

Jonah

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Calum Matheson

[0 : 00] We are going together to consider words in the chapter which we read. The Book of Jonah, Chapter 1, and we shall read verses 1 to 3.

Jonah, Chapter 1, at the beginning. And today we hope to begin our series of sermons on this Book of Jonah.

Now the word of the Lord, children, to Jonah, the son of Amittai, say, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before them.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tartish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Jobba, and he found that ship go to Tartish.

So he paid the fare thereof, and went down unto it, to go with them unto Tartish from the presence of the Lord.

[1 : 23] I suppose most people, if asked why we should study the Book of Jonah, would say, well, of course the Book of Jonah should be studied, because it contains valuable lessons for spiritual living.

And no doubt, that's true. But, this morning I'd like to suggest to you three basic reasons why it is important that Christians should study this Book of Jonah.

Jonah. And these reasons are quite apart from the great overriding reason that Jonah is part of the canon of Hollywood.

And I think the first reason for which we should study this Book of Jonah is that this Book of Jonah, ought to stand up to feel as we live our lives in a secular world, in a secular society.

One, surely it is a major power for men who have made God's healing and in holiness.

[2 : 55] It is the age in which we live. Secondly, I think it should be studied because here we have an account of new life being spread out to the Gentile world.

In fact, it's all that's been revealed in the Book of Jonah. You have a new place made in the future against you, because in that specific way, God is indeed in the prophets to bear the message of repentance and new life, to the Gentile world, to the world of the Gentiles.

And you know, it's not so long in Scotland since there was great opposition to any kind of move to bring the word of God to the heathen world.

At the end of the 18th century, there were great, great, great things in the general assembly of our national church, in which opposition was being expressed to the cause of God as a missionary enterprise with the gospel to the heathen world.

So in three short centuries, a mess of two centuries, we have had just such a male rapute among men in this nation.

[4 : 25] And therefore, we should study this great book because I think it's a sign to us of the world which the gospel is to be commemorated among all kinds of men and women.

And thirdly, and perhaps here in this thing we should study this book because of it, we have foreshadowed the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

We have in this book signs that have been given by Jesus himself with regard to his death and his resurrection, where in the fact that Joe will be with the belly of the great fish is, we're told by Jesus that this was a foreshadowing of the great fact that for three days, the Lord Jesus, the Lord himself would be in the birth of the great, the Lord Jesus, our Savior, till the lives of death and the grave would be opened and he would rise with glory to victory.

So now we have three reasons why we should really make a study of the book of Jonah. Jonah. But I want today to begin by saying a few words about Jonah himself.

Jonah is mentioned in Bible in three locations. He's mentioned in Kings, he's mentioned in this book that bears his own name, and he's mentioned by the Lord Jesus, where he tells the generation in

which he lived, that no sign would be given to them but the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[6 : 29] So there are these few, sparse references to this man of God, this prophet Jonah in the Bible. And each of these references is of our viewers in understanding something of the ministry of this great man.

And I think first of all we can say that the king's reference, it's in 2 Kings chapter 14. That reference shows us that Jonah had been used before this incident that we have here before us.

And I think we can get Jonah to the time of Jeroboam II. Remember last Sabbath morning that we mentioned this in Jeroboam II in relation to the prophet Hosea.

And it was still in the reign of Jeroboam II that Jonah was a prophet of God. And Jonah, the main thrust of Jonah's prophecy until this time, had been exercised in relation to the Northern Kingdom, to the Ten Tribes.

And he had been used among these ten tribes in report and in the work of Reformation. And that's a very word work for any prophet of the earth.

[8 : 08] He had been used in the work of Reformation in this field. So we can understand that this prophet would have a deep breath under his heart for the people of God in Israel.

He would have a deep breath for Israel. He was a genuine self. And obviously there was a great breath in his soul for his native land and for his native people.

Now, Jonah, as far as his family is concerned, was an obscure character really. We don't know anything of this man, Amittai.

We don't know a great deal about him. But we do know something about Jonah. And what we know about him is hidden in the name that is given in the Hebrew language.

This man Jonah is called the devil. That's what the word Jonah means. It means the devil. Do you remember that Kalamba, the great, great missionary of the Gospel who came with the Gospel to Scotland?

[9 : 17] His name was Kalimpeda. His name was Kalamba. And it meant the dead across the water. And it's wonderful, you know, that from all the rest of the times when men have been preaching the Gospel, they've been called to death.

And I wonder why God's children have been so uncalled to death. Well, you know that in the Old Testament, names are very often given to characters who bear the character with which they are given.

And you know that another picture of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, appeared at the baptism of Jesus as a dove from heaven.

And it's wonderful, you know, when the Gospel is spreading, how God takes men and He uses them and He blesses them in His day because they're dougs.

And the doves are anointed by the dougs, by the Holy Spirit of God. And surely I think we can say that this man Jonah was a man in the past, in the work of the Reformation that had been accomplished in Israel.

[10 : 40] He was a man who had the character of the dead. He had the Holy Spirit of His life in an tremendous way. And He ministered in the amending and in the unction and in the power of the Holy Ghost.

I'll then cherish that for you, minister. Cherish it for me that I might minister to you, not in word only, but in the power of the Holy Spirit with the blessing of the dove upon our ministry.

But I think Jonah was given the name of the devil for another reason. This man, you might say, was with all his mighty power as a minister of Christ.

He was basically a timid Christian. A timid Christian. This obscure man, the son of Amitai, he was a timid believer.

But we must go on and this book shows something of the thoughts of Jonah. Now we're going to deal this morning with three thoughts.

[11 : 51] We're going to deal with, first of all, Jonah's commission. We're going to deal, secondly, with Jonah's disobedience.

And thirdly, we're going to deal with the excuses that may have lain behind the disobedience of Jonah.

These three thoughts, that should take up our time this morning. And the first thing I notice about Jonah's commission is that this prophet was given a direct commission from God.

God dealt with him very directly. God dealt with him in the most direct manner possible. God dealt with him in the world.

The word of the Lord. Who's the word of the Lord? Well, it seems to me that in the Old Testament, when you see these words of the word of the Lord came, it's all just as though Jonah was given a revelation of the second person of the community.

[13:02] Because he's the word of the Lord. Because he's the word of the Lord. He's the voice of the Lord that walked in the garden with Adam in the cool of the day. It was a manifestation, it seems to me, of the Lord Jesus Christ who had come to Jonah.

Christ in heaven had a concern for the world in which Jonah lived. And he commissioned this man with a specific task.

He came to him, and he came to him, and he said to him, Arise, go to the enemy.

What a strange commission. But that's the strange commission. Nobody sent the gospel to the heathen in the days of Jonah. Nobody in Israel ever thought that the gospel was meant to go out to the heathen world.

You've got it all wrong. Surely, the vice from the year of Jonah must have said, It's wrong, it's not a word to go to the living. But you know, my friends, Jonah knew in a very specific way.

[14:14] He knew the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that God's wonderful mercy, his abundant mercy, was to pour the light to a heathen world.

You can't take that as your excuse, Jonah, that you thought it was so ridiculous. No, no. Strange as the commission was, it was the commission of Christ to go to the heathen world with the gospel of redeeming grace.

All for that gracious God we have. A God whose love, a Christ whose heart goes out even to Ninevites and all their heathen idolatry and their blindness.

And you know this, when God commissions men to go to heathens with the gospel, God is genuine in the offer and in the invitation of the gospel that he sends out to the heathen world.

God is genuine. Do you realize, my friend, how real and how genuine the free offer of the gospel of Christ really is to you?

[15:34] Do you realize, sinner? Because really, you know, if many of us are alive in the heat and blindness, so often is worthy. And so do you, if you're unaccompanied with all the Christ, there's a blindness in your heart.

Do you know this? God means what he says when he pleads with you in the reason of Christ. He means what he says when he calls you by his grace in the gospel, the invitation of the gospel.

It's genuine. It's real. And it's to you. And it's to you. You might think that, oh yes, God only invites certain people.

No, no. God invites sinners. That's the kind of people that God invites. Sinners who are lost and undone by their sin.

God invites them to cling to Christ and to come to Christ while there is still time.

[16:46] My dear friend, you won't see in this commission of Jordan the wonder that is lying in the heart of God, the love that is lying in the heart of God to a sinful world saying to us sinners, Come unto me, you all, ye that labor and that heavy lady and I will give you rest.

And it's an explicit commission. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it. Do you know why you've been told to cry against Nineveh, to tell it to repent?

Why you've been given such a severe message to the people of Nineveh? Why you've been told by God himself, by Christ himself, that you must go to these Nineveh?

Why have you been given this commission? Why you've been given this severe message? This severe message in order that through it God might work to the bringing in of sinners in Nineveh. There are times when people in our day and our day think that the evangelical and the Reformed world to which we belong have an awfully severe message.

[18:13] You know the message of the cross? It's the most severe message that I could ever proclaim. That God deemed it necessary to punish His Son, Jesus Christ.

I remember what Dwight Jones once said in our Friday night by his study. That he had been to preach in a city in the south of England.

And he met a man who was of the low or moderate persuasion in the Gospel. And he said to him, do you know what he said, Doctor?

What I can't understand about you evangelicals is that you're quite willing to have this butcher, short theology.

The theology of the cross of Christ. It's a severe message. But let me tell you, my friend, the message of the severity of God in its mercy is the only message through which sinners can be reconciled to God.

[19 : 27] And that's the glory behind this message that Jonah was given to the Ninevites. Go, speak against this great city. Go, voice out the sins of this city.

You know, sometimes the ministry of the Gospel includes that severe ringing of the bell to the people of the cities of Arlantum.

We've got to point out to the cities of Arlantum and to the towns and to the people of Arlantum. That God is displeased with sin.

God is displeased and God is angry. And God is not happy with the sins of men. And a step further, that God will punish man sin.

God will punish man sin. But now we're going to look at Jonah's disobedience. So much for his commission. Jonah's disobedience and the reasons behind it.

[20 : 35] First of all, you'll notice in verse 2 that Jonah rose up to flee and to Tarshish.

You know what Jonah was doing here? He was going in the exact opposite direction to the cry of God. Where was Tarshish? Well, it's thought generally that Tarshish was a province of Tyre which was situated in present day Spain.

In present day Spain. Eventually. He mentioned. You know what Jonah was saying? He was saying, I know it was half the way God wants me to be.

As it's possible to go. Because you know Tarshish and modern day Spain was on the horizons of the known world in Jonah's day.

It was as far as he could go to the west. And that's where this man was going to go. From the commission of Christ and from the presence of the Lord.

[21 : 53] And Jonah, you thought something really strange. There was to flee and to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah, how often did you hear Psalm 139 being sung in the rest of Israel? How often did you hear that Psalm being sung?

From thy spirit, where shall I go? Or from thy presence, fly? Ascend thy head and know what I have there. There is in hell my life.

And yet, Jonah, you're so foolish that you're wrong to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. You see, apart from his going out in the presence of the Lord.

And you know what what sin always does to men and women. It always takes men and women away from the presence of the Lord. But you know, I think I can see another level of interpretation here.

[22 : 57] You see, Jonah was cocooned in the safety of Israel, wasn't he? He knew that he had done work for God in Israel.

A work of reformation had taken place. And to Jonah, as a nationalistic Jew, Israel was the presence of the Lord.

Because you see, you listen, Jonah, the sunshine of God's smile rested on Israel. And it rests on the other nations of the world.

The other nations of the world, where I am with the presence of the Lord. Jonah, were you going to preach the gospel in Spain? No, I was running. That's what Jonah could say.

I was on the run. I think it was a single person who wrote a book about Jonah and he called it Prophet on the run. Look, man on the run. And I remember my words, I put them in Jonah, and he called it Prophet on the run.

[24 : 02] Prophet on the run. And that's what this man was. He wasn't going to proclaim the gospel in Tartus, in Spain, no more. He wasn't going to be a holiday in Spain, no more.

He was going to be a holiday in Spain, no more. He was on the run from the presence of Almighty God. Oh, my friend, can you not see how in hell the spirituality of this great man of God have done? When he ran in disobedience from God. But I'm going to suggest today one or two of the possible reasons that Jonah could have given for his disobedience.

Have you ever noticed whether a man disobeys God? Have you ever noticed for a person sins against God?

How impossible it is for us to make plausible excuses for our disobedience. And I think there are a few plausible excuses that Jonah could have made for his sin in this instance, as he freed from the presence of Almighty God.

[25 : 25] And I'm sure one of the first two of the priests, Lord, I'm sure you're not asking me to go to Nineveh. Nineveh, as you have said to yourself, Lord, is that great city.

Do you think that's what was wrong with Jonah? Was he afraid because of the magnitude of the task that God made? You know, I'm sure that's something that stands before every preacher of the Gospel when he's called into a new field.

I know when I was called to come to Inverness, one of the thoughts that I had and one of the things that used to overwhelm me as I walked around the sanctuary of the Manson Shoremost.

Lord, I used to say, how can I go to that big town? How can I go to that big town? And you know, that must have been one of the things that was behind Jonah's thinking.

That great town. It was two or three days journey into Nineveh. And the work was so great. And he saw himself so insignificant and so small.

[26 : 46] And I wonder if these facts may have made him disobey. I hardly think so, you know. Jonah had done great exploits for God before and done great things for God in the past.

I wonder. Somehow I don't think that it was the greatness and the task, Jonah, that made him run. Great as the task is and the task is always great for the preacher of the Gospel.

That's not what made him run. But then I wonder if it was because of the natural aversion that Jonah had to the Ninevites.

You know, they were evil people. They weren't that pleasant people to go and work amongst the Ninevites. They were more for their sinfulness, so there were these people of Nineveh.

They were evil people to choose. And you know, there are people that think like that. I can't go and work down in parts of Inverness because the people are so base.

[27 : 56] I can't go and work in areas of the country, so God, I can't go and evangelize certain areas because they'll bring the throne of the free church down if these people are converted.

I remember Professor John Murray talking about that kind of move in the hearts and in the minds of people. How people would refuse to go and evangelize in certain places in case the converts would bring the throne of the congregation down?

Do you think like that? Do you think like that? Do you think that the free church is really a middle class institution and you don't go and preach to certain areas of Inverness?

You don't go to certain individuals in case they bring the throne of a place down? My friend, does that not veil the real lack of spirituality in your own heart?

Do you know, my friend, that God can take these people and he can make them polished stones for himself from the very gutter?

[29 : 13] Does it mean that in the gospel of the 20th century to be like Jonah would mean you don't go to certain homes, you don't go to certain houses because these houses have been touched in a very specific way of sin?

You don't go and witness there. It's not the way you think. You know, sometimes there are people who say, I can't go to these people.

They're too base. And then there are others who say, I can't go to these people. They're too cultured to receive the gospel. It's not why Jonah wouldn't go to Nineveh.

They're too base or they're too cultured. I don't like these people. You know what that means? Your likes and your dislikes for the gospel of Christ will have to be crushed under the soles of your feet if you're going to mean anything for God in this world.

It's not because you like people that you go to them with the gospel. God goes to them with the gospel in all horror of their sin. God sent Christ to die on the cross for them, not because they were better or worse, but because He commends His love to us and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[30 : 45] Jonah, you can't make this your excuse. They're too base. They don't live on the culture that we have. We can't go to them with the gospel. That's no excuse.

But then I wonder did Jonah flinch from the task that God gave him because of the severity of the message with which God had commissioned him?

Do you ever feel that you cringe from going to your fellow men with the gospel because of the severity of the gospel message? Do you ever feel that you can't go and tell these cultive friends of

yours, you're going to hell because you don't have Christ?

Do you ever feel that you can't go to them with the gospel because of the severity of the message? That's another possible reason for Jonah's disobedience.

But you know the strange thing is that Jonah himself tells us why he disappeared. And it wasn't the greatness of the task.

[31 : 53] Nor was it the inhospitability of the people. No, it wasn't the scenario of the message. What was it?

What held you back, Jonah? Jonah chapter 4 and verse 2 tells us, I was afraid of the goodness of God.

I was afraid of God's goodness. I am the only one in my vision. What an excuse.

What an excuse. What an excuse to get from one world to Nineveh. It was all the glory and the character of the merciful God. I was afraid that after I had told them that in forty days, Nineveh was going to be destroyed.

That they would turn to God and they would repent. And I was afraid that the world would be looking on and saying, There is God's prophet, his kind move, one to the other.

[33 : 04] You know my friend, the reason that Jonah gave was the glory and the character of God. That's the reason he gave for not being to Nineveh.

And isn't it strange, my friend, that his vision of the glory and character of God was at peace, motivated by nothing, more and nothing less, than self-interest.

Jonah, why didn't he go to Nineveh? Why didn't he obey God? He disobeyed God because he refused to see that at peace you were most interested in your own self.

And isn't it true, my friend, that if anything holds Christians back from the work of evangelism to which God so often is calling us, it's really this base self-interest.

There I want to look at some of the possible excuses that Jonah would use to justify this crucial action. And I'm going to mention four.

[34 : 21] And the first thing he could say to justify is not going to Nineveh was this. I did it on impulse. I did it on impulse.

I refused to go on impulse. I was moved by an impulse. And how many there are who will try to veil their sin by their own impulsiveness.

I thought that was what was behind it all, just an impulse. I did it at the turn of a screw. I did it in a moment of time.

Jonah's attitude was it just your impulsiveness that caused you to look at the situation of Nineveh and to say what if God causes these people to repent?

What if they really turn? What if they really turn? Am I going to be left with egg in my face? Was it really impulse? Do you know this my friend?

[35 : 29] No. Sin always has in it the element of premeditation. Premeditation. And that was in the sin of Jonah despite any excuse that he might make that he did it on impulse.

You thought it out Jonah. of Jonah. You really are at fault here. It's your fault. You really are at fault.

Another thing Jonah could have used another excuse for his disobedience, and it was this. I followed that evil course of sin because it was the easiest thing to do. It was far easier for me to go and take a ship and go down to Tarshish to Spain. It's far easier. And isn't it amazing, you know, when you find a man with a bent of heart against the will of God, isn't it amazing, he'll always find it easier to disobey. Always find it easier to disobey.

And very often you know that's the kind of excuses we make for our sin. I find it easier to disobey.

And I want you to remember this. You'll often find in your life, if you're a Christian, that the easy course is not the course of disobedience. The easy course might seem to be the course of disobedience.

But the easier course is always to obey God and to do his will. However much it seems that it's easier to disobey. I did the easier thing.

You know, You know, sometimes it's far easier to flee from the presence of the Lord and from obedience to our God than it is to follow him in the course of obedience.

[37 : 58] The good course often seems to be difficult. But it's that course that's laid with blessings.

Laden with blessings. Whereas the seemingly easy course of disobedience is laden with difficulties and with the anathema of God. But a third excuse. Jonah would say, When I did it, when I did it, Providence was with me. I had all green lights, all signs that Providence was with me. It

seemed so much as though, you know, it sounds as if God was providing for me to disobey. Have you ever heard people talking about that? They say, I know that I have done this in God's plan, but look at the way God's Providence opened up for me.

As well as everyone that experienced the providence of God opening up for him. Because Jonah, there he was in Joppa. God had opened up for him anyway. And he goes down with the key and he's looking around. And he's looking for a boat to run away from God.

And Lord behold, the boat was naked. The boat was naked. There was a boat going to charge. He's going to stay. As far from where God wanted him to be as it was possible for him to be. And it was honest, as Lord Jonah could say, the Lord did provide. The Lord did provide.

[39 : 49] Have you ever heard people coming up for sin by quoting the providence of God. God's providence was so real and so gracious. And he went to the shipmaster and he said to that shipmaster and the captain of the boat, where do you know, John?

John? And his captain said, we're going to Spain. What's the fare? Said Jonah. And Jonah put his hand in his pocket. And out came the exact fare.

Look, look at how wonderful it is for me, says Jonah. And even of the fare to pay for my tip to Spain in my pocket.

What's this but the providence of God? My friend, are you so crass? Am I so crass? Are we so corrupt in our hearts? That there is within us the spirit that would say, God's providence was with me.

How can you call it sin when God's providence was with me? Do you know, my friend, what that is? Do you know what you do?

[41 : 13] When you're replacing the providence of God with, you're replacing the command of God with providence of God.

You're reaching the command of God with providence of God with providence of God with providence of God with providence of God.

You're reaching the point where you're making God the author of your sin. And you say, I'm evil because God's opened the way for me. Is God the author of your disobedience? Is God the author of my sin, my disobedience? No.

And it shows the corruption of the human heart when you're willing to make God the author of our sin by saying, after all, his providence led me so.

Finally, couldn't Jonah say there's nothing wrong in himself of going to Tartus? Nothing wrong in it of himself.

[42 : 21] And there are people that deal with God and sin just like this. There's nothing wrong with it in itself. What I did, there's nothing wrong with it in and of itself.

No, Jonah, there's nothing wrong with it in and of itself. It was all very good for these sailors to go to Spain. They were following the course of their duty. That's right.

But you're a man under order. Christian, remember this. You're a man under the command and under the command and unbending will of God. You're a man under order.

And you can't afford to disobey God. It might be alright for others. It might have been alright for you in other circumstances. But you're a man of God. You're a prophet of the Lord.

And therefore, you have to learn self-denial. And self-denial is always an element in obeying God.

[43 : 35] How can I be Christ's disciple? I can be Christ's disciple as I learn this great lesson that I must deny myself and I must take up my cross and I must follow Jesus.

Have you come into that school? The school of discipleship? That's the school in which Jonah failed.