

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

The Worst Missionary

Scripture: Jonah

Code: 80-111

Well this morning, because it's our mission's conference time, I wanted to direct your attention to some missionary emphasis, and, I suppose, like all preachers you think about 4 John 35 that wonderful text, "Look on the fields. They are white, already to harvest." Or, you think about 9 Matthew 37, 38, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest."

Or maybe you think about 24 Matthew 14 which says, "The Gospel will be preached to the end of the earth, and then the end will come." Or 28 Matthew 19, 20, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel."

Or perhaps even 24 Luke 47, "Repentance is to be preached among all nations," or, 1 Acts 8, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses," or maybe 1 Romans 16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God and the salvation of everyone that believes."

Many familiar missionary texts and they're all positive and affirming, as I was thinking about what I might share with you, however I was drawn to one that is not so positive, in fact it's a negative missionary text. It's a look at the world's worst missionary.

Take your Bible and turn with me, if you will, to the Book of Jonah. Now, as you know I'm not accustomed to teach an entire book in one message, or anything remotely related to that kind of speed, but I'm gonna' do that this morning as we look across this book to get the flow and the feel of this wonderful Old Testament prophecy.

This is a missionary who, by the way, did not make the All Star team. When the votes were in, he does not appear in 11 Hebrews. He's not in the list with the rest. In fact, in 7 John 52, some Jews remarked that no prophet has ever come out of Galilee. Jonah did, but he was forgettable.

He is a curiosity because of the unique account of his life which includes him being swallowed by a great fish and vomited up three days later. But, he's more than a curiosity. He is a prophet of God. More than that, he is a missionary and he teaches us much about responding to God's call to missions.

In the Old Testament, we find very clearly reiterated for us on numerous occasions the fact that God designed Israel to be his missionary nation. That is to say, they were collectively to represent God in the world; as a nation, they were to demonstrate the benefits of knowing the true God; the benefits of obeying God. They were given very clear and concise and precise definitions of life from what they ate and what they wore, and how they worshipped and how they related to one another, to how they conducted themselves in the moral and spiritual realm.

They were to be uniquely a witness nation. In fact, in 1 Chronicles 16-23, we read, "Sing unto the Lord all the earth; show forth from day-to-day His salvation. Declare His glory among the heathen; His wonders among all peoples." And really that was directed at Israel; they were to be the declaring nation. They were to be the witness people.

In 18 Psalm 49, the Scripture says, "Therefore, I will give thanks unto thee O Lord among the heathen and sing praises under Thy name." And here the psalmist is saying, "I take the responsibility to speak of you among the pagans who know you not."

96 Psalm 3 reiterates, "Declare His glory among the heathen. Say among the heathen the Lord reigns. Preach the true God; proclaim His sovereignty, His saving power."

And in 43 Isaiah 21, God says of Israel, "This people have I formed for Myself, they will show forth My praise, that is their purpose." They were to be a witness nation.

In addition to that, within the nation God put his hand on special individuals who were to be preachers. Certain men we know as prophets, whose role was to preach to the nation itself; to make sure that it was getting enough divine revelation, enough exhortation, to stay the witness nation it needed to be.

In other words, there was a pastoral role in the prophetic ministry calling people to righteousness; calling them to obedience so that their witness would not be hampered. Additionally, there were some who were called to be missionaries, not to stay within the culture, but to go beyond the culture and to reach the pagans, the heathen, those outside.

No different really than the Church. Today we are the duly constituted community of God. We, the Church, are the witness nation. The wall has broken down; it is not anymore identified as Israel as over against the gentiles, but the wall has come down. Jew and gentile are one in Christ; we're the Church; we are the witness people.

Within that witnessing community, God has identified certain men, certain leaders whose job it is to strengthen the community, to preach. They are the pastors and the shepherds whose responsibility

is strengthen the powerful witness of the Church in the world. And then there are others who are selected to go; to go beyond the walls of the Church; beyond the shepherding, beyond the nurturing and the teaching of God's word to God's people, and to reach the lost. We call those people missionaries.

In the Old Testament, there were a number of very well known figures who fit the missionary role. Certainly Abraham was one; he, according to 20 Genesis 7 was a prophet to his neighbors. Moses, a transmitter of God's truth to the pagan Egyptians; Elijah preached to pagans; Ahab and Jezebel, Elisha, you remember, was used in the life of the heathen Syrian by the name of Naiman.

And even among the literary prophets, those who wrote books in the Old Testament, there were many who preached to the heathen, though not all of them went to heathen lands. There were a number of them whose message was directed at the heathen, for example, Isaiah who in Chapters 13-27 preaches to the heathen. Jeremiah, who in Chapters 46-51 speaks to a very wide heathen audience, namely Egypt, Felitzia, Phoenicia, Moab, Amman, Edom, Syria, Quadar, Hizzor, Ilam, and Babylon. And there was Ezekiel; you remember who to Tyre and Sidon and Egypt preached judgment? It's recorded in Chapters 25-33.

And of course we all know Daniel. Daniel, that unique missionary to Babylon, and who even outlived the empire and found himself in the Medo-Persian empire, an effective missionary during the captivity.

There was Obadiah. Obadiah's small little prophecy was a missionary's message to the nation of Edom about the impending judgment of God.

There was Zephaniah whose message was to gentiles whose mission was to proclaim judgment for their lack of repentance.

And then there was also Nacham. And Nacham was sent to preach of the coming judgment on the city of Nineveh. Now, these men and many others were the missionaries. They sort of fit the pattern or the profile of the missionary. There, in some cases was a role for them within the nation and additionally one outside the nation.

And I suppose that if I were to ask you to tell the story of all these people, the first three you might know, but those who are the literary prophets you might even not be able to recite the wonderful stories of their missionary effort, and that's unfamiliar.

But, there is one with which you are familiar. There is one you know well, and that's Jonah. And we know him probably, for all the wrong reasons, as the reluctant missionary. He is the best illustration whoever lived of a man who did exactly what he wasn't supposed to do, who refused to do what God

had called him to do.

If you characterized him, you would say he was disobedient; he was selfish; he was sinful; he was obstinate; he had a bad disposition and he was prejudiced. Now, if he had filled out an application for any mission agency that I know, they would've flatly turned him down at the first reading. And that's certainly understandable.

But, he does teach us a lot about the rights and wrongs of responding to God's call to missions. Now, if I were to divide this little prophecy of four chapters up, and make a simple but hopefully memorable outline, my outline might go like this. Go, no, woe, go, yes, bless.

Here is a man who needed two calls before he got to the field. To the first one he responded no; to the second one, for reasons we shall see in a moment, he responded yes. Let's look at the first one.

Starting in the beginning, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai saying," and let me stop there. We won't stop after each verse, but we need to stop here. You were afraid of that. I can feel it!

Now, here is Jonah. We don't know anything about him. We don't know the story of the man. He's only mentioned in 2 Kings 14-25 as being the prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II, in the Northern Kingdom; puts him somewhere between 800-750 BC. Jewish tradition says he is the son of the widow of Jerafat whom Elijah raised from the dead. Certainly couldn't verify that.

Israel is prospering at this time under Jeroboam II. The ancient boundaries have been restored. Israel possesses as far as Damascus, but since the days of Omri, the king of the Northern Kingdom around 885, they had been under flash attacks from Assyria. And there had been building up a deep animosity and hatred between the Jews and the Assyrians.

They already had a problem with any gentiles. Their nationalism had really run amuck and they had become anti-gentile in many, many cases. And instead of being a witness nation, they became resolute in their own isolationism which was the very antithesis of what God wanted out of them.

But, Assyria, particularly they hated because Assyria was pulling off these flash, surprise terrorist attacks on them, and so had a special place on their list of those that were to be hated.

So, at this particular time in the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, out of Gath Heather, a little town four miles north of Nazareth in Galilee, comes this man called Jonah. And he just pops onto the scene; the word of the Lord comes to him and here's what God says to him. Three verbs, "Arise, go, and preach, or cry." That's his call. "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city; cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me."

This is a very direct commissioning. Assyria was a growing power, as I noted, to the east. You will note at the end of the book it tells us, at the very, very last verse that there were 120,000 persons in Nineveh who didn't know the difference between their right and left hand. That's little babies; that's how they describe a little baby; 120,000 little babies in that city would put the population of that city, if you add the older, young people, and the adults, that's somewhere over 600,000 conservatively.

A large city, we will note later, that it took three days to walk across this city, according to what he says in 3 Jonah 3. This was advanced culturally as was much of the Mesopotamian valley in ancient times. The people were arrogant; the people were proud of their achievements, but they were sinking in the morass and the muck of immorality. Nachum called it a bloody city. Nachum said it was full of lies and fraud and robbery and sensuousness and violence and witchcraft and idolatry. And their soldiers were infamous for brutality and cruelty.

And God knew about their wickedness because the wickedness of man rises to the ever-watchful eye of God like smoke from a fire to the nostrils of one who stands over it. And it was time for God to act and as he does, before he brought judgment upon this wicked nation, He wanted to confront them and give them an opportunity to respond to mercy and repent.

And He chooses a very unlikely subject, Jonah; gives him a threefold cry, "Arise or get up; go to Nineveh and preach against it." Now, I want to add another component here because I think it's important to note. Not only is God doing this- wanting to evangelize Nineveh for the sake of the salvation of the Ninevites, for the sake of His own mercy, grace, and compassion, and because he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Not only is He doing it for that reason, but He is doing it because He wants to shame Israel. He wants it to have a remedial effect on Israel that could perhaps even bring about a spiritual revival there.

What do you mean? Well, here goes one stranger, Jonah, wandering into an utterly debauched and pagan city of massive proportions, a city that is unknown in terms to God; have no relationship with the living and true God. So, they're gonna' hear a stranger, one lonely man who is from the nation that is their immediate antagonist; a nation that despises them, and it is mutual.

And when that whole city repents, at the preaching of one, strange Jew, it is gonna' be a rebuke to Israel who will not repent, though they have heard a myriad of preachers and a myriad of prophets, and they are the very people of God. What a rebuke! What a rebuke.

Israel failing to repent at the continuing cry of many prophets; Israel so reluctant to respond to truth when they have so much of it, and yet, here is a pagan culture that at the preaching of one man totally repents; furthermore, it would rebuke Israel in a second way.

There they sat in their land, feeling animosity toward the pagan world instead of reaching out to convert them. And probably convincing themselves that they wouldn't believe anyway, and here is one preacher, one stranger, and out of his own ministry, an entire city repents. What a rebuke that is to the indolence and the unwillingness and the laziness of the Jews who refuse to go and take the message of the true God.

So, it is on both counts a shame to Israel when God chose them, what true repentance is at the simple preaching of one man, and how much of a harvest of souls there is out there, if they had been willing to go.

So, Jonah receives this commission. And his response we know, Verse 3, didn't take him much time; Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So, he went down to Jaffa; found a ship which was going to Tarshish; paid the fare; went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Twice it says he was leaving the presence of the Lord. Didn't he believe in the omnipresence of God? Did he really believe that he could flee from God's presence?

Or, was he just really saying I want to get away from the Temple; I want to get away from the land; I want to get away from this kind of territorial place where God is and I want to get so far away that God's gonna' have to pick somebody else.

And if I get so far removed as Tarshish which is on the west, south coast of Spain, a long way in those days, across the entire Mediterranean, God's gonna' have to pick somebody else.

You say, "Well, why did he do that?" I mean, why didn't he want to go preach? What a tremendous opportunity. I'll tell you why. 4 Jonah 2, we'll see it later. He says, "Because I knew Thou art a gracious and compassionate God." That's what he says.

He says, "Look, I fled to Tarshish because I knew You were gracious." What kind of a strange motive is that? Well, you know what? He said, "I was afraid that if I went, you'd let those gentiles get converted. And if there's anything I can't stand it's gentiles getting converted. I don't want them horning in on our blessing; I don't how much there is to go around and if they take too big a piece, there won't be enough left for us." This is bizarre, isn't it? Talk about reluctant missionaries. He was afraid the people would repent and be converted.

Well, we're not concerned with that, yet, let's go back to where we are. That was his motive. So, he decides to jump ship and go clear across the Mediterranean to the commercial port on the southwest coast of Spain, and as he's out there, he's running from God. He's just flat out, as clear as you can make it, leaving God's presence; leaving any sense of responsibility; getting himself in a position where he cannot do what God wants him to do, and forcing God to pick somebody else.

He just reasoned, I'll be physically unavailable. The Lord will know that I'm so unwilling and so reluctant and so far out of the picture, He'll pick someone else. I think there are many Christians like that, who have been spoken to by some message, some text of Scripture, some time of conviction in private prayer, some influential missionary, somebody who touched your life, some word from the spirit of God that came through a messenger in a pulpit somewhere or a book. And you feel the call and the movement of God to a certain ministry and you're afraid of it. You don't want to do it; you will resist, and so you turn and you spin your wheels; you go as fast as you can in another direction. Get yourself as busy as possible; as far away from the influence of that particular call, as you can. And think you'll find in that kind of safety some respite from what it is that God wants you to do. If you can just kind of get into your work and get very involved and get very busy and get yourself tied down and get a big mortgage and get in hock and get a lot of problems, God can't extract you from all of that, you're gonna' be safe from doing His will.

But, attempting to run from God's will is like fleeing from light; you just end up in darkness. It's like trading wealth for poverty or wisdom for ignorance or joy for sorrow or peace for chaos or usefulness for uselessness or fruit for leaves or reward for punishment. It's a silly exchange.

Look at the consequence. God said go; he said no; God said woe, here's the woe. First of all, the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea. The word hurled is the same one used in 1 Samuel 18-11 when Saul hurled his spear. "The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea, and there was a great storm on the sea. The ship was about to break up." Storms like that in the Mediterranean are very common and very fierce. We read about one of them in Acts 27, in the New Testament that literally disintegrated the ship that the Apostle Paul was on.

So, here goes Jonah, but here comes the Lord. The Lord is a pursuer. Jonah thinks he's gonna' run away from the presence of the Lord, he's got another thing coming. The Lord is after him. And the Lord throws this wind on the sea.

Verse 5. "Then the sailors became afraid." Now, when sailors get afraid, you've got a serious storm. And all of a sudden, they all become very religious. "And every man cried to his god." They are into all different kinds of gods. That was the distinctive of Israel, wasn't it? They were monotheistic, one God. The rest of the world was polytheistic, many gods. And so they've all got their own deities and they all start crying to their gods. And you know what they're saying? Stop the storm; preserve us; protect us; if we've done anything to offend you, please forgive us.

And then they started to throw the cargo which was in the ship, into the sea to lighten it for them. Obviously, that's what they do in a storm; it lifts the ship up a little higher; less likely that water is gonna' surge into it and sink it.

But Jonah, this man is not only disobedient, but he has cultivated almost a seared conscious about his disobedience. I mean, you could think that if he was out there on that ship, he would be saying, "I know why this is happening. I'm the guy." He's asleep, it says. He's asleep.

He'd gone down below in the hold of the ship, laid down, and he's fallen asleep. He's sleeping in a storm. Self-security in the midst of the storm; no thought for the reality of what's going on, so the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up! Call on your God. Perhaps your God will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." Which is a wonderful confession that none of the other gods worked.

None of the other gods could do anything. I mean, that's to be understood. Right? Because all they were, were false gods of the invention of man. "So, will you get into this deal? We've covered every god on the boat. Now, you're the only guy left. Will you please call on your God? And perhaps your God will be concerned about us so that we don't all drown."

Now, we can know one thing from this little account, and that is that Jonah hadn't preached to anybody on the boat. They didn't know who his God was. They're very basic in what they ask them to do. If he had given them any kind of instruction; if he had fulfilled any kind of a role of a prophet; if he had been any kind of witness, they would've perhaps had more information than is revealed there, but a running prophet is no good to anybody. If he's running from God, he's not about to expose himself to others. If he doesn't want to serve the Lord, he doesn't want pagans in Nineveh to be converted, why would he want pagans on the way to Tarshish to be converted?

So, he's not telling anything. He's got his mouth shut. He's a very disobedient prophet. And so in their religious superstition, they start all this kind of stuff trying to get their gods into the act. None of them respond.

Verse 7. "Each man said to his mate, 'Come, let us cast lots, so that we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us.' So, they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. That's providence, folks, that's God's providence. He orchestrated those little pieces of straw, those little sticks, those little dice, whatever it was they used to determine this; to make sure the thing pointed right at Jonah.

You see, they know somebody's offended a god. That's their superstition; that's what they assume. They can't figure out what god's been offended by who, so they decide to just roll a dice and wherever it lands, that's the guilty party. And it turns that the Lord orchestrated it so it fell on Jonah.

So, they say to him, "Tell us now." And look at this rapid-fire bunch of questions. They were probably all around him in a swarm and these questions were coming with an excited leap from one to the other rapidly. "Now, tell us on whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your

occupation? Where did you come from? And what is your country? From what people are you?" They don't know anything about him. He has not opened his mouth. He is an unfaithful man, isn't he?

He hasn't said a word about anything. They're trying to figure out why this God of this guy is angry at him. And who is he?

Verse 9. "He said to them, 'I'm a Hebrew and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.'" He tells them I'm a Hebrew and my God is the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. That is always the way prophets evangelize pagans. You start from creation. That's why evolution deals a deathblow to Gospel preaching because it eliminates the point of contact with the pagan world, that there is a creation, therefore there must be a creator.

If there's evolution, you don't need a creator; if you don't need a creator, there's no God; you've got no platform to evangelize. So, he says, "I'm a Hebrew and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." That says it all.

Verse 10. "Then the men became extremely frightened. And they said to him, 'How could you do this?' For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them." He must've gone on between Verses 9 and 10 to say and I'm running from the Lord God who made the sea and the heavens, and their simple deduction is, what in the world are you doing in a boat on the sea running from the God of the sea? But, on the other hand, what would you do on the land running from the God of the land? So, you're sort of stuck.

"How could you do this? How could you bring this calamity on all of us? Don't you have any regard for us?" That's what they said to him. Verse 11. "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?" For the sea was becoming increasingly stormy, what are we gonna' do?

Jonah could've said, "Well, hold it guys. I've got to go down in the ship for a minute. I'll be right back." He could've gone down there or some private moment; found a place and repented. And said, "God I repent. I'm sorry. I've been belligerent. I've been prejudiced. I've been self-willed. I've been disobedient. I admit it; please forgive me. Stop the storm. I'll catch the next port, turn around and go back." Not on your life. No way was he gonna' pray that prayer, no way.

Verse 12. "He said to them, Wait a moment till I repent." No, no, "Pick me up and throw me in the sea, he said." What? This guy has a death wish. Pick me up and throw me into the sea? What are you saying? I'm saying I would rather be dead than obey God. I would rather be dead than be a missionary. Just kill me. I'd rather drown and drowning is not pleasant. I don't know anybody whose drowned, but I assume it's not.

I mean it's not a quick and painless way to go. Sometimes, negative situations soften the heart. But, in this case, it just makes him hard. He says I'd rather die than preach because if I preach those people will get converted. And if they get converted, then gentiles will have the same God we have. I can't handle that. So, he said, "Just throw me overboard."

But, these men understood the value of human life. So, Verse 13 they just rode desperately to return to land. They're trying to roll against a wall of water; they couldn't successfully for the sea was becoming even stormier against them there. They are just rowing and rowing and pulling as hard as they can. They can't do it.

You know a disobedient Christian, somebody completely out of God's will makes life a mess for everybody around them. They're no good to God and they're really no good to themselves and they're no good to anybody else. A disobedient Christian is the most miserable creature in the world, and they just spin misery around them.

So, they decide look, we can't fight the storm. This guy says throw him in the water. We don't want to do that, so we need to go to the God of this man and give him some requests. So, in Verse 14 they pray to Jonah's God.

"They call on the Lord and they said, 'We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life.' That's prayer request number one. Twice they pray this, by the way, here. "Don't let us die because of him. It's not fair." And then they say this, "And don't put innocent blood on us. And if he goes in the water and drowns, don't hold us responsible for Thou O Lord has done as though has pleased."

One, don't let us die. Two, don't hold us responsible for taking the life of Jonah because this is Your thing, not ours; this is between You and Jonah. You two need to work this out. And here again, we see the utter uselessness of a man out of God's will in himself; he's a pain in the neck to the whole world of unbelievers.

Verse 15. I'm sure after much counsel, "They picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea." That must've been tough. "Picked him up and threw him into the sea and the sea stopped its raging." That's the most powerful sermon Jonah ever preached about who is the true God. When that sea stopped boom; the storm ended. They knew they were now dealing with the God of the land and the sea. It ceased unnaturally, instantaneously. And God was using Jonah in spite of himself. If he wouldn't open his mouth, he would allow throwing him into the water to give testimony.

And the last we hear of these sailors, Verse 16. "Then the men feared the Lord greatly and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows." Whoa! That's revival folks. You think they got

converted? They feared the Lord greatly; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord. Before Jonah went overboard, he must've given them the message that if you have sin in your life, then the way to deal with sin is through sacrifice. And they made vows, promises, pledges, covenants. I don't know all that that means, but to fear the Lord means to worship Him. To make sacrifice means to be dealing with your sin; to make covenant means to be affirming obedience.

And here is Jonah, this utterly useless guy who just wants to drown rather than see anybody converted, and even in his drowning, a whole boatful of people get converted. It's like God was saying, "Take that Jonah, I'll use you to do it even if you don't want to do it."

Well, he's tumbling in the waves for a few moments, probably thrashing around just trying to preserve himself and tumbling down into the depths. Verse 17 says, "The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights." Now, this is where the Book of Jonah gets attacked. Isn't it?

And some of the critics have a harder time swallowing Jonah than the fish did. I read one guy who said that what it really means is that Jonah was thrown overboard and he landed on the top of a dead, floating whale and floated along for a few days. Another one said what it really means is that the ship found a port and they took Jonah and put him in an inn called 'The Whale'. I read another one that said, "They actually had a little dinghy tied on the back of the big boat and the name of the dinghy was the great fish and it simply means they put him in the dinghy and pushed him off."

No, God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. It's not hard for God to do that. There are sharks and you know, sperm whales. The accounts of those that there have been some white sharks 70-feet long that could easily swallow a man whole. We don't know what kind of fish it was, but God made it a special fish. The miracle wasn't that the fish swallowed him; the miracle was that he stayed alive in there three days and three nights. That's the miracle; that the gastric juices of the fish didn't disintegrate his body; that he could get some kind of air. Who knows how in the world God did that, but He who preserves the living embryo in the living grave of a mother can certainly provide here a place in a fish for Jonah. Faith always laughs at skepticism. Doesn't it?

Well now, Jonah was ready to reconsider his call. In fact, that would do it to you, wouldn't it? You wake up all of a sudden and you're looking at ribs from the inside of a fish. I can't even imagine what he was seeing in there; what was coming at him. But, there he is and he decides that maybe he ought to check his spiritual life and do a little inventory.

So Chapter 2 becomes the three-day autobiography of Jonah, or how an out of the will of God prophet found true repentance in the belly of a fish, if you want the long title. This is Jonah's own spiritual statement. First, he recognizes God's authority. "He prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish. He said, 'I called out of my distress to the Lord and He answered me. I cried for

help from the depth of 'shaole'Thou doest hear my voice.

His confidence is that God can hear him. His confidence is that God is still an authority over his life, still sovereign, still powerful. He is trapped in a hell of disobedience. He is trapped in a hell of unfulfillment. He is really right where he should be because he's been out of God's will and this is where you get, into some dire circumstance.

So, he recognizes God is still sovereign, and then he recognizes that he's in a very difficult predicament. He affirms that predicament. He's been cast into the deep in Verse 3. "The heart of the seas, the current engulfed him, the breakers, the billows passed over him." But, he also recognizes God is present. "So, I said, I've been expelled from Thy sight, nevertheless, I'll look again toward Thy Holy Temple."

At first, I thought I was out of Your presence and now I'm gonna' look again. "Water encompassed me to the point of death; the great sea engulfed me. Weeds were wrapped around my head." Apparently, he was all tangled up in seaweed and he was about to die when he got swallowed.

He said, "I was all the way to the bottom, down by the roots of the mountains in the depth of the sea. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but Thou hast brought up my life from the pit O L, my God! You were there! Whither can I go from Your presence? You were there!" I went to the bottom of the sea and I was wrapped in seaweed and You were there. He recognizes God's sovereignty and he recognizes his predicament and he recognizes God's presence.

And he recognizes God's mercy in Verse 7. "While I was fainting away I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to the end of Thy Holy Temple. I pleaded with You to deliver for me." Pleaded for mercy; he recognizes God is a merciful and forgiving God. He gets his eyes off his problem here, you see, and he gets his eyes onto his God.

"Those, he says, who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness. There's no God; no faithful God for those who worship idols, but I don't worship idols. I worship the true God and I know You're there and I recognize Your mercy."

Verse 9. "I'll sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I'll give You a sacrifice of thanks and that which I have vowed, I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord." I'll be obedient, that's what he means. I'll be obedient, Lord, I promise. I'm gonna' do what You want. I believe in Your salvation. Please deliver me.

Here is a man called to a mission field by God, turns his back; runs the other direction; gets in a dire situation; does the right thing. Cries out for mercy, forgiveness; says, "God, I'll go. I'll go." This is a foxhole conversion, folks.

And God answered. Three days of that reluctant prophet even made the fish sick. Verse 10 says, "The Lord commanded the fish had vomited Jonah up onto the dry land." The fish was going somewhere towards the dry land and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land, probably up onto the surf or whatever, and he kind of floated in, either that, or it was a pretty terrific shot if he was out in the water anywhere.

But anyway, he ended up on dry land. I don't know how miraculous the actual catapulting of Jonah was, but it's interesting to think about. And, he vomited him out. Now, just to give you -- I don't want to do a word study on vomit, but I do want to make a couple of comments about it.

When you look at it in the Bible, vomiting in the Bible is always associated with something negative. Jehovah threatened Israel would be spewed out of the land in Leviticus 18. Laodicea was warned of being spewed or vomited out of God's mouth in 3 Revelation. "The wicked man who was rich and unjust gain." You remember it says, "will vomit it up again"? The hypocrite returns to his sin is like a dog going back to his vomit. And other vomiting and spewing is associated with drunkenness in several Old Testament passages.

This is the only pleasant vomiting in the Bible; that's what I'm trying to get at. This is the only good one, disobedient missionary. This is a wonderful thing. God has already used this guy even in the midst of his utter disobedience by bringing about a revival on a boat when they just threw him in the water. But, now he's come to the place where he recognizes God's authority; he recognizes his predicament; he recognizes God's continued call, God's presence, God's forgiveness, mercy; His power to save. And God can change the course of his life and he has. So, there he is on the shore.

I guess he picks himself up and the call of God comes back. This is the second one. Now, the word of the Lord, 3 Jonah 1, came to Jonah the second time. Same three verbs; arise, go, cry, preach or proclaim, however you want to translate the third one. "Go to Nineveh the great city. Proclaim to it the proclamation which I'm gonna' tell you." This is 'go' again. "Go." His response, "Yes."

Verse 3. He's had enough of those kinds of trips that he just encountered. So, Jonah rose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city; a three days walk. Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk and he cried out and said, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Now, that's not his whole sermon. He supported that; he preached judgment, judgment, judgment. He preached God is coming to destroy you. Jonah was not a user-friendly prophet.

Jonah was not one who preached a happy message that everybody wanted to hear. He did not offer psychological salve for their hurts and pains. He just told them, "You better repent or God is gonna' come in here and destroy all of you." That's what he told them. That is always the prophet's

message. That was Noah's message, preaching righteousness. That is always God's message. Always.

He preached repentance. God said, "Go." He said, "Yes." And the answer came, "Bless," Verse 5. "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God." Wow! They believed in God. He was preaching God. The God of the land and the sea; the creator, God. And they actually called a fast and they put on sackcloth from the greatest and noblest, the highest in the social echelons to the least, the poor, the street people. All of them, I mean, the whole place repents. This is without a question the greatest evangelistic harvest in the Scripture, historically. Nothing like this occurs anywhere else in the Old Testament and certainly in the New there is nothing like it. This is an immense response to a really flaky preacher. Doesn't that give you great hope about what God can do with whom?

And here is this mightiest of all Old Testament revivals. The greatest single missionary effort; one man, going one day's walk into this massive metropolis and the whole place repents. God is certainly in the business, isn't he, of restoring disobedient Christians? This is an Old Testament illustration of what He does for believers in this age.

Well, Verse 6 says, "This deal was so powerful when the word reached the King of Nineveh, he arose from his throne; laid aside his robe from him; covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes." Now, get the picture. Assyria and the king have got Israel in mind as a land to conquer. Now, you well know that there was a time soon to come when Israel would be conquered; taken into captivity and never returns. So, this is enemy. They would go to battle; huge army against huge army to destroy each other. And here's one lonely Jew comes in and knocks off a whole nation. And they all convert to Judaism. It's incredible. Power of God. Don't ever underestimate it and say I'm only one life. Don't underestimate what God can do with one life.

So, the king rose, got with the crowd; put on the sackcloth and sat in the ashes. That's repentance. That was an ancient way to demonstrate brokenness over sin. He preached repentance, judgment, repentance, judgment, repentance, judgment, repentance. Where is that message today?

In our cleverness, we've eliminated it. We may have eliminated its results. The king made a proclamation, Verse 7. "In Nineveh, by the degree of the king and his nobles, do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water." We're having a fast here, a big time fast, a really serious fast.

God is showing mercy to us and we're gonna' fall on our faces and we're gonna' repent. "Both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth. Let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way from the violence which is in his hands." This is the king taking over now. He has influenced the king, the whole nation. Who knows? "God may turn and relent and draw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

Verse 10. "And when God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared he would bring upon them and he didn't do it." Why do it? They've repented. Right? They've been converted.

God used Jonah for the mightiest revival ever. Absolutely thrilling. God is in the business of restoring a sinful vassal a second time; putting him back where He wanted him the first time; showing His power through him. God doesn't look for perfect people, just willing ones. And if you're not willing, He may make you willing.

You say what was Jonah's reaction? 4 Jonah. You'd think it would be a chapter full of praise. Right? Hallelujah, glory to God that he would be the first charismatic. He would be so excited. No, "It greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry." He's angry. "And he prayed to the Lord and he said, 'Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country?'" I told You this.

"Didn't I tell you when You called me, 'I told you, God. I know what you're gonna' do. You're gonna' send me over there and all those gentiles are gonna' be converted and I don't like that.'" I told You You'd do this." I knew it.

"That's why I went to Tarshish because I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger; abundant in loving kindness and one who relents concerning calamity." Is that unbelievable? What a bizarre response. This is such a reluctant missionary. He'd rather be drowned than be a missionary. And when he has the greatest revival in history, the greatest spiritual awakening in history, he's mad.

I knew You'd do this, God. Verse 3. "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me." Death is better to me than life. I'd rather be dead than see gentiles horning in on our God. Kill me, just kill me. This is a very melancholy guy. Isn't it? He is depressing. I wonder if there was a Mrs. Jonah, poor soul.

And the Lord is so patient with this guy. "The Lord said, 'Do you have good reason to be angry.'" Isn't that patient? I mean the Lord could've said, "Gladly." You're gone. Take my life for death is better than life. The Lord could've said, "Sure, happy to. You're more trouble than you're worth."

The Lord said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" What a patient response. Maybe the gentleness of that is bound up in the fact that he could see the positive side of Jonah's attitude was his zeal for Israel and he was afraid that maybe God was turning from Israel to the gentiles. And that this might've meant because of the tragic condition of Israel, that the heart of God was moving away. And it was that fear that made him feel the way he did.

But, his silly response to everything killed me. He can't handle anything; everything makes him want to die. And Jonah went out of the city; sat east of it. He's not gonna' do any follow-up; he's for sure not gonna' do that. He just goes, leaves town; goes east, sits. Makes a shelter for himself and he sits under it in the shade till he can see what's going to happen in the city. He wants to sit there for 40 days to see if this revival or this awakening is real. Just gonna' watch; not gonna' help. See, he doesn't want to help; just wants to watch. Sort of like folding his arms and just saying, well, we'll see if this thing is really real.

And God is so good. "The Lord God appointed a plant. And it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his discomfort. He was hot. It's a hot place, desert. Jonah's sitting out there waiting to see what's gonna' happen in the city of Nineveh. He's all by himself and God has this little plant that just grows up real fast, overnight. It's this lovely little shade.

And then it says, "Jonah was extremely happy about the plant." This guy needed help with his priorities, didn't he? what makes him happy? A plant. But, God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. Verse 8. "It came about when the sun came up. He gets up; the plant's now dead; all shriveled up; no shade." God sends a 'shiraco', scorching east wind across the desert, and the sun is beating down 120-degrees on his head, so he became faint.

And guess what his response is? He begged with all his life to die! Are we surprised? That's what he always wanted to do. And he says again, "Death is better than life; kill me." He tells the sailors to kill him. He tells God to kill him twice. Boy, talk about somebody who couldn't cope. I'd rather be dead. I'd rather be dead than be Your preacher. I'd rather be dead than see gentiles converted. I'd rather be dead than be hot.

And God said to Jonah, and here's the lesson, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" He's patient, isn't He? He said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." The Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you didn't work, which you didn't cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" That's a pretty powerful lesson.

What's the lesson? You care more about plants than you do people? You're happy when a plant grows, and not happy when a city repents? You have compassion for things of comfort and no compassion for the lost? Can't you have the heart of God, Jonah?

What do you see in this wonderful little story? How God took a broken vessel, disobedient, self-willed; called him to preach. He ran; God pursued through severe chastening; Jonah saw God;

repented of his sin; said, "I'll obey." God issued a second call; he went; God used him mightily. All of that's here.

But the major lesson here is this, how can a nation of people like Israel, and its preachers and prophets not have God's heart for the lost? That's the issue. We ask the same question of the Church. We are God's witness nation. And from among us God has ordained preachers and missionaries. And how can we not have God's compassion and care more about the lost than we do our own comfort, right, our own contentment? The things that benefit us; it's a simple message.

What a powerful ending. Not too many books in the Bible end with a question. It doesn't even need to have an answer written down. Shouldn't I have compassion on the lost when I have such compassion on so many other things that appear and gone? Where do my passion lie?

See, the problem with Jonah was a problem of passion. He didn't have passion for the right things; he didn't have the heart of God for the lost.

May God grant us His love for lost sinners. Father, we thank You this morning that this wonderful story has come to us through the pages of holy Scripture inspired by Your spirit. It isn't the story about a man being swallowed by a fish. It's a story about a man with a deep, deep problem of selfishness, who was fully and completely committed to his own comfort and his own will, and had no heart for the lost.

Here we sit in America, supposed to be influenced widely by Christians. Here we are the Church, the witness nation. We are concerned about our comfort, our shade, while there are Nineveh's right waiting with people who will respond to the message of judgment and repentance.

I pray that you'll find some who will have Your compassion and Your heart, who will go, knowing that there's plenty of evidence that You can do a mighty work through a single person. We pray Lord, that whatever there is of Jonah in us, You might purge that reluctance, that prejudice, that selfishness; that You might free our hearts from the bondage of the things around us, and liberate us to give ourselves a way to the Nineveh's of the world.

Work Your work in every life, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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