

TIMELESS TRUTHS FOR A CRUCIAL TIME

The Messages of Twelve Old Testament Prophets

Discussion Guide
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Sermon Title

God's Love For Lost People

by Paul Martin

Jonah 1-4; II Kings 14: 23-29; Matthew 12: 39-41; Luke 11: 29-30

Introduction: While it cannot be stated with certainty that Jonah is the first of the written prophets (largely due to some ambiguity surrounding the dates of other prophets), the time of his prophetic ministry can be clearly ascertained in the Bible as during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This makes him a transitional prophet between the oral prophets leading up to Elisha and the written prophets to follow. Even though Jonah was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, this record records a specific mission to Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, and speaks to us of God's love for all people regardless of nationality or moral depravity.

Sermon Outline

I. The Life and Times of Jonah

- A. After Solomon, one of the greatest periods of Jewish prosperity:
 - 1. Jeroboam II—41 year reign in Israel; great expansion, security, and national prosperity.
 - 2. Uzziah—reigning in Judah and also enjoying immense blessing and prosperity
- B. Syria, a powerful “buffer” nation to the east between Israel and Assyria, has been driven back by Jeroboam in a recovery of lands beyond Jordan.
- C. Assyria in a waning period of the kingdom is, to Israel's delight, somewhat weakened and less of a threat.
- D. Despite growing alliances and treaties, both Israel and Judah are experiencing a period of great nationalism and racial pride.

II. The Assyrians

- A. A pagan nation and the home of the goddess Ishtar and her temple.
- B. A morally bankrupt nation filled with moral vice and idolatry.
- C. A cruel nation noted for the most horrific tortures of captured peoples of any nation in the ancient world and a great enslaver of those who survived.
 - 1. Soldiers were paid in plunder based on the number of heads presented.
 - 2. Captured peoples (men, women, and children) were tortured, dismembered, and impaled with merciless cruelty.
- D. Nothing made Israel as happy as Assyria's weakness; nothing could be worse than for anything good to happen to Assyria.

III. The Love of God and the Call of the Prophet

- A. Despite her cruel history, God loved and wished to spare Nineveh.
 - 1. Israel was intended to be God's messenger to the ancient world of His love and mercy.
 - 2. God's love is amazing, and His grace is available to all people.
- B. Jonah knew God, His mercy, and the likely outcome of his campaign.
 - 1. He was indifferent not only toward Nineveh, but even the pagan sailors who became his means of escape.
 - 2. Even in his reluctant obedience, Jonah was angry with God over His mercy toward Nineveh.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." ³ But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1: 1-3 (NASB)

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Jonah 3: 10-4: 2
(NASB)

IV. Lessons From Jonah

- A. Prophetic type of Jesus' resurrection from the dead
- B. One of the most ridiculed miracles of the Old Testament, it is given historical and literal credence by Jesus Himself.
- C. When God makes His will clear, going the other way is not a good idea!
- D. God loves all people and wants none to perish, even our worst enemies—we must have an eternal perspective on all people.
- E. When God tells us to speak, we can be sure that He is already at work:
 - 1. Serious plague and famine in Nineveh in 765 B.C.
 - 2. Total solar eclipse on June 15, 763 B.C.
 - 3. Second serious plague and famine in 759 B.C.
 - 4. Hearts were prepared for God's message before Jonah's arrival.

Conclusion: Jonah is a message for our time. We still have not seen the moral depravity and godless culture of the Assyrians in the time of Jonah, there is still hope for our nation. God not only loves us, He also loves our enemies. Our mission is to share His love and grace with everyone who will listen. When God speaks to us, we need to take heed to His call. He is not to be ignored!

Discussion Questions

1.) What seems to be both *fitting and surprising* about God's command (in 1: 2)? About Jonah's evasive response? What was the root cause of Jonah's disobeying?

2.) God's pursuit of Jonah is quite revealing. What does it reveal about: (a.) The justice and mercy of God? (b.) The gifts and call of God? (c.) Human fear and faith? (d.) God's claim to judge all the earth?

3.) Have you ever felt that God has given you a second chance to respond to a specific calling or command from Him? By what means did He bring it about? Have you ever ignored a "second chance" from God? Explain.

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. ²⁴ He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. ²⁵ He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amitai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. ²⁶ For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. ²⁷ The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. ²⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam and all that he did and his might, how he fought and how he recovered for Israel, Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? ²⁹ And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel, and Zechariah his son became king in his place.

II Kings 14: 23-29 (NASB)

4.) What is the significance of Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish? How was Jonah a "sign" to the Ninevites (see Luke 11: 29-30)? What's the meaning of Jesus' recounting of this story in Matthew 12: 39-41? What kind of "sign" was Israel looking for during the ministry of Jesus?

5.) What three things does God provide Jonah in chapter 4? What do these three things reveal about God? About Jonah?

6.) Have you ever attempted to limit the extent of God's mercy toward others? Is there someone or some group of people to whom God wants you to show mercy? How has God spoken to you regarding Jonah's message and its relevance to us today?

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Matthew 12: 39-41 (NASB)

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

Luke 11: 29-30 (NASB)

