

Heeding a Merciful God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Welcome to the service this morning. I trust that we're here to praise and to worship our God.

I too would like to extend a happy Father's Day to the fathers here this morning. It wasn't that long ago I was up here saying happy Mother's Day. Goodbye so fast.

You know, fathers play an important role as well. As I spoke last time about mothers and the important role that they play.

And the same is said for fathers. Fathers need to be there for the families as well. They have a big task given to them by God to provide for the family.

To sacrifice time to go and to work to earn wages to provide. And on top of that to lead the family.

[1 : 1 4] To make sure the family is headed in the right direction. That there is good, sound teaching. That the children are being raised up the right way.

And, you know, the list goes on as well. But fathers are crucial to a family as well. And so, just again this morning, a happy Father's Day.

I have a message specifically for fathers this morning. Ben touched on looking for children's stories for the summer.

And this may be a bit of an early start on it. Jonah is a popular children's story, right? And so, it was kind of the question I was going to start with here.

What comes to mind when we hear Jonah? And what we normally think about would be children's books, right? Most of us probably have had various different children's books read to us when we were younger.

[2 : 2 1] The different authors writing about Jonah as well. We know the story. Jonah is commanded by God to go to Nineveh.

And Jonah doesn't want to go. And he decides he's going to run away from God. And so, he gets aboard a ship. And he's going to get away from God.

But a storm comes up. And Jonah is thrown into the sea. He's swallowed by a whale or a great fish. And three days later, the whale spits Jonah out onto the land.

And Jonah has learned his lesson. And he's off to Nineveh, right? That's kind of the picture we get when we get Jonah, right? And so, that's everything.

That's all that's to it, right? That's the story. That's it, right? It's only a story that was put in the Bible for our entertainment, right?

[3 : 2 5] Not so. Although, I did come across in a little write-up there that there are certain Bible scholars who believe that Jonah was placed in the Bible just as a story.

And I wouldn't call these people Bible scholars. They are missing the mark. You know, God chose specific men to write specific things.

He gave them the words. And to put these writings together to make up the Bible. Every book, every chapter, and even is important in bringing out God's message to us.

And such is the case with Jonah as well. Jonah is an important book. Else it would not have made it into the Bible.

There are lessons here for us. God's intent was not entertainment value. He had a purpose for telling us Jonah's story.

[4 : 33] And so if we read through the book of Jonah, we only have four chapters, we can pick out an overarching theme to the book, a theme that the whole account brings out.

And what I was seeing here is there's the theme of God's mercy. You know, the Bible tells us many things about God.

It tells us that God is love. God is faithful. God is holy. God is just. You know, and the list goes on. It also tells us that God is merciful.

He is long-suffering and He is patient. This is very clear in Jonah. Now, Pastor Wayne, he has started a series on eschatology or end times teaching, looking at the final judgment of God on the world and on unrepentant mankind.

For those who refuse to believe in and to receive Christ, it's going to be an awful time. But to those of us who believe that Christ Jesus is the Messiah and we have received Him into our lives, there's no need to fear.

[5 : 59] We have passed from death to life in Christ. God's wrath will not come down upon us, but rather we will be safe in the presence of the merciful God that Jonah talks about.

And so over the next months here, Lord willing, as Pastor Wayne goes, teaches on the subject of eschatology, I wasn't quite confident yet with teaching on that.

And so the dates where I'm scheduled to speak, I've decided that I was going to work through the book of Jonah to pick a book maybe in the Old Testament, something we don't hear that regularly, and to teach through that.

And so I will be doing that on the dates that I am scheduled to speak coming up here. And so I'll be going through the book of Jonah, sharing on God's mercy.

And so I think together with the end times teaching, I think the two subjects will fit together fairly well. And so this morning we'll start with chapter one of Jonah.

[7 : 18] And this first chapter kind of covers 30 of what we read in the various different children's books on the story of Jonah.

So we'll look at maybe the main part of what we know about Jonah. Jonah. And so the three different, three points that I'll look at is Jonah is commissioned by God.

Jonah runs away from God. And the results of Jonah's disobedience to God. And so I've titled the message this morning, Heeding a Merciful God.

Thank you, Brother Jake, for reading the text for us this morning. Let's break it down a bit here.

Let's look at verses one and two. Jonah's commissioning by God. So verses one and two in Jonah one. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.

[8 : 35] So Jonah doesn't start off with a lengthy introduction on who Jonah is, where Jonah is, why God chose Jonah, why He wanted him to go to Nineveh.

It just goes right into what God wanted Jonah to do. God's message to Jonah was a simple message. We have that in the first part of verse two.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it. That is what Jonah was to do. That was his commission.

A simple message to a wicked city, as the second half of verse two points out. Nineveh's wickedness. Repent of your wickedness, or God will destroy you.

That was God's reason for calling Jonah to go to Nineveh. But who is Jonah? Why did God want him to go to Nineveh?

[9 : 44] And then why Nineveh? A couple of questions that arose here. Scripture is mostly silent on Jonah.

There isn't a lot written in Scripture about Jonah, who Jonah is. The only thing that our text tells us is he is the son of Amittai.

So what does that tell us? Well, he had a father like we all do. We have his name, but Scripture doesn't tell us anything about Amittai either.

And so who is Jonah? He's probably just the average red-blooded male, just like any other man on earth.

And Jonah is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. There's two other places in Scripture where Jonah is mentioned. The first time he is mentioned is in 2 Kings 14, verse 25.

[10 : 49] And let's just quickly go there and read that. So 2 Kings 14, verse 25.

I'll back up to verse 23 just to kind of get the context of what is being said here.

So starting in verse 23 of 2 Kings 14. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king and reigned forty-one years.

And he did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he had spoken through his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-Hefer.

So it's speaking here in verse 25 of Jonah being a servant of the Lord God of Israel. He was a prophet. A prophet from Gath-Hefer was his hometown.

[12 : 10] And so just to kind of cover this portion a bit, it's Jeroboam is a king in Samaria, and he expands the territory of Israel to its greatest extent since Solomon.

And this was something that Jonah had prophesied would happen. So Jonah is at times a prophet. He is speaking God's word to certain people, and in this instance to Israel.

Second Kings here also tells us where Jonah is from, from Gath-Hefer. In Joshua 19 verse 13, we won't turn there, but in Joshua 19 verse 13, it explains that Gath-Hefer is a town along the border of the land, of the land that was given to the tribe of Zebulun.

So Jonah was raised up. He was living in land that was part of the tribe of Zebulun.

And it is a town that is near Nazareth. And this area is later on known as the area of Galilee. And so it's a little ways west of the Sea of Galilee.

[13 : 35] And so the other mention of Jonah is by Jesus. In Matthew chapter 12 verse 40, Jesus makes mention of Jonah and compares the three days and nights that Jonah spends in the belly of the fish to the, he compares it to the three days and nights that he, Jesus, will spend in the belly of the earth or spend in the grave.

So those are the mentions of Jonah that we have in Scripture besides the book of Jonah. And this is the one account here. And so going back to our text, why does God want Jonah to go to Nineveh?

All that God states here is that their wickedness has come up before him. And so without digging too deeply into the next chapters, we will cover them yet.

Without digging in too deep, Jonah's message to Nineveh in chapter 3 verse 4 is, In 40 days, Nineveh shall be overthrown. That is what he tells the people of Nineveh.

And so the reason that God wants Jonah to go to Nineveh is to warn them of their coming destruction if they do not repent of their wicked ways.

[15 : 07] We can see here that God is merciful. He's showing mercy. He wants to spare Nineveh.

He wants to give them another chance to, or a chance to repent before he destroys them. It's similar to Sodom, where the angel of the Lord is going towards Sodom and Gomorrah to destroy them because of their wickedness.

And Abraham knows that his nephew Lot is living in Sodom, and so he pleads for Lot's sake.

If there are so and so many believers, will you spare the city? And the angel of the Lord says, Yes, if there are so and so many, I will spare them.

And then Abraham comes back, Well, maybe it's not quite so many. How about if it's only so and so many? And so they go on and on, and they bring it down to the point where if there are ten believing souls in Sodom, Sodom will be spared.

[16 : 24] We know the story. Sodom is destroyed, and so there were not ten believing souls there. Sodom did not repent.

Sodom was destroyed. And so here we have Nineveh, their wickedness coming up before God, and his wrath is about to be poured out on them if they will not repent.

And so Jonah is the messenger to bring that warning to Nineveh. Why Nineveh?

So who or what is Nineveh? Nineveh is a city, a city that was founded by Nimrod. And so if we quickly flip to Genesis chapter 10.

Genesis 10, looking at verses 8 through 11. Cush begot Nimrod.

[17 : 28] He began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, like Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Kelne in the land of Shinar.

From that land, he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth, Ur, Calah, and the list goes on. So we see that Nimrod is the founder of Nineveh.

He built Nineveh. Now, he is the great grandson of Noah. He is the son of Cush who was the son of Ham, one of Noah's sons.

Nineveh was a city in the land of Assyria. And it was located on the banks of the Tigris River at an important crossing in a trade route.

And so, being perfectly situated like that, it became a large, wealthy city in Assyria. Now, if we expand a little bit beyond Nineveh, it's in the land of Assyria.

[18 : 44] Who is Assyria? Assyria was a country, they were an enemy to Israel. And at the time of Jonah, there is Asherdan the third is the ruler in Assyria and quite possibly living in Nineveh.

And he has, at this point, already overthrown some cities, some parts of Israel. He's captured them. And Asherdan the third, he was known for cruelty towards captives, among other things.

there were more things, but one thing that I found was that he had been very cruel toward captives taken, prisoners.

And so, this could well have been a part of the wickedness of Nineveh that had come up before God. And so, back in our text here, in Jonah 1, God is sending Jonah to the city of an enemy of Israel.

So, why would God want repentance of a heathen city? A Gentile city. These are Old Testament times.

[20 : 02] This is before Christ's sacrifice of himself brought salvation to the Gentiles. And isn't God the God of Israel? Wouldn't he be on Israel's side?

Why would he be wanting to extend mercy to an enemy of Israel? Why would he be concerned about Nineveh's wickedness?

You know, this shows us that God has always had a concern for all people, even the Old Testament Gentiles.

His desire was and is the salvation of all people, the Jews. His desire isn't to destroy mankind.

He wants a restored relationship with them the way that he had intended it when he created us. And so God used a regular guy, Jonah, living an ordinary life in a regular ordinary small town to speak his word to Israel in 2 Kings and now here in Jonah 1 he wants Jonah to speak a warning to a wicked Gentile city.

[21 : 23] And so talking about Jonah, does this sound familiar? Are we not regular people living ordinary lives in a regular small town? We could compare ourselves to Jonah with that, couldn't we?

God's commission to Jonah to go to Nineveh isn't a strange commission. Really, it's no different than commission to us, to all believers.

Jonah was to go and warn Nineveh to repent of her wickedness. Likewise, each believer is called gospel, salvation through Christ Jesus, or to plant seeds in the hearts of unbelievers which, if they take root and grow, cause men to repent and turn to God.

So any one of us can be a Jonah. All of us should be a Jonah in the sense of taking God's word to the nations. It's what Jonah tries to do, first off, that we should not do.

So what is it that Jonah does? Well, Jonah tries to run away from God. Let's read verse 3 of our text.

[22 : 52] But Jonah arose 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 down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

So back in 2 Kings, the first mention of Jonah, he has been commissioned by God to prophesy to Israel land that is going to be restored to them.

So let's say a good work for him to do, right? He's got no problem whatsoever doing that. We don't hear of him hesitating to obey God then.

He gladly tells his fellow countrymen about land that is going to be restored to them. So there's no issue in delivering a positive message there, right?

Now God calls on Jonah again to deliver a message. The difference is this time it's a Gentile city, the city of Nineveh, an enemy of Israel.

[23 : 59] But this time Jonah has an issue. He has an issue with what God wants him to do. First of all, Nineveh is not of Israel.

In fact, they're an enemy of Israel. Part of a heathen nation that is attacking Israel, that is taking Israelite captives, and is treating them cruelly. And so the people of Israel would obviously not think highly of such a nation and such people.

And we get the sense here that Jonah definitely didn't think highly of them as well. And he had other ideas than what him to do.

And so he decided to head in the opposite direction of Nineveh. And so our text doesn't tell us that he is in his hometown of Gath-Hefer.

But if we assume that this is where he was born and raised, this is where he is living, God's plan was for him to head slightly northeast for about 500 miles to go to Nineveh.

[25 : 17] Jonah instead heads and there was a conflict there with the distance. Some people were saying it wasn't a far distance, some were saying double what others were saying, but it was anywhere from 30 to 50 miles southwest is the direction he goes to the port city of Joppa.

And there he finds a ship heading to Tarshish. Tarshish was a city that is now in the land that we today know as Spain.

It was some 2,500 miles across the Mediterranean Sea. So Jonah he pays the fare for passage there, he boards the ship and he settles in for the trip.

He didn't want to go to Nineveh, but he could get away from the presence of God. You know, if he's far enough away, surely God would change his mind about sending him there, right?

He's too far away, I've got to send someone else. Do we sometimes think like that? Do we think we can flee from God's presence? You know, maybe, like Jonah, God is calling us to talk to someone.

[26 : 38] Maybe not a message to a whole city, as Jonah was asked to do. Maybe it's a little more localized, maybe we're to talk to one person, maybe to share the gospel with someone, but we're uncomfortable with doing that.

We'd rather not. We come up with a whole list of other things that we could do instead. We make excuses for not being able to do it.

We try to numb our conscience. You know, things like, well, somebody else could do it better. Maybe tomorrow, not today, I'm busy today, I don't have time right now, Lord.

Maybe it's because we fear the response that we would get from people. They might ridicule us or run us down or laugh at us.

What's the point in telling them about Christ, really, right? Why waste our time with a hopeless cause? But haven't we all been there, though?

[27 : 52] Before we were saved, were we not hopeless causes as well? You know, if we look back, are we not glad that someone was willing to share the gospel with us so that we might be saved?

Who's to say that we can't play a part in someone else's salvation? Salvation is of the Lord. We cannot save anyone, but we can share the good news that in turn leads a lost soul to the Lord.

You know, and this is good fruit that we are called to bear. God has shown us mercy. He saved us, though we didn't deserve it.

And He wants to show mercy to others who are still lost. He's still willing to give them a chance to repent. He wants us to be obedient and to spread His message.

So let's not be Jonah's in this sense. Let's choose to be obedient to God. God. So moving on to our third point, how did Jonah's disobedience turn out for him?

[29 : 21] Well, there was a lesson for him to learn. Let it be a lesson for us as well. Let's look at the rest of the chapter.

Maybe first of all, let's look at verses 4 through 6. But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

Then the mariners were afraid, and every man cried out to his God, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

So the captain said to him, What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God. Perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.

So the rest of the chapter here talks about the results or the consequences of Jonah's disobedience. Did he get away with it? Verses 4 through 6, we hear that the Lord sends out a great wind on the sea, a mighty tempest.

[30 : 36] It's a sharp reminder here that God controls the elements. The wind blows at God's command. And so this wind that they experience here, it is so strong that the ship is about to be broken, and the sailors are afraid.

Now, I'm not overly familiar with the sea or with sailing in ships, but if I understand correctly, there would have been a storm season between September and January through the winter months where sailing is risky, is not advised, it's a storm season.

You know, if we think of Paul in Acts 27, he is aboard a ship, heading, he's a prisoner, he's heading towards Rome, and it would have been about late September or October, they are caught in a tempest as well, and they are shipwrecked.

And so generally, ships wouldn't sail in, I'm not sure if it's the same thing nowadays, but in those days, ships would not sail during those months, these storm months.

They would stay in the ports over those months, and then when the bad weather those months pass, then they would resume sailing again. And so there's nothing like that mentioned here in the time of the year, so I don't think it likely that it would have been that time of the year.

[32 : 14] The sailors aren't expecting major storms they have put out to sea, they've got no issue with sailing, the weather is fair, things should be good, right? And so when this strong tempest picks up suddenly and threatens to destroy their ship, they are afraid.

Here are men who live out at sea, they know the patterns and so on of the weather, they're confident that they will get to Tarshish, and here is this storm, and they are afraid.

It just brings out how strong of a storm this must have been. And in their fear, they cry out to their gods and they begin throwing the cargo in the ship overboard to lighten it so that it would sit higher in the sea, that it wouldn't take on as much water.

Where's Jonah in all of this? He hasn't even noticed the storm. He's in the bottom of the ship. I don't know, maybe Jonah was seasick and he had to go lay down.

We don't know that. We don't know if he's a guy that regularly went out to sea. Even nowadays, most people who aren't familiar with sailing on the sea and so on, we hear so often of them getting seasick.

[33 : 40] And so maybe this was the case with Jonah, we don't know. But regardless, he was in the lower parts of the ship, he had found a bed, he was fast asleep. And so the captain of the ship finds him there, finds him asleep and he wakes him.

Why are you sleeping? Call on your God. Maybe he will care about us so that we don't drown. You know, the sailors had cried out to their gods, to the different various gods that they believed in.

And these gods could do nothing for them. And so here's Jonah sleeping. He obviously hasn't been calling on his God.

And so the captain wants Jonah to call on his God. Perhaps Jonah's God would listen and would save them.

Our text doesn't record it here either, but Jonah must have called out to God as well at this point. We would assume. Does the tempest stop? Let's read the next verses.

[34 : 50] And they said to one another in verse 7, Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us. So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Then they said to him, please tell us, for whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country?

And of what people are you? So 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, why have you done this? For the men knew that he fled 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 be calm for us?

For the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.

[35 : 58] Does the tempest stop? It doesn't. It's growing worse. And so in verse 7, the sailors cast lots to try and figure out whose fault it is that they are in this storm.

This isn't the time of year for storms. There's got to be a reason for this storm. Who is at fault? The lot falls on Jonah. And so God must have directed this as well.

And so these sailors, they immediately begin to question Jonah, who he was, where he was from. Jonah's answer strikes fear into their hearts.

Verse 9, I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. Jonah's God is the God of heaven, the God who made the sea and the dry land.

And furthermore, Jonah had told them that he was fleeing the presence of his God. He was fleeing the Lord's presence. The sailor's reaction, Jonah, how could you do this?

[37 : 21] He created the sea and the dry land. How could you flee before him? Do you know what you are doing? And so their question is to him, what shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?

You know, the tempest is growing stronger. Jonah knows within his heart that he is at fault. He knows he should have gone to Nineveh.

and he knows he isn't going to Tarshish either. He won't make it. And so in Jonah's answer to the sailors, when they ask him what they should do to him, in verse 12, and he said to them, pick me up and throw me into the sea.

Then the sea will be calm for you, for I know that this great tempest is because of me. If we continue on, 13 through 16, Nevertheless, the men rode hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

Therefore, they cried out to the Lord and said, We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.

[38 : 47] He picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.

These sailors don't want Jonah's blood on their hands. After all, Jonah's God controls the wind. He made the sea and the dry land.

they fear Jonah's God. Nevertheless, they don't want to be the cause of Jonah's death, and so they make every effort to get to land.

They've thrown off the cargo to reduce the weight of the ship, and here they are rowing hard, trying to get to the land. But the storm only grows worse, and the sailors too realize they won't make it to dry land.

And so they cry out to the Lord in verse 14, we pray, O Lord, let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.

[40 : 11] Now, there's punishment happening to Jonah from the Lord for not obeying, them, and these sailors are caught in the mix.

But they don't want further punishment from the Lord for dealing with Jonah, for throwing him overboard, as he told them to do. But they realize that this is the last option.

This is their only hope, their only chance at survival, is to do what Jonah told them to do. And so they pick him up, and they cast him into the sea.

What happened then? It says the sea ceased from its raging. The storm stopped, and the wind calmed down.

You know, I picture these sailors standing along the ship's rail. They watch as Jonah's body splashes into the water, and it sinks from sight beneath the dark waves.

[41 : 24] How amazed must these sailors have been seeing the tempest cease, have been there to begin with. Let's look again at verse 16.

verse 16. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. Now, the God of Jonah had a profound effect on all those aboard that ship.

It says they feared the Lord exceedingly. There was a great, deep respect for him, not for calming the storm, but for having mercy on them and saving them.

They knew that they would have perished had that storm continued on. And now the storm had stopped. Jonah's God had stopped the storm.

He had saved their lives. And so they offered a sacrifice to him and took vows. So what was the result of Jonah's disobedience?

[42 : 31] He thought that he could flee from God's presence to get away from what God wanted him to do. You know, as Jonah hurried off towards Joppa, God must have been thinking, Jonah, you don't want to do this.

But he allowed Jonah to get so far. And then he got Jonah's attention. He sent the storm. And now there were these unbelieving sailors made aware of what Jonah was trying to pull off, who and what he was trying to do, how he was trying to flee from him.

You know, in the end, when it's all over here, it was a good thing for the sailors to meet Jonah's God and to experience his mercy on them.

But it didn't go so well for Jonah to be disobedient to God. He ends up sinking into the sea. So as we know, this isn't the end for Jonah.

The book of Jonah doesn't stop here. This isn't the end. But this is where I'd like to stop for today. Things aren't going well for Jonah at this point.

[44 : 01] But we must remember who Jonah's God is. Jonah's God is the same God that we serve today. He is a merciful God.

We know that, and we have heard it in the text here today. God desired to show mercy to Nineveh in the land of Assyria, though they were enemies of his chosen people, the Israelites.

And though Jonah didn't have the same thoughts toward Nineveh, and he tried to get away from warning them, God shows mercy to Jonah as well. He didn't strike Jonah down for disobeying him.

The sailors too experienced the Lord's mercy when he saves them from perishing in the tempest that was aimed at getting Jonah's attention.

You know, and today, we too have experienced God's mercy. mercy, we were all deserving of death, deserving to face the wrath of God, and yet God, in his mercy, sent his only Son to bear the weight of our sin, to die in our stead, to experience separation from the Father, so that we might have fellowship restored with our God.

