

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Tragedy of an Unwilling Missionary

Scripture: Jonah

Code: 80-10

As I mentioned to you this morning, in our service tonight I want us to examine the very wonderful and intriguing prophecy of Jonah in the Old Testament as we come to a conclusion of this particular emphasis on reaching the world for Christ. No more fitting Old Testament book than this could be examined. So we're going to look precisely at the book of Jonah, and I'll give you a few minutes to find it.

There are, of course, in the Scripture many very wonderful and special texts which emphasize the missionary theme. Texts particularly familiar to us in the New Testament, our Lord speaking about the fields being white unto harvest. As we saw this morning, the great commission, "Go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to all people." The great text of Acts 1:8, "You will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth." Great words from the Apostle Paul who said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation." And then the great text of 1 Corinthians 16:9 in which the Apostle Paul says, "There is a great door and effectual open unto me and there are many adversaries." Texts like these that remind us of the missionary theme, the emphasis of reaching a lost world for Christ.

We could even read, as we did last Sunday morning, Psalm 96 which is a parallel to 1 Chronicles 16 in which the Scripture says to declare God's glory among the nations, His wonders among all people. Show forth, it says, from day to day His salvation. We could read Psalm 18 verse 49 which says, "Therefore I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the heathen I will sing praises unto Thy name." In Isaiah 43:21 God says, "This people have I formed for Myself, they will show forth My praise." Many passages. I'm thinking also of Deuteronomy chapter 4 verses 5 and 6, "Behold I have taught you statutes and ordinances even as the Lord my God commanded me that ye should do so in the land to which you go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations who shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." And God is saying to His people, "If you're the people you ought to be, you'll attract the attention of the world. And when they see your wisdom and understanding, you can speak to them of the one who is indeed the source of that."

Israel as we know was chosen as a nation of missionaries, to proclaim God's truth to the world. This was God's design. In addition to calling the nation as a witnessing nation, both by their life style and by their speaking of the truth of God, in addition to calling the nation in total, He called from within the

nation very special men who were prophets. And their object was to speak the message of God to Israel and other nations as well. First to Israel in order that Israel might maintain its purity and its holiness and its righteousness, and therefore maintain a testimony in the world. And then also they were to speak to other nations as well, mainly a message of judgment and repentance from sin.

Each of the prophets had special direction from God. Each of them had a varied ministry. Their message came directly from God, as ours does. Theirs came directly from God not necessarily through the written Word, ours comes through the written Word. They received theirs in revelations and visions and voices from heaven. But they were called of God from within the nation to speak to the world. And among those prophets to the heathen, those very special missionary prophets, we could mention Abraham. Abraham, who was a prophet to his neighbors. We go back even into Genesis and if you'll look for a moment at the twentieth chapter of Genesis, just one verse to point you to, verse 7, "Now therefore restore the man his wife for he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou and all that are thine." And in this situation where Abraham could have forfeited his wife, God instructs that the woman be given back to him for he is a prophet. He is a transmitter of God's truth.

Moses also is called a prophet, a unique prophet who spoke the Word of God, who spoke the Word of God to a pagan nation, Egypt, as well as to his own people Israel. Then there was Elijah who preached to Ahab and Jezebel and Elisha who was used in the life of a heathen Syrian by the name of Naaman. So there were very unique prophets of God, even as far back as Genesis in the early years of God's redeeming work, whose task was to speak to the nations the truth of God.

Then came the literary prophets that we know so well because books of the Old Testament are named after them. And they also preached to the heathen world. There was Isaiah who in chapters 13 through 27 preaches to the heathen. There was Jeremiah who in chapters 46 to 51 of his marvelous prophecy speaks to Egypt, Philistia, Phoenicia, Moab, Amman, Edom, Syria, Kedar, Hazor, Elam and Babylon. And there is Ezekiel who preached judgment to Tyre and Sidon and Egypt and such judgment recorded against the Gentile nations in chapters 25 to 32.

Then there was Daniel and Daniel was God's personal missionary to the courts of Babylon, an effective missionary during the captivity of Israel, both to the Babylonian and the Medo-Persian Empire. There was Obadiah. Obadiah was God's missionary to the nation of Edom, the Edomites and he gave to them a message of doom. There was Nahum. Nahum was sent to preach the coming judgment of Nineveh, the same city to which Jonah was sent. And there was Zephaniah whose mission was to proclaim judgment on all unrepentant Gentiles.

So, God has always had His prophets, both those prophets whose ministry was primarily a vocal one, and those whose primary ministry was a literary one to call the nations to the truth of the only true God. The amazing thing, I suppose, is that if I were to ask you to recite the story of many of these

prophets, you would be hard pressed to do that. One of the richest elective courses I ever took in my life was in college when I took a course, a full three-unit semester course on the minor prophets and spent the whole time absorbing myself in the message of the minor prophets. I remember buying minor...only because their books are shorter...I remember buying a set of colored pencils, one color was for a geographical identification, another color was for a message of judgment, another color was for a message of promise, another color was for an attribute of God, another color was for the identification of a sin within that people against whom the prophet spoke. And I went through those for that whole semester underlining all through those prophets in order that I might be able to perceive fully and in detail the message they gave to the world. And the overwhelming impression that came from that was that God indeed did send messengers to preach repentance and faith in the one true God to the world, even as early as those days.

And though we may not be familiar with all of those prophets, in fact we may not be familiar with most of those prophets, there is one prophet with whom we have great familiarity. And his name is Jonah...Jonah. He is the best illustration in the Bible of what a missionary should not do. He is disobedient, selfish, sinful. He has a rotten disposition. He is prejudice. And yet the Lord puts his story here because it is so instructive. He teaches us more about the wrong way to do things than anyone called of God to a specific task. It's a marvelous lesson we learn from Jonah.

We also learn from Jonah not only how not to be a good missionary but we learn from him how deeply concerned God is for the heathen and utterly unconcerned Israel was for them. The contrast in Jonah is two-fold. It is the contrast between what a missionary ought to be and what Jonah was. And it is a contrast between the concern of God for a heathen world and the unconcern of Israel for that same heathen world. And it tells us from about a rather ancient perspective about problems that we face even today, for there are people today who are as reluctant as was Jonah to obey the call of God and there are churches today who are as unconcerned about the lost as God is concerned about them. So we want to look at his story.

Now it has two parts. There are two calls issued to Jonah and two responses. The first call comes in the first two chapters and we see his response. The second call in the last two chapters and see his response there. Now I want you to follow closely, we're going to cover 48 verses tonight and go from start to finish, so hang on.

The first missionary call comes in the first two chapters, beginning with the commission in verse 1. "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah...by the way, the word Jonah means dove and was symbolic of a messenger of peace...the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying," the time is between 800 and 750 B.C. at this time Israel is prospering under Jeroboam II, the ancient boundaries have been restored. In fact, the kingdom of Israel goes as far to the northeast as Damascus. But since the days of King Omri and around 885 the northern kingdom had been under flash attacks from Syria and Assyria, the capital city of Assyria being Nineveh. So it's a time when

Israel in terms of boundaries is enlarged, the northern kingdom, but it is also a time in which they are under sort of guerilla raids from the Assyrians and Nineveh has become for them the epitome of hatred. They despise the people and the place because it represents to them their enemy. Israel was in fear of a serious power because Assyria was a growing giant to the east. At that very moment, God called Jonah. We know very little about him, as I said. We know his name. We know his father's name. We know nothing more.

At that time, God speaks to him and in verse 2 we find what God says, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry...or perhaps better to capture the meaning...preach against it for their wickedness is come up before me." Now as I said, Assyria was a growing power. Nineveh had originally been built by Nimrod. It was a city of approximately 600 thousand people, according to archaeology. And by the way, there has been a lot done to discover the original city.

Also, the city was so large, and this is hard to imagine, I guess, in an ancient city, but it was so large that it was a three-day journey from one side to the other. That's a large city. It was located on the east bank of the Tigris River. It was very advanced culturally. The people were arrogant, they were proud of their achievements, but it was sinking in corruption. Nahum the prophet, who also spoke against Nineveh, called it a bloody city full of fraud, full of lies, full of robbery, full of sensuousness, full of violence, witchcraft and idolatry. Their soldiers were famous around the world for brutality and cruelty. And God knew very well about their wickedness. The knowledge of man's wickedness on earth ascends to the throne of God like smoke from a fire. He knew all about them.

And so, He calls this prophet, Jonah, during the reign of Jeroboam II to go to Nineveh. He gives him three commands, "Arise, go, preach...arise, go, preach." Now he is sent there not only...and I want you to get this...not only for Nineveh's good but also to shame Israel in a very dramatic way. Instead of evangelizing, instead of reaching out and proclaiming the one true God to the nations around them, Israel was entrenched in a self-indulgent form of religion. And when this one sort of non-descript strange prophet goes to Nineveh all by himself, preaches to them, and the whole place repents, it is going to be a rather large rebuke of Israel's attitude. I mean, it is in a sense the slaying of Goliath all over again. For here was this formidable enemy Assyria which the Jews were very afraid of and yet one, as I said, sort of unknown non-descript prophet causes them to fall to their knees prostrate before the one true God by simply going there to preach. What a rebuke of Israel's attitude. Israel's own spiritual defection had caused them in their unrepentance to be unwilling to preach and so they were unwilling to do what God wished and they are rebuked in the way that God uses Jonah. Their enemy is made a believer in the true God by the faithfulness of this man. Hard coming, but nonetheless eventual.

So, the Lord sends this prophet to do what the people will not do. And I only want to point out at this point that it seems to me that in this commission that's a pattern that God has had to follow for many many centuries. What the larger group will not do, He sends individuals to do and not only does He

accomplish His work for the work of God cannot be thwarted, but He rebukes the group that was unwilling to do what the one was able to do.

Now in response to the commission we come to a second point in verse 3, and that is the disobedience. For Jonah does not respond positively. "Jonah rose up to flee." Now you say, "Wait a minute, why is he doing this?" Well think about it. This is the enemy. You understand that? This is the enemy in a time of war. You don't just walk into the chief city of the enemy and preach at them, especially if you are the ones that they are attacking. That's a tremendously frightening thought to most people. I don't want to go there, this is the enemy.

Secondly, the last thing the Jews wanted was Gentiles horning in on their God. They were so far away from the mentality of reaching the lost nations with the truth of Jehovah as to be locked into an attitude that says "we don't want any Gentiles sharing any of this good stuff with us," they were entrenched and had no thought for reaching the Gentiles. So he substituted, like so many people do, his own will for God's. And he rose up to flee to Tarshish. Apparently that's a commercial port on the southwest coast of Spain. I mean, he was going as far as he could go in the opposite direction, clear across the Mediterranean. And he went to Joppa, he was really running, it says, from the presence of the Lord. He went to Joppa. Joppa, you could still there go there today, it's just to the south of Tel Aviv, a little area there, I've been there. Jaffa, it's called. And he found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare, went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, second time, from the presence of...what?...of the Lord. "I've got to get away from this, I'm not about to get into this deal, I'm not interested in this calling. This is one opportunity I'm not going to take."

Now the reason he is running is given over in chapter 4, you might want to get a little preview. Very interesting. He says in the middle of the verse, "Therefore I fled before to Tarshish." Why did you do that? "Because I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness and repentance Thee of the evil." You know why he ran? Because he knew God was gracious and he knew that even though the message against Nineveh was judgment, if Nineveh repented, God would forgive Nineveh and he couldn't stand the thought...the couldn't stand the thought of heathen people being forgiven. He couldn't stand the thought of any Gentile nation that was an oppressor and an aggressor against Israel being forgiven. I mean, that is prejudice that runs very very deep.

The real issue here was not so much the fear, although we can understand that they may have been there, the fear of going into the city of an enemy. The real issue here was he ran away because he knew that if they repented God would forgive them and he couldn't stand the thought. He had come instead, now listen to this, he had come to the point in his life like so many of his contemporaries that instead of loving the lost, he hated them. He despised them. Sad, tragic attitude. Racial feelings ran deep in those days and with some people they run deep even today. He felt the Ninevites deserved judgment. He felt that they deserved condemnation, not salvation. And he was afraid of the mercy of God and he was afraid of the grace of God. And he felt the Gentiles would corrupt Israel's privileges.

And especially as a prophet of God did he know that if the Ninevites repent, they're going to be in a better position than the Israelites who are apostate. And he could see the scene. If I go and preach and they repent, they'll step into the place of blessing and Israel that is filled with sin will be out of the place of blessing and God will turn to the Gentiles and my people will be lost to His blessing. Do you see his dilemma? I mean, it's nationalism to the hilt. He feared the end of Israel's special election.

But here we're concerned with his disobedience. Now he knew that God was omni-present, he knew that God was everywhere. And you can't get on a boat and run away from God. He remember what it says, don't you, in Psalm 139? "Wither shall I go from Thy presence, from Thy Spirit? Wither shall I flee?" Where am I going to go that you're not going to find me? What's the answer? No place. But at least he was getting out of Israel and at least he would get himself so far from Nineveh that God would have to get somebody else to go if He wanted somebody to go. He would be physically unavailable, even though he knew God would know...he's not saying I'm running from the presence of the Lord in the sense that I don't believe in omni-presence, he says I'm running from availability. What we were talking about this morning. I don't want to be available, I want to get away from this and God will have to use somebody else.

And I suppose all of us have struggled with that to one extent or another. How many Christians have felt that God has called them to a task, God has called them to a preparation, God has called them to be a certain person in a certain ministry in a certain place, maybe a missionary, maybe a pastor, maybe a teacher, maybe someone who works in a Sunday-school class? All of us He has called to reach the people around us for Christ. And we have instead of accepting that calling run from it, hiding from the call of God. We know that God can see us and know that, but we run the other way, if we can just get involved in our work, busy in our activities, tied down, then we can't go. I'm sure there are people and I have known some who when they sense the call of God got themselves so entrenched in where they were in order that they might not be able to be extricated to fulfill the call they knew God gave. That's like trying to flee from light. The only thing you're going to end up in is darkness. That's like trading wealth for poverty. That's like trading wisdom for ignorance, or joy for sorrow, or peace for chaos, or usefulness for uselessness. That's like trading fruit for leaves, reward for punishment.

So, the commission and the disobedience...now let's look at the consequence. Now they're out on the ship and they're going across the Mediterranean headed for Tarshish. And the Lord set out a great wind. This is a miracle wind, folks, the Lord sent this wind. This is not normal course. The Lord sent it. And there was a mighty tempest in the sea so that the ship was in danger of being broken. Now God goes after the fleeing prophet. All the rest of the people are victims. I suppose you've thought when you've gotten on a plane, "I hope there's not a fleeing prophet on this airplane," right? See, rebellion never escapes God, He always identifies the person and says, "Thou art the man." God may let a person go to a certain point, but eventually He'll step in. And God sent a storm.

The Hebrew verb is very interesting. When it says the Lord sent out a great wind, it literally is the word "hurled" and it is used in 1 Samuel 18 verse 11, I think it is, where Saul hurled his spear at David. I mean, the Lord just spun out a great wind, furious tempest and the ship was being potentially devastated and wrecked. Verse 5 says, "Then the mariners.." that comes from a root word for salt, that's where we get the "old salt" concept for someone who sails the sea. "Then the mariners were afraid." Now when the crew gets afraid, you've got some problems. They're supposed to know what they're doing. Everybody starts crying unto his deity...they're polytheistic, they've got myriads of gods and they're all crying out to their gods. "And they cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it of them." They start jettisoning the cargo and throwing it out because the danger, of course, is that the deeper the draft of the ship in the water, the more water is going to come into the boat, so they've got to lighten it up and get it up on the top so it will bob a little like a cork and not be filled so easily. So they start throwing out the cargo.

"But Jonah was gone down to the sides of the ship and he lay and was fast asleep." This is amazing. Everybody else is praying to their god and throwing things overboard in the midst of the storm and he is in this deep sleep of false security, with no thought that God is after him. "So the shipmaster captain came to him and said to him, What do you mean, O sleeper? What are you doing? Get up, call on your God." I mean, among all of us we must be able to get through to somebody to stop this thing. And so far we are unsuccessful. "If so be that God will think upon us that we don't perish." Start praying to your God.

And so here is a pagan who calls Jonah to prayer. He doesn't want to talk to his God about anything, he wants to sleep, he doesn't want to think about his God. I'll tell you one thing, he sure hasn't preached to those sailors or they would have known more about him and about his God...a running prophet basically is no good to anybody. We can be sure he wasn't preaching anything to those men. And so he's not even acknowledging who his God is and the pagans have to come and tell him to call on God. He doesn't want to hear that. He doesn't even want to get near God. But their religious superstition demanded that they get everybody tuning in to his deity in hopes that somebody would get the right wave-length going and good would come. I thought to myself, too, these poor guys were victims of this disobedient prophet and it's true, I suppose we could extrapolate that that sin can cause natural disaster, sin can cause natural disaster to the extent that other people in the world who really have very little to do with it become victims of it. That's not an uncommon thing. And so, here they are victims of this one disobedient prophet. You see, you can either as a person who represents God be a source of blessing for the world or you can pull the world into a lot of problems when God starts to deal with you.

Well, having discovered the guilty one, you'll notice what it says in verse 7, "And they said everyone to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots." I mean, this was a superstitious way to work but God accommodated it. "And we'll find out for whose cause this evil is upon us." They had that rather

simplistic view and it is true very often that what is going on as a result of somebody's evil, some God has been offended, we've got to find out. And so they go through this process of drawing straws, or whatever it was they did. They cast their lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Now not only have they awakened him out of his sleep of self-security, not only have they called on him to pray to his God which is the last thing he wanted to do, and basically which was what he was supposed to do, call them to pray to the true God. But now they have cast lots and it has become apparent that God is controlling even that and the lot points to Jonah as the reason for the problem. So they discovered it.

So they said to him in verse 8, "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us? What is your occupation? And where did you come from and what is your country and of what people are you?" So he hasn't said a word about anything. He's hiding. He is a stowaway. And then that's a natural response, in verse 8, just a series of questions, remember it's a state of panic. They don't even give him a chance to answer. "Why is this upon us? What's your occupation? Where did you come from? Where's your country? Of what people are you?" Just..blur-blur- blur, see. This is a very very excited group as their life is on the line and they have found the culprit.

"And he said to them, I'm a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who hath made the sea and the dry land." And he identifies himself as one who worships the true God who is the creator.

Now it is apparent that he also told them that he was disobedient. You say, "How do you know that?" Because in the next verse, "Then were the men exceedingly afraid and said to him, Why have you done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord because he had told them." So he not only told them who his God was, but he told him he had fled from his God and all of this was happening because God was upset about it. And they're probably saying in their minds, "If this is the God of the sea, you sure picked a bad place to run." A lot of choice, if He's the God of the land and the sea, what am I going to do? There were no airplanes in those days.

So verse 11, "And they said to him, What do we do for thee that the sea might be calm unto us for the sea raged and was tempestuous. What do we do?" Now Jonah on the spot could have repented in prayer, he could have told God he would obey. He was so belligerent and he was so prejudiced and he was so self-willed that he says, "I would rather die than go preach grace to those Ninevites, have them converted, blessed by God. I can't stand the thought. I'd rather die." That's amazing, isn't it? Now that shows how deep this prejudice was. That shows how far away the heart of this man was from the passionate concern for the lost that filled the heart of God.

So he said in verse 12, "Take me up and throw me into the sea." That is amazing. Sometimes negative situations soften the heart of a man, but this negative situation just hardened it. And he was angry. He said, "Just pitch me in the ocean. I'd rather die than see that Gentile city converted, those enemies, those Ninevites." I mean, this is a...this is a heavy thing. I mean, I suppose there are people in America who are so anti-communist, the last thing they would ever want to see would be

the Russian leadership come to Christ. Now that's sort of the attitude here. There might even be some people in America who have such deep racial prejudices that they can't even imagine going to certain races of people to preach to them the saving gospel, have them all repent and receive the blessing that they wished their own people would receive. So he said, "Just throw me overboard. I'd rather die."

But they were merciful men. So in verse 13 it says, "Nevertheless, they just rowed hard." They couldn't do that. They weren't murderous men, they just rowed hard to bring the ship to the land, but they couldn't do it because the sea raged and was tempestuous again. They rowed hard. Every other place that Hebrew verb about rowing hard is used it's used in the Old Testament to refer to the violence of breaking through a wall or breaking through some kind of enclosure. And the figure is trying to be demonstrative there is the idea they were trying to break through these great walls of water. But they...no matter how hard they rowed, they couldn't do it.

And here you have another interesting scene. Here is a...here is a disobedient prophet of God and a bunch of pagans that he should be witnessing to are trying to comfort him and trying to save him from himself. A disobedient Christian, by the way, is the most miserable person in the world and the only way we can see the misery of this man in its ultimate demonstration is the fact that he'd rather be dead.

Well now they know what God it is that's causing the problem. It's this Hebrew God who created everything. So verse 14 says, "They start to pray to the Lord and they beseech...they say, We beseech Thee, O Lord, we beseech Thee. Don't let us perish for this man's life. Don't kill us because of him. And don't lay on us innocent blood for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You and don't blame us if he dies. Don't kill us for him and don't blame us if he goes. We're innocent. You put this storm on, we didn't." So they have two requests, don't let us die and secondly, don't punish us for his death. This whole deal, they're saying, is between You and Jonah, not...we don't have anything to do with this, just stop this deal, will You? Or get rid of this guy.

And we see again the conclusion that a person out of God's will and disobedient is not only useless to God but he's useless to the people of God, he's useless to himself and he's a pain in the neck to the whole world of unbelievers. Just get rid of him. So they decide to unload Jonah.

Verse 15, "They took Jonah and threw him in the sea." That must have been kind of a dramatic moment. They just pitched him over. Now this is out in the middle of the Mediterranean somewhere in a storm. There's no chance for survival, they know that. They know this is the death of Jonah. And Jonah knows that. And as soon as he hit the water, the sea ceased from its raging. Suddenly, unnaturally, it was confirmed in their minds that indeed this man had violated his God.

Now I love what happens. Because God is so intent on using this guy that He's going to use him in spite of himself. It doesn't matter how terrible he is, God's going to use him. So verse 16 says, "Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made promises." He evangelized them. God used him as a prophet to speak about the true God in a very convincing way...by being thrown overboard. He didn't say a word about thing, except he told him who his God was and that's all they needed to hear and then his God went into action and it was very convincing. And if God wants to get the work done, He'll use you or He'll use you, I should say, one way or another. And that's the last we hear about the sailors. The boat goes on.

Meanwhile...glug, glug, glug, glug, glug...Jonah is sinking. And so we go to the commission and then the disobedience and then the consequence and now comes the deliverance. Verse 17, "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." God had prepared a wind...this book, by the way, is full of supernatural events, God prepared a wind and God prepared a storm and now God prepared a fish. And God is not done with Jonah, he's not going to be able to just go down there and drown like he wants. He's not going to be able to have that luxury. God prepares a big fish and he swallows Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Remarkable, isn't it? And some people have as much trouble swallowing that as the fish no doubt had swallowing Jonah. And the rationalists and the humanists and the naturalists really struggle with that. But I don't think this is any very special miracle. It's unique but I don't know, I've read all kinds of articles, you know, about a 70-foot great white shark swallowing a man and the man survived and there are sharks and sperm whales whose mouths are big enough and whose stomachs are big enough. I really can't imagine what the accommodations are like over the three-day period, or how all of the factors work out, but I don't have any problem believing that. I mean, he was swallowed. I mean, to put it another way, the God who preserves the living embryo in its living grave in the womb of a mother can sure preserve a man in the belly of a fish, if He wants. The miracle to me is not that Jonah could survive being in the fish, but that the fish could survive having that rotten prophet in his stomach. I don't know how the fish held off three days before he vomited.

While Jonah's in the predicament...and in that predicament, folks, you do begin to think about God. I mean, things come into clear perspective. This is the first right thing he did. Verse 1 of chapter 2, I love this, "Then Jonah prayed." Right. Not too hard to imagine, is it? And it was a prayer of repentance. Of course. He prayed just what God wanted him to pray. God was not ready to let Jonah go.

Now chapter 2 is Jonah's autobiography of three days in a fish, or how an out of the will prophet of God found true repentance the hard way. This is Jonah's own spiritual statement. And as we go through it, I want you to notice the elements, or the ingredients in this repentance. First of all, he recognized God's authority, verse 1, "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." He goes right to God, just like the prodigal in Luke 15, "I will arise and go to my father." He is

awakened to submit himself to the Lord his God. He stops running and says, "Okay, God, this is it. If You're going to play this way, I give, I can't fight this, I submit to You, I recognize Your authority, I come to You." And he is like so many disobedient Christians who run from the call of God in their lives and become trapped in some hell of disobedience, some terrible place where the pain is so deep they cry to the God they've been ignoring. So first he recognized God's authority, he went back to submit to God.

Secondly, he recognized his predicament. Verse 2, "And said, I cry reason by reason of my affliction." I mean, the reason I'm crying out is because this is not a happy occasion. "I cried because of my affliction to the Lord and He heard me. Out of the belly of Sheol...that is out of pit of the grave...cried I. He knew he was near death and He heard my voice." Don't get the idea that being in the fish's stomach was some pleasant experience, it was an absolutely horrifying painful affliction that's beyond imagination, inconceivable what kind of horrible experience it would be. And he knew he was as good as dead. He was crying, as it were, out of the belly of the grave. And it is crucial to deliverance from disobedience that one recognize God's authority and recognize his predicament. And what he is saying is, "I'm hopeless, I can't go any further, this is it, God, I cry out to You in my hopelessness."

The third thing is a recognition of God's presence. In verse 3, "For You cast me into the deep in the midst of the sea and the floods compassed me about all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me. Then I said I am cast out of Thy sight, yet I will look again toward Thine holy temple. O God, You've done this, You've put me here and now I lift my eyes to look to Your holy temple. The waters compassed me about even to the soul, the depth closed me round about. The weeds were wrapped around my head, I went down to the bottom of the mountains, the earth with its bars was about me forever, yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God." And what he says is I recognize You're in all of this. You threw me down here, You've preserved my life, You got me in this thing and You're still here. And when you have disobeyed the Lord and drifted from His presence, you must recognize His authority and recognize your predicament and recognize the presence of God in all the things that have happened.

And then he comes to another recognition, a wonderful one in verse 7, and that is he recognizes God's forgiveness. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came into unto Thee and to Thine holy temple." Get's his eyes off his problem now and says, "I remembered the Lord, I remembered the Lord." Ever and always, the pattern for the overcomer is to see his circumstances, see that God is in his circumstance and then lose sight of his circumstance and see God and God only.

And then he gives his testimony in verse 8, "They that have observed lying vanities forsake their own mercy." He who had observed the lying vanities of the world, he who thought he could be happy and satisfied in disobeying God and grasping for the nothingness of that disobedience found out that he

had forsaken the mercy that was available to him. In other words, what he's saying there is when I went into disobedience I forsook your blessing. No believer is happy apart from God. They forsake their own mercy. Disobedience is to walk away from the mercifulness goodness of God. So what he's doing is repenting, that's what he's doing...he's repenting. They that do what I do forsake their mercy. And then he can't make a sacrifice there, obviously, so he says, "I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving." The best I can do is just offer you praise, I can't start a fire in here, obviously, I don't have a lamb, I'm going to pay my vow...I'm going to make You promises and I'm going to pay those promises. This is a fox hole conversion if ever there was one. "I sacrifice unto You with a voice of thanksgiving, I'll pay...I'll do everything I promise, O God, salvation is of the Lord." And what he means is save me, O God, save me, O God, get me out of here. And therein does he recognize God's power.

It's a beautiful series of recognitions. He recognizes, first of all, that God is in charge. He recognizes God's authority. Then he recognizes his predicament. Then he recognizes the presence of God, the forgiveness of God, and then the power of God. "God, I know You can do it and so I offer You thanks, and I know salvation is of the Lord." In other words, he's saying, "You can deliver me, You can deliver me, I know You can." And God honors faith. And God wanted him to repent. And I'm telling you, He took him to extremities to get him to do it, didn't He? And he did it. He believes in the salvation and recovery power of God, and God answered in verse 10, "And the Lord spoke to the fish." The Lord is...this is miracle after miracle, now the Lord tells the fish what to do. "And it vomited it out Jonah on the dry land." I don't know how it did that without beaching itself. God sent that thing right in there to vomit him up on the dry land. As I said earlier, I can understand why the fish vomited him up, it's just amazing that the Lord controlled the place even.

Now vomiting in the Bible, and I don't want to do a word study on...(laughter)...I mean, but here it is, what can I say, right? Is always associated with evil events. If you study vomiting in the Scriptures, you'll note that. Jehovah threatened that Israel would be spewed out of the land in Leviticus 18, or vomited out of the land. Laodicea, you know, because it is luke warm, Christ says I will vomit you out of My mouth, Revelation 3:16. There was a wicked man who was rich in unjust gain and in Job 20 it talks about the fact that he will vomit it up again. The hypocrite in 2 Peter is one who is like a swine returning...a dog rather, returning to its own vomit. And you'll find it associated in many places such as Isaiah 19:14, Isaiah 28...28, I think it's about verse 8, a place in Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 48, it's associated with drunkenness. Every time it's in the Scripture it's used in an evil or gross sense, except this time. In this time it is the only pleasant vomiting in all the Bible. So now you know.

God rescues him and this big fish vomits him up on he shore. And that's such a hopeful thing, you know, I mean because what this tells me is that you may be reluctant to do God's will and you may be disobedient to do God's will and you may rather desire to be dead than do God's will, but God is gracious enough that He'll go to extreme circumstances, if need be, to get you to do what He wants you to do in the first place. God is in the business of recovering unwilling missionaries. That's

hopeful, isn't it? You say, "On the one hand it's hopeful because it means that if I have failed in the past God can still use me. On the other hand, it's not hopeful if you're running because you may wish that God wouldn't do this but He will." And when you have come to the extremity of your running, when you've run away from God's will and God's purpose and you're not willing to do what He wants you to do and go where He wants you to go and say what He wants you to say, you're not willing to fulfill His calling in your life, you may come to an extremity. You may come to a disastrous point in your life but in the middle of that extremity and that disaster, if you recognize God's authority, if you recognize your predicament, if you understand God's presence is there, God's forgiveness is available and God's power is mighty to save, He can turn the course of your life all the way around, even in the midst of a desperate situation. So as we close out act one, we find Jonah lying on the beach.

We don't know how much time passes before you come to chapter 3, but here's the second call. The commission comes again, "The Word of the Lord," verse 1, "came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and cry or preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Now He gives him the very same command again...arise, go and preach, same word as translated cry in chapter 1. God is so loving and so gracious and so merciful and so restoring He persists after this prophet He wants to use. And this time he obeys. He's learned his lesson.

"So Jonah arose and went according to the Word of the Lord." He did it, he was obedient. And he then becomes...I want you to get this cause it's a terrific thing...he then becomes a fitting instrument for proclaiming judgment because he has experienced it. He is also a fitting agent to proclaim mercy because he has experienced it. He is a living example of what it is to disobey God a living example of what happens when you repent, isn't he? He's a living model of his message. And the sign of Jonah in Luke 11:29 and 30 is that God can bring good from evil, that Jonah...remember when it said that Jesus would not show them any sign but the sign of Jonah?...the sign of Jonah is not just three days and three nights in the water and the belly of the fish as Christ is three days and three nights in the grave, that is not just the sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah is that a person who is a living entombment, in a sense, the person who is entombed under the judgment of God can rise again, that's the sign of Jonah. And as Jonah was entombed three days and three nights under the judgment of God for sin, so Christ was entombed three days and three nights under the judgment of God for the sins of the world. And as Jonah came out to preach again, so did Christ. That's the sign of Jonah. He's a type of Christ.

And so, Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, a bold deed. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey, as I mentioned, took three days to get across the city. And Jonah began to enter into the city, a day's journey. He went one day into the thing, one third of the way across, and he cried, he preached. And his message was a very simple message. It wasn't a big expository sermon. He said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed. You have 40 days and the whole place is going to be destroyed." Pretty straight-forward message, a message of judgment. Now that's the

message to the world. And I'm sure that Jonah didn't leave out the fact that if you repent, God will be merciful. But he preached judgment. He said you're going to be judged unless something changes. Noah preached righteousness to his generation. They ignored him. Only eight souls were saved. God even preached the message of judgment to Sodom and Gomorrah, nobody believed that either and the cities were totally destroyed. Moses preached repentance to Egypt and nobody listened to him either and the first born were all destroyed, and you know the devastation of Egypt. And so, Jonah's in that kind of heritage and he comes and preaches repentance and judgment and that was his commission.

And look at the consequences. Verse 5, just so matter of fact, "So the people of Nineveh believed God." Isn't that amazing? Well let me tell you something, folks. The big miracle in Jonah is not that Jonah was swallowed by a fish and lived, the big miracle is that an entire city of wicked pagans repented at the preaching of one rather mediocre or less prophet. That is the greater miracle. The great miracle is not the fish, the great miracle is the repentance, is it not? I mean, it may be that we could explain the fish some way other than the miraculous, but we couldn't explain this any other way than that God poured out grace to believe on behalf of these people. So they believed God. This is a greater miracle than the fish. They believed in God and they proclaimed a fast and they put on sackcloth from the greatest of them, that is their leaders, even unto the least of them, that is their street people. Everybody from the king to the street people proclaimed a fast. Why? Because they were repentant and that was a symbol of their repentance.

Just as a note, you want to remember, this is the greatest revival in the Old Testament. It is the single greatest revival in the Old Testament. To be honest with you, it's the greatest revival in redemptive history that I know about. The whole place repented...and as I said, the estimation of 600 thousand people. The day of Pentecost, only 3,000 came to believe. The greatest single missionary enterprise, the greatest revival in redemptive history recorded. And it's such a wonderful thing to know that God can take a vessel like a Jonah who was so disobedient and so self-willed and so obstinate and so prejudiced, put him through a tremendous cathartic experience, wash him back out of that, send him to preach and use him to bring redemption to an entire population. Marvelous.

The word came to the King of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid his robe from him and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, showing his humiliation over his sin, his repentance. This is the real stuff, folks. This is not...this is no Jesus movement. This is the real thing. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh. Now remember, this is their enemy who has come to preach to them and they've all believed. And the publishing is the decree of the king and his nobles saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything, let them not feed nor drink water, we are going to abstain and we're going to fast as an entire population. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloths and cry mightily unto God. Yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands. And who can tell if God will turn and repent, that is change His mind, and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not? Let's come before God and let's

be humble and let's repent of our sin and maybe God will spare us. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them and He did it not."

It isn't that God actually changed His mind, it's just that they lived up to the conditions which allowed God to do that. The conditions were repent and I'll be merciful, don't repent and you will be judged in 40 days. God marvelously worked in that pagan city. That is the heart of God. And Jonah had the privilege of being the instrument.

But this is a stubborn guy--Jonah. And we go from the commission and his obedience and the consequence to his reaction. Are you ready for this? Chapter 4. "It displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry." He's hot...he's furious. "And he prayed to the Lord and said, I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country, I knew You'd do this." That's what he says...I knew You'd do this. Boy, does this burn me up. I knew You'd convert those pagans. That's the reason I went to Tarshish, I knew it. You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness and you repent of the evil. I knew it. Furious.

This guy's a real stinker. He is...he is an obstinate...he's so mad. You know how mad he is? He's so mad he wants to die again. That's right. He's an odd guy. Verse 3, "Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech Thee my life from me, it's better for me to die...I'd rather be dead than have pagans saved. I can't take it. I can't stand it." Humph...it's comforting again to know that God can use people who don't quite have their whole act together yet. And the Lord is so gracious with this...His prophet. In verse 4, "Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry." Isn't that mild? I mean, what would you have said? I don't think I would have said anything, I'd have gone ...you know, Pshew...you're gone. You want to be dead? You got it.

This is very gracious, isn't it? As if the Lord says, "Is it right for you to be so angry, Jonah?" A gentle rebuke. But you have to understand that deep down in his heart was a zeal for Israel, so profoundly built in that the idea of God having a new and repentant people and his own people being apostate was more than he could bear. I don't think he would have minded so much if Israel was believing, and they were believing in Nineveh, too, it was just that Israel was so unbelieving.

Well, verse 5 says he went out of the city, sat on the east side of the city. He wanted to hang around for 40 days to see if the revival was real. Yeah, because if the revival wasn't real 40 days the Lord would wipe them out, he wanted to be there if that happened. So he went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city, built a little booth for himself. And sat under it in the shadow of the booth, a little lean-to to protect him from that tremendous heat in the Middle East, till he might see what would become of the city.

And the Lord God...this is a great lesson...the Lord God prepared a gourd...literally prepared a...it's actually a growing plant with large broad leaves. This is another miracle, a lot of miracles in this story. And it instantly grew up and shaded him. This is sort of instant tree, just boom, right there. And Jonah was exceedingly glad about this. He's very happy. And then God prepared a worm, this is another miracle...God prepared a fish, God prepared a worm, God prepared a tree, God prepared a storm, a lot of miracles. And God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day and it smote the gourd and it withered. That worm attacked the gourd and it went right down, the broad-leaf plant. So he had his shade for one day and now he's in very bad shape. The city has repented and a worm killed his shade. His irritations are mounting.

Now the Lord isn't done. In verse 8, when the sun comes up and it's real hot, the Lord prepares a sirocco, an east wind, hot, sand-blowing and the sun beat on the head of Jonah and he fainted...and here he is again, he wished in himself to...what?...you guess it, to die. This is the third time he's wished to die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." This is how he solved all of his problems. Just kill me, get it over with.

God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry about that plant?" Very gracious response again. And He said, "I do well to be angry even unto death." I'm mad about that plant...that worm, that wind. The Lord said, "You had pity on the plant for which you didn't labor, neither made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night." You had a lot of pity on that plant, didn't you? "Should not I spare Nineveh that great city in which are more than sixscore thousand persons...600 thousand persons...that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand and also much cattle?"

Six hundred thousand ignorant people...some say the 600 thousand mean 600 thousand children, that wouldn't even include the adults. You know what His lesson is? Hey you, haven't you got your perspectives off a little bit? You're so concerned about a plant and you don't care about a city. That's the point. You had pity on a plant, you didn't even labor for that plant, you didn't even make it grow, it came up in a night and it died in a night. And you're making a case out of that. And you're all upset about the plant and I did create these people and I did cause them to grow and they are in my image and you don't even care that they perish, see. Boy, have you got it messed up.

God taught him a very profound lesson, didn't He? Better get your priorities right. You're so concerned about your own shade and you could care less about a dying civilization without Christ. We need to hear that. We've got to get away from selfishness, this is in summary, a totally selfish man, he wants to do exactly what he wants to do and nothing else. And God sends him through all of these events to bring him down to this one lesson...you are so concerned about your own comfort and your own prejudice and your own will and all the things you want that you could care less about the damnation of a civilization of lost people. Don't you think you better get your priorities turned around? That's the lesson.

We ask you the question. Where are your concerns? I can identify with Jonah. I really can. I was a Jonah, called to preach as a young person, I ran. God grabbed a hold of me, threw me out of a car at 75 miles an hour, slid me down the highway 110 yards on my back, put me in a bed for two or three months. And in that I began to turn to God, I was again called to preach, responded, obeyed. And in my imperfection, God has chosen to use me and teach me lesson after lesson about where my priorities ought to be. And so we ask ourselves tonight, where are we? What do we learn from Jonah? I trust the Spirit of God has taught us this one great lesson, somewhere along the line we have to get God's perspective on the lost world. And if all we care about is what we want the way we want it, we're nothing more than a Jonah and we need to learn the same lessons he needed to learn, until God finally taught him, if you're going to be concerned about something, let it not be how well shaded you are, let it be that lost men and women hear the message of salvation. Let's bow in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for our time tonight, for the great lessons of this marvelous prophecy. Confirm them to our hearts for Christ's sake. Amen.

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