

# A look at the story of Jonah

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[0:00] I thought for this particular sort of one-off sermon we would look together at the book of Jonah. So you might have already found it. It is a difficult book to find, isn't it?

It seems to be in different places in your Bible each time you look. But you've now got an opportunity to look in the front, find the page number. No disgrace in doing that. I had to put one of these little tabs in so that I could find it. And it might seem a bit random to look at the book of Jonah for a sort of end of year, new year.

But we're praying that God will use it. So what we'll do, we'll just put it into context. If you're not familiar with the book of Jonah, I think we'd all value a refresher where it comes in time and space. And then we'll just go through the story in order. And I've just got a few things to pick out which I hope will be helpful for us. So let's look, first of all, at the time of Jonah.

[0:57] And I've got this wonderful chart. I was going to use the pointer, but I don't think the pointer is going to work. It is a wonderful chart. I didn't do it.

So thanks to whoever Kim P. van der Reit is. The bit that I wanted to point out is where Jonah comes. On this left-hand side is the kings of Israel in wonderful order and color. And on the right, so Israel is the northern part, the northern half of the territory, as it were. And then Judah being the southern kingdom. They split, unfortunately. And so they've got two sort of simultaneous histories. And Jonah comes in here. He's mentioned in two kings, I believe it is. In the reign of Jeroboam II. And the thing that you need to notice, and there's a lot of baffling information there. Don't be baffled by all of it. Is what happens at the end of the history of the kings of Israel.

[1:57] It comes down to here. I don't know whether you can read it. Anybody tell us what happened at the end of the history of the kings of Israel? Anybody read that?

The Assyrian captivity. So the Assyrians came and wiped out the northern kingdom. That turns out to be an important factor.

Let's look at the map. A beautifully drawn map. I hope you can recognize it. This up here is the Mediterranean. I seem to have missed out Cyprus. Now, the Red Sea, Persian Gulf. With the two rivers being the Tigris and the Euphrates. And Israel, Judah, being along here on the shores of the Mediterranean.

And the thing to notice is some places. So Nineveh is there. And just in case you haven't tweeted, it's inland. It's inland. It's inland. And it's actually a long way from Joppa.

[3:00] Which is where Jonah heads in the story, as we'll find out. And Tarshish is even further away. Tarshish comes up in the story.

And that is in the opposite direction. So he heads in the opposite direction of where he's supposed to go. So that map is important. Just the basic ideas of that.

So let's look at a little bit of context more. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. And the Assyrians were noted for their warlike nature.

Their extreme war efficiency. And their cruelty. And as I've just said, they're destined to be the destroyer of the northern kingdom.

So let's see what happened to Jonah. I'm just going to put this up a little bit. I won't risk it. I won't risk it. So if you follow in the Bible with me.

[3:58] The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai. Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it. Because its wickedness has

come up before me.

So the word of the Lord comes to Jonah. And he's sent against Assyria, against Nineveh. Which is termed a great city.

There's a number of great things. The word is repeated. But this is the great city. And he's to speak against it. There's no particular word for preach in the original.

It's just to call against it. To speak against it. And to speak, he's sent to Nineveh. Not because they are good.

Why is he sent to Nineveh? Because it's a wicked place. Yeah. It's a bad place. So go and speak against it. Call to it.

[4:58] Because of its wickedness has gone up before me, says the Lord. But what did Jonah do? Verse 3. He something R, something A.

I do this even with adults, you see. What did Jonah actually do? He ran away. He ran away. And he ran away. NIV says from the Lord.

From in the original. Usually uses the word face. Which may or not be important depending on the context. But let's put it in in this case. He ran away from the face of the Lord.

He ran away from the face of the Lord. Or if you like. He ran away from the presence of the Lord.

There he is running away. And off he goes to Tarshish.

Which we've just said is the opposite direction. He went down to Joppa. Where he found a ship bound for that port.

[5:57] After paying the fare. Which shows he must have sort of thought about it beforehand. You know, got his credit card ready. Taken out some foreign currency. And he paid for his ticket.

And off he goes to flee from the Lord. And interestingly, having refused to go to the pagans.

To call to them. To preach to them. To witness to them. He now finds himself rather ironically locked in. With a whole bunch of pagans on this ship.

Now using the word pagans is slightly derogatory, isn't it? But I think that's how Jonah would have seen it. They are not kosher people.

Or they are, you know, people that we don't really want to have much to do with. Certainly the Ninevites. And here, unfortunately, as he would have seen it. Perhaps he's locked in with a bunch of pagans again.

[6:55] And I just find this an interesting thing. That the Lord had given him a mission. Which he runs away from. But somehow he can't escape it. So there he is.

With a mission field of however many sailors. Which he wasn't expecting. Which he was hoping to avoid. But the Lord puts him there anyway. And I think there's just some really encouraging and helpful things.

About the sort of God that we have. And the sort of way he deals with people. He ends up testifying despite himself. And he ends up, as we shall see, saving people's lives.

And I wonder if, as we look back on the past year. Our various efforts. And we look forward to the future year. Whether we find that there's some encouragement in this.

That even if we are fickle and unreliable people. The Lord somehow manages to steer us. So that we do end up in the place that he wants us to be.

[7:57] And we do end up with the task that he wants us to accomplish. Is that a helpful thought? I think, you know, despite ourselves. That God is a sovereign God in this sense.

So what happened next? Verse 4. The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.

And a great storm arose. So there's some more greats here. And there's some hurling. So we get quite a bit of hurling. Chucking stuff around.

And the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. And we have a great storm. So that the ship threatened to break up. And the sailors are afraid.

And they hurl the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. So they're hurling stuff around as well. Can you think of another occasion where there was a great storm? And seasoned sailors feared for their lives.

[9:04] Do you remember? Yeah. The storm on the lake with Jesus in the boat. So this is a little bit the same and a little bit different. But

there's a likeness, isn't there? And I don't want to try and do every single phrase in this.

But as we read on through. The ship threatened to break up. Verse 5. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own God. And they threw the cargo. They hurled the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

Now Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. And 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 won't perish.

A sleepy Jonah. I mean, he's off duty, isn't he? He should be praying. He should be alert to this situation. And doing his best to seek God's mercy.

I think it's a great pity we've got a sleepy prophet. And God prevent us from being a sleepy church in this new year. You know, there is a storm around us.

[10:09] There are needs around us. And I would like to encourage us not to go to sleep. But to be on the alert. And if we have the opportunity to pray, let's be praying people.

You know, there's enough need, isn't there? And I do want to encourage us. And as you would expect, I'd say, we pray each week as a prayer meeting. And I want to encourage you, if you possibly can, to see the value of doing that.

And not in some sense be sleeping. Watching Netflix. When you could actually be here praying. Yeah?

So the captain is right to rebuke Jonah. You know, you're a prophet. You shouldn't be sleeping. Now the sailors cast lots. Verse 7. The sailors said to each other, let's cast lots to find out who's responsible for this calamity.

And they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, tell us who is responsible for making all this trouble for us. What kind of work do you do? That's an interesting question, isn't it? What kind of work do you do?

[11:14] I'm a prophet. Where do you come from? What is your country? What people are you? That's a lot of questions. And he says, I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

And that's a great testimony, isn't it? That's, he still ends up speaking out, even though that's what he was trying to avoid doing. And what a wonderful testimony that is.

Who is the God whom we serve? He is the maker of heaven and earth. He is the almighty. He is not just our personal little God. He is not just the God that suits us.

He is the God who rules everything. And it isn't just that we've chosen to worship him and that's okay for us. All men and women and boys and girls ought to worship him because he is the maker of heaven and earth.

He is the almighty. He is the great one. Everybody should be worshipping him. And in a sense, that's what the call of the gospel is, isn't it? Come and draw near in friendship to the great, almighty, holy, sovereign God who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

[12:28] So it's an essential testimony. He made us. Everybody owes him whether they feel like it or not. That's very important. You know, people say, well, I don't feel my need of religion.

That's not the issue, is it? The issue is that God made everybody and we are all obligated to him because we are his creatures and he is the creator, whether we feel like it or not.

Anyway, let's carry on. So the sailors are afraid. This doesn't, I had a go at the translation. I'm just an amateur with Hebrew, but it seemed to me that there's a little bit that doesn't really come across. They're saying in verse 11, this terrified them. They asked, what have you done? They knew he was running away from the Lord because he'd already told them so. The sea was getting rougher and rougher.

So they asked, what should we do to make, what should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us? And somewhere in there, I think, is some words which say, so the sea won't come up on us, so the sea won't come over us.

[13:33] There's not just a question of the calmness of the sea, but how much it overwhelms us. So what should we do so the sea won't come over us? And Jonah says, if I've got this right, hurl me into the sea.

There's been a lot of hurling. Now hurl me into the sea and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you. Is that what it says?

Yes. And it will be calm and it won't come upon you if I'm hurled into the sea. Now that is an interesting question. We won't go into that.

But instead, the men did their best to row back to the land, but they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the Lord, please, Lord, please, Lord.

That's the specific name of the Hebrew God, Almighty God. Do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man.

[14:33] For you, Lord, have done as you pleased. And they took Jonah and threw him overboard and the sea grew calm. So they hurled Jonah overboard.

The sea grew, I've rest out a word, calm, haven't I? And then it says, they feared the Lord greatly. There's another great here. They feared with a great fear and they sacrificed to the Lord and made vows to him.

Can you think of another occasion where something happens and suddenly the sea grew calm and the people there fear with a greater fear than they feared before?

It's the same before, isn't it? That's what happened with the storm on the lake. There was a great storm. Then there was a great calm and the disciples had a great fear. Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?

It's a bit like that, but not quite like it. But notice that they do offer sacrifices. I think I come back to that in a moment. It is very like Jesus in the boat, except, of course, Jesus stayed in the boat, didn't he?

[15:39] And it's a bit like Jesus on the cross, who was overwhelmed by, you know, all your waves and breakers have gone over me.

Everything went over on top of him. But he on the cross was not rescued. See, Jonah was rescued, wasn't he?

He went into that place of danger, but was rescued. And Jesus on the cross was overwhelmed by everything on top of him, our sins, the wrath of God, all of that.

But, of course, nothing intervened to spare him from that. You know, no fish came along. No angel took him down from the cross. He endured that.

He wasn't rescued. And the sailors, well, the effect on the sailors. I mean, what do you think about the effect on the sailors? Something happens to them, doesn't it?

[16:37] They are grateful. They fear the Lord. And they offer sacrifices and make vows to him. Now, I don't know, would you count that as a conversion? So if you're Jonah writing your prayer letter, your missionary prayer letter for the year, would you say, we had wonderful conversions as I felt the Lord was leading me to Joppa?

Oh, dear, that wasn't right. I mean, what would you say? I mean, I don't know. I don't know whether you would count these people as converted. But something's happened, hasn't it? I mean, what the rest of their story, we don't know.

But something happened. Something positive. And I think there's just some comfort in this. That the Lord's hand was on Jonah such that he didn't let, even Jonah tried his best to run away from the Lord.

The Lord gave him a bit of rope, shall we say that? But only so far. You're still mine, Jonah. And you're still my prophet, actually.

And I'm still going to use you, even though you have made such a mess of my first set of instructions. But I'm still going to use you. And I'm even going to bring people to faith through you.

[17:53] I think that's enormously encouraging, don't you? I mean, I don't know about you, but I feel I don't know whether I messed that opportunity up or didn't take it or whatever. But here's somebody that really does mess things up in a big way.

And the Lord still uses them. And I think that's an encouragement for us. Encouragement for the year past. Thank you, Lord. You didn't let me mess things up as badly as I might have done.

Left to myself. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy. Thank you that you still use people like me. Looking for the year ahead. Well, he was sent to Assyria.

He went off in the opposite direction. He went with some pagans. God sent a storm. Jonah offered to bear the trouble himself. And God sent a protective fish. Verse 17.

God provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Now, providing.

[18:57] The book of Jonah has a number of repetitions. You know, this is the way that Hebrew literature makes points. You know, they didn't have italics. And they didn't have underlining.

And they didn't have background music like you might have on YouTube. So they do repetitions. And in verse 17, the Lord provides a huge fish.

And we'll see in chapter 4, verse 6, the Lord provides a leafy plant or a vine. In chapter 4, verse 7, the Lord provides a worm. And in verse 8, God provided a scorching wind.

So we learn, if nothing else, God is a God who provides stuff. So let me not get ahead of myself. So there's the fish. A God appointed or provided a great fish.

That's not a great. To swallow Jonah. Now, no use looking, I think, in books of... It's not botany, is it? What is it, the science of living animals?

[19:59] Zoology? It's no use looking in books to try and find a suitable fish to put a profit in for three days and three nights.

This is a special fish. God has particularly designed this fish for the purpose. He's able to do that, if he so wishes. I wouldn't have particularly liked.

I mean, I like fish and chips the same as the next man. But I would not like to be actually embedded in a meal of fish without the chips for three days and three nights in the dark or whatever it was.

But, I mean, this is a special fish. So we presume that God has thought of that. But I don't think anybody would particularly want to be in a fish for three days and three nights. And presumably there's enough room in it for Jonah either to compose the psalm at the time, which he does in chapter two, or to have clear enough thinking to go back later and put it in his diary, this is what I was thinking at the time, and to make it into a nice poem.

It's not nice, but it is safe. And rather than thinking of the great fish as being a rather unpleasant way to spend a long weekend, because I wouldn't like that, would you?

[21:23] But notice that that's a lot better than drowning. And God has provided this great fish in a safety measure for Jonah, the disobedient prophet.

Unpleasant. Wouldn't have chosen it, but safe. Specially designed for Jonah. And I wonder if we can perhaps look back on what God has provided for us and think, well, what he provided in terms of, I don't know, our physical health, our employment, our loved ones, the situations that we've been through.

You know, they may be positive, but they may be a little bit fishy. You know, a bit that it wasn't very nice. But as we look back, it was safe.

God kept us through that, whatever it was that swallowed us, which we might not have enjoyed, but he kept us safe in it, like he did Jonah the fish.

And we, is that making sense? Yeah. There is a strand of teaching about God's love for his children.

[22:52] Those he loves, he disciplines. And discipline does not seem pleasant at the time, but produces a harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

It might not seem pleasant. But not only is it safe, God actually uses disciplinary measures.

And, you know, you could put it the other way around. If you look back and you say that my past year, I just sailed through everything. It was just like being on holiday all the time. Then I would say, where's the evidence that God loves you?

Because a loving father disciplines his children. He trains them. He says, right, you've learnt that lesson.

Good. Now there's another lesson to learn. Here's something else. You're not perfect yet. Here's something else for you to learn. Here's more faith for you to exercise. And he disciplines those he loves.

[23:53] And perhaps as we look back, we might say, it's a helpful set of spectacles to put on to say, that situation was for my good. God kept me

safe.

And it was even part of his plan to teach me something through it. And certainly Jonah learns something when he's in the fish because he writes this psalm. He prays inside the unusual fish. Chapter 2, in my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me. Well, he makes a wonderful psalm. I don't know whether he would have done that at the time.

I don't think if I was there at the time, I would have just been praying like mad. And I offer this observation on human nature. I don't know whether it's the same with you. I pray an awful lot better when I'm under stress and pressure.

Do you not? I mean, if we're all going smoothly, prayer sort of doesn't seem to be that important. But prayer is important. And sometimes the Lord sort of squeezes us a bit to squeeze some prayers out from the heart.

[24:58] And here is the prayer of Jonah. I, in my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me. You know, if we are in distress, that is a storm that God has sent to drive us to the harbor of prayer.

And I want to encourage us. I think there is something really profound about that thought, moment by moment, depending on the Lord Jesus Christ. Praying all the time because we need him all the time.

We have a great high priest who hears us when we cry in our time of need and sends us grace to help in our time of need. And for me, that is just most of the time, if not all the time.

Do I have an amen to that? Yeah. Okay, let's move on. I'm not going to do much on the prayer. It's there. I call to the Lord. And he's in the fish three days and three nights.

[26:08] And in chapter 2, verse 10, the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Another slightly unpleasant thought. Having now got grandchildren, all sorts of bodily functions are renewed in my experience.

And the idea of being sicked up, which is basically what it's saying, isn't it? Oh, there's a prophet there in the middle of it all. And I'd always thought, no, I hadn't always thought, but previously I had thought he must get sicked up onto the shores of Nineveh.

But no, he doesn't, does he? He just gets sicked up back onto the shores of the Mediterranean. And he now has a 500-mile journey. I haven't got the pointer thing, but from the shores of the Mediterranean across to Nineveh is about 500 or thereabouts miles.

So he's got a long journey ahead of him. And it says, he was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Good things happen on the third day.

There's a number of things in the Bible that happen on the third day. You're thinking of one, aren't you? On the third day. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. And Jesus himself specifically refers to this.

[27:35] He says, the sign of Jonah. So as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights.

And then he'd rise from the dead. Amen. Now let's move on to chapter 3, verse 1, which I think is a significant verse.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. Isn't that great that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time? This is encouraging for us because God gives him a second chance. And I don't think God only gives second chances.

But it's great that he has another opportunity, doesn't he? An impatient, pedantic God would say, right, you've had your chance but you've blown it.

[28:44] But our God is not an impatient, pedantic God. He is a merciful, gracious God. And he gives Jonah a second chance.

I think that's really great. And so this time, chapter 3, verse 3, Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

And it says that Nineveh was a big city. And he goes into, verse 4, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. So that's his message, which is a pretty uncompromising message, isn't it?

And you'd say, well, now, what are the chances, if we put it that way, what are the chances that you'll get much success from that Jonah? And I guess, well, interesting, Jonah would probably say,

hopefully zero.

What are the chances people will respond to your message, Jonah? I think he is saying, hopefully zero. But, no. They believe God, verse 5.

[29:54] The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, sat down in the dust, and proclaimed, take a fast.

A fast is a sign of unhappiness, of sadness in those cultures. And that's why they're fasting. And they accompany the fast with action. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. And he says, who knows? Verse 9. Who knows?

God may yet relent, and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. They believe God, and they repent.

You know, you really wouldn't expect that, would you? I mean, they've never been to Sunday school. Nobody's prayed for these people in their early years. Goodness knows about their parenting.

[31:00] But he comes, proclaims the word of God, and they repent. They believe. They repent.

Oh, just amazing. Now, I don't know how deep it went. I don't know how long it lasted. But they repented. And there was enough repentance, verse 10, that God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways.

He relented and did not bring on them the destruction that he had threatened. And I think this is something for us to take on board as we go on to a new year.

It is possible for wicked, lost, pagan people to believe and repent. It is possible.

We don't see much of it. And I think if we had come across, I don't know whether it's so much these days, churches or movements which say, here is the golden key to make people believe and repent, and it just works.

[32:03] I don't think that's true. I don't think that fits experience. It doesn't happen magically. It doesn't happen automatically. There is no technique that makes that happen.

But it can happen. People can believe and repent in the most unexpected and extraordinary ways. And I think it's absolutely vital that we believe that.

Because otherwise we lose hope and we won't bother and we'll just retreat and we'll say the best thing is just to hang on until the second coming. And that is not the right attitude.

If God sends us somewhere we should go, we should speak to people that we think probably won't take any notice, but they may.

The thief on the cross became a Christian, I'll put it in those terms, right at the very end. Who would have believed it? So let's keep on praying for our families, for our loved ones, for our neighbours, for our workmates.

[33:12] by God's grace, they can, they could, surprisingly, amazingly, believe and repent.

I mean, after all, isn't that how you became a Christian? Christian? And I'm going to suggest it would be a good matter for the week of prayer, to be praying impossible prayers.

You know, my workmates are so hard, they're so woke, they are so whatever they might be, I don't think any of them would ever believe the gospel. Well, let's pray to a God who is able to bring the Ninevites to repentance, that he could bring them to repentance.

You know, the Apostle Paul saying, but what did he say? I've lost it completely. God is able to save sinners of whom I am the chief, isn't that what he said?

Chief meaning sort of number one. If God can save someone like the Apostle Paul, he could save our family members, he could save our workmates.

[34:24] Paul was dead set against Jesus. If he could save Paul, he could save, you know, unbelieving husband, unbelieving wife, mum and dad, who make fun of being a Christian, workmates, who are, you know, just fill in the list yourself.

God is able to do it. And I think it's absolutely essential, as a church, we keep believing that God is able to do that. And to keep trying, and to keep praying.

Now, as we go on, then, in chapter 3, verse 10, God saw what they did, and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented, and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Chapter 4, verse 1, I had a look at the translation of it. NIV says, but to Jonah, this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.

I think the original is a little bit stronger than that. To Jonah, this seemed evilly evil. Evil squared. And he was greatly angry.

[35:36] angry. What is going on here? He was really angry about this. These wicked people, they deserve to be destroyed and overthrown.

What is going on, God, that you haven't done it? He's very angry. Isn't this what I said when I was at home, verse 2?

It's what I tried to forestall, NIV says. Because I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Because that's the sort of God God is. And really, Jonah was being upset about God being God, wasn't he? But when you start being upset about God being God, that has all sorts of unsettling effects, as we shall try and unwrap a little bit.

God is a God who forgives. He forgives sin. Now, I'm sure there are degrees of sin.

[36:49] Jesus said at his arrest, the one who handed you over has the greater sin. So there are degrees of sin. But in essence, all sin is abominably evil, isn't it?

There's no sin that's good. It's just degrees of evil. And if God has forgiven our sins, now you may not be a murderer, but you may be a hater.

You may not be an adulterer, but you might be lustful, et cetera, et cetera. We're all sinners. And if we're believing Christians, we find amazingly, God has forgiven us.

And who are we to get angry if God forgives other people? Because we're all in the same boat, aren't we? God who forgives. It says in Romans chapter four, verse five, God justifies the ungodly, or he justifies the wicked.

This is scandalous, that God says to wicked people who come to him through Jesus Christ, you are totally forgiven. You are totally justified.

[37:58] I declare you innocent. Come and experience the embrace of my love. And to a penitent sinner, no matter what, that is God's grace.

The vilest offender who truly believes. That moment from Jesus, a pardon receives. You think of the vile people that you might have in your mind.

The one that comes to my mind is something like Jimmy Savile, a sex offender, a vile, exploitative person. And we have to put it into our heads that if, I mean, we don't know what happened in his life, do we?

But if, even if a Jimmy Savile were to come to the Lord Jesus and ask for forgiveness, he would be forgiven. Totally, completely.

The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus, a pardon receives. That's grace. And we're either believers in grace or we're not.

[39:06] we can't sort of have it that God forgives some people but he won't forgive others. So here is Jonah objecting. And it's a problem for him.

Now who is this a problem for? It's a problem for those who are self-righteous. It's a problem for those, sorry, he's saying, why doesn't God just wipe them out, the Ninevites?

Why doesn't God wipe out all the racists, all the tyrants, all the sexually immoral? That is just not the way God operates. I mean, he does recognize the reality of evil and one day evil will be totally judged.

Impenitent sinners will receive the due reward for their sin but for those who believe in the Lord Jesus, he received the penalty for that awful sin.

And now is the day of grace and I think we're glad of it, aren't we? What other day would we like to live in? I mean, this is the day of grace.

[40:09] We live in grace, we stand in grace because of the Lord Jesus and he offers grace to all and sundry and I think rather than being angry

about it like Jonah was, we should rejoice in it and be amazed as we sang amazing grace.

And it isn't just, sorry, it isn't just a problem for, or an issue for Jonah, it is actually the way God is. Just to repeat what Jonah himself said, I know that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

That's the sort of God you are by nature. Well, let's follow the story on. So, Jonah goes to see what happens next.

He's angry and in verse 5, chapter 4, verse 5, Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. He makes a shelter, sits in its shade and waits to see what would happen.

[41:16] So, there's the city, there's Jonah, there's the sun and he's waiting to see will they get zapped because really, I'd really like to see them get zapped.

And God provides things. He has a shelter with shade but in verse 6, God provided, this isn't a provision, a leafy plant, a vine to grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort and Jonah is, yes, you know, he's doing his blog, his YouTube blog or whatever it is, great plant, subscribe and follow or whatever else he's doing.

So, he's very happy about that. God's appointed a fish and now he appoints a plant. So, that's really nice for Jonah. And then the next day, God provides a worm which chews the plant so that it withers and when the sun rose, God provides a scorching east wind.

And the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint and he wanted to die and he gets angry again. A worm, a worm which ate the plant and a scorching wind and there's poor Jonah with the sun beating down on his head and he gets angry.

You know, what do you think you're doing, God? You provided that plant and then you took it away and here I am in the sun and now you provided a scorching east wind. I mean, whose side are you on? You know, he's getting angry about God's provision and we can get angry about God's provision, can't we?

[42:49] We say, well, why have you provided it this way? Why didn't you provide it that way? Why have you provided that for somebody else but you haven't provided it for me? Why have you provided this for me and you didn't do it for them? But we have to rest, don't we?

In God's sovereign provision. That's what I've provided for you. That's the family background, that's the life experiences. I've put you in this place, I've put you in these people, that's where you need to be.

Don't be complaining about it all the time. That's for your good. Stop being angry. Anyway, he is angry. He's very angry. Does it say very angry?

I'm so angry I was, I wish I were dead. Now then, come on, Jonah. It's only a plant and a worm and a wind. You know, come on.

That's a little bit over the top, isn't it? He's more concerned about his personal inconvenience, his plans, his dignity, his reputation as a prophet, his sense of superiority than he is about Nineveh being zapped.

[44:03] Isn't that right? Because this is the issue. What's going to happen to Nineveh? Well, I'm actually more concerned about my personal convenience. You know, I had a really nice plant going here. My plans, you know, I was looking forward 40 days, zap, home.

That's not going to happen, is it? My reputation, here's the prophet who prophesied 40 days and zap, they were zapped. But when you're actually sent to prevent that happening, and I think there's a sense of superiority.

I am one of God's elect people. They are pagans, zap them. And he's angry about all this. And it's a bit of a rebuke, isn't it?

I don't know whether we think along those lines, but let's not think along those lines. Let's not be so wrapped up with our personal convenience and our personal plans that we forget the lost.

That's what's at issue here. And it ends up, doesn't it, with a question that God says, what do you think I should be most caring about?

[45:17] Your plans, your leafy plant, the temperature of your scalp, or verse 11, should I not have concern for this great city?

There are 120,000 people here who spiritually don't know their right hand from their left. They're going to go to hell unless they hear good news about a gracious God.

And there are many animals there. Shouldn't I be caring about them? I mean, it ends with a question, doesn't it? Shouldn't I, the implied question, shouldn't you be caring as well?

God. So, let's just summarize the things we might have thought about.

I think the message of Jonah is that God is compassionate and cares about the lost, the Ninevites. even if we've really messed things up, God can still use us sometimes despite ourselves.

[46:21] Jesus is sort of under the surface of the text here. He, like Jonah, volunteered to bear the trouble so that, in Jonah's case, the sailors didn't bear the trouble, but Jonah did.

In the case of Jesus, he bore the trouble so that we would not have to. Jonah got rescued, didn't get drowned, but Jesus did suffer ultimately the death on the cross, but on the third day was raised.

Good things happen on the third day. God's provision, things that swallow us might be a bit fishy, but God's provision, even if it's strange, can be a safe thing.

There's a lot to be learned in the place of prayer. God is the God of second chances. Sinners are not always as hard as one thinks.

God teaches us to be merciful rather than superior. First lesson repeated, should I not care about that great city?

[47:30] Should not we care about the great city that we're in? God cares about the lost. End of sermon. ending of