

Jonah's Reaction

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[0 : 00] I'd like to turn your thoughts to the chapter we read in the book of Jonah, chapter 1 and the opening verses. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Ninnati, 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. When you look at this story, you remember that this was a particular incident in the life of this man.

We know that he was a Hebrew prophet. We know that he was a believer. He was a preacher. He was a man who trusted in God and a man who prayed.

We are told that he would hear the Lord speaking to him and he would speak to the Lord. Jonah followed Elisha and Elijah.

And when you look at this book, you see that it is a continuation of the work of the Lord in the hearts of his people.

[1 : 20] Now someone pointed out that when you look at the story of Jonah, it's not just about a big fish. That's mentioned four times.

It's not just about a great city. That's mentioned nine times. It's not just about a disobedient prophet. That's mentioned 18 times. It is about the Lord God of heaven. And he is mentioned 18 times.

Although it is called the book of Jonah, it tells us the dealings of the Lord with Jonah when he rebelled in his heart against God.

Now, there's a lot that we can learn from this book. There are tremendous challenges in it, but there are also tremendous comforts.

[2 : 24] That the Lord God of heaven is in control. He is working out his purposes. And nothing will in any way thwart the promises or the purposes of the Lord.

And I think that is what you learn when you look at the book of Jonah. Now, the first thing that I want us to notice is God's revelation to Jonah.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai. He was a real person. It's not just a story that was made up.

It's not just a figment of someone's imagination. He was a real person. And God revealed himself to him.

So, there are a number of things I want us to notice about this revelation. And the first thing to notice is this. It was God's word that spoke to Jonah.

[3 : 31] How this happened, where this happened, when this happened, we don't know. It could have been an angel that spoke to him. He could have had a vision or a dream.

It could have been a still, small voice that spoke so clearly to Jonah. It could have been an impression that God the Holy Spirit made upon Jonah.

But, the point is this. As a prophet of God, he knew that it was God that had spoken to him. He believed in God.

And often, he would have heard God's word speaking. In other words, he recognized the voice of the Lord. And that tells us one very important thing.

That at this particular stage, he was in the place, spiritually, where he could hear the word of the Lord speaking to him.

[4 : 38] Now, the interesting thing is this. God was speaking to him at this stage through his word. A time would come in the experience of Jonah when God would not speak through his word, but that God would speak through his works.

I want to let that sink into our hearts. It may be just now that God is speaking to you through his word. It may be that you're disobeying the word of God.

And rather than God speaking to you through his word, he's speaking to you through his providence, through his dealings with you, through his works. And that's what happened in the case of Jonah.

A question then for us is this. When did God speak last to us?

When did we really listen to what God was saying in his word, whether it was read or sung or preached? Have we ever been in a place where we would say, Speak, Lord, in the stillness, while I wait on thee, and hush my heart to listen in expectancy?

[6 : 11] When did God last speak to you? So that's the first thing. When you think about this revelation, it was God's word speaking to Jonah.

But then a second thing about this revelation was this. God's will was being shown to Jonah. God's will.

God was calling him to be a missionary. And God was saying to him, I want you to go to the people of Nineveh. Okay, it's a hostile city, but I want you to go there with this specific task.

I want you to preach to this people. He was called to be a missionary. He was asked to go to Iraq. Now, somebody said that that would have tried the stamina of the bravest of people, anybody who would go there. But the point to remember is this.

[7 : 17] God wasn't asking anyone else to go to Nineveh. He was asking Jonah. Jonah had to go to where these people were.

God wanted to show mercy to the people of Nineveh. God wanted them to know about him, about his word, and about his mercy.

And it seems that Jonah had no desire to do what God wanted him to do. God wanted these people to hear.

Remember the story of the man from Gadara. He lived in the tombs We are told how he self-harmed. We are told how he came face to face with the power of the gospel of the Lord and Savior.

His life was turned around. He was changed. And he wanted to go where Jesus was going. I want to be with you. But Jesus said to him, go back to your own people and tell them the wonderful things that God did for you.

[8 : 40] The people who didn't want Jesus, Jesus wanted them to know about him. And this man was someone who knew Jesus.

And God was sending this man. In all probability, there was nobody else to go. So this man was being sent.

And I think that's the same thing you have before us here. Jonah is being sent. And in the providence of God, there was no one else that God desired to send.

It was only Jonah who was to go to Nineveh. So God showed him his will. I want to pause there for a moment.

Has God shown to you something recently? His will. Has his word spoken clearly to you and shown to you his will?

[9 : 45] And you have been left in no doubt. This is God's will for me. I wonder.

Are you listening? Are you obeying? God willing, you're going to have a communion season. An opportunity for individuals to openly profess their love of the Savior.

You haven't done it before. But you see clearly from God's word that this is the next step that you ought to take.

The will of God. You know, sometimes folk will say, well, I want to know the will of God. Is this the will of God for me that I obey his command?

Or that I sit at his table? Surely when God is showing to us his will, and when God is saying to us, this do in remembrance of me, then that is his will.

[10 : 58] But the question then is this. How many are going to hear the word of the Lord over these coming days? How many are going to know what God wants them to do?

And they're going to run away from that. You see, that's what Jonah did. But again, when you think of this revelation, it was God's word that was speaking to him.

It was God's will that was being shown to him. But another very interesting thing is this. God was showing to him the wickedness of the people of Nineveh.

Hundreds of thousands. And they're steeped in sin. Now we're not told what their sin was. That's not important. But the point is this.

Jonah was to go to these people who were steeped in sin, in wickedness, and he was to proclaim the word of God to them.

[12:03] You know that from time to time, in different ways, God shows to us the wickedness of individuals.

The wickedness of maybe groups of people. And we're seeing the awful wickedness in the world. the awful wickedness in the country.

I wonder, are there those who are saying to themselves, maybe there is something that I can do to try and stop or prevent or change around this wickedness.

Jonah was being asked to go and to preach to these people so that their lives would be turned around.

They would come to that place of belief and trust in him. So, that's the first thing. God's revelation to Jonah.

[13:13] Now remember today, we have God's word. That is God's revelation to us today. God will not reveal anything more to us that is not already in his word.

See, there are numbers of folk that say, oh well, God told me to do this. But then when you look at scriptures, you see that it goes contrary to scripture. The point I'm stressing is this, we have God's revelation.

We don't take from it, we don't add to it, and we seek to live in obedience to that full and final revelation. The second thing that I want us to notice is Jonah's reaction.

Jonah's reaction to what God had said. We will always react in some way to the message of God. And maybe you're sitting here today and you've started this reaction. You might be saying, I'm not having it. You might even be saying, I don't believe it.

[14:30] You could be saying, well, I would like to do this. Remember, we always react to what God is saying to us in his word.

And the first thing that Jonah did was refuse to go. Now, you could imagine there is debate, you know, was this something that Jonah suddenly, that suddenly happened to Jonah that he refused? Was there not something going on beforehand? Was he not losing out with God before this? We don't know. What we know is this, he refused to go. Why?

Because he didn't want to tell this particular people about the message of God. He refused to go. Remember, he was being asked to go to a particular place. He was being asked to go to a particular people. And he was being asked to preach to that place or to that people.

[15:41] We can take that down to our own situation. What is it that God is asking us to do? Well, you can put it like this. You're being asked to go to the young.

You're being asked to go to the old. You're being asked to go to the disadvantaged. You're being asked to go to the lonely. You're being asked to go to the housebound.

There are lots of people that different people are being asked to go to and maybe God is saying to you, I want you to go to these people. I want you to maybe teach them or instruct them or just befriend them.

Jonah refused. Why? Well, there are a number of reasons that I'll come to but there's one main thing. It wasn't convenient for Jonah.

How many people will say this today? It's not convenient. They're seeing what God's word is saying.

[16:55] They know what God's will is. It's not convenient. would you say that about the place of prayer or the prayer meeting or the services on the Lord's Day?

Are you putting something else before these things? Could you be saying it's not convenient?

I think that's what Jonah was saying. I think that you have to remember. now I know you can stretch this out but think of it this way.

The people concerned could not come to Jonah. So Jonah had to go to them. Remember when Jesus was speaking to Peter?

He told them to go out where the fish were. The fish weren't going to come to him. And you see God wanted the people of Nineveh to know about his mercy.

[18:01] He wanted them to hear about his mercy. And it seems, it does seem, Jonah couldn't care less.

Imagine the prophet of God, the believer, someone who is trusting. And they're giving this attitude that they couldn't care less while people heard or didn't hear.

Now, Jonah could say, well, the difficulties that lie ahead, you know, the size of the place, it took 40 days to go around it. Jonah could have said, well, the number of the people, you know, maybe two million folk.

It could have been, Jonah could have been saying, well, it's not the difficulties, it's not the danger. The people of Nineveh, it's true that they were his enemies.

And Jonah could be thinking, the Ninevites, they might kill me. But on the other hand, Jonah didn't seem to fear death when he said to the sailors on the boat, just pick me up and throw me into the sea.

[19 : 20] So it wasn't the difficulties that seemed to lie ahead. It wasn't the dangers that seemed to be there. Jonah had a dilemma.

He had this fearful dilemma in his mind. He believed, he knew, that God would bless the people of Nineveh, the enemies of his people.

That was a dilemma he had. And later on he said, I brought this to you in prayer. When God had initially asked him, he said, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

I think Jonah knew that God was going to have compassion on these people. And that wasn't in Jonah's mind.

[20 : 33] Maybe Jonah was concerned about the integrity of God. If Jonah goes there and preaches to these people, and many of these people are converted, then maybe there are some that will not be pleased either with God or with Jonah.

So there was this dilemma. And I think that when you add all these things up, Jonah had come quickly to the place where he refused to go.

The second thing he did was to run away. To run away from the revelation that God had given him. To run away from the responsibility that God had given him. As I said earlier, Jonah is thinking, I can do what God wants me to do when it's convenient to me.

But that wasn't the way God was thinking. Now, did Jonah really think that by going the opposite way, he would change things?

[21 : 50] Did he really think that he would get away from God? Did he really think that he would get away from God's plan? Or God's purpose?

Did he really think that he would get away from God's presence? And see the way it is put there, that he would go away from the presence of the Lord.

And in his effort to get away from the presence of the Lord, he was willing to do anything, he was willing to go anywhere. And what he wanted was this, to get away from that place where God had spoken to him, where he was aware of the presence of the Lord and the Lord speaking to him. That's one reason why some folk don't come back to church. Because the last time they were there, God spoke to them.

And God showed to them that they needed him. Did Jonah think he could get away from the presence of the Lord? Remember the words of David?

[23 : 04] From thy presence whither shall I go? where can we run from the presence of the Lord? You can't. And Jonah was trying to do that, running away from the place where God revealed himself to.

He was willing to go anywhere, to Tarshish, the south of Spain, 2,000 miles in the opposite direction. He was willing to do anything.

He paid the fear, whatever it was. He was prepared to do anything. He was prepared to deny himself all the comforts in order to escape the command of the Lord.

You see, the moment he disobeys, he runs for a place to hide the moment he disobeys.

Trust and obedience has gone. Two things. The first thing is this, he has now lost out with God.

[24 : 22] Lost out. He's not experiencing the presence of the Lord, or the nearness of God, or the fact that they are hearing God's words speaking to him.

He's lost out. Remember the words, where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul's refreshing dew of Jesus and his word? Could it be, that in some way you have lost out spiritually?

That you are not what you once were. You have lost out. And the reason why you have lost out is because of your disobedience.

It's not just that he lost out, but he looked for the easy way out. and that's what happened. And you know, when Jonah is running away, things seem to be going well.

[25 : 35] Because there there's this boat on its way to Tarshish. Now somebody pointed out that such a ship probably didn't come along but once every six months.

And that ship happened to be there. he looks for an easy way out. Sometimes, sometimes, in the path of disobedience, another way appears.

Lord, I don't want to do this. And maybe something else occurs and you say, right, I'll do this. But the path of disobedience can only lead downwards.

Losing out with God, losing fellowship with him, and so on. a number of questions. Is there something today that you're trying to run away from?

Are you a believer and you're trying to run away from what God has shown you, shown to you in his word?

[26 : 52] Are you running away from that? Could it be that you're still in unbelief? And you are trying to run away from the voice of the Lord that is speaking to you?

You're running. And you're running, if you're not careful, to a lost and to a Christless eternity.

Are you running away from God? No matter what, you're going to lose out. But we'll notice later on, Jonah was brought to the place of obedience.

A mark that we are owned by God or loved by God is, sooner or later, he brings us to the place of obedience.

The easy way, if possible, the hard way, if necessary. And you might be saying, how do I know that I'm a believer?

[28 : 11] Are you walking in obedience to the word of the Lord? Or are you trying to run away from him? Alan Redpath was a famous preacher in America and in Scotland.

And he said, may our response be, that is, to the word of God or to the will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. where do you think you are today, spiritually speaking?

Are you in the place where you can hear and you are hearing the word of the Lord speaking to you?

How are you responding to that?

Are you closing your ears to the word of the Lord? Or are you saying speak Lord, your servant is listening? You want to hear God speaking to you.

[29 : 31] And if you believe that God is speaking to you today, just now, then close in with what he is saying. Remember the words in Psalm 40, attributed to the Lord, yes, but can be so appropriate for us.

To do thy will, I take delight. Are you prepared to do the will of God? Whatever it is, whatever he asks you to do, you're prepared to do his will.

I leave these thoughts with you and God willing this evening to go on to another part of it. You see, there was God's revelation, Jonah's reaction, and tonight God willing, God's response to the reaction of Jonah.

Amen. Amen.