

The Sign of Jonah

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[0 : 00] Well, it's wonderful to see all of you this Sunday. For the last five weeks, we have been in the book of Jonah and basically looking at the Old Testament text.

I remember as a young Christian, as a senior in college, reading scriptures for the first time. I did not grow up in a family where we had regular devotions. You could have asked me how many Gospels there are and I'd have no idea. That wasn't my upbringing. But as a young Christian, I started to realize that Jesus regularly alludes to or quotes or mentions the Old Testament.

As many as 4,000 times. I remember reading the verse, but my father's house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.

[1 : 11] And it dawned on me that Jesus was quoting from Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 11. I was, in some ways I should have known that, but I was shocked.

I thought to myself, I am reading the same verse that Jesus read at one time. And then I started to think to myself, what did he feel?

How old was he? What was he doing before? How did that verse impress him? Why does he quote it, but he doesn't quote from the other 50 chapters in Jeremiah?

And I found myself really fascinating by the fact that Jesus knows the Old Testament and refers to it regularly. Well, this morning, we're going to do something similar to that.

We are going to look at the sign of Jonah. But we're not from the Old Testament. We're going to ask ourselves, when Jesus read the book of Jonah, what did he get out of it?

[2 : 17] I know what I get out of it. I know what my students get out of it, because I give it a passage on a test and they all do badly. So they don't get much out of it, but I get a lot more out of it.

And I thought, what did Jesus get out of it when he read it for the first time? Did he say, oh, that's me in the future? Or what? So we're going to look at the sign of Jonah in the Gospels.

You are familiar with the sign of Jonah in the Gospel of Matthew. This is not what we're doing today. We are not looking at Matthew.

We are looking at Luke chapter 11, verses 29 through 32. So I want you to turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 11.

But let me cheat here a little bit. Because we are in the Gospels, whenever you read the Gospel, you must keep two things in mind.

[3 : 20] It doesn't matter which Gospel, which passage, which verse, what chapter. You must always remember two things before you even begin.

This is like preliminary. This is like prerequisite. And what we need to remember about the Gospels are these two things, which we find very well stated in the Gospel of John.

So please turn, first of all, to the Gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 30 through 31. And then we'll go back to Luke.

Look at John, chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

John is saying, I didn't include everything that Jesus said or did. I left out some things. I would add to it, he left out some things as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to decide what to include and what not to include.

[4 : 37] But if you read the Gospel of John, you shouldn't say, I have read everything that Jesus said and I've read everything that Jesus did. John is telling us, no, he did not.

But Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. So if he included some things guided by the Spirit, if he included some things, why did

he include them?

One of the things you will be surprised to find out, that in the four Gospels, the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels is this. It is not raising Lazarus from the dead.

I thought that would be big enough to make all network news at seven. It's not raising Lazarus from the dead. It's not walking on water.

For all of you who think walking on water is easy, after the baptism service, I'll pay \$10 for everyone who can do it.

[5 : 41] It's not walking on water. It is not calming the storm. It's interesting to notice that the only miracle that Jesus, that all four Gospels record, is feeding the 5,000.

So this illustrates John's point. Jesus did many other things that are not recorded in this book.

So, why did he include some material and leave out others? Look at verse 31. These are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

John is saying, this is my purpose for writing. So if I read the Gospel of John, and I conclude that Jesus hates the Gentiles, I've misread John.

Because John is telling me, you should arrive at this conclusion. If I arrive at that conclusion, I miss the point. And so, John, bless his heart, says, but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you have life in his name.

[6 : 59] I love John, because he tells us, I like, I'll put this delicately, I like Mark less, because he doesn't tell me.

He wants me to play detective. John is kind. Mark needs to be rebuked by somebody, not me. Keeps me guessing. Maybe gives New Testament scholars something to do in their profession. So, the Gospels, the evangelists, choose the material they're going to include, guided by the Holy Spirit, and they choose it for a purpose.

John makes the same point, again, in chapter 21, verse 25. In chapter 21, verse 25, John writes, Jesus did many other things as well.

If one of them were to, if one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have enough room for the books that would be written. If we, of course, this is a hyperbole, if we wrote down everything that Jesus did, we'd fill this world with books.

[8 : 21] So, evangelists do not record everything. So, we're going to look at the sign of Jonah from the Gospel of Luke, which automatically raises the question, what is the purpose of the Gospel of Luke?

Well, I'm not going to tell you. Not right now. At the very end, we'll get back to this. So, I'll keep you in suspense for a while. We're going to ask ourselves, what is the purpose of Luke?

And why does he include the sign of Jonah? So, let's turn to the Gospel of Luke, where we're going to be staying the rest of this sermon.

Luke chapter 11, verse 29. Luke 11, 29 is going to illustrate what we just finished reading. Luke 11, 29.

As the clouds increased, Jesus said, this is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

[9 : 34] Keep reading. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Moses' wisdom.

And now, one greater than Moses is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And now, one greater than Jonah is here. Look at this passage carefully. 29 through 32. Did you read anywhere the word fish?

There is no word fish. Did you read anywhere three days and three nights in the belly of the earth? No. No. As I was saying a minute earlier, the Gospels don't record everything that Jesus said.

[10 : 46] They choose what Jesus said to make a point. So we know that Matthew is trying to point to Jesus' death and resurrection based on scriptures because that's important for Jews.

But Luke is doing something else. So what's he trying to do? Well, that's what we need to do. Let me begin by helping you understand something.

Verse 29. As the clouds increased, Jesus said, this is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

What is a sign? In the Old Testament, if a prophet said something fantastic or incredible or too much, like if I said, God in one night is going to wipe out the whole Assyrian army in one night. Miraculously. Well, you may say, well, he may be patriotic or he may be hallucinating or maybe he's on LSD or, you know, God knows what's happening to him.

[11:49] So you ask the prophet Isaiah, give us a sign that will authenticate that you are a true prophet, not a false prophet, that you're not making up this stuff, that you are indeed bringing us a word from God.

And then you could have signs from above and signs from below. Signs from above would be the rainbow. God says, I'm going to give you a sign.

I'm not going to flood the world again like this. And so a sign from above would be the rainbow. Another sign from above is at the time of Elijah, where he says, you say Baal is the great God and I'm telling you Elohim is the great God.

You call on your God to send fire, I'll call on my God. And they called and called and nothing happens. And he called on his God and fire came from heaven. So that's fire from heaven.

At the time of Noah, the flood, water, came from heaven. So that's a sign from heaven. It could be a sign from earth. In the book of Numbers, because they disobeyed God, God made the earth open its mouth and all these evil leaders were swallowed.

[13:09] So signs could come from both places. Jesus' death and resurrection is signed from below, not from above. He is rising from the earth.

Now, in this case, the sign is, as verse 30, as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the son of man be to this generation.

So we have to figure out what does that mean. Let's ask several questions. The first one, the first very important question is, how are Jonah and Jesus similar?

If Jesus is a sign to his generation the same way that Jonah was a sign to his generation, how are Jesus and Jonah similar? Well, most of the time we think of Jesus and Jonah are quite different, and they are.

Jesus is the son of God. Jonah is not the son of God. Jesus will judge the world. Jonah will not judge the world. Jesus is part of the Trinity. Jonah is not part of the Trinity.

[14:17] And you can go down the list. Jesus accepted his mission. Jonah rejected his mission. Jesus went and did what the father told him to do. Jonah tried to run away and escape.

And so there are differences, but there are similarities. And this, noticing the similarities will help us figure out what the sign is. Number one, they were both sent by God.

They were both sent by God. I am standing here in front of you because the elders asked me to preach this Sunday.

Am I sent by the United Nations? No. Am I sent by the IRS? No. Am I sent by FIFA?

World soccer? No. Why am I here? Because the elders, representing God, asked me to come.

[15:23] So I am representing the elders. I am also representing the Lord. So in that sense, in a very, very small way, I am sent by God.

But on a much, much larger, more magnificent way, Jesus is sent by the father in a fantastic way. But I am sent by God. Why did I come here?

Well, for a purpose. It's not to negotiate a treaty with Iran. If I wanted to negotiate a treaty with Iran, I wouldn't be here.

I would be over there. I am not here to spy on Mike Salvati. I don't know why I would want to spy on him.

I am not here to pull a rabbit out of the hat to show that I can do more magic tricks than the rest of you. I am not here to conjugate verbs in Arabic.

[16:23] I am here because I am trying to present a message from the Lord. I am bringing you a message in a very humble way I am saying thus saith the Lord.

While quite aware that I am terribly inadequate and lousy sinner and should be on my knees begging for mercy. But I am sent by God as was Jesus as was Jonah.

They were both sent with a message and they both preached to their audience. Jesus didn't escape to Germany Jesus preached.

Jonah escaped. God got him back and he preached. So they were sent by God with a message from God and they carried out their duty of bringing that message. One with great love for the world and one with resentment and probably didn't like to do it anyway. But interestingly enough the sign of Jonah is associated is connected with the Ninevites and the queen.

[17 : 36] So let's look at verse 31 please. Please verse 31 the queen of the south will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom and now one greater than Solomon is here.

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and now one greater than Jonah is here.

He is saying look at the example of the queen of the south look at the example of the Ninevites. How are they different? This will become important in just a second but let's figure out first how are the Ninevites and the queen of the south different?

Well first obvious way is that she is a woman and they are men. The text says the men of Nineveh. I need to tell you something about Hebrew. Semitic languages are strange in some ways as all languages are. So if there is if all of you were here and indeed you are and this is a mixed company with men and women in Semitic languages I would address you as gentlemen.

[19 : 01] It's not because I can't tell the difference between men and women or because my eyeglasses are so bad that I can't tell that there are women standing in front of me but Semitic language is such that you would use the word gentlemen to cover men and women.

We don't do that in English but we do it in Semitic languages we do it in Arabic and you know you learn to live with it. So I don't want you to think that only men in Nineveh believe the gospel.

I suspect the whole population but if you're going to talk about a mixed group you would say the men. So she is a woman they are men.

Not only men but they are men. She is just one singular person. They are multitudes. Noah mentioned God mentions the 120,000 in the city who don't know the right hand from their left. She is one they are multitudes. She is from the south. They are from Nineveh which would be the north.

[20 : 14] It's like saying I have a friend from New York and I have a friend from California. that means one end of the United States the other end of the 48 states or one from Massachusetts and one from Florida north south east west.

She is from the south they are from the north. The other difference is this. She is a queen they are just ordinary citizens.

If she is a queen that means she is rich she is powerful she has prestige she has position in society she is highly respected they are just average citizens.

And one more important thing to notice she came to listen to Solomon they did not come to Jerusalem Jonah went to them they stayed put in their place but in her case she had to travel they didn't have to travel he had to travel but they didn't so there are these differences but what do they have in common well they have several things in common number one they are both Gentiles if she is queen of the south she is a Gentile by the way during World War II Ethiopia was ruled by a dynasty the last emperor in Ethiopia was Helasi Lasi and he claimed that he was a descendant of the queen of the south that she had a son by

Solomon absolutely nothing is said about that in the Bible the Old Testament it says nothing of the sort they claimed according to their tradition which they may have made up that they were descendants of Solomon through the queen of the south in its gardeners whether anyway she she is a Gentile and so are they they both heard the message they both believed in God they both as the text says will stand up on judgment day and condemn this generation and they both were ministered to by someone less than Jesus please notice the expression someone greater than Solomon is here someone greater than

[23 : 16] Jonah is here so they are Gentiles who heard the word of God believed in the Lord they were ministered to by someone far lower rank than Jesus and they will stand up for that reason and condemn that generation so why does Luke include this passage in his gospel he left out other things resurrection is not listed here so why does he do it John tells us his purpose you can read that in John chapter 20 verse 31 what is Luke's purpose and why would the sign of Jonah help us understand

Luke's purpose what's on his mind well the best way to understand that is to turn to Luke chapter 1 Luke chapter 1 the first four verses many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled many things that have been fulfilled among us just as they were handed down to us by those who from first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word therefore since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning it seemed good also to me and there it is it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Most excellent Theophilus. Please notice two things. First of all, his name. If you are at a baseball game and they are introducing the players and one of the players' name is Jesus Gonzalez, you can say with some certainty, yes, he is probably Hispanic. If the next player is Hans Reichenbach, then you can be sure he's probably of German certainty. So if your name is Theophilus, what does that mean? It is two Greek words. His name consists of two Greek words.

Theos or Theo, which means God in words like theology and Theophilus. The Phil part means brotherly love. Philadelphia, philanthropy, philosophy. So his name means lover of God, one who loves God. That is clearly a Greek name. That's clearly a Greek name. And secondly, he is addressed with the title most excellent. In the New Testament, this is the title that you use to address a Roman governor.

Roman governor. So he may be a Roman governor. It's not limited to Roman governors, but it is used very often with Roman governors. He may have been a senator. He may have been a governor of a province or mayor of a large city like Corinth, but this is a high-ranking Roman person. He has a Greek name and he has a very high title.

[27 : 45] So if that is the case, then he is a Gentile. In chapter 11, who else is a Gentile? The citizens of Nineveh and the Queen of the South. Both of them heard the message of God and accepted it, even though they were ministered to by somebody not quite as great as somebody not quite as great as Jesus. Someone greater than Solomon is here.

Someone greater than Solomon is here. So this person is also hearing the word of God, but he is not hearing it from a minor prophet.

And a king. He is hearing it from Jesus. And Jesus is greater than both. If they repented at the preaching of Solomon and Jonah, how much more should he repent hearing the words of Jesus? Jesus. But you may say to yourself, well, he is a very high-ranking officer. May I suggest that the Queen of the South was a very high-ranking officer too.

So what is the point? The point is, God does not say only university professors can be saved. God does not say only musicians can be saved.

[29 : 43] God does not say only taxi drivers can be saved. God does not say that only bankers can be saved. If you look at the Queen and the citizens, the gospel goes out to a woman and it goes out to men, regardless of gender.

God does not say only. It goes out to a woman and it goes out to a woman and it goes out to people who are high position and people who are just ordinary.

It goes out to those who have great prestige and just common citizens. It goes out to people who live in the north and people who live in the south.

It goes out to people who live in the south. It goes out to people who are looking for the truth and think that they have found the truth there and they go to it and some of them just stumble on the truth because somebody decides to share the gospel with them.

What it is saying is that the gospel goes out to the whole world. Regardless of gender, regardless of position, regardless of money, regardless of influence, regardless of geography, the gospel goes out to the world.

[31 : 09] This is like Luke's version of the Great Commission. And what Luke wants to do is to encourage the church to open its eyes and realize that the gospel isn't just going to be limited to Jews.

It will include Gentiles. That even in the Old Testament, Gentiles were converting the queen, the people of Nineveh.

We can add more to those. Ruth. So, what this means to us is that we shouldn't underestimate the power of the gospel.

which can convert the whole city or limited to few people, not realizing that it can reach the whole world.

That is the point that Jesus wants to communicate in the gospel of Luke. Now, how is Jesus able to do that? Well, here's where the gospel of Matthew puts in.

[32 : 27] He is able to do it because he will rise from the dead, conquer death, and empower us to carry on the task. Let's have a word of prayer.

Let me pray for you. Father, we are a young church.

We desire to obey you. We desire to love you. We desire to do you well. Give us the confidence that the gospel is powerful and that it can reach every segment of the human race, regardless of where we are or where that person is.

Help us to have confidence in your ability to change hearts and to bring into your flock those you are calling. Show us how to do these things, Father.

How to be faithful to you by preaching the gospel. I ask it, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.