

I Am Here

Jonah 3

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 25, 2019

If you would, open your Bibles with me if you haven't already, to the Book of Jonah. That's the book we are in this morning. And as you're turning there, if you're joining us for the first time today, we are in a series on the Book of Jonah called the "Whale of a Tale" series because that's what it is. Jonah is a whale of a tale. It's a very unusual book in the Bible about a prophet who gets swallowed by a whale or some kind of fish, and the Lord spits him out on dry land. The Lord tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, which is this way in the far east. Jonah goes to Tarshish, which is this way in the far west, and the Lord catches up to him and devours him with the fish. He says, "You can run Jonah, but you can't hide," and He catches up to him in the middle of the ocean.

And let me just say here as we're beginning to look at this book this morning, God has a way of doing that, doesn't He? He has a way of catching up to us and saying, "You can run, but you can't hide. You can sin, but I will find you." I remember talking to a man several years ago at a church who looked very familiar, so I said to him, "Have I seen you before?" And he said, "Yeah, you have." He actually took me to the side and he whispered in my ear, he said, "Yeah, you saw me at a drug and alcohol rehab center where you were preaching." And he said, "But I don't do drugs anymore. The Lord has saved me, and I'm here now." The Lord has a way of doing that. I almost shouted out, "Praise the Lord, you're here." But he seemed kind of embarrassed. I didn't want to embarrass him. But the Lord has a way of doing that. He finds us in a rehab center and he puts us in a church. He finds us on drugs and He leaves us in Christ where we're free from all of that. Because that's what God is, that's what God does. He is a Saviour. He loves to save people.

To say it another way, sometimes God doesn't just (and this is a lesson in the Book of Jonah) save us once, but He saves us several times. Sometimes He doesn't just find us once and chase after us once, but He does it over and over and over again. It's been said God is not the God of second chances only, but He's the God of a thousand chances or a million chances. And that's what you see in this book. This is a man, Jonah is a man who was given a million chances with God. God just chases after this guy over and over and over again. He's relentless in this book.

Many of you have heard the hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing". Is that hymn familiar with you? But you may not know the story of it. It was written by a man named Robert Robinson, who was a pastor who did some amazing things. But he got involved in sin and he left the ministry for a while chasing his sin. And during that time, he was traveling on board a train with a lady who asked him what he thought of the hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing". She had just read it, she liked it. And she asked him what he thought of it. And he said, "I wrote that hymn, but I don't believe it anymore." And he broke down crying on the train. To her surprise, he just lost it. And she said to him, she said, "But don't you think God can still forgive you? Don't you believe His streams of mercy are never ceasing?" That's a line from the hymn. And he said, "Yes, I do." And he made his life right with God. But that's what Jonah is experiencing in this book. God's streams of mercy are never ceasing for this man. His forgiveness is never ending.

In fact, this is what makes this story so memorable because we've all been there before. We've all experienced God's mercy like Jonah has. Let me illustrate this with a question for you; how many of you can tell me the theme of the Book of Nahum? Oh, shame on you, shame on you. That's in the Word of God - shame on you. That was actually one of my questions for my ordination exam and I wouldn't have been able to answer it if I hadn't studied it. But how many of you can tell me the theme of the Book of Jonah, even before this series, right? All of us can, right? Why is that? Because you can relate to this book. It's not just because it's about a fish and that's really neat, it's because God forgave him just like He forgave you. How many of you can tell me the theme of the Book of Joel or Amos or Obadiah or Habakkuk? See, we're not familiar with those books, those Minor Prophets, but we know this one because we've all been through this before.

And we can especially relate to the key verse which is found in chapter 2:9. If you want to turn there with me, to Jonah 2:9. This is, many believe, the key verse of the book. This is what it's all about. At the very end of that verse, it very simply says this, "Salvation is from the Lord." That is a wonderful verse, isn't it? Salvation is from the Lord. I told you before that Jonah said that from the belly of the fish, which means salvation could not come from anywhere else. This is the only place it could come from. Salvation comes from the Lord, which means Jonah didn't earn it, Jonah didn't deserve it, Jonah didn't do a bunch of good works to get his salvation - it came directly from God. Martin Luther said, "When I look at myself, I don't see how I can be saved, but when I look at Christ, I don't see how I can be lost." It's what Jonah said here. Some of your translations say that, "Salvation belongs to the Lord," which means that He owns it. It is His personal possession and no one else's. No one else could have saved Jonah at this point in the book. You can just imagine Jonah floating around in the ocean, saying, "What am I going to do now? I mean, how am I going to get out of here? I know what I'll do, I'll pray. I know who can get me out of this fish - the Lord can." And that's what he did.

And if you think about it, God didn't have to answer his prayer at the end of chapter 2. God didn't have to save Jonah. He could have let him die. He was totally justified in doing that. Jonah had rebelled, Jonah had sinned, so God could have let him go. He could have let him drown and send another prophet to Nineveh. He could have sent a whole team of prophets. But He doesn't do that to show that salvation is from the Lord. He saved Jonah to show the world that salvation belongs to our God.

And this morning, we're going to talk about how He showed this to more than just Jonah. He showed salvation to more than just this prophet. He showed it to a whole city. And if you look in chapter 3:1-3, this is the background for our passage this morning. Let me read this to you. Jonah 3:1-3, it says,

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

That's an interesting passage because if you want to turn back to chapter 1 and look at the first few verses of chapter 1, you'll notice it's almost word for word what you read at the beginning of the book. It's almost the same thing that's said in Jonah 1:1-2, because it's as if God is saying, "Okay, Jonah, since you didn't hear Me the first time, I'm going to say it again. Since you didn't go when I first told you, I'm going to tell you again, arise and go to

Nineveh.” There's actually a lot of stuff in here. One thing we learn is that God forgave Jonah, didn't He? He told him to go back because He forgave him, completely. We also learn that God is not going to back down from His commands. God told him the exact same thing again here.

And just a little background about Nineveh. Nineveh was a city located 600 miles from Jerusalem to the northeast. That's about the distance from here to Calgary. So, it wasn't too far apart. Chapter 1:17 says, Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. So that's how long he was in there: three days and three nights. Some commentators say that's about the length of time it would take for him to travel back from where he came from. He was in the Mediterranean Sea for some time. This was about the amount of time it would have taken him to get back to where he was from. Chapter 2:10 says, “Then the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.” We don't know where that dry land was, but wherever it was, in chapter 3, he packs his bags and he heads to Nineveh. He wipes the fish guts off of him, and off he goes.

Nineveh is in the heart of the Middle East. It's located in the modern day country of Iraq. And at one time, it served as the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The capital would kind of go back and forth between Nineveh and Babylon, but this was one of the capitals. The Greek historian, Diodorus, said there was no city on earth like it. Nineveh was so beautiful, it rivaled even Babylon itself. And it was well-fortified. It had walls that were so thick they had 1,500 towers on them. That's how many towers were on the walls of Nineveh – 1,500 towers. And it was said that two chariots could pass side by side on top of the walls without touching each other. That's how thick they were. Isn't that amazing? Two chariots.

And it was an evil city. You might want to add that to the mix here. Nineveh was beautiful, well-fortified and very, very evil. It was one of the cruelest places on earth. Everybody hated the Assyrians because they were so mean. There are stories (I think I've told you this before) of the ancient Assyrians capturing their enemies, skinning them alive, and then hanging their skins on the wall to say, “Don't mess with us, leave us alone.” And there were other accounts of how they would abuse the women and burn their children in front of them just so they could watch. They would behead the town leaders and pile their heads up in the town square. They would send lepers into a city during a siege. There was just no end to their atrocities.

But if you notice in Jonah chapter 3 at the start of this passage, God sends Jonah there again. As if one time was not enough, God had to repeat the command a second time, and He sent him to do the unthinkable. He sent him to save these people. That's why Jonah went there. He went there to begin what some have considered to be the greatest revival in history, the greatest awakening of all time. A whole city turns from their sin, and that's what I want to talk to you about this morning.

If you're taking notes in Jonah 3, we're going to see four stages to the greatest revival in history. That's our outline for today. That's what this passage is about. Jonah goes to Nineveh and begins the greatest revival in history, and we're going to look at this in four stages. Which is important to talk about, because if you think about it, if you are going to bring about a revival somewhere, if you are going to start an awakening of God, where would you do it? Would you do it here? I don't think you would. I wouldn't do it here. These people didn't deserve it. This is a city full of murderers. If you were going to save thousands of people, if you were going to awaken hundreds of thousands of people, who would it be? Who would you pick? Let me tell you something, you would not pick the Assyrians. You would never do

this. But here's the thing I want to show you this morning, friends, God did. This is exactly who God chose to awaken. This is who He selected, so the whole earth will know that salvation is from the Lord. Only God would think of saving a people like this and helping them. He's not the God of second chances only, but He's the God of a thousand chances or a million chances. One author said it this way, he said,

If the miracle of the fish is great, then that of this chapter is greater for here is the record of nothing less than the greatest mass conversion in history. Though generalities must always be used with caution, we may say that never again has the world seen anything quite like the result of Jonah's preaching in Nineveh. The Lord used him to reach one of the most evil places on earth.

And today we're going to see that with four stages to this great revival. The first stage is this: the prophet's message. The first stage to this great revival is the prophet's message. All great revivals start with a message, don't they? They all start with a word from God. Historians believe the first great awakening probably started with Jonathan Edward's sermon – "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." That's sort of the spark that lit the flame. Second great awakening, there was a couple of sermons and preachers that were involved in that. That's what you see here. This started with a sermon, a very simple sermon. It's so simple we don't have a lot to say about it. But if you read in verses 1 through 4, here's how things started with this revival in Nineveh. It says,

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Just a few thoughts on that, but verse 3 says that Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. It's a three days' walk. According to one source, the walls of Nineveh were eight miles in diameter, eight miles in every direction, which actually would not take three days to walk around. Would have taken less time than that. But ancient cities often had villages outside their walls, just like we do today. We have suburbs outside the city, the cities back then did that. And during a siege or a time of attack, the villages would all come within the walls. So, if you put all the villages around Nineveh, there was actually three of them, I believe, and they were called the Assyrian Triangle. They kind of made a triangle around the city. And if you put all that together, it would've taken Jonah three days to get through that, a three days' walk.

And also, if you look in Jonah 4:11, it says that there were 120,000 people in Nineveh who did not know the difference between their right hand and their left. Some take that as a reference to children. And if that's the case, if there were 120,000 children in Nineveh, there would have been half a million people or more in the city, which means that Jonah went to a big place here. This would've been probably the biggest city he'd ever seen.

And verse 4 says that when he arrived there, the first thing he does is he starts preaching. He doesn't waste any time, he's not there on a tourist trip - he starts preaching.

And his message was this, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." If you think about some of the great revivals sermons in history, this doesn't come close, does it? Have

you ever read “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”? That will strike fear in your heart. This doesn't strike fear in my heart. This is not long enough. It's a very, very short sermon. It's several words in English, but it's only five words in Hebrew. There's almost nothing to it at all. It's so brief. And in fairness to Jonah, this might've been a condensed version of what he said. He might've said more than this. Plus he had just gotten out of a fish. So, I don't know what kind of sermon you would preach if you'd just got out of a fish. But he was still traumatized. Also, the Assyrians did not speak Hebrew, from what we can tell. They weren't familiar with the language. So this might've been Jonah's attempt to translate something into their language - very short, he couldn't say much. But he told them they had 40 days and their city would be in trouble. 40 days and Nineveh would be overthrown.

I told you before, but Jonah being in a fish for three days, some have speculated that his skin might've been bleached by acid from the fish's stomach. And there probably would have been something of a terror in his eyes because he's thinking, “If I don't do this, God's going to put me back in that fish.” So, there might've been something convincing about what he said.

But the word for “overthrown” is an interesting word here because it sheds light on what he's saying. That's the word *haphak* in Hebrew. It means “to be turned upside down” or “utterly destroyed.” It's the same word used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Book of Genesis. Genesis 19 says, “Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord of Heaven, and He overthrew those cities.” That's the word *haphak* in Hebrew. He overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the cities and what grew on the ground. Jonah says, “The same thing is going to happen to you, Nineveh, if you don't repent. God is going to turn you upside down. He's going to wipe you off the face of the earth. He's going to destroy you.” Which was a bold thing to say in a city like this. You don't march into a place like Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and talk like this. It would have gotten you in deep trouble.

But that leads to the next stage to this great revival in history, and that is the people's response to this. The first thing you see is the prophet's message. Five words in Hebrew, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” Not much to it, it's pretty brief. This would have failed a homiletics course in seminary. If he was in a preaching lab, he would have spoken for just a few minutes and been done and would have been in trouble. But next, I want you to see the people's response to this. Here's what they did when they heard Jonah preach. You would think they would skinned him alive and put his skin on the wall, right? You would think they would cut his head off. It's how the Assyrians typically dealt with traveling prophets. But look at what they do in verses 5 through 9. Verse 5 says,

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”

Now we read that and don't think much about it because we're familiar with this story. But you got to understand this is not how the Assyrians should have responded to this message.

This is not how they should have heard it. At the very least, you would think they would laugh at Jonah and walk on by or just ignore him. But verse 5 says, "They believed in God." Jonah gave them one of the shortest sermons ever preached in the Bible and they believed it. They trusted what he said.

It also says, "They called a fast and put on sackcloth," which was a sign of repentance for these people. Fasting is to deny yourself of food, and to put on sackcloth was to deny yourself of clothes. Sackcloth was like a short rough burlap bag that went from your shoulders down to your knees. It was the clothing of slaves. So they all put on the clothing of slaves here as a sign of humility. And it says they did this from the greatest to the least of them. The king did this in verse 6 and issued a proclamation. The highest person in the land did this. The animals did it in verse 8, the lowest things in the land. Sounds kind of strange, but the Assyrians would often have their animals involved in their mourning, in their repentance.

But the point is, and here's the point of this passage here so far - the point is this, you never know what God is going to do with a message, do you? You never know what God's going to do with His word. To think a city like this would repent after hearing such a simple message is astonishing. This is unheard of. And to think they would repent after hearing such a simple messenger is equally amazing. Jonah was not a hero here. He's not the stuff of which prophets are made. I mean, the first two chapters are all about him failing, failing, failing, and then this happens. I mean, you can just imagine him going around the city of Nineveh saying like Eeyore, "You have forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Or maybe just saying, "God's going to get you, you evil sinners." And yet, God used him to do this, to bring about a revival. Now, whether these people were fully converted or not, we don't know the whole story here, and we don't know what happens years down the road. But the point is this, he got their attention because you never know what God will do. And you never know who God's going to use. We often think, "Whoa, is me, God could never use a sinner like me. I can never witness to that person. I can never talk to those people." But look at what God did with Jonah. Look at what God did with this guy, because God can use anyone.

The story is told of the pastor who resigned from his church to go somewhere else. And at his farewell service, a little old lady came up to him with tears in her eyes and she said, "What are we going to do now? Things are never going to be the same." And the pastor said, "Well, don't worry. I know the Lord will bring you a better pastor when I'm gone." And she said, "I know, but the last three pastors have said that and they keep getting worse." It's a nice farewell service when you hear that. It's not about the pastor, is it? I mean, it's not about the messenger, it's about the message. It's not about the preacher, it's about the word of God. One author said, "Spiritual work demands spiritual power. And therefore, the secret to powerful preaching lies with God and not with man. Skill alone does not make a preacher, God does. So our focus needs to be on Him and not on us." I don't know about you guys, but when I preach or I witness to someone, I don't look in the mirror because that doesn't help me. I look in the Word of God, I look in the Bible. And I don't look to other people - they can't help me either. I look in the Scriptures because that's where your power comes from. That's where your strength lies.

Another way to look at this passage is this, you never know who's going to be saved. You never know who's going to believe. The Word of God can save anyone. Nobody would have looked on a map and said, "Okay, we're going to spread the word of God, let's go to Nineveh." It may be the last place you'd go to. That'd be the last place you would look. But the Bible can save anyone, God can save anyone. His word is strong enough to save even

the hated Assyrians. There's an ancient tradition of the Jews that they read the Book of Jonah every year on the Day of Atonement to remember this. They read this book every year on that special day to remember that God can save anyone, God can atone for anyone. You can be the most wicked sinner on the planet, God can save you. You can be a city, the most wicked city on the planet, and God can save you. I don't know what sins you're wrestling with this morning, I don't know what sins you've brought with you, but let me assure you, this story shows you God can save you from anything you've done. Look, you might've done some bad things, but I'm guessing none of you have ever skinned anybody alive and hung their skin on the wall. Anybody ever done that? You might've imagined it in your head, but no one's ever done that. If you have, please come see me after the service. We need to go down to the RCMP and... You might've done some bad things, but you've never beheaded anybody. These people did that and God forgave them, which means God can forgive you.

And that leads to the next thing we want to look at in this passage, the next stage to this great revival. The first one is the prophet's message. Jonah gave them five words in Hebrew, five words that turned the whole city upside down. It's a message that you wouldn't even think would've had an impact on them at all. But he says, "You had forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" leading to the second stage, which is the people's response. And verse 5 says, "They believed this. From the least of them to the greatest, they ordered a fast, they put on sackcloth and ashes and repented." Let me say this, it did not go unnoticed. Their cries and their behaviour were not ignored in heaven. Just as Jonah cried from the whale and he was heard in the ocean, these people cried from their wicked city and they were heard as well. This story goes from amazing to amazing. I mean, the first thing is the fact God tells Jonah to go back. Second thing is He gives such a simple message and they believe. And here's the third amazing point - God heard them. God heard these evil people. And that's the next stage to this great revival. That's the Lord's response to this. We see the prophet's message, the people's response, but here's the next stage, is the Lord's response to what they did. You would think you would read here that God said, "All this repentance, all this fasting stuff is nice, but you guys are so bad, you need to donate \$1 million to the church. You guys are so messed up and evil, you need to all move to the city of Jerusalem and spend 10 years there, purging yourself of all your wickedness." Look at what verse 10 says. It says this, "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."

Without going into all the details here, let me tell you a few things about this. First, you see in verse 10, it says, "God saw their deeds." He observed what they did, He watched their behaviour. And then it says, "God relented of the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them." That doesn't mean He was surprised or caught off guard by what the Ninevites did. Nothing surprises the Lord. But the word is *nakam* in Hebrew, which means "to relent out of compassion" or "to relent out of mercy." The idea here is that when the Ninevites turned away from their sin, God relents of the disaster out of mercy. When they believed and put on sackcloth and did all these things in chapter 3, God changed His mind out of compassion, and He did not overthrow them. He was going to do that. He was very sincere in saying that, but when they repented, He relented.

In fact, if you read the Book of Jonah all the way through, you'll see that it reads like this, in the first half, God forgives Jonah and He doesn't overthrow Jonah. That's the first half of the book. God forgives Jonah and He doesn't destroy him. The second half, God forgives Nineveh and He doesn't destroy them. That's how the book reads. Starts with His prophet and

then He goes to the city. But in the whole book, it's God forgiving people. In the whole book, it's Him showing mercy. It's all about "salvation is from the Lord."

The word "calamity" here really expresses this because it shows them what they're saved from. But if you look in verse 10, that word "calamity" can refer to a lot of things. Some of your translations say "destruction" here, some say "evil". If you have the English Standard Version, it says, "But when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He said He would do to them, and He did not do it." The idea is that God meant what He said when he said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." He meant what He said when He told them He was going to wipe them off the face of the earth. But since they repented, He forgave them out of compassion and out of mercy.

Which is important for us to remember because when you read your Bible, if you're not careful, you can walk away with the idea that God is a God of judgment in the Old Testament, and He's a God of grace in the New Testament, right? You guys ever heard that before? In the Old Testament, He's just a mean, mean, mean God, going into the Promised Land and wiping off the Canaanites from the face of the earth. And in the New Testament, He just got really nice. When He met all of us, He got really nice, right? But that's not what you read here. God's mercy is mentioned over and over and over again in the Old Testament. Salvation has always been by mercy. You see it here in Jonah, but let me just read a couple of other passages to you from the Old Testament to give you a picture of this.

But Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His mercies never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." That was written in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, that's what the Jews thought of the Lord. They said, His mercies are new every morning. Why? Because we need them every morning, amen? You get up every day and you need the mercy of God. You get up every day and you need His grace, and the Old Testament says you can have it.

Micah 7:18 says, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over our rebelliousness...[God] does not retain His anger forever because He delights in unchanging love." Mercy is the delight of God. God does something like this for the Ninevites and He enjoys it. It brings a smile to His face to show mercy.

Psalms 145:8-9 says, "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." And that's what you see here. This is God's mercy over all His works. It extends even to the Ninevites.

God's mercy extends even to the Gentiles. A Jew would read this book and he would understand chapters 1 through 2. He would understand that God was merciful to Jonah. Jonah is a Jew, Jonah's from Israel. It makes sense God would forgive him. What he would not understand is Jonah chapter 3. A Jew would get to this part of the book and it would all break down for him. Which leads us to one more point in this passage, it leads to one more stage to this great revival. So, we see the prophet's message, we see the people's response and we see God's response.

But before I move on to the next stage, let me say, if the story would have ended here in chapter 3, it would be a great story, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that be encouraging? We would read this and say "amen", and go drink coffee next door and be blessed. I mean, Jonah would

be an example for all to follow. This would be the first minister to the Gentiles, the first one to open the doors to the nations, that kind of thing. But the story doesn't stop here. Unfortunately, there is a Jonah chapter 4, which is ugly. I mean, the first couple of chapters, the first two chapters are kind of rough. Chapter 3 is very encouraging, chapter 4 is just ugly. It's one of those chapters you would hope would not be in the Bible. Which shows Jonah's humility because if he wrote this book, the fact that he put the last chapter in here was amazingly humble. But it leads to a fourth stage to this great revival, I want to briefly look at with you this morning - and that is Jonah's response to all this. We've seen the prophet's message, the people's response and God's response, but now let's look at Jonah's response to this. We're going to spend a whole week on chapter 4 next Sunday. But this is the fourth stage in the revival.

I've told you before, the outline for the Book of Jonah is pretty simple. It goes like this, if you were going to summarize the four chapters, here's how the four chapters go: chapter 1 says, "I won't go," chapter 2, "I will go," chapter 3, "I am here" and chapter 4, "I want to leave. I don't like this place," Jonah says. That's how he ends the book.

And the thing that changes his mind and makes him say, "I want to leave" is the fact that God forgave the Ninevites. If you look in chapter 4:1, it says this, "But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry." As a matter of fact, if you want to read chapter 3:10 again, and read down to chapter 4:1, it says, "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 (the word 'but' there is a contrast, contrasting Jonah from God) it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry." Just to explain this to you, God saw what they did and was happy. God saw the Ninevites' response and was joyful. Jonah saw it and got mad. And not only did he get mad, the verse says, "It greatly displeased him."

One commentator said Jonah was a very strange man to be displeased by his own success - but he was. He couldn't stand it. The verse could literally be translated, "it was evil to Jonah, a great evil," and "it was wicked to him." The Hebrew language does not have the word "more" or "most." But what they would often do if something was more or most, they would pluralize the word. And so what the Hebrew language is saying here is that Jonah thought this was really, really, really, really bad for God to do. He thought it was wicked for God to do this. And it made him angry. He had just preached the greatest revival in history, he had just lived a preacher's dream by singlehandedly leading a whole town to the Lord. This is the kind of stuff you send newsletters about. This is the kind of stuff you put on Facebook and you blog about, right? This is what he does. You know the Prophet Jeremiah preached for 50 years and from what we can tell, he never had a single convert. Jonah preaches for a few days, five words, and he gets all of this. Jeremiah is actually the longest book in the Old Testament word for word, I think if I'm correct on that. And he had almost no response to his ministry. Jonah gets this and he's this angry.

And he was this angry because he did not understand the mind of God. He was this angry because he did not understand what God is all about. God is in the saving business, amen? God is a Saviour of sinners. As we said in the beginning, He's not the God of second chances only, but He's the God of a thousand chances or a million chances. He doesn't just save us once, but He saves us over and over and over again, and Jonah didn't get that. He didn't understand. His mind was as far away from the things of God here as anybody could possibly be. Salvation is from the Lord, anger is from Jonah, judgment is from him.

A lot of sources I read said Jonah is kind of, in one way, a picture of the Jews here. Because this is what the Jews would have thought when they read this book. They would have all been angry at this. You read Jesus conversations with the Pharisees, right? Sadducees. This is what a Pharisee would have done. Donald Grey Barnhouse, the former pastor of Tenth Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, once told a story of how an old seminary professor of his came to hear him preach. And afterwards, he told him that he was encouraged because he said, "You are a big God-er." That's what he said - "You're a big God-er." To which Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "I don't know what you mean by that." And the professor said, "Well, after seminary, I like to hear my students preach to see if they're little God-ers or big God-ers, because that'll determine the kind of ministry that they have. You are a big God-er, you have a big view of God." Jonah didn't have that here. This was a little God-er. He had a small view of God. He thought God could save Israel and that's it; God could save the Jews and that's all. God could save the good people, but not the bad. But God says He can save anyone. God will forgive anyone who trusts in Him and repents, even the Ninevites. And we're going to say more about that next week.

But let me just ask you this morning as we tie this off, let me ask you this, what about you? Are you a big God-er or a little God-er? Do you have a big view of God this morning or do you have a little view of God? You think God can save anyone, God can rescue anyone? God can bring anyone up from the depths of sin? Or do you believe God can only save the good people? "God can save the people of Chilliwack, but those people in Vancouver, I don't know."

Let me say it this way, this is maybe making it even more personal - which one are you like in this story? Are you like God or are you like Jonah? Do you want to judge people like Jonah did and destroy them and have them pay for their sins, or do you want to save them like God did? There's only really two main characters in this story, there's only two people to follow. Jonah and God, which one are you?

I think we're all guilty of this. We're all guilty of watching the news or seeing stuff on the internet or just talking to lost people and saying, "Lord, when are you going to go get them? When are you going to destroy them?" When we should be praying, "Lord, when are you going to save them?" That's the heart of God. God wants to show mercy to sinners like this. Do you have His heart today?

A Southern preacher once delivered a famous sermon called "Payday Someday." In which he said, "You may live a life of sin now and get away with it, but one day you're going to answer for it. There's going to be a payday someday." But he said in the sermon, "But the payday will come from God, not from you. The payday is God's business, the judgment is God's business. It's your job and my job to show mercy to people and pray that they'll be saved."

Will you do that this morning? Will you have the heart of God in this book? God has shown you so much kindness, can you show it to others? God has forgiven you. We read the first two chapters of Jonah and that's us, right? We failed over and over and over again. So when we read something like chapter 3, we should be overjoyed and not judge people. Let's pray for the Lord's help in that.

Father, we thank you for the story of Jonah this morning, a powerful story about a prophet who just didn't get it. And we can all see ourselves in this story. We all wrestle with this,

Lord, but we thank you for Your mercy to him. We thank you for Your mercy to the Ninevites. God help us to see Your heart in the lives of sinners, Lord. We want to be in the saving business with You. We want to see you draw Gentiles, lost people, even the most evil folks on earth to Christ. And Lord, we can do that because You've shown us mercy.

Lord, thank you for those who are saved this morning, who have experienced Your mercy full and free. Would they be overjoyed when they see what You've done with these people in Nineveh.

Lord, I pray for those who are lost this morning and they may not know the mercy of God. All they know is Your judgment. Would You draw them to Christ and let them know You are a God who forgives and You delight in saving sinners. May we do so as well as a church.

And as we come to the Lord's Table, would You be glorified as we remember the mercy of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray this in His name, amen.