

Jonah 1

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

- [0 : 00] It has turned out to the Old Testament to the book of the prophet Jonah.
- You might have difficulty in finding this book. It's about the eighth last book in the Old Testament. That might help you to find it. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- [2 : 23] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. This man, Jonah, is referred to just one other time in the Old Testament in the second book of Kings, chapter 14.
- We read that he prophesied in Jerusalem, in Israel rather, during the reign of Jeroboam the second. That was about 750 years before the birth of Christ or some 50 years or so after the ministry of Isaiah.
- And the only other reference we have to him in the Old Testament is in the book which bears his name.
- We know that he prophesied in Israel. We know that he prophesied in Israel during very troublous days indeed, at a time when the nation's greatness was degenerating rapidly economically, politically and ecclesiastically.
- And this prophecy which bears his name brings before us in a very wonderful way the great mercy of God towards Jonah and particularly towards the people of Nineveh.
- [4 : 00] Now I know full well that there are many people who would not accept the historicity of this book, nor even of this man.
- There are many who would pour scorn upon the element of the miraculous in Jonah, people who do not believe at all that supernatural events which we will come across actually happened.
- They would look upon the book rather as a parable, perhaps a mythological story that was told in Old Testament times that carries with it some moral even for us today.
- But for us who believe in the inspiration of the word of God and the authority of the scriptures, we accept the historicity of the book and of the man.
- We accept that these events actually happened, that these miracles took place, that the supernatural element in the book was real indeed.
- [5 : 15] And we are on good ground in taking our stand there because as we read in Matthew and we could have read also in Luke's gospel, Jesus believed in the historicity of the book and in the historicity of the man.
- He believed that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and that Jonah was vomited up in dry land by the fish after three days.

And he himself showed that that was a sign that he gave them. He said that that was a type of what was going to happen to himself, that he would be in the bowels of the earth for three days and that he would arise from the dead just as Jonah rose from the belly of the fish and went and preached in Nineveh.

So, in the face of all those who would scoff, in the face of all those who would pour scorn and laugh at anyone who would believe really in this book as history or this man as a historical person and of the events as real, well in the face of all that scorn, we will take outside beside the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that we couldn't stand beside a better and knowing that we couldn't stand on better ground.

So, we turn to look at this book and look at the great lesson that it brings before us as it unfolds to highlight for us the wonder and the extent of God's mercy to lost sinners.

[7 : 08] But tonight we will look at something rather different. The book opens with an account of something which we find quite startling, almost difficult to believe, the rebellion of a prophet.

This man of God, the son of Amittai to whom the word of the Lord came, not for the first time, we find this man in rebellion against the will of God.

And if you want to give a title, which I don't usually do, but if you want to give a title to this address, you could perhaps title it this way, A Man Running Away from the Lord, because he fled from the presence of the Lord.

Well, if I add a little this evening, let us turn our thoughts to this wonderful and almost unbelievable incident.

In the first place, notice how this man's call to this duty is brought before us. The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, say, Arise and go to Nunivy and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me.

[8 : 33] Now, if you read the Old Testament often, you will come across, you will become quite familiar with these words, the word of the Lord came. This is the way in which the God Spirit introduces to us the communication of the divine mind always to the prophet.

The word of the Lord came to him. God spoke. That's what a prophet was. A man who told people what God had told him concerning things to come.

He didn't go out with his own views. He didn't speculate about history or the application of history or the unfolding of history. He told them exactly what God had told him.

The word of the Lord came to them. Now, we're not told how that word came. We're not told what means God used for the word, for his mind to be communicated to them.

We know, for example, in the Hebrews, that God spoke in various ways to our fathers through the prophets. There were various means that God employed when he wanted to communicate his mind to a prophet.

[9 : 50] But the prophet's responsibility and his task was to communicate exactly what God had told him to the people to whom God had sent them.

So, here you have what you always have in the Old Testament. The prophet's mission is introduced to us by these words. The word of the Lord came to him.

And then, attention is focused for us on the message that God had given him to direct, that God had given him to communicate. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me.

Now, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria at that time. And it was, therefore, the most renowned city of that heathen kingdom.

Assyria, as you know, was the enemy of Israel. And the course of time, Israel was to be brought into bondage by Assyria.

[11 : 01] For years, for centuries, this conflict had been going on between Assyria and Israel. For many, many years, the Assyrian nation were exacting taxes of Israel, and thereby weakening the nation economically.

And together with that weakening economic situation, there was a degenerating political and ecclesiastical situation. More and more, heathenism was creeping into the land of Israel.

More and more, idolatry was being practiced in Israel. And the cause of God was becoming weaker and weaker. Fewer and fewer people were truly worshipping the God of Israel.

What we find so difficult to believe today is that a tremendous number of people in the nation were bowing down and worshipping idols.

They had turned their back upon the God of Israel. There was, to an extent, there was a partial recovery during the reign of Jeroboam II, but it was very partial indeed.

[12 : 21] And this nation, Assyria, which was noted for its cruelty and for its violence, was on the increase. It prided itself in its military greatness and pomp.

And it was known for its licentiousness, together for its life of luxury. In effect, it was really the symbol of all that was opposed to God.

The anti-God symbol. The symbol of the ungodly power that exerted itself and exercised itself in open defiance of what God was wanting and what God was saying.

Indeed, 150 years after the ministry of Jonah, the prophet Nahum gives a picture of this kingdom, which by then was ripe for destruction.

It had become so ungodly that the question that was on the lips of some people was, why is God allowing this state of affairs to continue?

[13 : 35] By that time, this nation, even some of the people took prisoner in its conquests, their lips were torn off and their hands were torn off as well.

The accumulation of sin had become so bad in the time of Jonah that God had to act. Now, I'm sure that you and I, confronted as we often are with the problem of evil in this world, with the strength of wickedness and ungodliness, I'm sure that you often ask, why does God allow this to go on?

Why doesn't God do something about it? I must confess that there are times when I'm troubled with that thought myself. Even in an area such as our own, in an island such as our own, which has enjoyed so much gospel privileges over so many years, where, comparatively speaking, the gospel is still strong, and where the cause of God is still strong, where religion is seen to be practiced, more than you can say of many areas in our land today.

There are times when you wonder, why is it that God allows this anti-God element, those who defy the Almighty, and those who are bent on the destruction of all that we prize so dearly in connection with the gospel of Christ, and the gospel of his kingdom, why does God not do something about this?

Jeremiah was perplexed with the same problem. I want to ask you a question, he said to God. Why is it that wickedness seems to be on the rise, and righteousness is on the gutter?

[15 : 42] Hapakuk had the same problem. The first century Christian church had the same problem. Paul was in prison, Nero was on the throne.

Why do these things, why do they exist? Do you ever ask the question? I'm sure you do. I'm sure you do.

Let's remember that there's a simple answer to that question. God is doing something about that situation, because God is always in charge, even though his action may be veiled from our sight.

His hand is at work in the affairs of men, and let us never accuse him of not doing something when he who is sovereign over all things works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

Don't you run away with the idea tonight. I say this to encourage those of you who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and who love the cause of truth and of righteousness, who love the gospel, and who would want to see everyone brought into the kingdom of Christ.

[16 : 55] I say this for your encouragement. God is in control. Even when wickedness and unrighteousness seems to abound, as you and I read the situation, you bear this in mind, God is at work.

And though you and I may not see it, God will not allow wickedness to go unpunished. That principle is the one by which God acts.

So, he sent Jonah on this mission to Nineveh because of its wickedness.

Now, that was the state it had reached. It had become so bad, and this is the language it is used, it had come up before God himself. And always bear in mind, that is the nature of sin.

Sin is against God. Against thee, the only, said the psalmist, have I sinned. And that is why in the Old Testament, ritual of worship, in all the sacrifice which were offered, in atonement for sin, the blood had to be sprinkled towards the mercy seat, in the holy place, in the most holy place, in the tabernacle, and in the temple.

[18 : 15] The blood was sprinkled towards the mercy seat, and on the mercy seat, because that is where sin had gone. That is where sin penetrates. It reaches up to God. And if it could, if sin in its defiance of God could do it, God would be dethroned, and God would be annihilated.

That sin had come up before him. That was the extent to which the sin had gone.

So, he sends this man to Nineveh. And who better than this prophet from Samaria to go these 500 miles to the northeast and speak to this people.

Well, what happened? He didn't go at all. He ran away from the presence of the Lord. Now, I suggest to you that if you consider this, that this really comes to you as a bit of a shock.

That a man of God, a prophet like Jonah, should run away from God's message to him. What if God spoke to you tonight and said to you, look, any one of you, I want you to go down to Cromwell Street after the service, and I want you to speak to all the people who are down there in Cromwell Street who didn't go to church and who never go to church and who don't know a thing about the gospel, people who are openly defiant to the things of God.

[19 : 54] I want you to speak to them about their sin. How many of you would go? I suggest that there are some of you who wouldn't go and I'll go further.

I suggest to you that there are some of you who aren't going and who aren't responding to God's call to you. And I want to show you how this can happen as we apply this to ourselves here tonight.

Jonah refused to go to Nineveh. Where did he go? Well, he went to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish and he paid the fare, went down into it and he sailed to Tarshish in the very opposite direction.

2,000 miles due west, right across the Mediterranean Sea, away from Nineveh. He turned his back on Nineveh and he went off somewhere else.

He put as great a distance between himself and Nunavut as he possibly could. The great question is this. Why should a man of God do that?

[21 : 10] Why should he do it? And there may be various reasons. Various reasons have been advanced for this. He may have thought that, well, the thought of going to Nunavut is really, it's very difficult and I suggest to you that it is difficult and that's why I'm saying that some of us here at night may not be prepared to go down and speak to some people on Cromwell Street because it's not easy in a face-to-face situation to confront people with their sin.

It's not easy at all. And the easiest thing for the church is to sit back and do nothing about the encroachments of wickedness upon a border or upon any community.

It's the easiest thing in the world. Say nothing. It costs to confront the sinner. It does.

It costs. I'm sure that there are some ministers tonight in pulpits throughout our land who, if I know anything at all about the heart of a preacher coming to a pulpit, would do what Jonah did.

They too would go in the opposite direction. They too would go a thousand miles just to get away from the difficulty of confronting people with the message of the gospel when they don't want it.

[22 : 32] I know that there are plenty of people who think that the work in which we are engaged in is easy work.

I would love to take them up the steps of this pulpit of his congregation just once and I'm sure they wouldn't open their mouths again about the task.

Jonah may have found it difficult and he may have thought of the difficulty so much. After all, Nineveh was a huge city. There are some people who reckon that the 120,000 referred to in chapter 4 of people who don't know the right hand from the left is a reference to children.

Which of the children they estimate there must have been a million people in Nineveh? It may just be that there were over nearly 200,000 people in the city itself but even that going into a city he had never been there before they were Gentiles they were heathen they had never heard of the God of Israel and here he's going with a message about God from God.

He'd be an absolute fool wouldn't he? He'd be ridiculed. No, he couldn't face that situation so he ran away. That's one of the views that advanced Iran because of the difficulty of the situation.

[23 : 56] He also ran away because they were really so wicked. What's the point of going with a message to people who are so steeped in wickedness that they wouldn't even listen to you?

Spartan of Israel Spartan of Samaria here he was prophesying in the time of Jeroboam to king and country telling them look if you don't turn from your ways you're going to be brought into captivity and they weren't listening to him but these people at least they knew who God was they'd heard about him so much they'd heard about him for generations none of it that's also you sent someone maybe from Stornoway to some unknown place in the heart of southern America which had never heard of the gospel at all in southern Africa or South Africa or in India the heart of some of these places where God is unknown and you're going to be sent there with a message from God do you think that's easy?

of course it isn't easy and that's why the church at home is burdened and ought to be burdened for those who are in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ in far off places burdened let me say the throne of grace not publicly but privately oh yes it's not easy to communicate the word of the Lord to people who have never heard of the Lord but then what we are told in chapter 4 when we do come to it in verse 2 is this Jonah himself tells us why he fled from the presence of the Lord you know he says he prayed unto the Lord and he said I pray thee O Lord when he saw that God had forgiven the Ninevites was not this my saying when I was yet in my country therefore I fled before 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 that's why he didn't go he didn't go because he knew the God whom he served was a merciful God and he knew he had a good idea that the message he was given to communicate

God was going to use it for the good of Nineveh and that God was going to bring the spirit of repentance revival into Nineveh and he didn't want it you and I may find it almost impossible to believe that such a spirit could exist in any human heart especially the heart of a man of God well it did because the Jews had no time for the Samaritans they had no time for the Gentiles they didn't want the privileges that they had to be communicated to the Gentiles they didn't want them to come into the church that was the spirit in which he went that's the spirit in which he was he didn't want to see them coming to the knowledge of the God of Israel didn't want to see them being saved or converted in other words if Jonah had been convinced that Nineveh would have been destroyed he would have gone immediately but he wasn't convinced of that he was afraid that Nineveh would be saved what a spirit but my friend how many of us may have the same spirit in our own hearts a vindictive spirit rather than a forgiving spirit running away from this work because he didn't want he didn't want to see these people benefit from the message that he was given perhaps an element of that spirit in us all as I suggested it was in the Jews towards the Gentiles it may be in us towards people of other races people of other of other cultures and other creeds where we don't want our own doors open too wide to let too many people in we're nice and cozy the way we are leave us ministering to ourselves witnessing amongst ourselves let's forget about the world outside us and the world beyond us oh I wonder how many have this spirit of Jonah in their heart

I just wonder I remember many many years ago in a church in Glasgow there's no point in thinking what the church was because you wouldn't know it anyway a church in Glasgow and some people came to the church visitors and the elder two of us built the church door and one asked one said to the minister who are these people and the minister told them I didn't know who they were but I knew where they were from and they certainly didn't belong to that particular church background and the obvious bearer's answer to the minister was we don't want these people in here that's the spirit of Jonah we don't want these people and it may be unfortunately the spirit in some some hearts to this day that they don't want the blessing of God to extend too far beyond their own borders and it's a spirit which is very alien to the spirit of Christ and to the heart of God himself and Jonah was going to be taught that lesson in a very in a very striking way well he ran away from the presence of the Lord because he was mastered by these circumstances by these thoughts by these impulses all which were wrong they drove him on and they overpowered him he was afraid of the consequence of going and because of the fear of these consequences he ran away and you know this he found it easy to run away there were no problems he wanted to go to Tarshish so he went down to Joppa and lo and behold a ship going to Tarshish the very place he wanted to go to he had the money which to pay his ticket if you want to put it that way he bought the ticket he borrowed it he made himself comfortable and boy you know before you know before he knew where he was he was fast asleep in the hold of that ship and one word sums up this providence it was easy as a matter of fact it was dead easy it was very favourable the way was opening up before him he found a ship how fortunate you and I would say what a lucky fellow he was there he was just made it the ship to the very place where he was going he found this means to keep him in the path of disobedience no difficulty at all in keeping going and as someone put it being in the way of disobedience he found helps to disobedience and this is a very this is an awful thought means to help him in a downward path

[31 : 20] I hear people talk about providence of God this is a favourite question how do I know what God wants me to do get a conference of young people no matter where it is and they look up and they they're at a committee and they're looking for subtopics for their conference as sure as anything here's one knowing God's will for my life when someone is asked to speak about that particular topic very often this is the line that is taken well in the way of God's will God's commandments doors open the way is made plain the way is made easy the path is made simple and you go through these doors and that's the way God speaks to you in favourable providences I'm not so sure but that God's voice is heard more clearly in providences that are not favourable and that are not easy take Achan it was easy for Achan to take the forbidden loot at I take Judas it was easy for Judas to find the money with which to betray his law take Peter it was easy for Peter to get into the hall of the high priest where he was to deny his law take Lot as we're talking this morning in the Galilee take Lot it was easy for him to move towards Sodom from when he was delivered by the skin of his teeth oh yes it is easy to get on when you're on the path of disobedience easy to find excuses to encourage you in a downward direction easy to make excuses yourself not if things were placed in the way of his disobedience

Judas as someone said will not lack money and Jonah will not lack a ship the devil is always at hand to help those who run away from the Lord he can find occasions at all times and means for that purpose and he want to say this if you will fly from the Lord the devil will lend you this is put in the old days perhaps we'll substitute for it today cars motorbikes ships planes trains this is the way it was put in the old days if you will fly from the Lord the devil will lend you both spurs and a horse that will carry you swiftly away to all sin he will prompt you he will entice you and he will tempt you to sin using any means and he will soon persuade you with the means to commit it if you want to get away from the presence of the Lord you be assured of this you've got a very ready willing helper right beside you and he will give you means he won't see you stuck and as a matter of fact he may make it very easy for you to get as far away from the

Lord as you possibly can so this man decided to run away he planned and he skimmed who knows but he may even have prayed just to get away from this task and eventually he's on the very path where he wants to be but you see this as let me I don't like I hope you understand when I say this on Sabbath evenings when I preach the gospel as you know yourselves speak to my own congregation I try and communicate the gospel to you in our element at least I try that's all I can do and though I fail miserably I accept that but

I try but do you know there's a Puritan Thomas Goodwin who once put it like this speaking about providence before I forget this speaking about providence and the word of the Lord the word of the Lord and here's a classic example of it of what Thomas Goodwin meant in Jonah God's God's God's word told him to go in a certain direction providence opened up to lead him in another and this is what he said providence can be for you and the word against you and the word can be for you and providence against you always take your stand on the word of God even though your providence may be difficult to fit into that compartment never abandon the truth Jonah did with disastrous consequences and finally this is how it is put he went to go with them and to

Tarshish from the presence of the Lord from the presence of the Lord now as you know there's another favorite expression in the Bible the presence of the Lord what does it mean well it means one of two things first of all it can mean this God's omnipresence God is everywhere as we Psalm 139 I can't remember we sang this verse so we're going to sing them just now from thy presence whither shall I go from thy spirit or from thy presence fly ascend thy heaven lo thou what they're there if in hell I lie no matter where you go God is there he is everywhere now Jonah knew that he couldn't escape that presence of the Lord he's everywhere what's the other meaning of the presence of it is this the place where God manifests himself

[38 : 04] Adam and Eve were put out from the presence of the Lord that is the place of his manifestation in Eden and that is why you have Psalms for example which tell you that the Psalmist loved the presence of the Lord the place where he showed himself the place where he made himself known the place where people gather together in an act of worship the place where he reveals himself in the Bible in prayer in Christian fellowship in the preaching of the gospel that is the presence of the Lord where God is known and God is felt and God is experienced and God is responded to and God is worshipped that is the presence of the Lord now Tarshish was no such place as far as we know God's presence in that way wasn't known in Tarshish wasn't known in Tarshish and so he went away from that place of revelation to the place if you want to put like this where God was not in that way distance himself from the presence of the

Lord now you know as well as I do how easily this can be done people distance themselves from the Lord from the means of grace you stop reading your Bible you stop prayer you stop coming to church on the Lord's day you stop coming to the means of grace throughout the week you stop coming to prayer meetings you stop frequenting the Christian fellowship that's where God is in a particular and in a peculiar way and a wonderful way and you run away from these things anywhere where God is not in that way how many here this evening may be in that way running away from the presence of the Lord when did you last pray in earnest in reality

I'm not talking about the primity I'm talking about on your own because as someone once put it what a man is in the presence of the Lord that is what he is and nothing else nothing else no matter what people may think of me hearing me or seeing me it is what God knows me to be that's what's important when did you last pray when did you last read your Bible looking for the Lord when did you last thirst for him as you summed your way through these pages when did you thirst for him coming to the service on the Lord's day when did you last come like that prayer meeting perhaps one aspect of the Christian's life that bothers me more than any other the prayer meeting have you outgrown its usefulness in your own life you don't need it any longer is that your condition whatever it is my friend

I suggest to you that like this man you too are running away from the presence of the Lord heading for Tarshish anywhere where he is not and I'll tell you something I don't alarm you you're finding it pretty easy in that downward spiral pretty easy do you remember this no man or woman boy or girl runs away from the Lord without the Lord bringing a storm into that man's life and that's what he did with Jonah and was through the storm that he brought him back to the path of obedience let us pray Lord have mercy upon our souls and keep us in thy fear give us grace to follow thee grace to look unto the

Lord and grace in the face of all the problems that we may have to cast our cares upon thee and to do thy will part us this night with thy blessing forgive our sins for Jesus sake Amen