

Don't turn your assignment into an argument

Opening Scripture: Jonah 1:1-16

Introduction: Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah. We have all heard about this reluctant prophet and his predicament in the belly of a big fish.

However, the book of Jonah it is not so much about

- the big fish (only mentioned 4 times),
- or about the disobedient prophet
- the big city of Nineveh
- but it is mostly about God Himself – mentioned 37 times (in 4 short chapters)!

The Bible is comprised of 66 books, but they all tell **one story**: the story of God and His love for us. In the book of Jonah, God is revealed in this way:

Jonah 4:2b – ... *“You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, one who relents from doing harm”.*

Sharing the love of God is the assignment we were all born for. As we will see, Jonah turned his *assignment* into an *argument*.

1. Arise, go!

1. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

One of the things we learn from this book is that God's intention is always to awaken sinners to repentance, not to destroy them.

Two very important words in Jonah's assignment: 'arise' and 'go'.

a) Arise

Ephesians 5:14 - *Therefore He says: wake, you who sleep, **arise** from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”*

Jonah 1:5-6 - ... *But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was **fast asleep**. ⁶ So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, **sleeper?** **Arise, call on your God;** perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”*

Sleeper, arise, call on your God!

How sad if the world would find us asleep, indifferent, inactive, disengaged, hiding at the bottom of the ship.

- b) *Go* – This word is at the heart of the Great Commission and of what Church is all about: *Go and preach the gospel to every creature.*

God says those same words to Jonah again, in **chapter 3:1-3**:

3 *Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,* ² **“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.”** ³ *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.*

2. Arise and go - not “arise and flee”

V.3 - 3 *But Jonah arose 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*

In this story God used a big fish, a plant, and a worm. Nature readily obeyed at God’s command but not this prophet – not without resisting, not without arguing, not without objecting.

Thank God for an obedient whale but what about this disobedient man?

The God of all creation can use a storm, a fish, a worm, and a plant to preach but He really likes to use a person to proclaim what is on His heart!

- a) Jonah’s goal was to run in the opposite direction of God’s will. Also to run to a place where He couldn’t be found by God and wouldn’t hear His voice again. The voice of God kept urging him towards his assignment and he didn’t want that.

God loves – and that is why He keeps knocking! That is why He insists, and He convicts.

Psalms 139: 7-9 - ⁷ *Where can I go from Your Spirit? or where can I flee from Your presence?* ⁸ *If I ascend into heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there.*

Jonah made his bed in the lowest parts of the ship, but God was also there!

3. Arise go to Nineveh, that great city

God said Nineveh but Jonah went down to Joppa.

V.3 ... *He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*

- a) Joppa marks the place of his deliberate departure from the will of God. 3 times it is mentioned that he wanted to run away from the presence of God.

- b) Jonah's objection to the plan of God was so intense that he didn't consider the cost: he paid the fare. He invested in his bitterness, he invested in his disobedience. The prejudice he carried against the pagan Assyrians was too great. **How could God want to save these gentiles?**
- c) Interestingly, there is another story in the Bible about Joppa and gentiles. We read in **Acts 10** how God wanting to reach out to a gentile man, named Cornelius, summoned Peter from Joppa to share the gospel with him.

We read how God first had to prepare the heart of Peter with a vision so that he would reach out to this gentile man without objection. Initially Peter argues 3 times "Not so Lord – I have never touched anything common or unclean" and 3 times an audible voice spoke back to him. **Peter also turned his assignment into an argument.**

However, he ended up obeying.

Acts 10:24- *And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.*

28-29 - *²⁸ Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ²⁹ Therefore I came **without objection** as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"*

34-35 - *³⁴ Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

4. 120 000 repent

We are all probably familiar with how this story ends: 120 000 people repent and turn to God. What a great crusade that was. I have never come across an evangelist who would turn down a crowd of 120 000 people. 120000 conversions? That is the wildest dream of any evangelist!

A few thoughts for personal reflexion

1. **Don't turn your assignment into an argument.** May we never be found fighting, resisting, and objecting the will of God.
2. **Don't be Jonah in Joppa.** Make no investment in what can take you far from the presence of God.
3. **Don't make your bed in the belly of the ship so you won't end up the belly of the fish.** The world needs the message we carry. The world needs the prayers we can pray. It is no surprise that the world calls on their gods or no god at all, but only our God can save them from perishing. We need to arise and go, not be indifferent and be found asleep. "*Arise, wake o sleeper*"
4. **God only uses circumstances when we have stopped listening to His voice.** God had to use other means to communicate with the man who kept resisting His voice. Let us be quick to hear and quick to obey.