jonah’s response. Jonah 1:3 **But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.** Jonah says, “No way am I going to Nineveh.” Jonah was emphatic. “God, I am not going to go, and you can’t make me.” Nineveh was about 500 miles to North and Jonah headed about 2500 miles to west. The exact location of Tarshish isn’t known but it was universally known as the end of the world. To give another idea of how far it was away, when Solomon was building the temple it took the ships 3 years to make the round trip. So, Jonah said, I am

not going to Nineveh, in fact I am going far, far, far away. Scholars give several reasons why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. 1) He was scared. This was a tough city. And he was a foreigner. While Nineveh didn't have anything going against Israel at this time – they had all this crime going on. Maybe think inner city of Chicago. 2) Jonah was proud and felt “no way” do these people deserve God's grace. He was selfish and self-righteous. And 3) he wanted his people to repent, the people that looked like him, acted like him, had the same customs as him, as opposed to those who were from a different culture, tradition and background. And, as we wrap up this study and series Pastor Ben will be telling you the real reason why he didn't want to go to Nineveh. Kinda like the Bachelor or Bachelorette you will have to wait to find out why.

In the meantime, do you have a Nineveh in your life? If you are not loving your enemies you are running from God. Which leads us to another question: Are you running from God in any area of your life? Maybe you are not surrendering your finances to God? Your time? Your heart? Your purity? Maybe some of us here today think we know what Christianity is really all about and we don't want that but maybe you don't know what Christianity is all about and you are running from the very thing that will actually set you free. “It is almost unbelievable how far we will go to avoid obeying God. We call Jesus “Lord” and beg Him to rejuvenate our souls, but we are careful to do not the things He says. When faced with a sin, we find it much easier to pray half a night than to obey God.” AW Tozer

So, Jonah is on this boat heading in the exact opposite direction of the way he is to go. And here is what happens. Jonah 1:4-8 **Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.** ⁵ **All the sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.** ⁶ **The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”** Keep in mind this must have been a sturdy ship if it is going to be sailing for a year and a half straight to get to its destination. And this sturdy ship is creaking, and groaning, and taking on water. And the sailors were afraid the ship was going to shatter. So, they start praying to their own deaf gods. The storm kept raging. They started throwing cargo and supplies overboard trying to make the ship more viable.

As the storm is raging out of control, Jonah is sleeping. Are you serious? How can you be sleeping in the middle of this violent storm? Some of you know why and how he is sleeping. He can sleep because he is exhausted physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually running from the Lord. Running from the Lord is exhausting work. Here is why – Psalm 139:7, 9,10 **Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,** ¹⁰ **even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.** God is present everywhere. So, Jonah is running, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually God is right there. It is kind of like when you are playing hide and seek with a young child. Your little one is hiding on the other side of the table thinking you can't see them because they are on the other side of the table from you. But it is clear where that little one is at. You say smile and laugh to yourself. When people run from God, God is like, “I see you.”

Jonah 1:7⁷ **Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.** ⁸ **So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”**⁹ **He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”**¹⁰ **This terrified them and they asked, “What have**

you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

Showing that they were far away from the true God the sailors, following the practice in the ancient East, they cast lots to get direction from the gods. They wanted divine direction on who could help them get out of their dilemma. God used it to point the finger at Jonah. And Jonah explained he worships the God who made and controls everything including this sea that is now raging out of control. Their response is "No Way, now we are really in trouble.

Jonah 1:11 ^{The} sea was getting rougher and rougher. So, they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" ¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." ¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. No way are we throwing you overboard. You worship the Almighty God and if we throw you overboard he will be angry with us. So, they fought against the Lord by trying to conquer the waves of the storm. Unlike Jonah they give up their fight against God. They prayed to the true God and submitted their will to his. They threw Jonah overboard. And it seemed no way could Jonah be saved. And the raging sea grew calm. And they realized they were in the presence of the Almighty God. And their hearts that were beating a million miles an hour in fear fell back in sinus rhythm. And they gave their hearts to God and worshiped him. I want you to know when these sailors set sail, no way would they have confused them for being followers of God. They weren't nominally following God. They were far away from God but like the people of Nineveh they were never far away from God and his heart. And now they have come to faith. No way. You see God Wanted them all along. It is too small a thing for God to be the Savior of only one nation. Isaiah 56:6-8 **And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant— ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."** ⁸ The Sovereign LORD declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

God uses even Jonah's disobedience to save the sailors. Which is great for them but what about Jonah? Jonah is thrown into the raging sea. And he began to sink down and drown. But when there seemed to be no way, God provided a way. God rescued him by having a big fish (we are not told it is a whale) swallow him. Kind of a crude rescue plan right. Getting swallowed by a fish. Nevertheless, a miraculous rescue plan. Jonah 1:17 **Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.** Pastor Ben is going to pick up the story from there next week.

Before we close did you know that Jesus points to this story in the New Testament? This is what he says in Matthew 12:38-41 **Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."** ³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

You know what this means right. God wants all people to be saved. And not just all people but you to be saved. You are Wanted (sermon graphic) by God's love. I know that some of you right now are thinking to yourself, no way God wants me. **No way can I be saved.** I don't even know much at all about him. Or I have gone too far. Bill, I hear what you're saying but you don't know what I have done. And that's true I don't know what you have done. But God does. And your sin, mistakes, history, thinking, emotion, cannot take you where God is not at. Your sin may be too big for you, but it is not too big for God. While Jonah was saved by God in a crude rescue plan, the belly of the fish, you and I are the whole world are saved through the cruel rescue plan of the cross of Jesus.

The cost of sin is not negotiable. The wages of sin is death. And so, Jesus was crucified for all our running away from God, all our selfishness, and self-righteousness, all our sins, all of ignorance, rebellion, you name it. Jesus took our place so that we might have victory. A victory that we can't win on our own. A victory that has been won for us already. **1 Corinthians 15: Death has been swallowed up in victory.**^[h]
⁵⁵ **"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"** ⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.** ⁵⁷ **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

What that means is no matter who you are, you are not left out of God's plan of salvation. So you can bring all of your big sins, hidden sins, the sins you did that you still get a chuckle out of, the sins that bring you great shame because when there seems no way **God provides the way**. John 14:6 **Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**