

Jonah 1-4

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[0 : 00] Verse 2 says, and he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Jonah recognizes that God is this type of God, a merciful God, and we'll see in some measure why he didn't want this to be the case for the Ninevites.

But he just doesn't want to join God in his merciful work in the world. Verse 3 of chapter 4 says, therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

We do not want to be like Jonah in this way. Now, because of the length of the narrative, I don't have an outline for you this morning. We're just going to simply read through it in its entirety, and I'm going to make comments to you as we read, and then we'll have some concluding points and some application questions for you.

So, we're going to look at the entire book of Jonah this morning. Before I begin reading, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. So, we would all do well this morning to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

[1 : 28] Jonah chapter 1, beginning in verse 1. Now, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

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 down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Right, so initially, we get the whole scene set up for us. God calls to Jonah to be a means of his mercy, to go to this wicked city, right? The evil has come up before God.

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. There's lots of Old Testament talk and prophecy about the wickedness of the Assyrians. They would be used by God for the punishment of Israel, but then they would also end up being punished for their wickedness, right?

This is what's playing in Jonah's mind in this day. In fact, in his day, they were paying tribute to the Assyrians. They were keeping the Assyrians at bay with money that they wouldn't come and attack them, right?

[2 : 46] The Ninevites, the Assyrians, were the enemies of God's people. And so, Jonah is reluctant. We don't find this out at the very beginning.

We're not exactly sure, if you have never read the narrative before, why it is that verse 3 says, But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

But we find out later in the book, it's because he did not want God to be merciful to these people.

Now, Tarshish was a coastal city of Spain.

Jonah travels to Joppa, the opposite direction of Nineveh. And he gets on a boat to go, in his mind, out of the presence of the Lord, to the very end of the known world.

This was like as far as he could sail away from Nineveh. He is fleeing away, and again, in his thinking from the presence of God.

[3 : 44] He wants with all of himself not to be obedient to what God has asked him to do. Verse 4. Note here that the fear of the mariners, right?

They are very aware that they are at danger, and they call out to each of their various gods, right? These are not God-fearing, Yahweh-fearing men, but they're crying out to the various idols that they worship at.

But they are afraid, and rightly so. They begin to throw the livelihood of this ship overboard, right? To make it lighter in the water, that it might not be destroyed. And note that juxtaposition to the seeming carelessness of Jonah, right? He all throughout the text, you're going to see he's just ready for his life to be over, right? God has put a call on him, and he finds himself in the midst of a storm, caring not in the belly of this ship. Verse 6.

[5 : 08] So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your God. Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may 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 on Jonah. Then they said to him, Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us.

What is your occupation, and where do you come from? 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 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. 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, 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.

[6 : 16] Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, 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. So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, 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.

Again, notice this juxtaposition between the mariners and Jonah. I think the author of Jonah really intentionally is laying this out for us.

Verse 5, as I mentioned previously, they each cried out to their God. They knew that they were at the mercy of something. Verse 13, Jonah has said to them, Hurl me into the sea, but they nevertheless rode hard, right?

They aren't quick to cast the life of this man into the sea, but they recognize there's some measure of morality in the world, and they don't want to transgress whichever God may have told them not to murder in their hearts.

[7 : 35] Verse 14, we see that they call out to whom? One of their gods? No, to the Lord. Asked that he would spare them of guilt of the life they're going to throw into the sea.

And then we see in verse 16 that the men feared the Lord exceedingly. And what do we find them doing now? Not offering to their vain idols, but offering a sacrifice to the Lord and making vows.

So here you have these men, right? Not followers of the Lord, but possibly in some measure converts at the end of chapter 1.

Verse 17, And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

God appoints, right? As Jonah is thrown overboard, right? The providence of God on display here that a great fish is there just at this time, and it swallows him whole.

[8 : 41] And we have absolutely no way to be sure if it was a fish or a whale. We won't spend much or any time on this at all. The best guesses are whale shark or sperm whale. My money's on sperm whale because around the turn of the century, turn of the 20th century, a man named James Bartley survived for 15 hours in the belly of a sperm whale, which I think is fascinating.

And so that's where my money's at. But it doesn't matter, right? It happened in fact, right? The Lord sent this great fish, this creature of the deep.

It swallowed Jonah up, and the Lord preserved his life in the belly of this fish for three days. As I previously stated, the theme of the book of Jonah is the great mercy of God to all peoples.

And we should not miss that this includes Jonah. Jonah is in the midst of a great disobedience, right? The Lord has come and said to him, right?

And he is doing the opposite, right? He is setting himself against God. Jonah thought he could flee from the presence of God.

[9 : 55] But God loved him enough to send a storm, to have mariners pitch him overboard, and to have a great fish swallow him.

God pursued Jonah on his way to Tarshish. It does not matter how great your sin, how dead level you are against God.

Our God is a merciful God. And if you will repent, he will save your soul. You may find yourself this morning thinking that you're outside the mercy of God.

I would plead with you to pay attention to the sign of Jonah. Jesus in Matthew chapter 12, verse 38 and following, answers some scribes and Pharisees who said to him, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.

They wanted something special. They wanted something miraculous to speak to them. But he answered them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[11 : 16] So, here's your sign. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jonah, this man, is a type for Christ. Christ is the anti-type. I talked to you again a couple of weeks ago about how the Old Testament does this again and again and again. Eastern logic often says, not this, not this, not this, but this.

And in some cases, in the case of typology, says, like this, but not this. So what does Jonah do? We'll see.

He comes out and he preaches repentance. He speaks of the mercy of God. And this is what Christ now does through the story of Jonah for you.

Verse 41, Matthew chapter 12. Jesus says, The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

[12 : 29] The Lord Jesus Christ, right? Preaching repentance to all who will believe. Chapter 2 and verse 1. Then Jonah, and I am always astounded that it took three days in the belly of a fish, then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me.

Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and he heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep and the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me. All your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me.

Weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God.

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

[13 : 42] But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the Jai land.

So after all of this suffering in the belly of this fish, Jonah remembers the Lord. He remembers God's steadfast love for him.

He turns his heart back to God. He desires his presence. He's been fleeing from the presence of God, but here, look at verse 4.

Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. He repents of his disobedience and turns back to God.

Chapter 3 and verse 1. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

[14 : 51] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

So here we see Jonah gets a second opportunity, and this time he is obedient. Chapter 3, verses 1 through 4, is the center of the chiastic structure.

of Jonah. This is the middle of it, where the whole thing folds in over on itself. Right? This is the place we want to pay extra careful attention.

Right? God says to Jonah again, right, go to Nineveh, and what does Jonah do? He goes, this is what the author is trying to draw our attention to.

Right? This merciful God has a message for Nineveh, and Jonah joins him in sharing that message. Right? We're going to see wonderful repentance here, and some few verses, and then the horrible end in chapter 4.

[16:04] Jonah's downcast disposition towards what the Lord did. But right here in these first four verses of chapter 3, Jonah repents, he's recommissioned, and he preaches in obedience.

Verse 5. And the people of Nineveh believed God. It's a wonderful sentence. And the people of Nineveh believed God.

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

These are outward expressions of repentance. And he issued a proclamation, and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything.

Let them not feed or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.

[17:08] Who knows? God may turn and relent, and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish. A city-wide repentance happens at the preaching.

Of Jonah. We can know roughly when Jonah traveled to Nineveh, because of some evidence from the book of 2 Kings. Based on Assyrian records, Jonah would likely have arrived within months, or possibly a couple of years, from a complete solar eclipse, that was soon followed by floods and famine.

There had been some signs happening of tragedy, impending doom. And so it is very likely that God had prepared the hearts of the Ninevites for the preaching of Jonah.

That this was a harvest ready to be yielded. We've got this man Jonah, right, who's resistant to preach to begin with. It seems that he has a heart turned back to God.

The only record of his preaching is something very brief, right? Yet 40 days, right? And Nineveh shall be overthrown. I'd like to think there was more to the message than that, but maybe not.

[18:22] Maybe these people had been so struck down that they were so ready to hear something of a God that they could place some measure of hope in.

Regardless, we see this whole city turning their hearts towards God. We see in verse 10, when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

So the city is spared because of their repentance. So God shows great mercy to this people when they repent.

Again, the theme of the book of Jonah is the great mercy of God to all peoples, right? These are not Israelites that God has shown this mercy to, right?

They are Assyrians, right? Our God is a missionary God. From the very beginning, Genesis chapter 12, verse three verses.

[19:29] Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.

Why? So that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God calls a man, right? Out of his idolatry. Sets his blessing on him so that a blessing will go to all peoples.

We see this work itself out in the Old Testament narrative in temporal ways. We know, as New Testament believers, that it is accomplished in eternal ways through the person and work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gospel message is meant to go to all peoples. And you see this again and again and again and again in the Old Testament narrative. I'm just going to give you one example from a psalm.

[20 : 35] I was really tempted to walk through the text this morning, but we don't have time for that today. So let me just give you one example. This is Psalm 96, the first four verses. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord. Bless his name. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations.

His marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods.

So Jonah and we as God's people are meant to be about the work that God is about, right? Sharing his glory, being a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

Our God is a missionary God and therefore we ought to be missionary people. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. Our God is a merciful God and therefore we ought to be people of mercy.

[21 : 42] Chapter four, verse one. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. There's been this citywide repentance.

I hope that any one of us would have just been rejoicing after such a thing. I came and preached a message in obedience to God and look at what he accomplished. Jonah is angry, right?

And as we'll see, he goes out of the city to pout, essentially. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life for me, for it is better for me to die than to live. For he is not happy about what has happened.

And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? The answer is no. It's a rhetorical question. You do not. Verse five.

[22 : 49] Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself, or a tent, you could think. He sat under it in the shade until he should see what should become of the city.

He's still holding out hope that God's going to destroy the Ninevites. It seems that he's going to stay there for 40 days to see what will happen to them.

Verse six. Now, the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. Now, my assumption here is that his booth is not quite doing the job.

It's providing a little shade, but not quite enough shade. We all know light shade and deep shade is much more cool. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

But when dawn came upon the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

[23 : 50] And he asked that he might die and said, it is better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, do you do well to be angry for the plant?

And he said, yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. And the Lord said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.

And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?

So he teaches here, Jonah, a lesson. And the text just hangs at that point. And I believe it hangs at that point because the Israelites and now we are meant to think of ourselves in this situation.

What is left for Jonah to do? To repent again, right? But it stops at that place and leaves us, I think, with the thought of repentance for our part, not being agents of mercy for others.

[25 : 02] So why does God show Nineveh this great mercy? First, because of the worm. He uses this example. This plant sprouts up quickly.

It's appointed by God. Then the worm is appointed by God. Verse 7, when the dawn came on the next day, God appointed a worm. It attacks the plant so that it withers.

And I believe what God's trying to communicate is that there has been a worm in the city of Nineveh, the work of Satan, deceiving those people. Jonah feels sad for the plant because of the worm.

And he should have felt sad for Nineveh because of Satan, because of that thing that's coming in to cause the Ninevites to wither.

He also shows Nineveh mercy because of his labor for Nineveh. First part of verse 6, now the Lord God appointed this plant, right? He makes it come up over Jonah, right?

[26 : 03] He brings it about in a day and he brings it to end in a day. But yet he had been working in Nineveh for much, much longer. The Ninevites were image bearers of God.

They were not worshipers of God, but they had built a great city. This was a magnificent city. He had labored over these people.

They were his. He also shows the Ninevites mercy because of their moral confusion. He says in the first part of verse 11, should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?

Now some think this is a, I would say an odd reference to children that he's numbering out how many people there are in Nineveh. But this phrase is not used anywhere else in the scripture to speak of children, to designate persons as children by talking about not knowing their right hand from their left.

I think, along with others, that it's more likely that God is referencing how very confused these people are. in need of mercy, utterly sinful, at fault for their wickedness, but morally confused.

[27 : 26] God chooses to show them mercy. And also he shows them mercy for, that's the word that ends the text, the many cattle.

Doesn't that seem like an odd way in the text, and also much cattle? And I suppose that what the Lord is saying is that there is also things in this city, right?

It's a mark of their wealth. Things that are meant to be used for God's purposes would also be destroyed in the destruction of this city.

God loves people. God loves cities. God is merciful to all peoples. This is the theme of the book of Jonah.

So have you experienced the mercy of God? Have you been forgiven for your sins? I hope that you identify with Jonah being shown favor in this text and the Ninevites being shown favor.

[28 : 36] If you have, do you now think of God as merciful? When you sin, do you throw yourself on the mercy of God found at the cross of Christ?

Do you find yourself running to Zion? Or do you find yourself running back to Sinai? Oh, God is going to be so displeased with me.

I deserve punishment. Or are you in Christ, having been shown the mercy of God, do you rely on His continued mercy on your behalf? The law of God is meant to drive us to Christ and then to show us, once we're in Jesus, how we can walk in Him.

Our recitation this morning asked the question, since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose? That we may know the holy nature and will of God and the sinful nature and disobedience of our hearts and thus our need of a Savior.

The law also teaches and exhorts us to live a life worthy of our Savior. So, if you have experienced the mercy of God, do you think now of God as merciful?

[29 : 49] Do you expect our God to be merciful to all peoples? People not like you? People who make you uncomfortable? And are you willing to be used by our God as an agent of His mercy?

To be ministers of the reconciliation that He means to bring to people who will repent and place their faith in Him? I hope that you can answer yes, a resounding yes to every one of those questions.

Let's pray to that end.