

Jonah 1:1

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[0 : 00] Now this morning I would like to live with you at the opening verses of the Book of Jonah. Now, as you may know, the Book of Jonah has been under attack by many people, mainly because of two incidents recorded for us in these four chapters.

One, of course, is the notorious whale. And if you want a good luck from someone who is very hostile and surviving in our likelihood, the story of Jonah will come up, and the story of the whale.

Another attack has been launched in the fact that the whole city was converted, and Jonah went through it and preached. The whole of Nidhi was converted.

Now, we do not reject the historicity of any book in Scripture, simply because it records the Lord as miracles. Indeed, ultimately, the Christian faith is not thinkable without miracles.

We believe in miracles as they recorded for us in the Scriptures. And not to say the least, the miracles really related to the work and life of Christ, the virgin birth, and then the healings, and exorcisms, and of course the resurrection, and so on.

[1 : 29] So one must clearly, I think, recognize that the whole Bible is full of miracles, and that it is quite unjustifiable just for a packet of authenticity, simply because of an anti-miraculous bias.

So I think we can easily really reject the criticism on that basis. Do also bear in mind that the word which is used for whales, really, are big fish.

We are not quite sure whether it was a whale. It is quite likely, but it does say big fish. So if you really want to be precise, then that is all going to be a tantrum, a big fish.

We do, of course, have the book of Jonah authenticated for us by the Lord himself. Let me just read to you some verses of Matthew's Gospel from chapter 12.

In the Bible, some of the Pharisees and teachers of the Lord said to him, Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you. In other words, we believe you, and we can see a miracle.

[2 : 37] And Jesus answered, A wicked and a justless generation asks for a miraculous sign, but nothing will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so will the Son of Man who will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh would stand up at the judgment of this generation and condemn it, for they had entered at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.

Not one says the book of Jonah has got this typological significance that it points to Christ and gives us clearly Christ's own understanding. But have you noticed that Christ himself confirms these two miracles?

The big fish, Jonah was followed up for three days and three nights, and Christ also stresses that the men of Nineveh actually repented.

Not maybe after a simple faith, but to me, that settles the holiest once and for all, that you can either believe with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ or the latest result of spiritual scholarship, who always change their minds in any case.

[3 : 55] So I would say that on the basis of eternal evidence, we have no reasons at all to doubt that here we have recorded for us some true historical events.

Historical in the sense as if they were recorded for us in a musical or recorded for us on television. If you have been there, you will see Jonah, you will see if you have been fishing, you will see the perversions of the Ninevehites, and so on.

Ultimately, it is a question of whether we accept what the Bible says or whether we reject it. It was Lutheran, she who understood context, said that no ungodly man can have a highly God for God's Word.

No ungodly man can have a highly God for God's Word. To Christians, it is not a problem at all. To believe in a big fish that swallowed Jonah, and to believe in a master's conversion after all.

The God of this universe, who created everything out of nothing, can certainly do these mindsets quite easily. And so it is only right to say that God regulates all things, that nothing takes place without this deliberation.

[5 : 17] I am talking about such a year that Christians really cannot believe in miracles. And it may well be that we have overreacted to certain trends within the Church.

But we cannot deny that miracles happen today. And I am not just simply thinking about miracles of conversion, although that, no doubt, is a tremendous miracle.

But I am also thinking about God being in control of the events of history, the events of nations, and the creation itself.

Now, just to indicate my own orthodoxy, I thought I would say to you a short sentence from the Westminster Confession. In chapter 5 of Providence, we read, God in His ordinary providence, makes use of means, yet is free, to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.

So the preacher certainly believes in miracles. We are not saying that we must believe every single miracle that is created, but we believe that God can do these things, that God can perform miracles, and that He controls the nation's history, that He controls creation, that He controls the events of nature to paradise for redemptive purposes, just as He did with Jonah.

[6 : 42] So I believe in the historiography of the book of Jonah, from chapter 1 to chapter 4. I do not have any thoughts at all to accept it as a stance, and I do not think that you should either.

But there is a little phrase that encouraged the book of Jonah all times, certainly in my version, and all that I may see, in the international version. But it's the phrase, God prepared, and we're told that God prepared this big fish, and then God prepared a worm, and God prepared a strong wind, and so on.

So God is in control of all these things, and uses them to further his own redemptive events. Now the book of Jonah, as of all, is an easy book, and it's straightforward and not a tip.

I do not think we should meet any difficulties in interpreting it correctly. If you want a quick summary of these 40 verses, in chapter 1, you find Jonah fleeing from God, in chapter 2, Jonah is fleeing, in chapter 3, you find Jonah preaching, and then, in Jonah chapter 4, you find Jonah sucking, being angry with God.

Now this morning, we only have time to look at the opening verses of this eventful book. It is, of course, one of these books that focuses on the trumpet itself, rather than on the prophecy, unlike the other prophets.

[8 : 18] The only words that are recorded for us in chapter 3, where Jonah proclaims, 40 more days, and maybe we'll be overturned. So you originally got five words, and that's the only prophecy that is recorded for us.

So the only focus of this book is on the person of Jonah, on the prophecy itself, rather than on the prophecy he gave. It is a very wonderful book, and there are very good coverages written on this book, and it is an easy book to understand, unlike other books.

Now let us then look at the opening verses. Having dealt with this in a very brief, closely, and manner, let us now look at verses 1 and 2. Let us refresh our memories.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amitai, go to the great city of Amitai, and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before thee.

First of all, I notice what I call the divine commission. The divine commission. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amitai.

[9 : 30] Now you will find this phrase quite often in another section of the Old Testament. The word of the Lord came. The emphasis in this word is very much not on the experience of Jonah, but on the objective reality of God speaking, addressing his servants to the prophets.

And Amos actually tells us the words since the fact when he says, and wants, surely the sovereign Lord has nothing without bringing his plan to his servants, the prophets.

And so, in the end, his writing, very answer of this book is the subjective reality of the divine initiative of coming and addressing Jonah the servant.

It yields his will unto us through the word. He speaks. The God of the way who speaks to you is not silent. He speaks to the very opening of scripture.

God said, God said, God said, and so on. We find it recorded over and over again. And so, this emphasis here is the subjective reality.

[10 : 49] Now, let me read 2v1 verse from the New Testament to stress this point I am trying to make. And it says, found it to Peter and to chapter 1 we read these words.

Above all, says Peter to his leaders, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture hereabout but the prophets own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man but men spoke from God as they were knudled along by the Holy Spirit.

And so, within this prophecy we do not think that Jonah had a vision in the sense that there was something that was hit and he thought what God has told me and I better stand up and say that is the Lord as the practice in some churches.

But rather the emphasis is that the word of the Lord came. It comes from above and it comes down to us. And you know if God did not speak to us, if God did not reveal himself out to us, we would know nothing about change.

We would be ignorant, we would be steeped in our dog of change just as the people of many were before the word of the God came to them. And so we are thankful this morning that God speaks to us that God reveals his will out to us and that God is not silent.

[12 : 18] Trader's heart has ignored and awaited the commission that came to him and he would run away from God. But he couldn't create an excuse because God clearly told him what he wanted him to do.

And Jonah sinned against might. He ran away from God. You have nothing to do with it. Isn't that true sometimes? We hear God's word and it speaks just so directly and we feel uncomfortable and we run away from it and then we plead to make excuses.

One of the fascinating books of the book of Jonah is that it stresses their suffering to God in confidence and that ultimately God carries away with Jonah.

Jonah did believe what happened. He got himself into trouble and brought him back again to that point where God refused him again.

And so we read chapter 3 that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. and again the great permission the safe permission was given for which the great city of Nineveh the message which I will give to you.

[13 : 37] And in the end Jonah could not get away from God. I said that the things have great comfort especially when we try and have our own way but God as a way of follows us up with this word and he gets us back in the end.

And that is true of the security of our believers that ultimately God will touch us with us. God will never let us go.

He may just hide us yet we get through the troubles and difficulties but in the end God will have his own way. And so we see in the story of Jonah how God chooses how God calls how God equips how God sends how God gives the second And Jonah was not a self-appointed prophet but he was directly and specifically commissioned from God.

That's then the first thing the divine commission. But then notice also in the second place in verse 2 the unpleasant task the unpleasant task Now my version it says Arise go to the city and cry out against it because it's wickedness before me.

And so we have these three key elements of this divine mission Arise go to the way cry out against it or preach against it.

[15 : 18] Let's look at these in more detail. First of all Jonah is told to arise that is to say Jonah is to leave his own country to leave his comfort of his surrounding and to leave perhaps an inquisition of authority and respect and the truth will leave all that behind in order to obey God's voice.

Now in those days of course the presence of God was very much confined to the borders of his strength beyond and in that sense Jonah was told to leave other behind and the Jew forsaken to turn his back around and that in one sense is not the chance of mission that we go where people are let we leave our homes and that we prepared to read the call and that's the second point here go God says to Jonah don't expect the world to be converted don't expect the world to come and flock into the temple or to flock into the church but go where people are that we have to be counted in those days the journey was taken I think up to four or five months it was some 800 miles no trains it would be very comfortable dangerous and

Jonah had to do all that in order to obey the voice of God a most unpleasant task that should be to God God also gave a great city and his emphasis of the great city comes out as well do for example chapter three we read that Jonah obeyed word of the Lord and went to Nineveh was a very important city a visit required three days now commentators are not quite sure whether three days of plastic ride through the city or going around the city but if you ever go to London and encourage you go to the British Museum and look at this mighty nation look at this history and see that it was indeed a very big city not just manly speaking but also a very powerful influence but it also was a wicked city wasn't it and that something which

Jonah blessed himself to and so the third element was not to rise and go but to also cry out against it now that can be very pleasant country it is that a teacher who wants to be faithful to the word of God to preach to the whole counsel of God now we have found out in past days have we not that we were going through many books of scripture we can't just dodge these two but we must deal with the text and when we find something which is awkward something which we don't like as to preach of the word of God we preach that which God gives unto us in his word nothing of the text of whether the word of God or whether he would just punch the issue the word and so Jonah is told to go and to preach against it and the word preach he of

God which has created as cry out so it was to be done publicly as Jonah did as we did in chapter three but what the awkward things that Jonah preached against it against the wickedness sometimes the church comes across to be negative all the time because we make moral judgments and we see that people ought to keep the Sabbath or the Lord's day that people ought not to commit murder that we ought to uncover punishment or that we ought to listen to the other and we feel a bit embarrassed about it and we get tired of it and other people get tired of it but you see in one sense the preacher the prophet has got no choice when God tells us his word we must preach it and must preach against which denounce the wickedness of our nation from the pulpit but even that is not enough because

[20 : 02] Jonah was told to go into the media itself Jonah has to go where people are it is easy to get hot under your collar but to actually address our leaders personally is very difficult to write letters to them is very difficult but to preach against them in the comfort and security of church building is rather comfortable not with Jonah Jonah was told to go where the people were now I've never tried to find out how Jonah managed to talk to them whether he spoke their language or the interpreter and I don't know but if they can't know I would be very interested to know in any case Jonah would have been a foreigner he would have spoken their language and he would be dressed differently and he came to that city and he started to the market square and started to cry out you can imagine what must have gone through his mind how awkward how embarrassing and yet how compelling because God placed him there and

Jonah could not get away from it after all so he could preach against it he was not told to get involved in what sometimes is called flinch evangelism or that human could die wrong or arguing discussing whether God exists or whether they're going to restraint or wrong or that Jonah was told to do to preach against it what an unpleasant task something which we don't like ourselves much nowadays imagine preaching against the wickedness of this nation or against a particular group how embarrassing how awkward we don't like it we want the love of God we want to hear nice things but Jonah had to preach and what was his message when he tells chapter 3 40 more days and maybe we'll be overturned no comfort no promises no promise at all judgment

I wonder how you would react if you knew that Abedin was to be destroyed because of his weakness in 40 days you may not belong you may not you may be taken apart as the people did so we looked at the divine commission of God takes the initiative we looked at the unhappant task that was given unto Jonah yet to rise to go and to give this God given message yet to preach yet to speak verbally address people again that's something which people don't like to be they find it awkward to preach and to these other members which can be justified from scripture incidentally you will notice that in Jonah's case it worked it worked to preach and people were saved and so Jonah was under the word he was under the divine imperative he was called upon to obey and so must we as those who treat the gospel as those who are under the word we cannot even choose our message a thought that must not be a place where we preach our own personal opinions but it is a place where the word of

God is preached proclaimed and applied so the demand of mission the unpleasant task and finally notice the reason why was thrown a separate to Nineveh now we are told here go to the great city of Nineveh preach against it because its wickedness has come up before God that's why Jonah was sent to preach because its wickedness the people had come up before God this story teaches us a few things about God in the first faith it teaches us that God is never indifferent to his sin that God sees the nations that God knows that God understands and that God is indifferent sometimes people give the impression that

God is shot up in heaven and he says that he watches the events of history and he leads us to our devices but that is simply not true now we may not understand why God delays judgment we may not understand how these things in Greek death because God is not to give them unto us and so we do not speculate but at the same time we know that God is not in church to other nations and to our nation now we should think here to this context that liberty was outside the covenant of grace they have no special revelation they have no prophets in our life there nothing about the God of Israel but God is not indifferent to that nation that was steeped in idolatry a nation very cruel indeed a nation that was to overcome the people of

[25 : 48] God and led them into captivity and so God must act God can't be silent God must speak and God must send Jonah to do something about the situation God and all people that unto dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice all nations all people are fallen upon to worship the God of Israel now I remember discussing something with regard to the mission with someone just recently the whole question of culture came up what happens when the gospel is preached in a land where the culture is different from ours do we as evangelists as preachers of ministries of mission have a right to destroy the culture of another country or should we not rather enable them to live on now

I think that we must make in both to all the nations that is the great commission sometimes called the great commission but that we are to go into the world and to preach this gospel which is for all men and obviously it's good cultural effects it means changes and differences and so on not maybe he was an idolatrous nation and that to walk to God because the love God will find him an army not just on his church and the first commandment tell us who God is and that we are told how to worship him and that God is not indifferent to nations that are steeped in idolatry that is true of countries where hindrance and reveals but there's also true of countries where Roman Catholicism prevails after all Roman Catholicism can be very idolatrous and so

God is not indifferent to these nations and God sends out teachers to see things which are very uncomfortable but God still speaks and so the God of Israel is the God of all the nations Abraham was so that in heaven and all nations shall be blessed and that God is not just the God of a particular church but a God for a church of people all over the world and that he cares and that he wants them to come and experience his mercy but God here is almost living as fish so he sends Jonah out now the interesting thing is here that there is not only trust and judgment and condemnation but there is also hope there is mercy because after all that is why

Jonah was sent to Lillian to preach and he knew Jonah had an inkling Jonah knew Jonah fled to God not because he is a coward there is nothing in the book that suggests that but Jonah tells us himself why he pledged if you turn to chapter 4 he tells us Jonah was rified and pleased to speak of the conversion of people of him he preached to the Lord oh no is this not for us bad when I was still at home that is why it so quick to teach it I knew that you are God with love God will advance from settling calamity and then Jonah wants to die isn't that rather strange that Jonah preached he was so successful and that he was angry and annoyed that non-Jewish

Gentiles dogs should be saved and entered into the covenant of Abraham and indefended it we had certain types of people here that were resistant from us and were saved Jonah is very much like that elder brother in the son of the father the eldest son was alive he was angry he did not want affection with his brother which burnt I wonder would be unangry when God saves people we don't want to be saved or we don't care about it very much oh we must not be we should be patient with all men we should be joyful and thrilled to be here that people are being saved now I've just come to a conference south south and there was an opportunity for various people from different countries to share what was doing and if he said that we should hear about other nations he is the

[31 : 14] God of our nation and countries he does work and we should be interested in our own missionary work and find out what God is doing we should be filled with enthusiasm rejoicing that God's inspiration and that in the midst of anger there is a midst majesty love and compassion before you may see it reverently God is a very much indiscible God when you read through the pages of the Old Testament you will find out that God's judgments are always preceded by warnings but here Jonah wants that you have been 40 days and you've had it and so they obey they're missing and that didn't put them off sometimes kids you don't teach judgment preach sweet short sex nice sex so that should put people off Paul a master who preach people and what does he preach through the son no promises at all there's a threat a threat that

Christ will return and judge and therefore repent it's worked some could say others want to turn and others just want to give words another time the youth response began get to the word of God but it worked and so it worked in Jonah's case let's not be afraid to speak the truth in love to preach the whole counsel of God and there is a time to preach from the love of God and the justice of God but also there is a time to preach God to preach God's mercy and so the Ninevites said there they knew because they tell us in verse 5 of chapter 3 when Jonah teaches their message the Ninevites believed God they believed Jonah they believed God they declared in fact that all of them from the greatest to the least could have such a lot and so on and then God repented

God turned away from the evil ways the judgment was taken away or at least I should say judgment was delayed because it was to come so to do we should thank God for those who are in the ministry who preach the word God faithfully it is a good sign it is a good sign that God sends missionaries out that God sends preachers out that God calls records and sends his boss Jonah was a little bit of a racist he didn't want to fix these foreigners these people are a different culture and so Jonah was taught this great lesson that the covenant extends to all nations and not just to the Jews and behind ourselves against this outlook that the present God really passed from us just as it did when the temple was fried in his sovereignty you see the

Israelites were saved outside from the start there was no ceremonial set up no temple no sacrifices they were saved saved in the same way that God the Old Testament believers were saved saved by faith alone so this morning let us encourage one another let us be faithful to the word to the word of God we must obey it we must do what we are told let us also remember that there is a reason behind it that God is slow to anger that God wants you to be saved that God is merciful that God is predictable that his anger doesn't just try not here there to be everywhere some people would love us believe but that God acts according to his values and cultures warm with confidence and that our teaching can be successful if we are faithful to the commission that God has entrusted unto us may God then bless his word to us and his praise you