

Jonah 1

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Date: 06 November 2022

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture text is Jonah 1. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. 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.

But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then 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.

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 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.

[1 : 19] 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. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land, but they could not.

[2 : 17] 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.

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. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. You may be seated.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. The Bible contains an astonishingly wide variety of stories.

[3 : 45] Stories about individuals, but individuals who act as representatives for God's people.

And this exceedingly vast array of stories all play their own part in God's plan of redemption.

Nowhere, perhaps, is put on display such a vast contrast as the two we are asking you to put on display this fall.

The book of Ruth. The book of Ruth. The book of Ruth. And then the book of Jonah. The pleasantries of Ruth.

I hope you were enthralled with her over the past four weeks as our hearts rose collectively.

[4 : 48] But the pleasantries of Ruth will for the next four weeks be exchanged for the pridefulness of Jonah.

The worthiness of Boaz. The worthiness of Boaz. For the unwillingness of God's people.

We leave the days when an outsider was welcomed into the family of God.

And we enter a moment in Israel's history when an insider wouldn't so much as lift a finger for those on the outside. We move from fields that were ripe, the barley harvest.

And we enter into a most damning portrait of a heart that is hard like a fallow field.

[5 : 58] We are moving into a story where mercy is discarded by God's people.

Where self-interest is on display. Where the church would be more concerned with her own callings.

Her own giftedness. Her own way. Indeed, Jesus, when he references this story in his day, only does so as an indictment on the people of his era.

And I sincerely doubt that things have changed all that much. Ruth gave us redemption. Jonah should have us cry, Lord have mercy.

Ruth put me on my feet. Jonah, this week, only causes me to weep.

[7 : 11] Jonah is a mirror. In which the spirit of God would have the people of God.

Behold themselves. Gratefully, thankfully. Therefore, it's brevity. Four chapters, four weeks. Maybe in God's mercy. Maybe in God's mercy. For who would want to see the image that is portrayed here for much longer.

Although, what God's word will teach us these four weeks is that God himself is on a mission.

A mission of mercy. Getting the church to embrace God's mission of mercy has never been easy.

[8 : 18] Especially mercy for those who you consider to be outside of you.

Especially mercy when ethnically and nationally and religiously and culturally encounter differences from you.

Amen. So, Ruth and her glories, I'm setting aside. And the Lord's table is what I can't wait to get to this morning.

The setting for the story of Jonah is given to us in the opening three verses. I would encourage you to look at it. And the setting, in a sense, provides the issues that are put down.

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.

[9 : 40] 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.

God says, arise and go. Jonah simply says, no. Doesn't get any cleaner than that.

But what do we know about Jonah? And Nineveh? And God? Come with me, if you will, to an earlier moment in the inscripturated text, 2 Kings chapter 14, for Jonah, this Jonah, appears there too.

We learn significantly where he's from, what his days were like, and how God was using him. 2 Kings 14, verses 23 through 27. Jonah will appear here.

[11 : 06] In the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria. He reigned 41 years.

Already we see something about the times in which Jonah lived. If Ruth lived in the days of the judges long before David was king, Jonah lives long after the days of David's fall, when the kingdom of Israel was now evidently split itself in two.

Yes, the church, God's people, were now divided. They were 10 in the north and 2 in the south. And that is the era in which Jonah will emerge. He emerges when, verse 24, the king of Israel and Jonah himself was among the northern tribes, did, it says, what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Same phrase that you'll find of Nineveh in our own text. But God's people were doing evil in the sight of the Lord, for they were not departing from the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin.

[12 : 23] But notice something of God in the days of Jonah. He restored the border of Israel from Labo Hamath, as far as the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Heifer.

Interesting. Jonah lived in a day when the church was divided when people did what was right in their own eyes and a day in which God was merciful nonetheless.

It says here that he had restored the border under this man's ministry. He had enlarged their territory rather than hindering their ability to move.

And then it says, verse 26, for the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free. There was none to help Israel.

But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from heaven. So he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. The Lord mighty.

[13:39] We just sang holy, holy, holy. Lord God almighty, merciful and mighty. The mighty Lord condescends into the midst of his people with all of its factiousness.

He says, let me enlarge your territory. Let me give you a little more rather than a little less. Let me provide a little security where you had no safety.

And I'll tell you why I'm going to do it, because there's not a person in your midst who could actually accomplish any of these things. And so we are learning of Jonah and his times.

What do we know of Nineveh? Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, present day Israel.

Mosul in Iraq. North then, even of the northern church. And to the east.

[14:50] As the capital city of Assyria, it was an economic engine for the world. It stood now on the cusp of becoming the world's great power. It was a center for commerce, for education, for influence, for art, for learning.

Nineveh was a wonder in and of itself. We have uncovered, well, we, those who do these archaeological digs, 25,000 inscribed tablets in the library of Ashurbanopal, including the Gilgamesh epic.

It was a place of culture and arts. The British Museum holds the relic of the lion hunt, the most significant Assyrian art available to the human eye today.

It was an economic engine. Sennacherib himself rebuilt gates, formed canals, administrative buildings are yet uncovered parks.

It was economically viable, educationally elite, culturally wonderful, and evil all at the same time.

[16:06] It says there, verse 2, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city. Don't you love that even God distinguishes between cities and great cities?

He looks down and he says, well, this is a great city. But their evil comes up before me. Now, the evil that's coming up from Nineveh is akin to the evil that comes up from God's people, at least in this respect.

Evil can be described as the conduct of the city, but also the condition of her people. Evil, then, is what's committed in the city, but evil is what's come upon the people as a result of living in the city. I mean, don't we see this? Have we not seen this again in our own neighborhood and streets this week? It says there in verses 7 and 8, that evil is more than merely their conduct, but their condition.

The mariners are going to say, come now that we may know what account this evil has come upon us. They said to him, tell us on account of who this evil has come upon us.

[17:29] Nineveh was an evil place by what it had committed, but it was evil in the sense of just what happened. It just chewed people up. And God wants him to go there.

God wants his people. In the great cities. For his purpose.

But, verse 3, Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Did you notice how the presence of the Lord is listed twice there?

Again, right before the end of verse 3, away from the presence of the Lord. Why? Why be asked to go northeast and get on a boat that's taking you southwest?

I don't mean the airline. Why? Could it be that he just flat out didn't like people from Assyria?

[18:57] Could it be that they spoke a different language and, doggone it, he wasn't going to have to learn it? Could it be that he wanted to be content with what he had rather than had to leave it for someone else?

Now you might say, oh, but it was to cry out against it. Yes, but he knew his Lord, did he not? He knew from personal experience that to speak to the people of God who were in the midst of evil might actually bring something where God relents and enlarges their territory.

He knew it not only from his own ministry, but he knew it from the scriptures earlier at the time of Deuteronomy, where Moses and Exodus, where the people had committed the great sin of the golden calf.

And at that very moment, God comes and says, well, let me tell you my name. My name, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, merciful.

He knew God's character was so different than his own. So, perhaps he fled because he just didn't want to get on with a mission of mercy.

[20 : 18] Well, we'll see as the story unfolds. This chapter unfolds in three movements, and I won't belabor them, but in verses four to six, there's a great contrast that will emerge between the mariners and the messenger.

And it's all tipped off by the storyteller's sense of hurling a great wind upon the sea.

Do you see that, verse four? A mighty tempest on the sea. But then in the second movement, that mighty tempest will actually increase in strength and power.

Verse 11, for the sea will grow more and more tempestuous. And then in verse 13, it will grow more and more tempestuous against them.

In other words, what's going to happen in the story is an escalation, a rhetorical escalation of conflict, not resolution.

[21 : 34] I know good preaching when I hear it. And normally they will tell you that as the sermon moves to the end, it heightens in its oratorical ability.

It actually raises you to a level where your heart is saying, yes, yes, yes. But here, all the yeses are escalation of desperation and greater conflict.

In other words, if you think my introduction was bad, wait till you get to the conclusion. Don't blame me. This is a storyteller.

The mariners activity is contrasted with Jonah's apathy.

Verses four to six. The mariners were afraid. Each cried out to his God. They heard cargo that was in the ship into the sea.

[22 : 35] But Jonah had gone down to the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, what do you mean, you sleeper? I'm guessing this is a paraphrase.

I'm thinking the words were even more difficult. Arise, call on your God. Perhaps the God will give us some thought to us and we may not perish. What a contrast.

Their valiant effort. They know they're in trouble. They know their lives are at stake. And so they're working and they're praying to their own gods. Meanwhile, Jonah, disenchanted as he is with God's call upon his life, disappointed with God.

Boards the ship, goes down into the hull, probably laying on a grain of grain. And just says, pardon me, to hell with it.

Apathetic. Apathetic. He goes down into the bowels. Just the way individuals can go down into the hull of their own inner heart.

[23 : 46] And grind away at God. An evidence of it was his unwillingness to even be prayerful for the condition of those that were next to him.

Even on the boat. I'm not talking about the city. I'm just talking about the mariners. They have to say to him, arise, call to your God. You would think then that verse 7 would say, and so Jonah prayed. But instead, they continue to speak. Prayerlessness is an indication of an apathetic heart. The apathy rises in verses 7 to 10 because their desperation is met with his disdain.

They say to one another, oh my gosh. I mean, cast lots. Where is this coming from? Does anybody have anything going on?

And they're like, we have no idea where this is coming from. The skies didn't indicate that this was on the horizon for us at all. And it falls on Jonah.

[25 : 18] But look at his disdain. This is amazing to me. They say, tell us. What is going on here? What's your occupation?

Where are you from? What's your country? What? I mean, they got lots of questions. And look at his response. This self-righteous, arrogant man of God.

I'm a Hebrew. And I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. Now the men are exceedingly afraid.

You remember verse 5, they were afraid. But now they are exceedingly afraid. Because they're saying, what are you doing to us? And look what he says.

Well, it says, for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them. This man had the audacity to say, well, I can tell you what's going on here. God wants me on a mission that mercy is a pretty real possibility.

[26 : 26] And to be honest with you, I'm not up for it. I'm doing my thing right here. I'm not going to do God's thing.

Stunning. What resistance. What bald-faced arrogance.

To begin to take glory in what ought to be your shame. I'm on the other side of God on this one. Don't care what he said. Their activity contrasted with his apathy. Their desperation with his disdain. 11 to 15. Their relentless effort with his defiance. They said to him, what shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us?

[27 : 30] And the sea grew more and more tempestuous. And he said, pick me up. Hurt me into the sea. The sea will quiet down for you. For I know it's because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. He doesn't say, turn around, roll back.

Get me on the land. I repent. I'm going to go to Nineveh. He basically says, I'd rather die. I would rather die first.

Then get on with the work. What defiance. What self-righteousness.

What unbecoming ugliness. What unbecoming ugliness. Thank God for the mariners.

I don't mean the Seattle mariners. I mean the mariners in the text. They start praying. You're not going to pray. We'll pray. And notice they're not calling out to their gods anymore.

[28 : 42] They're calling out to his God. They know that his God's powerful. They know that his God has disciplined them. They say, oh Lord. Oh Yahweh.

Let's all pray in the name of Yahweh now. Let us not perish for this man's life. Lord, have mercy on us. Regardless of the state of your church.

Hmm. So they picked him up. Hurling him into the sea. The sea's from rising.

And look. Notice what happened. These guys moved from being afraid. Verse five. Being exceedingly afraid. Verse 10. To now. Verse 16.

Fearing the Lord exceedingly. And offering a sacrifice to the Lord. And made vows. Let me put it to you this way. God is on a mission of mercy. And he will get his own.

[29 : 39] Regardless of what his people do. He doesn't need you. He doesn't need me. I can imagine Jonah hitting the water.

Going down. You've heard the story of the husband and wife that argued over whether something had been cut with scissors or a knife.

And the husband says, well, we cut it with the knife. And she says, no, we cut it with the scissors. They had argued over this for years. One day they were out in a rowboat. And it came up again.

And the husband said, we cut it with a knife. And she said, no, dear. We used the scissors. And he said, it was a knife. And just the scissors, the knife, the scissors. And they get so frustrated. He finally throws his wife overboard.

And he says, the knife. And he hears her from the water. The scissors. The knife. Third time she goes down like this. I kind of think of Jonah.

[30 : 52] Hand raised to God. Take that. Triumphant. And verse 17.

My title on this one. God will not be mocked. No. So Jonah goes down. And he doesn't understand that the Lord actually could get beneath him.

The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. This is the only text that Jesus refers to from this book.

I'm not going to give you any sign. You apathetic, arrogant, defiant people who reject my message, says Jesus. The only sign you get is Jonah in the belly of a whale three days and three nights.

Yes. Because that's where mercy is going to meet this man. You got to come next week for that.

[32 : 10] Yes, Lord. I got nothing for you this week other than the Lord's table. Yes, Lord. I got nothing for you other than that God is willing to condescend beneath our mess.

Yes. And say, I will entomb you in something that might save you. In order that I might yet, even with you, release you.

Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. That's a tough story.

Tough story. Lord have mercy.

Yeah.

[33 : 36] well the mercy of God came in his son to deliver us from our mess do you know that the Lord's Supper comes in the context of a mess so the Lord on the night he instituted the Lord's Supper his disciples are arguing about which which are really going to be should have the upper hand when the thing gets gets underway you know hey when this all gets underway we get the upper hand right all the other 10 guys they're going to have to assimilate to our our preferences because we're going to be the guys to go with you

Jesus is like you've got to be kidding me the greatest is the servant I came to serve not to be served get get out of yourself he says but nevertheless he he says this is this is to be taken I'll take care of you do you know that when Paul does his reboot on the institution of the Lord's Supper in Corinthians the church was a mess and actually the words that we read every month come in the context of the writer saying but in the following instructions I do not commend you because when you come together it's not for better but for worse for in the first place when you come together I hear there are divisions and I in part believe it I suppose there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine might be recognized so he comes in the midst of a mess he says this is my body which is for you take heed in remembrance of me this is my blood shed for you drink in remembrance of me it's almost as though Jesus is asking for a compromised church to stand at the foot of the cross and to by their presence be proclaiming something I am a mess I am a mess thank God for his mercy Thank you.