

AM Jonah 3 God is Compassionate

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[0 : 00] Bibles to the book of Jonah, Jonah chapter 1. Jonah chapter 1. 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 on board 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.

[1 : 25] And they said to one another, Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.

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.

[2 : 31] 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, 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. And then, moving on to chapter 3, Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

[3 : 51] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth.

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation, and published through Nineveh, By the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste

anything.

Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.

[5 : 06] Who knows? God may turn and relent, and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish. When God saw what they did, how they named, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster, that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Amen. And may God bless to us, that reading from his word, and to his name, be the praise. I invite you to turn back to Jonah chapter 3.

Jonah chapter 3, which I'd like to consider with you, under the title, God is Compassionate. God is Compassionate.

We tend to think of the book of Jonah, as a book about Jonah. And Jonah is, in some respects, the main character.

Jonah is a prophet, who is commissioned by God, to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh, and warn its inhabitants, of imminent judgment.

[6 : 27] Jonah refuses the commission. Instead of setting out for Nineveh, Jonah, he boards a ship, heading in the opposite direction.

When the ship runs into a dreadful storm, Jonah recognizes, that the storm is divine retribution, for his disobedience. And he asks to be thrown overboard.

But instead of drowning, he is miraculously swallowed by a great fish. And he spends three uncomfortable days and nights in its belly.

There he turns to God in grateful prayer, before being vomited out onto dry land. But the book of Jonah, also has much to tell us about God.

And in a sense, the book is just as much about God, as it is about Jonah. It is God who brings about the storm.

[7 : 37] It is God who commissions Jonah to go to Nineveh. It is God who brings about the storm. He is the one to whom the pagan sailors pray, and offer sacrifices.

It is God who arranges for the great fish, to rescue Jonah. And it is to God Jonah prays, when he is in the belly of the fish. It is God who makes the fish deposit Jonah on dry land.

God is at work throughout the book. He is sovereign. He is in control of all that happens. And he is compassionate. It is God who rescues Jonah from drowning.

And it is God who brings the pagan sailors to acknowledge who he is. Here in chapter 3, the focus is very much on God.

As we see his sovereignty and compassion demonstrated time and again. He acts as he pleases, and shows mercy and kindness to the undeserving.

[8 : 51] The chapter readily divides into four main movements. First of all, God recommissions Jonah in verses 1 and 2.

Secondly, Jonah proclaims God's message of judgment verses 3 and 4. Thirdly, the Ninevites respond.

We see that in verses 5 to 9. And fourthly and finally, God relents. Verse 10. First of all then, God recommissions Jonah.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

When God called on Jonah the first time, he disobeyed. He flouted God's call. God was under no obligation to give Jonah a second chance.

[10 : 00] He could have said to him, you disobeyed when I asked you to go to Nineveh. Don't think you can frustrate my will.

I can get others to do my bidding. You have deprived yourself of the opportunity I was giving you. God could have sidelined Jonah.

But he didn't. He gave him a second chance. He recommissioned him. And this time, Jonah had learned his lesson. He obeyed.

He had learned the important lesson that he might wave his puny fist in God's face. But he could no more resist God's will than a stream can run uphill.

Jonah was a believer. He believed in the living God. Didn't he tell the pagan sailors in chapter 1, I'm a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

[11 : 13] Jonah knew how great his God was. He knew his God was God of heaven and creator of the universe. But that hadn't stopped him flagrantly disobeying his will.

He refused to do what God asked him to do. To use biblical terminology, Jonah sinned with a high hand.

The American D.L. Moody was a great Victorian evangelist. On one of his visits to Scotland, he was speaking to a crowded children's meeting in Edinburgh.

And at one point in his address, he asked the rhetorical question, what is sin? It was a rhetorical question.

Moody didn't expect an answer, but school children in those days knew their shorter catechism. And hundreds of voices chanted back at Moody, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

[12 : 26] That's a good answer. Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. sin is when we don't do what God tells us to do as well as when we do what God tells us not to do.

But God was merciful to Jonah. He showed him compassion. He didn't write him off. Instead, he gave him a second chance to do what he should have done in the first place.

That's encouraging, isn't it, for all of us who call ourselves Christians. We're all too well aware that for as long as we live we remain sinners.

We don't always go God's way. Sometimes, indeed, like Jonah, we may even sin with a high hand. But God is compassionate towards us as he was towards Jonah. The blood of the Lord Jesus goes on cleansing from all sin.

[13 : 41] When we come to the Lord in repentance, we are assured of forgiveness. He doesn't write us off because he's the God of the second, the third, and the umpteenth chance.

two things are perhaps worth saying by way of qualification. One is that God was particularly gracious to Jonah in this instance, in that he gave him a fresh opportunity to be his messenger to Nineveh.

In Jonah's case, God, as it were, restored factory settings. He doesn't always do that. If God asks us to do something and we don't do it, that particular opportunity may not come our way again. It doesn't mean that God won't use us in other ways in the future, but it does mean that we miss out on that particular opportunity, and we may have to live with the consequences of our sin.

The second thing I'd like to say is this, God is compassionate. He is gracious, but we must never presume on his grace.

[15 : 05] We must never allow ourselves to think sin doesn't matter. All sin is serious. If we don't think so, we have an inadequate view of God.

we mustn't presume, but on the other hand, we mustn't despair. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God recommissioned Jonah. Secondly, in verses 3 and 4, we see how in response, Jonah proclaims God's message of judgment to the Ninevites.

Verse 3 gives us the burden of Jonah's message. Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. No doubt Jonah had more to say than that.

[16 : 16] He would have put God's judgment presumably in context and explained why Nineveh was about to be destroyed. History tells us that the Ninevites were notorious for their ruthlessness and cruelty.

They didn't worship the true God and they certainly didn't reflect his compassion. Jonah's message was one of judgment.

judgment. It was in many ways a negative and unwelcome message but it was also a compassionate message.

What do I mean by that? Well God could have summarily destroyed Nineveh. He needn't have given the Ninevites any warning but instead he chose to give them notice of what was about to happen.

In this way he gave them opportunity to repent of their sins and turn to him. We see how the king of Nineveh grasped this.

[17 : 22] Look at what he says in verses 8 and 9. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. That is a very perceptive comment.

Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. The king saw there was at least a possibility that if he and the people reacted appropriately to God's warning, if they acknowledged their sin and pleaded for mercy, then judgment might just be averted. We are not told that Jonah actively encouraged the Ninevites to cast themselves in God's mercy. He had cast himself in God's mercy when he found himself in the belly of the great fish. when he thought he was in imminent danger of drowning. But there is no indication he urged the Ninevites to call on God in the face of impending judgment.

[18 : 48] As chapter 4 makes clear, Jonah suspected it was God's plan to have mercy on the Ninevites. And he struggled with that. He thought they deserved God's judgment judgment.

And that was that. It's interesting how when Jonah thought his own life was in danger, he readily acknowledged that salvation belonged to the Lord.

It's up to God whom he saves. But he didn't follow that through in the case of the Ninevites. He wanted God to rubber stamp what he wanted.

It's also interesting that what the king of Nineveh says mirrors what the ship's captain says in chapter 1. We read how the ship's captain wakened the sleeping Jonah with the words, 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. The ship's captain was a stranger to the real God.

[19 : 59] But even he realized that in a dire situation there was nothing to be lost by pleading for divine mercy. It might just do some good.

Both the king and the ship's captain saw a glimmer of hope in the desperate situations which confronted them.

the king was right to see the warning of impending judgment as conditional. It held open the possibility that God might be merciful.

The Ninevites had 40 days to do business with God. More than the king knew, Jonah's message of judgment was motivated by compassion.

There was good news wrapped up in the bad news. Let's think about that for a moment. For the Christian gospel is like that.

[21 : 07] The gospel is good news. That's what the word gospel means. But it's good news only because there's bad news.

We can really understand why the gospel is good news only if we take on board the bad news.

Think of that well known verse in John 3.16 which is often quoted as a summary of the gospel.

God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but should have eternal life.

God offers us eternal life in his son. That is good news. But why did Jesus have to come? Why do we need eternal life?

Why do we need to believe in Jesus? Because otherwise we would perish left to ourselves we would be cut off from God and all that is good forever.

[22 : 21] And that's bad news. That's why we need the good news. We have been created in the image of God but have rebelled against him and incurred his righteous judgment.

Our sin is an affront to God. It's a contradiction of all that he is and he must punish it. He cannot simply sweep it under the carpet. Left to ourselves we are heading for inevitable and inescapable judgment.

We are destined for hell where God's wrath is fully unleashed on impenitent sinners.

The Bible speaks of God as being a consuming fire. It says that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

That is bad news by any standard. But there is good news. In his love and mercy God has devised a way for sin to be punished and for us to go free.

[23 : 33] His son came into our world as a human being. He was God in human form come on a rescue mission. He came as our representative and substitute.

He lived the sinless life we should have lived and he took upon himself the punishment which our sins deserved. He paid the price in full and now that he has been raised to life again he offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who put their trust in him.

It's the bad news that makes sense of the good news of the gospel. It's the bad news that explains why the good news is such good news and it's the bad news that underscores the urgency of the gospel.

we need to flee from the wrath to come. The Christian gospel isn't an ethical code. It's a wake up call in the face of coming judgment.

The gospel presents us with the only way to escape that judgment. Jesus isn't simply a great example or a great teacher. He is saviour.

[25 : 02] There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

I think that's a particularly hard message in our society today. Most people have no concept of the seriousness of sin in the eyes of a holy God.

they think they're at least as good as the next person and really that's all that matters. And our culture increasingly shies away from what it sees as negative messages.

We're expected to be positive and upbeat. Even in our colleges and universities there are attempts being made to create safe spaces where nothing is said that could possibly cause upset or distress. But is that really loving? If people are in danger isn't it the loving thing to warn them? Yes the gospel message we present must be balanced of course but it must reflect the bad news as well as the good.

[26 : 26] thirdly we see how the Ninevites respond look with me please at verse five the people of Nineveh believed God they called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them aren't these remarkable words the people of Nineveh believed God the pagan Ninevites believed God they accepted that the message which Jonah brought to them came from the living and true God they were convicted by the message and they acted on it the whole community fasted and put on sackcloth showing that they were sorry for their sins and an edict was issued by the king and the nobles commanding the people to call out mightily to

God let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands there was a city wide turning to God do you find that incredible well remember that Jonah had come to Nineveh to proclaim God's message and God's word accomplishes God's purposes in his compassion the Lord was using Jonah's message to convict the Ninevites of their sin and bring them to cast themselves on his mercy God's word is powerful down through history there have been instances of God's word affecting whole communities in June 1630 a celebrated revival took place in shots in

Lanarkshire we bypassed shots as we drove down this morning a young probationer minister the Reverend John Livingston preached a sermon in the churchyard which is thought to have been used by God to change the hearts of some 500 people one sermon 500 people were converted the 18th century evangelist George Whitfield is arguably the greatest evangelist Britain has ever produced when the pulpits of Bristol were closed to him Whitfield started preaching in the open air to the hardened coal miners in nearby Kingswood as they came up out of the pits their faces blackened with coal on the first day about 200 miners gathered round and as he spoke

Whitfield noticed pale streaks on the cheeks of some of the miners as his words his message hit home he noticed how tears were forming these pale streaks on the cheeks of the miners the men invited him to come back the next day to speak to their friends and families about 2000 people came to hear him preach five days later he preached to 5000 and two days after that to over 10,000 within days it was estimated that the crowd who gathered to hear what Whitfield had to say was around 20,000 when God chooses his power can accompany his word in such a way that whole communities are gripped and influenced for good in this case in the case of

Nineveh that's what happened and of course here in the west we haven't seen that sort of thing happen for many years but God can do it again and we need to pray that he will Jonah's message came with power to the hearts of the Ninevites they believed God they hadn't heard about the real God before but they took Jonah at his word they pleaded for mercy and of course that poses a challenge for us we have unfettered access to God's word so what are we making of it are we taking it to heart can it be said of us that we believe

[31 : 50] God do we believe God fourthly and finally we see how God relents God relents verse 10 when God saw what they did how they turned from their evil way God relented of the disaster that

he had said he would do to them and he did not do it in response to their whole hearted repentance God was merciful to the Ninevites and he didn't destroy their city disaster was averted at least from a human perspective God appeared to change his mind he warned the Ninevites through Jonah that he was about to destroy their city in response they turned from their evil ways and sought his mercy and God relented God is sovereign he foreordains whatever comes to pass but his sovereignty doesn't mean that our choices don't matter they do there's mystery here of course there is but the

Bible makes abundantly clear that we are responsible for our actions and decisions these are real and they have consequences we need to take that on board God promises to reveal himself to those who earnestly seek him Jesus promises never to turn away anyone who comes to him if we repent of our sin and put our trust in the Lord Jesus we shall be saved that's all we need to know if we do our part we can be sure that God will do his so in conclusion Jonah's rescue by means of a great fish was a great miracle but it was an even greater miracle that God saved an entire city from destruction why did he do that because he's compassionate he cares for lost people he showed compassion in recommissioning Jonah he showed compassion in warning the Ninevites of impending judgment he showed compassion in the convicting power of his word through Jonah and he showed compassion ultimately in sparing that great city our God is compassionate shall we pray to heal let's breathe out