

Guest Preacher - Rev RJ Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's help and blessing, let us turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together, the book of Jonah and chapter 1. And we'll read again from the beginning of the chapter.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Matthias, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Most people will be familiar with the narrative of Jonah. It is a narrative with all kinds of unusual features. We usually, when we think of Jonah, think of him as the portion that was swallowed by a great fish.

And three days later, the fish vomited him alive on to the seashore. Maybe that is all you know about this man, Jonah.

[1 : 14] But it is certainly a narrative that grips the imagination. And because of that, many have come to regard it as a myth or a legend or just a simple story or an allegory, rather than an account of a historical event.

However, we believe in the divine inspiration of all scripture. And therefore, we accept that this book is a true historical account of events that took place.

Jonah's forthright record of his own fault suggests to us that this book is a testimony of real experiences. One thing we find about the Bible is that it is very transparent about the failings and weaknesses of the children of God.

It never hides them. We read about the failings of Abraham and the failings of Moses, David, Solomon and many others. Because the only place where their sins can be hidden is in the blood of Jesus Christ.

There is no other covering for our sins. There is no other place where our sins can be hid but in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 40] That is, in his atoning work. A further pointer to the reality and truthfulness of this book is suggested by the fact that the Jews recognized it as part of the scriptures.

Although it weighed against their natural prejudice in exhibiting God's mercy to another nation, and particularly to the Assyrians, who were Israel's enemies, which may have been and played a major part in the disobedience of Jonah.

But the strongest proof to the reality and truthfulness of this book actually is found in the New Testament. As the Lord Jesus Christ refers to Jonah and his experience in the great fish as a real life event.

In Matthew chapter 12 we read, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

That was a reference, of course, to his own death and his own resurrection. He also speaks of the repentance of the Ninevites as an actual occurrence.

[4 : 08] For in that self-same chapter in the Gospel of Matthew we read, The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Here Jesus informs his listeners, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, that they, like the people of Nineveh, that they needed to repent.

Now Jonah's prophetic ministry is unique in that it is only from a very brief comment in the second book of Kings, in chapter 14, that we know about his prophetic ministry in Israel, when he predicted

the expansion of the northern kingdom in the reign of King Jeroboam II.

As you know, Israel was divided. There was the northern kingdom, where the ten tribes were, and there was the southern kingdom, known as Judah, where the other two tribes settled.

So we're talking about the northern kingdom. We're talking about the ten tribes who took the name Israel to themselves. And during the reign of King Jeroboam, Jonah had prophesied that there would be a great expansion of their kingdom.

[5 : 42] And that's the only mention that we have outside the book of Jonah, of this prophet. There is nothing else given to us until we come to the book here, which simply begins with the command of God to prophesy against the wicked Gentile city.

Yet this little mention that we have of his prophecy in Israel, from the second book of Kings, is particularly important for us to understand.

because Jeroboam II, the king over Israel, was very much an evil man. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

This was a time of national idolatry, for Jeroboam led the people to gross sin. And yet the Lord, in seeing the bitter suffering of the people, gave Jonah a positive message to give to them.

So that in spite of Jeroboam's wickedness, God prospered Israel and enabled him to recapture lost territory exactly as Jonah had prophesied.

[7 : 06] Jonah would have been made aware of the long-suffering of God at a time of great provocation. Against the darkness of the day, God was raising up a servant to give to the people a glimmer of light and hope.

We read, For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.

So he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joas. This was not a reward for Jeroboam's piety or that of the people of Israel.

This was a gracious initiative of God to prosper Israel at this time. Because of their disloyalty to him, he had been punished them through foreign invasion, especially Assyria, but now on seeing their desperate situation, for they were on the point of being wiped out, he saves them through the hand of this wicked king, King Jeroboam II.

Now, there are a number of lessons that we learn from this gracious initiative of God. God would not blot their name from under heaven because of his covenant commitment to his people.

[8 : 45] Again, the grace and mercy of God shines here so brightly. While we cannot condone sin, but speak out against it, making people aware of the fact that sin deserves God's wrath and curse, that to continue in sin will have consequences.

Nevertheless, we must also hold out to the people. The long-suffering of God tells us when we do so much to provoke him and how he holds out to us his hand of mercy.

So, the book has a lot to teach us about the character of God. This book has a lot to teach us about the sovereignty of God, about his love, his mercy, and his grace.

As I've already said, sometimes we may just think of the book of Jonah as the man who was swallowed by a great fish and finish it there. But this book is about a lot more than a man who was swallowed by a great fish.

It speaks to us of the character of God. It speaks to us of the sovereignty of God, of the love of God, of the mercy of God, and of the grace of God.

[10 : 00] As we already noted this morning, God would not blot out the name of Israel from under heaven because of his covenant commitment to his people.

You know, we should always value God's people. We should always value those who are in covenant with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

A lot of the Lord's mercies that we are partakers of are as a result of God's covenant people.

But another point that is remarkable here and that we must not overlook is that God brought his purpose to fruition through a wicked king.

You see, God is sovereign and he can work through a wicked king to bring forth his purpose and his will. And that ought to be a comfort for us when we consider how our nation has turned their back upon God and the wickedness that prevails in our nation.

[11 : 10] Yet we have the gospel. Yet we have the witness of God's people. We have the freedom protected by government to worship God in relatively peace while many of them in government

have no thought whatsoever about God.

However, the people of Israel did not recognize their good fortune as coming from the Lord. They didn't recognize their privileges as coming from the Lord.

And so, the people continued in their pagan ways. Paul speaks of a people despising the long-suffering of God, not knowing that the goodness of God ought to lead them to repentance. Of course, as we know from the history of Israel, they continued to despise the goodness of God towards them and they continued to provoke God by their continual sinning and eventually it caught up with them.

And we know that they were taken into captivity eventually by the nation of Assyria. As we always point out, sin has consequences.

[12:29] And as that was true of Israel, so shall be true for all those who will continue to provoke God by despising his goodness towards them.

the goodness of God ought to lead us to repentance. Peter answers those who were shouting, where is the promise of his coming?

Peter replies, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us, Lord, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He keeps back his judgment and the second coming has not happened yet and you wonder, well, why is he keeping back his judgment?

Why has the second coming not happened yet? It hasn't happened so that sinners can be saved. That is his goodness to you and that is his long-suffering to you.

[13:35] Despite the fact that we provoke God to anger by our sin. Nevertheless, he is long-suffering towards us and his goodness still towards us.

Why? So that we will repent and commit ourselves to him through his son, Jesus Christ. So we see that this historical account is much more than about a man being swallowed by a great fish.

It is a narrative about God. It's a narrative about God. It brings to our attention the sovereignty of God that God clearly controls events.

He controls events. Everything is under his control. He is sovereign. God clearly controls events. He is working out everything in accordance with his own purpose and his own will. It brings before us the character and the attributes of God.

[14:43] God's omniscience. He knows everything. God's omnipresent. God is everywhere. God's omnipotence. He is all powerful.

It was God who sent the storm. It was God who made the Lord to fall upon Jonah. It was God who prepared the fish to swallow Jonah. It was God who spared Nineveh and brought the Ninevites to repentance.

The book of Jonah brings before us the God of all grace and the God of all mercy. A sovereign God who is in control of all events and who works out his own purpose and will.

He is the sovereign God who has control over the sea, over the land. He is the sovereign God who has control over nature. The natural elements and all circumstances is under his control.

He speaks to us. He speaks to us through nature. The heavens declare the glory of God. The earth shows his handiwork.

[16:00] and everything that happens, all the circumstances and events is God speaking to us. Even in the present circumstances on the continent of Europe, with all the fires that is going on there, it is God speaking to us.

He is reminding us that the day is coming at his appointed time, when the earth will be destroyed by fire. Not by a flood, as it was in Noah's time.

God has said that he will destroy the earth by fire, that the earth will be scrolled up like a book. It will be destroyed by fire.

And we are reminded how these things so quickly can develop. now, I'm not saying it is our responsibility to look after our environment.

It is our responsibility to look after the earth. But we must remember that we do so in the light of that one day, God is going to destroy the earth.

[17:13] And he's going to destroy it by fire. That is what Peter tells us. So is God speaking to us by nature. It is God speaking to us by his word especially, by the word of God.

The book of Jonah stands as a vital link in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. Remember the words of God to Abraham when he covenanted with him.

And in these shall all families of the earth be blessed. This was a promise concerning Jesus Christ that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed, both Jews and Gentiles.

Now this was something that was not very acceptable to the Jews for they regarded the Gentiles as dogs outside the sphere of salvation, unclean.

They were outside the sphere of salvation. And as we already noted, this will play a major part in Jonah's disobedience. Israel was of the opinion that God cared only for them, and they resisted any idea of God's grace and mercy extending to any other nation but their nation.

[18 : 35] Nevertheless, we have in the narrative of Jonah a foreshadowing of what Paul refers to as the great mystery, that is, the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of God.

It was not explained or opened up for them as we have it now. Nevertheless, Jonah's mission to Nineveh was a picture for us of the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's redemptive plan.

The book is about God's grace to sinners. not only among Jews but also among the Gentiles. That is why we have a gospel to proclaim.

That is why Paul could say, for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God into salvation both to the Jews and to the Greeks or the Gentiles.

Now, this book opens in a familiar way by saying that the word of the Lord came to Jonah. We are going to spend some time on that this morning. The word of the Lord came to Jonah.

[19 : 48] This was a great privilege for Jonah in receiving the word of the Lord. However, it must have been quite a shock for him when he realised that the word came with a commission or command for him to go to Nineveh.

Israel was Jonah's comfort zone. Despite the environment that was around him, yet it was his comfort zone. But God was now commanding him to go outside his comfort zone and serve him in preaching in the exceeding great city of Nineveh.

To go to Assyria and to go to that great city of Nineveh, which was steeped in paganism, and to preach the gospel there.

He was taking Jonah out of his comfort zone. Jonah has been commissioned to go to a Gentile city renowned for its wickedness, a city that we know historically to be one of the great cities of Assyria. Arise, he says, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me. This was indeed a breathtaking commission.

[21 : 03] He was commanded by the Lord to go and preach and to seek to bring the people to repentance, those who were the enemies of his own nation, history. Nineveh, which was located in what we call now northern Iraq, there was a city noted as that great city.

It was surrounded by a mass of walls, a hundred feet high and wide enough to take three chariots abreast. But it was a city that was renowned for its paganism, idolatry, immorality and violence. And it is said that its leaders thought nothing of skinning people, cutting off their fingers and their noses for anyone who opposed them.

This was the way they punished them. The population of the city would have been between 600,000 to one million. them. This indeed was not an easy task for Jonah, to go outside Israel, to go to the Gentiles, to go to the pagan city of Nineveh and to preach the gospel there, calling them to repentance, calling them to forsake their sinful ways and their immorality and to turn to God. there were other prophets like Isaiah, Nahum, Sefaniah, who gave oracles against Assyria. But what is unusual here is that a prophet has been sent to a city in Assyria to preach and to call his people to repentance with the intention by sending the prophet to preach to the people of this wicked city that he would save Nineveh.

[22 : 49] Now Jonah was fully aware of God's purpose in sending him to Nineveh, was that God's mercy would be extended to the people there.

If you read chapter 4, we'll read that chapter in the evening, we'll see how Jonah was aware that this was God's purpose to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance.

Jonah, we are told that he was the son of Mattiah. It is possible that he was trained in the school of the prophets of Bethel and Jericho, as we have already noted, he prophesied during the wicked reign of Jeroboam II.

Here again we see the sovereignty of God, calling this man and giving the task to go and cry against Nineveh. Now, it was not a no to God at all how Jonah would respond to this command and commission.

God knew that Jonah would not only be reluctant to go, but that he would go down in the path of disobedience. And you may ask, why then, if God knew that, why did he choose Jonah?

[24 : 05] Well, if you're a Christian today, this may well be often the question that you ask yourselves. Why did God choose me? God reminds us that it is by grace that we are saved.

And it is grace that holds us. In spite of our failures and disobedience, it is grace alone that keeps us, that holds us.

And that is going to be so evident in the life of this man, Jonah. the grace and mercy of God is going to shine out so brightly in the life of Jonah.

All is down to the grace of God. John Newton's famous sin, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a rich like me.

Jonah refused to obey the first command to go to Nineveh. But when chastened, he appeared to have a change of heart about God's directives.

[25 : 16] God is going to teach Jonah that the grace that is going to be experienced by the people of Nineveh is going to be experienced by Jonah himself as well.

When the word of the Lord first came to Jonah, he rejected it. The fact that it would come the second time after it was rejected, the first time is in itself a demonstration of God's grace, God's mercy, and God's love.

There are many lessons that Jonah had to learn, which prepared him eventually as he came to preach to the Ninevites. He was taught much about God's grace and mercy, God's mission to all sinners, both Jews and Gentiles.

There is also this, that in spite of Jonah's failure, when he repented, God was pleased to use him and bring him to the Ninevites through Jonah to repentance.

In all God's dealings with him, God's grace and mercy shone forth. And when we come to the New Testament, we find the same with Peter who denied his Lord, but who repented, and how God used him on the day of Pentecost.

[26 : 42] It is a reminder to us that God can still use us even when we may have failed him. If we come to repentance, then we can still be used by him to be instruments of his grace and mercy.

Whatever was in our past, whatever is in our present, if we repent, God can use us. God can use me and you.

Why did God choose Jonah with all his knowledge of Jonah? Well, he chose him to be a trophy of his grace and of his mercy.

The same reason if we are Christians why he chose me and you, that we would be trophies of his grace and of his mercy. And if we are not Christians, then this grace and mercy is extended to you as it was to the people of Nineveh.

Is it not remarkable that God has chosen and redeemed sinners to bring the gospel to other sinners? Paul wrote, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

[28 : 11] There are many lessons that the book of Jonah has to teach me and you. In spite of Jonah rejecting God's command the first time, God's mercy and grace.

It came to him the second time and that was in light of God's mercy and grace. And it is true here today that in spite of you hearing the gospel many times, it still comes to you today.

The hand of God is still stretched to you. He is still seeking sinners to come to repentance. So, Lord, you may have taken over 20, 30, 40 plus years in rejecting the message of the gospel.

Today it is coming to you again. And you may ask, why? Why, after all the years that I have rejected the gospel, why is it coming to me again today?

It is because of the grace of God, the mercy of God, because of the love of God, that he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to life, to eternal life, to salvation, to be saved.

[29 : 35] As it was a great privilege for Jonah to receive the word of God and to bring that word to the city of Nineveh, it is also the same for me and you, that the Lord comes through us, through his word, whether we read it or hear it or it is preached to us.

Because the most valuable thing we can ever hold in our hand, the most valuable thing that we can ever have in our homes, is the word of the Lord. The greatest deficiency that can ever be brought to any person is that he or she does not have or hear the word of the Lord.

The worst thing that can ever come upon us as a people is a famine of the word of the Lord. The prophet Amos writes, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east. They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. That is the worst possible kind of famine.

How thankful we ought to be that we have the word of God. There are many places in Scotland today where vast congregations gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

[31 : 08] These places today are empty. a famine of the worst kind has come upon those places where people no longer have the word of God, where people no longer have any desire to hear the word of the Lord.

The word of God says the psalmist in Psalm 119 was a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. And the same psalm he says, order or direct my steps in thy word.

He knew the preciousness and how valuable God's word was. Here we see in the psalmist one who values the word of the Lord.

Well, how about yourself? What value do you put upon the word of the Lord? Do you only put a value upon it at times of crisis?

Many do. And when the crisis is over, the word of the Lord is forgotten until the next crisis comes.

Well, is that a picture of yourself today?

[32 : 16] We should always examine our attitude to the word of God. Many think that they can either take it or leave it. Our attitude to the word of the Lord always has consequences.

The word of the Lord, its preciousness, its value. In Hebrews chapter 4 we read, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Reminding us that the word searches us out. It is a blessed thing if today, if you are finding that the word of the Lord is searching you out.

I am not saying that it is comfortable, but I am saying that it is a great blessing. It is a great blessing if you find yourself uncomfortable and restless under the word of the Lord.

It is a great blessing. On this particular occasion, the word of the Lord that came to Jonah was in the form of a command, and he was to go to Nunavie and preach God's word in the form of a command.

[33 : 26] The word came to him as a command, and he was commissioned to go forth and bring a command to the people of Nunavie. And there is a sense in which the word of the Lord comes to us all with a command.

Yes, it is an invitation, but it is also a command. The word of God commands us to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved from what our sins deserve.

Well, what is your response to that command? For the church, there is also the command to serve the Lord, to witness to the world around us.

What is our response as Christians and as a church, as a congregation, to that command? At the beginning, we briefly mentioned the strongest proof to the reality and truthfulness of this book is found in the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus Christ provides the significance of Jonah's experience. Jonah was a sign, says Jesus, to the Ninevites of his generation. Jonah was a sign to the people of this great city, Nineveh.

[34 : 39] In Luke 11, we read, When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will give in to it except the sign of Jonah.

For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man, that is Christ, be to this generation. Jonah appears to the Ninevites as one brought back from the grave.

He was in the deep, and the fish vomited him onto the land as if he had come back from the grave. In the same way, through a far, though a far superior level, Jesus will be a sign to his and to our generation.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the sign of Jonah. Unlike Jonah, Jesus will be swallowed not by a fish, but he was swallowed by death itself.

In Acts chapter 2, we read, Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. The Lord Jesus is one who is greater than Jonah.

[36 : 00] He is the one who has victory over death and the grave. He is a sign to me and to you today. He is a sign to me and you today.

His death and resurrection is a sign to me and you today. He is a sign to us of what we ought to be doing and what our responsibility is.

To repent and to commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. And if we are Christians, to commit ourselves afresh to Jesus Christ and to be his witness in the world.

Yes, a greater than Jonah is before us in the world today. Matthew 12 again says, The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Well, will the people of Nineveh stand in judgment to condemn you.

[37 : 15] For you have light that they didn't have. You have the full gospel that they didn't have. You have the fulfillment of Jonah's sign in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you die Christless, then your condemnation is going to be great. And the men of Nineveh who repented by Jonah's preaching will condemn you because you did not fulfill that command in the gospel to repent and to commit yourself to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray. Eternal and ever-blessed God, we give thanks today that thou art the sovereign God, that thou art a God who is in full control of all events and all circumstances, that thou art the all-knowing God, the all-seeing God, and the all-powerful God.

And blessed be thy name that we can today be assured that the God of Jonah is our God. We pray, O Lord, that thou would continue with us and forgive us for all our sins.

In Jesus' name, amen. We shall conclude our service at this time by singing to the Lord's praise from Psalm 138.

[38 : 43] Psalm 138 at verse 6. That's on page 432. Though God be high, yet he respects all those that lowly be. For as the proud and lofty ones are far off knoweth he.

Though I in midst of trouble walk, I life from thee shall have. Against my foes, Father, stretch thy hand, thy right hand shall me save. Truly that which concerneth me, the Lord will perfect me. Though still thy mercy lasts, do not thy known hands works forsake. We shall sing these three verses to the Lord's praise. Psalm 138 at verse 6. Though God be high, yet he respects all those that lowly be.

Though God be high, yet he respects all those that lowly be.

Where else the proud and lofty ones are far off knoweth he.

[39 : 54] Though I in midst of trouble walk, I, I, from thee shall have.

Gave my foes, wrath thou stretch thy hand. Thy right hand shall be saved.

Surely that which concerneth me, the Lord will perfect me.

Lord, still thy mercy last. Do not thine own hands works forsake.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

[41 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.