

Please turn in your copies of God’s Word to the book of Jonah. This afternoon we begin a new series going through this well-known book, seeking to learn from the life and ministry of the prophet Jonah how we are to live as those called by God to a particular purpose in serving Him and seeing the advancement of His kingdom here in this place. This is not a doctrinal book though there is great doctrinal truths for us to glean from it. As we move forward in this series we will keep in mind the words of the Apostle Paul 1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Jonah is an example to us to learn from, to glean wisdom from, and to ultimately point us to Jehovah who encourages us in our mission in this Christian life. With that in mind let us turn our attention to the reading of the infallible Word of the Lord from Jonah chapter 1 beginning at verse 1.

Read Jonah 1:1-3

Pray

We are given very little background information on the man Jonah here in our text. All we are told is that he is the son on Amittai. We get more of an understanding of Jonah from 2 Kings 14:23-25, “In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher.” Here we see that Jonah was operating as a prophet under the reign of Jeroboam the son of Joash, and that he is from Gathhepher a town in Samaria. His work as a prophet is to the wicked northern kingdom of Israel. But that is the extent of what we know of the life and ministry of this prophet other than what we read here in this book. The message of the book of Jonah can be

summarized as “salvation is of the Lord.” This theme is carried out throughout the entire book. The sailors on the boat experience this salvation from the Lord when they threw Jonah overboard, trusting in the Lord to not hold the act against them. Jonah experienced the salvation from the Lord in his being delivered from the depths of the sea by the Lord sending a great fish to swallow him. His salvation is made known in his exclamation of praise in the psalm he utters in 2:2-9. The people of Nineveh experience the salvation from the Lord in their heeding the words of Jonah and repenting. The pattern of salvation is the key theme of the book. This pattern also displays the sovereignty of the Lord over all things. He displayed His sovereignty over His prophet Jonah by redirecting his path when he tried to flee. The Lord displayed His sovereignty over the ocean by causing the seas to rage and then bringing calm. He displayed His sovereignty over the animals by preparing a great fish to swallow Jonah. The Lord displayed His sovereignty over all peoples by taking the pagan sailors and the heathen wicked Ninevites and bringing them unto salvation. He displayed his sovereignty over creation by preparing a plant to come up and provide shade for Jonah, but also in preparing a worm to damage the plant, making it wither. The Lord displayed His sovereignty over the elements by sending a scorching wind. Lastly, He displayed His sovereignty over Jonah once again in preserving him and instructing him. All of this will be fleshed out as we continue on in this book. This morning our focus is going to be on the initial call of the Lord upon Jonah’s life and his response to it. As we consider this I want you to ask yourself what is your response to the Lord’s call. We’ll consider this by looking first at the call of the Lord; next, at the wickedness of Nineveh; and finally, and the fleeing of Jonah.

Let us first consider the call of the Lord. Look with me once again at our text, “Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it.” The word of the Lord came unto Jonah. Here was a man who had been specially chosen by God to be His mouthpiece unto the people of Israel and also unto the nations. Jonah knew the great

importance that was attached to being a prophet of the Lord and he understood that when the Lord gave him a word he was bound to obey. He also understands the great difficulty that comes with being the mouthpiece of the Lord. His service as a prophet in the kingdom of Israel was one that had some success as was seen in 2 Kings 14, but was likely one that saw much much more failure when looking at it from a worldly sense. The people of Israel were a stiff-necked people who were happy to embrace the paganism of the surrounding lands. Their rejection of the true true religion of Jehovah would ultimately be their downfall. And Jonah was one of many prophets in the northern kingdom who would be used as the mouthpiece of God to call the people unto faithfulness. But as we know the people did not heed the words of the prophets and continued in their sins, ultimately leading to their destruction. But despite all of this, in Jonah's life he witness the great longsuffering of the Lord towards His people. And as we'll see this abundant grace and longsuffering of the Lord will cause Jonah great difficulty in heeding this new call that is placed upon him.

This call that is placed upon him now is to "arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it." Israel is in a low state with the evils which it has embraced, and instead of the Lord having Jonah continue his work and ministry there among the covenant-breaking people of God he is told to go to Israel's worst enemy. Calvin says, "It might have been then, that he was sent to Nineveh, that the Lord, being wearied with the obstinacy of his own people, might afford an example of pious docility on the part of a heathen and uncircumcised nation, in order to render the Israelites more inexcusable." Perhaps this is the case. Or perhaps it was to teach Jonah the lesson Himself that Jehovah's salvation cannot be confined within the walls of Israel and Judah but instead extends forth from His people into all the earth. This is a lesson that we all must learn, lest we become prideful and isolationist and hinder the spread of the Gospel from reaching even the ears of our greatest enemies. And so instead of bringing the Word of the Lord to impenitent Israel, he is told to bring it to the great city of Nineveh.

And Nineveh was great. It was the capital city of Assyria. His walls were over a hundred feet high and were said to be wide enough that three chariots could be ridden side by side atop of them. Nahum says that they multiplied merchants above the stars of heaven. There was likely over 4 million people within this one city. It was great in wealth (there was no end of its store, Nah. 2:9), great in power and dominion; it was the city that for some time ruled over the kings of the earth. But great cities, as well as great men, are under God's government and judgment. And this is who the Lord has called Jonah to go and proclaim His Word to. This would appear a daunting task to anyone, but Jonah had the assurance of Jehovah Himself in this task. Jonah would have had absolutely nothing to say unless the Lord had given him what to say. And so we see that the Lord gave unto His servant those words to speak. That is why there is no hint of fear or worry or embarrassment in Jonah about going to Nineveh, because he knew if the Lord was calling him there that God would be with him and cause his message to be effectual.

It is easy to see the great nature of being one whom the Lord has called and given His Word to. But friends, how much greater a thing is it that we have been called of the Lord unto a high calling and have been given a fuller Word than even Jonah has? If you are in Christ then you have received a calling of the Lord that is much more than just to go into a great city, but instead to go into all the world, to go to the highways and byways compelling them to come unto Christ. While the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah through direct revelation of God, the Word that has come unto you is a greater and fuller Word, one of more power than that which Jonah received. You have, first and foremost, the Word made flesh in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Him that you have been called to proclaim unto all the world. It is the proclamation of Jesus Christ that is the burden of every minister who stands before the people and proclaims as the prophets of old "thus saith the Lord." It is the proclamation of Jesus Christ which is the central message in our evangelism when we call lost sinners unto salvation. It is the proclamation of Jesus Christ which ought to be what is displayed in

all of our lives, in every circumstance. In each and every one of our interactions and words and deeds Christ ought to be put on display. And we also have the full and final complete revelation of the Lord in the Scriptures. Friends, the calling upon your life and the Word which has been given unto you is far greater than that of Jonah. You have been tasked with this burden. What will you do with it?

So we see the call of the Lord on Jonah, but it is a very particular call as well. It is to go into the belly of the beast, into a land that was known for its evil ways. Let us consider now the wickedness of Nineveh. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” Their sins had consumed them, so much so that is what they were known for by the people at the time, and even what they are known for to this very day. But this should not be a surprise, for they were cut off from the blessings of God which He had shown to His people in restraining their sin and preserving them from complete descent into wickedness. Hugh Martin comments, “The Gentiles, as a whole, as nations, were obviously given over in the meantime to the reign of spiritual death, cast out beyond the pale of that visible Church, within which alone salvation is ordinarily revealed.” What we know of the ancient Assyrian people testifies to their wickedness. Nahum 3 gives us a glimpse of it, “Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.”

This wickedness is confirmed by historical sources as well. The Assyrians have been called by some the terrorist of the ancient world. They were a heinous violent people. Those whom they

conquered at best would become slaves and at worst would be made part of their sick and twisted practices. They were known to cut off the arms and legs of their captives. Some they would draw and quartered, which is an absolutely sadistic method of torturing and killing someone. There are accounts of them skinning people alive and covering the bodies with salt. They would behead men and force their wives to carry the severed head on a pole throughout the city. That is just a small sampling of the atrocities they committed. This speaks nothing to the spiritual wickedness of the people as well. They worshipped all sorts of false gods and made sacrifices even of their own children unto these idols. Their witchcraft and sorcerers and diviners were known all throughout the region and sought after, which spread their wickedness to other lands. When think of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities whose wickedness was so great that the Lord blotted them out from existence, it is a great surprise that the Lord would send one of his prophets to this great city whose sins, in our estimation, appear far greater. And yet, here we see a display of the sovereignty of God. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (Romans 9:15)

And yet, is our call that much different than the one Jonah received? No, we are not seeing the same kinds of atrocities here in America that were found in ancient Nineveh, but the wickedness of this land which you have sovereignly been called to proclaim the Gospel too is great. We have men masquerading as women and all of society and culture demands the delusion be accepted as good and right, and if you dare challenge the perversions of the land you are cancelled and blacklisted as a bigot. Nearly one million children are slaughtered in the womb every year in this land. Paganism and atheism are promoted and protected on a governmental level. And what is expected of you in heeding the call of the Lord is the same as what was expected of Jonah and going to Nineveh to cry against it: absolute, unwavering obedience. Calvin writes, “It is a genuine proof of obedience when we simply obey God, however numerous the obstacles which may meet us and may be suggested to our

minds, and though no escape may appear to us; yea, when we follow God, as it were with closed eyes, wherever he may lead us, and doubt not but that he will add strength to us, and stretch forth also his hand, whenever need may require, to remove all our difficulties.” You have a duty to go out into the streets, to go into this wicked land, and to cry against it. We live so close to one of the most infamously wicked cities in this nation. There are men and women and children being gunned down in the streets on a daily basis. Innocent babes are being ripped limb from limb in abortion mills. Homosexuality and transgenderism and all other kinds of sexual deviancy and perversion are just another part of life in the Chicagoland area. And yet, the Lord in His sovereignty has placed you here in this area and given you His sure Word to go out and cry against that great city. When the cry of sin comes up to God the cry of vengeance comes out against the sinner. Will we be obedient or will we too be as Jonah?

Jonah understood the Word of the Lord which he had received. He understood what was required of him. And yet Jonah fled from this call. “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” Jonah had his own desires, plans, and ambitions to fulfill; Jonah had his own concepts of how things should be and how best he could serve God. The flesh made war on the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), and it seems that the flesh was victorious. He devised in his heart a means of escaping the call of the Lord on his life. So instead of arising and going unto Nineveh, he rose up to flee unto Tarshish. Instead of going by land to that great city, he instead sought to go by sea to the other end of the known world. Instead of going up to Nineveh to declare the Word of the Lord, he instead went down to Joppa to flee from the presence of the Lord. Jonah knew that he could not escape God. He knew that God is omnipresent and that there was not escaping Him, but he also thought that if he fled from that place where God was especially present among His people that he would escape this call placed upon

him. He was not fleeing from the Lord's omnipresence. He was fleeing from His 'felt presence'; from the God who had made himself known in grace and power. But even God's felt presence was not confined to the holy land. No, it extends over all the earth and there is no escaping it. Surely Jonah knew the words of Psalm 139, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." And yet his sin of disobedience had deafened his ear to the Word which ought to have been hidden in his heart.

And so we begin to see the descent of Jonah in his downward trajectory in fleeing the call of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and there found a ship that was heading to the very place he sought to flee. In his mind it must have seemed like a true act of divine providence, which of course it was though not to the ends that Jonah assumed. There he paid the fare, the physical price for the sinful act that he was committing. Then he went down into the ship, forsaking both his people and his calling, and joined with the pagan sailors making their journey to Tarshish. And so we see this constant refrain here in this first chapter that will continue to be repeated: that Jonah went down, down, down. These words are like relentless, consecutive, fast-falling blows, under which his whole character as an obedient man of God is beaten to death and trampled under foot of Satan. Jonah sets before us more fully his own perverseness; so that he admits that he not only resolutely purposed to reject the call of God, but that he also confirmed himself in it: and though there were many things to be done, which might have sometimes forced him to stand still, he yet constantly followed where his perverse and blind impulse led him. Friends, this is the effect of sin in your lives. When sin is given into it begins to slowly take hold over you and

lead you further and further down the path which leads to destruction. Jonah understood what running from the Lord's call meant for him. He was a traitor, a coward, one who was to be cut off. And yet his own sin hardened him to disregard that and only care for what he thought should be done. What a wicked hold sin can have even upon the godliest of men.

Friends, I want to ask you a question. Are we the spiritual descendants of Jonah? We have never been sent to Nineveh. We may never have had to run away to Tarshish. But the commission that has been given to us is no less demanding than Jonah's, if we are Christians. Is it not true that our attempts to avoid it are often no less determined than Jonah's when he tried to run away? When you run away from the Lord you never get to where you are going, and you always pay your own fare. But when you go the Lord's way you always get to where you are going, and He pays the fare. Those that go on God's errands must rise and go, must stir themselves to the work cut out for them. It may be hard. It may be discouraging. It may be dangerous. It may even cost us our lives. But if the Lord has placed a call upon you and His Word has been given unto you to cry out against the wickedness of this age, there is only one response that is acceptable, and that is to obey the call of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, there is much to learn from this great man of God. The call of the Lord is upon you. You have been given His sure and perfect Word to go and cry out against wickedness. You have been providentially placed here in a land that revels in wickedness and despises that which is good and righteous. If you do not willingly subject yourselves to God, it is the same as though you had turned you back on Him and reject His authority. So I ask again, what will be your response to the call of the Lord? Will it be to arise and go and be obedient to what He has said, or will you be like Jonah and seek to flee from the presence of the Lord? Let us learn from the example given to us for our instruction and seek to submit to the Lord in all things.