

Jonah 5

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: 17 December 1989

Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] The book of Jonah, the chapter which we read, Jonah, chapter 4.

And we conclude our studies in this book by considering this chapter tonight. It has been said that if chapter 3 is the gospel of the second chance, then 4 is the picture of God dealing with a man who says, I wish that this had never happened.

Of course, we know that what we wish had never happened was God's sparing of the people of Nineveh.

Remember that in the third chapter, we have an account of probably the greatest mass revival in history. And we saw last week the evidence of that revival.

The people of Nineveh believed God through the preaching of Jonah. They repented in the presence of God and there were all the evidence of repentance.

[1 : 29] There was fasting, there was self-humiliation, and there was conviction of sin. There was also prayer. They cried mightily to the Lord.

And there was also the exercise of hope. And it may very well be in the words of Jesus that their hope was encouraged and fed by what they knew had happened to Jonah.

He, says Jesus, was assigned to the Ninevites. And they repented at his preaching. And it may very well be that what they knew and heard of Jonah's experience encouraged them to hope that God would have mercy upon them.

So they repented. And then we also read in chapter 3 that God also repented. And this is something that causes great difficulty to many people.

Especially in view of the fact that we know that God cannot change. He is unchangeable.

[2 : 47] But we also know that God uses words and terms so that our minds can understand what happened in a particular situation.

And what happened was this. God purposed to bring Nineveh to repentance. The method that he employed to bring into repentance was the preaching of Jonah.

The content of the message was that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days. And Nineveh's understanding was that they would be destroyed if they would not repent.

And so, in bringing his purpose to pass. When God spared them. In bringing his purpose to pass. It looked as though God had changed. But it wasn't God who had changed. It was they who had changed. And now in 4.

[3 : 50] We see God dealing with the prophet Jonah. He had already dealt with this great city of Nineveh.

He had saved this city of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people from destruction. But in the midst of it all, in the course of it all, God was also dealing with this one man.

God who used his mighty power to bring Nineveh to repentance. Employed the same power to teach just one of his people.

And as someone has said, an obdurate one at that. To teach him a lesson that he needed to learn. But before we pass on to look at this fourth chapter in more detail.

Remember what I said at the very beginning of these studies. The book of Jonah is full of the supernatural. People turn away from studying it.

[4 : 56] They're ridiculous. Because for them, it has only one so-called supernatural event or occurrence. This fish swallowing Jonah.

But there's far more of the supernatural in Jonah than that. We've seen that already. That great storm that came forth on the hand of God was supernatural. The calm that broke out was also from the hand of God.

The conversion of the heathen sailors was from the hand of God. The preparation of the fish, the swallowing of Jonah by the fish and the ejection of Jonah by the fish was all of God.

The conversion of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah was a miracle from the hand of God.

And here in chapter 4, we have further evidence of the supernatural.

The gourd, the warren on the east wind. All coming forth, as the word tells us, from the hand of God prepared by the hand of God.

[6 : 01] Don't think that the book of Jonah is just about the fish swallowing Jonah. It's full of the supernatural power of God at work in the lives of sailors and cities and particularly in the life of one man.

Well now, how does that come to light in this chapter tonight? Well, I suppose that the first thing we have to look at is this almost unbelievable attitude of Jonah to what happened.

When God spared Nineveh and it wasn't destroyed immediately, it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry. Just crossed my mind that maybe I've referred to Jonah as Noah here tonight.

I hope maybe I have. It displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country?

Therefore I fled before thee unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness and repentance thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

[7 : 20] And the Lord said, Doest thou well to be angry? Jonah. Jonah. Now we know what displeased Jonah.

What displeased him was God's sparing mercy towards Nineveh's repentance. And he was, it wasn't just angry, he was mad, he was hot within him.

He was burnt up, he was very angry, he lost his temper. He lost the place completely. And this is strange. Because this was a man of God, this was a prophet, a preacher.

A man who had been eminently successful under the hand of God. A man who had seen a lot, who had heard a lot, who had been through a lot. He had experienced more than probably any one of us here tonight.

In the way of God's delivering mercy and God's power in his life. And yet, he was very angry with what God, with God's dealings with Nineveh.

[8 : 32] And no doubt, God's dealing with himself. And the question is, why? Why should a man, a man of God, react like this to God's dealings?

Well, verse 2 tells us, Lord, he said, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country?

Therefore I fled before thee unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger of great kindness and repentest thee of the evil.

Ah, now we know why he was so disobedient to the command of God initially. He tells us why he ran away.

He didn't want to come to Nineveh with a message because he knew, he understood that this was to be God's way of leading Nineveh to repentance.

And here's a man who was not prepared to be used for the purpose for which God had called him.

[9 : 41] Isn't that significant? Isn't that strange? Some of us think that if God showed us where to go, if God, you've got a problem with guidance.

Who hasn't from time to time? And you say to yourself, if God showed me where to go and if God gave me a message and if God told me what to say and if I saw this being worked out exactly the way that God directed, I would go.

Well, Jonah didn't. And yet he knew what God was going to do. But at least he had learned one lesson.

In all that he had passed through, he had learned the lesson of bringing everything to God in prayer. And here, remember the first time when God told him, go to Nineveh, he didn't pray about it. He ran off to Tarshish. But this time, when he saw God's purpose fulfilled, he prayed. At least he did this. He brought himself into the presence of God, angry though he was.

[10 : 51] Though he was in the wrong spirit, at least he was in the right place. Praying in anger because he didn't get his own way.

Do you know what that is? I'm sure if you know any of your heart, you do. You know that there are times when God crosses your path. What you want, God doesn't do it at all.

He does something else. Of course, you accept what he did. But you're angry that he didn't do it your way. Anger at God's way prevailing over your own.

And as I said earlier, as verse 2 tells us, he now tells us and he tells God why he ran away. This is no excuse, of course, for running away.

But he knew that God was going to act like this. He knew that God, as he puts himself, was full of mercy, full of grace, full of kindness, slow to anger, and would save Nineveh if they turned from their evil way.

[12:05] Therefore, I fled. He didn't want God to act like this. Now, there are some people, notably Hugh Martin, who claim that Jonah was desperately trying to defend God's character.

He didn't want the heathen people to say to him, You said that this place would be destroyed. What can I have a God of you, God? He didn't destroy this place at all. So he's defending God's character. Others say that he was defending God's character with reference to his own people, the Jews.

He didn't want to go back to his Jews and be classed as a false prophet. One who went with a message of destruction to a place, and the place wasn't destroyed at all. And, of course, false prophets in Israel tended to have a pretty gory end in Jonah's day.

But whichever way you look at it, there is no way in which you can justify Jonah doing what he did. And it's amazing how you and I can use theological argument, can use good doctrinal teaching to justify our own wrong conclusions.

We can have all the right premises. And then come to the wrong conclusion. And that's what Jonah did. Of course God was full of mercy.

[13:37] Of course God was a God of grace. Of course God used means to fulfill his own purpose. These things were all true. But it was not true. That was right for a man, because of these things, to disobey God and not to do his will.

And so he prays for death. Lord, it is better for me to die than to live.

Take my life from me. Now here's another interesting insight into the human mind, into the human heart.

Sometime before this, in desperate circumstances, this man wanted to live within the belly of the fish. Now he wants to die.

You know, there are times when we can be quite irrational. I remember a minister once giving me advice at the beginning of my own ministry.

[14:52] And I've valued it ever since. I wish I'd put it into practice oftener. This may help some of you here this evening. Never, he said, never come to a decision on any issue when you're down in the mouth or when you're up on cloud nine.

Because you tend to come to the wrong decision. It's very good advice. And here's this man. He's really, he's mad. He's mad with himself.

He's mad with God. He's mad with Nineveh. He's mad with the word. And he prays that God would take away his life. Remember there's a man also in the Bible, a famous Old Testament prophet Elijah.

who, like Jonah, was disappointed because of what happened. After a tremendous triumph for Carmel, Jezebel, the king's wife, had sent a message that she was going to take his life before the day was out.

And when he heard that, he fled. And he got into an awful depression. And he prayed for the same thing. Perfectly possible for good men to pray for the wrong thing.

[16:06] Paul himself said, There are times, he says, when we don't know what to pray for as we ought. Is it not true that you found yourself faced with similar circumstances?

Confused. Disappointed. Perhaps self-opinionated. Couldn't stand the thought of being proved wrong.

And he didn't want things to go on any longer. Here was a man who had forgotten what God had done for him.

And you and I tend to forget what God does for us as well. And we can become the victim of our own feelings and of our own moods. And a spirit of dejection and depression and disappointment and distress.

We conclude that we are useless, unwanted and full of self-pity and feeding self on self-pity. We pray for the wrong things.

[17:07] Angry. Because God had allowed this situation to develop. Do you find the spirit of Jonah in your own heart?

Do you know what it is to be mad with the Almighty? Do you know what it is to turn against all on Sunday because you're not getting your way? Because things aren't working out your way. And do you know what it is because of that? To pray for the wrong thing and to say the wrong thing. Oh yes my friend. It's great to learn about yourself.

And to learn what Paul learned as we read there in Corinthians chapter 4. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. That the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

How did God deal with this man? He asked him a question. Do you do well, he says, to be angry? Can you justify your anger?

[18:19] He asks Jonah a direct question. How can you justify feeling the way you feel? I've saved thousands of souls.

You're mad because you haven't been destroyed. Can you justify your anger? And how did he react? He sulked.

Sometimes some of us react. He went out of the city. Didn't answer. Went off in our mood. Sat under the east side of the city and there made him a booth or a body maybe.

Sat under it in the shadow till he might see what would become of the city. He still harbored the hope. Contrary to his belief about God.

That Nineveh would be destroyed. Can you justify, he was asked, your anger?

[19:21] Oh well, my friend. I suppose that there are times when this question can justifiably be put to yourself. Who knows whether it can be put to you here tonight.

I don't know what mood you're in. I don't know what feelings you have. I don't know how you're reacting to the providence of God in your own life. I don't know. But I wouldn't be surprised that if you were to be honest with yourself, the things that make you angry very often are pretty trivial. And yet you nush your anger. You feed your anger as Jonah did. And you sulk away like Jonah did at this time.

And the strange thing was this. This man had no grounds to be angry at all. As a matter of fact, he had the best grounds of all to be thankful. Because the Bible tells that there is no news in the world quite like the news of people turning from sin to God.

People distancing themselves from sin and throwing near in faith and penitence to God. You know what the Old Testament says. News of that event. It's like a drink of cold water to a thirsty soul.

[20:36] Heaven itself rejoices, Jesus tells us. Over one sinner repenting. What would it be like over a whole city? If the whole of Storne, with the whole of Glasgow, and the whole of Irvinese, turned tonight to the Lord Jesus in faith and penitence.

What would the joy in heaven be like? There was heaven rejoicing. And there was the man, instrumental in God's hand, in moving them Godward.

Sulking. Because they weren't destroyed. Almost unbelievable. That what can be at the heart of heaven's joy, can be at the heart of your anger.

Isn't that strange? And yet again, if you look to yourself, I don't know if it is all that strange. How many of us have our hearts so closed to the extension of God's kingdom?

How many of us are quite prepared and quite happy to have the gospel and all the privilege of the gospel to ourselves and with ourselves? And when these privileges are blessed in the experience of those who are out without border, far from rejoicing in it, there are times when we question the reality of it.

[22:01] And perhaps they're quite angry that such a thing should be said. And we pour cold water and we pour scorn over the very idea of so-and-so being converted to Christ by the power of the gospel.

Oh yes, the spirit of Jonah can be in you and me as well. We can be angry with the Almighty because of what he's doing. And when he asks, are you right, are you just, can you justify your anger?

No. But we have plenty of ground for being thankful for his mercy and for his power. And think of this man. Here he was, having been instrumental in turning this people to the Lord, a successful ministry as you and I would define it.

And yet he's angry because it happened and so he sulks away. What does he do? Well, he builds what could probably be referred to as some kind of a trellis, a very hastily prepared body in which

he was going to look out and wait for the destruction of Nineveh.

And this is where we see the supernatural coming in again. God is at work. He prepared a gourd. That's something like a palm tree.

[23 : 24] He prepared a gourd. And it came up supernaturally. That's the meaning of the word prepared. He supernaturally brought this plant.

brought it to life so that it grew and gave a tremendous shade to Jonah in the body as he sat, as someone has put it, almost like a fellow camouflaged bird watching, looking for wildlife.

You know, the way they camouflage themselves in case they disturb the wildlife. That's the kind of picture of here of Jonah, hoping to see the visible destruction of this people.

So that he would have to say maybe they had a power to pray in this phenomenal destruction. He was more prepared to be known as a man who had a power to pray in their destruction than a man who had a power to pray in their salvation.

Again, unbelievable, isn't it? So the Lord has to teach this man a lesson. The first lesson he teaches is this. He gives him the shade, the shadow, the comfort that he needed in that hot country.

[24 : 40] And I've no doubt that Jonah welcomed the protection of this gourd, this tree, this bush.

And here he was preparing Jonah's heart so that he would understand something of the gladness in God's heart. I think that this is the way we can understand it. Jonah was made to see that what God gave him benefited him, filled him with thankfulness and gladness as he sat under the shadow of this gourd.

And his mind was supposed to go in that direction and to understand this. If you're glad because of what I prepared for you miraculously, why should I not be glad?

Because miraculously, the people have been turned from the sin of violence to faith and penitence Godward.

So it is with you and with me. Look at the many things that God has given you tonight to enrich your life. The many shades under which you can shelter.

[25 : 56] The many comforts that you have along life's way. The many things that have enriched you. And you know, my friend, you should use these things, whatever they are.

Whatever the blessings may be in your life. Use them. So that through them, you can understand that the heart of God is made glad.

Particularly when people turn from sin to himself. But God wasn't finished with Jonah.

We read that God also prepared a water when the morning rose the next day and it smoked the gourd that had withered. Another miraculous preparation from God.

Something like a caterpillar. And Jonah was now overwhelmed by the thought of this withering plant.

[27 : 01] God took his comfort away. God took his comfort away. And he was teaching him there as well.

In the same way as he teaches you and me. When he takes our comforts away. When he takes the things that enrich our life away. The things that gladden us. It's wonderful example.

Let me give you an example of that communicational level. It's wonderful to live under the comfort of God's presence and God's mighty power at work in the midst of our people.

But you see, God doesn't always work at that. God takes it away. And you and I have to learn to live in dependence upon God. It is God who is at work.

And the problem very often with us is this. When God takes our comforts away. When God takes our blessings and our enrichments away. Then we step in and we try to replace what God has given.

[28 : 10] And it can't be done. It can't be done. And we have to learn to recognize God's hands. God's hand in our disappointments.

As in our comforts. And this is what God is bringing Jonah to see. To see that he's at work. And that when he works, Jonah should rejoice in whatever he does.

And that's a very difficult lesson to learn. It's a very difficult lesson to learn. It is comparatively easy to rejoice rejoice in the light of his favor.

But it isn't so easy to rejoice in the face of adversity. Only grace can enable you to do that. And here he's teaching Jonah that lesson.

And yet he's not finished with it. And it came to pass when the sun did arise that God prepared a vehement east wind and the sun beat down upon the head of Jonah that he fainted and wished

himself to die and said it's better for me to die than to live.

[29 : 28] Oh how difficult it was to teach this man. Yes my friend. But no more difficult than it is for God to teach you. There is no person in the world more difficult to teach than the individual himself.

You're not the best pupil God ever had. You're not the best student who was ever in his school. There are many rough edges to be knocked off you. And in spite of all that God has said to you and all that God has done in spite of the many lessons you've already learned you have more to learn. That's true of each one of us. That is why Jesus said of those who came into his kingdom that no one could come in unless he became as a little child. And when you're in you become more of a child.

You become more and more teachable as the days go by. Here in this scorcher of a day Jonah's misery was complete.

There he sat someone said in his miserable little hut dogged in his obstinacy of spirit and perched in his body as the burning wind blew on him and the sun beat down on his head.

[30 : 52] Everything seemed to be against him. And how did he react so predictably he just wants to get away.

He wants to opt out. He can't go on. He wants to give up. It is better for me to live than to die.

But God doesn't give up. And there is something for which you and I ought to be thankful tonight. It is this. that God didn't give up on us when we wanted to give up on him.

God wasn't finished yet with Jonah. Almost. But not quite. He has to apply this teaching to Jonah's life.

He is, as someone has put it, he has to bring Jonah to heel. And look at all the things that he used in a short space of time in this man's life. the storm, the calm, the conversion of the mariner, the fish, the prayer, the gourd, the caterpillar, the conversion of Nineveh, the scorching weather.

[32 : 07] God was using all these things so that he would bring Jonah to recognize, to understand, and to acquiesce in the sovereign will of God.

Do us do well to be angry, he says, for the gourd. And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. He was angry before because Nunaví wasn't destroyed.

Now he's angry because the gourd was destroyed. Look at how rational we can be as I mentioned earlier. Why couldn't God spare the plant?

He says, why couldn't you leave that with me? And there he is now brought by God to see this. Ah, yes, you wanted me to spare the plant in your interests.

Do you not see then why I should not spare in Nunaví in their own interests? It was difficult for Jonah to part with the gourd.

[33 : 22] Do you not see, he says, the difficulty that I would have in parting with Nunaví when they have come to love me?

You are afflicted so deeply by the loss of a plant. Afflicted so deeply that you want to die. What about me?

He says, as though he was saying to him, when these people have turned to me. Furthermore, you had no hand in providing the gourd. It was me who came to you.

It came to you. You cherished it. You appreciated it. You welcomed it. You were glad of it. And it wasn't even you. I gave it to you. What are these people created by me, purposed by me for myself, should I not rejoice and delight in their penitence and in their turning to me?

And so he is being brought, as I said earlier, to acquiesce in the will of God. Should I not spare none of it?

[34 : 37] There's no answer to this question. We believe that Jonah has learned his lesson. You are glad because of what I have done for you.

Should I not rejoice in what these people have done for me? They have turned to me. and this is the question for you and for me here tonight so we come to the end of our studies of this book.

How much in sympathy are you with the mind and the will and the purpose of God? How glad are you the presence of God tonight for his blessings and for his favours both spiritual and temporal? Are you guilty of the spirit of exclusivism? How close to your heart to the purpose and to the will of God?

As the gospel comes as a message of salvation from God to our lost world how much of that lost world is embraced by you?

[35 : 53] Do we need to repent because of our attitudes as Jonah did because of his for as someone has said no one begins to understand this profound and searching little book until he discovers the Jonah in himself and then repentantly lays hold upon the boundless grace of God and as you and I think tonight of our lost world to whom this message comes how thankful you ought to be that the message comes to it and that the message comes to you how thankful you ought to be that God has borne so patiently with you in spite of what you are and in spite of what you've seen and in spite of what you've heard and in spite of how little you have put into practice of all you have learned ah my friend how thankful you ought to be that is written tonight learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls may God grant that you and I may discover more and more the rest that is in Christ as the savior of sinners as he bids you yet again to come to him let us pray bless us in our meeting here this night in thy name we beseech thee

God to apply thy truth with conviction to our hearts oh do thou help us to learn forgive us for our slowness give us for not being more reconciled to thy will than we are forgive us for seeking our own will so often and give us grace to believe that if we put our trust in thee that if we follow thee that thou will be more and more and more of a blessing to us help us in our relationship with thyself to learn of thee and to lean not upon our own understanding but upon thyself part us this night with thy blessing watch over us and over all who may commit to thee wherever they may be and forgive our sins for Jesus sake amen for

TWO PRESIDENT I lets music and impossible to