

The God Who Has Mercy

A Sermon on Jonah

by

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1. Introduction

- a. Whether you are a Christian or not, I'm willing to make a bet that at some point in your life you've at least heard of the story of Jonah.
- b. This story isn't about a great fish, God's unrelenting pursuit of a rebellious prophet, or any of the secondary themes we tend to get focused on.
- c. The story of Jonah is ultimately designed to teach us something incredibly significant about the character of God: God loves to show mercy.

2. God's First Commission of Jonah (1:1-16)

- a. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim judgment for their evil, yet Jonah rebels (1:1-3).
 - i. Jonah is commanded to go to this great city called Nineveh and cry out against it, because their wickedness has come up before God.
 1. What this means for Nineveh is that the time of judgment is at hand. God is no longer overlooking their ignorance, but He will be dealing with them incredibly harshly.
 2. But instead of Jonah going, we see in the beginning of v. 3 that Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord to go to a place called Tarshish and the natural question we ask is why.
 - a. Jonah has one job and that job is to go where God sends him and proclaim the message God gives him, but he has this profound hatred of the Ninevites.
 - b. It's helpful for us to have a little bit of background information on what's going on here.

- a. Jonah fears the One True God who is supreme above all of creation.
 - b. There is nowhere they can run and hide to escape the wrath of this God.
 - 2. Jonah doesn't stop here; he tells them he fled from the presence of the Lord who commissioned the prophet to go to Nineveh.
- d. God stills the storm (1:11-16).
 - i. They ask Jonah what they have to do in order for the storm to stop and he tells them to dump him into the sea and the storm will stop.
 - 1. The sailors instead try to bring Jonah back to the shore.
 - 2. Despite their best, they recognize their efforts to get to shore are fruitless, and so they throw Jonah overboard and throw themselves at the mercy of God.
 - ii. Jonah gets cast into the sea – and miraculously, just as the storm started, it suddenly stops.
 - 1. One minute, the wind is howling, the waves are slamming up against the boat – and then it just stops.
 - 2. The Lord shows mercy to a group of men who didn't deserve it, and what gets produced is a fear of the Lord and worship.

3. God's Rescue of the Rebellious Prophet (1:17-2:10)

- a. God appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah remembers the Lord's salvation (1:17-2:9).
 - i. Then in a great act of mercy on Jonah – God sends forth a giant fish to literally come up out of nowhere and swallow the prophet whole.
 - 1. Some of you are already trying to rationalize it away or look at this and mythologize it.
 - 2. But let me just ask you: if a great, big fish is holding you up here – what's stopping you from rejecting the resurrection of Christ?

- ii. God appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah – and all of chapter two is about Jonah reflecting on being cast into the depths of the sea and swallowed by this huge fish.
 - 1. Jonah’s prayer here is incredibly dark – and you can’t really fault the guy because even though he’s done it to himself, he’s being dragged down to the bottom of the sea and he’s in the midst of an incredibly horrific situation.
 - 2. At the end of verse six we see Jonah’s mind shift because he finally – after all of this time, remembers the Lord and seeks Him in prayer.
- b. God commands the fish to vomit Jonah on dry land (2:10).
 - i. God preserved his life, He heard his prayer, and then the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah back up on dry land.
 - 1. Not only do we see the sovereign hand of God over the elements of creation, but of the very creatures in creation as well.
 - 2. The winds and the waves obeyed Him, and now this great fish obeys the Lord – yet Jonah did not, and yet God showed him mercy.
 - ii. This is where you see the incredible grace of God play out in a really difficult way for the prophet.
 - 1. Some of you find yourselves kicking against the goads of God.
 - 2. Let this be an example to you, not only in God’s faithfulness with the unfaithful, but in His discipline.

4. God’s Second Commission of Jonah (3:1-10)

- a. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim judgment for their evil and Jonah obeys (3:1-3).
 - i. In v. 1 you see Jonah just comes right back to square one:
 - 1. Chapter one: The word of Lord came to Jonah saying...
 - 2. Chapter three: and the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying...

- ii. Jonah obeys this time and goes to Nineveh, which is about a three-day walk from where the fish puked him up.
- b. Jonah preaches the message of God's judgment and the Ninevites respond in repentance (3:4-9).
 - i. Nineveh is a massive city and it takes a day's walk to get through the whole city.
 - 1. Jonah is walking from place to place with an incredibly simple message, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."
 - 2. That word "overthrown" here isn't referring to something light either, he literally means the whole city is going to be reduced to rubble.
 - ii. Here's where something incredible starts to happen. (vv. 5-9).
 - 1. The Ninevites hear the simple proclamation of God and they respond. They *believe*.
 - a. From the greatest to the least we find genuine repentance; they call a fast and put on sackcloth, which is an expression of incredible grief and remorse.
 - b. Every man, woman, and child feels the full weight of the proclamation they have heard from the mouth of the prophet.
 - 2. Then, something even more incredible happens; the news of God's judgment reaches the king and he doesn't dismiss it with a handwave.
 - a. He got up off his throne, and he humbled himself and put on a sackcloth and sat in ashes.
 - b. Not only this, he issues an official proclamation of the king: no man, beast, herd, or flock can eat or even drink water. Everyone and every animal must be covered in a sackcloth and mourn.
 - 3. Verse 9 is so important in this section because this king has no clue if God will hear their cries and relent from unleashing disaster upon them.

- a. The king only has a message of doom to work with – yet he commands everyone to turn from their wickedness and cry out to God
- b. He has absolutely no clue if what he commands the people to do will work.
- c. God responds to the Ninevites and relents of the disaster He was going to bring upon them (3:10).
 - i. God sees the people of Nineveh cast themselves before Him in genuine repentance – and the incredible thing, is that He shows them mercy.
 - ii. He does not destroy them as He initially said He would, all because God loves to show mercy.

5. God Will Have Mercy Upon Whom He Will Have Mercy (4:1-11)

- a. Jonah responds in anger to the Lord's mercy on the Ninevites (4:1-3).
 - i. Jonah saw that God had forgiven the Ninevites and he was supremely angry with God, and this is ultimately why he didn't want to go to Nineveh.
 - 1. Jonah knew that if the Ninevites repented before God, He would give them grace and blot out their sins.
 - 2. If you're a guy like Jonah you don't want to bring that kind of message with you, because all you want to see is people burn.
 - ii. Jonah sees the mercy of God and finds it to be too much – so much so that he tells the Lord that it is better for him to die.
 - 1. He says, "Just kill me now. I don't want to live in world where you're going to forgive people like the *Assyrians*."
 - 2. And God asks him, "Do you do well to be angry?" It's a rhetorical question; Jonah knows the answer, but notice, he doesn't say anything.
- b. God disciplines the unruly prophet (4:5-9).

- i. Jonah goes outside of the city and builds himself a shelter and just sits and watches.
 1. You can just imagine that as Jonah sits and stewes in his self-righteous anger that he's continuing to picture God is becoming more and more convinced to come over to Jonah's side.
 2. Next, we see God appoints a plant to grow up over Jonah. He believes God's favor has come upon him with this plant and now he can just kick back and see the devastation poured out upon Nineveh.
- ii. Then in v. 7 – God appoints a worm that comes the next day and attacks the plant; the plant withers and dies, and all of a sudden Jonah goes from good to bad really quick.
 1. God appoints a scorching wind to come upon Jonah and he's really in a bad situation.
 2. He's fatigued and probably close to death yet again, and he's just begging to die here because it really is that bad.
- c. God will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy (4:9-11).
 - i. God asks Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" and notice that this time, Jonah responds.
 1. Jonah responds, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."
 - a. You can just hear the bitterness in his voice can't you?
 - b. Jonah still hasn't learned his lesson even after all he's been through.
 2. I want you to notice though that throughout this whole book, Jonah is the only one who routinely wants to die.
 - a. The sailors and the Ninevites cast themselves at the mercy of God and are spared.
 - b. Neither of these people knew the One True God or if He would even care to spare them, but Jonah did and it infuriated him.

- ii. Here at the end then is where we find God's final word on the matter (Read vv. 10-11).
 - 1. Jonah's priorities are way out of line, and frankly, incredibly self-centered.
 - a. For everyone else – Jonah wants what's fair in his mind and he doesn't care what happens in order for that to happen.
 - b. Jonah wants mercy for Israel – Jonah even wants mercy for a plant, but he didn't care if 120,000 people were wiped out.
 - 2. Yet look at what God prioritizes: God prioritizes compassion.
 - a. From the greatest to the least, God cared for the people of Nineveh – despite how incredibly wicked they were.
 - b. These people didn't know their right hand from their left hand. They were ignorant and knew not what they did before the infinitely holy God.

6. Conclusion

- a. For the Christian, God has called you to proclaim the gospel to the lost.
 - i. Ultimately, if you're a Christian – this is you at some point in your life before coming to Christ.
 - 1. In His infinite kindness and grace, God gave you mercy when you deserved wrath.
 - 2. God sent someone to preach the news of judgment and salvation, and you believed, and now He has called you to go and do the same.
 - ii. I just want to ask the simple question: are you being faithful to share the gospel?
 - 1. It's easy for us to look at Jonah and condemn his actions all the while remaining blind to our own disobedience.
 - 2. I've said it before in a past sermon and I'll say it again: the greatest danger facing the American church is comfort.

- b. For the person here today who would say they are not a Christian, God has called you to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.
 - i. You need to understand today that although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times and people, He now commands all men everywhere to repent.
 - 1. The message is much the same in one sense, because if you refuse to repent and believe upon Christ, you will not only potentially suffer His wrath in this life, but you are guaranteed to suffer it in the life to come.
 - 2. Yet the message is much deeper and wider than Jonah's because we know the way of salvation lay in Jesus Christ and Him alone.
 - ii. If you would just come and throw yourself at His mercy, you would find that God loves to show mercy instead of wrath.
 - 1. So I'm going to deliver to you what is of first importance which I also received: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day, just like the Scriptures said He would.
 - 2. The Scriptures declare that if you turn to God in repentance and confess your sin, and you believe on Jesus Christ, the promise is that you will be forgiven and free from the wrath to come.

7. Closing Prayer

Small Group Questions

- 1. Take some time to reflect upon how God, in His mercy, saved you; maybe have one or two people in the group give a brief testimony (5-10 minutes max).
- 2. Name three people you haven't shared the gospel with that God has placed in your life?
- 3. What has prevented you from doing so, and what specific actions will you take over the next two weeks to change that?
- 4. How can we come together as a small group and help each other in this, beyond just prayer?