

Jonah 4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 December 1989

Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us read now in the Old Testament in the book of Jonah, chapter 3.

Let us turn now to the Old Testament, to the book of Jonah. We will continue our studies in this book by studying chapter, we read chapter 3, the prophecy of Jonah, chapter 3.

And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it, the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

Now the story tells us at the end of chapter 2 that Jonah once again stood on dry land.

Whether the fish survived or not, we're not told. The point is that Jonah did. And in this chapter, the story of Jonah reaches its peak.

[1 : 33] Indeed, the chapter contains an account of a greater miracle than we have in the first two chapters.

Because, in the words of another, it tells us of the greatest mass conversion in history. The world has never seen anything quite like the result of Jonah's preaching in Nineveh.

The whole city turned to the Lord. Now, that highlights for us really what the book of Jonah is all about.

It is about the supernatural, the power of God at work. Some people tend to limit the supernatural in Jonah to the fish swallowing him and the fish vomiting him.

But the supernatural comes light in far more than that in the book of Jonah. It is by the power of God that a man is called in the first place.

[2 : 49] Called to office as Jonah was. We saw that it was the power of God that was behind that unique storm that broke on the Mediterranean.

It was the power of God that was at work in bringing that miraculous calm upon the same sea.

It was the power of God that was at work in providing the fish. Keeping Jonah alive within the fish. Giving Jonah the spirit of prayer, the ability to pray.

No one can do that apart from the supernatural. It was the supernatural power of God that answered Jonah's prayer. It was the power of God that was at work in making that fish vomit Jonah on dry land.

It was the power of God that was at work in using the incidents of the storm and Jonah's confession to bring these heathen mariners.

[3 : 59] To our knowledge of God himself. But above all, it is the power of God that is at work in turning the heart of this city from its violence to the service of God himself.

And that's what we have in this chapter. Jonah recommissioned. Jonah, obedient to the call of God.

Particularly, Nineveh's repentance towards God. And, interestingly enough, God's repentance with reference to Nineveh.

Let's look at these few things with you this evening. First of all, Jonah recommissioned. The word of the Lord came unto him the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

Now, this chapter has been called by some the gospel of the second chance. Jonah is given another opportunity, another chance to serve the Lord.

[5 : 18] The word of the Lord came to him a second time. Now, you know that this is invariably the way in which the Old Testament speaks to us. The word of the word of the Lord came to Jonah at this time.

We're not told how God spoke to him. What we do know from the New Testament is this, that God spoke in various ways to our fathers through the prophets, says the writer to the Hebrews.

He used various means of communicating his mind to people. But we're not told here whether the word came directly to Jonah or whether God used means to convey his word to him.

It may be a problem for some people here tonight to know what God wants them to do. Well, let us remind ourselves that God, as again the writer of the Hebrews puts it, God who spoke like that in these ways to those who in the Old Testament times, through the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us in and through his Son.

And what God says to each one of us, we have in his word. That's the great advantage of having a Bible. Every time you read it, God is speaking to you.

[6 : 53] You may not hear him, but he's still speaking to you. And this is how you and I are to know the mind and the will of God. He speaks to us in his word.

And he speaks to us particularly concerning salvation. No one with a Bible in his hand is left in any doubt as to how he is to come to know the Savior who is God alone.

That is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that gospel comes to you and to me again tonight. This for you is the gospel of the second chance.

And probably not the second, but the hundredth and the thousandth opportunity, the thousandth chance from God yet again to obey his voice.

And you know that there are many occasions, many instances in the Bible that encourage us to come to God ourselves in the hope that he will accept us and the hope that he will enable us to believe.

[8 : 03] Jonah, as he ran away from the presence of God, may have thought that he would never again hear God speaking to him. As he was in the midst of that storm, he may very well have thought that God would never again speak to him.

As he was thrown overboard, what hope did he have? That God would speak to him. He cast himself upon the care and the mercy of God. That's all he could do. How did he know that God would speak to him?

He was a cry out of the belly of the fish. He cried to God. And here the mercy of God comes to light. Jonah's forgiven.

Jonah's restored to office. Jonah's recommissioned. In the same way as David was, though he had sinned against God. In the same way as Peter was, though he had denied his law.

Here's another instance of a man who is restored according to the multiplied pardon of God.

[9 : 10] One who is forgiven. One whose prayer is answered. One who is blessed in spite of what he is. In all his unworthiness.

And one who, in the mercy of God, can be used again in the service of God. And you can imagine with what gratitude, Jonah would respond to this word, the word of the Lord.

You can imagine how thrilled he was.

How thrilled he was. At God's mercy towards him. You know that someone writing in the book of Jonah quotes this great hymn from John Newton, which illustrates the point I'm trying to make.

John Newton spoke when he thought about the life that he had lived. He put it like this. In evil long I took delight. And awed by shame or fear.

[10 : 19] Till a new object struck my sight and stopped my wild career. I saw one hanging on a tree. In agonies and blood.

Who fixed his languid eyes on me. As near his cross I stood. A second look. He gave which said, I freely all forgive.

This blood is for thy ransom paid. I died. Thou mayest live. And that's the message of hope. With which the gospel comes to you and to me tonight.

None of us deserves a second chance. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have abused each one of us.

Every blessing and every privilege that God ever bestowed upon us. There is no soul in this church tonight. Who is worthy of the mercy of God.

[11 : 21] But yet God's mercy comes to us all. He comes again. And he speaks to us again. And he commands us yet again.

To obey. Well. How did Jonah respond? What was it first of all that God said to him? Arise and preach. Go to Nineveh.

That great city and preach unto it. The preaching that I bid thee. Now this was no small task.

The thing about Jonah's obedience here is that it was immediate. God didn't minimize the task before him.

He was to go to Nineveh. That great city. Now as we saw. The night we started the studies here in chapter 1. He was a Jew. Going to a heathen city.

[12 : 20] A place which was unknown to him. And where he himself was unknown. A place where God was unknown. A place that was steeped in iniquity and in violence.

Particularly in violence. And he was to go there. A teeming city. Some maintain 600,000 people.

Almost as big as the city of Glasgow today. He was to go to that great city. And he was to preach unto it.

Now this is the same way and this may interest some of you here tonight. It's the same commission that God gives his church tonight.

The church is commissioned to go with a message. Preach unto it. The word. That I bid thee. The preaching. That I bid thee.

[13 : 22] The church has nothing from the hand of God. But a message to the masses. And the message that the church has. Is the message that God gives her. To preach.

It isn't her own message. It is his message. And it's amazing how people can sit under the picture of the word. And still refer to the preaching.

As what the minister is saying. As what the church is saying. Forget that it is what God is saying. True preaching is not what I say. It's what he says.

And we are not to preach. But what he gives us to preach. We are not to remember Paul's great concern.

That he would be a false witness of God. That he would say things of God that weren't true. That he would say that God had said things that he hadn't said at all.

[14 : 20] And this is a great burden of preaching. It must be the preaching that I give unto thee.

And that is the preaching that God will honor. I remember once.

Being in a pulpit. With the one who was. Who was. My own predecessor in. In Marnesca. The 5th Reverend.

Donald MacDonald. And trying to preach. As best one could. On a Sabbath evening. At the communion. And I always remember.

And I wish I had put him to practice. What he said to me. At the close. When we were in the vesti together. He laid his hand on my shoulder. And he said. Why. He says.

[15 : 14] Do you shout. And well. I said. It just. I just can't help it. Ah. He said. You remember.

It isn't shouting. That God is going to bless. It is his own word. And this is something that. We as preachers. Have to remember. We've got to work. At our.

Methodology. At the way. In which we present. The gospel. We've got to make sure. That we have. Content. That what we have. Is the preaching. That God.

Gives us. It must be steep. In the word. Of God. It must be. From the word. And we must. Direct all people. To the word.

And we must. Always remember. At the end of the day. That what God blesses. Not what we say. But his word. The preaching. That I.

[16 : 12] Bid thee. And Jonah. Arose. And went unto Nunivy. According to the word of the Lord. This is now Jonah's. Obedience.

To that. Call. There are no word now. About us. About us. The problem. That he had as a Jew. In going.

To Nunivy. All that was going to come to light. Later on. Yes I know. But for him. Nothing else mattered now. But that he. Obeyed the Lord. And in the strength of his God.

He was prepared to go. Because. He was filled. With the sense of God. Delivering and saving power. In his experience.

He couldn't get over. God's goodness to him. Think of it. Here I am. On dry land again. Here I am. With my commission renewed. It's as though he was saying.

[17 : 07] When I say. Oh Lord. I'm here. Send me. I'm prepared to go anywhere. Do anything. If it be Nunivy. Nunivy it will be. Is that not true.

Concerning yourself. If you have a. Real sense of God's goodness to you. And God's mercy. And God's forbearance. It encourages you.

So it should. It encourages you. To do whatever the Lord. Wants you. To do. Have you learned that lesson. In your own life.

May I ask. Do you know. Are you aware. Tonight. Of the great goodness. And mercy of God. To you. To such an extent. That if God will speak to you.

Go. You would go. Well remember this. As they used to put it. You remember that. Before he tells you to go.

[18 : 02] He invites you. First of all. To come. Are you encouraged. Tonight. To come. To the Lord. So that you may receive. From him. That with which you would.

Go. To others. So Jonah rose. And went unto Nunivy. According to the word. Of the Lord. Now Nunivy was an exceeding. Great city. Of three days journey.

And Jonah began to enter. Into the city. A day's journey. And he cried. And said yet. Forty days. And Nunivy. Shall be. Overthrown. Now it's difficult to.

Know exactly. What this means. That Jonah. Jonah began to. End the city. A day's journey. And he cried. And said yet. Forty days. And Nunivy. Shall be.

Overthrown. Nunivy was a exceeding. Great city. Of three days journey. It's difficult to know. Exactly what these words mean. Perhaps. They are used to convey. To us something. Of the. Size. The enormous.

[19 : 00] The enormous size. Of this. Great. City. But it was. Another thing. About this. Is that. Though these.

People. Were so. Godless. Nevertheless. They were important. To God. Himself. Some people. Think that.

It took Jonah. Three days. To get to the city. Other people. Believe it took Jonah. Three days. To walk. Through the city. If it did. It was a very big city.

Indeed. But. The importance. Of this. For us. Is. That. As he went. He preached. He cried. This. Message.

Message. That God. Gave him. Yet. Forty days. And. None of it. Shall be. Overthrown. He cried. In his. Preach. Now.

[19 : 53] Though. Though. I mentioned. Earlier. That story. About. What was said to me. About. Shouting. And that. At the same time. I must.

I must. Say that. I think. That anyone. Who preaches. The gospel. Should be. Involved. In. What he's saying. It's an awful thing. To.

If any of you. Are ever going to become. Preacher of the word of God. Don't ever stand. That. That. So. What you're saying. Didn't mean a thing. To you. Or to the people. You're speaking to. This is the greatest message.

That the world. Has ever heard. And you've got the privilege. And the responsibility. Of communicating it. Do it well. Be involved in it. Make people know. Make them see. That what you're saying.

Means something. To yourself. You know something. About this yourself. And so he went. And he cried. Yet forty days. And Nineveh.

[20 : 50] Shall be. Destroyed. A message. Of judgment. But I believe. Also. A message. Of hope. There was hope.

In it. In that. God. God. Gave them. A message. At all. You know that. It is a mercy. That God. Is speaking.

To any one of us. Here tonight. A great mercy. God. Could be silent. My friend. In your life. There was that. Pathetic.

Individual. In scripture. Herod. To whom. The Lord. Spoke. Not a word. Question. After question. Rain down. Upon the Lord. And he answered him. Not a word.

It is an awful thing. For the silence. Of Jehovah. To reign. In anybody's life. Terrible thing. And there was.

[21 : 50] Mercy. Coming from God. In that. He sent a message. At all. To Nineveh. A message. Of. Threatened. Judgment. Now there is.

That is. I think that we can infer. From this. Forty days. And Nineveh. Shall be overthrown. There is. An inference there. That. Time. Was given.

To these people. Time. Was given. To them. To repent. And they made use.

Of the time. That God. Gave them. Now of course. Before I leave this. I know. I know. That there are. Problems. That people raise. In connection with this. How for example.

Could that Jewish prophet. Make himself understood. In a heathen city. Like Nineveh. When he didn't speak. Their language. This is one of the objections. One of the objections.

[22 : 43] Raised. To an acceptance. Of this. This. Account. Well. We don't know.

What language. Jonah used. As he spoke. To the Ninevites. But we do know. That he was. Able to communicate. To them. He was able. To make known.

To them. This message. They got. The message. But the important thing. Is the effect. That it had on them. The people of Nineveh.

Believed God. Proclaimed a fast. But done sacrifice. And gave it to them. Even to the least. And the word. Came unto the king of Nineveh. And he rose. From his throne. Now this is really. What the chapter.

Focusing attention on. The revival. That took place. At Nineveh. Do you ever think. Of this as a revival. Of religion. Or some people.

[23 : 38] May say. But what's known. Is according to the prophet. Nahum. Who prophesied. Some years. After Jonah. Was Nineveh. Not destroyed. Because of its violence.

Yes. It was. Through the revival. May not have been. That deep seated. There have been. Instants of revival. Movements of God's. Power. Amongst a people.

Or in a community. In a country. And the effects. Of it. Haven't lasted. All that long. Take the history. Of the free church. For example. Of Scotland. In 1843.

At the time. Of the disruption. There was a tremendous. Spiritual movement. It had been running. Right throughout. The whole country. At that time. And that.

That. That. Period. In church history. Was as much. The product. Of the spirit. Of revival. As it was. The product. Of anything else. But within.

[24 : 34] Thirty years. Things. Were very different. In the whole of Scotland. As spiritual malaise. Had settled over. The whole area.

There. And so. It can be. For example. In that town. That over a period. Of two or three years. You can have a movement. Of God's spirit. In a community. In a town.

In a congregation. And within a matter. Of three or four years. The spiritual deadness. Seems to settle over. An area. Where there had been. So much life.

And vitality. I often wonder. That has happened here. I'll be perfectly honest. With you. I often wonder. As I left the man's.

Last night. To go to prayer meeting. In the seminary. I remembered. Five years ago. When the street. Was packed. With cars. The car back. At the seminary. Itself.

[25 : 31] Quite full. People in the prayer meeting. It's no longer the case. Perhaps. The spiritual malaise. Has settled over.

The congregation. You find this. At the time of revival. People are so. So keen. Wild horses.

Wouldn't keep them. From the means of grace. Spiritual deadness comes. Television is far more important. Than a prayer meeting. Other things. Become more important.

And the things. That were so important. Before. Are relegated. Then. Because of the. Spiritual sloth. That settles over. You see. What I'm trying to point. I'm trying to make.

Is this. The congregation. Nineveh. There is no reason. To say. That because. Nineveh. Was destroyed. Some years after this. Because of its violence. That this was not. A genuine revival.

[26 : 25] It has all. It has all. The hallmarks. Of a genuine revival. In the first place. They believed God. Then they repented. The king was involved. The nobles were involved.

The people were involved. The very animals were involved. In the spirit of penitence. In this. In the evidence of penitence. In its outward manifestation.

No reason. Why this should not be construed. Thought of. As a genuine. Revival. From the hand. Of God. Look at the evidences. The people.

Believed. God. And they proclaimed a fast. And put on sacrifice. From the greatest of them. Even. To the least of them.

Here you have one of the. One of the many examples. In the Bible. Of the national. Or recognition. Of religion. From the king. Right now.

[27 : 24] That. There was to be a fast. Came from the king. The expression of hope. Godward.

Came from the king. Who can tell. If God will turn. And repent. And turn away. From his fierce anger. And we. Perish not.

This used to be the case. In this land. That the people. Were given the lead. By those. In authority over them. On matters. Spiritual. It is no longer the case.

It is no longer the case. The church. Ought. To direct. The leaders. Of our land. To direct.

The people. In the ways. Of God. For. The church. That the church. That the church's voice. Today. Goes. Unheard.

[28 : 19] By those. In authority. Unfortunately. One has to say this. That the national churches. Have nothing.

To say. To the leaders. Of this land. Regarding. Spiritual. Reformation. In our land. and the churches which do speak along these lines are dismissed out of hand as not being worth listening to they are oddities fundamentalists who are grouped together with oddities like themselves so here you have a revival which which was encouraged by those in authority and it's outward it manifests itself outwardly everyone wore sackcloth that was clothes made of goat hair or camel hair they were seen with ashes as well the evidence you know what ashes are when something is burnt there is nothing left and here's the evidence that these people recognise that they had nothing

God would that would merit God's favour God's mercy towards them an expression of their hopelessness and their helplessness and their emptiness in the presence of God above the din as someone says Jonah was heard and his message spread people responded to the simple message they didn't laugh at him nor arrest him for disturbing the peace he was heard and a world capital listened a world capital believed and repented it was the greatest mass conversion in history someone may say it wasn't possible humanly of course it wasn't but what is impossible for man is possible with God it is said that the 1938 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica says of this revival in Nineveh can we really conceive of a large heathen city being converted by the message of an obscure foreign missionary this prophet yes we can if we believe in the power of God here is the supernatural in Jonah here is a greater miracle than the fish swallowing the prophet this prophet under the hand of God moving a city to repent in the presence of God you know it's unbelievable that people should should accept that a man like Churchill

Winston Churchill could move this nation by his oratory to the spirit of of such honorable valor in the face of tremendous odds that a man like like Adolf Hitler could move thousands of people by his fanaticism why should we not believe if men like that in a pop group in our own day can move thousands of screaming teenagers by their own actions and antics why is it not possible for God the almighty God to use one man to move a nation to believe and to repent here is evidence of genuine repentance the word came and they believed the truth the only way in which people can become believers accept what God says they believed

God they believed what this man was saying of course there were men before Jonah who preached to their generation the generation did not believe people laughed at Lot people laughed at Jonah at Noah but no one we're told laughed at Jonah so it is that the word can come to one person he may laugh the other may believe the same word because the power of God is blessing it to his heart and they repented they fasted a good biblical practice we don't engage in this today there are some people who think that it would be good for Christians at a time of crisis maybe in their own lives when they've got that difficulty to confront with when they've got a decision to arrive at it might not be a bad thing to fast and to pray to fast so that no one knows that you're doing this is the way

[33 : 43] Jesus told people to fast not so that the whole world would know that you're doing it no one will know that you're doing it but yourself and the God abstain from food maybe for a day it wouldn't do any of us any harm might do some of us the power of good even physically and then they prayed they cried to God they cried mightily to God this was the decree that every man was to cry mightily unto God to turn away from his evil way that's what you also have in revival not just faith in God there is prayer born in the heart there is a prayer which has meaning it is a crying mightily to God not a case of saying a prayer not a case of following a set pattern not a case of repeating what you taught or what you told what you instructed to do by someone else say this if you want to be a believer ah my friend that's not the prayer that is born in the heart of a person who's converted by the power of God say it oh he has no option but to say it he can't but say it his every waking moment is one of prayer as he cries

God would for help life mercy peace forgiveness salvation don't think of prayer as being something mechanical that someone can teach you or you can learn from a manual or from following certain rules and regulations it is the product of the spirit and the heart that's prayer repentance they turn from their evil way from the violence that was in their hand then if it was noted for its violence this was its great sin its violence we hear a lot today about the violence of human rights the violence of one's conscience whatever in whatever way violence expresses itself it is the result of lawlessness people abandoning law turning away from law doing their own thing in their own way in whatever sphere of activity you find in your own life and you remember this that when

God comes and converting convicting power he will convince you of your sin it may be one besetting sin but above all it will be the sin of your unbelief in Jesus Christ and you will turn away from that sin you will distance yourself from that life in which that sin expresses itself there will be a break with sin a break with the past a break with the old way of life of any man being Christ he is a new creature and there was that evidence of conversion evidence of revival in the lives of these people that break with sin which corresponded with their sorrow and with their remorse there was pain and anguish associated with a wrench necessity has to be there between the past and the present and there was also hope who knows if

God will turn and repent remember these things faith repentance prayer hope who knows where did hope come from well I think it were indebted to Jesus for the answer to this question we're right there in Luke chapter 11 this generation he says looks for a sign I can give it no sign but the sign of the prophet Jonah because Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the throes of death in the belly of the earth what I suggest to you that one way to be understood is this Jonah was a sign to these I'm a sign to you I tell you I'm going to be three days and three nights in death Jonah said to these people that he was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish and that

God had delivered him God had saved him and that may have been the ground of their hope what God did for this man can he not do for us and you know that even as you listen to the gospel tonight if it be that you're looking for God if it be that there is an element of dissatisfaction in your life that sin has become exceeding sinful that the old way of life has turned sour I suggest to you my friend to encourage you that you too have hope and this is the hope the hope of the gospel that what God did for others he may do for you and that is also an element in revival an element in conversion show us hope that God is able that God alone can save who knows but that

[39 : 46] God are you not conditioning yourself tonight can you not least lay hold of that hope for yourself are you entertaining it for yourself this was the repentance of Nineveh they turned from their sin to God there is one final thing that I want to deal with here because it does create a problem and let's not try to evade these problems brought before us by the word of God God saw their works and they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them and he did it not and the question is this as it has been often expressed by other people does God change his mind what does it mean when it says God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them and he did it not well you know that in the old world

God repented that he had made man and he brought destruction upon the old world by way of the flood and from time to time you get these words expressed in the word of God that God repented what he said that he would do and he didn't not when you and I when it said of you and me that we repent it means a change of mind a change of direction then I explained that earlier on when a sinner repents he turns from his evil way and he comes to God God never ever changes his mind he cannot change himself I am Jehovah I change not therefore are ye not consumed O ye sons of Jacob but

God uses words so that you and I can understand something in the way in which God works and this is the way in which God works he sent this message to Nineveh now Jonah tells us in verse 2 of the next chapter he was so angry that God didn't punish Nineveh and he said Lord was not this my saying why I was yet in my own country therefore I fed before thee into Tarshish because I knew that thou a gracious God merciful slow to anger and of great kindness and repentance thee of the evil what he saying Jonah knew that this was God's way of bringing Nineveh to repentance destruction in forty days the inference being if you will not repent the same way the gospel comes to me to you and to me and it says this ye shall all perish if you don't repent that's the message and you know as well as I do and I need to emphasize this that what

God says is true he uses means to bring people to repentance and the means that he used was the message that he gave and both the message and the means are within the decree of God God decreed both the message and the means to bring these people to repentance themselves God didn't change but the Ninevites did God God threatened to destroy the violent Ninevites at the same time God promises to save the penitent Ninevite and so it is with you here tonight you know that as an impenitent disobedient sinner you expose yourself to the wrath and to the curse of God you also know from the word of

God that if you repent God saves the sinner who repents and this is the message and I come back to the beginning the gospel of the second chance for you tonight yet again it comes with the offer of salvation through faith in Christ let us pray Lord be merciful to us and guide us to the knowledge of thy will help us to put our trust in thee and help us to know that thou art our God the God who saves guide us have mercy upon our souls and forgive all our sins for Jesus sake Amen