

JONAH -- A DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

Jonah 1

Intro: The Lord willing, I am going to spend at least four Sunday evenings on the short OT book of Jonah. For years it has been a book which has attracted the attention of those who are critical of the Bible. Many have been critical of the part which tells us that Jonah was swallowed by “a great fish.” The argument is that a whale could not swallow a man. But we must add to that the fact that if a whale did swallow a man, under normal circumstances no man could survive such an experience. The critics also call attention to the gourd and the worm in chapter 4, refusing to accept that part of the story.

But let me point out, first of all, that when we are talking about the book of Jonah, we are talking about a part of the Word of God. This book was not written under normal circumstances; it was written under the direction of the Spirit of God. Also we need to keep in mind that our Lord Jesus Christ confirmed the story and the book of Jonah, even making Jonah a type of Himself. So to argue against the reliability of the book of Jonah is to question the inspiration of the Word of God, and it questions the trustworthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a serious thing to attack the Scriptures, and the person who does so puts himself in danger of great judgment from God, if not in this life, surely in life after death.

Before I leave this part, let me point out to you how we are told about the “great fish,” “the gourd,” and the “worm.”

We read in 1:17 that “the Lord had **prepared** a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” In 4:6 we read that “the Lord God **prepared** a gourd.” And in 4:7 we read that “God **prepared** a worm.” And in 4:8 we are that “God **prepared** a vehement east wind.” Those who criticize the book of Jonah obviously do not believe in a sovereign God Who is capable of preparing special things to meet special needs. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and He did not exhaust His creative powers when He had finished making the heavens and the earth. So, in the case of the whale, or “great fish,” it is entirely possible that God made a special fish for this particular occasion. But whether he did it or not, that fish swallowed Jonah. It is not an allegory, but an historical fact. I agree with the person who said that she would believe the Bible if it had said that Jonah swallowed the whale. Let God be true and every man a liar who dares to stand against what we find in the Word of God. And let us beware lest in arguing over the whale we lose sight of God and of His servant, Jonah.

One sad thing about our generation is that people do not usually care enough about the Bible to raise some of the objections that were raised years ago. And our indifference to Scripture, our take-it-or-leave-it attitude, is not only ruining lives eternally, but it has caused terrible consequences in our generation--and those consequences are only going to get worse.

Let us approach this inspired book of the OT in simple faith, seeking to learn the lessons which the Holy Spirit has for us.

Our first point is:

I. THE WILL OF GOD FOR JONAH (Jonah 1:1, 2).

The Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh, and to cry against it. This meant that he was to point out their sin, which is never a pleasant job. But he was also to declare to them the remedy for their sin. "Their wickedness" had "come up before" the Lord. It is clear that the people of Nineveh did not care about the God of the Israelites. The fact that things had gone well for them up to that time encouraged them to believe that nothing would happen. Even with pagan people there is an attempt to hide the things which they know in their hearts are wrong. But every sin that was being committed in Nineveh was well-known in heaven.

The same is true of our Portland area today, and of our country. God knows every sin, those that are done openly, and those that are done in secret. But for wickedness to come before God is evidence that their cup is full, and God is prepared to move against them in judgment. Apparently things have not gotten to that point yet in our country, but with the troubles we are having we are dangerously close to a whole scale judgment from God.

But notice an amazing thing. God was sending Jonah to Nineveh, a Gentile city, not to tell them that there was no hope for them, but to proclaim the Gospel to them. This is grace! The longsuffering of God, the patience of God, the mercy of God, is amazing! No sinner has an excuse for his sin that will stand up before God. People know the difference between right and wrong. But they persist in their sins anyway. The book of Jonah is a book about the grace of God. No one in Nineveh was calling for a prophet to come to show them the way out of their troubles. They were not interested in that. But God had His purpose, but at this point Jonah did not know what it was. However, he was suspicious that God might be gracious to the people of Nineveh, and he did not want to

see that happen.

So what did he do?

II. JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE (Jonah 1:3).

We have to give credit to Jonah for one thing: He was a patriotic Jew. The Assyrians, of which Nineveh was the capital, were the major threat of that day to the people of Israel. Jonah did not want to do anything that would benefit them, and hold off the judgment of God. And so he refused to go. Instead, he went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid his fare, and left when the ship sailed.

Twice in this verse it is said that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. (Read.) We have it stated again in verse 10 of chapter 1. We can be sure that Jonah knew that he could not actually get away from God by going to Tarshish. What does that expression mean?

We are told in Gen. 3:8 that Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord by going into the trees of the Garden of Eden. We are also told in Gen. 4:16 that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord. Twice in the book of Job we are told that when Satan left the Lord he went out from the presence of the Lord. Cf. Job 1:12; 2:7.

It is an expression which means either departing from the Lord, or knowingly turning away from the will of God. The Lord is omnipresent, but we can lose the blessing of His presence when we fail to do His will. And it would seem that when we do that, we are oblivious to the consequences which we will have to face.

Jonah could have encouraged himself with the fact that when he got to Joppa there was a ship leaving for Tarshish. He had the money to pay his fare. And so, if he had been judging the will of God by his circumstances, he could have been comforted that things worked out so smoothly. That is why it is never a good idea to trust our circumstances alone. We can interpret them almost any way that we want to. Regardless of the circumstances which Jonah faced, he was rebelling against the will of God. Historians tell us that ships were going and coming from Tarshish constantly, and so it was no special thing that he happened to get to Joppa and found a ship going where he wanted to go. Nineveh was east; Tarshish was west, probably in southern Spain.

The remainder of the chapter is given over to:

III. THE LORD'S PURSUIT OF HIS SERVANT (Jonah 1:4-7).

In reading the book of Jonah you have probably noticed in addition to what God “prepared,” and to what is said about “the presence of the Lord,” that there are several times when the word “great” is used. Let me point out for you those that are in chapter 1:

- 1) Nineveh is called “a great city.” See v. 2.
- 2) In v. 4 the Lord sent out “a great wind.”
- 3) In v. 12 the storm was called a “great tempest.”
- 4) In v. 17 we read about the “great fish.”

The word suggests something that is bigger than usual. That was true of Nineveh. The fact that the storm terrified the sailors on the ship would seem to indicate that they had never been in a storm like this particular storm. As seamen they would have been well acquainted with storms, but they had never seen one like this! It had all of them calling upon their gods.

But look where Jonah was, and what he was doing. He was not a sailor, and so he would not have been acquainted with the sea. But he seems to have been the only one on board who was not afraid because of what was going on. But you and I can see that this was a false peace. Jonah had more reason to be afraid than anyone on board, but the disobedience of his heart made him insensitive to the fact that God was dealing with him.

A special lesson we should all notice is that our disobedience usually causes difficulties for others. It was the shipmaster who told him to wake up, and to call upon his God. The heathen never knew what god was giving them trouble, and so they called upon all of their gods in the hope of finding the one who was angry. This was illustrated in Acts 17 when Paul was in Athens and saw an altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” With all of their gods they felt that there might be one that they had left out, and so, without knowing who he might be, they constructed an altar to him. How pitiful is spiritual blindness!

But can't we say from this that Jonah's disobedience had affected his prayer life. If anyone should have been praying in those days, it should have been the man of God. But instead he was asleep, unconcerned about the trouble he had caused others, and the danger in which he had placed them.

In their desperation the mariners cast lots to find out who was the cause of their trouble. The lot fell on Jonah, and then they began to question

him. See verse 8.

Notice how empty and meaningless his testimony was to them. Read verse 9.

And then the men asked him, “Why...?” This is in verse 10. It would be very interesting to know if Jonah told them all of the truth.

But they were not through with their questions. In verse 11 they asked him a very normal and important question. (Read.) The storm evidently was increasing. If anyone should know the answer, it should have been the one who was responsible for the storm.

Look at Jonah’s answer. (Read v. 12.)

Does this not strike you as a strange answer coming from a man of God? It shows that although he knew he was to blame for the trouble they were having, he was not ready to make things right with the Lord. His heart was not repentant. What he should have done was to dismiss himself from them, get below deck where he had been asleep, and fall on his face before God confessing his sin, and telling the Lord that he would go to Nineveh if the Lord would only have mercy upon them. Jonah knew that God was a merciful God, and that is why he didn’t want to go to Nineveh. He felt that if he did, the people would repent, and God would forgive them, and not judge them. But there is no evidence that he would apply this wonderful truth to himself in his present circumstances. How tragic this is to see the response of Jonah. It is impossible for us to know what he thought might happen to him if the sailors did throw him overboard. Maybe he felt that he would rather die than go to Nineveh. But there certainly is no evidence that his heart was repentant toward the Lord.

Look at what the sailors did.

First, they did everything possible to bring the ship to land. See v. 13. “But they could not.” They showed more concern for Jonah than Jonah had shown for himself or for them.

Second, they prayed. And they did not pray to their gods; they prayed to Jonah’s God. Jonah wasn’t praying, but they were. Their prayer reflected the fact that they were being taught a lot of good theology on the spot. Verse 14 is truly a wonderful verse, and we will see in a moment that it is more wonderful than it first appeared. God was at work on that ship doing some wonderful things--but not yet in Jonah’s heart.

Verse 15 tells us that when they had tried to get the ship to land, and that was not possible. And when they prayed for God to have mercy upon them, the only thing left to do was to throw Jonah into the sea--which they did! And verse tells us that immediately “the sea ceased from her raging” (v. 15).

But then a remarkable thing happened. You can see it in verse 16. The Holy Spirit tells us that the men on board “feared the Lord.” Jonah had told them in verse 9 that he feared the Lord, but he did not act like it. The men on board acted like it. Not only did they fear the Lord, but they feared Him “exceedingly.” They gave outstanding evidence that they were trusting the Lord. And right there on board ship they offered sacrifices to the Lord, and made vows to Him--the very thing that Jonah should have done.

Note how remarkable this is. Here was a disobedient prophet, fleeing from the Lord in rebellion against the Lord’s will, disgracing himself before the men he was traveling with, and yet the Lord used His servant in this time of his disobedience to be the very time in which that whole shipload of men were saved! Does that justify what Jonah was doing, or make it a little better than it had been? Absolutely not! It shows that God is greater than our sin, and that He can use us even when we are in rebellion as instruments for His glory.

When the Lord told Moses to speak to the rock, he struck it, struck it twice! What happened? Did he get water? Yes. Did that prove that it was all right for him to strike the rock when God told him to speak to it? No! What it does prove is that God is faithful even when we fail.

That was true in the case of Jonah. Should it encourage disobedience? Certainly not! It should make us even more determined to do His will to please Him so that we might even see greater blessing.

One more thing before I close. Look at verse 17.

If the Lord had not done this, Jonah would have died in the sea. God was preserving his life. Don’t let the discussion about the fish cause you to lose sight of God in this whole experience. God is merciful and gracious beyond anything that we can possibly imagine. Jonah deserved to die, but (and here we come to another wonderful lesson from this chapter) God still had a job for Jonah to do. He was going to see to it that Jonah went to Nineveh to preach the Gospel to the heathen people in that city. It is a marvelous story in itself of the grace of God.

Conc: There are many times in Scripture when God would have been perfectly righteous in turning away from one of his servants to use someone else. Think of Moses killing the Egyptian. Or think of David committing sin with Bathsheba, and then ordering the death of her husband. Or think of Peter denying that he even knew the Lord. And then add Jonah to the list. Perhaps we feel that our names should be added to the list. Oh, if the book of Jonah doesn't teach us anything else it teaches us how gracious God is, how merciful, how mighty. And it ought to give us hope to believe even in our day that, although we disobey Him, or do not trust Him as we should, yet the Lord's purposes are going to be fulfilled, and His work in us is going to be completed. Jonah didn't realize it but he boarded a ship that was loaded not only with much cargo, but with a crowd of men who were the elect of God.

JONAH'S PRAYER

Jonah 2

Intro: Matthew Henry has this interesting remark about Jonah in this second chapter of his prophecy:

We left Jonah in the belly of the fish, and had reason to think we should hear no more of him, that if he were not destroyed by the waters of the sea he would be consumed in the bowels of that leviathan... But God brings his people through fire, and through water (Psa. lxxvi. 12); and by his power, behold, Jonah the prophet is yet alive, and is heard of again. In this chapter God hears from him, for we find him praying... (IV, 1286).

It is not always correct to argue from the absence of anything in Scripture, but it does seem that Jonah is found doing something in chapter 2 that he did not do in chapter 1 -- and that "something" is praying. We have no record even that he tried to argue with the LORD when the LORD told him to go to Nineveh, "and cry against it." He did not even tell the LORD that he would not go. He just made plans to go to Tarshish instead. Even when the heathen mariners were all calling on their gods to deliver them from the storm, Jonah was asleep. He was asleep when he should have been praying. It is very similar to the disciples when the LORD took them with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane. And it probably has been true of us that we sleep when we ought to be praying.

But God has ways of bringing us to our knees. He can easily order our circumstances so that this most vital of all activities, especially for a prophet, is resumed. Even the thought that he would be thrown overboard at his own suggestion did not cause him to pray. We are not told what Jonah was thinking at this time, but it was not until he got into the fish's belly that the LORD heard from him. He heard from the LORD in chapter 1, but it was not until chapter 2 that the LORD heard from him. Notice that chapter 2 begins, "**Then** Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." And in verse 2 he attributes his "affliction" as the reason he was again crying to the LORD.

Everyone knows that the people of God should pray, that this is even one of the distinguishing marks of a child of God. This was how Ananias was to identify Saul of Tarsus. The LORD said, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Saul was not just saying prayers, but for the first time in his life he was really praying. The same is true of Jonah here. He was desperate. He knew that he was in the hands of the LORD, and he was pleading with the LORD for deliverance.

Let us follow through his prayer and learn what we can about God's dealing with Jonah at this time.

The first thing that we see in verse 2 is that:

I. WHEN JONAH PRAYED, GOD HEARD (Jonah 2:2).

This is real grace! We don't know how Jonah was assured of this, but he was. It is very likely that he knew that the LORD had heard him because he was alive in the belly of the great fish. To use Jonah's own language, he had been saved from "the belly of hell," or sheol, when the fish God had prepared swallowed him. He cried, and God heard. God heard Jonah's voice even though it would have been impossible for him to speak audibly while he was in the water. You see, God had prepared the great fish, not to destroy Jonah, but to save him! Much of what Jonah was talking about here in chapter 2 took place before the fish swallowed him. We don't have Jonah's prayer while he was in the water, but we do have his prayer after he was swallowed by the fish. This is what we are reading in Jonah 2.

The second thing we see is this:

II. JONAH KNEW THAT GOD WAS DEALING WITH HIM (Jonah 2:3-6).

Notice how it is expressed here. In chapter 1:15 we read that the mariners took Jonah and threw him into the sea, but here in 2:3 he said that the LORD did it. (Read.) And in addition He said that after he got into the water, "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me." Jonah recognized that it was God's billows and God's waves that he was faced with. We don't know if Jonah knew how to swim, but it seems from the words of this verse that when Jonah was thrown into the sea, he sank, and did not come up once! The sailors would have assumed that he had drowned.

But then Jonah feared the consequences of the very thing that we are told in chapter 1 that he was doing. He even told the mariners that he was fleeing from the LORD's presence. But in the sea he realized that this was what he did not want! But in his desperation he knew that it was better to pray than not to pray, casting himself upon the mercy of God. See v. 4.

Verses 5 and 6a tell us the terrifying experience he had as he went down

to the bottom of the sea. Humanly speaking there was no hope for him if the LORD did not hear his prayer. And yet God is a God of mercy. He heard Jonah's prayer, and this is what Jonah said in response: "Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God." This is what he said after he was swallowed by the great fish.

And so he could say what he did in verse 7. (Read.) When he knew that the Lord was his only hope, he prayed, and the Lord saved him. So he knew that the LORD had heard his prayer, even going from the depths of the sea into His very presence in the temple, and the fish swallowed him, thus sparing his life.

It was a miracle for Jonah to be swallowed by a whale, but it was also a miracle that he was not consumed in the fish's belly. But the stomach of the whale turned out to be Jonah's prayer room -- the only such prayer room mentioned in the Bible.

Now it is wonderful to see what the Lord did for Jonah, but it ought to come as a warning to each of us, in several ways.

First, we need to stop and think how great God is. He is all-mighty, omnipotent. No one has ever been able to stand against Him. Nations are as nothing in His sight, and so it is impossible to express how insignificant a single man is, even though he is a prophet. To do what Jonah was seeking to do shows us how much Jonah needed to understand about the power of God.

Second, it must follow that the most serious thing that we can do is to disobey the LORD. The LORD is very patient with us (and He had been patient with Jonah), but if we persist in our disobedience, there can be serious consequences. The OT expression which Jonah himself used in 1:9 which is the equivalent of know the Lord and trusting the Lord and serving the Lord, is to be seen when he said to the mariners aboard ship, "I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). It was quite different from what Paul said to the mariners on the ship in the storm. He told them what the Lord had said to him about all of them being saved, and he followed his remarks with this grand statement:

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (Acts 27:25).

Jonah said he feared the LORD, but he didn't fear the LORD enough. His life contradicted his words. If he had truly feared the Lord, he would have been on his way to Nineveh, not Tarshish!

The LORD has ways of dealing with our disobedient hearts. We may be able to conceal our rebellion (even though we don't like to call it that), and he can order our circumstances, as he did Jonah's, to bring us back to Himself, and to make us willing to do His will. Sometimes when we quote Phil. 2:13 we need to remember what God has sometimes had to do to bring His people back to Himself. The Babylonian captivity is perhaps the greatest example of this in Scripture, although we see God at work many times in Scripture doing this very thing.

I doubt if anyone looking at Jonah could have known the struggle that was going on in his heart concerning the will of God for him. There is no evidence that it was common knowledge that he was to go to Nineveh. This was a big thing, but sometimes our problems are very little things. It is the little foxes that so often spoil the vine. We know when we are not doing what the LORD wants us to do. We have our excuses for not being as obedient to the LORD as we should. Perhaps we are pleasing Him in most areas of our lives, but there are just one or two or three areas where we know we are not being obedient. Perhaps we feel that we are not being rebellious against the Lord. But our relationship with some person is not right. It might be someone in our own homes. The Holy Spirit deals with us, and we need to be listening to Him. Let us learn from Jonah's experience that there never is any real excuse for our disobedience against the Lord. Maybe we have some habits that are keeping us from God's greatest blessing. It may be in the way we are using our time. Whatever it might be, we need to get things straightened out with the LORD now, tonight, even before we leave this place where we have come to meet with the LORD.

But let me go on with our text. We see in verse 8,

III. JONAH'S ADVICE TO EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY THE PEOPLE OF GOD (Jonah 2:8).

To observe lying vanities is the opposite of trusting in the Lord, and obeying the Lord. A lying vanity is a false idea about life. It was a lying vanity for Jonah to think that he could run away from the Lord. It was a lying vanity for him to feel that the LORD would overlook his disobedience. Just because the LORD doesn't deal with us immediately, we think that He doesn't care what we do, or that He is not paying attention to what we do. This is a lying vanity. Anything that encourages us not to obey the LORD is a lying vanity. It is sin, and it will bring us into difficulty if we persist in doing anything that is displeasing to the LORD. Jonah knew this before, but here we have the voice of experience. Jonah

is counseling us from the whale's belly, and the wisest thing that we can do at this point is to listen, and to listen carefully. Jonah would have us know that the safest place to be, and the happiest place to be, and the place to be if we want to be a blessing to others, is right in the very center of the will of God. Let none of us miss what the prophet Jonah was saying here. It ought to mean a great deal to us that this disobedient prophet encourages us not to forsake the LORD and His mercy, but to keep walking in fellowship with Him. A person who has been out of the will of God always counsels others not to do what he has done.

But we have one more point.

IV. JONAH'S REPENTANCE (Jonah 2:9).

Jonah had made some promises to the LORD. They are called vows. A vow is a promise, and there is certainly nothing wrong with making a promise to God providing that promise is made in utter dependence upon God Who alone can enable us to keep promises that have to do with our obedience and our holiness of life.

Some feel that Jonah vowed what Jacob vowed, to give a tenth of what he had to the LORD. Cf. Gen. 28:22. To think that is, I believe, to have learned little or nothing from this book. Jonah vowed that he would go to Nineveh or anywhere else to do what the LORD wanted him to do. He vowed to make things right in his life which had been so displeasing to God.

And surrounding this vow, this promise, were two wonderful statements. The first that Jonah would offer to the LORD the only sacrifice that he could offer where he was, the sacrifice of praise -- which, after all, is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all sacrifices.

The other word was this: He declared that salvation is of the LORD. He certainly meant that when we get away from the LORD in any part of our lives, the only way to get out is to look to Him. We get ourselves into trouble, but the LORD is always the One Who gets us out.

Perhaps he had in mind also that if the people of Nineveh were to be saved, it had to come from the LORD God of Israel. It is as Peter declared in Acts 4:12. (Quote.)

Anyway, what we see here is Jonah's wholehearted return to the LORD. In chapter 1 he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD; in chapter 2

he was going back. In chapter 1 Jonah heard from the LORD; in chapter 2 the LORD was hearing from Jonah.

Conc: Let me close by referring to one NT passage. You will find it in Rom. 15:4:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Paul was referring to the OT when he spoke of the “things” which “were written aforetime.” He was probably thinking of what the OT has to say about salvation. The book of Jonah is included in that. What is it that the LORD wants us to learn from this book, and especially from chapter 2? He wants us to learn how important it is for us to obey God, not just in the major decisions of our lives, but in every detail. And He wants us to know that He knows when we are disobedient even in what we might consider to be small matters, and that He will do what is necessary to bring us back into fellowship with Himself.

May God give us eyes to see this, and ears to hear this, and hearts that will be responsive to the Word of God and to God’s providential dealings with us in our lives. There is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust Him and to obey Him.

JONAH, THE PREACHER

Jonah 3

Intro: The third chapter of Jonah gives us the record of one of the greatest spiritual awakenings of all time--surely the greatest in the OT. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a great heathen nation--at the time of Israel's captivity it was the greatest in the world. It seems that it was because Assyria was a threat to the security of Israel that Jonah originally refused to go to preach the Gospel to them. He, being a loyal Israelite, did not want God to bless the Assyrians. So, as we have seen, he refused, and headed off for Tarshish instead.

God, however, being much greater than His servant, pursued His prophet, brought a storm on the ship, had Jonah cast overboard, preserved him from drowning by have a great fish swallow him, and then, after Jonah repented, we find him cast out of the fish's mouth and landing safely and in good health "upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10). This is where chapter 3 picks up the story.

The third chapter is easy to outline, and the story is very wonderful:

- 1) The Lord's word for Jonah (vv. 1, 2).
- 2) Jonah's word for Nineveh (vv. 3, 4).
- 3) The king's word for His people (vv. 5-9).
- 4) The mercy of God upon Nineveh (v. 10).

I. THE LORD'S WORD FOR JONAH (Jonah 3:1, 2).

How gracious it was of the Lord to send His Word to Jonah a second time. Obviously the Lord wanted Jonah, and no one else to go to Nineveh. God's purposes are unchanging even to the instruments He sees fit to use. But this is a different Jonah from the Jonah of chapter 1-- not different men, but a prophet who had learned that he could not flee from the presence of the Lord. He knew also that God would do anything necessary to humble His servant into obedience. The Lord's work in Jonah was not complete yet (as we will learn from chapter 4), but he was better than before.

Again the Lord told him to get up, go to Nineveh, "and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." God was calling the same man to go to the same place to preach the same message as before. The Lord did not give Jonah the option of deciding what he thought about the city, nor about the message that should be preached in the city. Jonah had vowed in the fish's belly that he would go where the Lord wanted him to go, and do

what the Lord wanted him to do--and so the Lord gave Jonah his direction.

— Jonah would fall into the same category with Moses and Peter who sinned against the Lord in different ways, but who were not bypassed by the Lord, but restored and put back into service. In none of these three instances did the Lord find a substitute. This ought to encourage us when it seems that our unfaithfulness has rendered us useless in the work of the Lord.

II. JONAH'S WORD FOR NINEVEH (Jonah 3:3, 4).

Jonah did just what the Lord told him to do: He went to Nineveh. And he preached the message which the Lord sent him to proclaim: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

— The figures in verses 3 and 4 have been explained in various ways. Probably the most reasonable interpretation was that it would take three full days to see the city, and that it was "a day's journey" from the entrance to the heart of the city. Matthew Henry said that the wall around the city was 100 feet high, and wide enough for three chariots to go side by side on the wall. There were 1500 towers on the wall, each of them 200 feet high. Some feel that Nineveh was a complex of cities, much like New York City, with hundreds of thousands of people.

But just think of the position that Jonah would have been in. Nineveh was the greatest city of its day, with a military power that all of the nations around feared, and a lonely, despised Jew is called of God to enter that city and declare to them that within forty days the city would be destroyed! If that happened in Portland, or Washington, D. C., or any of the other large cities of the U. S., we would probably consider him a nut, and ignore him. What if such a thing were to happen in Moscow? Such preaching would not be tolerated. But this was different. God's time for Nineveh had run out, and they were face to face with imminent judgment from God. If we want to add to the list the things that are possible with God, here is one that really ought to head the list.

Next we have:

III. THE KING'S WORD FOR HIS PEOPLE (Jonah 3:5-9).

— In verse 3 we are told what the people did, but verses 6-9 tell us why they did it. It was none other than the king of Nineveh who called his nation

to repentance in the hope, as he said in verse 9, that God would have mercy upon them so they would not perish as a nation. It is clear that he believed Jonah, and with all of their military and political might, yet feared that such a judgment would fall upon his nation.

I imagine that many of you are like I am when it comes to such large movements toward the Lord. We live in a day when evangelists use special methods to get people to prepare for a revival, and to get people to respond to the message. But we have seen so many instances when evangelists come and go, and in a matter of days, or possibly hours, a city returns to normal, and things are as God-less as they were before. So we might be a little skeptical about a situation like we read about in this chapter. Undoubtedly not everyone felt the same degree of repentance, but we have the Lord's Word to guarantee that a mighty work was done as a result of the preaching of Jonah.

Let me ask you to turn to Matt. 12. I want us to see what the Lord said to a group of scribes and Pharisees. The verses are 38-41:

38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:
40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Here the Lord confirmed the story given to us in the prophecy of Jonah that Jonah actually lived for three days and three nights in the whale's belly, and He declared that to be a type of His own death and resurrection. But notice what He said about Nineveh in verse 41. He said that the men of Nineveh did repent "at the preaching of Jonah"--a result which not even our Lord was privileged to see in His day.

So we must take that repentance at genuine. God brought his insignificant servant into what was really an enemy city, moved upon the heart of the king to accept the message Jonah was proclaiming, and then he called the people of Nineveh to drop their normal and necessary duties, and do everything possible to show that they believed the preaching of Jonah.

Talk about a miracle--this was a miracle of the greatest proportion. And remember also that Jonah never doubted but that this would happen. He understood the mercy of the Lord even before his experience in the sea and the whale. This is credit that we fail to give to Jonah. Jonah never doubted but that if the Word were preached in Nineveh, the people would repent because God would grant them repentance, and the city would be spared.

But I think that we have to realize that the report of Jonah's preaching which we have here is greatly abbreviated. Jonah not only preached judgment, but he preached the way of deliverance from judgment. Jonah preached the Gospel. He told them how they could get rid of the penalty they were under because of the sins. He preached, as we learned in chapter 2 that "salvation is of the Lord." And so we have a Jew preaching the Gospel to Gentiles, and the whole city turned to the Lord. What a wonderful day that was in the history of God's dealings with the nations of the earth.

So Jonah's message was twofold:

- 1) That judgment was imminent.
- 2) That the only way to escape that judgment and eternal judgment was for the people to turn to the Lord.

And his authority for preaching everything that he preached was that he had come to give the people of Nineveh the Word of the Lord.

God does not usually work like He did in Nineveh, but this account is given to us to show that He can if such is His will. We can't put limits on the power of God. This ought to encourage us to speak to people about the Lord, and it ought to encourage us to pray for people who are so far away that we can't really sit down and speak to them. Or we might pray for people with whom we know that we could never speak. There is no more powerful message than the Gospel of the grace of God. It is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. It is God Who moves upon people's hearts to repent, and it is God who grants people the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Jonah was right on another count. He was a pre-Calvinist Calvinist. In chapter 4 and even before, he knew that if the people of Nineveh repented and believed, it would be God's fault.

Nineveh was not only a very powerful city, but it was a very wicked city. It was a city filled with violence. We don't feel safe on our streets any longer; the people of Nineveh never felt safe on their streets. It was an idolatrous city. But the Lord pushed aside every obstacle that stood in

the way of the success of the Gospel, and we find the pagan king of Nineveh ordering his people to turn from the sins and turn to the God of Israel as though he were the prophet who had come to preach to them.

— What does our chapter tell us in conclusion?

IV. THE MERCY OF GOD UPON NINEVEH (Jonah 3:10).

It is very clear that God knew exactly what was going on in the hearts of the people of Nineveh. He knew that they were sincerely turning from “their evil way,” and that they were turning to Him. And so he “repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”!

Was this a case where God changed His mind? Is this what we are to understand about verse 10?

No, God did not change His mind. His mind has always been that people who sin will face judgment, but that those who repent will be delivered from judgment, and their sins will be forgiven. So we can say that He changed from what it looked like He was going to do, but that He was acting entirely in accord with all that He had done before. Their were always curses for disobedience, but blessings for obedience. The people repented, and God spared them.

— **Conc:** The story of Jonah should cause us to have a far greater understanding of the power of God as well as the mercy of God. It should enable us to see that even in OT times God was saving Gentiles, and that by His power He could bring the mightiest nation on earth to her knees in sincere repentance and faith. Jonah helps us to understand that God will fulfill His purposes, and that there is mercy for the greatest of sinners. We truly see here that nothing is impossible with God.

— It is one thing for us to know this; it is quite another thing for us to live in the full assurance of this. God works through His Word, and He obviously intended that this short OT prophecy about a rebellious and reluctant prophet would only help us to see what a truly great God we have. So let us not give up on anyone. While there is life, there is hope, hope that God in His mercy will still touch the hearts of the people you and I are praying for, bringing them to repentance, granting them faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we can look forward to enjoying the blessings of heaven with them for all eternity.

JONAH, THE ANGRY PROPHET**Jonah 4**

Intro: We come tonight to the final chapter of the prophecy of Jonah. I agree with Dr. Charles Feinberg that if this book were merely of human origin, it would have been much better to have stopped at the end of the third chapter. Jonah's mission had been completed. His ministry in Nineveh was highly successful. Starting with the king, and extending down to the lowest of the citizenry of Nineveh, there had been great repentance in the city. God had been glorified in the salvation of hundreds of thousands of Ninevites, and the people had turned from their sins which had brought the judgment of the Lord upon them.

If the book had closed at the end of chapter 3, we could have put it down thinking the best of Jonah. He had been very rebellious against the Lord. Instead of going to Nineveh as the Lord wanted him to, he paid his fare to get Tarshish which was in the opposite direction. But God judged His servant, cast him into the sea (according to Jonah's prayer in 2:3), saved his life by having a great fish swallow him, and then brought him to repent of his disobedience. The result was what we saw in chapter 3. It looked as though God had not only worked a great victory in Nineveh, but that He had also won a great victory in Jonah's heart. But, as the account continues, we learn that all was not well with Jonah. He was still rebellious against the Lord, possibly even more so than he had been in the beginning. We need to read the last verse of chapter 3 with the first verse of chapter 4 in order to see the reason for Jonah's anger. (Read.)

I. JONAH'S ANGER (Jonah 4:1).

Hugh Martin, in his commentary on Jonah in the Geneva Series published by Banner of Truth, said that one commendable thing we can say about Jonah in chapter 4 is that Jonah himself is the one who related how he felt. And he did not try to cover up his true feelings at all. "Displeased" may be a gracious translation of how he felt. He was greatly illustrated, even to the point of feeling that God had failed to do what he should have done. This was equal to charging God with sin. Some feel that Jonah felt that his reputation as a prophet was at stake because God had not judged the city. That may, or may not, be true. It would rather seem that we are seeing here what a deep hatred Jonah had for that great Gentile city and its people. At any rate, he was burning with anger. This is far beyond his feelings in chapter 1. In chapter 1 he felt that he could just go away and not be bothered with the people of Nineveh. But now he was there, and what he feared had taken place. The people repented, and God had

turned his judgment away from them. It is hard to describe the intensity of Jonah's anger. But here we see it exactly as it was.

II. JONAH'S PRAYER (Jonah 4:2, 3).

How different this is from the prayer in chapter 2. In chapter 2 he was both grateful and repentant. But here he is angry with God! And he brought his anger to the Lord, and poured it out before Him. And he did not hesitate to tell the Lord that what had happened in Nineveh was the very reason that he had not wanted to go there in the first place.

Note Jonah's theology in the latter part of verse 2. He was right on every point. God is exactly as Jonah's described Him here. But he did not stop to realize that it was just because God is the kind of a God Jonah described him to be that his own life had been spared by the fish which the Lord had prepared to swallow him. It is sad when our anger with the Lord causes us to lose sight of the many times He has shown His mercy to us when we deserved nothing but His judgment.

Anyway, Jonah's anger brought him to the place where he felt that there would be no peace for him unless the Lord took his life. Since God had shown mercy to Nineveh, death was looked better to Jonah than for him to continue on in life. How sad it is when our hearts are so full of hatred for others that we cannot rejoice when their lives are spared and changed, and God shows Himself strong in using His Word to bring about their repentance. And how thankful we can be that there are times when God does not answer our prayers, as was the case with Jonah.

III. GOD'S QUESTION (Jonah 4:4).

How interesting it is to see how little the Lord had to say in response to the attack which Jonah had made on Him. The Lord asked a brief, simple, but penetrating question: "Doest thou well to be angry?"

Here again we see evidence of the mercy of God. The anger of Jonah had exploded in rage at God Himself, but the Lord, Who is slow to anger, did not get angry in return. Jonah did not realize that though he was the Lord's spokesman on this occasion, there was much that he needed to learn, much that the Lord was seeking to teach him. We can see that anger blinds our minds to what God is doing, and it also blinds our minds to what we are doing.

It is so easy for our sin infected hearts to rise up against our holy God,

when, if we stop to think about what we are doing, we will realize that there is never any justification for us to be angry with God. “As for God,” David said, “his way is perfect” (Psa. 18:30). And he said this, according to the superscription on Psalm 18, when he could look back and see how God had delivered him from Saul and his many other enemies. We can be sure that David had his moments when he was at least confused with the ways of the Lord, as we all have, but he knew that he had no reason to be angry with the Lord.

In our times of disappointment and perhaps disillusionment, let us remember the Lord’s question to Jonah, and possible the Spirit of God will use the question to take away our anger, and to cause us to wait a little longer to see what the Lord is doing.

IV. JONAH’S BOOTH (Jonah 4:4).

It seems that Jonah did not give much attention to the Lord’s question. If he did, he seems to have misunderstood it. He may have thought that the Lord was saying that Jonah was impatient and if he would only wait, he would see God’s judgment upon the city. So he went out of the city, built himself a temporary shelter, and waited to see what God would do. It seems that here Jonah was taking comfort in the fact that God might yet destroy Nineveh.

It is probably true that we have all been where Jonah was at this moment -- not in a booth in a desert area, but waiting for God to do something to someone else, not realizing that God is dealing with us, not with somebody else! Jonah was so sure that he knew what the Lord ought to do that his mind was completely closed to what the real issue was. If a prophet can misinterpret what the Lord is doing, then it is possible for all of us to be at times in the same position.

V. THE LORD’S GOURD, WORM, AND WIND (Jonah 4:6-8).

It is interesting to see how the Lord uses common instruments to teach us lessons that we need to know. In 1:17 “the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” Here in 4:6 He “prepared a gourd.” In 4:7 He “prepared a worm.” Dr. Feinberg said that the singular, “worm,” can be used collectively for many worms. And then in 4:8 the Lord “prepared a vehement east wind.” It is the same verb in each case, and it suggests that the Lord did something special, making the fish, the gourd, the worm or worms, and the wind to be exactly what he wanted it to be to meet His purposes at that particular time.

The gourd was a vine which grew quickly. Jonah was very happy about this, and it probably encouraged him to continue thinking that God was going to do something to Nineveh after all.

— But then came the worm, or worms. I am inclined to think that what the Lord did here could have been accomplished by a single worm. But it destroyed the vine. This, according verse 9, made Jonah angry again. And then the east wind, a sirocco, came up, and that combined with the sun, caused Jonah to faint. And he came back to the same condition he had when he had prayed, asking the Lord to take his life.

Then it becomes clear to Jonah that the Lord was dealing with him.

VI. THE LORD'S MINISTRY TO JONAH (Jonah 4:9-11).

The anger which the Jonah had manifested over what had happened to the gourd was interpreted by the Lord as Jonah's mercy upon the gourd. And yet he had had nothing to do with the gourd. He did not plant it. He did not water it. He couldn't have made it grow. And it was there only for a night. The Lord wanted Jonah to tell Him if he, Jonah, had done the right thing in being angry, in showing pity, for the gourd, in view of the fact that Jonah had had nothing to do with it.

— Jonah responded that he did do the right thing, even if it cost him his life.

Then the Lord asked him the big questions. (Read v. 11.)

"Sixscore thousand persons" would number 120,000. Since he was speaking about those who could not "discern between their right hand and their left hand," it is generally taken to mean that the Lord was speaking about children possibly 3 and under. There may have been over a half a million people in Nineveh at this time. The Lord even mentioned the livestock. The question then for Jonah to answer was, was it not right then for the Lord to spare this city of human beings whom God had made in view of the fact that they had repented and turned to the Lord from their sins.

The answer is obvious. God did the right thing, completely consistent with His nature. It was Jonah who was blinded by his love for Israel and his hatred of the Gentiles.

— **Concl:** What was the outcome? Who knows? I think that we must assume in view of the fact that Jonah was telling the story, that

Jonah got the point, and that he himself turned in true repentance to the Lord. The conclusion to the book is intended to provoke thought in those who read it, and for each reader to ponder the Lord's questions, and to answer them for himself, or herself. It is to be hoped that this was a great turning point in Jonah's life.

But what other lessons do we learn from this story about the prophet Jonah? May I mention four?

First, we learn that God uses men to accomplish His purposes even though things may not be right in their lives. We are often told that blessing indicates that everything in the life of the Lord's servant is pleasing to Him. The story of Jonah indicates that that is not necessarily true.

Second, we learn that outwardly the Lord's people, especially the Lord's servants, can act as though their hearts are right with the Lord, when in fact they are not. Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 sounded like Jonah had really turned back to the Lord, and that his problem with Nineveh was settled. It was not. And the Lord knew that it was not. He brought blessing through Jonah because it was His will to have mercy upon the people of Nineveh.

Third, we learn from this story that the Lord does not give up on his people. He continues to work with us, showing us our needs and our sins, and then ordering our circumstances in such a way that we see what our problems are so that we can really get things right with the Lord.

Fourth, what a lesson all of this is in evangelism, especially the evangelism of children. That is clear from the last verse of the prophecy. It was our Lord Who had mercy on the children when the disciples wanted to turn them away. Who will ever forget our Lord's words in Luke 18:16b, 17?

16 Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

May the story of Jonah cause us to remember that while men look on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. Cf. 1 Sam. 16:7. Therefore it behooves all of us not to be satisfied just because we are able to act like things are right with the Lord. Let's make sure that they are.