

Today we will finish the book of Jonah

- Last week we saw that Jonah was running from God, but in so doing he was running from his true potential, as I called it, his true self
 - Faced with his sin; on a boat; in danger of destruction
 - He stops running
 - In the belly of a fish, he submits to God, repents, and is saved
- This week we'll see that Jonah is obedient, but still not happy
 - He is still not able to see how the repentance of Nineveh could possibly be a good thing
 - We'll see that, with a fuller understanding, and a historical context, we can see how God is working
 - But Jonah, stuck in a very limited and restrictive world-view, lacks the ability to
 - To what? Trust, faith?
- It's not just trust or faith. And this is the big idea, I hope you leave with this morning, the thought that sticks and returns to you through the coming day's ups and downs
 - Trust God: Its something we hear so much that it almost loses meaning, have faith
 - I want you to hear it with fresh ears. . . so much so that I toyed with making up a word
 - It's Positivism, or looking through the world with rose colored glasses
 - But not naively.
 - Instead: seeing the world that way because you are so confident that God is doing something great,
 - that you become a fan-boy
 - So, I thought, God-colored glasses. . . meh
 - Optimist, but with God. . . deist. . . optideist, but that sounds like a mythological eye-doctor to the gods
 - So, deus. . . optimist. . . de-optimist
 - Not sure I like that one any more, but. . .
 - The idea I'm trying to convey with this new word, is not that your just trusting God
 - As a passive buffer to your life's choices
 - But that you're actively imagining the potential good God is working!
- Jonah doesn't have that
 - He's not, so much looking at the world and trying to figure out how God is working to make things better
 - He's looking at God and waiting for Him to make things go the way Jonah has already decided they should go
 - Instead of looking to God for the narrative
 - He's already written his own idea of the story and is judging God for going off script!
 - Having only read act I, Scenes 1 & 2. He's decided He doesn't like God's script
 - Imagine the hubris
 - We never do that
- So let's read the final verse of chapter 2 to 4:5. Let's see how this all unfolds.

Jonah 2:10-4:5

¹⁰ So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry *land*.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey *in extent*. ⁴ And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

¹⁰ Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Break. . . chapter 4

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. ² So he prayed to the Lord, and said, “Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!”

⁴ Then the Lord said, “*Is it* right for you to be angry?”

⁵ So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

PRAY

- ****MAP**** 1 Nineveh, where modern Mosul in Iraq
- Everything goes exactly as Jonah predicted; Nineveh repents
 - And in one of the most perplexing passages of scripture, Jonah extols God’s great attributes, but as though they are horrible
 - 4:2 “I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!”
 - Take that passage out of context and watch brows furrow in confusion!
 - What’s Jonah really saying here?
 - Nineveh doesn’t deserve his goodness

- The inherent implication? Israel does
 - Does he not know that God chose Israel out of His good pleasure? Not because Abraham was good?
- Jonah seems to see very little, or only what he wants to see
 - Do you know what is happening, Biblically, right now, in Israel?
 - Jeroboam II
 - That means we are more than a dozen kings into the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Remember after Solomon's son Rehoboam caused a split: Northern tribes (10) – Israel; Southern Tribes (2) – Juda
 - While the south had some good kings
 - North turned to idolatry immediately (Political reason)
 - Among god's they worshipped – Asher and Asherim
 - Nineveh is the capital city of Assyrian Empire. . . Assyrian means Country of asher
 - So, they worshipped the same gods
 - Jeroboam's dad had just plundered Juda's temple and destroyed part of the wall of Jerusalem
 - Jeroboam will rule for many years to come, in total rebellion against God
 - Jonah has been a prophet in Israel for years, he prophesied about Jeroboam II in 2 Kings 14, but Israel is not going to turn to God
 - And Jonah thinks Nineveh is not worthy?
 - Jonah's perspective
 - *** MAP *** He's from Gath Hopher, well into the Northern Territory
 - He's almost certainly seen Assyrian, (that's Nineveh) incursions
 - When I say that rape and flaying are among the kinder things the Assyrians were known for. . .
 - Their army's cruelty was what made them so feared and powerful
 - It certainly wasn't slapping each other with fish. . .
 - He's just been given a word from God that they will be destroyed
 - The very people who are destroying his nation
 - Are about to be wiped from the face of the earth
 - And God wants him to . . . give them a chance?
 - But here's another perspective
 - On the one hand: Nineveh, a gentile city, known for its atrocities, but really, a gentile city like any other, who just happens to neighbor Israel and therefore clashes with them more frequently
 - On the other: Israel, chosen of God, saved out of Egypt, rejected Him
 - On the one hand: A gentile city who hears the word of the Lord and repents in sackcloth and ashes, immediately
 - On the other, God's chosen people who have been entrusted with the Oracles of God and have been given multiple chances to repent, multiple examples of

God's goodness and blessing when they repent, and yet they still drift further away.

- And then, here's yet another perspective; there's God's perspective
 - Turn with me, it's too big to put up on screen
 - 2 Kings 17 :7-12

⁷ For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, ⁸ and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. ⁹ Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that *were* not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. ¹⁰ They set up for themselves *sacred* pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. ¹¹ There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, ¹² for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."
 - What Does Isaiah say about Nineveh? What is God doing with Nineveh?

** SLIDE ** Isaiah 10:5-6

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is my indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
- By seeing the world through his own myopic lens, by not imagining how God could be working in a day-optimistic way, Jonah not only misses out on the potential good's we'll see here in just a moment (with the benefit of being able to look back over 25 hundred years of history). . . not only does he miss out on the opportunity to imagine the God Potential of the future. . . He misses the real truth of his present situation
 - Nineveh is not worthy of God's love and mercy?
 - Neither is Israel!
 - Who is?! Those who submit, repent and ask for it, that's who
- And God is trying to show Jonah. . .
 - We'll come back to Jonah in a second
- We have the whole picture
 - Jonah is a book that is designed to help us develop the very thing that Jonah is so clearly missing, this thing I'm calling a day-optimist view or reality
 - So, I want to give you three cases that, if Jonah had imagined them, or had been aware of them, would have resulted in him jumping up and down on the side of the hill, watching Nineveh repent, excited about what God was doing

Case number one

- Because of Jonah, Nineveh does repent
 - Because they are not destroyed,
- *** Slide *** TIMELINE

- In about 20-50 years they capture the northern kingdoms of Israel
- *** SLIDE*** zoomed in timeline
- But, also, during this time there is a (secular historians mystery) sudden interest in knowledge, science, and art
- A golden age seems to have happened around this time In Nineveh
- A young Ashurbanipal, who would not be king because his older two brothers are first in line of succession, studies science and art and literature
 - But is suddenly promoted to king when his brother is killed and his father passes over the 2nd oldest
- So what is Ashurbanipal known for?
 - The great library of Nineveh
 - Cuneiform tablets that lasted remarkably well
 - Found in 1852 and currently residing in the British Museum
 - 30,000 plus tablets, a wealth of information for us
 - But ok. . . big deal
- In the next 100-150 years they will be destroyed by the Medo-Babylonian Empire (who will then be conquered by Persian, who will then be conquered by Alexander the great all that in a span of about 350 years)
- So, long after Nineveh's destruction, Alexander the Great passed through
 - Amidst the ruins of the library, Alexander was so impressed he made plans to build a library as great, or greater
 - Didn't happen in his life . . .
 - Split the kingdom in 4
 - Ptolemy II, one of his generals, carried out the desire
- And, according to secular history and tradition, that is the birth of the Library of Alexandria
 - Where every piece of text that entered the city was copied and translated into the most popular language at the time. . . Koine Greek
 - Where scholars traveled from all over the world
 - It is Most likely here that the Hebrew Old testament was translated into the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old testament that Jesus quotes from in the Gospels
 - And we're not done
 - Because as the library fell into disuse over the next 400 years (no, it was not completely destroyed in a fire by Julius Caesar's careless soldiers in 46bc. . . it was only partly burnt)
 - As it fell into disuse many copies of new testament books were sent from Alexandria to safer, more prosperous churches in the eastern, and to a lesser degree, Western Roman Empire
 - You've often heard that we get our modern Bible from two major textual streams, The textus Receptus and the Alexandrian
 - That's because some of those early versions of the New Testament came from Alexandria

- So, is that all true? Did God use the preservation of Nineveh to set up the dispersion and preservation of his Holy Word for Millinia to come?!
 - Well, I didn't make it up
 - I actually don't think it's important that I prove or disprove . . .
 - It's how you should view the world – it's the fanboy perspective
- Case 2
 - Jonah was asked to go to a city of gentiles; evil pagans who worshipped false gods.
 - Jews didn't go on mission trips
 - Israel was set up at the cross-roads of civilization so that the empires came to Israel
 - But Jonah was told to go to a gentile people and preach repentance
 - And after three days in a fish, he did
 - Those people repented and God spared them!
 - Just So, Jesus, after the "sign of Jonah" after being buried three days, rose from the dead and commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
 - God used Jonah to foretell, not only the Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection, but also, that God was going to do something wonderful with the church. He was going to break out of the confines of Israel, he was going to send his message of repentance to the darkest corners of the world
 - And, no matter how dark, the darkest of the dark, if they turned and repented God would forgive and bring them into his fold
- IF Jonah knew that. . . do you think he would have been of a different mind-set?
 - This odd trip to my enemy is a foreshadow of the coming Messiah?
 - That I go to my enemy and preach repentance to God may echo later in the future
 - That some-day people will read, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"?
 - I believe that if Jonah could have seen God's full plan laid out in front of him
 - Not just then
 - But the 25 hundred years since then
 - If God had revealed it all to Jonah
 - I believe he'd be dancing on that hill, fist pumping the air
- But that's not how God works
 - It's not faith if we see it all
 - Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen
 - We have to be the vision, we have to be the day-optimists
- And God, in Jonah is a God of 2nd chances
 - We read in 3:1, the word came again to Jonah
 - Jonah was a prophet, he knew he was going against God
 - It's a similar case to the differences between Israel and Nineveh,
 - Nineveh is just some pagan city, wallowing in their sin
 - Israel knew better

- Jonah's is not some wandering sinner
- He's rebelling against God's word
 - Could that be you? Or me? At any given time?
 - I believe, Jesus is my lord
 - But God, I'm not really with you on this one
 - I don't get it or like it
 - Last week we saw that God is guiding our lives to the best life for us
 - By dying to self we can discover our "true-self"
 - But this week I want us to see how we can reimagine it (with a little help from day- optimism) *NOT* as a sacrifice, but as an expression of our optimism that God *IS* doing the best thing . . . not just for us, but for everyone, the whole world and everything in it!
- And God is with us, every step of the way
 - Just like he is with Jonah
 - This isn't just about God's magnanimous mercy with a detestable people
 - He's with Jonah, every step of the way
 - He doesn't pull in the second string prophet
 - Doesn't call a jona-ito
 - Lovingly, patiently
 - Jonah's despairing of life
 - But see God, like a dad, pushing his son on a long hard hike up the mountain (maybe sometimes kicking) but all the way, as the son complains and whines, dad has a smile, knowing it will all be worth it
 - Saying, "you've got to see this, son. . . I want you to see this."
- So we get to Case 3, The case God makes with Jonah
 - Chapter 4:6-11

⁶ And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. ⁷ But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it *so* damaged the plant that it withered. ⁸ And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is* better for me to die than to live."

⁹ Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!"

¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"
- And we're left here with Jonah at the end of the book, because God pulls one of the biggest mic drops in the Bible
 - He says

- You care about a plant, you did nothing to make grow, and it was only there for a day, you care about that?
 - But you don't see how I should care for 120,000 people and livestock?
 - 120,000 who don't know R from L . . . could be a lot of things
 - Most commentators say it's children
 - Because animals are also mentioned
 - I think the point is that there are creatures in this city who are just living their lives
 - They didn't hurt anyone
 - God made them. . . for that very fact alone they have value!
 - Are you so blinded by your hate, Jonah, that you don't see a living city?
- And we fade out, on a miserable Jonah, waiting, in judgement, to see God unfairly preserve an undeserving people
 - But he's left to contemplate what God has said
- The pessimist (realist) in me
 - Thinks he probably went home depressed
 - Why? Because he's human. . . it's rare for humans to change or do the right thing, otherwise, redemption would be commonplace and redemption is not commonplace, it's rare and wonderful
 - But the reason transformation and redemption is rare and wonderful is sad
 - Because humans are hard hearted and prideful
 - Sorry. . . I did say the pessimist
- The optimist in me imagines Jonah
 - Imagining a future
 - Where a young girl, daughter to the king, repents and believes in God
 - Gets a copy of God's law and learns it
 - Grows in grace and beauty and is married to a young prince in the Babylonian empire
 - She teaches him about the Hebrew God and he too is converted
 - Their love and devotion to each other and the God of the Israelites sparks a love and popularity of all things Jewish throughout the Mesopotamian empire
 - much like the brief infatuation America had with all things Australian after the 80's movie *Crocodile Dundee*
 - I can see Jonah, on that hill, smile creeping across his face as he envisions Israel, moved to jealousy by the pagan empires blessing at turning to God, repenting themselves, destroying all their high places of worship to foreign gods and reuniting with Juda again, ushering in 1000 years of peace and prosperity!
 - I mean. . . that's a fantastic story!
 - Does it matter that it didn't happen?
 - If Jonah imagines a future with a day-optimist attitude and he's wrong, it just means something else happened. . . not something *worse*

- Has God not proven, time and time again, that he is writing the best, most satisfying story in existence?
- And has he not given us the mother of all spoilers? Jesus seated at the right hand of God ruling over creation
 - Wiping away every tear
 - Comforting those who love Him?
- Has God earned the courtesy from us? To imagine him as the best author making the best story?
 - Does he need to? Doesn't he deserve it anyway?
- Perhaps it's not for us to give God the right to tell the story
- Perhaps it's our place to recognize that he always had that right
- And then stand with praise in our mouth as the story unfolds and wows us with its beauty!
- We need to be constantly imagining how God is working things to his greater glory and the ultimately greater good in all things!
 - This is why story-tellers are so valuable to our culture
 - People who can imagine and tell how something is meaningful
 - How even the worst suffering can be framed in such a way that even the most ardent critic would look and say. . . OK. . . worth it.
 - Viktor Frankle, who lived through the Nazi prison camps in WW2, and wrote a book called Man's Search for Meaning said,
 - "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'."
 - Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning
 - "In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice."
- If that's not the message of Jonah, I don't know what is
 - We're given the entire history
 - But Jonah is just given the sliver of his perspective
 - We're shown how God's greater plan works from Jonah through Jesus,
 - We've seen how He may have used this to preserve His word
 - We've seen how this was a foreshadowing of God extending the gospel message to the gentiles
 - And we've seen how God lovingly and patiently stays with us, trying to get us to see His bigger picture
 - And in that context, we get to see a sullen, unhappy man
 - Don't make the mistake of laughing at him and seeing him as foolish
- Seek the wisdom of asking God where your mindset, prejudices, where your idea of how you think the story is supposed to unfold is judging God,
 - Where are you expecting God to conform the world to your perspective
 - Rather than Looking to God to transform your perspective
 - Where, in your life, would you benefit from being a day-optimist
 - Sitting in meditation, on your own hill-top and imagining how God is working the things you don't understand into something wonderful?

- There is a magic, magic: meaning-that power of influencing the course of events by using mysterious or supernatural forces
 - There is a magic to living your life controlled by a belief that God works all things out for the good of those who love Him
 - It will influence your life in mysterious and supernatural ways
 - People will be tempted to pass you off as another simple, naïve, optimist
 - But as they see the depth of your belief
 - The solid foundation on which you stand
 - And the steadfast hope with which you face life
 - They are going to be moved. . . they are going to want to know
 - Always be ready to give an answer to the hope you have in you
 - But live your life in a way that people see it and ask