

The Sign of Jonah the Prophet

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] We can read at verse 38. In the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation. And condemn it for they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold something greater than Jonah is here.

Some years ago we looked at the prophet Jonah. Because really his life was quite an exceptional. Well his story is quite an exceptional one. And if you remember Jonah was the reluctant prophet.

But who did not want to do what God asked him to do. In fact he went in the very opposite direction. When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh.

That great city of the Assyrian Empire. We find that Jonah goes in exactly the opposite direction. He was the reluctant prophet.

[1 : 19] I had a commentary on Jonah. And it was titled the preacher on the run. And that's exactly what Jonah was. He was running away from God.

Something of course that you cannot really do. And Jonah didn't want to go with the message. That the Lord had to the great city of Nineveh.

And what Jonah did of course was really bad. Because he willfully disobeyed God. Now we all, every day, all of us, we disobey God.

Sometimes we're very conscious of our disobedience. And it grieves our heart. Other times we're often, we could almost say, we're oblivious to our disobedience.

Because our disobedience has become so natural to us. Because so often we live out our lives. And if we really structured our life according to the word of God.

[2 : 20] We would all be a lot more careful in the way we spoke. In the way we conducted ourselves. In our attitude of spirit and heart. Towards one another.

In fact, towards everybody. We would be very different people. But it is because so often we just live out our days in a particular way.

And so often it is not keeping to the high standards that the word of God requires. But there are other times where we are willfully disobedient.

Different to the way that I'm talking about there. Where we are challenged by God's word. And we know that the direction that we're going in. And what we're doing.

Or our attitude of heart. Or the way we're talking. Or the situation that we have involved ourselves in. We know that it is against God's will.

[3 : 17] And we're so conscious of it. And yet there is a stubborn resistance within us. Refusing to obey God's will. And being disobedient. Well that is the kind of spirit that Jonah was showing.

Because God's word was so clear to him. Jonah, I want you to go for me to Nineveh. And I want you to proclaim a particular message to that great city.

This is what I want you to do. Couldn't be clearer. Jonah said, no, I will not do that. And so he goes in the very opposite direction.

And as we said, he tried to run away from God. Which is an absolute impossibility. Nobody can run away from God. Even people who live their lives denying the existence of God.

Who live as if there is no God. Every moment of their life is lived out and played out. Under the eyes of God. Who sees everything.

[4 : 20] Takes note of everything. Doesn't just see it. But takes note of absolutely everything. We say and we do. So we're told in Jonah chapter 1 and verse 3.

But Jonah, this is what it says, rose to flee to Tashus from the presence of the Lord. And that language indicated that Jonah, as he did that, he was no longer in the service of the Lord.

Nor was he under the favor of God. And you see, actually, this is where we see how dangerous disobedience is. And particularly for a Christian.

Because we've got to remember that primarily, as we have been saved, we've been saved to serve the Lord. And we serve the Lord in loads and loads of different ways.

Our whole life really is a life of service. But if we're living in disobedience away from God, then we are no longer serving God.

[5 : 21] And we're actually not living under the favor of God at that particular time. So Jonah is a clear warning to us of the danger of disobedience.

And you remember how Jonah got the ship and away he went. And he was out in the open sea when the most awful storm came. Remember that every boat out on the water that night was in danger of going down.

And you remember how the crew did everything they could. In the end, they had to throw all the cargo over the side. Just they were doing everything to try and keep that ship afloat.

And again, it shows us that this was because of one man. And Jonah knew that. Because when the sailors were speaking to him, he said, This storm is because of me.

It's my fault. And it shows us that our sin doesn't just affect ourselves. It affects other people as well. Same as Achan. Achan caused the death of loads of people because of his sin.

[6 : 30] And Jonah, because of what he had done and trying to run away from God, he was endangering the lives of every sailor that was out on the sea that night.

And Jonah said, There's only one thing for it. You have to throw me overboard. And when you do that, the storm will stop. Of course, the men didn't want to do that.

But at the end, that's exactly what they did. And everybody would think that would be the end of Jonah. No doubt the sailors, well, it's not no doubt.

The sailors knew that this was going to be the end of Jonah. Because nobody could survive out in that fearful storm being thrown out into the middle of the sea.

But it tells us in Jonah 1 verse 17, The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Everything is under the control of the living and true God.

[7 : 34] The fish of the sea. He directed that fish, that quail or that huge fish to come along and swallow Jonah. In the very same way as, remember the night the disciples had been out fishing.

They had caught nothing. They were dispirited. And the Lord said to them, Go back out and put your net out on the right-hand side. And Peter said, More or less, he said, What's the point?

We've spent all night. I know these waters. I know the way the waters run. I know the winds. I know when the fish will be there and when they won't be there. There is no point.

But at the word of the Lord, He went and did. They went and did. And they got the biggest catch they'd ever got. See, the Lord's directing everything.

We saw that this morning with Elijah. That the Lord directed the ravens, scavenging birds, greedy birds that will take everything to themselves to carry every morning and every evening bread and meat to Elijah by the river.

[8 : 40] God is in charge of the animals. Daniel was put into a den of lions. Naturally, he was put in there to be torn limb from limb. And these lions the whole night were like tame pussycats.

Didn't go near him or probably rubbed against him. Just tame as anything. The Lord closed the mouths of the lions. See, everything.

It's his world. Every single thing is under his control. And so often we forget that. And so it's important for us to be reminded of these things.

So Jonah was swallowed up by this great fish or the whale. And he was three days and three nights in the belly of it. And what happened to Jonah, the Lord Jesus is saying, is a message.

It's a sign. What happened to Jonah is full of gospel meaning and gospel message. And that's what I want us to consider briefly tonight.

[9 : 47] Now, Jesus in this section is addressing the scribes and Pharisees who have been, who are wanting a sign. This is what they're saying. Give us a sign. And many of the scribes and Pharisees, they were incensed against Jesus.

They hated Jesus. Because you see, Jesus was not keeping to their ways, to their laws. It must have been really difficult living at that particular time.

Because for the Jew in these days, their lives were shackled and bound by a multitude of laws.

What they had done was they'd taken the law of God. And then to make sure that they were keeping the law of God right, they added loads of other laws to every law. So that you could barely move or do anything.

Just to make sure you were keeping the law of God. And the people were living in bondage. But Jesus came and he totally disregarded their law. He hadn't come to fulfill their law.

[10 : 53] He had come to fulfill God's law and make it honorable. So his teaching was revolutionary and radical. And he lived a life that was at variance to the laws that all the religious leaders were setting out for the people.

And they tried to live by. And that's why they were incensed at Jesus' disciples for plucking the ears of corn. They were incensed at Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

He shouldn't do that. If he's a man of God, he can't be a man of God. And in fact, there was a vicious campaign started against Jesus. When you think about some of the things they said about Jesus, we read there a little of it.

They said that he cast out devils, cast out demons by the prince of the power of the demons. It was really, what they're saying is, he operates by the power of Satan.

He's a satanic man. This is what they were saying. They also said about him, we know that this man is a sinner. We know.

[12 : 03] These men had set themselves up in judgment against Christ. And they said, he is a sinner. In other words, he is a person who is evil.

Another thing they said was, he deceives the people. That's what they were going around saying. You know what? It's quite extraordinary. Here are the religious leaders of the day. People who had been schooled and trained in God's word.

And that's what they were telling the people about the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, don't listen to him. He deceives people. Isn't that extraordinary? Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus, who was incapable of ever speaking anything but the truth. And they're saying, he deceives the people. They also said he was a blasphemer.

They also said he was a glutton. They also said he was a winebibber. In other words, somebody was always at the wine. They said he was a friend of publicans and sinners.

[13 : 05] And they meant that in the most derogatory way possible. So, we sometimes underestimate just what that was like for Jesus.

Every day, wherever he went, there was this prejudice against him. People were saying, the religious leaders were saying, don't listen to him.

He's a deceiver. He's out for his own good. He's actually satanic. If you want to look at evil, look at Jesus. And it really, it's extraordinary what was actually happening.

So, here are these people. And they're saying to Jesus, right then, show us a sign. Give us a sign. We wish to see a sign from you.

And, you know, the thing is here that their blindness actually is staggering. Because you've got to remember, we're not talking about people who don't know anything.

[14 : 08] As we said, these are religious men who spent their days studying God's Word. And as they studied God's Word, or they should have seen, everything that it said in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah was being fulfilled before their very eyes.

That Jesus, we were told this, that when he would come, that he would open the eyes of the blind, that he would heal, that he would bring healing and help to everybody.

And his teaching was going to bring so much good. Everything that was being prophesied about him was being fulfilled. And yet, they're saying, we want a sign.

And there's nothing that blinds a person like unbelief. Unbelief is so incredibly blinding. And as we said, these were people who studied the Word, and they knew everything in the Word.

So, they're saying, look, you do some sign for us right now. Do something for us spectacular. And if you do, we'll believe.

[15 : 23] And Jesus said to them, I'm not going to give you a sign. The only sign is going to be, and that's what he says, an evil and adulterous generation seek for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

You know, there might be somebody here tonight, and you're thinking along these lines. And you're saying, you know, I hear all of this about Christianity and about believing.

Just to believe. I need something more than that. I need a sign. I need something. If I, if tonight an angel was to just appear into this church, you know what?

I'd believe. If on the way home tonight, all of a sudden the sky opened up, the clouds parted, and I saw all the way up into heaven, I'd believe.

If, well, I beg to differ. You wouldn't. You wouldn't. And you might say to yourself, well, that's a very bold statement. Well, I'm basing it upon what the Lord Jesus said.

[16 : 31] Remember, we quoted this morning from the rich man and Lazarus. Again tonight, an example. We have that dialogue that was given where the rich man in hell, and he was in torment, and he was saying to Abraham, he could see Abraham in heaven, and he was saying, send Lazarus to my, I have five brothers.

Go and send, please send Lazarus to them and warn them of this place. I do not want them to come here because I am in torment. Remember the words that came back to him.

They have Moses and the prophets. In other words, they have the word of God. They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. Supposing one rose from the dead, they will not believe.

And that's what the Lord is saying. It's not signs. It's not huge miraculous displays of wonder. It's the word. And it's the word for you and for me.

The word applied by God's spirit into our heart. Everything we need. It's not outward signs. It's an inward belief in the truth of what we have here.

[17 : 54] Of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. So that is what we were told here. And then the other thing that we will say about this is that Jesus is also testifying to the authenticity of the Old Testament.

Of the reality of the Old Testament. Because, you know, there's a lot of people who will say, I accept the New Testament. But I really struggle with the Old Testament.

A lot of people say the Old Testament is just, they're all, a lot of, they're just allegories. They're kind of stories with meanings. They're not real stories, but they're there to teach spiritual truths.

They're kind of fables. And people will say that. But we know that that is not true. That the Old Testament is as much the word of God as the New Testament.

The same Holy Spirit that enabled the men to write the New Testament enabled them to write the Old Testament. Both, they're different dispensations. We know that.

[19 : 00] And what Jesus is highlighting here is that the whole story of Jonah and the fish is absolutely real.

Because there are a lot of people who will say, I believe a lot of the Bible, but see Jonah, well, forget it. Don't believe that. Well, it's very interesting. Jesus highlights this particular one.

And he's using it as a sign of himself. The reality of it. The authenticity of it. So Jesus is showing here how real the Old Testament is.

To deny the Old Testament really is to deny Christ. So what is the sign and significance of Jonah the prophet? Well, there are four things in just a minute on each. The first is that Jonah went the way of death.

To all intents and purposes, Jonah was thrown over the side of the ship. And Jonah was dead. And so Jesus Christ also went the way of death.

[20 : 04] Jonah went the way of death primarily because of his sin and disobedience. Jesus went the way of death because of our sin and disobedience.

Not his, but ours. The second thing was Jonah remained, as it were, under the, he appeared, as it were, to remain in the grip of death for three days.

Although he wasn't dead. To all intents and purposes, he was. He was nowhere to be seen in the land of the living. And everybody assumed he would be dead.

Although he was being kept alive with inside this great fish. Jesus spent three days. He was, like that, under the power of death.

His body really died. His lifeless body was carried down from the cross and laid into the tomb. Third thing was Jonah returned onto the land of the living.

[21 : 04] On the third day, as the fish vomited Jonah out onto the dry land. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. And his body was back into the land of the living.

Because he, remember how he appeared. Never appeared to any apart from meeting his own people. And he had made frequent appearances.

His soul, of course, immediately to glory. But his body lay in the grave, but then rose on the third day. Jonah was a sign to Nineveh.

A sign of God's judgment, but also a sign of God's mercy. And Jesus' death and resurrection is a sign to us of God's judgment.

And also of God's grace and God's mercy. So there are these things with regard to Jonah. So that's why, as we said, God dealt with Jonah by way of death because of his disobedience.

[22 : 09] Remember that the wages of sin is death. And death is that awful thing that, it just, it affects us at every level.

There is the physical death that we all have to die. It's appointed unto all men once to die. And after death, a judgment. But there's also spiritual death. Jesus came to deal with that as well.

What is spiritual death? It is our condition without Christ. It's where God's word doesn't really mean too much to us. It means, say for instance, you can sit every Lord's Day under the gospel.

And you might hear really sweet invitations about coming to Jesus. It doesn't really mean much. Or you may hear the condemnation of the law telling you that unless you repent, you will perish.

It doesn't really mean anything to you. That's deadness. That's spiritual deadness. Where there is no spiritual life within us. But then that spiritual deadness will give way eventually into eternal death.

[23 : 19] There's natural death. There's spiritual death. And there's eternal death. And that is where there is eternal separation from God. It is the most awful thing.

Where we are separated from God who is love and grace and mercy and all light. All these things. It's an awful concept.

And that is what Jesus came to deal with. That's why he came into the world. To deal with death. To deal with our physical death.

To deal with our spiritual death. To deal with our eternal death. And he took all this upon himself. Because we couldn't. We're utterly helpless to do anything about it.

But he did it all. He came and he's. That's his whole work in this world. Was to deal with these things. And then.

[24 : 17] As Jonah spent. As we said. These three days. In the belly of the whale. So the Lord Jesus. Was three. He was under the power of death.

It's quite remarkable. And this is where we see the marvel of his love towards us. And taking a body just like ours. So that he could die. That's the only reason why Jesus. Jesus took a body like ourselves.

Because there were times in the Old Testament. When Jesus made appearances. And he did so. Making. With the appearance of a human body.

But it was simply the appearance of. But that's not the way he came into the world to die for us. He had to. It wasn't the appearance of. It was a real body. Real physical body.

Because that's the only way the son of God could die. Was by taking. A body like ours. And so. In order to be fully our representative.

[25 : 15] He had to die. Because he's going to conquer death. That's why. He had to die. And he had to take the full punishment. That our sin deserved.

He had to take as it were. Our hell upon himself. That's why he's crying on the cross. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? As he was experiencing.

The agony. And the torment. Of God's wrath. And anger. And forsaken us. Because of our sin. And then he rose.

On the third day. Just as the fish vomited Jonah. Out onto the dry land. Jesus rose again. And through his rising again. He had beaten death.

He had destroyed. The power of physical death. Which means that we too. Will rise from the dead. He destroyed the power of.

[26 : 13] Eternal death. By taking our hell. Upon himself. And that is a great Christian hope. There's nothing. That's what so often baffles you.

And makes you think. Why do people close their minds. Against the Christian faith. Because you look at death. And death. You look at the grave.

Grave seems such a final place. It's not. It's just. The temporary residence. Of the body. Until the resurrection. We say it so often.

Every grave. Will open. The sea. Will give up. Its dead. It's going to be. The most extraordinary moment. When the. When the whole earth. Will give up.

All the dead. All the dead. Will rise. Again. It's an extraordinary thought. And it's because of what Jesus has done. And then the last thing.

[27 : 09] Jonah went to Nineveh. He was a walking. Living message. Of God's judgment. But also of God's mercy. And Jesus is rising from the dead.

His message. Jesus' whole message. His life. His work. His death. His resurrection. Is a message to us. Of God's judgment. Of God's love. Of God's mercy.

Of God's grace. The question you have to ask yourself. Is this. All right. What? Do I do. With this? What do I do. With Jesus? Does Jesus.

Mean much to me? Or is this just a. Is this just a. Sort of a. Words. That don't really mean much. That the most important.

This is the most important message. That we can ever hear. Because this Jesus. Demands a response from us. There will always be. A day of accountability.

[28 : 04] As it says. It's appointed for all to die. After that. The judgment. All of us. All of us. All of us. Every single one. Everywhere. It's going to appear before Jesus.

And everybody is going to have to say. One of two things. I love you Jesus. Or else. I've never loved you Jesus.

There's no opportunity. On the day of judgment. The day of opportunity. Is this life. Nothing after that. No opportunities. And I cannot imagine.

How awful it will be. To say to Jesus. On that day. I never wanted you. Wasn't interested in you. Didn't like you. Because for every person.

Who says that. Then the words of Jesus. Will come and say. Well. You chose what you wanted in life. And forever more. You are going to get what you chose.

[29 : 03] Depart from me. For I never knew you. Can't get more solemn and serious than that. But it doesn't have to be like that. Because Jesus. Is tonight. He's offering himself to you.

And he's saying. Look. I came into this world. For the simple. Task. Of saving. Didn't come for anything else. I came to save. I came to seek.

And to save. Those who are lost. And that's what Jesus. Is doing here tonight. And wherever the gospel is preached. He's offering himself. He's seeking to save. If you're lost tonight.

It's for you. Jesus came. Not for the righteous. But for sinners. Like you. Me. That's who Jesus came for. And tonight. He is saying.

I'm here for you. Well will you take him. And accept him. As your Lord. And your Savior. Let us pray. Oh Lord. We pray to bless us. We pray that.

[30 : 00] We may indeed. Accept the Lord Jesus Christ. As our own Savior. To realize that. The love that God has shown. In sending his son.

Is the greatest display of love. This world has ever seen. May we not treat it lightly. But may we rejoice. And accept. All your goodness to us.

We pray Lord. That you will take us. To our home safely. We pray for the youth fellowship. Tonight. And all who lead and run it. And again. We pray for Stuart. Who will talk at it. Watch over us all.

And do us good. We pray. Taking away our sin. In Jesus name. Amen. We conclude singing from Psalm 77.

And this is from Sing Psalms. Psalm number 77. On page 101. And the tune is Amazing Grace. Verses 16 to the end.

[31 : 01] The waters saw you. Oh my God. They saw and writhed in pain. The very depths became convulsed. The clouds poured down with rain. The thunder rolled across the skies.

As lightning bolts were hurled. Your thunder in the wind was heard. Your lightning lit the world. The whole earth trembled then. And quaked. Your path was through the sea.

Your way through mighty waters led. Your footprints none could see. Your people like a flock of sheep. You guided every day. By Moses and by Aaron's hand.

You led them on the way. Verses 16 to the end of Psalm 77. The waters saw you.

Oh my God. Oh my God. He saw a brightened rain.

[32 : 04] A belly death became or was.

A cloud poured down therein. A thunder rolled across the skies.

As lightning bolts were hurled. Your thunder rolled across the sky. Your thunder rolled across the sky.

Your thunder rolled across the sky. The wind was heard. Your lightning lit the world.

The whole earth trembled then and quained.

[33 : 09] Your path was through the sea. You've waved through mighty waters plain, your food fresh and good sea.

You're people like a flock of sheep, you're guided every day by Moses' hand, by Aaron's hand.

You led them all the way. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you, now and forevermore. Amen.