

Jonah 5

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Date: 05 July 2015

Preacher: Samir Massouh

[0:00] The last four weeks, Pastor Mike Salvati has been looking at the various chapters in Jonah. This is in some ways like looking at a forest, one tree at a time.

But today I wanted to look at the whole forest rather than the individual parts of it. And after we look at Jonah as a whole, I wanted to look at even the background behind that.

So we're going to look in two stages at the larger and even larger picture. But before we do that, I wanted to summarize where we are now so that in case you missed one of the four sermons, you wouldn't feel left out.

You would understand what's going on. Well, what is happening basically is that Jonah lived at a time when the Assyrian Empire was the world-dominant power in the ancient Near East.

On four different occasions, they wanted to conquer the world. And the first time was at a major battle, very important battle in ancient history called the Battle of Karkar.

[1:21] One of the enemies that fought against Assyria was Israel, King Ahab to be specific.

Well, the Assyrians lost at Karkar in 853. They tried again and they conquered Damascus in 803. They tried another time in 745 and one more time in 701.

So it was obvious to anybody that Assyria wanted to conquer the world. In the middle of this period, when everybody knows that Assyria wants to conquer the world, God sends Jonah to preach to Assyria.

Well, Jonah now is thinking to himself, should I go or should I not go? Should I obey God or should I not obey God? What should I do?

He is clearly thinking like this. If I go, I will preach. If I preach, they will listen. If they listen, they will repent.

[2:31] If they repent, God will forgive them. And he knows that and he argues about that as early as chapter 1 before he gets on the boat.

You can see that in chapter 4. Didn't I talk to you about this? So if I preach, they will hear. If they hear, they will repent. If they repent, God will forgive them.

If God forgives them, they will not be destroyed. What will happen next? Invade us and destroy us. On the other hand, if I don't go, I don't preach.

If I don't preach, they won't hear. If they don't hear, they won't repent. If they don't repent, God will destroy them. And if God destroys them, what can they not do?

Invade us. So for him, it's a political decision. What is more patriotic thing to do? You know, if we don't ask these questions on the 4th of July weekend, I don't know, you know, when should we ask these questions?

[3:42] What is the patriotic things to do? Do I want to see them destroyed and resurive? Or do I want them to survive and re-destroy?

And he decided, forget about them surviving. I am going to sail and not preach. Well, he wasn't planning on the fish, spitting him.

So, he's in the boat. There's a huge storm. And he says to the sailors, it's my fault. Throw me overboard.

You think to yourself, oh, what a kind, nice guy. You know, he is concerned about the sailors and the ship. And he doesn't want them all to drown. Well, you know, that's one way of looking at it.

Another way of looking at it is that if they threw him overboard in the sea, in the middle of a fierce storm, what would happen? He would drown. If he drowns, he dies.

[4:41] If he dies, what will he not do? Go to Nineveh and preach. So, he is willing not to go, even if it costs him his life.

Of course, what he wasn't counting on is the fish swallowing him, spitting him, and being sent a second time. So, he does not want to go because he knows what's going to happen.

And he does go and he does preach. And Assyria is spared.

And God gives them another hundred years of history. Now, this summary is part of a larger theme in Jonah, namely about God, the creator.

I'm going to try to help you see that theme in a variety of ways. Let me begin by saying, in the 60s, when I was a groovy hippie in California, one of the songs that was famous was Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.

[5:57] Now, you could think that they were singing about their girlfriend, Lucy, but they weren't. If you look at the words carefully, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, you know that's LSD.

They weren't talking about any girlfriend. They were talking about hallucinatory drugs, a trip they had had. So, you could read it at one level, but you could read it at another level.

All languages have tricks like that in poetry. In Hebrew, one of the most common ones is chiasm. Chiasm is when you present an idea, and then you present it again in reverse order.

So, one, two, three, four, four, three, two, one. You present it, and then you present it in reverse.

A, B, C, D, D, C, B, A. That's a chiasm. There are many chiasms in the Old Testament.

[7:06] The whole book of Micah is a huge chiasm. The whole book is a huge chiasm. Okay.

It turns out that there is a chiasm in Chapter 1, which we may or may not see. So, let's take a look at it. I put the chiasm there so you don't get lost.

So, please take a look at the chiasm in Chapter 1. God sent in Verse 4. God sent in Verse 17. The sailors are afraid.

The sailors are afraid. They throw things overboard. They throw overboard. There's a prayer.

There's a prayer.

There are questions. There are questions. And in the middle of this chiasm is Verse 9. The purpose of chiasms is to help you focus on what is really important.

[8:09] And what is really important is Verse 9. That is the point. That is the foundation. That is the basis of everything that's going on in Jonah.

That will help you understand what's going on. So, if the center of this chiasm is Verse 9, well, let's take a look at Verse 9 and see what Verse 9 says.

So, in Jonah Chapter 1, Verse 9, Jonah says, he answered, I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land.

That is the central message of Jonah. God is the Lord of heaven who made the sea and the land.

God is the creator.

Everything else that happens is a byproduct, is a ramification of the fact that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the land.

[9:19] He makes this point in another way. What we have here is a prophet disobeying God. Well, this is hardly the first time that it's ever happened in Israel's history.

You only need to read the book of Numbers to see how they annoyed God and disobeyed him and aggravated him for 40 years. You need to read 2 Chronicles to see that again.

So, when somebody disobeys God, usually a Jewish person, God sends a prophet to confront that unbeliever and to force them to make up their mind and hopefully to repent.

So, David commits adultery and God sends him a prophet, Nathan. Jeroboam commits disobedience to God and God sends him a prophet.

Ahaz disobeys God, God sends him Isaiah. Jehoiakim disobeys God, God sends him Jeremiah.

[10:32] Jezebel disobeys God, God sends her Elijah. So, when people disobey God, God sends them a prophet to confront them and cause them to return.

In this case, we have a prophet disobeying God and God doesn't send another man to confront him. God wants to confront Jonah, but he is not going to use a prophet.

What is he going to use? The clue is the verb send. And God sends five things. First, he sends the wind.

Then, he sends the great fish that swallowed Jonah. After he preaches in chapter 3 and he's sitting to see what God is going to do with the city.

God sends a vine. Then, God sends a worm. And then, God sends the scorching heat.

[11:43] Look at those five things. Wind, fish, plant, worm, wind, scorching hot wind. Is any of those people?

No. They're all what? Part of nature. God is making the point that he can use people, but he can use nature.

God is the one who made the sea and the land. And the third way Jonah makes this point is in the question and answer between Jonah and God about sparing the city or destroying it.

So, let's take a look at chapter 4. I want you to follow the reasoning closely. So, in Jonah chapter 4, verse 10.

Please notice the contrast between what Jonah did or did not do and what God did and did not do. In verse 10, the Lord said, You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow.

[13:07] It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left.

And many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about the great city? What is the relationship between Jonah and the plant? Absolutely nothing.

He did not plant it. He didn't water it. He didn't take care of it. He didn't attend to it. It grew up all by itself and died because of the worm.

Jonah did nothing to the plant. Absolute zero. And yet, he cares about the plant that he didn't plant. By contrast, what has God done for the Assyrians?

Among other things, he created them. Just as he created the sea and the land. So the point is that while there may not be a covenant relationship between God and Assyria, it doesn't mean that there is no relationship at all.

[14:23] There is. God cares about his creation. And that is the lesson that Jonah needs to learn. That God cares about his creation.

Now, we're now on item B on the outline. We're on the second half to help you see the much larger but very, very important picture.

If you look at the prophets who are writing at this time, there is clearly a debate that is going on. The issue, simply put, is whom does God love?

Now, Hosea would give you the traditional answer. We are God's people. We are God's bride.

And even if we sin, God will take us back because God loves us. Hosea is saying, God loves us because we are his people.

[15:36] Jonah is saying, yes, maybe God loves us, but we aren't the only people that God loves. We don't have monopoly on God's love.

God loves us, but also God cares about the Assyrians who happen to be our enemies. God loves the Hebrews, Hosea.

God cares about the Gentiles, Jonah. There are two other prophets. And fasten your seatbelts. I'm going to drop the atomic bomb on you in just a second.

I'm going to show you one of the most controversial, one of the most incredible, fantastic verses you'll ever read in the Old Testament.

I suspect that most of you have never read it, but it is extremely important. That passage is in Amos 9-7.

[16:36] Let me help you find Amos. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. Four major prophets almost in the middle, just after the middle of the Bible.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. Three prophets after that. Hosea, Joel, Amos. What is the issue?

Let me help you understand the issue like this. Let me use a modern example. Think about Russia at the time of Stalin. And think about the United States.

Was the United States like Russia at the time of Stalin? Or were we different? Well, anybody would tell you we were different.

We are a democracy. They're not a democracy. We have several political parties. They only have one political party. We have freedom of the press.

[17:42] They don't have freedom of the press. We can criticize the government. They can't criticize the government. We have democracy. We have a democracy.

They have despotism under Stalin. We have free trade. They have communist form of economics, Marxist economics.

So we are not like Russia at the time of Stalin. We're different. God now decides to drop the bomb. He says, Israel, I want you to think about you and the Kushites.

Who are the Kushites? The land south of Egypt. At least what we would call Nubia or modern day Sudan or maybe Sudan and Ethiopia.

More than likely just Sudan but something, you know, perhaps Sudan and Ethiopia. So God says, look at yourselves, look at Nubia, Sudan.

[18:45] Are you the same or are you not? And any good Jew would say, we're not the same. And why are you not the same? What makes you different from them?

Well, what makes us different from them is that you performed the Exodus events. We were in bondage and you set us free. You brought us out of bondage and we are your people.

Please turn to Amos 9.7. God asks an ironic question, a rhetorical question.

Aren't you, Israelites, the same to me as the Ethiopians? Any good Jew would say, no, we're not. We're different.

We're your people. They're not your people. So God says, aren't you, Israelites, the same to me as the Ethiopians, declares the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt?

[19:52] And they would all say, of course you did. You brought us. It's recorded in the Exodus, you know, second book in the Pentateuch. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt?

The Philistines from Kaphtar and the Arameans from Kerr? God is saying, so you think you're special because I brought you out of Egypt.

Are you aware that I brought other people as well? The Philistines and the Arameans.

Let's take this one bit at a time. The Philistines were the Greek people. Homer called them the people of the sea, the sea people.

The Aramean, I'm sorry, not Aramean, Amarna letters mentions them at the time of an Egyptian pharaoh by the name of Mernapta around 1220 BC.

[21:01] The Greeks, finding it very difficult to make a living, left Cyprus and Crete and the Aegean islands and migrated and they ended up on the coast of Israel.

The largest city in Israel today, Tel Aviv, was a Philistine city. So the Philistines were Greeks and God said, you think that they just traveled?

I am the one who brought them. And the Arameans have given us the Aramaic, not Arabic, but Aramaic language which Jesus spoke and which was earlier, became international language at the time of, just after King David.

They came from probably Elam, that is the point where southern Iraq meets Iran, what is called Elam.

And they migrated and ended up in what we call Damascus today. So how did they end up there?

[22:24] It's not that they had a good tourist guide who led them to the right place. They were brought up by God. As God brought up the Hebrew from Egypt, he brought up the Philistines and the Arameans.

I have to stop and wonder to myself. If I were there, I would ask God this question. Lord, did you do it just to those two people or did you do it to others?

Do you mention those two people because the Hebrews would recognize them? But if he mentioned Brazil and Denmark, they'd have no idea what he's talking about.

So are Israel, the Philistines and the Arameans, the only three people or there are a lot more, but the Hebrews would only recognize the Philistines and the Arameans, but wouldn't recognize Germany and Scotland.

If he allows me on judgment day or after judgment day or once we settle down in our mansions in heaven, I'm going to take the Lord out to a cup of coffee and say, please, would you explain this to me?

[23:40] I have to revise my notes that I use in my classes. What Amos is saying, the fact that God brought us out of Egypt doesn't mean anything.

We don't have a monopoly on God's work in history. He has led other people. I would tend to ask him, but why did you place them here, next to us, to fight against us?

Why didn't you put one in South America and one in South Africa? Why next to us? Probably to keep Israel honest. So every time they disobeyed, he had a tool to use to spank them.

So, Amos is saying, God's work in the lives of the nations is much bigger than you might think.

Well, let me drop the next bomb. The next bomb is Isaiah 19. Please go back to Isaiah 19.

[24:52] Verse 20 and following. Isaiah 19 is an oracle against Egypt. And the Hebrews would remember very well the Exodus and the ten plagues and all of that.

And so they remember what God did to the Egyptians. But now God is going to do something different. So, starting with verse 20, we're in the middle of a thought.

I know that, but you can catch on. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. Egypt. When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors.

Egypt had oppressed Israel. Now, Egypt herself is being oppressed. So when they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender.

And he will rescue them. God is going to send a savior to rescue Egypt from oppression. Verse 21.

Verse 21. So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians.

[26:00] And in that day, they will acknowledge the Lord. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings. They will make vows to the Lord and keep them.

The Lord will strike Egypt like the ten plagues. The Lord will strike Egypt to the plague. He will strike them, but heals them.

He strikes them in order to heal them. They will turn to the Lord. And he will respond to their pleas and heals them.

23. Take a deep breath. In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria.

The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day, Israel will be a trio, a party of three. In that day, Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria.

[27:12] A blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people.

Assyria, my handiwork. Israel, my inheritance. I read that the first time and said there's something wrong with that passage. It says, blessed be Egypt, my people.

Doesn't Isaiah know that Israel is my people? And Isaiah says, no, in this case, blessed be Egypt, my people. If I asked Isaiah, who are the people of God?

At that point in history, he will say, Egypt is my people. Assyria, my handiwork. Israel, my inheritance.

These three nations that God is going to use to bring a blessing to the whole world. You think that's fantastic. I happen to be an Arab.

[28:15] And I have cousins who live in Egypt and cousins who live in Iraq. When I look at what's happening in Iraq and in Egypt today, I find it impossible to believe that this will ever happen.

In Egypt, there is a serious political struggle between the secular modern Egyptian army and the backward-looking, the ones who want to return to the good old days, Muslim fundamentalists called the Islamic Brotherhood.

And there is a battle going on in Egypt between those who want to go forwards and those who want to go backwards. We want the good old days.

No, we want to modernize and go into the 21st century. In Iraq, we have the Sunnis and the Shias going at it.

And then we have ISIS as well. To think that Egypt will turn to God in great numbers and that Iraq will turn to God in great numbers and that Iraq, Egypt, and Israel will be a trio.

[29:35] God's blessing to the world is just absolutely incredible to me. What is the point? The point is this. Whom does God love?

Hosea would say God loves us even when we have become a spiritual prostitute. If we repent, he will forgive us and take us back.

And Jonah is saying God cares about the Assyrians. God does not want to see Nineveh destroyed. And Amos is saying God is working and has worked in the lives of other nations, the Philistines, the Arameans.

And Isaiah is saying one day just as we are the people of God, Egypt will be the people of God. What is the point?

Two points. So Jonah is part of this larger discussion about the love of God. How wide or how narrow is the love of God?

[30:46] Is it just us four and no more? Or is he seeing something really big? By the time we get to the New Testament, we have the answer. It's John 3.16.

God so loved the world. Not just Assyria, you know, the Arameans and the Philistines. God so loved the world. We need to stop thinking that we have a monopoly on God's love.

And that it's only us. That since I'm a professor, God only loves professors. And if you're a musician, then God only loves musicians. And if you're a lawyer, God only loves lawyers.

Maybe God loves all three of them and more. So we need to start to realize that God loves the world.

And not have a narrow view of the love of God. The second thing is that if I wanted God to love somebody, I certainly wouldn't expect him to love my worst enemies.

[31:58] I have very confused feelings about ISIS.

On one hand, there is this impulse. Nuke them. Erase them off the face of this earth. The other hand is God loves them.

What were the Assyrians famous for? Their cruelty. Different civilizations were known for different things. The Greeks for philosophy. The Romans for law and roads.

The Babylonians for astronomy. The Assyrians for cruelty. I'd like God to love nice people.

Not cruel people. These passages are inviting us to realize that God reaches to people and to places we would never guess.

[33:07] Please don't say to yourself, I'm an alcoholic. God can't love me. God can.

Don't say to yourself, I stole money from my business. God doesn't love me. God does.

God doesn't just love the well-adjusted, the psychologically balanced, the well-educated, my students who studied under me.

God loves as he loves. God loves. God loves. God loves. God loves as he loves. God loves as he loves. And maybe it's much broader than we have ever thought.

So, does God love. God loves Kenosha? Yes. Does God love Christ the King's Church?

[34:11] Yes. Does God want to use us? Yes. So, this Sunday, as we think about Jonah, and God extending a hundred years to an empire famous for cruelty, let's ask ourselves, what can God do in Kenosha?

What can he do in southeast Wisconsin? And at least, let's start from there. Amen.

Let me pray for you. Lord, Father, thank you for these incredible passages. Thank you for reminding us that your power and your love can penetrate the greatest obstacles, the highest walls, the thickest fortresses, that you can do whatever you want to do in the life of whomever you want to do it to, and that you can reach, and there is no escape from you, not even in the deepest darkness, not even in the highest heavens, you are there as well.

So, give us the confidence to carry the gospel and to be faithful to you, Lord. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.