

# God's Prejudicial Prophet

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Preacher: BK Smith

[ 0 : 00 ] Oh, Father, how true these words are. Lord, we need you. Father, how blessed we are that we are children of the great King, that we can depend on you, lean on you, that we are changed by you.

And it simply takes a humbling of ourselves. So, Father, may these words be true that come out of our lips and in our praise to you and our desiring to be humble, we do desperately need you. And all God's people said, amen. Please have a seat. Please take out Jonah once again. Today we are embarking in probably one of the most famous prophets of the Bible.

I could say one of the greatest prophets of all time. Actually, I'm going to change that word. One of the most famous prophets of all time.

How famous is he? Well, I'm pretty much assured if you ask any of your friends who've never been to church, ever opened a Bible, they will know the story of Jonah and the whale, right?

[ 1 : 16 ] It is a story that has transcended over 2,800 years. It is still known to this day. As I said earlier, Jonah is classified as a minor prophet.

And just in case you don't know, minor does not mean he is small in stature or his message isn't of any importance, but he's classified in a group of 11 other prophets where they generally had a very small, minute message compared to Isaiah or Ezekiel or some of the earlier prophets.

So these minor prophets were not minor in message. But what's interesting about Jonah is that even amongst the minor prophets, he stands out for more than a few reasons.

The one is that he got attention. People knew about Jonah. In fact, Jesus Christ refers to Jonah himself, not once but twice.

How many times does Jesus Christ refer to the, all the rest of the 11 prophets? Zero. Zilch not, no reference to them by Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 37 ] So if we would say in modern terms, vernacular, Jonah trended, right? He hit social media a couple of times. People were talking about him.

The second reason why Jonah stands out is that the entire book of Jonah, all four chapters, there's really essentially only one sentence of prophecy.

It is, yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. It took Jonah four chapters to get to that message.

Most of the prophetic books we find in our Bible are about the prophecies themselves. But Jonah is a story about Jonah.

We believe it is a book written by Jonah, for only Jonah could know the intricacies of this story.

Jonah stands out as a prophet who is given a prophecy that he did not want to prophesy.

[ 3 : 51 ] Let's pretend you all have bulletins today. And you knew what the title of the sermon, I originally entitled this sermon, God's prejudicial prophet. But that would not have been sufficient for what this sermon is truly entitled.

The full title is The Relentless Pursuit of a Prejudicial Prophet by an Overwhelming, Loving, Merciful, and Graceful God.

The theme of this book is God. God's pursuing love. Even those who may not be seen as his own. The story begins with God pursuing Nona, giving him a command, Jonah, to go to Nineveh. In this story, we'll see the heart of God in his pursuit of us.

I think more than a few of us at one time or another have attempted to flee the presence of God. But yet, we've all experienced the tenacious commitment and reconciliation power of the Lord Jesus Christ in our life.

[ 5 : 07 ] The application of this book is immense, especially for such a short book. And you will see that the story of Jonah touches us at different times in various ways.

My prayer through the teaching of this small book is that as always your knowledge of the Lord would increase. Through your knowledge of the Lord, your love for the Lord would increase. And because your knowledge and love of the Lord may increase, your worship would increase. I pray that you would grow in wisdom and knowledge to live a life that is indeed pleasing to the Lord. As well, perhaps it will be served to identify certain things in your life, stumbling blocks. Perhaps their actions, attitudes, wrong thoughts.

Perhaps they might be even actions, attitudes, in wrong thoughts that you sincerely think are right and just and before God.

[ 6 : 19 ] And there's a few other things that I believe that you will experience, but most of all that you come away with a sweetness for the Lord and what He deeply desires of us.

you have undoubtedly noticed that I use the word prejudicial in this title. Seems appropriate for today, doesn't it? Everything seems to be about prejudices these days.

Someone always seems to be calling someone either a racist or sexist or a white supremacist or a white whatever or perhaps even a nationalist.

The reality is everybody is prejudicial against someone somewhere somehow. I believe at the heart of hearts Jonah needed to face his prejudices in his life as well.

And through Jonah I pray that we will be able to deal with our prejudices as well. Jonah is a great book that confronts us as where we are even if it's not where we want to be.

[ 7 : 28 ] So let's start. Verse 1. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying arise go to Nineveh the great city and call out against it for their evil has come up before me.

In the first two verses we meet the two primary players throughout this whole book. We meet Jonah and we meet Nineveh. Jonah just to give you a little bit of feedback about Jonah.

We know from this text he is the son of Amittai. We believe that he was born about four miles outside of Nazareth in Jesus turf.

He was a man of Galilee and his ministry consisted of a ministry to the northern part of Israel. We understand through the Bible that Jonah ministered there.

We're not sure for how long but we are familiar with two of his prophecies. Now if you remember Israel at the time Israel was a split kingdom. After Solomon there was a division in who would be king.

[ 8 : 45 ] Ten of the kingdom split from Israel went and formed the northern kingdom and two separated and became Judah the southern kingdom which also included Jerusalem.

I think they've got that right. From that we found that Jonah was quite revered as a prophet. Now remember prophets were called by God for a very specific purpose with a very specific word. And it always began with delivering a word from God.

My point is Jonah just didn't dispense his wisdom when he meant to go with people but he actually had a word from the Lord. You will notice in most of the prophets they begin with thus said the Lord. Sounds kind of cool right? Speaking for God. All the fanfare, the adulation of the crowds. Kings hated prophets.

[ 9 : 54 ] They killed prophets. You said something that the king didn't like, you're gone. In fact, if you prophesied and said wrongly what God had spoken, you were under the penalty of death.

So to be a prophet was a fearful thing. Most prophets at the time lived as outliers, alone in caves in the wilderness.

They were given the weight of God's word that even themselves they struggled to carry. Some prophets saw great successes. Some prophets never ever saw a fruit of their ministry for one moment of their lives.

But Jonah, Jonah had some game. second kings, Jonah actually gave a prophecy that the borders of the northern kingdom would be expanded.

Now what was crazy about this prophecy is that it was under an evil king. The king actually, it says in the text, did wrong, did evil in the sight of the Lord.

[ 11 : 08 ] But to this king, Jonah would have been one of his best type of prophets. prophets. Because when all the kings were doing evil inside of the Lord, when a prophet came and told them what God was doing, they did not like it.

But here's this king doing evil. And the point of that passage was God even hears the pleas of his people even when the kings are evil.

So Jonah was already known because of this prophecy. So he had a name for himself. Now, we have the city of Nineveh.

And it's important to understand Nineveh in order to understand this book. Nineveh is an interesting city. Do you realize it goes all the way back to Genesis 10, 9?

It was founded by what scholars believed to be the first mighty men of the Bible. His name was Nimrod. He was known as a mighty hunter.

[12:12] Nimrod was actually a grandson of Noah. And this city actually grew into what's called a great city. It was great in importance, great in size, great in wealth, great in power, and great in reputation.

It is said that the walls that went around the city, you could line up four chariots side by side by side. It was so wide. If you wanted to walk around the breadth of the city, it would take you over three days at a good pace.

This was an immense city. And it's also the capital of the Assyrian Empire. In case you don't remember, the Assyrian Empire will be the first empire that God will use to bring punishment to the Jews, to Israel.

they were known as a wicked people. It was their capital center, a trading center, and it was a cultural center.

And many of the great Assyrian kings chose to use Nineveh as their capital. One scholar said, it is said that the power and influence of the Assyrian Empire lay in their cruelty.

[13:34] it was a city filled with wickedness and all manner of atrocity. And now, Jonah is being sent to do something that no other prophet had ever done or asked to do before.

Verse 2, arise, go to Nineveh. Nineveh. The truth of the matter is many prophets prophesied about Nineveh, but none of them had to go to Nineveh.

It's pretty easy, right? Shout down the government from here in Squamish, right? I have a prophecy for you, Jim Horgan or Justin Trudeau or whoever else.

It doesn't matter. But it's something to go to this city and say it in the middle of their people and that is exactly what Jonah is being called to do.

But also think of the message that Jonah is to deliver. One author writes that essentially the accumulated wickedness of Nineveh had grown so great and stunk so bad that even the God in heaven could smell it.

[15:10] And God's command, go, arise, and go to Nineveh. So it's amazing, the author Jonah in just two verses gives us these two tensions that exist.

what does Jonah do? We all know, right? Verse three, but Jonah rose, and notice how many times Tarshish is used in one simple verse.

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to where? Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it to go with them where? To Tarshish. Away from the presence of the Lord. The point that Jonah is making at that time, Tarshish was the city on the other end of the world.

Some scholars believe it was on the southern most tip of Spain. Some have even speculated that it was a port in India. Scholars can't agree, but the reality is we know that it was considered if you could get to Tarshish, you were outside the presence of the Lord.

[16:27] Jonah, in his decision, decided to do the exact opposite of what God asked him to do. As we progress through this chapter, we're going to see God give Jonah three calls, three reminders to go to Nineveh.

All the while, Jonah is going to do his very best to flee. Let me ask you guys a question.

Have you ever attempted to flee from the presence of the Lord? You made decisions in your life to separate yourself from things that you know are of Christ, are of the faith?

faith? Has God in his kindness ever assigned you a task, an opportunity, a ministry to perform? but instead of fulfilling your ministry, your service, or your opportunity, you chose to flee from God? Sadly, I know many men and women who have run away from their family responsibilities.

[17:49] I know many men and women who have run away from their church and the responsibilities they have for their church family. I've seen very many people choose self, their own fulfillment, rather than God's calling.

Others, I know, have totally tried to block out God entirely by turning to worldly pursuits instead of heavenly pursuits.

Others, perhaps this is you, maybe not that extreme, but have failed to pursue a gospel-filled life, a life with the responsibility of sharing the good news with those around you, with your family, your friends, your neighbors.

I still know many a Christian who have yet to teach and disciple another young believer, the call which Jesus Christ commands and puts on us all.

perhaps it's even the call to leave the world behind and follow Jesus. This morning, I want to give you five excuses that Jonah could use to disobey God.

[ 19 : 10 ] Maybe, just maybe, you might be able to relate to one of these excuses. excuses. The first excuse is the work is too great.

The work is too great. Jonah could have said that, I am just one prophet. How in the world can you send me God to a city that takes three days to walk around?

Imagine, he would have to go neighborhood to neighborhood, street to street, house to house, repent, repent, repent, judgment is near. What an overwhelming task.

Certainly, he would have asked of God, tell me there's not another 99 prophets going with me. I'll need support, I'll need friendship. Please, oh please, God, give me some type of support.

See, Jonah was called to do what no other proper prophet had been, called to do, to go over 500 miles on a dangerous journey to an incredibly foreign and wicked city filled with foreign people, all sorts of wickedness and do the work of God.

[ 20 : 29 ] I don't know about you, but I'd feel pretty unequal to that task. Have you ever felt unequal to the task that God has given you? It could be as serious as loving your spouse, raising your kids, perhaps it's being a righteous employer, a righteous and honest employee, or perhaps just a simple thing of ministering to your neighbors.

Perhaps you do not feel good enough, strong enough, smart enough, rich enough, educated enough to reach those who are around you. You think God must have dialed the wrong number when they called me to talk to this person.

Perhaps you're stewing in your seat and you might be thinking, the Holy Spirit, that's not my stewing, that message must be for the person behind me or beside me or in front of me.

Why would God call me when there's so many more gifted people around me? It's interesting, my friend and his father have been a part of a great many missionary endeavors.

They're blessed with some good wealth. And I've asked him the simple question, how do you know when something is right? He says, all we know is that when my mom and dad are praying about something, my wife and I are praying about something and we go into it, when we have the greatest amount of questions, there is God gets the greatest amount of success.

[ 22 : 06 ] And he simply has that old adage, where God guides, God provides. He goes, our job, my husband and wife, he simply says, is to make sure we have the right heart to hear God.

So we do our very best to unplug our ears. I think that's something we can all relate to. Too often we forget the verse, when I am weak, God is strong.

Amen? We think service is for the strong, for the people who have got it all together. The second reason, plausible reason, that Jonah could have elected to not go on his service is that Jonah hated the Ninevites.

Let's be honest, they were a cruel and wicked people. The stench of their actions had actually reached up to the Lord and offended him. could we blame Jonah?

The fact of the matter is, when we have prejudicial positions, we usually think they're justified by some reason. Some people group, country group, whatever kind of group treated us wrong or did something evil, why in the world would they need to hear the gospel?

[ 23 : 28 ] Often, when it comes to witnessing to others, we are too afraid of them. We don't know them. We don't know their language. We don't know their culture, their background.

What a hassle that would be. And sadly, we allow fear to overcome us. It was interesting, when I was young, I was chosen to go on a missions team to France.

How hard is that, right? This is France, Paris, Grenoble, Mont Blanc. I spoke French. I love French toast and French fries.

I couldn't have been more called to that position, right? An easy way to go. So, they had to train me first and sent me to Chicago. First time I'd ever been in an airplane, from flying from Toronto to Chicago.

Now, if you know me a little bit, I come from North Bay, Ontario. If you don't know Ontario, you probably know Toronto. I'm about three and a half hours north.

[ 24 : 38 ] I'm in the boondocks, the boonies. The only important thing that goes through there is the railway and the Trans Canada Highway. What's interesting is that I actually knew every person that wasn't white in the city.

there was really only three African American families, a handful of Asian families, and one East Indian family. We all went to school with the kids. It was all quite normal.

But there was one people group I had never experienced. Hispanics. The only experience I had with Hispanics was movies.

They're all gang members, right? Doing bad things on TV. So, part of my training, what they had to do is they had to drop me in to a neighborhood in Chicago and asked me to go administer to a Hispanic neighborhood for my training.

The morning we get bussed in, I arrive, the main intersection is actually taped off. Yellow police tape and there's a chalk outline on the pavement.

[ 25 : 49 ] It couldn't have gotten any worse or more fearful for me. Of course, I did what every brave man would do. I let the two women in my group lead the way. We went door to door and I just acted tough.

I'm just going to give you protection. And it was interesting. As I went, I couldn't understand the language.

Some of the houses, parents would speak in whispers for they were fearful of their gang. Kids would hear them. by mid to late afternoon, we found our way into a house with parents crying.

And they were simply joyful that we were there. Our task was simply to go and invite the children of the neighborhood to the local church which was doing a daily vacation Bible school.

If you remember, it's a one week type of program where the gospel is given to the kids. it's simple, but it was so hard.

[ 26 : 57 ] From doors slammed in my face, people speaking language I never heard, being fearful for my own safety eventually, all it took was a family saying, would you like a glass of water?

And in the house I went, and down the rabbit hole of ministry for the rest of my life. I was 18. You know, for some of us, it all just takes us to say yes.

And it's okay to be scared, it's okay to be fearful. Sometimes we are called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are too ignorant, those who may even be too cultured, too polite, too rough, but there is no such thing as someone that is too lost.

The greater the sinner, the greater the work that Jesus Christ has to do, amen? The third reason that Jonah could have resisted was, what happens if God doesn't do what he says he's going to do?

What happens if I go to this great city? I say this prophecy. They don't listen to me. God doesn't bring judgment on them.

[ 28 : 24 ] How am I going to look? He goes hood to hood, street to street, house to house. They don't listen. In fact, they throw him over the wall.

Get out of here, you nut job. Maybe they just laugh at him. But God doesn't do what God's going not to do. What about you?

Have you ever feared that you might experience a loss of reputation because you do not share Jesus Christ? Perhaps you will be seen as weak less than because you need the crutch of Jesus Christ.

Christ. The greatest line that I used to use with people when I was working for CSIS was, ah, that's just a crutch. Crutch, it's the whole hospital, man. Lord Jesus, I need you.

Amen? The fact of the matter is your pride may get hurt. You may not be as convincing as you think you are, but it's okay.

[ 29 : 32 ] Charles Spurgeon said, if you do anything for Christ which will lose you the respect of good people and yet you feel bound to do it, never ever give two thoughts to your reputation.

The highest reputation to have in this world is to be faithful and God will be faithful to you. If it's the world, I'll paraphrase what he said, if you're looking for affirmation from the world, you're in big trouble.

The world is a fickle place and will turn on you in a dime. The fourth reason that Jonah could have used, I don't want to say anything because I want those people to be judged.

That's how much I hate Ninevites. They have been a thorn in the side of Israel forever and as we will find out, they will bring ultimate judgment.

does that sin hide in your heart? Do you have a hatred for a person?

[ 30 : 42 ] Perhaps it's their sexual orientation. Perhaps it's the color of the skin, the job that they do. Do you know that you hold the keys to the kingdom of God but you choose not to put it in the lock?

Would you rather see people judged horribly by God for their sins rather than tell them about the wonderful forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ?

If you do, you've got a big issue to deal with in your heart. You might think God's mercy isn't big enough for those people.

What about God's reputation? Imagine if that person started talking about Jesus, how bad would that make us look? Are you actually tired of waiting for God to judge the world?

You read the news, the kind of wish that you could be God's executor? I'll be honest with you, I felt that this weekend. You ever see, you guys see the video, there's a video trending, there's two girls pouring paint on a church, two white girls wearing Lululemon and Birkenstocks and complaining about the hardship and yet they're putting graffiti all over a church.

[ 32 : 06 ] I kind of imagine I wish I was walking by and I would have grabbed that paint and dunked it over their heads. problem is my justice is not very good.

But there is a God in heaven who hears all, sees all and carries out perfect justice. You see at the same time Nahum and Amos were prophesying against Nineveh, all Jonah had to do was keep his mouth shut and they would be judged.

And the fifth reason, and this is the right reason why Jonah chose to not to go to Nineveh, Jonah knew that God was a merciful God.

Jonah knew that God would ultimately save Nineveh. that God is indeed a God of mercy and a God of justice.

And if they indeed did repent, they would be spared. Maybe you think the gospel is only meant for people like you.

[ 33 : 28 ] Let's be honest, it's easy to do, right? We're prejudicial to a point. I remember in high school, I don't know why God brings these thoughts to me when I was in high school.

There was two types of people. There was red tab people and there was orange tab people. Red tab people were the people who could afford the red tab Levi jeans, right?

Orange tab people, man, they were buying their stuff at Walmart. We don't want to be talking to those guys. even though I was poor as a church mouse. We had our little social structures of the people we thought were cool.

We did it. We didn't even know it. Or maybe we did know it. We were just stupid. But sometimes we think the gospel is for good people like us.

They're bad people. They won't want it. They're broken people. They'll just forget about it. What about those lost people? Ah, they'll never find it. What about those enslaved people?

[ 34 : 35 ] Ah, they deserve to be there. They made their own decisions. It's really easy for us to forget when we sing that great hymn, I once was lost but now am found.

My friends, the greatest I have found personally that one of the best ways that I have a heart for the unsaved is to look back at my heart when I wasn't saved.

How stupid, immature, dumb I was. I have used many of these excuses for reasons not to share the gospel.

Fear, impatience, selfishness, thinking people were not good enough. but if we are children of a king, our duty is to do as the king has called and he has indeed called us to reach this city for Jesus Christ.

Do you know that? This is our turf. This is where God has sovereignly put us. and if we don't do it, God will chase us down.

[ 35 : 55 ] And as we're going to learn in the life of Joseph, he's going to knock, he's going to throw storms, he's going to throw us off ships, but in the end, God will ultimately win.

Next week, we're going to go and look at the extremes that God uses to call us to his attention when we make foolish decisions.

Last week, I made a point, and I think this is a point we have to take forward. Our lives are not our own. I think we have an opportunity to reboot, so to speak, after COVID.

There's a new way to pray, a new way to act, a new way to talk. And my prayer for this church is that we will embrace this. We will come to the understanding that we have been called to more to just then come and sit and listen.

But that we will be called to engage the world that's full of bad, broken, lost, enslaved people. Some might even be too proud to come to Christ, but we are never going to be too proud to not share Christ.

[ 37 : 09 ] Christ. I pray that we are called just as Jonah is called. Let's pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I know it is a tough subject to talk about and what we're called to do as we look into the life of Jonah.

Too often we're not trained, we're not prepared, but I pray we begin to organize as a church, that we begin to prayerfully and practically learn to share the gospel.

Father, I pray that as people answer the call, that it will begin by desiring to learn more of you, to learn more about their faith, to more learn about you, Jesus Christ, God, the Holy Spirit, and how it all fits together.

Father, you will equip us. One of the easiest ways is just to simply invite someone to church, where they can hear the clear sound of the gospel, that Jesus Christ calls all sinners to him, that all they need to do is place their faith in him, recognizing that they need him, that there is no way to make peace with God outside of Jesus Christ, that as Jesus Christ was put on that cross where he bled and died, became the ultimate sacrifice for us, and in that moment, our sin became Jesus' sin, and Jesus' sinless perfection became our sinless perfection, and that the God of all heavens looks upon us as he looks upon his perfect son, and calls us children of him, and redeems us from this world, saves us from our brokenness, our lostness, our enslavement, and yes, even our foolishness and stupidity.

There's anyone here who's on a journey to get away from God, your presence of Father, I pray that you would blow the winds to bring them back, to not be afraid, because as we're going to see when we simply read verse 17 of chapter 1, God had appointed a fish from before the beginning of time that would rescue Jonah from the sea, take him to dry land, where he would be able to fulfill his calling before the Lord.

[ 39 : 52 ] Men and women, people in church might never be as kind and merciful as you, God, but you always are perfect in your justice and mercy for us.

May you cast away our fears and our doubts and give us a living, true faith. We ask these things in your most gracious and holy name.

Amen.