

Communion Preparatory - Friday

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Preacher: David Gibson

- [0 : 0 0] Well, if I can invite David to come up and take the service from here on. Welcome to Bonacord.
- Thank you. It's very nice to be here with you this evening. It's a great pleasure for me to share in your communion weekend like this.
- It's a new experience for me. But I know, while looking around the room, I know some of your faces at least, and others I'm getting to know. And like David prayed for us, it's nice to have the connection, isn't it, between our two fellowships in the city.
- Moir, who's newly with you, was with us for many years. So it's nice to see that kind of connection between our fellowships. I hope you're going to bear with me this weekend, as you may be able to tell about the end of a chest infection, which has made its way into a dry cough.
- And when I met with David earlier this week on Tuesday, he had to do all the talking. I had practically no voice, but it's returned at least a little bit, which is great.
- [1 : 0 3] So please do pray for me. I'm with you in weakness, which I hope itself is something that the Lord will use as we look at his word together. It's wonderful to be able to look at Jonah with you, a whole book in one weekend.
- And I want to begin this evening by looking at chapter one. And as if a whole book in one weekend wasn't enough, I want to begin this evening by trying to show us how this is a whole book about one word.
- A whole book about one word. So finish this sentence for me. Jonah and the what? Well, it's obvious, isn't it?
- Here is one of the best-known Bible stories in all the world. Jonah and the whale. What are the other well-known Bible stories? David and Goliath. Daniel and the lion's den.
- And Jonah and the whale is right up there, isn't it? And just like some of those other great Bible stories, we know them and we don't know them. Herod and the three wise men.
- [2 : 1 2] Apart from the fact the Bible never tells us there were three. Maybe there were 30. And Jonah never tells us it was a whale.
- One of my children's Bibles at home presents the story of Jonah like this. You've maybe got one of these at home or you've heard this. The story goes, God speaks to Jonah, Jonah tells Jonah to go to Nineveh.
- Jonah runs from God into a storm. And then God saves him in a whale. Then he preaches to Nineveh like he was meant to preach in the first place. They repent in the end.
- And chapter 4 of Jonah is excised and lies on the cutting room floor. Look at chapter 4, verse 1.
- But it displeased Jonah exceedingly. Chapter 3, verse 10. When God saw what the Ninevites did. I'm reading from the ESV this evening. When God saw what the Ninevites did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he'd said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

[3 : 21] But this displeased Jonah exceedingly. Isn't that astonishing? What is the book of Jonah about? Here this evening is a whole book about one word.

I wonder if you've guessed what the word is. Have a look at chapter 1, verse 1. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, 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 from Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. This is a book about that word, but.

Chapter 1, verse 3, but. This is a book about what happens when God speaks to his people, and the next word is but.

This is a book about how there is a world of trouble waiting for us when God speaks, and our first response back to him is, but. But, it is not the only but in the book.

[4 : 43] So if you look at it with me, verse 3, Jonah rose to flee from Tarshish. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. And in the version I'm using, the English Standard Version, don't worry about this if it's not here in yours.

There are other ones I'm going to show you in just a moment. In the English Standard Version, chapter 1, verse 4, but the Lord hurled a great wind. There's that word again. Jonah, do this.

But, Jonah does that. But, the Lord does this. Friends, this is a book about how you can run from God and find yourself only running into God.

And when you run into this God, when you flee to the ends of the earth to get away from him, you find yourself only pressed right up against him so that you see more clearly and more surprisingly than you ever have before.

When that happens and you see God, is that the end of the story for you? Or is it just the beginning? Look again at chapter 3, verse 10.

[5 : 55] When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he'd said he would do, and he did not do it. But, this displeased Jonah exceedingly.

This is a book about that but in chapter 4, verse 1. What happens when God shows himself as he really is? And you do not want to know.

What does God do next? Cut you off? Write you off? No, look at chapter 4, verse 9. It displeased Jonah exceedingly but, 4, verse 9, God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant?

Jonah runs, but the Lord hurls. Jonah rages, chapter 4, but God speaks. Jonah, Jonah, and the what?

Someone has said, when it comes to this book, many have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God. And so, we're going to take four sermons, to look at Jonah, but to look at Jonah in order to look at God.

[7 : 19] For friends, here in this book, here is a God of such tender compassion, compassion, and mercy. That my prayer for you, for me, for you as a church family, for all of us as we look at this, my prayer is that we will respond to him with singing, with brokenness, with profound humility before him, and with deep compassion towards others.

Deep compassion. Do you know why? One of the most beautiful things about Jonah is that it shows us that one of the greatest problems God has in the world is his people.

Do you know that? One of the greatest problems God has is his people. Not his enemies. No, God can deal with his enemies in a moment. But his people.

You. Me. Verse 1. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai.

We know from 2 Kings chapter 14, Jonah was a real flesh and blood man from the northern kingdom of Israel. He's not a fictional character. He was a prophet.

[8 : 37] A prophet in Israel. You see it? This is God dealing with his people. The apple of his eye. You. Me. Is it not true? I don't know many of you well enough so I can say this, but is it not true?

We can be so, so stubborn. So proud. So complex. So right in our theology about God and so wrong in our experience of God.

We can be so like that that, well, here's what Jonah's going to show us. Because we're like that, God takes the time to place us in the palm of his hand and just write some chapters into our lives while we're sitting there to make us stop and stare and see who he really is.

Jonah shows us the lengths God will go to to crucify the self. And it is always an act of mercy. Listen to these words. The last idol to fall is the self, the sinful nature, the flesh.

The last idol to fall is the self. Self-love is so blind, so subtle and so strong that it will lead a man or a woman into a fool's paradise and leave him there until the searchlight of God locates him and spoils his vain opinion of himself.

[10 : 06] Until a Christian is found there and given a death-dealing self-disclosure, he will know little of God's mighty inward redemption from the power of the flesh.

Friends, wherever you are with God this evening, wherever you are, Jonah is a book to say to you that God loves you enough to turn your life upside down and inside out.

He loves you enough to give you a death-dealing self-disclosure, to shine his light right into the deepest, darkest corners of your life and leave you there blinking.

Am I really like that, Lord? Is that me? And yet, leave you there not condemned, not destroyed, but astounded at his grace.

So just to start this evening, the first four verses, really, are all we're going to look at. And really, these four verses as a window into the chapter, chapter one, and a window into the whole book.

[11 : 20] Here is Jonah's blind self-love leading him into a fool's paradise where God is waiting for him. God.

So I want to show you three things. Three things. Sometimes God's people go to very great lengths to do these three things. We go to very great lengths to do them.

Number one, ignore his word. Sometimes God's people go to very great lengths to ignore his word. Chapter one, verse one, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai.

The word of the Lord came. 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.

So clear, isn't it? So simple. The word of the Lord coming to prophets. That's what God did. That's what prophets were there for. God speaks. The prophet listens.

[12 : 30] And then the prophet re-speaks to the people what God has said. And Jonah knew that. Jonah had no grounds for saying, nobody told me about this, did he?

It wasn't in the small print, in the contract when I signed up. No, it was front and center in the job description. You are a prophet. I speak. You listen.

You speak. And any time the word of the Lord comes to us, to you, this evening, to you, any time the word of the Lord comes saying, this is my way, walk in it.

And the next word is, but, but, any time that happens, friends, there is a problem. We've already gone wrong.

First Kings chapter 17, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, arise, go to Zarephath, and dwell there. So he arose and went. Yes.

[13 : 39] Yes, that's right. That's what you do. That's how the world works. That's what will make your life work. God speaks, and if self is dead, and if the self is not on a throne, if you are not the king over your own life, God speaks, and the next word is never, but.

And God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But, the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die.

Friends, it's true. From the dawn of time, right through to today, and right through to this very evening, sometimes God's people go to great lengths to ignore what God says.

Great lengths. Jonah goes to geographical lengths. Maybe you're doing that this evening. I suspect mainly the lengths that you and I go to are internal lengths, aren't they?

We physically go nowhere, but we mentally adjust the dials, turn the volume down, just so that we can carry on ignoring what God says.

[15 : 04] There are some things we will not let God speak to us about. There are acceptable areas, aren't there? Of course, a bit of Jesus goes a long way. The Bible is a great guide in many areas, but there are some things which are just off limits to God's voice.

sex and marriage. Sometimes we go to enormous lengths to ignore what God says. We may not hop on a boat to Tarshish, but we will jump through any number of hoops to ignore what the Bible says about where sex belongs and what makes it safe and life-giving.

I don't know what it is for you this evening. Gender, Identity, Relationships. Take the Ten Commandments. They cover everything, don't they?

First four commandments, Vertical, My Relationship to God. The next six commandments, Horizontally, My Relationship to You.

They cover everything, don't they? Everything. From my love for God as first in my life through to how I choose to use the Lord's Day, my attitude to my parents, all the way down to the envy that lurks hidden in my heart.

[16 : 28] And God says this, and in my mind, I rationalize my behavior, and I blur clear lines so that God says this, and I say, but, but.

It's more complex, God. It's not black and white. It's shades of gray. Let me ask you, are you here this evening quietly, pleasantly, ignoring God's inconvenient word?

Are you doing that here in the midst of the people of God, week by week? Jonah is not a Gentile, not a pagan. Jonah, the son of Amittai, the Israelite, the prophet, the cleric, the minister.

How do I know if I'm ignoring God's Word? It's a good question, isn't it? The way to measure where you are with the Bible is always to ask, when was the last time I submitted to something the Bible says?

When I find it offensive. When I find it costly. When I didn't want to do it, but I knew what it said was right. That's where you know where you are with the Bible.

[17 : 51] If you've never done that, said, yes, Lord, your way, not mine. If you've never done that with the Bible, maybe this evening you have a God in your image.

Maybe you have a Bible that is censored. And, says Jonah, maybe you have you on the throne. Brothers and sisters, step down this evening.

Step down. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey. And drippings of the honeycomb. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward.

[18 : 58] Lord. But look, not just ignoring God's word, sometimes God's people go to incredible lengths, number two, to escape His presence.

Incredible lengths to escape God's presence, ignoring His word, fleeing His presence. Look how the writer puts together, he wants us, doesn't he, to see the extent of Jonah's flight. Look at it again in those opening verses.

Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, but notice that to do that he went down to Joppa and then on a ship he goes down again into the ship.

He's trying to hide himself, isn't he? Deep, deep, deep down, not just at the ends of the earth, but in the depths of the earth, out of sight, out of mind, away from the presence of the Lord.

Oh, Jonah, Jonah. Here is the whole book about one word, verse four, but the Lord, the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.

[20 : 19] It's like that game of hide and seek, isn't it? Have you ever played that with a two-year-old and you tell the two-year-old to go and hide and they run off and they stand on the wrong side of the tree right in front of you and you open your eyes and there they are and you have to say to them, I can see you.

The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. He's just saying to Jonah, isn't he, in the bowels of the boat, in the depths of the ocean, at the ends of the earth, Jonah, I can see you.

I can see you. Sometimes God's servants go to great lengths to escape God's presence and Jonah says to us tonight, friends, it cannot be done.

It cannot be done. Look again how it's put together. Verse 2, Arise, Jonah, and go to Nineveh, that great city.

Nineveh was part of the Assyrian Empire, a Gentile nation, a great city miles away. Why does God want him to go? Because he sees its evil, it has come up before me.

[21 : 35] Do you see it? There is no square inch of this earth over which the Lord does not cry, mine, mine. It's what Jonah himself says, isn't it?

Verse 9, I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. Because God made it all, he rules it all, he's present in all places at all times.

God is sovereign over everything, at every time, in every place, in every circumstance of your life. God is present, and sometimes, like Jonah, we can believe what Jonah believes in verse 9.

The Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land, we can tick that box on our doctrinal statement without joining up the dots of it in our daily lives. God is sovereign, yes, over the earth, but not in my life.

God is present with you in everything.

[22 : 44] Jonah was not the first and he was not the last to try to say to God, I do not like what you are doing here and now in my life, and you cannot be present with me here in this moment.

Friends, you do not have to get up and run like Jonah. You do not have to do that to try and escape God's presence. We do it all the time. God's people, Christian believers, try to escape God's presence all the time.

Frank Limehouse is an older minister, experienced godly man.

He tells the story of how as a young minister he was shadowing a hospital chaplain and they were called to a room where a woman's son had been pronounced dead after a tragic car accident and the woman was lamenting over and over and over again, why did God do this to me?

Why did God do this to me? The chaplain, trying to be helpful, said, Ma'am, God had nothing to do with your son's death.

[24 : 01] And Frank Limehouse said, I realized I was in the presence of a Christian man, a chaplain, trying to escape God's presence. All he had to offer this woman was a big, bad world and a small God.

So that certain parts of this world were off limits to God. And the chaplain was trying to be comforting and it is wrong. So, so, so, so, so, wrong.

Do you know what happened? The woman, the grieving, broken woman answered the chaplain before Frank Limehouse had to.

Ma'am, God had nothing to do with your son's death and the mother looked him in the eye and said, don't you take away the only hope that I have. Don't you take away the only hope that I have.

friends, how big is your God? How big? When disaster strikes, has God left the building?

[25 : 18] See, Jonah is teaching us, isn't he? Wherever you are and whatever you are going through, the mountaintops of success, that's some of us this evening or the very depths of failure, maybe some of us again.

Wherever you are, Jonah is saying, even if you are in the valley of the shadow of death, you are in the presence of the good, wise, faithful, the leading, loving God of the covenant who will not drop the reins of the universe and who cannot be escaped.

it's very possible that some of us are questioning the reality of God's presence with us. We think we've arrived in a circumstance where God cannot be present with me in this.

Maybe you're thinking this evening, if only I up and go and move, that's where God's presence is, that's where life will be better, where I will be happy.

That place over there which we had to leave. Maybe that's where we would have been really blessed. I'll only really be happy when I reach that place in the future.

[26 : 41] See what Jonah is saying, friends, God is sovereign over all geographical locations. God is with us wherever we are. The question for the believer is never, why am I here?

How did my life go so wrong that I ended up here instead of there? No, the attitude for believers is never, my life will be so much better if I was over there.

No, the question for believers and which Jonah was refusing to answer is this, what is God doing in your life right here and now? what is God doing with me by putting me here, here, in this place with these people?

We're hardwired to believe, aren't we, that the grass is greener somewhere else. Is that true? We're restless people on the move. Maybe you find yourself here in this city for this season and the kind of unhappiness that you have with being here shows that you think you have escaped God's presence.

Your unhappiness is the sign of the lengths we go to to escape him. You think God is not here. But Jonah says, what is God doing in your life by putting you here?

[28 : 16] If you are thinking of moving or preparing to move, the question for the believer is always, what will it mean to leave here and be in God's presence there?

What is he doing in my life by moving me? What is God doing? So here is the last, the final thing.

Christian people do something else as well. Sometimes we ignore God's word, God's God's presence. Number three, sometimes we fight God's character.

Sometimes we fight God's character. We just fight against who God is. How could you be like that, Lord? How dare you?

Doesn't it strike you as strange? Verse two, verse two just says arise and go, and verse three, Jonah rises and goes in the opposite direction. There's no buildup, no reason, no fallout, no argument, no explanation given.

[29 : 21] He just runs a quick disobedience in the wrong direction. But chapter four tells us why Jonah did this.

Look again, I know I've directed you before. Look again, chapter three, verse ten. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he'd said he would do to them and he did not do it, but it displeased Jonah exceedingly.

He was livid. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee, to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster.

Jonah runs because he is furious. He's angry. Now we're going to come to this Sunday evening.

What is going on here in chapter four? But friends, this evening, some of us just need to see this. Here's how one commentator put it, sometimes God's people hate what God is doing in the world.

[30 : 49] Isn't that true? Not your non-Christian friends at work hating what God is doing in the world. Sometimes God's people hate what God is doing in the world.

not. This is a book for angry Christians. This is a book for people who hate what God is doing with them, who hate what God is doing with their enemies, who hate what God is doing with the world.

And the reason God's people can come to hate what God is doing is because sometimes it is not easy to see that what God is doing in the world is right. isn't that true?

Jonah is unable to see that what God is doing is right. It seems wrong, Lord, that you should do this. And friends, if you have to live with something that you think is wrong and you have to stare at it, it will make you angry.

Verse 9, it's amazing, isn't it? God said to Jonah, do you do well to be angry for the plant? Jonah's response is basically, you have no idea how angry I am.

[32 : 07] Yes, I darn well do have right to be angry, well enough, angry enough to die. Listen to these words.

This is not a simple world in which God's good purposes are always easy to like. God's love. The Bible is real about what He and the world and us are really like.

So if you are struggling at the moment with being angry at God for what God has done to you, what God is doing with you, how refreshing to know that this book is in the Bible.

For God is remarkably patient with us when we hate what He is doing. friends, I love that so much. God is patient with us when we hate what He is doing.

When we hate His ways, how many of us ever say that? It's in the Bible. Jonah, a prophet. When we hate His ways, God is patient with us.

[33 : 22] are you angry this evening? Some of us might be. Are you patient with others when they're angry with God?

We tend to try and fix them, don't we? Jonah shows us a great God who puts, well I'm going to show us this in chapter 4, who puts His angry servants in the palm of His hand and says, just sit a while with me.

I want to show you something. Here is a great God able to cope with angry preachers, wrestling servants, perplexed prayers, hate-filled Christians.

Anger can be a season in our lives for all sorts of reasons, can't it? Our marriage, the dead end we find ourselves in, our children, our inability to control them, our circumstances, the fact that God is blessing our enemies, that's what's going on in chapter 4, blessing our enemies, the people who do that, you love them, can make you angry.

What is God doing? We just cannot see it. Here I am in life, the way my life has worked out, I'm not where I thought I would be, I'm not with the person I thought I would be, I am not the person I thought I would become.

[34 : 55] We're angry, angry with God. Do you know what God is with us while we're like that? Patient, patient, patient, God is patient.

Today, this evening, dear friends, whether you are ignoring, whether you are fleeing, whether you are sitting here fighting, there is always, there is always more grace here for us with this God, more grace than we can ever know.

We will spend eternity scaling the heights of God's mercy and compassion, diving to the depths of it. we will spend eternity scaling and diving and we will not reach the top of it and will not reach the bottom of it.

That's how big his compassion is for you, his child, for me, his child. So let Jonah say to you this evening, this weekend, if you are ignoring his word, make an end of it today.

Submit to it. obey it. More than that, treasure it, love it. If you're fleeing his presence, stop running or looking or searching for God is here, right here, with you now, today, in this place.

[36 : 32] If you're fighting God, if God's purposes with you are not to your liking, I say this as a pastor with a congregation of people who I love dearly.

I say it all the time, I do it myself, men and women, fighting God. Why this, Lord? If that's you, then just realize with Jonah, it must mean there is a but coming.

It must mean it. You are angry, but there are depths to God's compassion and mercy that you just cannot grasp yet.

He must be doing something with you or in you or through you that you cannot yet see or comprehend. Maybe, maybe, just maybe, maybe all he's doing is just toppling the self, knocking you off your perch, your throne.

Maybe he loves you that much, yes, maybe that much, to deal you death, self-disclosing death, death of the self, to bring you life.

[38 : 03] Well, let's pray. loving heavenly father to have your word open in front of us, paper, on screen.

How precious a gift. Together we confess to you how quick we are to ignore, to run, to fight. We simply bow before you and treasure your mercy, treasure the depths of your compassion to us, your people.

I want to ask, loving father, for these precious men and women, young and old in this room this evening for this weekend, place us, we pray, in the palm of your hand and speak to us, as you show us yourself.

So we pray, would you help us to love you and trust you and give our all to you. For we pray it together in Christ's precious name.

Amen.