

# Jonah: Not About a Big Fish

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please turn your Bible to the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah is an Old Testament book. It is the fifth among the minor prophets.

! It's right after the book of Daniel. If you need a Bible, there are some few Bibles under chairs. So just look under the chair. You'll see a blue Bible. Feel free to use that to follow along.

And if you are using a church Bible, it's on page 774. Page 774, the book of Jonah. And feel free to use the table of contents if you need to do that.

A casual look around the room, although we are a small group, you'll see that we are still a diverse group. Some of the obvious differences we have are sex, race, and age.

And then there are some differences that are not very obvious to the eye. But despite our differences, when everything boils down to the realities of the human experience, we are really all alike.

[ 1 : 14 ] And one of the ways that we are all alike is we are all broken people and we live in a broken world. All of us exhibit some degree of the brokenness of this world.

We exhibit this in different ways. But to some degree, we all exhibit it. And one of the most common forms of human brokenness that we experience is relational brokenness.

All of us, at some point or another, have experienced relational breakdown in some form or another. Strife and division has ruptured and separated us from one or more persons.

And actually, the root of this, we find in the book of Genesis in chapter 3. We are because of Adam's sin.

The Bible tells us that sin came into the world. And immediately when you read in Genesis chapter 3, you see the context of that. God says to Adam and Eve. He says, Eve, you are going to rebel against the authority of your husband.

[ 2 : 38 ] You are going to desire his place. And to Adam, he said, you are going to harshly rule over your wife. And we see that where immediately Adam is blaming his wife for what took place.

We see it going further where between two brothers, there's such strife that one murders the other. And what we see from there is a spiraling of the human condition in terms of relationships.

We see this strife and separation within families, outside of families. And we see the ultimate of it culminating in murder.

Where hostilities can run so deep. We can commit the ultimate crime of taking another person's life. And even when it doesn't lead to murder, we can harm another person. As I look around the room and I see the faces represented, I think it's fair to say we are not that kind of people.

[ 3 : 44 ] But even when we don't murder, even when we don't physically harm people, I think we all would agree that at one time or another, in the midst of relational strife, we have harbored ill will in our hearts towards others who we are at odds with.

And even when we don't harbor ill will, we would say, we do the Christian thing and we say we pray for them, I can pray for you.

And that praying for you is pray that God deals with you, not that God will bless you, that God will give you your just desserts. And many times we can find ourselves not wanting the people we are at odds with receiving the same mercy that God has given to us countless times.

You realize that if we paid for everything we did wrong, we'd all be dead. All of us, without exception. People always say, well, you sow what you reap.

How many of you know that the many things we sowed we didn't exactly reap from? And yet, we can find ourselves wanting a different experience for people that we have a difference with or we have an ought against.

[ 5 : 18 ] We don't want them to receive the same mercy that we've received. And there's a term for that. It's called selective mercy. We want people like us to receive mercy, but we don't want people who are unlike us, different and for whatever reason, to receive the same mercy.

If they've treated us unfairly, if they've hurt us in some way. Well, this morning, we're starting a new sermon series in the Old Testament book of Jonah.

And in this book, we come face to face with a similar attitude of selective mercy on the part of Jonah and the nation of Israel. And in this small but powerful book, we also come face to face with the fact that God extends mercy even to those from whom we would wish that he withholds it.

Now, if you're wondering, Kingdom Life, why we are considering the book of Jonah as our first sermon series for 2020, it is because the message of Jonah, if we will hear it, will help us to be better disciples, calling us to remember that God wants to save all kinds of people, including some people we don't like, including some people we have differences with, and people we're not motivated to reach out to.

And this will help us with our church resolutions for 2020, as we seek to grow in discipleship. And we know that reaching the lost is certainly the most important thing that we can be engaged in as a local church.

[ 7 : 11 ] So this morning, we begin with an introduction to this fascinating little book, the book of Jonah, and we're going to be considering the first three verses of chapter 1.

So please follow along as I read the book of Jonah, chapter 1, and we'll be reading verses 1 through 3. I'm reading from the English Standard Version, so if you have another translation, yours would read slightly differently.

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. Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for preserving your word that we may have it. We ask this morning that as we consider these opening verses that you would speak to our hearts.

[ 8 : 43 ] We ask that you would lay a foundation for this series, and more importantly than for the series, but to help us to hear right up front the overarching message of the book of Jonah.

Lord, would you help us to posture our hearts to hear as we ought to hear and then to obey as we should obey.

We pray that you would do this now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm going to leave some room at the end for questions and answers, so if you have a question that is popping up in your mind as we go through, just make a note of it, and you'll have an opportunity to ask it at the end.

But in this first sermon in our series, I want to help us get our bearings in order to see the overarching message of the book of Jonah.

And so in this sermon, I want to do two things. First, I want to consider some preliminary questions about the book of Jonah. And then I want to make a few observations about the book of Jonah.

[ 9 : 58 ] So those are my two goals this morning. So first, the preliminary questions. The book of Jonah begins rather abruptly. We introduce this man by the name of Jonah, Jonah, the son of Amittai.

And we're told that the word of the Lord came to him. So I think the first question is, who was Jonah? Jonah. But we cannot tell from the immediate context who Jonah is, but we can conclude that Jonah was a prophet.

Jonah was one of the prophets of Israel. But in addition to what we read in verse 1, that the word of the Lord came to Jonah, we have this reference in the book of 2 Kings, chapter 14, verse 25, that also refers to Jonah.

This is a reference, actually, though, written about King Jeroboam II. And this is what it says. Talking about Jeroboam. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-Hemath, as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-Hepha.

So that's another reference for Jonah. So what we see is Jonah is placed in a context and a time of Jeroboam II. And we know that Jeroboam II led Israel for about 40 years, from 786 BC until 746 BC.

[ 11 : 43 ] And so that's pretty much the setting for the story of Jonah. Jeroboam was one of the well-known military leaders of the nation of Israel.

According to 2 Kings 14:25, which we just read, Jonah supported Jeroboam by prophesying blessings on his kingdom. And he specifically prophesied that Israel would expand its territory into Damascus and into Hamath, and thereby would restore its northern boundary to the place that it used to be in the time of King Solomon.

So this was a really big expansion. And so Jonah, we can see, was a prophet of Israel, and God is now sending him to a pagan people, the people of Nineveh, to prophesy against them.

And this brings me to the second question. Why did Jonah flee? Why did Jonah flee? This question is obviously one that jumps off of the page because when you follow what Scripture teaches us, that doesn't happen when you see, and the word of the Lord came to someone.

That does not happen where they arise and do something quite opposite to what the Lord said that they should do. If you want to take some time and look at this, there are about a hundred references to, and the word of the Lord came.

[13:23] And normally what you would see is, right after that, you would see words spoken from the Lord, or you would see instructions given to the prophet, and you'll see the prophet in the end obeying whatever it is that God says to him.

But in this case, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, but we don't see Jonah obeying. Instead, we see Jonah disobeying. Instead of making haste to go to Nineveh, Jonah makes haste to go in the opposite direction.

Nineveh is in the area of modern-day Iraq, which was east of where Jonah was, but Jonah sets up and he heads west to Tarshish, clearly opposite to where the Lord had told him to go.

It's interesting that we are told that Jonah ran away from the presence of the Lord. And those of you who are familiar with your Bible and what it teaches about God, it teaches that God is omnipresent. God is everywhere. The psalmist in Psalm 139, verses 8 through 12, writes about this. He writes, If I ascend to heaven, you are there.

[14:42] If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the outermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day.

The darkness is as light to you. And so God's omnipresence is such that we cannot literally, physically get out of his presence.

Yet we see these words that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. And so clearly it must mean something other than getting out of God's sight.

What the author is helping us to see is something far more serious than someone just trying to hide. The author is helping us to see that Jonah is making a deliberate decision to cease from being God's prophetic voice and God's servant who stood in his presence.

[15:59] And we know this because the role of the prophet was to stand in the presence of God. And there's this reference in 1 Kings 17, 1, for example, where Elijah is talking to Ahab and he identifies himself as one who stands in God's presence.

And that's what the prophets did. In essence, what Jonah was saying to God, when God said to him, you go to Nineveh, Jonah is saying to God, I'm not going to Nineveh. So that crosses the line. I'm not going to Nineveh. Rather than go to Nineveh, I quit. I would rather quit before I go to Nineveh. As a matter of fact, I'm quitting. I'm going to Nineveh.

I'm going to Tarshish. And so what Jonah decided is, I'm not going to be your prophet anymore. Don't give me no words. I'm not going to obey your word.

Now, if you were there, you'd say, Jonah, you know, what's going on? Why would you feel so deeply about going to Nineveh that you would rather give up your ministry than go and simply tell these people what God has said?

[17:11] What was so difficult about that assignment? Well, the answer is not so obvious from the text. But the answer becomes very obvious when we have an appreciation for who the Ninevites were.

And they were part of this great city, which was a part of Assyria, a much larger nation and territory. As I mentioned earlier, the book of Jonah is portrayed during the time of Jeroboam II, which we read in 2 Kings 14.

By the time that Jeroboam II became the king of Israel, Assyria had long been on its way to becoming a world superpower. And it was a bully. Assyria would bully all of its neighbors. And one of the ways that Assyria bullied their neighbors was they made them pay tribute. Israel was one of them. And they would just go in and say, look, it's kind of like shakedown money. It's like a mafia.

[ 18 : 14 ] They'll say, look, if you don't want me to break your business down, you have to pay me, at the end of the month, so much. And that's what Assyria did. Assyria would tell them, you have to bring me so much gold and so much silver and so much agricultural goods.

And if you don't do it, we'll plunder your nation. And so these nations bowed to that and they paid it. They paid it with great objection, but they still went ahead and they paid it.

And even at times when the people would suffer, and you'd read about this in accounts of the Old Testament where they would just go around and they would just scavenge all the gold and they would take whatever is needed and the people would be suffering, but they would be paying these tributes to these more powerful nations.

And you can only imagine the kind of contempt that the Israelites had in their hearts for the Assyrians because of this oppression that the Assyrians had put them through for such an extended period of time.

It was a very long time. Jeroboam II was the fourth king in the dynasty of King Jehu. And the Assyrians were extracting these tributes from them from the time of Jehu.

[ 19 : 38 ] And eventually it culminated in 722 BC when Assyria finally invaded Israel and they took them into captivity. And so I think with that bit of background, you're able to see the hostility and the contempt that the Israelites would have had for the Ninevites and all those who were associated with the Assyrians.

It was deep-rooted hatred because of this extended period of oppression.

And when you think about it, the length of that oppression and how long they'd been into captivity, it was highly unlikely that people who were living at the time of Jonah knew anything other than captivity all their life.

It wasn't like someone could have been alive possibly at that time who knew what it was like not to be under their captivity. That's all they knew. And so they inherited this hatred for the Ninevites.

And so when the Lord says to Jonah, I want you to go and I want you to prophesy against this city for their wickedness, and Jonah refuses, we're able to see that even though he was God's prophet, even though he was one standing in the presence of God, he harbored this hatred in his heart.

[ 21 : 07 ] And I think it helps us to see how deep the human condition can run. that this man who would be standing in God's presence could still hold such deep, rooted hatred in his heart for people.

So much so that he is willing to give up his ministry over it rather than go to these people and proclaim the message that God gave to him. And so those preliminary questions, I think, are the first set of bearings to help us understand the message of the book of Jonah.

So let's now consider some preliminary observations. Some preliminary observations. And I want to offer three of them.

My first observation about the story of Jonah is the story of Jonah is fascinating. It's fascinating because it's not about a big fish that swallows a man, but because it is about a great God who extends mercy.

And that mercy is seen in these opening verses of the book of Jonah. You see, even when God commanded Jonah to go and preach against the Ninevites because their evil had come up to him, that was an expression of mercy.

[ 22 : 44 ] That was an expression of the mercy and the patience and the long-suffering of God that he would send Jonah to Nineveh and call out to them in light of their great sin that, as the author says, had come up to him.

Nineveh's evil was ripe for judgment. But rather than judge them immediately, God sent Jonah to preach to them. And God's message to Nineveh, and Jonah knew this, God's message was not an absolute message of judgment.

Because think about it. If God was telling Jonah, you go there, tell them this, and I'm going to judge them, Jonah would have run to Nineveh knowing that when he tells them the things that God told them to cry out against their sin, God was going to judge them, he would have gone.

But Jonah knew that God was merciful. And Jonah knew that if the Ninevites repented, God was going to show mercy.

And he didn't want mercy for them. He wanted them to be judged by God for their sins.

[ 24 : 04 ] But we see God's mercy that even though this nation deserved his judgment, he's showing them mercy before he would bring judgment. And I trust that this is instructive for us this morning.

That God will not bring judgment before he would extend mercy. mercy. And the Bible says that some people count God's patience, his long-suffering as slackness.

But no, God is kind, not willing that any should repent. God sends messages to us in all kinds of ways expressing his mercy.

You know, recently, I have come to see, you know, that death, as hard as it is for us when we go through it, you know, death for many of us is mercy.

Not when we literally go through, but when we have people around us dying, it's mercy because in death, God is always speaking. I've heard one person say death is an evangelist.

[ 25 : 15 ] Death preaches. And in that, God is showing us mercy when he's calling us to repent. Because if we don't repent, then judgment will fall.

But God extends mercy before he would execute judgment. There's no reason why the Ninevites were any different from Sodom and Gomorrah, for example.

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah came up to God. He destroyed them. But to Nineveh, he is saying, Jonah, you go and tell them because God wants them to repent so that he may show them mercy.

God's mercy unfolds as this story of Jonah unfolds. And it is an amazing thing. That's the first observation.

The second observation is the story of Jonah is troubling. The story of Jonah is troubling. It is fascinating, but it's also troubling.

[ 26 : 28 ] And it's troubling because if we read it humbly, if we read it honestly, what we will find is that in many ways, Jonah and his hard-heartedness towards those whom he disliked is very much like our own hard-heartedness towards those we dislike.

If we engage the story of Jonah humbly and honestly, we will not just see Jonah, but we'll see ourselves.

If you would turn to 2 Kings chapter 14, I read one verse, but I want us to look at three verses now. 2 Kings chapter 14.

14. I want to look at verses 23 through 27. Starting in verse 23, in the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria.

And he reigned 41 years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all his sins, all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

[ 28 : 02 ] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo Hamath, as far as the sea of the Araba, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-Hepha.

For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel.

But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash.

Here's a passage where we're able to see God's mercy to Jonah and Jeroboam the second and the nation of Israel, though they were doing evil in his sight.

He didn't blot their name out from under heaven. He saw the affliction, he saw that it was very bitter, that there was no one left, bond nor free, there was no one to help them.

[ 29 : 16 ] And so God saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. He didn't judge them, he saved them. And Jonah knew this first hand.

Jonah knew Israel's wickedness first hand, and Jonah knew God's mercy to them, despite their wickedness first hand, yet he did not want to extend the same mercy to Nineveh and to the Assyrians.

And so when it is so easy to just jump all over Jonah and say how hateful he was, let's remember that in our own fallenness, we're no different from Jonah. And we too many times are unmindful of

God's mercy to us, when we have no desire for him to extend that same mercy to our enemies, whether they are real or imagined.

And my third and final observation is this. The story of Jonah is encouraging. Yes, it's fascinating, yes, it's troubling, but it is also encouraging.

And again, it's encouraging because it's not about a big fish who swallows a man. It's about a great God who shows mercy to sinners. And the story of Jonah is also encouraging because the story of Jonah is really not about Jonah.

[ 30 : 53 ] Believe it or not, the story of Jonah is about Jesus. And I think this is perhaps the most important observation for us to see if we're going to read the book of Jonah properly and apply it correctly in our lives.

And indeed, any book of the Bible. Any book of the Bible. You know, you may have heard the joke, supposed to be a joke, that's a hint that you're supposed to laugh, about the little boy in Sunday school and every question they would ask him, he didn't go much, he'd say, Jesus.

Whatever they would ask him about anything in the Bible, he'd say, Jesus, Jesus was the answer to it. You know, to a certain degree, that's true. Friends, this book is about Jesus.

Not just a random collection of things, this book is about Jesus. In a few weeks, we're going to be celebrating Easter.

And one of the passages that will be read, no doubt, will be this passage from the book of Luke, Luke chapter 24. This account of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus where they were discouraged because they thought that Jesus was not going to die, but he was going to be a great deliverer, that he would be the prophet who would come and deliver them.

[ 32 : 21 ] And so, on the morning of the resurrection, they're walking on the road to Emmaus and they are very discouraged. And Luke tells us that Jesus came among them and Jesus asked them, why were they so discouraged?

And they began to tell him, well, where were you? Haven't you heard what happened? Jesus of Nazareth, how he was crucified and we thought he would be the great prophet. And Luke tells us that Jesus did something.

Luke tells us in Luke 24, verses 25 through 7, Luke says, and Jesus said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that Christ, that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And then in verse 27, it says, and beginning with Moses, and Moses would be the first five books of the Old Testament, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, which would have included the book of Jonah, because it's one of the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So Jesus would have taken some time to talk to those men on the road to Emmaus about Jonah, and he was saying to them, Jonah is about me. Ultimately, Jonah is about me.

[ 33 : 57 ] The point of Jonah is about me. But the point of all the books are about him. That's what he did. In Matthew 12, 40, Jesus likens himself to Jonah when he said, just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

So Jonah pointed and indeed continues to point to our need for the one who's greater than Jonah. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh to preach to sinners he thought were undeserving.

Christ willingly came to this earth, and he did more than preach to sinners who were undeserving. He gave his life for them. He gave his life for them.

Jonah was under no threat to go to preach to Nineveh as we will see. Jonah had no idea what reception would await him with any kind of certainty.

But Jesus knew what would await him when he came to this earth. Scripture says his own did not receive him. He was mocked, he was scoffed at, he was spit upon, and ultimately he was crucified.

[ 35 : 36 ] And he knew that coming. He wasn't surprised at the treatment that he received when he came to this earth. Jesus came to this earth and he knew when and how he would die.

And unlike Jonah, he didn't run. At least he didn't run from us, he ran to us. And showed God's mercy to those who are undeserving.

And friends, that's encouraging. That should encourage us that there's one better than Jonah. That should encourage us that Jesus needed to come because all the rest of us are like Jonah.

We would not give mercy, and we don't want mercy for those we dislike. But Jesus came, the very representation, the exact representation of God, and he showed mercy to those who deserve judgment.

And so what we see in these opening verses of Jonah, we see that it's fascinating, we see it's troubling, we see it's encouraging, but the overarching message that we see as we get our bearings in this book is we see that God is more desirous of extending mercy than executing judgment.

[ 37 : 12 ] God is more desirous of extending mercy than executing judgment. I imagine if I were to take a poll this morning, there would be some of us who would have a hard time believing this.

Because so often we have a view of God, that God is the great cosmic police in the heavens waiting to judge us and beat us for every single wrong we've ever done and he will hold it and hold it against us forever and ever.

But that's not the God of the Bible. You probably heard people say, well, the God of the Old Testament is an angry God. And the God of the New Testament is not angry like the God of the Old Testament.

Friends, the same mercy we see in the New Testament is the same mercy we see in the Old Testament. The mercy that we see in the New Testament is God's mercy and God always had that mercy even from the Old Testament.

And I say to you this morning that God is more desirous of extending mercy than he is executing judgment. Wherever you are, whoever you are, whatever you have done, this is true.

[ 38 : 44 ] God wants to show you mercy rather than execute judgment. But when we do not receive God's mercy, when we reject his message of mercy, judgment will fall.

Indeed, judgment must fall. Because if it does not fall, then God would not be holy. God would not be just and true and good.

I believe that all of us would agree generally with the idea, well, yeah, okay, God is more desirous of extending mercy than executing judgment.

But if we're honest, I think we would agree that we sometimes have a hard time applying that in our lives. Because we are broken people living in a broken world, I would venture to say that all of us right now would have people in our world, in our circle, where we may have strained relationships, perhaps some of them have sinned against us previously, some of them have wronged us.

And if we are honest, we would say it's hard for me to want mercy for them. I'd rather wish judgment for them. And this is where the book of Jonah helps us.

[ 40 : 17 ] This is where the book of Jonah can help us. as we come face to face with this merciful God who withholds judgment from those who deserve it, because he sends them first, a message of mercy, calling them to repent.

And so may God help us as we go through this series, and may we look ultimately to him, and may we grow in extending the mercy of God that he has shown to us, to others who like us, don't deserve it, but who need it.

So let me pray, and then I'll take whatever questions you have. Father, thank you for the book of Jonah, which we come face to face with the fact that we are more like Jonah, and though we love to receive mercy, we have a hard time giving it to those who we dislike, who we have prejudices against, but Lord, we also come face to face with you, the great merciful God who shows mercy to the undeserving, who sent his son to redeem and reconcile rebels and to make them sons and daughters.

Pray, Lord, that you would speak through our hearts as we go through this series. I pray it would not be in broad ways, but in very specific ways.

Help us to reconcile in our hearts where we are compared to where you are calling us to be, to be those who would extend mercy because we've received mercy.

[ 42 : 39 ] Pray you do this in Jesus' name. Amen. Any questions from the sermon? Questions?

No? Going once, going twice, all gone.

All right. Let's stand for our closing song. Yes,