

# The Amazing Jonah P2

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## **Asleep at the Wheel**

### **Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast**

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Speaker in the audio file:

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Tim:

Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying, Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this Podcast, I'm putting together the last ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this strange, and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com).

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

Alright. We are continuing in this series we're exploring the book of the ancient prophet, Jonah. Again, this was a teaching series I did at Door of Hope Church in 2013. And in the second message we're exploring the main part of chapter 1 which is all about Jonah, the set up was God's own prophet but was the only person in the book who refuses to really listen to God, but everything else in creation, both humans and non-human are very aware in listening to God in this story. The second message explores how Jonah is a figure who is asleep at the wheel, namely he is deaf to God in every means that God is using to communicate to him. And I think the story invites us in to thinking about our own lack of perception and awareness of ways that God might be trying to get through to us. It's a very challenging story. I was really challenged both preparing and realizing what's going on in the story and giving this message. So I hope it can open up this story of Jonah for you. So let's dive in and explore.

We're continuing this series in the Book of Jonah, and you remember I kind of pitched this whole thing as like a rescue effort? We were battling against what I called, Veggie Tales Factor, right, with this book? And so the Veggie Tales Factor is the strange thing that children's media have done to the Bible in our culture where they've made the stories very familiar to us but they have at the same time watered them all down and turned them into bland moral lessons about how to be a nice person, something like that. And so what this is a rescue effort, we're clearing the vegetation away. This covered over the book and our culture, and we're discovering what really a very disturbing and challenging book this is. So kind of recap last week kind of help us see that this story is quite surprising in how it's told and how it's even in the Bible. It's the only book in the Bible that is a

story about a prophet, it's not a book of the prophet's words, it's a story about a really horrible person actually. And that story has a profound message to offer to God's people. And it's a unique kind of story that I characterized as comic or comic satire. So it's an ancient comic book, Saturday Night Live, skit bundled up into one. And Jonah, he has this representative character he refers as the covenant people of God, and he's a horrible, horrible hypocritical, hateful person. That's what Jonah is. The story-teller just rakes him over the coals in front of our eyes, and especially after chapter 1. I mean we're going to get a kick out of it. I mean it's really quite funny how ridiculous he is. And everything's upside down in this book, and everything's crazy, and extreme. The bad guys are actually the good guys, and the good guys are actually the bad guys. No one behaves according to their stereotype. And all of it is aimed at critiquing the worst tendencies that form in the hearts and minds of God's people, of judgementalism or pride or as we're going to see this week's spiritual apathy, spiritual slumber. This chapter is all about either being asleep or being awake, essentially.

So remember I said Surgeon General this morning, punched in the gut, number 2 of this book packs a wallop. So get ready for the pain. So kind of orient us into chapter 1. A part of it is these stories for some of us becomes so familiar. It's difficult to read the story like it's for the first time and to see it with new eyes or from a different perspective. So kind of give us the entry point of the story and then help us frame what we're going to focus on in chapter 1. Let me show you a picture of Google Maps, and this has nothing to do with Jonah but everything to do with Jonah at the same time. So what this is, you can see B maybe over here on the left little green dot. That is where you're sitting right now. This is South East Portland. So we're at B, and A is where I live. And in between the blue line there is my daily bike commute.

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And so one of my dreams I wanted to do when moving back here in Portland when we came to be a part of Door of Hope a year and a half ago, was I wanted to enter the culture of bike commuting because I just love it. I don't know. I love that Portland celebrates bike commuting. I think it's wonderful. Sometimes I cross the Hawthorne Bridge on Wednesdays to go meet someone every Wednesday, and at 8:45 and I'm the fifteenth hundredth bicycle to cross the bridge at 8:45,

and I'm like, "I love this city. This is the best city on the planet." Anyway, so this is part of living the dream, so to speak. And so I live up of 51<sup>st</sup> and Division, and so there it goes, my daily bike commute, and I make this at least once and day, there and back again. It's 2.3 miles as you can see here, 12 minutes, pretty accurate. So the longest stretch you can see, the longest stretch right there at the beginning is along the Lincoln Street, is one these bike highways. Do you know about the bike highways in Portland? It's wonderful, they're so great. So, what the city's done is, and this is great, so these bike highways is multiple. They do them parallel between main arteries through the city but it's often main drags, so it's more safe for bikes. So they put in these speed bumps that drivers hate so cars don't really like to go there, and they put huge pictures paint with big bicycles on the street so you can't mistake where you are, you're on the bike highway, and they've rigged all the stop signs. So that it faces all the side streets so you can just cruise. I mean you can just go and never have to stop except when you come to the main arteries like 39<sup>th</sup> and Cesar or something else. And so it's great. These are totally wonderful. What's also interesting though is, so basically you know once I hit Lincoln like that's it. I have to make one stop and it's kind of a long stretch, and then I zigzag and cross Hawthorne and over. Now why am I showing this to you?

Because something strange has started to happen. So I've been doing this back and forth, once a day, sometimes twice a day is we have evenings, something going on here. And something has started to happen. I thought I'd share it because I'm pretty sure this is a very common experience. So maybe I might cross 39<sup>th</sup> or I start zigzagging over towards Hawthorne, and somewhere along the way, I might kind of come to have to cross Hawthorne and so there's often traffic in the morning or something so I have to be aware. It's like I come to somewhere around 30<sup>th</sup> and something and I'm just like, "I have no memory of the last five minutes." What just happened? I passed uptown already, I guess I did, I don't remember that, but I guess... do you guys know what I'm talking about? Have you ever done this? So maybe for you this might be driving. And you're driving your daily commute, your daily routine, your route, and you're just like, "I have no memory of the last three minutes." It's like, "What just happened? I just drove five miles and I don't even know what happened," you know?

And so it's this weird experience, this human body and psyche, it's so amazing because we can do really sophisticated, physical operations, but could be completely, mentally checked out. I think it's really amazing. It's also scary at the same time because you're operating a motor vehicle for goodness sake. And I'm

riding a bike. This is the most dangerous thing I do in a day, and you too and we're checked out for half of the drive. And so of course if a squirrel came over, a cat or a person, you know you would stop and be alert, I would hope. But it's bizarre. You're awake, but you're not awake. How many know exactly what I'm talking about here? This happens to us especially in parts of our lives that become routine and they become kind of dull or uninteresting to us and so we just for all intents and purposes we kind of check-out. And it's not just when operating vehicles of any kind. It happens around the house too, this also happens—this is kind of a shameful story to tell, but I'm trying to work on it. So laundry is kind of a very big part of my life right now. Two tiny little boys, cloth diapers. That's a lot of diapers to wash. Our laundry unit is actually out the back of our apartment and you have to go to a separate entrance to a little storage area down below. And so make that trip, a lot, just a lot. And sometimes I'll come back, coming from the back door and once again you'll come too. What just happened? Did I turn the machine? Did I turn the washing machine on, did I put the clothes in? Did I just go down there? I think I did just went down there. And so I'll go down and the soap dispenser will be open, and I didn't put any soap in but I put the clothes in and turned it on or something. So this is—it's not funny to my wife at all, what's funny to me because they'll be like, "Hey, what's up with the laundry?" And I'll go down an hour later and no progress. So they've been wet but there's no soap on it. So this happens to us. Do you guys know what I'm talking about. I'm not alone here. No, no. So this is not just how some of us live or drive or whatever. This goes much deeper, and this precisely the kind of dynamic I think that Jonah Chapter 1 is exposing for us. Some of us perpetually in the state of disengagement, right? It's like 80% of your life, and you're like, "Where did the last 3 months go?" I don't know, whatever, keep on going. And that's how some of us feel about our lives. That's how many of us are in our spiritual lives as well. And so maybe you've been a Christian for a while.

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And maybe at one point you had kind of a sense of alertness, a wakefulness to your life and your connection with Jesus, and you know you felt like the scripture spoke to you or prayer was a meaningful practice for you. But at some point that just kind of fizzled, whatever, and you're just kind of cruising, and totally say I'm a

Christian who loves God, whatever. It's fizzled. And you're like, "Why did that happen? I don't know why that happened." There's lots of reasons for it.

Sometimes it's seasons of life. You know, Eugene Peterson has this great line where he talks about the journey of following Jesus is like a long, obedient, in the same direction, a couple of book clubs around here reading that book this summer. It's exactly what it's like. And so not all of life is thrilling, and exciting, and yes of course, we get that. But there is something real that's been lost when I don't sense any kind of vitality in my connection with Jesus. And maybe some of you have never had that experience before. And so we might get there through seasons of life. We might also end up in that place because of decisions that we've made. They may be small decisions, maybe they're bad, unwise decisions, maybe they're bad moral decisions. We know they're compromises, but how we justify these kinds of things, and then we find ourselves three months later down this road of decisions, and we're like, "How did I get here? What happened in the last three months? And how am I doing this? How'd this happen?" And it's not rocket science. There's a slow process of decisions that landed you at a place of spiritual apathy, of being asleep at the wheel, and all of a sudden, things you never thought you would be, you're thinking, you're doing all of a sudden is part of your life now. How'd I get here? You're asleep at the wheel. This is an experience we all have, and Jonah Chapter 1 really is like a portrait of spiritual apathy. It's a portrait exploring why, and how, and what's happening to us when we're asleep at the wheels spiritually and a tragedy that that really is. It's not uplifting necessarily, but it's good for us here to hear. It's like eating your vegetables. So as Jonah Chapter 1—are you guys with me with this image here? Asleep is the big image in Jonah Chapter 1, so let's dive in. We'll watch Jonah fall asleep at the wheel here.

So back at the first sentence, we kind of cruise our way through this. So, "The word of the Lord that came to Jonah son of Amittai," two things. Remember when you see LORD in all capital letters in the Old Testament, that's the English Translators remind you that in Hebrew, what's there is not just the generic word, God, but the divine name, personal name, Yahweh, covenant God of Israel, this is going to be important as the story goes on. So, "The word of Yahweh that came to Jonah son of Amittai," Jonah means dove son of Faithfulness. You're supposed to laugh because he's not an innocent dove, and he's the least faithful character in this entire story. "The word of Yahweh came to Dove son of Faithfulness: Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." So God is surveying His world, He sees these horrible acts of

oppression and injustice, and violence arising out of the capital city, Assyrian empire, and we'll explore more of that in a couple of weeks here when he actually goes to Nineveh in chapter 3. God wants to send His messenger to confront, and name the injustice that's happening, and what does God's messenger do? What does the innocent dove do? He runs away from Yahweh, headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, he found a ship bound for that port after paying the fare, he went aboard, and he sailed through Tarshish to flee from Yahweh. We explored this last week. Now, so just to kind of put a map up here just to remind you of what's happening here. As he flees to Tarshish, so he's supposed to go east of Nineveh, instead he goes as far west as humanly possible in the ancient world, right? So Tarshish was on the edge of the known world there before you get to the Atlantic. So you're supposed to chuckle. He's going as far as you could possibly go from Nineveh at that time.

First step he has to go to is to go south, Israel's in the northern, little country there of Israel, he has to go south to Joppa, that's a little detailed, that's important, you'll see in a second here. So he goes south to Joppa, hops on a boat to flee.

Verse 4, let's pick it up. "So then Yahweh, He sent a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." This is another little comic image here. The word threatened or some of you have, "the ship was about to break up," in Hebrew, the ship is animated, it's like a character in the story. So literally, and the shipped pondered, breaking up into pieces. It's like the ship is actually thinking, "Should I stay together, should I stay apart? I don't know, the storm's pretty intense." That's the idea you're supposed to chuckle. Our English translation's kind of covered up a little but that the ship actually has a brain in this line. So the ship was pondering, breaking into pieces. And all the sailors, they were afraid, and each cried out to his own God.

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They even threw the cargo into the sea so they could lighten the ship. So Yahweh pursues His man with severe mercy. So you might think, "Oh, here's the Old Testament God throwing lightning bolts at people," or whatever, and so, no. Remember the bigger picture. God wants to send Jonah to speak to the Ninevites so that he can bring them to repentance so they can find forgiveness in life. It's

God's mission to reach people and rescue them. That's pursuing Jonah. This is a severe love. This is like the love of a parent chasing after their child who's going to bring their own ruin if someone doesn't intervene. That's the image here. This is not the volatile, that's a different God, it's not the God of the Bible, the volatile, and perpetually ticked off God who's just waiting to squash you. It's a different God, it's not the God of the Scriptures.

And so this is the God of a fierce love who pursues His disobedient prophet and so, the sailors... Look at what the sailors are doing. I mean, are the sailors asleep? No. They're wide awake, right? So they're yelling, you can imagine they're throwing their own livelihood over the side. They're throwing their cargo, that's a loss commission now, they've lost all their money because this is what they were carrying. And notice they're awake and alert to what's happening here. What are they doing? They're afraid. They're throwing cargo, but what else are they doing? They're praying, aren't they? To whom are they praying? All kinds of different Gods. Each to his own God. So first of all, they are alert enough to recognize, this isn't a normal storm, and there are divine powers at work here. Now in their worldview, which is polytheistic world view, they believed in the existence of hundreds, thousands of Gods over all the different realms of life. So they do the shotgun approach to prayer, which is what you do when you're a polytheist. You shout out many prayers to as many gods as you can. "You take that one," "You take that one," "Okay, Jimmy that one," "Johnny, that one." And hopefully we'll hit the right one, right? Because we don't know which one is angry with us. And that is the perpetual state you live in, in a polytheistic world view is you could offend any of the gods at any moment you don't know. They might throw a lightning bolt at you, that's very much of a polytheist world view. And so they're like, whoa, okay, let's just call in all of the gods and just see what happens then.

But what was Jonah doing? So with all of this frenetic activity calling, praying, cargo overboard, oh afraid, yelling and so on. And in contrast, the prophet, man of God, what's he doing? He's asleep. Jonah had gone below deck where he laid down and fell into a deep sleep. And there's a word play that's kind of a little red thread through this first part of the chapter here that's all about this language of Jonah going down, down, where did he go to get the Joppa? What did it say? He went down, he went south here. Actually you can just trace the language here in verse 3.

"He went down to Joppa," and then, some our translations have, "He went aboard the ship," literally in Hebrew says, he went down to Joppa, he went down into the ship. Verse 5, he went below the deck into the depths of the ship, and there he

went down, laid down in the deep. So here's this image here for the prophet, man of God. The pagan sailors, they were very alert to—there's a divine mysterious power at work. And where's the religious man of God? He's slowly descending into a state of literal and spiritual slumber. And this is a very powerful portrait that the author develops here with this repetition of down, down, down. He's depicting Jonah's—he's depicting Jonah's sin here as something that has led him to this kind of numb, dead-end, unaware state, asleep at the wheel. Alright. And so, remember this kind of last week, what's Jonah's basic failure here with his sin? Sin is that God has given him a call to go participate in God's story of His grace reaching more and more kinds of people, confronting humans in their oppression, and injustice, and wickedness and offering mercy and grace. And Jonah ran from that. And why did he run? Remember, he's not afraid, he hates Ninevites, that's why. And he knows that somehow Yahweh is going to find a way to bring them to repentance so that they will be forgiven and Jonah thinks that world is in a much better place with the Ninevites who are not forgiven and who gets annihilated or something. So Jonah thinks he knows better than God, and he acts accordingly.

So that's his failure, his sin. What his choice does is all of a sudden, it begins to make him descend into this stupor. It's like his sin becomes like a sleep drug. It makes him last, it's growing separation between him and God, and all of sudden, he's in this scenario where there's like havoc, and threats of danger, and death or whatever, and he's just blissfully unaware of what's going on in his own life.

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This is a huge image here. It's ridiculous to us. We're like, "Who would fall asleep in the ship at sea, and so on. And so all I can think of is we have a month old son, and when he does sleep, he really crashes. I mean you can put a jack hammer next to his head, and he is out. He has—and so yes I suppose, Jonah could fall asleep in the stormy sea. But there's much more going on, this is an image of his sin and what's happening to him on the inside spiritually.

And so, who suffers as result of Jonah's spiritual apathy? How's Jonah doing? He's great. He's sleeping like a baby; you know what I mean. Who's suffering as a result of his bad decisions? Everyone around him, the sailors are. This is very insightful, I think. In other words, his sin is selfishness. He knows better than God

and everyone else, and he acts accordingly. This has led him into a state where he is just totally unaware of the people around him even though he's bringing ruin on them. Jonah has become this relational wrecking ball in the people's lives all around him, and he's so unaware and dulled by his apathy. He's totally unself-aware that this is taking place. This is such a profound image, I think of the nature of sin and its consequences in our lives. This is only one story, one passage among many in the scriptures that highlight this. And we hear this as westerners, and we're like, it's kind of weird. And it's because our view of morality is very individual-centered. And so we are raised in this culture that essentially says, "Your moral decisions and your moral compass is kind of, choose your own adventure but as long as you don't hurt anybody and everybody's consenting, then whatever. It's morally permissible and Jiminy Cricket, "Let your conscience be your guide." It's kind of the way our culture operates here. And so what happens in Las Vegas, it stays there. What do you mean? It's your private decision. It doesn't involve anybody else. No one else can say that's wrong for you. Because it's what you want to do, nobody's hurt, and so on. And so we have this very privatized, individualized, moral world view where if it's right for, it's right you, and so on.

And what the scriptures do, and you don't even have to be religious to agree with this. What the scriptures do, and Jonah wanted, just exposes that. It's just utterly naive and simplistic. The Bible's account of human decisions and our moral decisions, and how they affect other people is very profound and sophisticated. And so you have to respond to our western culture and you have to say, you're telling me that every moral decision that I make very moral decision Jonah is making in this story is the little brick, one little brick and a huge wall, and that wall is forming who you are as a person and your character. And you're telling me that a thousand little moral decisions isn't eventually going to form you into the kind of person who, if you're making a thousand bad moral decisions, small moral compromises, eventually you will reach a thousand first decision that will spill over the banks of your own life and ruin somebody else's. Are you with me? Like I said, it's utterly naive to think that my own moral decisions just affect me. That's so ridiculous. Our lives are so much more interconnected than that. And you can just see this.

I think that the humor and irony of when sex scandals break the news of course in the Portland Government, we just had another one break the news. Did you guys follow this over the last few weeks. And American culture is so silly about this because we're bathed in sexual imagery and media more than any culture on

the face of the planet. But we're also really prudish at the same time because when our leaders have these affairs or sex scandals, we're like, "Oh, I can't believe they would behave that way," and they get totally lampooned in the public media, and so on. Are you actually surprised that someone makes these kinds of choices? Are we really surprised? Are you kidding me? How is everyone not making these decisions based on how we all grow up, you know what I'm saying.

And so what Jonah wanted, and is trying to tell us, is that, Jonah's decisions are not just his own decisions. And how does a person get to become a wrecking ball in the lives of other people is a thousand small compromises. And what was at first just a private decision between Jonah and his God, all of a sudden wreaks havoc in all of the lives of people, and he's so checked out. He's so self-absorbed, he's not even aware that he's a force of ruin in other people's stories. Now, it's the tragedy of falling asleep in the wheel spiritually and morally, it only gets only more intense in verse 6.

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So who has to go wake him up. The captain of this ship. This is a great moment in the story. So the captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up. Call on your God. I mean, maybe your God will take notice of us so that we will not perish." Maybe Jonah's God will notice them. Did you get it? Does Jonah's God notice them? Very much so. In fact, the whole reason they're in this mess is because Jonah's God already notices them, right? And this is ironic in so many ways because he's a prophet. He has received and spoken the very word of Yahweh before, and yet he has to be reminded to do something as simple as pray. By whom? By this pagan, polytheistic sailor who doesn't know Yahweh from anybody else. He's like, "Well call in your God. We didn't check on yours, and so let's try your God." And so as the sailors kind of rebuked to the prophet, man of God. Let's keep going, verse 7, so then prayer's not working, lightning the cargos, not working, this guy's sleeping, and that didn't work. So they said to each other, let's cast lots to find out who's responsible for this calamity. So casting it's like ancient dice rolling, and in many cultures, and still today even in Ancient Israelite culture, it was a way of discerning the will of the gods, we prayed, threw the cargo overboard, what do we do? Just roll the dice. Right? Maybe there's an unknown God and he'll reveal his ways to us, and ironically it

works, doesn't it? Because they cast the lots and who wins the lottery? Wouldn't you know it? Wouldn't you know it? It fell on Jonah. You won the lottery or lost it, depending on your point of view. So they asked him, well they said, "Okay. Tell us. Tell us. Who is responsible for making all these trouble for us? I mean what kind of work do you do?" Which always struck me as funny, them asking about work he does. What does that have to do with anything. What do you do for a living? They're so worked up here. Again, It's this contrast you could almost picture him as like yawning, like sleepy, like "What? Sorry, what's that? What?" They're so alert and aware on what's happening. "Who's responsible for this? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? Where's your country? From what people are you?" And he gives a dry, one-line answer. He says, "I'm a Hebrew," so he gives his ethnic identity, okay, then answers one of their questions. And he says next, "I'm a Hebrew, and I worship Yahweh. You know, the God of heaven, He's the one who made the sea and the dry land. I worship Yahweh the God of heaven. He's the God who has power over the sea and who I'm running from on a boat." Come on, come on! It's a good one. It's a good one, isn't it? That's pretty good. That's pretty good. So, there's a few other things. Some of your English translations don't have, "I worship Yahweh." What do they read? "I fear Yahweh." And so this is a Hebrew turn of phrase, familiar from the Book of Proverbs or wisdom literature. The fear of Yahweh. So it's about this deep, reverence and awe, but also like a really healthy fear of someone that you're accountable to. Not because you think you're a jerk, but because you really, really respect them.

My dad was a graphic designer and a car painter here in south east, and he had a huge cabinet of Krylon spray paint, all my years growing up. And I had a very healthy fear, especially when I was fourteen, skateboarding, graffiti art, that whole thing was very popular. But I knew my dad counted his Krylon cans and I had a very healthy fear even though there was a whole world of graffiti art to be had from all of that. But no, I didn't touch it because I had a fear, not because I thought he was a jerk, because I knew that he loved me, and that he was very aware of my behavior, and I was accountable to him. So get this, Jonah says, "I'm a Hebrew. You know, one of the covenant people of God. And I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven the one who made the sea and dry land." And you the reader thinking, "No you don't." No you don't. You don't fear Yahweh. What is this? This religious, babbled, bullshime. You what I'm saying. Really! This is the height of religious hypocrisy which is supposed to be—I think which was supposed to be scandalized that he would even say something like this. What's he talking about? You don't fear Yahweh at all. We can just see it right here. We can see that his

words and his religious confession of faith are in deep contradiction to the choices that he's been making. And the author just leaves us with this. It's rich, isn't it? And the whole story after this point, and the story-teller is just feeding us this horribly, hateful, hypocritical man. And we're just taking it in. We're like, this is great, what a great story.

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I can't believe this guy. I can't believe anybody would actually behave this way. I'm sure I wouldn't. Oh, oh, dang it. And there you go, you fell into the trap.

The very fact that you start to feel a little superior to Jonah, you're following right into his trap because what he's doing with the story, he's holding a mirror right up to your face and he's saying, "Oh really? Yeah, you've never had a contradiction between what you say you believe and how you actually live? Really? Really? You're really superior to Jonah? Congratulations." Right? You must be asleep at the wheel if you really believe that about yourself.

And the sailors can see the contradiction, holy cow. Look at verse 10, it gets even better. So this funny, so he says, "I'm a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh." And we're like, "No, you don't." And what are the sailors' response when he says, I fear Yahweh? They were terrified! They were deeply afraid, and they asked, "What have you done?" And then the story-teller whispers in our ears here, and he says, "They knew he was running away from Yahweh because they already told them that." What? What does that even mean? He's transporting us back. It's the little Wayne's world. He's transporting him back to the port when got onto the ship in the first place. And this is really sophisticated what he's getting at here. So there's a little scene in the port, and you can just imagine if you've gone through customs, immigration, that kind of thing, reasons for travel, where you headed, to Tarshish. Where are you going, business or pleasure? Neither really. You know, I guess I'm running from Yahweh, my God. And whatever sanctified imagination. Never heard that one, but welcome aboard, you paid your fare, so come on aboard. They're polytheists. They're like, Yahweh, I guess it's his personal God or something, I don't know. He's a got his issues with his God, whatever. He paid the fare, so get him aboard. But now they realized, you're—wait. "You told us you're running from your God, and Yahweh is the God who has power over the sea, and you're running from him on our boat? What do you think you're doing? What do

you think you're doing?" You guys, this is one of the most tragic ironies at this part of the story. This happens multiple times in the Bible, it's that it's often people who are completely outside the people of God, who can see on full display the deep contradiction between what God's people say they believe in, and how they actually behave. And so here's what's actually more fascinating of course, you're going to see this throughout the story. Is Jonah an imperfect witness to the God he says he believes in? Is he imperfect? Very imperfect. He does a very bad job of pointing to his God. Is God limited to how successful Jonah is as a perfect witness to God? Is God limited to using this Jonah in bringing people to himself? Just tuck that away back there. So he goes on this, what do you think you are doing? So the sea gets rougher, and rougher.

Verse 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?"

"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."

This is brilliant. There's two ways you could take his words. And no one saw this coming. So what should we do? Kill me. Throw me over, kill me. Whoa. Okay. That's an interesting response. So, how are we supposed to take that? Well it could be that he's had a real change of heart. This is the first kind of awareness of others, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, what have I done to other people? Oh no, no. Like, what? Okay. I made my choice. I got to get what's coming to me. Time to pay the piper." That could be what he means by that. And if you read commentaries, people are back and forth on this. He could also have actually be running even further from God right now. What would be the surest way that he could escape from having to go to Nineveh? Die. And this would not be out of character because he's going to request to die again in chapter 4 because he'd rather die than live with an obeying God like Yahweh.

Could it be that he's actually further even hardening his heart? He would rather die than obey God, and acknowledge what's really going on here. The story-teller doesn't make it clear. He just kind of leaves it there. And I think it's actually intentional on the story-teller's part because what it gets you to really look deep into human motives and why we do the things that we do and even when we confess and are aware of the wrong that we've done. Are we really fully aware of how screwed up we are, and I don't even understand the motives of my own heart sometimes, much less somebody else's. So he's bringing us into this here. We know what the sailors think about, they think that this is a horrible idea.

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Look at verse 13, the men are like, "No way." So they did their best to row back to land, but they couldn't because the sea grew even more wild than before. Here's my opinion: If Jonah really was having a change of heart here, why didn't he just say, okay, I give up, God. I'll just go back to Nineveh now. He says, toss me over. And they're like, bad idea. No, that's bad. But they can't go back. So something's happening with Jonah that's making it impossible for them to go back.

Verse 14, then the sailor's cried out to Him. Verse 5, when the storm first hit, who are they crying out to? All the different gods. Now they've had this experience, and they have come to a place as we're going to see where they recognize that there is only one God who has power over sea and land, the most powerful God who's the only God who can rescue us now. It's Yahweh.

Something has changed inside of these sailors. Now they are recognizing Yahweh, and this is ironic, this is the first prayer offered to Yahweh in the chapter, and who does it not come from? Jonah. Who does it come from? These pagan sailors, whatever they're cluing in to what's going on. So they cried out to Yahweh, "Please Yahweh. Don't let us die for taking this man's life. We don't want to, it's his idea. Don't hold us accountable for killing this innocent man, he hasn't done anything wrong against us. You, Lord, You've done as you pleased, I mean you could just see," I mean they're just like, "We don't know, Yahweh, you're powerful and You can save us. So I guess we're going to do this even if we don't want to." They took Jonah, threw him overboard. And the raging sea grew calm.

At this, the men greatly feared Him. Who only says he fears Yahweh? Jonah. Who actually fears Yahweh? The pagan sailors, right? And they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made—oh man, this is astounding because if you're burning up two whole goats or a cow, this requires a very large fire. Yes? So you need a big altar, and a big huge fire. Are you going to make a fire that size from the deck of your wooden ship? No. It's implied here, they get back to land, they find a Yahweh temple, and everything is dedicated to the Yahweh here, they offered sacrifices, they make vows to Him. They become dedicated followers of Yahweh from here on now. And so something has happened inside these sailors, despite the very imperfect hypocritical behavior of God's people in this story.

God is still capable of bringing people to Himself. But is that licensed for us to go behave like Jonah? That would be the most idiotic thing you could get from the story. You know what I'm saying? So because not only will it go badly, it's going to go badly for you. It's just not going to go well for you. Much less for other people as you become a wrecking ball in their lives because you're so tuned out. And so here's the greatest tragedy I think of Jonah Chapter 1. It's that you have God's own prophet, His own covenant, man. And he's so tuned out and apathetic, and asleep because of his sin. He's not even aware to the fact that all these other people around him are totally alert, and alive and God's doing amazing things right around him, he can't even see it. He's so turned in on himself in his little deal. So he misses being a part of this conversion of the sailors around him because all he's thinking about is himself. Totally tuned out.

I can't think of a more accurate depiction of what spiritual apathy, and spiritual slumber looks like or us. It's this basic idea. Somehow American Christianity has fostered this system where you got the Grace Card, and so you're covered there for the thing that happens after you die. So that's done, cool. And so whatever, kind of grin and bear it, trying to keep your nose clean, but you can always play the Grace Card, and so on, have a good weekend, then come back to church again. It's fostered this kind of thing. And so what you end up with is the whole culture full of people like Jonah. And they can tell you all kinds of theology. "Oh, I fear Yahweh, do you know he made the land and the sea? Do you know He's the God of heaven?" "Oh yes, absolutely." And, but yeah, there's this deep contradiction between what he says and what he actually lives, and the choices he made. And everybody can see it but him.

And so it's this tragedy because not only does he miss out on what God used him on the lives of these other people. He's withering as a human being. Totally drawn in on himself. And so it begs the question, where's the resolution here? Is Jonah going to wake up? We'll go to the next line.

Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow up Jonah. If Jonah was a one-chapter book and ended right there, is this a happy ending? No this would be a tragedy, wouldn't it? This would be like a Greek tragedy play or something. You have the protagonist and he's a horrible, like goes down in flames, dies, tragedy and maybe some other people have goodness happen in their lives or whatever. Utter tragedy. You're not supposed to read this line, "The Lord provided a huge fish on Jonah and go hurray." It's not a good thing when you get swallowed by a huge fish. You die. That's what happens.

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So we're thinking Jonah and the belly of the fish, three days, three nights, slow digestion. It's like the Sarlaac Pit in The Return of the Jedi. Slow digestion over thousands of years, right? That's good. It's a good geek line. Best idea, we're supposed to go like, no, no, no! But then all of a sudden a surprise from the inside of the fish we'll get to next week, Jonah all of a sudden is very awake, and very alive, and alert to Yahweh after this experience. He be like, what he's composing intricate Hebrew poetry from the oxygen-less environment from the fish's stomach. We'll talk about that next week. But once you just see the image here, Jonah, he can't go any further to the bottom, literally. And it depicts himself as going to the roots of the mountains and the sea. And a huge fish gobbles him up.

And you think it's over, wiped off the face of the Earth. And that may be true if we're dealing with any other God but Yahweh, the maker of the sea and the dry land. And so in this story, just think of the arc of the story right now. Jonah is blind, asleep, wrecking ball, can't even own up to it all the way to the very end, he hits bottom, and Yahweh provides this instrument of what seems like death to swallow him up. But right there in this moment of just hands up, can't go any deeper, like he's utterly powerless, that moment of death becomes the moment of his new birth and the moment where God strangely uses this instrument of death as this now bizarre vehicle of grace, and to give him life and a second chance. Do you smell the Gospel here? Do you smell it? Can you see now why Jesus appealed to just this moment in the story to describe himself in Matthew Chapter 12. The Jewish leaders talk to him like, "Who do you think you are? You think you're the Messiah? Give us a sign." And Jesus says, I'm not going to give you any sign except the sign of Jonah. And you're like, what? That's so weird. Why does He say that? Just like Jonah? Swallowed up by the fish? Three days, three nights. So, I will be in the grave three days, three nights. I'm going to die. What?

So Jesus sees this moment of God enveloping his covenant people in death because of their sin, and rebellion, and the moment that they can't go any further into rebellion. And he meets them right there in their brokenness and as we're

going to see next week, repentance. And all of a sudden this moment of death has turned into new life. A chance of new life, and Jesus said, yes, that's like what I'm going to do. So Jesus lives as like the anti-type. He's the very opposite of Jonah. He was utterly and completely others-centered, self-giving, and aware of other people and their world being perpetually 24/7, He's just on. He's God become human to be the kind of human that you and I can only dream of becoming. And what do we do with Him? We murder Him. Like collectively. As a human race, we are all responsible for why this world is the way that it is.

And Jesus died for this world because it is the way that it is. And so Jesus absorbs into Himself all of our sin, and our apathy, and the ruin that it causes in our world, and He actually takes the hit for us. But somehow strangely, the death of Jesus becomes something that gets turned upside down into this vehicle of life. And in His love, God conquers our sin, He conquers death itself. And in Jesus' resurrection from the grave as we grab onto Him, we actually can experience a second chance at being human beings. A new and different kind of life. And the life that's given to Jonah after this experience, he's on borrowed life now. It's not his life to live anymore. He's living on pure grace from this point out.

How do you wake up spiritually? I don't know. I could write a book, Three Steps to Wake Up Spiritually, and it could have gone to Oprah or something like that. My time's passed now, whatever. But there's a hundred of those books out there, and some of you bought those books and they don't work. And they don't work because what do you have to do to wake yourself up spiritually like slap yourself awake. Something happens—do you do that? What does Jonah do to wake up spiritually? You see that's the wrong question.

Jonah doesn't do anything. Something is done to him. All he does is sit at the bottom of his character, a thousand decisions that made him this hypocritical man and he just throws up his hands and is like, "You know, uncle, I give up." And right at this moment where he feels like he's meeting his own death, that becomes the place where God meets him with his grace and gives him a second chance at life. This is good news for people like us. Amen?

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And so Jonah doesn't do anything to wake up. God's grace happens to him. And he becomes awake to it for the very first time. And so I don't—I'm not in the business of trying to get you to be good, religious people. I would have a much nicer suit, much taller hair if I was trying to do that, right? I mean that's not what this is about. We're a community of people that's—I don't even feel authorized to give this message. I mean I was deeply convicted stuffing Jonah 1 this week. I'm a total hypocrite. I don't have any right to give this message to anybody else. But here's the thing, neither do you. So, what are we going to do? Somebody's got to read Jonah 1, so here I am. And so, whatever. We are a community of people that are trying to wake up to the fact that God has done something for us. I don't know how to wake you up. I don't know how to wake myself up except to wake up to the fact that I'm helpless. That's all I have to do. And that—we even work with that. This is precisely where Jonah lands. He just throws his hands up. And so, man, I don't know where you're at tonight. You know, I'm at many of us, we're seeing ourselves in different moments of the story. The contradiction between what we say and what we actually do. The way that we may be aware of it or not aware of it, but we are the wrecking balls in the lives of other people around us, and we may be totally ignorant of that fact. I bet your best friends are ignorant of that fact. But you might be. And so this is what it means is just coming to Jesus and saying, "I'm asleep, I'm drowsy, I don't know what to do. But I know I'm screwed up," and we can work with that. Jesus can work with that.

And so I just encourage you and the time that remains every week. We have this extended time at the end to turn on the ac units and to reflect the poetry of the music and to meet Jesus, and the Bread, and the Cup, and you don't know let the bread and the cup become verse 9. All the broken body, like I worship Yahweh and so... No. Wake up to what's happening there. This is the moment you have in the presence of God's gathered people to meet Jesus and remember these tactile experiences of what Jesus has broken body for you, has shed blood for you. And if you need to turn to the community for prayer, fill out the prayer card and drop it in the box. Come to the prayer team. This is the time for us to be real and to not just spout religious bull honkey. So did you like my use of bull shine earlier? So you thought I was going to say it, and I'm like, "No I'm not going to say it. But it's good." Anyway, it's not what this is about. And so whatever that means to you, I have no idea. I do believe God's spirit can show you what it means to you, and so let's just humble ourselves, and throw up our hands and wake up to the mercy and grace that's available to us and in Jesus.

Thanks for listening to Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast. If you like this podcast, you could really help me out by going to the iTunes page or whatever service you're using, and submit a review and just tell other people what you think, and that may be something really nice that you say, and might be some disagreement that you have, whatever. I would like to hear from you, and it would also help in letting other people know about it as well. So again, thanks for listening, and we'll have the next episode up very soon. Exploring the Strange Poem that Jonah utters from the belly of this fish. See you next time.

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