

I Need To Vs. I Don't Want To Jonah 1

By Dave Urbanski

As we dug into the first chapter of Jonah on Sunday, Pastor Scott said the reluctant prophet has a problem called "I need to, but I don't want to."

Sounds like a problem we all can relate to!

Sure, not many of us get a tap on the shoulder from the Lord who then instructs us to pull up stakes, leave the home and loved ones we've known for years, and travel to a hostile country so we can tell its citizens to repent of their sins. That's what Jonah was called to do.

However, we can relate to MANY other examples of not wanting to do the things we need to do. Kids especially have this problem, but adults know they still struggle with it. Taking out the trash, preparing our income taxes, going to the doctor (or the dentist!) ... just a few of the countless necessary tasks many of us struggle to get done.

But whether we're called to travel to a hostile, foreign land or find ourselves staring at a pile of dishes crying out "wash me!" it's all part of obedience in the Lord's mind and heart. What's more, Pastor Scott emphasized that Scripture shows if we're faithful in little things and a few things, God is more apt to entrust us with bigger things and more things.

So, in chapter 1, we find Jonah completely disobeying God's command to travel to Nineveh. But he doesn't just not go. He's so amazingly intent on his "I don't want to" moment that he travels in the opposite direction to Tarshish. Last week Pastor Don called that a kind of physical expression of trying to get as far away as possible from God — as if that could ever happen.

Next Jonah is aboard a ship that's getting ravaged by a raging storm due to Jonah's disobedience. But Jonah is asleep on the ship's bottom while mariners are panicking on deck. How can Jonah be ASLEEP during this tempest? Pastor Scott, noting the importance of maintaining our faith as well as our consciences, said that continual disobedience to the Lord over time endangers us to searing our consciences shut to the Lord — which makes it incredibly difficult to hear what God is telling us. Jonah was headed in the direction, for sure.

Verse 5 tells us that "the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them." Pastor Scott remarked that no matter anyone's spiritual beliefs (or lack thereof), for all of us, when life gets out of control, we turn to whatever "god" we believe in as we become aware that we can't control all of life's problems. It's also interesting, he said, that the mariners were literally throwing their livelihoods away in the hopes their lives could be spared — which shows what things like money mean when death comes knocking at our doors.

But still Jonah remains in belly of the ship, fast asleep, apparently having grown comfortable with his disobedience.

The mariners cast lots to try and find out who's responsible for the storm, and the lot falls on Jonah, who replies to the mariners' multiple questions: "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Pastor Scott noted that the word "LORD" in all capital letters indicates the personal name of God, which is used frequently in the book of Jonah — and there's a reason for that, as we soon learned.

When the mariners ask him what can be done to quiet the storm, Jonah tells them, "Pick me up and hurl 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." Wow! Instead of telling God, "OK, I'm sorry. I'll go to Nineveh now!" Jonah continues his disobedience — and would rather drown. Stubborn!

Things get even more interesting. The mariners — in another "I need to, but I don't want to" moment — try to row to dry land instead, but it's no use in the raging sea. And then, instead of calling out to their non-existent "gods," they appealed to the one, true God of Israel, using His personal name like Jonah just did: "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."

Then they tossed Jonah into the sea — and lo and behold, "the sea ceased from its raging" and the mariners "feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows." God will reach who he wants to reach — even through the disobedience of his chosen!

With that, a great fish swallowed Jonah, and we know what happens after that. But as Pastor Scott closed Sunday's study, he reminded us that the book of Jonah is really a book about God — the Almighty who created the world and is a personal God who cares about people, who loves them enough to get a message to them to repent of their sins or face the consequences, and who controls even the weather and water on the earth. It's a book about God, who is never far off from us.

We all have our Ninevehs, don't we? Well, instead of heading as far away from that hostile city as possible, let us recognize that God loves us and then heed his call, no matter how much we don't want to listen and obey. Indeed, we know full well that doing so will result in us being exactly where the Lord wants and doing exactly what he wants us to do. There's nothing better than that!