

JONAH | The Runaway Prophet Who Hated God's Mercy | Full Sermon

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[0:00] You can guess what I'm talking about this morning by the picture there. We were able to look back in the archives and we found a photographer that was actually there on the beach.

! Of course, it's not a real, because we colourised it because it would have been a black and white photo. Oh no, he's got the picture there of Jonah. Jonah the runaway prophet. Jonah the runaway prophet. The reluctant missionary, you could say. And he shows us how we can know all the right things about God and still have a wrong heart. Jonah. He knew that God was kind and forgiving. And this is exactly what made him angry, as we'll come to talk about.

Jonah. And we'll pick it up from chapter 1 verse 1 of the book of Jonah, where we see his call. And then what he does? He runs. The wrong way.

[1:05] Jonah chapter 1 from verse 1. Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord.

What a story. We see Jonah there. God says, go east. God was sending Jonah there alone, unarmed.

A dangerous place, Nineveh. It lay about 550 miles east, across the desert. It was the capital of the brutal Assyrian Empire.

[2:13] Israel's most feared enemy. And these folk in Nineveh, they were known for violence, and for cruelty, and pagan idol worship.

Go east, says God. Jonah goes west. He bought a one-way ticket west.

He wanted to get as far away from where God was sending him to as he could, in the world of its time. So he wanted to go to Tarshish, to flee from his calling into the sunset.

He heads west. 2,500 miles away from his calling. He ran down that dusty road to Joppa.

Tarshish was the end of the world. In his mind, he thought he could escape. He thought he could run from the hand of God, the arm of God.

[3:23] Three times, Jonah ran away from the presence of the Lord. Three times. Why? He knew that God's character was gracious and merciful, slow to anger, as we see in Jonah 4, verse 2.

And Jonah knew if he preached to the Ninevites, they might repent. And God might forgive them. And Jonah didn't want that. He didn't want these enemies of God, the enemies of his nation to be saved.

He wanted them smashed. He hated the Ninevites. Now you can say that you believe in God's mercy and still hate it when God shows mercy to people you dislike.

Maybe there's people in your mind, you think, oh, I don't like that kind of people or this sort of people. But God shows mercy to whom God shows mercy.

And correct doctrine is worthless without a compassionate heart. And this was Jonah's problem. He paid the fare. It cost him. And it was going to cost him big time.

[4:38] Much more than just the one-way ticket to Tarshish. And he curled up in the dark belly of the ship. There's always a ship to Tarshish.

There's always a way that you can run away from what God wants you to do. There's always an excuse. There's always a distraction. There's always something else you can busy yourself with. Something else to quiet your conscience. The answer, obey God and his call, his mission. He paid the fare. It seemed reasonable.

Maybe just a few coins. But the real price showed up later. The real price. Then the storm came. Jonah 1 on verse 4 it reads, But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his God, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them.

[5:49] But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay, and was fast asleep. The Lord sent the wind.

This was no accident. It was the pursuing love of God. Jonah slept on. He was fast asleep. I wonder what he was dreaming. Whether he was snoring. He was having a really good sleep there. He was going to need it for what was coming. He was coming.

Yeah. And the storm rages. Imagine the storm, the lightning, the thunder, the waves crashing. The chaos of it all.

As the sailors threw things overboard. The cargo. All the precious goods to lighten the load. They were crying out to their false gods.

[6:52] The sailors pray and panic. Where is God's prophet? He's asleep below deck.

God's prophet. And they shake him awake. And the ship master, the captain, he comes to him. And he says to Jonah, What meanest thou, O sleeper?

You can imagine him grabbing a hold of him, shaking him from that sleepiness. What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God.

If so be that God will think upon us that we perish not. And it came to light that he was the one that was responsible.

The sleeping prophet. As they shake him from his slumber. Imagine them screaming at him. What are you doing? You sleeper.

[7:49] Wake up. Wake up man. This is a crisis. And Jonah confesses perfectly.

And he said unto them, I am in Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land.

The sailors knew of this God. He was the God who drowned Pharaoh's army. He split the sea. Nice speech, Jonah.

Jonah's theology is flawless. But his life is a disaster. And he would rather die than obey God and go to Nineveh. I am in Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land.

Great theology. Zero obedience. Jonah says, throw me into the sea. The sailors try everything first. Crying out to their gods, small g.

[8:59] They care more about Jonah than Jonah cares about Nineveh. So they grab a hold of him and throw him over into the waters.

In this last desperate act. It tells how they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea. And the sea ceased from her raging.

The storm stops instantly. The sailors are in awe. The waves fell flat. Jonah sank. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly.

And offered a sacrifice unto the Lord. And made vows. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. The sailors worshiped the true God.

Jonah's rebellion became their revival. Your rebellion never stays private. It always pulls others into your storm. But God is so strong that he can use even your failures to help others.

[10:14] Jonah's rebellion became the sailors revival. That was conversion. They feared the Lord. Exceedingly feared the Lord.

Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

And imagine as he fell down into those waters. And got. This great big mouth envelops him.

Now four times in the book of Jonah God prepares. Something. The fish.

The plant. The wind. God prepares things. In your life. Nothing is random. We don't always give God credit.

[11:17] For what he's doing. As much as a lot of it we may not like. Sometimes so. But the fish wasn't a punishment for Jonah. It was a rescue. It was God's rescue operation.

And he sank down into that great fish. This huge whale. This great fish. And now he was rock bottom. Inside.

Imagine what it would have been like inside that fish. Of course this is only an artist's impression. We couldn't get the camera in there. And of course there wouldn't have been light. So you can imagine.

It's very creative here. Imagine the picture. Just imagine the stench. Imagine the visual imagery. Well you couldn't see anything because it was pitch black.

But if you could have seen anything. Inside a belly. Inside a stomach. Imagine what it would have been like in the suffocating darkness. Three days in the suffocating darkness.

[12:18] I wonder how much room he had to move as well. Like in a stomach. You can imagine. It might have been quite suffocating. And warm and slimy. Maybe he heard the heartbeat.

Of the great fish. Or the stomach juices. Coming and going. You can imagine. The seaweed in his hair. Can you picture it?

Can you smell it? Can you visualise it? Yeah. It makes you want to be sick. Doesn't it? Acid burning his skin. The stomach acid. Of the great fish.

The reeking darkness. This was Jonah's classroom. God's going to teach you something here Jonah. And God often teaches us.

Doesn't he? In those strange. Hard places. When we refuse to learn. In the easy ones. Big lesson time Jonah.

[13:16] And in the darkness. Jonah prays. Then prayed. Jonah unto the Lord. His God. Out of the fishers belly. Finally.

Jonah. Praise. The most desperate prayer. His first prayer. In the book. The prophet prays. Not on the shore. Not on the ship. Not in the storm. Only at rock bottom. In the fishers belly. And he calls the fishers belly.

The belly of hell. Sheol. The place of the dead. He's. Feeling like he's finished here. I'm in hell. But he says. Verse 4. Of Jonah 2. Yet. I will look again. Toward thy. Holy temple. He says there. Verses 7 through 8. When my soul fainted within me. I remembered the Lord.

[14:19] And my prayer came. In unto thee. Into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities.

Forsake their own mercy. Forsake their own mercy. He's saying he's entering in. His prayer is going into the very holy place.

Into God's presence. Into God's holy temple. In the fish's belly. Into the holy temple.

His prayer goes from the fish's belly. Into God's holy temple. In the holy temple. And he tells of the idolaters. The worshippers of.

Metal and stone. And wood. Fake idols. Are lies. And selfish desires. Steal away the very grace.

[15:28] That we could have. He says. Idols aren't going to do it. Idols aren't going to give us the grace we need. God's mercy. But.

God can. And he says. Of these. False idols. Of these fake gods. They're not going to give mercy. Verse nine.

But I will sacrifice unto thee. With the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord. God. Five powerful words.

Five powerful words. Salvation is of the Lord. Amen. It's the gospel isn't it? In a nutshell.

Salvation is of the Lord. Five powerful words. Jonah admits. Jonah admits. He cannot save himself. What can he do? He's.

[16:27] In this. Confinement. In this living. Tomb. Of a fish's belly. Like. How long is he going to last. Stomach acid.

Is going to. Disintegrate him. He cannot save himself. He's doomed. Damned. It would seem. It would seem. Then God speaks.

The fish spits him out onto the shore. Here he is. Half digested. His skin raw. And blistered. And what would he have smelt like?

Stinking of death. Yet. Breathing still. Half alive. What would it have felt like? God hears his desperate prayers.

Even. Is his own fault. And it's the same for you and me. Brother. You're never so far gone. Or so deep.

[17:29] In the consequences. Of your own bad decisions. That you cannot. Cry out to God. The God who saves. Cry out. God hears.

Next we see. Jonah. Jonah. Gets another. Go. Jonah 3. From verse 1. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah.

The second time. Arise. Go unto Nineveh. That great city. And preach unto it. The preaching that I bid thee.

Same command. Go. Get up. Preach. God doesn't lower his standards. The mission doesn't change. But God's patience gives Noah a second chance.

And God gives second chances. Doesn't he? Amen. Who can say amen to that? God gives second chances. Third chances. Fourth chances. Doesn't he?

[18:31] And. This time Jonah goes. Jonah goes. On the outside. He obeys. Verse 3. Of chapter 3. So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh.

According to the word of the Lord. I don't know whether he was kicking the can down the road. Or you know just sort of. Oh. I've got to do what I'm told.

You can imagine how he was reluctant. But he went. And Jonah began to answer into the city. A day's journey. And he cried and said.

Yet 40 days. And Nineveh shall be overthrown. He marches in. And he shouts. Eight blunt words.

Yet 40 days. And Nineveh shall be overthrown. No invitation. No niceties. No. God loves you. Just a straight out.

[19:31] Judgment. Warning. And then. Boom. The biggest turnaround. In the whole Old Testament. Revival. It's revival again.

In the book of Jonah. The people believed God. The people believed God. Imagine what it would have been like. As he was there. He was probably stained white.

From the stomach acid. The bleaching effect. Of the stomach acid. And he's probably still had bits of seaweed. Hanging off there. And he's probably still smelt really bad.

You can imagine. And here he is. With this. Eight point sermon. An eight word sermon. Eight blunt words. You've got 40 days.

And you're done. You're going to be overthrown. It's over for you Nineveh. And I feel good about that. Well he didn't say that. But that's what he thought. Isn't it? Yeah.

[20:27] This is good. You're going to get smashed. You're going to get destroyed. It's the end of Nineveh. And he was jumping inside for joy. You can imagine it. And. What Jonah would have felt like.

And. How the people. Would have reacted. People stopped. And stared. Who is this man? What is this? Judgment. And it tells us there.

So the people of Nineveh. Believed God. And. They proclaimed a fast. And put on sackcloth. From the greatest of them. Even to the least of them. And for word came.

Unto the king of Nineveh. And he arose from his throne. And he laid his robe aside. And covered him with sackcloth. And sat in ashes.

Imagine the picture of that. The king. Stepping down. From his royal throne. Throwing off his crown. Putting on sackcloth. Like this rough potato sack.

[21:25] Kind of clothing. And he sits in ashes. Imagine that. Sitting in a pile of ashes. The king. The ruler of the nation. And he caused everyone. To fast and pray.

To cry out for mercy. He sends word out. Across the city. His royal decree. Man and beast. Herd and flock. All must fast. And be covered. With sackcloth.

And the king says. But let man and beast. Be covered with sackcloth. And cry mightily unto God. Yea. Let them turn everyone. From his evil way. And from the violence.

That is in their hands. Who can tell. If God will turn. And repent. And turn away. From his fierce anger. That we perish. Not. The people of Nineveh. They were fierce.

They were proud. They were cruel. Nineveh believed God. Wow. Wouldn't that be something. If Australia believed God. Wouldn't that be something.

[22:22] They did not assume. They did not assume. That God would forgive them. They begged him. Who can tell. If God will turn. And repent. And turn away. From his fierce anger.

That we perish not. They besought him. For mercy. For grace. They pleaded. For God. To save. And God saw their works. And God heard. And God saw their works. That they turned. From their evil way. And God repented. Of the evil. That he said. That he would do unto them.

And he did it. Not. The power is not. In the preacher. It's in the word of God. Jonah here. He's saying. What God told him to say. But. The power wasn't in Jonah.

It was in the word of God. Eight grudging words. From a bitter prophet. Were enough for God. To save a whole city. And. And.

[23:18] The people repent. God relents. From judgment. But Jonah. Jonah. Explodes with anger. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly.

And he was. Very angry. Jonah is furious. He's the only prophet in the Bible. Upset. That people got saved. What? That's not what I wanted to happen.

And he tells God. I knew it. This is why I ran. I knew that thou art a gracious God. And merciful. Slow to anger. And of great kindness. And repentest thee of the evil.

I know you're gracious God. I know you're kind. You're merciful. And judgment. You're. You turn from.

When people come. To you. You. He quotes one of the greatest verses of the. Bible about God. Exodus 34. 6.

[24:20] He hates it. That this is true. A gracious God. Oh. I knew it. You were going to be gracious. Oh. I should have known. God. And he would rather die.

Than live in a world. Where his enemies are forgiven. He wanted Nineveh smashed. He wanted Nineveh done. And dusted. And he stomps out of the city. He builds this little shelter.

And he sits down. Watching. Hoping. As he looks at the city. Come on God. Burn it. He hopes that that city's going to burn.

And then God teaches in one last lesson. He prepares a gurd. It's this fast growing plant. Like a vine. A leafy plant. With broad leaves. To give him cool shade.

It was a hot dark time. Here. He's in the heat. Of the day. And this gurd. This plant. Grows up really quickly. Overnight. And it shades Jonah. And he was exceeding glad.

[25:18] Of the gurd. He was really glad about this. Wow. Thanks Lord. A bit of shade and shelter. While I watch Nineveh burn. And next day. God prepares a worm.

To eat the plant. And the plant withers. It just dries up. And withers away. God prepares then. This scorching wind. And the sun beats on Jonah's head.

Until he faints. And he begs to die. Again. And God questions. Dost thou well. To be angry for the gurd. Why are you getting angry.

Why are you getting angry. About this plant. And Jonah insists. That he does. That he's angry enough. To die. He thinks. Yeah. I am angry. Angry enough to die.

I don't want Nineveh to live. And then. The book. Finishes really with. Final words from God. Aimed at Jonah's heart.

[26:15] And our heart. Then said. The Lord. Thou hast had pity. On the good. For the which thou hast not labored. Neither madest it grow. Which came up in a night.

And perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh. That great city. Wherein are more than six score. Thousand persons. That cannot discern. Between their right hand.

And their left hand. And also. Much cattle. It's telling us here. Nineveh had more than. 120,000 people. Who could not tell. Their right hand. From the left.

And it's an idiom. We can understand. That it means. Very young children. There's 120,000.

Children even. Who can't tell. The right hand. From their left. And so.

Understanding that. It could mean. That the total population. Was. Over 600,000. Maybe up to a million people. In Nineveh.

[27:10] And God is saying here. In other words. Jonah. You cared about a plant. That you did not plant. Or grow. It popped up. And died. In one day.

Should not. I care. About a huge city. Full of people. Who don't. Even know right from left. And all their animals. And then the book stops. That's it. There's no answer.

There's no answer. To the question. What is Jonah's answer. The question is not just for Jonah. But it is for you. You can do great things for God.

And still have a heart. That hates what he loves. Some questions we could. Ask ourselves from the book.

To ask yourself honestly. What is my Tarshish? In other words. As we saw Tarshish.

[28:06] Which was where Jonah went. When he should have gone. To Nineveh. What is my Tarshish? What is it that I'm avoiding? What is it that I'm. Doing. Instead of God's will.

God says go here. And we go here. We go to Tarshish. What is my Tarshish? Where are you going? For comfort. Or escape.

When God's will is here. And we go here. We go to Tarshish. What is my Tarshish? What command are you avoiding?

What are you doing? What are you doing? Instead of God's will. Tarshish. And then we could ask the question too. Who is my Nineveh? Who do you struggle to believe.

That God could love? The people in your mind's eye. People in your circle. People you're acquainted with. You think. Well.

[29:05] They're my enemy. They're a group that I look down on. Who is my Nineveh? Ask God to give you his heart for them.

But they're Nineveh. Doesn't matter. Who is my Nineveh? Those you might struggle to believe. God could love them.

And God could save them. Who is God sending us to? Nineveh. Nineveh. Oh no. Not them. Not him.

Not her. Yeah. Share the simple good news. Judgment is real. Mercy is offered. God still uses weak, reluctant messengers.

Brother, sister, think of it. Who is my Nineveh? Hmm. Maybe I should tell them the gospel. Even though I don't really like them. I don't want to see them in heaven.

[30:01] They could be our next door neighbor. Who knows? Jesus is the true and better Jonah. It says that in Matthew 12, our Lord is talking about himself. He says that greater than Jonah is here.

The Lord Jesus is greater than Jonah. We think of Jonah. Jonah ran from his mission. Jesus said, not my will, but thine be done. And he went all the way to the cross.

Jonah slept in the storm. Jesus speaks to the storm. Peace be still. And it obeyed. Jonah was cast into the sea to save sailors. Jesus was cast into death to save sinners.

Jonah was three days in the fish for his own sin. Jesus spent three days in the grave because of our sin. Jonah was angry that his enemies were spared.

Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them, even for the people killing him while they were doing it. And Jesus is the savior, isn't he? He became like us so we could become like him.

[31:04] We can have his righteousness. The question for you then, we can all be a bit like Jonah. Jonah. And the book of Jonah leaves this question, God's question hanging in the air.

Are you right to be angry? Shouldn't I care about these people? Really, God cares for all souls, doesn't he? In the sense that all souls are potentially souls that can be saved.

And who are we to judge? Who do we tell the gospel to? And God is still asking, will you stop running? Wrong way.

Stop running to Tarshish and go to Nineveh. And trust God to give you mercy, let alone Nineveh.

And will you carry that mercy, that grace to people that you think don't deserve it? Do we care more about our comfort or the lost?

[32:06] It's easy to go to Tarshish. Well, it seems easy. A one-way ticket. Well, God's got other plans for you. He's going to get you to Nineveh one way or the other.

Go to Nineveh. Amen. Go to Nineveh. Just a message of Jonah. It's the good news, isn't it, of our Lord? Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you.

We know we like Jonah sometimes. We run away. We disobey. We ignore your call. We find other distractions, other places to go, rather than your will.

Lord God, we might even resent that you're kind to people that we don't like. And we've got our own prejudices at times.

Lord, help us to see every living soul as a potential saved soul by your grace. Lord, thank you for loving us. Even though we've acted like Jonah, oft times, we've not always been wise.

[33:10] We've been careless, even disobedient. Thank you, Lord, that you took our punishment, our sin, our storm. You spent three days and nights in the tomb.

And you rose again. Soften our hearts, Lord. Help us to obey you the first time rather than having to have a second time.

Lord God, work in our hearts. Lord, that revival might even come. As it came to the sailors in that storm.

As it came to Nineveh. Cruel, violent Nineveh. So too, your grace comes to unworthy sinners such as we.

Lord, we thank you for it. Help us, Lord, to trust you more. If there's any present here yet to trust you. They would say like Jonah, salvation is of the Lord.

[34:10] That we'll see, yes, Lord, you've done everything. Everything that had to be done to save our soul. Salvation is of the Lord. We want to give you thanks for it and receive it by faith to believe, to trust, to come.

I'll bend at me to know your grace avails still. And revival comes still to the heart that turns to you.

Lord, we thank you for that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.